

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "SOMETHING SWEETLY PERSONAL AND SWEETLY SOCIAL": MODERNISM, METADRAMA, AND THE AVANT GARDE IN THE PLAYS OF THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYERS.

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The argument of this study is that the experimental productions of the original Provincetown Players (1915-22) should be viewed not simply as modern, but as a mixture of modernist and avant-garde theatre. The Players' early comic spoofs critiqued the modernist zeal for nouveau social and cultural topics of their era, such as free love, psychoanalysis, and post-impressionist art, and were the first American plays to explore the personal as political. Hutchins Hapgood, a founding Provincetown Player, described these dramas as containing at once "something sweetly personal and sweetly social" (*Victorian* 394). Often employing metatheatrical techniques in their critique of modern institutions, Provincetown productions, I argue, echoed two key attributes of avant-garde theory: The self-critique of modernism's social role recalls Peter Bürger's description of avant-garde movements developing out of a fear of "art's lack of social impact" in aestheticism and entering a "stage of self-criticism" (Bürger 22). Additionally, by integrating

performance into the life of their community, the Players' echo Bürger's theory that the avant-garde attempts to reintegrate autonomous art into the "praxis of everyday life" (22).

Discussed in this study are plays created during the summers of 1915 and 1916, including Neith Boyce's *Constancy* (1915), Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook's *Suppressed Desires* (1915), John Reed's *The Eternal Quadrangle* (1916), Wilbur Daniel Steele's *Not Smart* (1916), and Louise Bryant's *The Game* (1916). Also considered is Floyd Dell's Liberal Club satire *St. George in Greenwich* (1913). A second group of expressionistic plays analyzed in this study include verse plays by poet, editor, and troubadour Alfred Kreymborg, such as *Lima Beans* (1916), *Jack's House* (1918), and *Vote the New Moon* (1920) and Djuna Barnes's exploration of Nietzsche in *Three From the Earth* (1919). A third section of the study is a group of full-length plays by Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook, and Eugene O'Neill: Glaspell's *The Verge* (1921) and *Inheritors* (1921); Cook's *The Athenian Women* (1918); and O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* (1916), produced by the Provincetown Players, and *Bread and Butter* (written 1913-14) and *Now I Ask You* (written 1916), both unproduced.

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MODERNISM, METADRAMA, AND THE AVANT GARDE IN THE PLAYS OF
THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYERS.

By

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Dedication

For Louis Charles and Rosemary Rattigan Eisenhower

And

Sara Eisenhower Martin

morning steals upon the night

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Provincetown Players, the legendary theatre company often associated with the advent of modern drama in America, has long been credited with the discovery of Eugene O’Neill in 1916. More recently, as the group’s other leading playwright Susan Glaspell has been rediscovered, the Players have gained recognition for developing her feminist dramas. Less well known is the company’s president (and artistic director), George Cram “Jig” Cook (1879-1924), Glaspell’s husband, who led the original group from 1915-22. During Cook’s tenure, the Players produced over ninety original plays by American authors, a feat unrivaled by any other American company of its era. Despite this sizeable achievement, however, and the often experimental nature of O’Neill’s and Glaspell’s work, scholarship has been slow to recognize the group’s relationship to the political and cultural movement so often identified with its era—modernism. The first serious approaches in this field emerged only recently, led by Glaspell scholars such as Barbara Ozieblo, Marcia Noe, and J. Ellen Gainor. It was remarkably not until 2006 that the first book-length study appeared, Brenda Murphy’s *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*. Moreover, with regards to the Provincetown, even less critical focus has been given to the term so often used in connection with modernist experiment—the avant-garde.¹ In contrast with previous scholarship, in this study I explore the specific relationship of the Provincetown’s experiments to theories of the avant-garde, suggesting new ways to view the company’s work as a mixture of modernist tragedy and metadramatic parody. In my view, the Provincetown Players should be recognized

not only as the founders of the modernist off-Broadway tradition but also as the progenitors of American experimental and avant-garde theatre.²

Although it is a commonplace in the historical scholarship of the American intelligentsia to refer to the writers and artists of Greenwich Village in the first decades of the twentieth century as America's "first avant garde,"³ the term is used frequently simply as a synonym for formal experimentation. Modernist experimentation during the period often included various attempts across genres to represent internal experience through stylization, fragmentation of visual images, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, and other techniques. Today, however, the relationship between modernism and the avant garde is contested territory. A growing body of contemporary critical theory distinguishes modernist experimentation from the more ideologically radical insurgency of the avant-garde. European cultural critics such as Peter Bürger, Andreas Huyssen, and Martin Püchner treat the avant-garde in dialectical relationship to modernism. The founding premise for many such critics is Bürger's distinction that modernism, which he defines as formally experimental and opposed to tradition, is countered by the avant-garde, which more radically turns against "art as institution [. . .] both the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society" (Bürger 22). As Jöchen Schulte-Sasse explicates Bürger: "Modernism may be understandable as an attack on traditional writing techniques, but the avant-garde can only be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutionalized commerce with art" (xv). These critics contend that the ideological critique of the avant-garde

attacks the paradigms of western art, the galleries and institutions that support it, and especially the concept of the “autonomy of art,” the idea that in bourgeois culture is detached from social and political systems (Bürger 23). The term, “anti-art,” originally coined by Marcel Duchamp in 1914 and adopted by the Zurich Dadaists, is also often associated with Bürger’s critique of “art as institution.”⁴ Additionally, Bürger’s theory is seen by many as valuable to postmodernism.

Few if any Provincetown productions can be classified as pure examples of “anti-art,” or complete breaks with theatrical convention as developed in surrealism or dada (Bürger’s two favorite examples). Many Provincetown playwrights wrote in a naturalistic mode, and Cook and the Players were working hard to build a modern theatrical institution in America while some of their more radical European colleagues abhorred such institutions. Nonetheless, in the chapters that follow I will demonstrate that something of this “anti-art” attitude, “critique of art as institution,” and the economic critique of artistic commerce appeared in and sustained the Provincetown Players’ work throughout the existence of the original company. Their plays were rife with critiques and parodies of modernism; my research emphasizes that more often than not the Players’ favorite tool was not the high seriousness of tragic theatre, but a consistent and unrelenting metadrama which critiqued and undermined the tenets of modernism.

The presentation of this self-critique often relied on various metatheatrical techniques which broke the fourth wall and employed the audience’s special knowledge of the characters and performers. From early comic spoofs of modernist excess, such as Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook’s *Suppressed Desires* (1915),

which parodied a sophisticated Village couple's encounter with psychoanalysis or Cook's *Change Your Style* (1915), a spoof in which the modernist painter B. J. O. Nordfelt played a parody of himself, to "expressionist" pieces such as poet Alfred Kreymborg's verse drama *Lima Beans* (1916) that ended with the marionette-like characters expecting direction from the audience, or the play within the play of Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo*, the Provincetown Players chose to use metatheatric devices and self-reflexive characters, themes, and situations. Some of the metatheatrical techniques or moments in these plays have been previously identified by scholars, but in this study metatheatre will be considered as a form of intellectual and ideological performance tradition, as Lionel Abel originally proposed when he coined the term in 1963, and is therefore different in nature from the modern tragic vision usually associated with O'Neill. Metadrama as used by the Provincetown Players as a critique of modernism also suggests another key element in Bürger's avant-garde theory, what he outlines as the "self-critical" (22) moment of the avant-garde. Bürger argues that this self-critical stage emerges as avant-garde artists fear their art lacks social impact. In the pages that follow, I will argue how mechanisms similar to those Bürger describes were operating at the time of the founding of the Provincetown in 1915. Further, I will show that the Players' use of metadrama to express this critique was much more conscious, pervasive, and deliberate than has been previously discussed in the scholarship.

Many of the Provincetown Players' self-critical comments on modernism are found among their early satirical one-act comedies, which were primarily naturalistic in form. When later a splinter group of the Players began experimenting with non-

naturalistic staging and language, employing poetry and expressionistic techniques, the meta-dramatic critique of the American cognoscenti continued. Formally experimental techniques that challenged realism often appeared for the first time in America on the stage of the Provincetown (some had appeared earlier in theatres such as the Chicago Little Theatre), and when used to continue a critique on institutions of art should also be seen as avant-garde. Thus, one objective of this study is to correct the impression that American experimental drama was exclusively an import from Europe or originated exclusively with expatriate American writers only in the 1920s or later periods; instead, both modernist and avant-garde drama can be shown to have developed in America during the era of the Little Theatre movement, a fact misunderstood in previous accounts.

Marc Robinson, in *The Other American Drama*, makes an eloquent and impassioned plea for the identification of an alternative American drama that recognizes, as Gertrude Stein did, “an acute sensitivity to form” and “rediscovers the essential elements of dramatic form—language, gesture, presence” (3). Robinson is nothing short of inspirational in his quest to find a group of American playwrights that freed themselves from the constraints of realism. However, Robinson cites the groundbreaking nature of Stein’s dramaturgy as the origins of this new tradition. While I think it without dispute that Stein’s radical experiments in dramatic form be recognized, her role historically in American theatre and performance is problematic. Stein wrote her first plays between 1913 and 1922, when they were published in Boston. Modern American theatre practitioners were aware that Stein was writing plays—Provincetown founder Neith Boyce knew Stein through literary salon hostess

Mabel Dodge, and Provincetown poet Alfred Kreymborg reports in a 1915 article a rumor that Stein's plays might be staged in New York ("Gertrude Stein"). However, these productions did not take place, and the Provincetown Players effectively disbanded the year of the publication of Stein's first volume of plays. Many of the qualities Robinson praises such as letting language be "heard for its own sensual qualities" (2) in the playwrights he examines can be equally powerful in the work of Provincetown writers like Kreymborg, Glaspell, and Djuna Barnes.

In another recent study, *A History of American Avant-Garde Theatre*, Arnold Aronson also argues for the seminal nature of Stein's work and dismisses out of hand the experiments of the Provincetown Players as belonging to the realistic tradition. Aronson views writers such as Susan Glaspell and Alfred Kreymborg as raiding the European avant-garde for techniques, which then become "mere stylistic conceits" (3) in their otherwise realistic dramas. Although Aronson employs a more theoretically informed definition of avant-garde than Robinson, there are problems with the strict categories of avant garde and modernism he asserts in relation to theatre. Specifically, Aronson like many critics, fails to place expressionism, the most influential cultural movement among the Provincetown's experimental playwrights, in his category of avant-garde. A detailed look at Aronson's theory and the question of expressionism will be offered below in this chapter.

Aim and Structure of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the growing literature on the Provincetown Players and American drama at the time of the Little Theatre

movement by specifically identifying those impulses within the Players that can be considered meta-dramatic and avant-garde, as opposed to simply modernist.⁵ To achieve this aim I build on textual analysis, independent research, and an exceptional body of scholarly work, much of which has appeared recently on the company. For many years, the only published book available on the Players was Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau's *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* (1931). Deutsch and Hanau, employees of the Playhouse in the 1920s after the departure of Cook, tended to blend Cook's era with that of later directors. The first scholarly book on the original company, Robert Sarlós's landmark history, *Theatre in Ferment: Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players*, did not appear until 1982. Along with pioneering articles by Gerhard Bach from the late 1970s, Sarlós's work began a renaissance of academic interest in studies of the Players. This renaissance coincided with a renewed interest in the work of Susan Glaspell on the part of feminist critics. By 1991, when Adelle Heller and Lois Rudnick's anthology of articles on the contexts of the Players' first performances, *1915: The Cultural Moment*, was published, only a handful of critical articles had appeared on plays by Provincetown playwrights other than O'Neill and Glaspell, and a number of Glaspell's plays still remained largely unexplored by scholars.

In the last fifteen years, a full-blown revival in Provincetown Players studies has occurred. In addition to two Glaspell biographies, one by Barbara Ozieblo (2001) and one by Linda Ben-Zvi (2006), and numerous articles on Glaspell's dramaturgy, many of the early plays by Provincetown authors such as Neith Boyce, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Louise Bryant, Alfred Kreymborg, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, formerly

ignored, have now been analyzed by contemporary critics. Some of the major works to provide such analysis include Leona Rust Egan's *Provincetown as a Stage* (1994); Linda Ben Zvi's edition, *Susan Glaspell: Her Theater and Fiction* (1995), which features an essay by Judith Barlow on women writers of Provincetown exclusive of Glaspell; Barbara Ozieblo's anthology of Provincetown one-act plays, *The Provincetown Players: A Choice of the Shorter Works* (1996), which in addition to making many of these long out-of-print plays available contains an important critical introduction; J. Ellen Gainor's *Susan Glaspell in Context* (2000); Cheryl Black's *The Women of Provincetown 1915-1922* (2002); Jackson R. Bryer and Travis Bogard's edition of Edna Kenton's significant eyewitness history, *The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre, 1915-1922* (2004) composed in 1924 and long available only in various incomplete manuscripts; Linda Ben Zvi's new edition of Susan Glaspell's 1927 biography of George Cook, *The Road to the Temple* (2006); Brenda Murphy's *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (2006); and Jeffrey Kennedy's dissertation, an updated history of the company.

My discussion in this study of the Provincetown Players' work, as well as of certain key plays produced at the Greenwich Village Liberal Club that were forerunners to the Players, owes a significant debt to and is in many ways complementary to the seminal work of these scholars. In addressing the topics of avant-gardism and metadrama in the play of the Provincetown Players, I seek to link through taxonomy, to frame theoretically some of the ongoing research in the field. Further, in this study I often address the topic in depth rather than in breadth. I will analyze an important sample of plays from each of several groups outlined below, but

I will not produce another survey of the Players' complete oeuvre (totaling ninety-seven plays). To discuss the important early work of the Provincetown, I will necessarily have to cover some plays that have previously received critical attention, but wherever possible I will discuss works which have been virtually ignored by scholars.

Chapter 1 of this study (this chapter) will define the terms *modernism*, *avant-garde*, and *metadrama* still contested by cultural critics and literary historians, and provide historical background on the Provincetown Players, Greenwich Village, and the Liberal Club. In Chapter 2, I will provide an analysis of the early Liberal Club and Provincetown plays that critique the Greenwich Village intelligentsia, who were present as both performers and audience. I will demonstrate how the self-referentiality in these plays functions as a mild avant-garde critique of certain modernist assumptions. In this chapter, I will cover the first plays by the Provincetown Players, such as Neith Boyce's *Constancy* (1915), Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook's *Suppressed Desires* (1915), *The Eternal Quadrangle* (1916) by John Reed, and *Not Smart* (1916) by Wilbur Daniel Steele. I will also discuss Louise Bryant's *The Game* (1916) in greater depth than it has been covered in the past, and I will offer an analysis of the first modern Greenwich Village satire, Floyd Dell's *St. George in Greenwich* (1913).⁶ Additionally, I will provide readings of the critics on these plays and make it clear where I agree or disagree with current evaluations in order to demonstrate their incipient avant-gardism. I will also use unpublished archival material wherever possible to enhance my interpretations of this group of plays.

Chapter Three will explore several key plays of the Provincetown Players that are most self-consciously modernist, i.e., that employ verse, expressionistic or symbolic sets, and other types of stylization. My analysis will focus on the avant-garde and metatheatrical aspects of these works, which although previously mentioned by critics, have not been situated within the overall framework offered here. I will also provide new research into the early writing of Alfred Kreymborg, particularly for the *New York Morning Telegraph*, that reveals more about the poet/playwright's politics. I will then cover Kreymborg's plays produced in association with the Provincetown Players, including *Lima Beans* (1916), *Jack's House* (1918), and *Vote the New Moon* (1920). I will conclude with an extended discussion of *Three From the Earth* (1919) by Djuna Barnes, which I believe is the first scholarly exploration of Djuna Barnes's use of Nietzsche.

Chapter Four will discuss modernist and avant-garde technique and the continued critique of the modern artist in several full-length works by Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook. I will discuss Glaspell's highly expressionist *The Verge* (1921) and Cook's *The Athenian Women* (1918) as well as discuss connections between these plays and Glaspell's *The Inheritors* (1921), her short story "Pollen," and Glaspell and Cook's last collaboration, *Tickless Time* (1918). Finally, I will reflect on the relationship between modernism and bohemianism in several plays by Eugene O'Neill, including *Before Breakfast* (1916) a play O'Neill wrote for the Provincetown Players, and two plays on similar themes he apparently wrote for a Broadway audience but which were never produced, *Bread and Butter* (written 1913-14) and *Now I Ask You* (written 1916).

The remainder of this introductory chapter will consist of two sections. The first will provide the background and history of the Provincetown Players; the remaining section will produce working definitions of the three critical terms used in this dissertation: modernism, metadrama, and the avant-garde.

History

Writing at the end of the 1930s, Bertolt Brecht opens his essay “Theatre for Pleasure and Theatre for Instruction” by asserting that Epic theatre in Berlin had superceded the modern theatre in the other leading cities in the world:

A few years back, anybody talking about the modern theatre meant the theatre in Moscow, New York and Berlin. [. . .] broadly speaking there were only three capitals so far as modern theatre was concerned. Russian, American and German theatres differed widely from one another, but were alike in being modern, that is to say introducing technical and artistic innovations. (326)

That by the late 1930s Brecht thought it a commonplace that modern American theatre was on a par with that of Berlin and Moscow, implying that New York had advanced over the western capitals of London and Paris, is a state of affairs that would have been imagined only by a few visionary American theatre artists a generation earlier. In the 1910s, American theatre was dominated by several large syndicates, which controlled productions and venues nationally and used them as star vehicles for melodrama (Bryan 4-5). The American stage was forty years behind that of Europe both in subject matter and technique; it had all but missed the ruptures in

European drama caused by naturalism and the symbolist and expressionist movements that followed. Change in the United States began with the Little Theatre movement.

“Little Theatres”—so called because they occupied smaller physical spaces than their commercial rivals and because they often operated as clubs with a subscription audience—began to appear in the United States about 1911 in imitation of the art theatres of Europe such as André Antoine’s Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Moscow Art Theatre, and the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Henderson 233). America’s little theatres allowed audiences of enthusiasts to see the modern European masters—Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw—playwrights who had only limited productions on Broadway. Arguably the most significant of these ventures was the Provincetown Players who, pledging themselves to produce only the work of Americans, pioneered modern techniques and introduced the playwrights that would earn New York its place in Brecht’s trio of modern theatrical cities.

The beginning of the Provincetown Players is a legend that has been told many times. Provincetown, Massachusetts, on the very tip of Cape Cod where the Pilgrims first landed in the New World on their way to Plymouth Rock, was a major whaling port in the nineteenth century. With the decline of that industry, the town had become by about 1900 a haven for many Portuguese immigrants who made a tough living in fishing.⁷ Provincetown also began to attract a few vacationers, the “summer people,” and established a reputation for the arts when the painter Charles Hawthorne began conducting painting classes on the beach in the 1890s. Artists, writers, journalists, and political activists from New York’s Greenwich Village began

summering in Provincetown in about 1907 after the labor journalist and activist Mary Heaton Vorse purchased a house there.

In the summer of 1915, a group of Vorse's Village friends renting nearby cottages began writing and performing amateur dramas. The contingent consisted primarily of couples: George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell; the journalist and short story writer Neith Boyce and her husband, anarchist and essayist Hutchins Hapgood; Vorse and her husband, labor journalist Joe O'Brien; the short story writer Wilbur Daniel Steele and his wife Margaret Steele; the post-impressionist painter Brör Nordfelt and his wife Margaret Nordfelt; and Max Eastman, editor of the Greenwich Village radical magazine *The Masses*, and his wife Ida Rauh, an attorney who would become the Provincetown's most prolific actress. Also in this group were poet and journalist Floyd Dell, assistant editor of *The Masses*; modern artists William Zorach, Marguerite Zorach, and Charles Demuth; scenic designer Robert Edmond Jones, and actor Frederick Burt; as well as lesser known associates Edward J. Ballantine, the artist Myra Carr, and Edwin and Nancy Schoonmaker (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 14). One evening in the middle of July,⁸ two performances took place at the cottage rented by Hapgood and Boyce at 621 Commercial Street. The first play performed was Boyce's *Constancy*, a critique of the infamous love affair of journalist and radical John Reed and Village salon hostess Mabel Dodge. The second was Glaspell and Cook's collaboration, *Suppressed Desires*, a spoof of the current Village obsession with the New Psychology of psychoanalysis. Later that summer, the participants cleaned out an old fishing wharf owned by Vorse and presented Cook's *Change Your Style*, a spoof of the conflict between realist and post-impressionist art and the

commerce of art, and Wilbur Steele's *Contemporaries*, a play based on the activism of anarchist Frank Tannenbaum on behalf of the homeless, as well as revivals of the two earlier plays (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 17-18).

The group was apparently enthused by the reception of the plays in the arts community in Provincetown and returned for a second summer season in 1916 on the wharf. New members now joined, including John Reed and Louise Bryant; the "hobo" poet Harry Kemp; editor, suffragist, and pioneering psychoanalyst Grace Potter; artist Marsden Hartley;⁹ short-story writer and journalist Lucian Cary and his wife Augusta; Edna Kenton, a friend of Cook and Glaspell from the Midwest who became the company's official historian; and a young playwright previously unknown to the group, Eugene O'Neill (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 19-20). The summer of 1916 surpassed the initial season, breaking ground with a number of extraordinary "firsts" for the American theatre including O'Neill's world premiere with *Bound East for Cardiff* in July and the debut of Glaspell's now classic feminist one-act *Trifles* in September. Also significant was the *mise en scène* for Louise Bryant's play *The Game*, created by the Zorachs, that marks one of the earliest performances in America to use scenic design inspired by post-impressionist art.¹⁰ This was also the summer of the infamous love triangle began between Bryant, Reed, and O'Neill, later dramatized in the 1981 Hollywood film *Reds*.

On September 5, 1916, under the leadership of Cook, Boyce, and Reed, as Edna Kenton recorded in her history, a constitution for the new organization was adopted and the group took the name the Provincetown Players and moved to MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 25-29), abandoning their

seaside idyll permanently (although many continued to live and write in Provincetown for part of each year). Distributing their manifesto in the form of a subscription circular in the fall of 1916, the Players stated that their aim was to be a proving ground for American playwrights, free from the commercial formulas and producers of Broadway. They had organized, they claimed,

for the purpose of writing, producing and acting their own plays. The impelling desire of the group was to establish a stage where playwrights of sincere, poetic, literary and dramatic purpose could see their plays in action and superintend their production without submitting to the commercial manager's interpretation of public taste.

(Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 32)

The Provincetown Players thus set themselves apart from their little theatre comrades in a single-mindedness to develop a new American drama and produce only American writers (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 27). In their New York incarnation, which lasted until 1922, the Players attracted a *Who's Who* list of American modern and modernist writers, including, besides those who had participated in Provincetown, Alfred Kreymborg, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Djuna Barnes, Laurence Vail, Edna Ferber, Michael Gold, Wallace Stevens, and Theodore Dreiser, to name just a few. The original Players (1915-22) boasted of the number of their playwrights—forty-seven Americans—and the variety of their experiments—ninety-seven new plays (Sarlós 161).

Developing new playwrights, however, was not the only accomplishment of the Provincetown Players. Participation in the plays was opened to a more diverse group

of individuals than in any theatre of the era. As Cheryl Black has noted, women comprised nearly half of the founding members of the collective and after the group expanded, forty of its active members were female (*Women of Provincetown* 3). Women were thus allowed unprecedented involvement—as playwrights, actors, and as directors, a role in which Nina Moise (O'Neill's favorite director)¹¹ and others distinguished themselves. For the production of O'Neill's *The Dreamy Kid* (1919), Ida Rauh recruited black actors from a theatre in what was then called “New Harlem,” the neighborhood emerging as the center of African American culture in America, rather than having white actors perform in black face (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 105). It was in *The Emperor Jones* that Charles Gilpin became the first African American in a New York (later Broadway) lead in the twentieth century—paving the way for Paul Robeson's later success in the role. In fact, James Weldon Johnson claimed that the Provincetown “was the initial and greatest force in opening up the way for the Negro on the dramatic stage.”¹² Other names in acting appeared early in their careers at the Playwright's Theatre as well, including later Theatre Guild star Kira Markham and the grand dame of the American theatre, Helen Hayes (“All American Actresses” qtd. in Sarló 108).

In the world of stagecraft, the Provincetown Players productions were also significant. While realistic settings had appeared on Broadway under the aegis of such impresarios as David Belasco, Provincetown productions were among the first in America to employ modern set design inspired by visionaries Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Max Rinehart; the “new art” of post-impressionism; and the stylization of European expressionists. Important designers such as Robert Edmond

Jones, Cleon Throckmorton, and Mordecai Gorelick contributed some of the earliest work in their careers to the Playwright's Theatre (the official name of the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village).¹³ The Provincetown Players should thus claim a large share of the credit for "introducing" the "technical and artistic innovations" Brecht associated with the modernity of the American theatre.

In terms of its literary and critical reputation, the Provincetown Players was for many years known primarily for its discoveries of O'Neill and Glaspell and associated with the modernism of those authors. However, the Players never adopted a single aesthetic style, such as naturalism or symbolism, as many European art theatres did, and were not focused exclusively on the work of its two star playwrights. The ninety-seven new plays and handful of revivals produced by the company were diverse in design, style, and technique. The group produced social problem play comedies, expressionist monologues, satires and spoofs, naturalistic tragedies, and modern morality plays, among other genres. The Players, in fact, spanned a transitional period in American culture from the progressive era to that of the Lost Generation, serving as an important bridge between the American cultural revival of the 1910s, often called the "Little Renaissance," and the high modernism of the 1920s. It is telling that the original Players disbanded in 1922, the year often cited as the watershed moment of international modernism.¹⁴

Despite their central role in nurturing the modern American theatre, scholarship, exclusive of studies of O'Neill and Glaspell, has not until very recently explored the Provincetown's relationship to the larger international cultural currents of its era or analyzed their work systematically using theories of modernism, as has

often been done in other genres. As a consequence, an ironic situation in the criticism exists: The company is most famous for staging the first American modernist drama, plays such as O'Neill's expressionist *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and Glaspell's *The Verge* (1921), yet scholars of the original Provincetown Players have traditionally used critical terms such as "modern," and "modernism" very sparingly in analyzing the group's output.

Of eighteen essays in the indispensable 1991 anthology of essays on contexts of the Players' first performances edited by Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, *1915: The Cultural Moment*, only one dealing with the revolution in the visual arts brought about by the 1913 post-impressionist exhibition uses the term "modernism" in its title (Zurier 196). Only a handful of the other essays in this collection mention the plays of the Players or their creators as "modernist" (Heller and Rudnick 1-11; Trimberger, "New Woman" 98-116). As recently as 2004, a leading Glaspell and Provincetown Players scholar, Barbara Ozieblo, lamented that not only had the work of three women playwrights (Louise Bryant, Mary Caroline Davies, and Edna St. Vincent Millay), the subjects of her article, been ignored, but in general the "productions of the Provincetown Players [. . .] have not been included in the modernist canon, although among them we find the earliest experiments with anti-theatricality—expressionism, symbolism, surrealism—in American theatre" ("Avant Garde" 15). This oversight is typical, of course, not only for the Provincetown, but for the critical treatment of drama in the scholarship of modernism. As Christopher Innes notes, "in the various critical studies of the movement published over the last half century [. . .]

drama has been conspicuous by its absence; and where mentioned at all, it is generally dismissed as following a different—even anti-modernist—agenda” (130).

A more rigorous theoretical assessment of the Provincetown Players’ dramas in light of theories of modernism and the avant-garde is the intended contribution of this study, which builds upon the sources mentioned here and several important additional texts specifically directed towards the relationship of the Provincetown Players to modernism and the avant-garde. These include Brenda Murphy’s seminal book-length study, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*, and Barbara Ozieblo’s article on three formally experimental women of the Provincetown entitled “Avant-Garde and Modernist: Women Dramatists of the Provincetown Players: Bryant, Davies and Millay.” Additionally, an unpublished conference paper by J. Ellen Gainor entitled “How High was Susan Glaspell’s Brow?: *Avant-garde* Drama, Popular Culture, and Twentieth-Century American Taste” provided inspiration for the argument advanced here. Citing cultural theorists that doubt the existence of an American avant-garde prior to abstract expressionism and the counter-view recently advanced by Americanists, Gainor stresses that the question of an American avant-garde remains open and “productively debatable” (13). Marcia Noe and Robert Lloyd Marlowe’s “*Suppressed Desires* and *Tickless Time: An Intertextual Critique of Modernity*” approaches two one-act plays, collaborations by Jig Cook and Susan Glaspell, through the lens of Einstein and relativity. Although the approach used in this study is different from that used by Noe and Marlowe, I arrive at a similar conclusion—that Glaspell and Cook’s collaborations (along with

many of the other early Provincetown Players' one-act plays) should be regarded not primarily as examples of, but rather as *critiques of modernism*.

An examination of the Provincetown Players in the light of the contemporary theory of modernism and the avant-garde that challenges the concept of the autonomy of art is not only warranted, it is demanded by the interrelationship of art and politics that characterized the era of the Little Renaissance and the plays of the Provincetown Players. As Hutchins Hapgood, essayist, anarchist, and Provincetown founder, recalled of the group's first amateur efforts at playmaking in 1915,

At first in each little piece there was something fresh and personal—as if something was springing again sweetly from the earth. They were of course not “great” things. Their very modesty was promising [. . .] It meant much to us all; at once we were expressing something *sweetly personal and sweetly social*. (*Victorian* 394; emphasis added)

Hapgood's observations reveal that, at this early stage, the Provincetown Players emerged with the spirit of exploring the relationship between personal experience and politics, anticipating the slogan of the 1970s women's movement that the “personal is political.”¹⁵ Contemporary theory, as will be shown in the subsequent chapters of this study, can help to reveal the ways in which the Provincetown Players strove for an American theatre of social and political relevance. In order to understand the critique of modernism that is offered in plays of the Provincetown it is necessary to review definitions of several key critical terms.

C. Modernism

The terms “modern,” “modernism,” and “avant-garde” are of course some of the most overused and slippery critical concepts in scholarship of the last century, and it would be impossible to present exhaustive definitions of these terms here.

However, I would argue that the terminology is less settled in the scholarship of American modernism than in that of its European counterparts, and those interested in the Provincetown Players have encountered similar difficulties as those scholars exploring other aspects of American modernism prior to the First World War. In 1987, in a special issue of *American Quarterly* devoted to the subject, Daniel Joseph Singal entitled his introductory essay “Towards an American Modernism.” At a moment when, as Singal mentioned, the critical buzzword was “postmodernism” (12), Singal’s use of “towards” in his title indicates the lack of a critical consensus on the underlying categorization of modernism in the American context.

A number of intellectual historians and cultural critics begin their narratives of modernism by citing the social, technological, and historical conditions in the West at the turn of the last century, conditions which produced two opposing “modernities” (Calinescu 40). This was a period becoming increasingly dominated by mechanization, standardization, and urbanization with the attendant social disruptions to once agriculturally based societies, including the especially harmful effects on human labor brought about by industrial capitalism. Artists and humanist intellectuals saw themselves alienated from these changes and usually, according to most accounts, protested their effects. Matei Calinescu in *Five Faces of Modernity* outlines a “split in Western Civilization,” resulting in “two distinct and bitterly conflicting modernities” (41).

The first “bourgeois idea of modernity,” Calinescu explains, continued the tradition of the industrial revolution, displayed “confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology,” and demanded a “*measurable* time, a time that can be bought and sold” (41; emphasis in original). This bourgeois modernity is also associated with “the cult of reason” and the “orientation toward pragmatism and the cult of action and success” (41). In contrast, Calinescu identifies the “other modernity, the one that was to bring in to being the avant-gardes,” as one which was from its romantic beginnings inclined towards radical anti-bourgeois attitudes. It was disgusted with the middle class scale of values and expressed its disgust through the most diverse means, ranging from rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism to aristocratic self-exile. (42)

This second type of modernity produced an intellectual, literary, and artistic modernism with an “all consuming negative passion” in its attack on the bourgeoisie (42). This alternative modernity confronts and critiques positivism and the myths of European colonial civilization turning, as Calinescu suggests, to the now classic stratagems of radical politics and “anarchic” culture. However, sometimes in their retreat from commercialism and use of formal experimentation, modernists also developed a certain elitism and a corresponding rejection of everyday life and its struggles (42).

Calinescu’s views of international literary modernism as one of a number of forms of opposition to bourgeois modernity is paralleled by observers of the

American scene such as Daniel Singal. Singal calls the capitalist modernity “modernization” (7) but is in accord with Calinescu, arguing that

Modernism should properly be seen as a culture—a constellation of related ideas, beliefs, values, and modes of perception—that came into existence during the mid to late nineteenth century, and that has had a powerful influence on art and thought on both sides of the Atlantic since roughly 1900. Modernization, by contrast, denotes a process of social and economic development, involving the rise of industry, technology, urbanization, and bureaucratic institutions [. . .] with Modernism arising in part as a counter response to the triumph of modernization, especially its norms of rationality and efficiency, in nineteenth-century Europe and America. (7)

Singal’s definition of oppositional modernism is very broad; not just limiting his scope to the arts, he sees modernism as affecting every aspect of contemporary life from politics to popular music and believes, ultimately, that it should be treated as a historical period such as “Victorianism or the Enlightenment” (8). Modernism in this view includes social reform movements and the new politics, feminism and the status of women in society, even changes in typography (9) as well as changes in high culture. Singal’s modernism, like Calinescu’s, is a definition of an age of various responses—social, political, and aesthetic—across disciplines against the rigidity, dogma, and cultural and political repression of western industrial society and the deleterious effects of its commercial empires.

This broad view of modernism is also implicit in recent cultural histories of the American intelligentsia of the first two decades of the twentieth century such as that by Christine Stansell. Stansell's study of Greenwich Village, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, describes the era's multiple interrelationships between cultural and political radicals, workers and intellectuals. Stansell's study provides a fresh look at the legendary intermixing in New York where Harvard-educated middle class rebels and lower east side immigrants, artists and suffragettes, anarchists and labor activists mixed in salons, liberal organizations, political demonstrations, and social life (8). Like Singal, Stansell acknowledges disparate movements that were all, however, part of a transformation from the Victorian era to the new century. The transformation was brought about by

the people who embraced “the modern” and “the new”—big blowsy words of the moment. The old world was finished, they believed—the world of Victorian America, with its stodgy bourgeois art, its sexual prudery and smothering patriarchal families, its crass moneymaking and deadly class exploitation. The new world, the germ of a truly modern America, would be created by those willing to repudiate the cumbersome past and experiment with form, not just in painting and literature, the touchstones of European modernism, but also in politics and love, friendship and sexual passion. (1-2)

Indeed, the generation of which the Provincetown Players were a part fled small-town America for the freedom of the urban centers, particularly traditional areas of artistic bohemia such as Chicago's 57th Street District and Greenwich

Village, where they sought freedom of intellectual thought, sexual experience, and the means to contribute to cultural and political change. They attempted to transform bohemia from romantic myth to social experiment by embracing a host of new intellectual movements, which promised greater personal, creative, and political freedom. The Village intelligentsia debated and to an extent practiced “free love,” as articulated by writers such as Havelock Ellis and Ellen Key, read the New Poetry of free verse, championed post-impressionist art after the 1913 Armory Show, and discovered Freudian psychoanalysis (Heller and Rudnick, “Introduction” 3-6). This was the Greenwich Village where Emma Goldman preached anarchism, Margaret Sanger advocated the legalization of birth control, and Big Bill Heywood, leader of the International Workers of the World, mixed freely with artists and writers as a frequent guest at the salon run by Mabel Dodge on Fifth Avenue.

All of the new movements were regarded at the time as “modern” or part of the “new,”¹⁶ which reveals both early modernism’s opposition to tradition and its optimistic hopes of reforming many areas of human experience. In the introduction to *1915, The Cultural Moment*, Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick observe that “fundamental to all” members of the new movements was “their belief in individual creative effort to reshape self and society” (2). Understanding early modernism in this sense as a complex of the “new” social, political, and aesthetic movements provides insight into the interdependence of art and politics in the plays of the Provincetown Players and explains a good number of the topical references in the plays. Many of the new movements in art and politics were based in Greenwich Village and members of the Players were active in them. In fact, the Players often

satirized the Villagers' over-indulgence in "the new." It is the topicality of such plays and their authors' sense of contemporaneity that makes the Provincetown Players part of the larger world of modernism.

Additionally, the Players not only added to the conversation about modern things, but applied the concept of "the new" to their theatrical productions by experimenting with dramatic form and stylization. As modern theatre, the Provincetown rebelled against outmoded nineteenth-century notions of melodrama, declamatory acting, and artificial scenic designs. If we can situate the Provincetown at the center of American modernism, the question still remains whether their experiments can be correctly and usefully referred to as avant-garde. To explore this issue requires a further terminological distinction between the modern and what came to be called the modernist.

The Modern versus Modernist

In Europe, culture in the 1880s underwent profound changes, which some scholars trace to the emergence of Ibsen and the realistic social problem play (Bradbury and McFarlane 43). Emile Zola expressed the frustration of the realists and the naturalists¹⁷ with the state of nineteenth-century tragedy's "outlandish situations, improbabilities, dishonest uniformity, and uninterrupted unbearable declaiming" (352) and likewise cursed romantic drama's obsession with action, medieval heroes, and "a scale too shrill in sentiment and language" (355-56). Naturalistic drama, according to Zola, moved instead "towards simplicity, the exact word spoken without emphasis, quite naturally" (371). As *The Oxford Companion to*

the Theatre explains, realism was an attempt to replace the “well-made play” of the late nineteenth century with “dramas which should approximate in speech and situation to the social and domestic problems of every day, played by actors who rejected all artifice and spoke and moved naturally against scenery which reproduced with fidelity the usual surroundings of the people they represented” (789-90).

In the introduction to their well-known collection of essays on modernism, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane explain that it was realism during the early years of modernism in Europe that was heralded by critics as the “modern breakthrough” (42). However, as Bradbury and McFarlane note, by the mid 1890s German-speaking critics turned from Ibsen to Strindberg and French intellectuals from Zola to the Symbolists, the drama they saw embodying the “modern” (42-43). “Something happens,” the authors note, “to the fortunes of realism and naturalism, themselves modern but not quite modernist movements,” in the 1890s at a moment the authors define as the “critical crossover point” in modernism (43). Bradbury and McFarlane maintain there is a turn towards “a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representation, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life” (25). Realism is dethroned by Strindberg’s dream play and symbolist drama, approaches to art which might be said to represent internal psychological reality but clearly reject an external objectively verifiable world. However, Bradbury and McFarlane emphasize that in the context of the drama one can see what may be obscure in other media, one form of modernism “*growing out of the other*” (44; emphasis in original).

The idea of a “crossover point” between the “modern” and the “modernist” which had begun in the drama of Europe in the early 1890s was only just arriving in New York by the second decade of the twentieth century. In fact, the full revolt against realism did not appear first in America on the stage, but rather in the visual arts, and then primarily only after the Armory Show of 1913 (Brown, “Armory Show” 172). The Armory Show had originally been conceived of as a venue for furthering the art of progressive American painters, many of whom worked in a figurative style, including the group that later became known as the Ashcan school—John Sloan (also the lead artist of *The Masses*), George Bellows, Robert Henri, and Everett Shin (Green 159). However, these American painters suddenly saw their works “relegated to history” (Green 159) when the exhibit became dominated by European abstract artists. With hundreds of thousands of visitors in attendance, providing a field day for the press to make fun of the European “madmen” (Brown, “Armory Show” 172), the American public and many American artists saw for the first time what were then the revolutionary works of Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Léger, and Duchamp (172).

Ironically, the locus of the crossover point between the two styles of modernism had been the theatre in Europe, but American drama was perhaps the least modern of the arts in the era. Still dominated by out-dated modes of nineteenth-century melodrama, American playwrights and producers had not yet employed many of the stylistic and thematic developments of European realism; stylized stagings influenced by abstract art or attempts at the representation of internal psychological experience were not even on the horizon. American theatres had seen only a handful

of plays of the New Drama of Shaw, Galsworthy, or Ibsen, and American playwrights' efforts at realism had not been met with much success. The financial failure in Boston in 1891 of James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming*, arguably the first modern American play, is a notable example (Bryan 3). Thus, when the Provincetown Players emerged in 1915 establishing a stage "where playwrights of sincere, poetic, literary and dramatic purpose" could produce their work free from commercial considerations, they did not pledge themselves to either a naturalistic or modernist aesthetic. Presumably, this was because their maxim was to support a theatre art form developing from any "sincere" effort, which would challenge the commercial culture of Broadway. This lack of an aesthetic platform, though, probably also reveals that the group could not agree on what a definition of modern or modernist American drama should be.

Modern vs. Modernist and the Provincetown Players

The modernist artists William and Marguerite Zorach first introduced stagings based on post-impressionist designs for the Provincetown's Production of Louise Bryant's morality play, *The Game* (1916). William Zorach then encouraged his friend the free verse poet Alfred Kreymborg (also editor of the important "little" magazines *Glebe*, *Others* and later *Broom*) to submit a play to the Provincetown Players. The result, *Lima Beans* (1916), was nearly rejected by the company until John Reed famously threatened to resign if the play was not produced—an extraordinary moment in the history of the modern American theatre where arguably the most politically radical member of the intelligentsia insisted on the then most aesthetically

radical experiment (Kreymborg, *Troubadour* 242). In return, Kreymborg dedicated his first overtly political play, *Vote the New Moon* (1920), to Reed and Bryant (Kreymborg, *Vote* 5).

Kreymborg became a member of the Players, attended meetings, and voted on submissions. However “he did not feel at home in this new environment” as he relates in his autobiography *Troubadour* (245), and he had little success convincing the Players to “abandon their absorption in naturalism” (242) and accept more work of an experimental or poetic nature. (There were two exceptions, *Knotholes* [1917] by Maxwell Bodenheimer and *The Gentle Furniture Shop* [1917] by Bodenheimer and William Sappier.) After his next play was rejected, Kreymborg negotiated to rent the Provincetown Playhouse between bills to produce an evening of work by a splinter group which he led and named the Other Players (*Troubadour* 246), named after the magazine of modernist verse he was then editing. The Other Players’ bill included plays by Kreymborg and Edna St. Vincent Millay, a dance piece by Kathleen Cannell, wife of the poet Skipwith Cannell, and music by a young composer named Julian Freedman. Although the bill was apparently successful, the Players were not willing to rent the Other Players additional evenings at the Playhouse, and further experiments in modernist stylization had to wait until the 1918-19 season. When Cook left for a sabbatical year to write in Provincetown in the fall of 1918, James Light and Ida Rauh were appointed to co-direct the Provincetown Players. It was during this season that perhaps the most modernist works were produced, including plays by Kreymborg, Millay, and Djuna Barnes. Thus, this apparent resistance to non-naturalistic plays on the part of the founding or controlling members of the company,

and the sudden change in attitude when Cook was in Provincetown, have led to a critical debate among scholars as to Cook's and the founding group's aesthetics.

The first taxonomy of the Provincetown's plays that attempted to account for the apparent conflict between modernist stylization and naturalism was proposed in a pioneering article "Susan Glaspell: Provincetown Playwright" by Gerhard Bach in 1978. Bach argued that the Provincetown's work could be divided into three phases: an early phase which demonstrated "the need as expressed by Cook and others, for an American dramatic literature expressing a socio-historical awareness" (35), characterized by plays which "attempted almost unanimously to depict, criticize, and satirize contemporary social ills and to propagate liberalism and a moderate radicalism" (35); a middle phase he called "realism vs. symbolism (or the realistic prose play vs. the symbolistic verse play)" (36), in which where experiments with form challenged the realistic model; and a final phase of "renewed social realism interspersed with experiments in expressionism" (36). The older group of founding players may have disagreed on much, but in Bach's view they agreed on a naturalistic aesthetics.

Barbara Ozieblo, both in her critical biography of Susan Glaspell and in the introduction to her anthology of the Players' short works, takes issue with several of Bach's points. Ozieblo notes that no record exists of Cook's opinion of the Other Players' bill and given Cook's "faith in the power of music and dance, and his later development—he must have approved of their venture in verse" (*Provincetown Players* 29). Further, Ozieblo argues, "Cook complained so frequently of the dearth of good plays by Americans that he was not likely to refuse a play merely because it

did not comply with the canons of realism, and he was always eager for the type of play that would never be accepted for production in a commercial theatre” (*Provincetown Players* 108). Indeed, while the circumstantial evidence suggests Cook may have been an impediment to modernist stylization, it was also Cook who tried for years to have the poetic play *Grotesques* written by a Chicago friend, poet Cloyd Head, produced by the Players (Kennedy 821). Brenda Murphy, has recently joined the fray on this issue and, recognizing the contradictory evidence, is content to paint a broader picture. While she does not believe the conflict between the modern and the modernist was “generational,” Murphy argues that Bach identified “one significant tension within the Provincetown Players’ aesthetics, broadly speaking between realist or representational art and non-realist or presentational art” (41), in short what has been sketched here as the contradiction between the modern and the modernist.

I stated at the outset that my intention was to explore whether the Provincetown Players experiments were not only modernist, but avant-garde as well. European cultural theorists specifically counter what they believe is the perception among Anglo-American critics that modernist experimentation is in and of itself avant-garde (Calinescu 140; Schulte-Sasse vii-x and xiv). The very interesting revolt against realism sketched here that emerged after the New York Armory show and which became an internecine conflict within the Provincetown Players thus would not necessarily be considered *prima facie* evidence of avant-garde experimentation by such critics. In the next section, I will look at theories of the avant-garde in more detail and propose that an alternative taxonomy of the Provincetown Players oeuvre

can be constructed, not along the chronological/stylistic axis of Bach, nor the modern representational/modernist presentational aesthetics of Murphy, but rather between a modern tragic aesthetics and a meta-dramatic avant-garde politics.

Before we can move on to this argument, we must acknowledge a final problem with Gerhard Bach's taxonomy of the Players. Bach concluded that during what he believed was the middle phase of the Provincetown's development, "realism vs. symbolism (or the realistic prose play vs. the symbolistic verse play)" (36), symbolism lost out to naturalism in "the 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' [. . .]" (35). Bach's assumption here that the more naturalistic plays were more socially committed in nature, and that the symbolic verse plays dealt with vague universals is highly debatable. In fact, the social and political concerns of the Provincetown Players, the mix of the "sweetly personal and sweetly social" goals of the company, are not abandoned but *continued* and extended by the more presentational, non-realist plays. It is true that "timeless concerns" as poetic themes are often expressed by "verse" playwrights such as Kreymborg, Bryant, and Millay but such ideas are always depicted as being constrained by, and the plays ultimately comment on, social and political contexts. Kreymborg's star-crossed newlyweds in *Lima Beans* are depicted as the working poor; Millay's *Aria da Capo* (1918) presents a murder on stage which is then related to the First World War; and Bryant's *The Game* (1916) features allegorical figures of Life and Death, but portrays Life's

struggles to justify saving the lives of a few individuals when thousands are dying in France.

The idea that a naturalistic or realistic art was more effective in representing social or political concerns *was* expressed by at least one group of artists and writers during the period. As art historian Rebecca Zurier has demonstrated, the art of the periodical *The Masses* remained decidedly figurative despite the notoriety of the Armory Show. *The Masses* was firmly committed to “scenes of contemporary life rendered in a representational style” (Zurier 206) and, as Zurier observes, “consistently shied away from publishing Modernist or nonobjective art and literature” (206) because “it seemed incompatible with the goals of participating in current political struggles and using down to earth humor to appeal to the working class” (207). However, the fact that modern art was met with resistance by some members of the American left does not mean that this art was entirely non-political. Indeed, all art is political, and a more complete analysis of the ideologies found in the plays of the Provincetown Players, both naturalistic and “symbolistic,” needs to be undertaken.

Avant-garde

In order to affirm the Provincetown Players’ contributions to both the rise of modernist and avant-garde theatre in America, it is first necessary to defend the idea that an avant-garde existed in the United States during the time of the Little Theatre movement—a point that is itself contested in contemporary scholarship. The term “avant-garde” has been used in many different contexts but the vernacular definition

implies a commitment on the part of early-adopters of “the new.” *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines the avant-garde as “the leaders in new or unconventional movements” (129). Such a definition is temporal: the leaders of the new movements are initially considered advanced, but once the movement becomes mainstream, the old vanguard are understood as simply the forerunners of what is now the accepted style. Most contemporary cultural critics, however, would charge that such a definition is too general and ignores the often ideological or political nature of new movements.

Both the etymology of “avant-garde” and the historical movements usually associated with it have generally entailed some form of political rebellion. Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick effectively set the tone for investigations of the Provincetown Players and the avant-garde in the introduction to their collection of essays on the cultural moment of 1915. Heller and Rudnick emphasize they are “returning” for their definition to Saint Simon, “who first defined the avant-garde as both a political and cultural vanguard” (10). Matei Calinescu has traced the etymology of the term to Old French medieval warfare, then to its appearance as a metaphor for the vanguard in politics, literature, and art in the sixteenth century, and finally to the beginning of what he calls its “modern career” also in Saint Simon. “Saint-Simon regarded artists, along with scientists and industrialists, as naturally destined to be part of the Trinitarian ruling elite in the ideal state,” Calinescu explains (102). In all of these incarnations, the avant-garde’s significance lies in the relationship of the cultural insurgents to social and political vanguardism. Indeed, any

definition of the term that would be useful to an understanding of the diverse social movements of Greenwich Village would necessarily involve the political.

There is also a specific divergence in the use of the term “avant-garde” between mainly European cultural critics and American and English scholars. Traditional Anglo-American criticism has tended to conflate the terms modernism and avant-garde (Calinescu 140; Schulte-Sasse vii-x and xiv). Modernist writers such as Pound, Joyce, or Eliot, known for having adopted new formally experimental methods of language and representation, would nonetheless not be referred to as avant-garde in continental theory where the term is reserved primarily for only the most extreme examples of “artistic negativism” (Calinescu 140). J. Ellen Gainor, a leading Glaspell scholar, provides a trenchant account of this transatlantic debate with specific reference to the American Little Theatre movement in a recent conference paper. Gainor explains that “European theories of the avant-garde” (8), “which have defined our understanding of this insurgency [the Little Theatre movement], inform us that there was no avant-garde in the United States until the advent of abstract expressionism” (8-9).

Gainor traces the view that there was no American avant-garde before the Second World War, ironically, to American critic Clement Greenberg. She explains it was then passed to European cultural critics such as Bürger and Andreas Huyssen and returned to American studies through recent books such as that by American theatre historian Arnold Aronson. Aronson’s *History of American Avant Garde Theatre*, Gainor notes, begins in 1950 and effectively ignores experimental productions during the era of the Little Theatre Movement of the 1910s and 1920s.

Gainor argues that Aronson appears to accept uncritically Andreas Huyssen's assertion in his important early study of mass culture and modernism *After the Great Divide* that a "shift of artistic innovation" (6) occurred from Europe to America during the Cold War. This shift, Huyssen believes, explains the lack of a "political perspective" in pop art and abstract expressionism because of the "altogether different relationship between avant-garde art and cultural tradition in the United States, where the iconoclastic rebellion against a bourgeois cultural heritage would have made neither artistic nor political sense" (6). Huyssen's assumptions, as Gainor demonstrates, "preclude any acknowledgment of a possible critique of bourgeois values" except in "the artistry of the more recent past" ("How High" 9).

Huyssen, employing concepts derived from Burger's theory, argues that the avant-garde exists to critique high modernism's absorption in the "institutions of art" of bourgeois culture. If America did not establish a modernist high culture before the Second World War, it therefore follows it could have had no rebellion against high culture that would qualify as avant-garde. Here, Gainor lays the blame at the feet of Greenberg who, in his legendary 1939 *Partisan Review* essay "Avant Garde and Kitsch," relegated virtually all attempts at American culture to "kitsch" with a sweeping gesture, and recognized few attempts at experiment towards a higher culture. Gainor notes especially, that Greenberg "makes no reference to such nationwide endeavors" as the Little Theatre movement ("How High" 10). This Greenberg-Huyssen philosophy does seem to omit any reference to pre-war American modernism and the magazines, galleries, theatres and other modern institutions that developed to promote a new largely anti-commercial culture.

This failure to recognize the opposition to bourgeois commercial culture inherent in the insurgent American theatre leads Aronson, Gainor believes, to “posit a seamless development for American dramaturgy that begins with figures like Glaspell and moves on to Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams” (12). In Aronson’s history, he argues that “by the second decade of the twentieth century” (3) American playwrights like “Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Alfred Kreymborg, John Howard Lawson, Elmer Rice, and, of course, O’Neill” (2), were beginning to “incorporate avant-garde elements from European models,” but their plays remained essentially within a “realistic framework” (3) and these elements were not the “basis for creating plays,” the “fundamental building blocks of a radical European avant-garde became mere stylistic conceits in the hands of most American playwrights” (3). Proof that the use of European elements in American plays was not truly avant-garde, Aronson asserts, is revealed in the fact that “Broadway welcomed every new generation and easily absorbed what changes or permutations each had to offer” (3). Gainor objects, however, to Aronson’s assumption of a seamless tradition because of his “inability to see the difference between the economic model of the Little Theatres which emerged in opposition to Broadway nor the political differences” (“How High” 13). (Gainor presumably references here the fact that most Little Theatres were supported neither by the state, mass ticket sales, or even endowments from wealthy capitalists but subsisted primarily on season subscriptions as European art theatres had done.)

As opposed to this European/Greenbergist tradition to which Aronson subscribes, Gainor identifies an alternative tradition in American studies that has “begun to look more critically at the relationship between American cultural

production and European cultural theory” (13). She quotes Walter B. Kalaidjian, who believes “high, avant-garde, and populist styles” merged in the diversity of American “social modernism” (qtd. in Gainor 13), and Michael North, who argues for the existence of a “home grown avant-garde devoted to American popular culture, to the multiracial heritage of the Americas, and above all to modern writing in ‘plain American.’” Gainor summarizes the positions of Kalaidjian and North that “the artists connected with [. . .] [these diverse movements] made the European avant-garde tradition their own, by transforming it to speak to their audiences [. . .] within an American context” (14), and concludes that this “cultural mixing” of European avant-garde styles and home grown traditions in American modernism should be defined as the “hybridity of the early American avant-garde” (14). Gainor acknowledges that North and Kalaidjian were not writing specifically on the Little Theatre movement, but she believes “this theatrical tradition nevertheless fits within the cultural framework they describe” (15).

Indeed, in *American Culture Between the Wars*, Kalaidjian’s primary focus is on the print culture of American’s little magazines of the “revolutionary left” of the 1920s and 1930s; he opens with a brief discussion of *The Masses* from 1915 to 1920. Of course, a number of contributors to the magazine in this era were also involved with its successors, *The Liberator* and *New Masses*. Additionally, a number of these same contributors, such as Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Michael Gold, and John Reed, overlapped not only between the earlier and later periods, but also between magazine writing/editing and the Little Theatre movement directly through their participation in the Provincetown Players. Gainor seems justified therefore in suggesting that the

application of a hybrid theory of an American avant-garde along the lines of Kalaidjian's study can be applied to the Little Theatre movement, and the goal of this study is to apply it to the Provincetown Players' oeuvre in particular, although admittedly, the politics of early Provincetown Players productions are usually not as radically left as the movements Kalaidjian examines in the later period.

Kalaidjian argues that this hybrid strain of European and American impulses constitutes an alternative American modernist tradition—one of multiple avant-gardes. Arguing that “the diversity of this cultural production has been overshadowed by the more sanitized canon of high modernism” (4), Kalaidjian emphasizes the need to recover this culture and the larger panorama of modernist activities it represents. He maintains,

Postwar scholarship on high modernism has largely silenced the century's complex and contentious social context [. . .] . This lapse of cultural memory persists, arguably, through the canon's incredibly narrow focus on a select group of seminal careers. Such reigning tropes of individual talent have served to fix, regulate, and police modernism's unsettled social text, crosscut as it is by a plurality of transnational, racial, sexual, and class representations. (2)

Kalaidjian believes instead that the mixture of American and Russian proletarian art and writing represented in styles as diverse as Russian constructivism and American popular fictions constitute this “American tradition of critique” which “nurtured a revolutionary textual praxis” (9).

Kalaidjian's use of the term *avant-garde* to describe this alternative tradition to academic high modernism contests the Europeanized Greenberg tradition identified above by Gailor, because it recognizes that *both* an academic high culture and an oppositional culture existed between the world wars and accepts a mixing of high and popular styles. In particular, Kalaidjian articulates that "this new cultural force," American socialist and proletarian writing and art, "aspired to the *avant-garde* transformation of everyday life in its internationalist scope; its diversity of gender, racial, and class perspectives; its contentious mix of Greenwich Village bohemianism and Washington Square socialism; and its blend of high and populist styles" (9). For purposes of this study, Kalaidjian's argument for a hybrid American *avant-garde* tradition of social commitment will provide an alternative rubric under which the early plays of the Provincetown Players can be analyzed. This strategy throws into question the realist tradition thought to be monolithic by Arnold Aronson—as well as the reputation of the Provincetown Players as exclusively modernist. It also suggests that, stylistically, neither realist nor modernist aesthetics define, *per se*, the concept of the *avant-garde* in the United States between 1900 and 1920. Rather, identifying certain Provincetown Players plays or portions of plays as *avant-garde* must fundamentally rest on how the aesthetics and politics of the plays are used or performed. If elements are employed along the lines indicated by Aaronson—exclusively in the service of realism—these are likely to be modernist rather than *avant-garde* techniques. If elements are employed in a manner that both stylistically and politically seems at odds with the values of the emerging high modernism, these

plays or portions of plays can be productively thought of as belonging to an American avant-garde tradition.

Although Kalaidjian takes issue with some of the ideas of European cultural critics, it is important to note that in his scholarship there is nonetheless a reliance on certain fundamental aspects of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

Specifically in the quote above, as Kalaidjian articulates the American avant-garde's aspirations to the "transformation of everyday life" (Kalaidjian 9), he echoes Bürger's assertion that the avant-garde's purpose is to "reintegrate art into the praxis of everyday life" (Bürger 22).

Likewise, while articulating the existence of a hybrid tradition for the American avant-garde that can be identified in the early productions of the Provincetown Players, which thus places me somewhat at odds with the European critics, the argument advanced in this study relies on several key assumptions of Bürger's theory, particularly as was mentioned at the outset of this introduction, the politics of what Bürger identifies as the historical avant-garde's turn towards "self-criticism" (22).

Here it is important to include a note on the specific aesthetics of expressionism, which have often been linked to the non-naturalistic plays of the Provincetown Players such as Alfred Kreymborg's *Lima Beans*, Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*, and Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. As Peter Nicholls notes, the style was noted most for the tone of its rejection of realism: "Like the Cubists, the Expressionists were interested in arriving at unfamiliar images of the world through calculated modes of distortion, but where the French artists sought some kind of analytic distance and attachment [. . .] the Expressionist emphasis was always on

intensity of perception secured by infusing the world with violent emotion” (142). Additionally, expressionism has always problems for critics seeking to categorize it. Perhaps the most famous mid-twentieth century critic of the movement, Walter H. Sokel, noted that “what strikes one first about expressionist plays is an extremism of theme, language, stagecraft, mixed with many features of realistic or classical drama” (xii). It is itself a hybrid form, and this makes it problematic to give it either a modernist or avant-garde designation as per Burger’s theory of the avant-garde. In a recent discussion, Brian Richardson has argued that, with respect to the modern prose novel, expressionism should be allowed to stand as its own category, alongside realism, high modernism and the avant-garde. Meanwhile in recent studies of expressionist drama informed by theory of the avant-garde and postmodernism, critics such as David Gravers in *The Aesthetics of Disturbance* and Richard Murphy in *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* have argued for expressionism’s inclusion as an avant-garde movement and asserted its importance in the development of postmodernism despite its many affinities with realism and later high modernism. Such critical discourse makes evident the true hybrid nature of the genre as an intermediary category between modernism and avant-garde and thus will be discussed as relevant to the argument for the avant garde being made here (particularly in Chapter 3 below).

Avant-garde and Self-Criticism

At the beginning of this chapter, it was suggested that it was ironic that the Provincetown Players had the critical reputation of being harbingers of modernism on

the American stage but that they were rarely studied in this light. A more fundamental problem is that because the Players' modernism is associated with the later full-length works of O'Neill, the fact that many of their early plays were actually critiques of modernism has been generally overlooked. Only rarely mentioned in the scholarship is the fact that when the Players emerged at Provincetown in 1915, they were known for an ironic attitude towards modernism. The company was referred to in at least one early newspaper account, as a group "so modern that they not only write about modern things but satirize them" (qtd. in Sarlós 44). This study diverges from previous approaches by focusing on the degree to which the early Provincetown one-act satires critiqued the essential tenets of early Greenwich Village modernism. The satirical distance from the modern that appears in these plays is rarely seen as significant, but in fact it coincided with a more serious questioning of the group members' own roles as artists and of the way art functions in society—the kind of questions the avant-garde usually asks.

Although the following comments of Hutchins Hapgood, essayist, anarchist, and founding member of the Players, are frequently quoted, few previous studies of the Provincetown have fully explored the implications of Hapgood's recollections of the attitude that prevailed in Provincetown in the summer of 1915. While there was creative ferment in the air—as legends of the group's origins often maintain—Hapgood also underscores the impact that the outbreak of the first world war had on the assembled writers:

When the War broke out at Provincetown we had, in spite of our reckless excitement, a remnant of faith. We had, most of us, believed

in something—a cause, a method or art, or some enduring civilization. When the explosion came we hoped to see the fruition of our faith. The social revolutionists for the moment felt, that this civilization would prevail over the old ideas. But as the year passed their spiritual disappointment became even greater. It was before the Russian Revolution came to bring spiritual meaning again. It was before America had gone into the War; the contagion of conflict with its old eloquence had hardly touched us. Before the year had passed everyone I knew had lost something: he saw his work with less and less conviction; he was shaken in his belief in any ideas he may have had; he was disturbed, rudderless, relatively hopeless. (*Victorian* 391)

Hapgood's description reveals the close connection between the creative moment in Provincetown and a profound crisis in ideas. This crisis, brought about as the reality and horrors of the war were recognized by the intelligentsia, crushed the prewar optimism about the power of art and social reform to create a new era. Hapgood explains the playmaking at Provincetown in part as a rejection of prewar ideals:

So these few persons at Provincetown—and there were doubtless very many people everywhere with the same disillusionment and the same hope—were inspired with a desire to be truthful to their simple human lives, to ignore, if possible, the big tumult and machine and get hold of some simple convictions which would stand the test of their own experience. They felt the need of rejecting everything, even the *Systems of Rejection*, and of living as intimately and truthfully as they

could; and, if possible, they wanted to express the simple truth of their lives and experience by writing, staging, and acting their own plays.

(*Victorian* 394; emphasis added)

Hapgood's comments, then, suggest that the Provincetown group began working on plays, not simply as an expression of the ideas current in the prewar American renaissance in which most had participated, i.e., a rejection of the larger American mass culture and puritan values which were the *de rigueur* targets of cultural and political radicals of the 1910s. The group was also to some extent rebelling against their own commitments and ideals, the "systems of rejection." Previous accounts of the Provincetown have missed how the moment of their formation so closely parallels general historic trends in international modernism identified by cultural theorists. Matei Calinescu describes an underlying condition of modernism which results in a rejection of its own advances: "Aesthetic modernity should be understood as a crisis concept involved in a three fold dialectical opposition to tradition, to the modernity of bourgeois civilization (with the ideals of rationality, utility, progress), and, finally, to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new tradition or form of authority" (10).

Rejecting a "new form of authority" may explain why plays like Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires* emerged, spoofing both psychoanalysis and the whole method by which new intellectual ideas were disseminated in Village bohemia, or why Neith Boyce risked writing about the intimate details of her friend Mabel Dodge's relationship with John Reed in *Constancy*, providing an unflattering portrait of the cardinal Village principle of free love.

The intelligentsia's turn inward in Provincetown seems parallel to the cultural crisis identified in various studies of modernism. This moment of modernism's "opposition to itself," is defined by Bürger as the "stage of self-criticism." Bürger seizes on the concept of self-criticism as a fundamental opposition between modernism and the avant-garde. He believes the self-critical moment is tied to a recognition by cultural vanguardists of art's lack of social impact, the questioning of traditional assumptions about the "special" or autonomous place art holds, especially as this is formulated in the art for art's sake movement of the turn of the century.

Bürger explains:

with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism. Only after art, in nineteenth-century Aestheticism, has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life can the aesthetic develop "purely." But the other side of autonomy, art's lack of social impact, also becomes recognizable. (22)

For Bürger, this self-criticism is specifically political: it is the product of cultural vanguardists' anxiety that fully autonomous art works, created for purely aesthetic contemplation, have no social purpose. The avant-garde in contrast seeks to reintegrate art and society. "The avant-gardist protest," Bürger claims, "whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences" (22).

Bürger sees the rejection of the autonomy of art that follows from modernism's critique of itself as a "critique of art as institution," the essence of avant-garde activities:

With the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism. Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society [. . .]. The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. (22)

Bürger's theory significantly raises the bar as to what can effectively be termed avant-garde. Notions of experimental or even radical changes in the arts are not enough. Indeed, modernism's willingness to replace the works of an older culture with new works of different formal qualities is only further evidence that modernism is not itself, or is at least not usually, avant-garde. However, the plays of the Provincetown Players in their critique of cultural modernism, i.e., their satirical take on the institutions of art of their own rebellion, exhibit the self-criticism Bürger attributes to the avant garde. Some plays such as Cook's *Change Your Style* go so far as deliberately to expose the economics of the patronage system that was central to the formation of the canon of modernism (Wexler 19-20).

The early Provincetown performances of 1915-16 exemplify an avant-garde self-criticism that developed out of the American "cultural hybridity" of the early modernist era. These plays are part turn-of-the-century parlor game, part modernist psychotherapy, part avant-garde anti-theatre. The development of the Provincetown Players thus parallels the structures of modernism and avant-garde outlined by Bürger

in two significant respects. Thematically, these plays satirize cardinal beliefs of the era's radicals, a set of beliefs Malcolm Cowley called "the Greenwich Village idea" (52)—critiquing free love, psychoanalysis, the pretensions of the artist—and they reveal the group's growing anxiety about the bohemian life, with its Aestheticist trappings, as an ineffectual model of the artist for the group's larger social purposes. This critique of the Villager is made from several different vantages in their work, but it can be seen as emerging from a fear of "art's lack of social impact," (Bürger 22) born during the "stage of self-criticism" (Bürger 22) in their movement.

Second, the Provincetowner's reaction to the depressing continuation of the war and criticism of their own modes and methods of rebellion is to create plays, certainly aesthetic objects, but plays performed in contexts that openly defy traditional theatre paradigms; these plays were created neither as commercial Broadway commodities, nor as autonomous works of high modernism, but were integrated into the "life praxis" of the artistic community in Provincetown and in Greenwich Village. Indisputably, while many of these plays may be said to follow realistic forms and aesthetics, they almost all employ metadrama, using meta-theatrical techniques to remind their audiences of the real-life rather than aesthetic contexts of the performances and to implicate their audiences in the matter critiqued in the plays.

For the first performance of Neith Boyce's *Constancy* in 1915, the audience was seated in the living room of the cottage on Cape Cod Bay rented by Boyce and Hapgood. Afterwards, the audience relocated to the former "stage" and looked into the house for Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires*. Robert Sarlós has commented

that this movement of the audience was an “unconscious experiment with interchangeable performer-spectator space” (15). However, Gainor asks whether the group was really unconscious of this dynamic:

We can see that the interchangeable spaces exactly captured the relation of audience to production. The first two dramas established one of the central, but unstated, production criteria for the Provincetown Players: a concern with issues close to their lives and experience whether personal, political, artistic, or social. Thus, the seamlessness, or exchangeability, of the actor-audience roles perfectly exemplifies the creative milieu for the group. (Susan Glaspell 23)

Truly, the fourth wall was porous in Provincetown; plays were sometimes based on the lives of people who were part of the community, and in at least one case, a member of the group played a caricature of himself, when the post-impressionist painter Brör Nordfelt played the post impressionist “Bordfelt” in Cook’s *Change Your Style*. While these plays may lack the confrontational stratagems of the European avant-garde, they are clearly not self-contained autonomous art works either, instead depending upon a participatory relationship with their audiences. Often the conclusions to the plays remain consciously open-ended, encouraging a conversation about the issues they tackle within the community of artists who participated as both performers and spectators.

Cook’s theories of communal production, combined with the fact that subscription ticket holders after the company moved to New York were called

“associate members” and that easily half their audiences were comprised of Greenwich Villagers, all contributed to a theatre praxis reintegrated into the life of the artistic community. This was an idea of theatre that works against the notion of autonomy, where every phase of the theatrical experience is, theoretically at least, open to input—theatre as intertextuality rather than as hermetically sealed artifact.

While the self-referentiality of the early Players’ work has been noted by scholars, viewing the Players as the American manifestation of modernist self-criticism is a unique approach offered in this study. In fact, attempting to interpret this moment of self-criticism through Bürger’s theory of “critique of art as institution” may be somewhat unusual and likely requires anticipation of objections. The fact that the argument outlined here follows Kalaidjian’s categorization of an American avant-garde as a hybrid of left high culture and popular forms necessarily requires applying Bürger selectively. The limitations that Bürger put on his theory have in some cases frustrated scholars because of its focus on extreme examples and strict periodization of the classical avant-garde. The English modernist scholar Jane Goldman cites Richard Murphy, Dietrich Scheunemann, and Frederick R. Karl as three contemporary scholars developing theories of the avant-garde that widen Bürger’s assertions (20). As Goldman notes, “Bürger’s theory of the avant-garde has recently been opened up by various critics who have recognized the need both to revise his definition of the term, and to apply it to a wider spectrum or art of the period of the historical avant-garde” (20).

One objection might be that Bürger’s theory is based on the emergence of the classical avant-garde, e.g., futurism, expressionism, surrealism, dada, etc. in the early

years of the twentieth century. He charts this as a movement away from aestheticism; however, he does not offer a history of the avant-garde before this time. David Graver, a theatre scholar who in general subscribes to Bürger 's theory, has noted that prior to the art for art's sake movement, naturalism also did not seek to make an art "designed for aesthetic contemplation, an oasis in and respite from the world of politics and business" ; rather, "the original avant-gardes proposed a politically partisan art that imparted information about the world and led to action in it." Aestheticism and symbolism were retreats from the natural world to worlds of "aesthetic contemplation" (4) in Graver's view, essentially interruptions in the tradition of ideologically committed art, and it was only with the emergence of the classical twentieth-century avant-gardes that a concern for ideology once again became the province of insurgent art.

This chronology cannot simply be transferred onto the history of the American Little Theatre movement. Part of the hybridity of the period, and as indicated earlier, in the innovative Provincetown plays, involves an anachronistic or atemporal (by European standards) mixing of naturalistic and modernist aesthetics. With the Provincetown Players, naturalistic drama is introduced *after* decadence, not before it, and occurs simultaneously with formal modernist experiments. Thus, both aesthetic styles are employed to move away from the "Art for Art's sake" philosophy and toward an art form and a vision of the artist that is socially consequential. Many of the Provincetown Players were participants in the movements of social modernism, espousing political commitments to socialism, feminism, and labor. Their work rejects a fully autonomous art—advocating instead, as Hapgood suggests, an art that

finds connections between the “sweetly personal and sweetly social” (*Victorian* 394).

This introduction has provided background on the history of the dynamic theatre producing organization called The Provincetown Players—the technical and artistic innovations, to use Brecht’s terminology, which they brought to the American theatre, the racial and gender diversity they encouraged in the art form, their charismatic leader George Cram Cook, and the importance of the backdrop of the intellectual ferment of the Greenwich Village of the first two decades from which they emerged. Additionally, I have suggested that the Players’ own credo of artistic eclecticism (provided a playwright was American) as well as shifting critical terminology, and the aesthetic clash within modernism itself from naturalism to fragmentation and stylization, has historically made it problematic for scholars to place the Players firmly within the traditions of international and American modernism. This situation has been complicated by a lack of exploration of the group’s notions of experiment in relation to a theory of the avant-garde. The current critical debate between scholars of American modernism such as Michael North, Walter Kalaidjian, and J. Ellen Gainor and European cultural theorists indicates that the time is right for a renewed discussion of whether and/or what is an American avant-garde. The following chapters will suggest ways the Provincetown Players can be viewed as both modernist and avant garde. Hutchins Hapgood’s observation that the Provincetown Players began at a moment of “rejecting everything, even the Systems of Rejection” (*Victorian* 394), suggests that far from standing apart from the ideas and events of international modernism, including avant-garde self-criticism of

modernism, we should look more closely at the critique of modernism offered in their plays.

Chapter 2: The “Bohemian” Plays of the Provincetown Players

Bohemianism and Intellectuals

The importance of the bohemian myth to the generation of the modernists has been understood since the appearance of some of the earliest studies of modernism; Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle* and Renato Poggoli’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* are two examples. In a recent book, Michael Soto goes so far as to suggest that due to the problem of finding an accurate and complete definition of modernism, we should acknowledge “the artistic milieu and avant-garde lifestyle from which the modern arts derive.” Thus, the bohemian lifestyle may be modernism’s “single unifying characteristic” (3). Soto, like many interpreters of literary modernism, however, jumps from the bohemians of the 1890s to the Lost Generation of the 1920s, ignoring the formative era of the first two decades of the twentieth century. A growing body of scholarship now focuses on the role of bohemianism in literature of the period of the 1910s “Little Renaissance.” Scholars of the Provincetown Players have identified references in the group’s plays to Greenwich Village institutions, personalities, and theories. It is the contention of this study that the Village bohemian myth is not ancillary but rather a central and determining aspect of the Provincetown Players’ early modernism. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the self-referential critique of bohemianism and the intelligentsia that often appears as metadrama in the Players’ early one-act plays. As identified in Chapter One, this self-referentiality can be understood as the manifestation of a self-critical phase of modernism and provides a case for speculation on the origins of an American theatrical avant-garde.

Each of the playwrights examined in this chapter, while focusing on a variety of different issues and concerns, nonetheless presented plays that share similar doubts about cherished modernist and bohemian attitudes. The setting in all of these plays is literally the center of the artistic community. It might be an artist's studio in Provincetown, such as in Jig Cook's *Change Your Style* (1915), or around the arch in Washington Square Park, the geographical center of Greenwich Village. The arch is visible through the apartment window in Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires* (1915) and briefly bears the weight of an angel in Floyd Dell's *The Angel Intrudes* (1918). These plays also take on topics of current discussion considered part of the new modernist social culture by the intelligentsia, such as gender relations and free love in Neith Boyce's *Constancy* (1915) and Wilbur Daniel Steele's *Not Smart* (1916), psychoanalysis in Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires*, and the New Art in Cook's *Change Your Style* are a few among numerous other examples. Most importantly, these plays lambaste the character of the Village bohemian or radical, often identified in stage directions as costumed in the black velvet of the *fin de siècle* or the distinctive "chic" of the Village, or the attire of Jhansi the student activist in Glaspell's *Close the Book*, who is busy stirring up trouble on a college campus "dressed as a non-conformist but attractively" (63).

Most importantly, it is the character of the American artist or bohemian that emerges as the subject in these plays. Albeit amid much humor, the writers that contributed to the Provincetown seem to question the inability of bohemian utopianism to produce the ideal mixture of personal exploration and political change idealized by their generation. While many of the early plays are comic satires and

some might be construed as conservative in outlook in that they chastise Villagers for losing touch with “conventional” values, the persistence of the critique of aesthetic attitudes and the artistic life in the Provincetown bohemian plays is evidence of a persistent, and even avant-garde, self-criticism. This criticism, if not “anti-art” in the sense of European movements, is in some respects anti-artist. The Village plays challenge the artist or bohemian for maintaining an artificial distance from the realities of everyday life which is counter to their efforts for social change. Before considering the bohemian satires of the Provincetown Players in detail, it is necessary to review briefly the attitudes the Players and their generation held towards bohemia, consider the “code” of Greenwich Village that emerged from these ideas and is satirized in the plays, and to mention an early forerunner that likely influenced the group at Provincetown.

Origins of the Village Plays

Entering America’s Latin Quarters, the generation coming of age in the 1910s merged their own social and cultural revolt against stultified Victorian art and literature, Puritan sexual morality, and oppressive politics with a popular tradition of artistic bohemia. They learned of the bohemian—the threadbare aesthete in crushed velvet or the outlandish attire of a romantic epoch, a sexual adventurer and a provocateur dedicated to *épater le bourgeois*—from a variety of both popular and elite cultural sources. Henri Murger began the genre of bohemian narrative in *Scenes of Bohemian Life* in the 1840s, but popular revivals continued through the Victorian period including George DuMaurier’s best-selling *Trilby* (1894). The stories of O.

Henry and numerous “bohemian” publications¹⁸ in various cities Americanized the tradition, and a number of future Provincetown Players arrived in Greenwich Village with visions of aesthetic bohemia derived from such myths. Future Provincetowner John Reed captured this feeling in his long ode to, and lampoon of the Village, “The Day in Bohemia” (1913). Reed claimed he would

Embalm in deathless rhyme

The great souls of our little time:

Inglorious Miltons by the score. —

Mute Wagners, — Rembrandts, ten or more, — (*Collected Poems* 55)

Floyd Dell began his days in New York wearing the high-collar and silk cravat of the *fin de siècle* and was heralded as the “textbook case” bohemian (Hahn 77). Other young writers and painters were attracted to the Village’s celebrations of the traditions of the Left Bank including artists’ balls, teashops, and troubadour poets who performed at cafes.

As Reed’s early parody suggests, however, whenever the modernists’ sought to recount their sojourn in bohemia, the tales and plays they created emerged in a satirical tone. In his seminal history of American bohemia Alfred Parry describes some of the parodies that appeared during the periodic fads for “Murgeria” created both by denizens of the milieu and outside observers. William Dean Howells portrayed the subculture with a “condescending and amused smile” (Parry 101) in his 1893 novel *The Coast of Bohemia*. Burlesques of Du Maurier’s *Trilby* were performed in the 1890s. In the Village era that produced the Provincetown Players, spoofs of artistic pretensions were first staged at the studio of the painter Everett

Shinn in 1912. These were followed in 1913 by a series of short satirical one-act plays written and directed by Floyd Dell at the Liberal Club on MacDougal Street and performed by the club's members. John Reed's *Moondown* (written 1913), an early dramatic version of bohemian satire, was produced by the Liberal Club drama group's successor, the Washington Square Players, in early 1915. Both Dell and Reed would leave these groups to write for the Provincetown Players.

While Dell's early pieces were created by and about the residents of bohemia, Alfred Parry notes that, as the fame of Greenwich Village grew and was exploited commercially, parodies by outsiders appeared. Sinclair Lewis's *Hobohemia* emerged as a *Saturday Evening Post* short story in 1917 and then as a play which became a Broadway hit in 1919. Lewis, like Howells a generation earlier, was never comfortable with bohemian pretense and remained critical of Village circles. Parry locates a turning point in plays about artists and their audiences in 1918. During the war, most political radicalism was suppressed by the Wilson administration—resulting in two separate trials of the staff of the radical publication *The Masses* for sedition. Parry attributes the wartime fervor to a changed atmosphere in the Village (311-12) and notes that this affected performances as well. Parry maintains that while the earlier Village plays were quite distinct from the later parodies,

In 1918, the slumming bourgeois went into Greenwich Village expecting to see nude models [. . .]. The early plays about the Village had their audience among the very same villagers about whom the plays were written. But it was different now, in the season of 1918-1919. (312)

Dell's Village plays and the early one-act plays of the Provincetown belong to the earlier period Parry identifies—and thus are, as Parry suggests, plays in which Villagers created satirical portraits of themselves, a self-criticism intended for the modernists and not the “slumming bourgeois.” While these early plays may appear and were sometimes referred to by their authors as “slight,” I will show in this chapter how the parodies of bohemianism were more than carefree fun. In fact, these plays evolved into a leftist critique of some aspects of art and modernism, particularly in dramas by Dell, Reed, Bryant, and Cook—all writers with varying degrees of allegiances to socialism.

When Dell arrived in New York in early 1913, the radical wing of the uptown Liberal Club was in the process of following Henrietta Rodman, the club's most controversial member, to a new location in Greenwich Village.¹⁹ Rodman was a high school teacher known for her political activism and her celebrated love affairs who Dell described as “serious” but “preposterously reckless” and with “a gift for stirring things up.” Dell credited Rodman with bringing together the disparate cliques of Village radicals and artists that characterized the new Liberal Club; she was in “touch with the university crowd and the social settlement crowd, and the Socialist crowd.” It was these groups mixing with the existing “literary and artistic crowds” during the 1913-1918 period that “gave the Village a new character entirely [. . .] it was not any longer a quiet place, where nothing noisier happened than drunken artist merry-making; ideas began to explode there and were soon heard all across the continent” (Dell, *Homecoming* 247). Dell believed that his generation was redefining the bohemian myth with its mix of culture and politics, a view confirmed by later

observers such as Malcolm Cowley. Arriving after the Armistice of 1918, Cowley noted that the prewar Village

contained two types of revolt, the individual and the social—or the aesthetic and the political, or the revolt against Puritanism and the revolt against capitalism—we might tag the two of them briefly as *bohemianism* and *radicalism*. In those prewar days, however, the two were hard to distinguish. Bohemians read Marx and all the radicals had a touch of the bohemian [. . .].” (66)

When Henrietta Rodman asked Dell to write a short skit for the new Liberal Club’s opening, he quickly produced a satire of bohemia he had co-written in Chicago with the poet Arthur Davidson Ficke entitled *St. George of the Minute*. The title suggests both the trendiness and the thirst for new ideas on the part of the cognoscenti. Dell renamed the play *St. George in Greenwich Village*, and staged it with Sherwood Anderson, then visiting the Village from Chicago, and the actress Helen Westley (later of the Theatre Guild). Dell recalled that the group often forgot their lines and ad-libbed new ones (*Love in Greenwich Village* 30). Like Reed’s early poetic parody of bohemia, Dell’s spoof lacks some of the deeper explorations of the era’s ideas that would occur in Provincetown plays, but the production undoubtedly produced entertainment for the cross-section of Villagers that attended. Liberal Club members also included, as Brenda Murphy has recently emphasized, many future founders of the Provincetown Players (*Provincetown Players* 7). These included George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, John Reed, Floyd Dell, Hutchins Hapgood, Neith Boyce, Max Eastman, Mary Heaton Vorse, Ida Rauh, Alfred Kreymborg,

Charles Demuth, Harry Kemp, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Frank Shay, and Edward and Stella Ballantine.²⁰

While *St. George of Greenwich Village* exists in both manuscript and a much-revised published text and is mentioned in virtually all accounts of the Provincetown Players, it is not discussed in any detail by Provincetown or Dell scholars. Most commentators rely simply on the summary of the play Dell provided in his autobiographical writing. This fact might be due to several understandable biases against Dell on the part of Provincetown scholars. First, this play, like Dell's other early skits, was done for the Liberal Club, an organization separate from the Provincetown Players—although his last four plays, very much in the same mode, were done by the Provincetown.²¹ Second, Dell's discussion of the new sexuality in his plays, while presented from what must be recognized as a liberal-left point of view for a man of Dell's era—Dell campaigned stridently in print for equal rights, suffrage, birth control, and equal pay for women—might be characterized by the position Dell himself later described as a “particularly masculine kind of feminism” (*Intellectual Vagabondage* 142). Dell was of that generation of male writers that became known as experts on the topic of the New Woman. While committed to the progress of women, these male writers also feared the empowerment of women. As historian Christine Stansell notes, “From an admiring, exasperated, and not infrequently resentful audience, feminists' sponsors would become critics, impresarios, and, ultimately, judges” (272).

However, the omission of Dell's early work by Provincetown scholars may ultimately be because Dell had a rather acrimonious split with George Gram Cook

that began in 1916. Dell was from Davenport, Iowa, as were his good friends Cook and Susan Glaspell. He had followed them to New York from Chicago, as they had earlier followed him from Davenport to Chicago. However, Dell became the first of a number of founding members of the Players to resign under Cook's leadership. He submitted his resignation after the production of his second play with the company, *A Long Time Ago* (1917), during their first season in New York (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 49). Brenda Murphy attributes Dell's resignation (although ostensibly over the quality of the director of his play) to the power grab that Cook (along with Glaspell, O'Neill, and Kenton) made for control of the company (*Provincetown Players* 13). Numerous other founding members would also leave or be forced out in January of 1917 during a committee meeting referred to as "The Massacre" (Murphy, *Provincetown Players* 13). Although Dell contributed to *Greek Coins*, a posthumous tribute to Cook, he remained publicly critical of his former friend. In fact, when Dell's autobiography *Homecoming* appeared in 1933, Provincetown Players co-founder Hutchins Hapgood, in the *New Republic*, strongly refuted Dell's derogatory comments about Cook.²²

Although Provincetown scholars are justified in viewing Dell as standing somewhat apart from the main group of the Provincetown Players, the influence of the "Dell Players," as the Liberal Club drama group was informally known, has been underestimated. Dell's plays for the Liberal Club, which he produced between 1913 and 1915, typically involved a romantic couple in dialogue about modern relations between the sexes and free love. In several plays, Dell's characters are simply called "He" and "She," and Provincetown scholars have typically seen the continuation of

this style of dialogue in early Provincetown one-act plays. What has not been discussed, however, is how Dell's early plays exploited the performance environment of the Liberal Club, employing meta-dramatic techniques and breaking down traditional divisions between performer and spectator. *St. George in Greenwich Village*, Dell's inaugural play at the Liberal Club and the first Greenwich Village satire to be performed, particularly deserves to be examined in more detail. In fact, the Liberal Club skits developed a tradition of metadrama, which depended upon an audience of artists intimately connected with the themes and local references in particular plays. It is this relationship with audience that was most directly bequeathed from Dell to the Provincetown Players;²³ additionally there may be reason to identify the influence of Cook on Dell's early work.

St. George in Greenwich Village

One surprising feature of *St. George in Greenwich Village* not identified in previous scholarship is Dell's use of metadrama—beginning with the play's prologue, which survives in manuscript.²⁴ The prologue features a "Manager" character who speaks directly to the audience in a striking anticipation of both Pirandello and Thornton Wilder. Dell's Manager addresses the audience of assembled American vanguardists as "Ladies and gentlemen and fellow artists!" (1). Then he acknowledges their group ideals by asserting he is sure they are all "here to subserve the purposes of art" (1). Continuing in an exaggerated speech, the Manager promises he will deliver "art immortal and austere" (1) and then declares his allegiance to the newest of the new. In what is clearly a reference to the crossover point in modernism between naturalistic and non-representational styles, the Manager claims the

upcoming performance will be an “absolutely contemporary art unhampered by the limitations of realism [. . .] . Ibsen, that grand old master of the past [. . .] Strindberg and Gorky, Synge and Sudermann, Shaw and Wedekind” all, the Manager asserts, lack the ability to “animate the dramatic presentation of an age” (1). Unfortunately, the Manager’s bombast about “great art” and the new modernist style is undercut when the curtain suddenly rises and the actors are caught in ordinary street clothes studying their lines or milling about the unadorned stage. The curtain becomes stuck and cannot be brought back down, so the embarrassed Manager apologizes, fearing that “no doubt the author, if he is present, blames it all on me” (1). “The Author” then rises—as a plant from the audience—and chastises the Manager for violating the fourth wall, complaining, “You have destroyed the whole illusion. The play is ruined” (1). Exasperated, the Manager finally orders the actors to their dressing rooms to put on their costumes, but is informed that the baggage man has lost all the trunks and properties (3).

The prologue serves Dell on several levels. It represents Dell’s practical attempts to address the physical absence of sets and scenery in the impromptu and cash-strapped venue of the Liberal Club. Dell later recalled that *St. George in Greenwich Village* was produced in the “‘Chinese manner’ without scenery—also without a stage curtains or footlights” (*Homecoming* 250). Dell’s concern here suggests to me a previously unidentified link between this play and George Cram Cook. In the *Road to the Temple*, Susan Glaspell remarks on how Cook was impressed by the focus on performance, rather than on properties, in college productions he had seen while teaching in California: “A production need not cost a

lot of money, Jig would say [. . .]. He liked to remember *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* they gave at Leland Stanford, where a book could indicate one house and a bottle another. Sometimes the audience liked to make its own set” (255). Dell spent long hours at Cook’s farm in Iowa after Cook’s resignation from Stanford. Thus it is interesting that in the prologue to *St. George in Greenwich Village* Dell not only addresses the lack of sets and scenery, but specifically uses a metatheatrical prologue—which in one extant version is written in mock Elizabethan verse—in which to do so. Cook evidently preached the same viewpoint based on his having witnessed the Stanford performance of the most famous Renaissance metadrama, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. The 1607 play features “citizens” who are plants in the audience and who stand up at various points and interrupt the actors. The actors are then forced to “step out of their roles” to engage the citizens. Like Dell’s play, Beaumont and Fletcher’s is also a bawdy parody of a tale of a medieval knight errant. As Dell recounts in his autobiography, he acted as socialist mentor to George Cook who was thirteen years his senior. From Cook, however, Dell took discussions about literature and books from Cook’s library, including *The Mermaid Series* of Elizabethan dramatists, one volume of which is comprised of Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays including *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (156).

Dell’s use of metadrama in the prologue to *St. George in Greenwich Village*, addressed to his “fellow artists,” does more than simply excuse the lack of properties in the low-budget production. Dell’s prologue establishes the self-referential nature of the performance. Dell does not note who filled the roles of the Manager or the

Author, but presumably he played one of the parts himself, an open joke to the assembled Liberal Club members. Dell's brief experiment in diegesis breaks the traditional paradigms of mimetic theatre by briefly speaking directly to the audience. More importantly, it involves the audience in active participation in the art being presented, foregrounding the theatrical techniques of illusion-making and declaring the evening a self-conscious exploration of group identity as "artists."

The main portion of the play that follows the prologue—although without costume, sets, and scenery— is essentially a spoof of a problem play, despite the Manager's promises of something not in the mold of Ibsen or Shaw.²⁵ However, Dell mixes in parodies of melodrama and medieval romance and continues to experiment with meta-drama by making self-referential comments about the play and the devices of theatre. Dell's tale of St. George is complete with a dragon who resembles "a society matron but having a dragon's tail" (I.2), who is actually the respectable aunt of the maiden St. George must rescue. Typical of Dell's technique are quips like those which occur when the "dragon" asks St. George if he will strike her. St. George replies, "If this were a melodrama, I would. But it is a modern problem play, and so I suppose I will have to have it out with you in an argument" (I.8). Such asides remind the audience that Dell's goal is not to create a theatrical illusion, but rather to comment upon illusion-making and the ideals of would-be modern theatre artists. Dell spoofs the seriousness of the intellectual debate that occurs in the problem play, forcing his audience to reconsider their participation in this type of theatrical illusion. Here Dell, it must be asserted, develops the generic mixture of technique—the combination of realistic problem play with self-reflexive

metadrama—which can also be found in numerous Village satires produced by the Provincetown Players.

George’s confrontation with the dragon is the result of his attempts to free a maiden tied to a rock. Her name is Priscilla, and the rock is a dining room chair. She is bound, but with her hands left free so that she can, as her aunt explains to her, “embroider [. . .] make tea [. . .] play bridge [. . .] indulge in polite conversation [. . .] everything that a middle class young woman of your age can do” (I. 2). George, a modern free-lover, convinces Priscilla that she should be free of her middle-class conventions and helps her untie herself. But upon gaining her freedom, Priscilla tricks George into the commitment of marriage, despite his vows to remain a free lover. Overhearing the engagement and George’s plan to go to New York to become an advertising man instead of a playwright, the dragon, unbeknownst to the lovers, is completely satisfied at her niece’s “rescue.”

How extensive Dell’s education in historical metadrama was is difficult to trace. However, Cook, renowned as a Greek buff, was certainly familiar with Aristophanes—his three-act play *The Athenian Women* (1918) is a retelling of *Lysistrata*; later in this chapter, I will suggest a previously unidentified link between Cook’s spoof *Change Your Style* (1915) and *The Clouds*. Dell’s choice of a quest as a frame for his tale of modernists searching illusively for “art” in *St. George in Greenwich Village* is also reminiscent of Aristophanes and this is perhaps an additional Cook influence. In the opening of *The Frogs*, the protagonist, Dionysus, seeks advice from Heracles on journeying to Hades to find the recently deceased Euripides because Dionysus has developed a fervor for Euripides lost play

Andromeda. The play is full of jokes about the expectations of Greek audiences and climaxes in the legendary poetry “slam” between Euripides and Aeschylus. Thus Aristophanes establishes a parallel between the amorous pursuit of Perseus for Andromeda and Dionysus for Euripides’ art. Dell emphasizes the same sort of allegory for the ludicrous adventures of George’s quest for modern art and free love in his playlet.²⁶

Dell’s modernist couple moves after their marriage to New York, where they choose an expensive apartment and fashionable furniture over cheaper options, and they rapidly become bourgeois sophisticates. George gets the advertising job, and soon a baby arrives via a cartoonish “property stork” (a deliberate and playful rejection of Ibsenism for the artificiality of stage melodrama). The couple’s neighbor, a Mrs. Flub, urges the Montessori method upon Priscilla for her baby. Montessori is so successful that Priscilla finds herself with free time on her hands, and Mrs. Flub convinces her to join a succession of modern movements to “find herself,” from suffragism to psychoanalysis, and finally to a movement called the “New Egoism.” Railing against her bourgeois husband, Priscilla becomes a bohemian Villager and now fears there may be “no possibility of an intellectual communion” between her and her gainfully employed husband (II. 17). Meanwhile, George cheerfully pays the bills for Priscilla’s chic Village clothing and her “pretty hat” (II. 17). In Act III, George has a change of heart and, feeling he is pursued by the “bloodhounds of materialism” (III. 37), decides to “express himself” as a Cubist painter (the stage directions calling for him to create canvas after canvas in real time with “wild gestures” (III. 38). After a failed attempt to market the dragon’s tail as decorative

kitsch,²⁷ the dragon—his wife’s aunt—reappears reading Shaw and explaining that “anarchism is getting very respectable” (III. 21). Priscilla finally decides to go into the catering business. The discovery that Priscilla is an effective and successful businesswoman brings the play to an end with the roles of bourgeois wage-earner and stay-at-home bohemian spouse reversed.

The multiple self-reflexive moments in *St. George in Greenwich Village* were, of course, undoubtedly played for laughs, and Dell recalled the “uproarious enjoyment” of the Village audiences at these performances (*Homecoming* 263). However, such moments of burlesque also record how the little theatre in New York emerged out of a participatory process of group entertainment and discussion, rather than as an effort to develop a professional theatre. In fact, Dell and the Liberal Club members were participating in what critics of metadrama have argued is really a separate tradition in the modern Western literary canon and distinct from tragic drama. Lionel Abel coined the term metatheatre in his 1963 study with that title. In the chapter entitled “Tragedy or Metatheatre?,” he discusses the elements that characterize each of the two kinds of theatre: “there is no such thing as humanistic tragedy. There is no such thing as religious metatheatre” (113). Abel argues that in a “true tragedy one is beyond thought” and has a “tragic view of life” (110). Metatheatre is therefore a theatre of intellectual analysis, opposed to tragedy which is a theatre of emotion. Ibsen, O’Neill and Tennessee Williams demand the “reality” of characters and therefore our emotional involvement in them, whereas Shaw, Brecht, Piscator, Pirandello, Genet, and Beckett write “metaplays” that force us to question “any image of the world [i.e., theatre] as ultimate” (113).²⁸

Richard Hornby took up the mantle of theorist of metatheatre in the 1980s with a sustained and structured study of metadrama. Hornby systematically divides the various types of metadramatic devices used in world theatre, including famous examples such as the *theatrum mundi*, the play within the play, the prologue and the aside and then distinguishes further techniques in his chapters on “Literary and Real-Life Reference within the Play” and “Self-Reference.” Hornby argues that there are many ways in which a play can refer to literature and that “In each case, the degree of metadramatic estrangement generated is proportional to the degree with which the audience recognizes the literary allusion as such” (88). When such allusions occur, the effect is “of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, breaking the dramatic illusion for a didactic purpose” (88). With the estrangement of the metadramatic moments, “the play stops being a play for a moment” (88). Hornby defines four types of “literary” metadramatic references: “*citation, allegory, parody, and adaptation*” (90) of which citation he discusses in the most detail. Much of what Dell does in *St. George in Greenwich Village* would fall under Hornby’s classification of citation: “In sum, metadramatic literary references are direct, conscious [sic] allusions to specific works [. . .] that are recent and popular. The work or works referred to must not yet be part of the drama/culture complex, but should preferably be avant-garde, or at least somewhat controversial” (90). Dell’s constant references to the “isms” of modernism, Cubism, Montessori, psychoanalysis, and feminism, especially when directed at specific figures or ideas of the movements, are all metadramatic citations. The “newness” of such theories in 1913 not only prevented them from becoming part of the social or literary background, Hornby’s “drama/culture complex”; but, since

many in the audience were involved in such movements directly or as bohemian explorers of related lifestyles, the literary and real life references were immediate and interconnected as well. Hornby notes that

However playful a moment of self-reference might seem, it always has the effect of drastically realigning the audience's perception of the drama, forcing them to examine consciously the assumptions that lie behind and control their response to the world of the play. Since these assumptions, the drama/culture complex, are also the means by which the audience views the world at large, self-reference has the effect of challenging, in a sudden and drastic manner, the complacencies of the audience's world view. (117)

Dell called his one-act plays for both the Liberal Club and the Provincetown Players "souvenirs of an intellectual play time" (*King Arthur's Socks* 5) and may have created the impression that the object of these plays was merely carefree fun. He remarks in his autobiography, "The Village wanted its most serious beliefs mocked at; it enjoyed laughing at its own convictions" (*Homecoming* 261). However, Dell also suggests a more serious purpose for these skits. He points out that while campaigning for votes for women and other causes in the pages of *The Masses* and *Vanity Fair* made him a "useful citizen" (261), mocking what he saw as the excesses of the participants in these movements was "harmlessly expressing another truth" (261). Dell does not elaborate greatly on what this other "truth" was, but one suspects it was a critique of the bohemians' own "egoism." As can be seen in his first

play, Dell underscores how such self-preoccupations work against modernists' ideological goals.

Neither Abel nor Hornby are particularly ideological in their arguments. Both portray the didactic use of metadrama in Brechtian alienation as but one facet at one moment in a long tradition. However, the fascination with metadrama on the part of the avant-garde and many satirists has certainly been political; even Aristophanes's use of metadrama in *The Frogs* is arguably tied to a conservative patriotism. In *St. George in Greenwich Village*, Dell's use of metadrama does grow out of his socialism as well as his bohemianism. The target of his satire is neither suffragism²⁹ nor the other individual movements that are briefly mentioned in the play. Rather Dell attacks the self-involvement of the Villagers who join such movements for reasons of self-development or ego-fulfillment instead of as a means to further the larger causes of social change for which the movements stand. Priscilla's conversion to suffragism does not mock the political goals of that movement; rather, Dell mocks Priscilla's claim that she has "Found Herself" (II. 14) in suffragism only to move on, like her fickle neighbor Mrs. Flub, to the next source of "spiritual rebirth" (II. 14) with votes for women not yet achieved. As Mrs. Flub declares, as far as suffragism was concerned, she has "Passed Through That Stage long ago" (II. 15). To which Priscilla responds, "I think the suffrage movement is a Very Fine Thing, but I fear that I have Got All the Good Out of It. There is Something Lacking. I too have Gone Beyond" (II. 15). Dell may tread briefly here on the sacred ground of the Village's commitment to female equality, but the suffragette movement is clearly not the target of his satire. Instead, he is really parodying the self-involvement of those joiners, who

enter such movements as dilettantes. Dell also may have had in mind a specific criticism here. Dora Marsden had begun the modern journal *The New Freewoman* in England in early 1913 as a publication dedicated to both feminist politics and culture. The title was meant to articulate “What women could, should, might, would do if they were allowed was the retort to those who said that such things they could, should, might, would not do and therefore should not be allowed” (Marsden). *The New Freewoman* championed such figures as English suffragette activist Emmeline Pankhurst in its pages. However, by the end of 1913, at the insistence of some of her contributors, Marsden changed the title to *The Egoist* and soon Ezra Pound became its literary editor, signaling a move to a less political—what Marsden calls less “controversialist”—modernism.

Dell’s parody of Priscilla’s pursuit of new movements for her own self-development culminates in the aptly titled “New Egoism,” which reveals the moderns’ absorption in self-exploration, rather in actually contributing to social change. That Dell’s play was fun for Village audiences is without question, but his satire of the egos of the intelligentsia appears serious. It suggests Dell was aware of a split between a modernism that emphasized personal freedom and a modernism that emphasized ideological commitment. In effect, Dell’s attitude reveals something of what the theorist Peter Bürger, mentioned in Chapter One, terms the avant-garde’s fear of “the social inconsequentiality” (22) of art. Although the rebuke is mild, *St. George in Greenwich Village* is ultimately a political play; Dell encourages Villagers to laugh at their insularity and inconsequential preoccupations, implying a challenge that they move beyond this to socially effective art and activities.

If Dell's opening Village play has been ignored by scholars, it did produce one line that was remembered long after by Villagers themselves. This is a note Priscilla leaves for George on the table:

Dear George: I have become an anarchist. I will be back for dinner. (II. 16)

The Code of Greenwich Village

Between the early Dell spoofs of bohemia and the founding of the Provincetown Players in 1915, a new sense of seriousness develops about modernism's social issues and its artistic practitioners. As noted in Chapter One, Hutchins Hapgood identified this new seriousness as a result of the crisis of the First World War. The Provincetown Players readily adopted the form of the bohemian satire begun by Dell for a new consideration of the broader ideas of the 1910s rebellion. Indeed, a survey of the one-act plays of the Provincetown Players reveals a critique of virtually every idea associated with the Village's attempts to live unconventionally. There have been a number of attempts to record or synthesize the set of core beliefs by which prewar radicals lived, and cultural historians have also sought to formalize analyses of bohemian ideals. In his memoir of the 1920's, *Exile's Return*, Malcolm Cowley lists eight tenets to which he believed Villagers avowed allegiance. Cowley maintains, "Greenwich Village was not only a place, a mood, a way of life: like all Bohemians, it was also a doctrine" (59). The doctrine termed by Cowley as "the Greenwich Village idea" (36) was later expanded by the social historian Caesar Ghana in his study of the evolution of the ongoing war between modernist bohemians and bourgeois values, *Modernity and Its Discontents*

(originally titled in English *Bohemian Versus Bourgeois*). Graña expands Cowley's doctrine of Greenwich Village into a general synthesis of the beliefs of all Bohemians in post-romantic literary history.

The following is a condensed version of the bohemian code derived from both Cowley and Graña. The following are from Cowley's list:

1. *The idea of salvation by the child.* Each of us at birth has special potentialities, which are slowly crushed and destroyed by a standardized society and mechanical methods of teaching. Children should be encouraged to develop their own personalities, to blossom freely like flowers. Then the world will be saved by this new, free generation.
2. *The idea of self-expression.* Every man and woman's purpose in life is to express themselves, to realize their full individuality through creative work and beautiful living in beautiful surroundings.
3. *The idea of paganism.* The body is a temple in which there is nothing unclean, a shrine to be adorned for the ritual of love.
4. *The idea of living for the moment.* Seize the moment as it comes, dwell in it intensely, "burn the candle at both ends," even at the cost of future suffering.
5. *The idea of liberty.* Every law, convention or rule of art that prevents self-expression or the full enjoyment of the moment should be shattered and abolished. Puritanism is the great enemy.

6. *The idea of female equality.* Women should be the economic and moral equals of men. They should have the same pay, the same working conditions, the same opportunity for drinking, smoking, taking or dismissing lovers.

7. *The idea of psychological adjustment.* We are unhappy because we are repressed. If we can confess our individual repressions, e.g., to a Freudian psychologist, then we can adjust ourselves to any situation and be happy. (60-61)

Graña adds several other criteria of the subculture, which particularly relate to the attitudes of literary and artistic bohemians:

"Cosmic self-assertion." The literary man is a demi-god, a natural aristocrat. He holds world-meaning in the palm of his hand and is the carrier of the higher values of civilization. Therefore, special respect is owed him and special freedom should be granted to him.

The social alienation of the literary man. Paradoxically, though men of letters are the vessels of superior values, they are denied by their fellow men, whose main interests are material gratification and the enjoyment of the cruder forms of power.

The hostility of modern society to talent and sensitivity. The modern world is sunk in vulgar contentment and driven by a materialism which is essentially trivial and inhumane—regardless of the technological complexity or institutional efficiency which may accompany it.

World-weariness and "the horror of daily life." Between the creative person and the surrounding society there is always an unresolved tension. The aspirations of the creative person are such that they can never be satisfied by ordinary existence. Daily life, therefore, is a constant denial and an intolerable burden. (67-68)

The most famous of the tenets of the Greenwich doctrine is probably the second mentioned by Cowley, *The idea of self-expression*. The cultural and political radicals of the 1910s sought to express themselves creatively and discover "their full individuality" through "beautiful living in beautiful surroundings," in quaint or rustic bohemia, refuges from the modern world. Many of the plays in this chapter reveal a tension between this impulse to live beautifully with helping others to escape the supreme ugliness of injustice and oppression. The Greenwich Village Idea is a set of beliefs intended to liberate the individual from social, psychological, moral, patriarchal, and aesthetic conventions, which they perceived as the oppressive rules of American Puritanism and materialism. Cowley's first ideal, "the idea of salvation by the child," is indicative of the romantic basis for the philosophical system. As Floyd Dell claimed, members of his generation had been taken with the famous first line of Rousseau's "The Social Contract": "Man is born free, and yet to-day he is everywhere in chains." The cultural rebel of the 1910s interpreted this freedom, not simply in terms of political oppression, but also, according to Dell, as a general statement of the repressive nature of society. Cultural rebels believed, in fact, that "Once the individual enters into complicated social arrangements, he is a slave" (*Intellectual Vagabondage* 36).

Thus, a second important tension emerged within bohemias like Greenwich Village where artists who had gathered out of mutual disregard for the larger society found that the solidification of the doctrine of the subculture spelled trouble for their intense individualism. Moreover, the recognition of the uniformity demanded by this lifestyle led the vanguard—many of whom were politically aligned with anarchism and socialism—to question the solidification of the new ideals into a new tradition. This anxiety of establishing new norms—a fear of the success of modernism—is parallel to trends noted by cultural critics such as Matei Calinescu. As noted in Chapter One, Calinescu argues that modernism should be understood as a “threefold dialectical opposition” to tradition, to bourgeois society, and “finally to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new tradition or form of authority” (10). The early one-act bohemian satires of the Liberal Club and the Provincetown Players represent the rejection of the “systems of rejection,” as Hutchins Hapgood identified theories of modernism, insofar as these form a new tradition with limitations on the individual. The place to look for the beginnings of an American avant-garde theatre, an alternative expression to the culture that would later be institutionalized as “high modernism,” is ironically in the same theatre where American modern drama emerged, the Provincetown Players.

Plays 1915

Constancy: A Dialogue (1915)

Neith Boyce’s *Constancy* was the first play produced in the summer of 1915 by the group that would later become officially known as the Provincetown Players.

The “Dialogue” was presented on the balcony of the cottage rented by Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood at 621 Commercial Street. It is essentially a humorous “He and She” play that seeks to discuss the differing male and female perspectives on free love and modern relationships by satirizing the romance of John Reed and Mabel Dodge. The Dodge-Reed affair was already the subject of Village gossip. Boyce weighs in primarily from the feminine viewpoint in the play, and the enduring importance of *Constancy* is that it is the first play written by a woman to enter the Village theatre’s “He” and “She” conversation about the sexes. As interesting as the theme of the play, though, is the unique community context in which *Constancy* was performed at Provincetown. This communal performance environment collapsed spectator and performer roles, and in its challenge to theatrical illusion it invites comparison with later avant-garde works.

The exact circumstances that led to the production of *Constancy* on that summer evening in 1915 may never be fully understood, but to the extent that it is possible, we must consider all available information. Details that suggest the intentions of these performances are significant in that they speak to whether the Provincetown group originally thought of the plays as preliminary to future professional productions, or rather considered them as primarily part of a self-critical analysis for artists. Robert Sarlós concludes from a review of primary accounts that three factors about the first performances are “beyond dispute”: “the plays were first thought of as a profoundly therapeutic party-game for a small, close-knit group; the idea no sooner emerged than it materialized in the form of scripts; Jig Cook was *spiritus rector* before it all began” (14).

However, within the burgeoning field of Provincetown Players studies, all three of these factors are now in “dispute.” First, the appearance of scripts may not be as mystical as Sarlós’s sources imagine. Of the two plays staged the first evening, *Suppressed Desires* is known to have been written in advance and rejected that spring by the Washington Square Players as “too special” (Glaspell, *Road* 250).³⁰ Provincetown historian Leona Rust Egan has suggested *Constancy* had also been submitted to this group (122); whether or not this supposition is correct, there is evidence Boyce was at least thinking about the theatre and had attempted to have a play produced in early 1915.³¹

Second, George Cram Cook undoubtedly always led the Provincetown group, and Sarlós was correct to recover his reputation in theatrical history, as Susan Glaspell had earlier tried to do in her hagiography of her husband, *The Road to the Temple*. However, recent scholarship indicates that Boyce and Hapgood were, in the beginning of the company at least, also prime movers.³² In an excellent and concise argument, Brenda Murphy suggests that the original idea of the Provincetown as a collective, exemplified by their first seasons in Provincetown and enshrined in the constitution they drew up in the summer of 1916, was replaced almost immediately in New York by the autocratic directorship of Cook (*Provincetown Players* 12). Cook changed the direction of the company from an ideal that boasted of the freshness and simplicity of amateurism to one of professionalism, causing the resignation of most of the original members halfway through the first season (12-13). Murphy contends that it may therefore be due to the “later centrality of Cook” (2) that his importance at the

founding of the group has been over-emphasized in the “master narrative” (2-3) of the Players myth.

The question remains, then, whether the original Provincetown productions were, as Sarlós suggests, “a profoundly therapeutic party-game” (14). In other words, did the members produce self-reflexive plays intended primarily for the benefit of artists, or did they have from the beginning have ambitions directed towards professional theatre? The evidence appears to be to be contradictory. The fact that both plays of their inaugural evening had been written for other theatre companies seems to work against the myth— which the group promoted themselves—of spontaneous creation by the sea.³³ However, if these plays were rejected by the Washington Square Players, a company then intent on breaking with the Liberal Club tradition of Village plays and moving to an uptown theatre (Langner 91), the Provincetown group’s scripts were likely seen as too local to Greenwich Village. In fact, the Provincetown Players, with their commitment to dealing with topics like psychoanalysis, free love, and feminism and performing in Provincetown and Greenwich Village, are more directly the inheritors of the self-satire of the Liberal Club metadramas than their rivals in the Washington Square Players.

In *Constancy*, the relationship of Rex and Moira mimics the affair between Mabel Dodge and John Reed. The characters would have been immediately recognizable to Boyce’s circle in Provincetown, but they were not likely to be identifiable to a wider audience. Boyce had the inside scoop on the story because both she and her husband Hutchins Hapgood had been Dodge’s confidants over the last several years. The unlikely pairing of Reed, the young journalist and socialist

firebrand, and Dodge, the millionaire patroness of the arts, had occurred during the planning of the Patterson Strike pageant, which had been organized at Dodge's salon on Fifth Avenue in 1913. Dodge had then whisked Reed away to her villa in Florence for the summer, but they returned in the fall of 1913 to live openly together at Dodge's 23 Fifth Avenue residence, despite the fact that Dodge had not obtained a divorce. However, Reed soon moved out, feeling that Dodge's jealousy— of both his time commitments to many activist causes as well as his sexual affairs with other women—“suffocated him” (Rosenstone 176).

Yet the romantic relationship continued even after Reed left for Europe upon the outbreak of war in August 1914, and numerous letters and telegrams were sent by each through their intermediary Hapgood. In Europe, Reed became entangled with Freddie Lee. Lee and her husband, sculptor Arthur Lee, were mutual friends of Reed and Dodge. Soon Reed telegraphed Mabel his intention to marry Freddie. On a trip to meet Freddie's parents in Berlin, Reed and Freddie recognized the rashness of their engagement and the two parted ways. Reed returned to the United States in January of 1915 with the intent of renewing his relationship with Dodge, but Mabel insisted that he and she remain only platonic friends and would not resume their sexual affair (Rosenstone 198). In *Constancy*, Boyce dramatizes the scene where Dodge rejects Reed's offer to renew their relationship. With a hint in the direction of environmental theatre, Boyce relocates the scene of the event from Dodge's house in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, where it actually took place, to a balcony overlooking the sea (*Constancy* 274), not unlike the Hapgoods' veranda where the play was first performed.

Boyce leaves little doubt that the models for her characters are Dodge and Reed. Moira appears writing at a desk, smoking "lavishly," and is clad in the long brocade robes for which Mabel was famous. Rex appears and is disappointed he must enter through the doorway, instead of by descending a rope ladder into Moira's bedchamber. The silken rope ladder was a famous part of the Dodge-Reed tale. Dodge had the ladder suspended over her bed in Florence, where her ex-husband, Edwin Dodge, used it only once to "see that it worked" (Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan* 34), but Reed had used it "like a fairy tale" lover each night (Page 94). In the play, Rex soon realizes that Moira treats him merely as an acquaintance despite his protestations that when they parted they "weren't friends but lovers" (*Constancy* 278). She recites to him his letters from Paris that declare his love for the other woman and then asks that they remain friends. Rex protests, telling Moira that despite his relationships with other women, he has demonstrated his faithfulness by always returning to her. "I was always faithful to you, really. I always shall be." Rex explains to her, "I should always come back" (278). Moira, unyielding, tells him their affair is over and rejects free love, declaring, "in love one cannot be free. I was constant to you every moment, while I loved you" (279). Rex finds it difficult to believe Moira ever loved him if she cannot now, but she maintains, "I can't endure love without fidelity." (279). *Constancy* concludes with Rex forced to accept the condition of friendship and to admit that Moira, because of her resolution of monogamy, is a "complete woman"(280). She in turn concludes that Rex is the "perfect man" (279), and seems to acknowledge his pursuit of multiple partners as part of the nature of the male gender.

Until Robert Sarlós's study of the Players in 1982, there was virtually no critical commentary on *Constancy*. (There were no newspaper reviews of the productions in Provincetown, and the play was not revived after the group's move to New York.) Since Sarlós, scholars such as Ellen Kay Trimberger, Barbara Ozieblo, J. Ellen Gainor, Kornelia Tancheva, Brenda Murphy, and Jeffrey Kennedy, among others, have commented on the play. Trimberger was perhaps the first to point out that the dilemma of *Constancy*—a male who is physically inconstant but believes he is ultimately faithful to the essence of a long-term relationship under the flag of free love, and a woman who finds that emotional and physical fidelity must go together—parallels the struggles in Boyce's own marriage with Hutchins Hapgood ("New Woman" 100). In fact, Hapgood began experimenting with a type of free love called "Varietism" in about 1904 (Deboer-Langworthy 16), and although Hapgood encouraged Boyce to experiment with other men, he became jealous and even violent when Boyce revealed to him her rather innocent flirtations (16).

Trimberger also points out that couples with very similar conflicts appear in a number of Boyce's works, including her short stories, her 1908 novel *The Bond*, and the play she wrote with her husband and performed in Provincetown in 1916, *Enemies*. In *Enemies*, a short dialogue between husband and wife, Boyce wrote and acted the part of "She"; Hapgood wrote and acted the part of "He." She is interested in intellectual companionship with other men to avoid the boredom and loneliness during his pursuit of other women. He complains that his wife's "soul's infidelities" (Boyce and Hapgood 189) are much worse than his "friendly and physical intimacies" (191). In both plays, men's and women's attitudes about sex and fidelity are different

and inextricably fixed: The “perfect man” is a wanderer; the “perfect woman” wants physical intimacy to be monogamous. As Brenda Murphy notes about the conclusion to *Constancy*, “Boyce implies that there is no resolution to what she sees as a fundamental conflict between essentialized male and female feelings about love, sex, and romantic relationships” (*Provincetown Players* 65).

However, if Boyce’s tendency in *Constancy* is to analyze men and women’s views of sexuality and commitment in general, her presentation relies to an extraordinary degree on the particular. *Constancy* follows the details of the real life model of the Reed/Dodge affair very closely. Further, Boyce’s salting of the play with in-jokes, such as the rope ladder and Dodge’s imitation of eastern dress, serve as metadramatic signposts for her audience, reminding them that they are not safely watching an illusion. Rather, Boyce involves both performers and spectators in the specific dilemma of their own attitudes about sexuality and freedom within the modernist bohemian community.

Boyce’s rather last-minute attempt to universalize separate emotional natures for men and women at the conclusion of *Constancy* belie what is otherwise a feminist critique targeted at the excessive sexual exploits of the male Villager. If ostensibly presenting both sides of the sexuality debate, it is interesting to note that nearly all the satirical barbs about free love that occur in the play are directed at the Reed character. Robert Sarlós remarked about *Constancy* in 1982 that “The script’s chief weakness is Moira’s unequivocal strength because it prevents dramatic conflict” (15). While it may be true that Moira’s unwavering position makes the dialogue less effective aesthetically, the slant of the play in favor of Moira may very well represent the

author's sympathies with Dodge. In 1914, when Dodge confided to Boyce and Hapgood that "Reed has gone," Boyce revealed what Dodge remembered as a surprising sense of solidarity with her:

To my surprise he laughed boisterously while Neith continued to look sad and continued to stroke my face, saying nothing. I remember feeling surprised that it was Neith who gave out a real feeling of sympathy, while it was Hutch who seemed merely amused. I was accustomed to see their roles reversed in everyday life. Generally it was Hutch who sympathized while Neith refrained from expressing anything more than a slightly cynical amusement. (Dodge, *Movers and Shakers* 243)

Dodge apparently had managed to crack Boyce's remote exterior, perhaps a defense against the emotions of her own battles with Hapgood.

Boyce's sympathy with Dodge seems then to be directly translated into repeated parodies of Rex's behavior in *Constancy*. Rex explains that he fell out of love with the woman in Paris because "she expects me to live with her in a little suburban house, and come back every night to dinner, and have a yard with vegetables, and a sleeping porch facing east" (277). While Moira suffers emotionally, Rex is lost in a bohemian protest against bourgeois commitment that is presented as nothing if not immature. It is not simply a question of different roles for men and women, but Boyce protests that the code of the Village that guarantees Rex/Reed's prerogative of freedom does not entitle him to define the course of the relationship for both himself and Moira/Mabel. Rex maintains his allegiance to the

bohemian code, Cowley's "idea of liberty," which requires the rejection of all rules and conventions of Puritanism (Cowley 60), and the "idea of paganism," which celebrates the sexual nature of the body (Cowley 60). Moira meanwhile has jeopardized her own emotional independence by being subservient heretofore to the male bohemian's needs to come and go from the relationship and, thus, is prevented from following another Village tenet, the "idea of female equality" (61). Boyce reveals the irony that because some Village women do not wish the kind of relationship forced upon them by some bohemian men, male bohemians' attempts to escape Victorian sexual oppression simply reimpose the Victorian double standard on female modernists.

Boyce's presentation of a relationship well-known to the Provincetown group, left with no complete resolution and presented primarily from the woman's point of view, must have been intended as a "therapeutic" means to generate dialogue on the part of the gathered participants that summer evening of 1915. It is therefore an example of what Sarlós termed "performance as process" rather than "art as product" (32). This contextual dramatizing of lives and loves through characters based on members of the group, or as in *Enemies* actually played by the members whose lives are being discussed on stage, is quite unlike the professional modern theatre that will later emerge from the Provincetown. While using primarily naturalistic dialogue, Boyce eschews most setting and decor, and in the relationship between performer and spectator, she transcends the expectations of naturalistic drama.

As feminist critic Kornelia Tancheva has recently suggested, despite what may appear to us today as Boyce's naturalism, the contexts of the productions of

Constancy and *Enemies* “defied conventional illusionism since they dramatized not a possible or probable reality, not even reality as it should be [. . .]. What they did was transpose onto the stage reality itself” (156). Tancheva further underlines the importance of how Boyce “spectacularly” collapses the distinctions between “author/subject, character/object, and performer” (156). While I agree with Tancheva’s observations of Boyce’s techniques here, I disagree with her assessment of the import of these developments. As Tancheva continues, Boyce’s techniques “epitomized the ideal of the unified work of art with a single source of creation, the Artist. In that sense they embodied the main principles of the modernist New Stagecraft—simplification, stylization, synthesis and unification” (156). It is true that much of modern stagecraft theory arriving in America from Europe at this time stressed the idea of a single artist of the theatre, and in modern theatre design theories of synthesis and unification were valued.³⁴ However, it would not make sense to call *Enemies* a work with “a single source of creation” because Hapgood wrote and performed half the lines. Nor would it make sense to say this about *Constancy* if we know Boyce wrote the lines but we believe these lines were a direct transferal of conversations between Reed and Dodge to the stage. I agree that *Enemies* and *Constancy* represent “reality itself transposed to the stage” (Tancheva 156). Rather than claim this process perfected a more unified autonomous artwork, however, I would suggest it opens the work to participation by all, and was intended as part of an ongoing conversation between performers and the audience/participants. Boyce’s work here is thus a collectivization of the creative process rather than a heightening of a single artist’s contribution.

Peter Bürger's observation about the avant-garde seems germane here. The "avant-gardist protest," Bürger believes, is against the autonomous artwork. It is a struggle to take art from the purely aesthetic realm and "reintegrate art into the praxis of everyday life" (22). A moderately experimental work in both subject and form, *Constancy* challenges what Bürger calls "art as institution" by violating the paradigms not only of commercial Broadway melodrama but also of the more elite theatrical style of naturalism. Boyce's invitation to open conversation seems fundamentally distinct from the closure of high modernist works. While in *Constancy* Boyce primarily gives us Moira's point of view, the conversation she initiated in Provincetown soon provided Rex/Reed with an opportunity to tell his side of the story.

Sarlós points out that Reed and Dodge's reactions to the play "were not recorded" (15). It is very unlikely that either John Reed or Mabel Dodge ever saw the premiere of *Constancy*,³⁵ and therefore it is from the premiere to its subsequent revivals that we now must turn. Edna Kenton claimed that *Constancy* was never staged in New York because the play required the backdrop of the sea (22). Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer have pointed out that Kenton's is a "dubious claim," because only a balcony is required not the sea itself (viii), and Barbara Ozieblo notes the minutes for the Provincetown Players' meetings record that *The Faithful Lover*, Boyce's most complete version of the Reed-Dodge tale, was rejected by the company on November 22, 1916 (*Susan Glaspell* 72, n42). Thus it is likely that the Players felt *Constancy* was too much a part of an intimate conversation within the context of its original Provincetown audience to be moved to New York. In fact, the play's only

revival after the initial performances in 1915 occurred the next summer in Provincetown when Boyce's portrait of Reed's bohemian playboy antics shared a bill with one of Reed's own plays on the topic of free love, *The Eternal Quadrangle*.

The Eternal Quadrangle is a drawing-room farce, which plays upon the typical plot of the love triangle in its title and evinces Greenwich Village's proclaimed modern sexual "sophistication" regarding the traditional drawing-room comedy. Wealthy Robert Fortescue, a "Captain of Industry" (105), confronts his wife Margot's lover, Freddie Temple. Instead of a jealous outburst, Fortescue upbraids Temple for not paying more attention to Margot: "How dare you throw my wife over?" he bellows (108). Fortescue, as it turns out, is thankful to Temple for keeping his wife busy, so he can get some work done, reversing the expectation that respectability demands his wife's fidelity and that he punish her lover. From this opening scene forward, the love relationships between the four main characters become progressively more entangled. The play ends with a quadrangle, two happy—albeit unconventional—couples: Margot falls into the arms of the butler Archibald (actually a famous skating champion in disguise) and her maid Estelle (secretly Archibald's wife) is paired with Freddie Temple. As Brenda Murphy notes, it is a "boyish play that celebrates freedom and autonomy and conveys a wariness of both women and social ties and constraints" (64).

Murphy has recently proposed a unique and original interpretation of Reed's play. She dismisses an earlier suggestion that Reed may have been writing the play to justify the love triangle then in progress between himself, Louise Bryant, and Eugene O'Neill. Instead, she argues that "the play is much more reflective of his [Reed's]

relationship with Mabel Dodge before he met Bryant” (*Provincetown Players* 61). Indeed, the situation seems to resemble that of Dodge, her husband, and Reed during the time of the Reed-Dodge affair. Edwin Dodge, who seems to have made no protest about his wife living openly with her lover in Italy or America, is the model for Fortescue. Murphy also points out that the descriptions of Margot’s excessive romanticism resemble Dodge’s. Freddie complains that Margot made him climb a rose trellis to her bedroom, which, as Murphy notes, parallels the story of the famous rope ladder in Dodge’s bedchamber (62). There are other echoes in the play of the Reed and Dodge affair that would tend to support Murphy’s interpretation as well: the wife’s name, Margot, sounds like Mabel; and her male lover’s name is Freddie—the name of Reed’s female lover in Paris.³⁶

Murphy places her analysis of *The Eternal Quadrangle* just before her analysis of *Constancy* in her study and thus implies a link between the two plays, although she does not explore this connection. In fact, it is very interesting that Reed’s play appeared on a bill with the only revival of *Constancy* after its 1915 performances.³⁷ This suggests that Reed took the opportunity to tell his side of the Dodge affair, perhaps because he was encouraged to do so by his Provincetown friends. Jeffrey Kennedy discusses the short notes Reed wrote and intended for the audience that evening in this context (146). In addition to a series of in-jokes about the designers of the sets and costumes Reed makes with “his tongue firmly placed in cheek” (146), he also remarks, “The audience is earnestly requested to remain for the second play which is respectable” (qtd. in Kennedy 146). This comment either

deferentially or sarcastically suggests that perhaps Reed intended the two plays to be viewed as related.

The placement of *The Eternal Quadrangle* after the revival of *Constancy* on the bill in 1916 is further evidence that the topics presented in these plays were intended as part of an on-going conversation in which the plays were in dialogue with each other, the writers were in dialogue with their audience, and the audience was in dialogue with the performers. Thus a full understanding of the early Provincetown plays is only possible with an analysis of their contexts. In Chapter One, I discussed Arnold Aaronson's claim that no avant-garde existed in America during the time of the Little Theatre movement. One reason Aronson makes this claim is that he believes a fundamental attribute of the avant-garde is that it produces a "non-literary theatre" (5). He explains that avant-garde productions do not have a printed text that can "be read in the way a work of literature could be" (5). While all Provincetown productions had scripts, and we are fortunate that most of these scripts are extant, an analysis of the scripts alone is not sufficient for a full understanding of the group's self-referential performances. I would argue this is more true of Liberal Club and early Provincetown Players productions than it would be for most other companies in the era of the Little Theatre.

Boyce and Reed's plays have many literary qualities, but as examples of the early American avant-garde hybrid of naturalism and experimental theatre, individual artistic ego, and collective group creation, they lack precisely the sense of portability characteristic of autonomous literary works. These plays remain un- or at least less commodified than other more fully aestheticized works. Viewed within the context

of the experimental community set up in modernist bohemia, their arguments for a change in sexual politics, and as we will see later in this chapter a concern with social consequentiality of art, the performance events in Provincetown served a purpose that also corresponds to the theorist Peter Bürger's definition of avant-garde as art works "reintegrated into the praxis of everyday life" (22).

Suppressed Desires (1915)

Suppressed Desires by husband and wife team Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook was the second of the two plays performed by the group that would become the Provincetown Players on their first evening in July of 1915. Because the stage directions for *Constancy* required a balcony overlooking the sea, that play was staged on the Hapgood's veranda. For *Suppressed Desires*, the audience moved chairs out to the deck and viewed the parlor drama through the open doors into the Hapgood's cottage with the water behind them. This is the interchangeability of audience and spectator space referred to in Chapter One. J. Ellen Gainor has suggested the likely possibility that rather than an "unconscious experiment" as Robert Sarlós believed (15), "the exchangeability, of actor-audience roles perfectly exemplifies the creative milieu for the group" (*Susan Glaspell* 23). As we have seen so far in this chapter, the collapsing of audience and performer distinctions was a standard technique for Village playwrights from the time of the Liberal Club onwards. In *Suppressed Desires*, although the characters and story line of the play do not immediately suggest members of the Provincetown circle, the play is unmistakably a satire aimed at Greenwich Village society.

Suppressed Desires spoofs the sudden craze for Freudian psychoanalysis in the Village. Much discussed by scholars of the Provincetown and Susan Glaspell (it is the first play Glaspell had a hand in writing), *Suppressed Desires* is in fact the first play to dramatize psychoanalysis on stage in America.³⁸ By 1915, psychoanalysis and its revelations about repressed sexuality had become a popular craze for Village radicals and bohemians. As Susan Glaspell explained, these "were the early years of psycho-analysis in the Village. You could not go out to buy a bun without hearing of someone's complex" (*Road* 250). And Hutchins Hapgood recalled, "Psychoanalysis had been overdone to such an extent that nobody could say anything about a dream, no matter how colorless it was, without his friends winking at one another and wondering how he could have been so indiscreet" (*Victorian* 322).

Although structured as a problem play, *Suppressed Desires* deals with elements of the unconscious such as dream imagery and the conflict between internal and external experience that gesture in the direction of the internal monologue of later modernist drama. The attempt to represent internal consciousness on stage would be a trope famously associated with the theatre of Glaspell and Cook's colleague Eugene O'Neill in the succeeding decade. *Suppressed Desires* was rejected by the Washington Square Players, as previously mentioned, as "too special" (*Road* 250), which may suggest this group thought it too local a topic to the Village.³⁹ Whether the authors had larger theatrical ambitions for the piece by submitting it to the uptown-minded Washington Square Players or not, arguably in the contexts of its first performances *Suppressed Desires* became a part of the conversation the cultural radicals were having among themselves over the nature of the Little Renaissance.

Thus, *Suppressed Desires* is a further example of the hybridity of the era's *avant-garde*. It is conventional in form, yet presages certain important developments in high modernist aesthetics. It was also, at least in its original performances, part of the experimental playmaking that eschewed traditional theatrical paradigms for the self-critical praxis of the artistic community. Glaspell and Cook were not interested in satirizing Freudian psychology for its own sake; the comedy in *Suppressed Desires* is derived from the all-too sudden faith placed in the New Psychology, what Cowley calls the doctrine of "psychological adjustment" (61), by Village sophisticates and the antics that ensued in the over-anxious pursuit of The New. Although not ostensibly political, *Suppressed Desires* does suggest that the frivolity of a counter-culture obsessed by fads may cut itself off from the social purposes to which radicals have pledged themselves—a theme Glaspell returns to in another one-act satire of the editorial meetings of *The Masses* called *The People* (1917).

Suppressed Desires intensifies the Liberal Club conversation over the role of the New York artist and, like *Constancy*, contains numerous in-jokes. Scholars have noted the protagonist's name, Henrietta Brewster, is reminiscent of the Liberal Club's founder Henrietta Rodman, and Henrietta's sister is named Mabel perhaps alluding to Mabel Dodge. Several other points not previously discussed in the scholarship are worth mentioning. The stage directions set the play symbolically at the center of the Village where "through an immense north window in the back wall appear tree tops and the upper part of the Washington Arch" (Glaspell and Cook, *Suppressed Desires* 281). This particular view would have been seen from John Reed's apartment, now at 43 Washington Square South. Reed's flat on the south side of the square was a

gathering place for Village radicals. George Cram Cook would shock his friend in the winter of 1915 by suggesting that Reed turn over his loft as a permanent home for the Players (Sarlós 158).⁴⁰ Also, Stephen and Henrietta Brewster are bourgeois Villagers. He is an architect; she spends her time on modern movements, and is currently writing a paper on psychoanalysis to give at the Liberal Club. They thus bear some resemblance to the couple in Dell's *St. George in Greenwich Village*. In the earlier Dell piece, there is a discussion about placing a drafting table in the parlor of the apartment to make it a "male space" (I. 10). *Suppressed Desires* opens with Stephen Brewster working at a drafting table in the main room of the house. This may be a reference to the earlier play or to a conflict known to Villagers about domesticity and art in the crowded quarters of artists' studios.

Stephen and Henrietta seem to have heretofore balanced their marriage with their artistic/intellectual pursuits. Stephen prides himself on a liberal attitude towards Henrietta's interests, but she complains, "You're all inhibited. You're no longer open to new ideas. You won't listen to a word about psychoanalysis" (281). Henrietta claims the reason Stephen's work has suffered and he is losing sleep is because of "suppressed desires" lurking in his unconscious mind. Stephen, who has learned to fear "the psychoanalytic look" (282) when it comes upon Henrietta, has refused to visit her analyst, Dr. Russell, and claims he's just "suffering from a suppressed desire for a little peace" (281). At the moment, the couple is hosting Henrietta's "somewhat conventional" sister Mabel from the Midwest, who claims not to understand her sophisticated sister, not "to live in touch with intellectual things" (283). Henrietta does her best to explain to Mabel that the new psychology will liberate people from a

“forbidden impulse” (283), declaring psychoanalysis “has found out how to save us from that. It brings into consciousness the suppressed desire” (283). To Mabel’s expression of horror, Henrietta assures her that psychoanalysis is “simply the latest scientific method of preventing and curing insanity” (283). Stephen’s deadpan reply is that he fears psychoanalysis is “the latest method of separating families” (283).

After a series of jokes about Henrietta attempting to perform her own analyses of her sister’s slips of the tongue and her husband’s dreams, she sends them both— independently— to her analyst. The good Dr. Russell tells Stephen that his dreams of walls dissolving suggest he desires “freedom” from his marriage, and Mabel’s comical dream of being told “Step, Hen” by a street car conductor is a suppressed desire for none other than her brother-in-law, “Step-hen.” Consumed with jealousy, Henrietta is unable to put into practice the psychoanalysis she has preached and sends Mabel back to her own husband in Chicago, exclaiming “Psychoanalysis doesn’t say you have to gratify every suppressed desire” (291).

Under the guise of spoofing psychoanalysis, Glaspell and Cook layer in a series of jokes that apply not only to the “idea of psychological adjustment” but also to the convictions of the whole modernist rebellion. When Henrietta claims the power of the new science of psychoanalysis will replace “petrified moral codes” (284), she encapsulates the modernist ambition to reject Puritanism. Individuals will simply have to learn to adjust, she continues, when their suppressed desires for someone other than their spouse is revealed because “old institutions will have to be reshaped” (284). Of course, in the era of the prewar cultural rebellion, the “reshaping” of “old institutions” was the rallying cry of every artistic and political

radical. Henrietta's comeuppance at the end of the play suggests a distancing on the part of the playwrights from the idea of the moment and exposes the faddish aspects of modernism as frivolous. Henrietta has adopted a new theory for its "radical chic"—as part of her general lifestyle in the Village—rather than as genuine therapy.

Henrietta is an exemplar of what Malcolm Cowley called the Village's "*idea of self-expression*." Henrietta embraces this Village idea's promise of "beautiful living in beautiful surroundings" (Cowley 60). Yet she is evidently frustrated by her ties to her bourgeois family members beyond the borders of the Latin Quarter. In Henrietta's attempts to convert Stephen and Mabel, Glaspell and Cook criticize the contradiction inherent in the Village doctrine of collective individualism, i.e., Stephen and Mabel are being forced to accept one Village idea, that of "psychological adjustment," in violation of another, the precept of individual freedom. Moreover, Henrietta's missionary zeal in spreading psychoanalysis has little meaning for the conventional Mabel who is perfectly happy in her marriage. The criticism is one Glaspell develops more fully in her satire of the editorial meetings of *The Masses* staff in her play *The People*. Modernists claim they are discovering new theories that will be of service to the general population but in practice as intellectual elitists in the isolation of bohemia they are often either unwilling or, as in Henrietta's case, unable to communicate their ideas to Main Street.

One issue that has been the focus of much of the by now large body of criticism about *Suppressed Desires* is the play's origins. Glaspell remembered composing the play with Cook in their Greenwich Village flat: "Before the grate in Milligan Place we tossed the lines back and forth at one another, and wondered if any

one else would ever have as much fun with it as we were having” (*Road* 250). Barbara Ozieblo (*Susan Glaspell* 69) believes the couple’s inspiration to toy with Freudian ideas in their dialogue was an article in *McClure’s Magazine* by Edwin Tenney Brewster. Brewster’s article included references to a number of the psychoanalytic ideas that appear in *Suppressed Desires* including, as Ozieblo points out, a confusion of suppression and repression. Glaspell and Cook also presumably borrowed Brewster’s surname for the main characters, Stephen and Henrietta Brewster (*Susan Glaspell* 69). J. Ellen Gainor further traces the influence on the play of Max Eastman and Floyd Dell’s articles on psychoanalysis in *The Masses* (*Susan Glaspell* 27-28).

If the sources and inspirations for *Suppressed Desires* have been investigated, I would suggest that another area of interest should be the play’s structure and possible theatrical influences. As Linda Ben Zvi observes, “For a first attempt at drama, the play is surprisingly polished” (*Susan Glaspell* 156). Indeed, *Suppressed Desires* seems a much more finished work than *Constancy* and one marvels at the talent of the authors’ first venture into the theatre. Glaspell scholars would likely agree that the quality of the script reflects the contribution of Glaspell who was a widely published short story writer and novelist by 1915. However, Glaspell had not written a play previously, and while Cook had published a melodrama and written at least one unproduced problem play,⁴¹ *Suppressed Desires* reflects little of Cook’s style of intellectual melodrama. It is likely rather that, despite their disavowal of Broadway, Glaspell and Cook were in fact emulating established playwrights.

In terms of structure, Glaspell and Cook adopted the formula of the social problem play comedy. They may have had diverse influences including Shaw and Ibsen, and Brenda Murphy has suggested that a number of the comedies of the Provincetown Players resemble the magazine farces William Dean Howells had been publishing since the 1890s (*Provincetown Players* 57). However, Judith Barlow, remarking broadly on a number of the women playwrights of the Provincetown including Glaspell but not specifically singling out *Suppressed Desires*, has noted similarities with the work of Rachel Crothers (284). Crothers, chronologically two years younger than Glaspell, was nonetheless part of the older generation of feminists and was a successful Broadway playwright, director, and actress. Several of Crothers's plays that feature female protagonists as champions of new intellectual creeds about marriage and sexuality had appeared before 1915. I believe there are some structural similarities between Crothers's play *Young Wisdom* (1914) and the Glaspell and Cook spoof.⁴² *Young Wisdom* played amidst some controversy on Broadway the season before *Suppressed Desires* was written, during a time that Cook and Glaspell were known to be attending Broadway plays.⁴³

Young Wisdom focuses on the idea of "trial marriage," i.e., living together before marriage, a variation of the free love movement. The play features Crothers's female protagonist, Gail Claffenden, who advocates the theory which, like Henrietta's version of psychoanalysis, is one that portends dire consequences for morality and the institution of marriage. Glaspell and Cook's dialogue seems to echo Crothers's in several places such as when Henrietta tells Stephen, "You're all inhibited. You're no longer open to new ideas" (*Suppressed Desires* 281). Gail Claffenden likewise

laments that her fiancée “is a slave to old, narrow ideas” (*Young Wisdom* I.31). *Young Wisdom* also ends similarly to *Suppressed Desires* with Gail receiving her comeuppance at the end of the play and being safely married off like Henrietta, who is forced to renounce psychoanalysis to restore the social order and conventional marriage.

There has been some critical discussion about a “conservative” drift to the ending of *Suppressed Desires* because the play would seem to validate conventional marriage and leaves Henrietta safely restored to convention, with her husband as the vessel of family values.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Crothers was criticized for the similar ending of *Young Wisdom*, which some contemporary reviewers thought showed a lack of commitment to feminism. The New York anti-suffragette league and the Daughters of the American Confederacy agreed, sending a combined 200 members to attend a performance and support what they perceived as *Young Wisdom*’s endorsement of traditional marriage (“Celebrations at Gaiety” X8). Arguing that she had proved herself in earlier dramas to be an “ardent feminist,” Crothers defended her intent in *Young Wisdom* to satirize the theories of “advanced women [. . .] to laugh *with* them, not at them,” and stage the antics that might ensue if “the radical ideas” of “the most militant feminist” were at once “adopted and acted upon” (qtd. in Gottlieb 141; emphasis in original). Crothers’s defense sounds like it might equally be used by Glaspell and Cook.

There is no evidence that Provincetown or Greenwich Village audiences reacted to the ending of *Suppressed Desires* as conservative or anti-feminist, perhaps because its original audiences could laugh at the self-indulgence of Villagers as part

of a larger critique of bohemian excess. The ending of *Young Wisdom* validates a conventional monogamous marriage; Gail Claffenden is able to select a mate of her own choice, a fellow artist who offers intellectual companionship. Although we do not learn a lot about Henrietta and Stephen's marriage, it may be that Glaspell and Cook assumed the audience of artists would understand that the couple was an intellectual as well as romantic partnership. Stephen and Henrietta's marriage is very different from that of her conventional sister Mabel and her husband the dentist. Mabel will return to an existence where she is dependent on her husband and society for her opinions but as Noelia Hernanda-Real has observed, there is no hint that Henrietta will do such a thing (4). Henrietta has sworn off psychoanalysis, but her husband has hardly asserted his will over her completely, and their marriage is closer to the ideal that many Village women advocated. The early twentieth-century feminists' ideal of egalitarian marriage typically featured equality between the partners, shared responsibility for domestic work and child-rearing, and a shared interest in intellectual and artistic pursuits. *Suppressed Desires* begins by providing the anatomy of how intellectual trends flash through Village sophisticates, but it ends on the unresolved tension in a bohemian marriage.

Like *Constancy*, *Suppressed Desires* critiques the institution of the Villager, as well as the trendiness of new intellectual theories and the sense of superiority bohemians express towards ordinary Americans. Staging the play as part of a communal praxis at Provincetown continued the ongoing conversation about marriage and sexuality the performers and spectators were trying to resolve in their own lives. This process was ultimately a political one. As Provincetown scholar

Cheryl Black observes about the creative women that contributed to the Provincetown Players,

The new world these women desired was to be an egalitarian utopia where absolute personal freedom led to absolutely unfettered artistic expression. It is perhaps in the attempts by these women to readjust their personal relationships — as lovers, wives, mothers — that their political objectives are most clearly manifested. (*Women* 30-31)

The critique of the bohemian offered in the first performances of the Provincetown Players, then, although amid a good bit of tongue-in-cheek, nonetheless reveals the villagers' sense of a need for greater social commitment in contrast to bohemian frivolity. Pursuit of modernist panaceas like psychoanalysis is simply less important than the ongoing real work of making equal marriages work.

Change Your Style (1915)

Change Your Style represents Jig Cook's first solo effort as a playwright in Provincetown. After the group was inaugurated with the performances at the Hapgoods' home in July, the gathered writers famously cleaned out an old fish house and built a stage on a wharf owned by Mary Heaton Vorse. *Change Your Style* was staged there in early September 1915 with a piece by Wilbur Daniel Steele, *Contemporaries*. A slighter work than *Suppressed Desires*, *Change Your Style* is nonetheless a very effective satire which focuses on how the controversy between realistic and non-representational art that followed the 1913 Armory Show was fought out in Provincetown. While a farce, the play nonetheless touches on a subject

of great concern to the *avant-garde*, what Bürger terms “art’s function within bourgeois society” and the “distribution apparatus on which art depends” (22). Cook’s particular target is the economics of patronage. In the play, he provides a brisk romp through a day in the life of a young painter in Provincetown and contrasts the high ideals of starving artists with the realities of their commerce with the bourgeoisie.

Change Your Style continues the meta-dramatic conversation about American artists of the Village plays, and should be recognized as an important American early modernist performance. The plot of the play is linear and the staging and dialogue primarily naturalistic; however, as Cook and Glaspell had gestured toward high modernist concerns with interiority in *Suppressed Desires*, Cook anticipates the coming modernist use of post-impressionist design in avant-garde performance by calling for both finished and unfinished post-impressionist paintings to be displayed prominently on the set of an artist’s studio. While, thematically, *Change Your Style* comments on the commodification of autonomous art work, formally the play relies on a series of meta-theatrical jokes based on the audience’s knowledge of the players. Thus the play is arguably not itself a work which strives to be autonomous but, like Boyce’s *Constancy*, embraces the context of its initial performances and audiences. Like *Constancy*, *Change Your Style* was never revived in New York. I believe further that in *Change Your Style* Cook was quite aware of the tradition of metadrama; the play bears some superficial resemblances to Aristophanes’s *The Clouds*, in which a property-owner tries to control his ne’er-do-well son who has fallen under the

influence of Socrates's "school of thinking" in much the same way the young painter falls under the spell of the modernist Bordfelt in Cook's play.

In *Change Your Style*, Cook not only modeled his characters on members of the Provincetown group as Boyce had, but he took the idea one step further by having one of the subjects of the play actually spoof himself. Bordfelt, head of a "Post-Impressionist Art-School" (292), was played in the original production by the post-impressionist painter Brör (B.J.O.) Nordfelt, and the stage directions and dialogue call for one of Nordfelt's most famous paintings, "Figures on the Beach," (293),⁴⁵ to appear in the play. The other roles were also easily recognizable caricatures of Provincetown personalities: Bordfelt's rival, the phlegmatic Kenyon Crabtree, "Head of an Academic Art-School" (292), is a combination of Charles Hawthorne, who had established the realistic art school in Provincetown in the 1890s, and Kenyon Cox, a muralist who became a strident critic of the Armory Show and the New Art. The young painter, Marmaduke Marvin Jr., played by another post-impressionist, Charles Demuth, was modeled on Fred Marvin, a young painter who was Mary Heaton Vorse's stepbrother. Myrtle Dart, "Lover of the Buddhistic" (292), an interested, if not too bright, patron of the new artists, is yet another Provincetown Players character based on Mabel Dodge. Mr. Josephs, "landlord and grocer" (292), is based on Provincetown native John Francis.⁴⁶

In *Change Your Style*, the bohemian artist ideal is embodied in Marmaduke who has been sent by his banker father to study art with the academic painter in Provincetown. The banker had "reconciled himself to the high-brow idea of having one painter in a banker's family—but a good, respectable, high-priced painter—like

Crabtree” (293). Instead of studying with the “old mummy” (293), though, Marmaduke has been kicking around with Bordfelt, learning the new non-objective style and becoming a "downer" artist, complete with the Murgerian cliché that he tries to trade his paintings for the rent. Marmaduke has also become a believer in the bohemian doctrine, including *The idea of living for the moment* (Cowley 60). We learn he has spent his “last dollar” (292) partying out late “on a bat again” (292). Marvin Jr also embodies *The idea of self-expression* (Cowley 60), priding himself on breaking all the rules of traditional painting and embracing abstraction as an expression of “pure creation” (294). Marmaduke’s pursuit of pure creation rather than a career as a “high-priced” painter also reflects what Graña identifies as the bohemian rejection of the modern world which is, to artists, “sunk in vulgar contentment and driven by a materialism which is essentially trivial and inhumane” (Graña 68).

However, Marmaduke’s lifestyle and art have all been supported by an allowance from his father. When the banker arrives and discovers his son has never taken a single class with Crabtree, he threatens to cut him off unless he changes his style back to “sane” art. Marmaduke Jr. is reprieved from his father’s wrath, however, when the father learns his son has just sold his very first painting to Myrtle Dart. Myrtle, a follower of Eastern mysticism and wearing Eastern robes, two details that link her to Mabel Dodge, allows herself to be convinced the painting represents the “spiritual form of the navel” (294).

While his father is happy about the sale, Marmaduke suddenly sees remuneration for his art as “disgusting” (298):

I've had nothing but mercenary emotions since I sold that picture. It's transforming. It's like a cat's first taste of blood. I have a carnivorous desire to sell. I don't want to be carnivorous. I don't want to be caught by the horrible American moneylust. I don't feel like an artist anymore. I'm commercialized. (298)

There is a turn of events, however, when Myrtle Dart returns the painting because she learns that what she had presumed was the "sacred umbilicus," Marmaduke had earlier told Mr. Josephs was the Christian "eye of God" (298). Marmaduke Jr's financial prospects once again appear grim, but he is at least relieved that in Myrtle not buying the painting for reasons of "vulgar realism" (298) he has at least not sold out: "I'm uncommercialized" (298), he exclaims. His father, furious that his son has not simply told Myrtle "a sale is a sale" and at his wit's end, declares, "The revelation he has made of his business capacity forces me to the conclusion that I owe it to society to support him—as a defective!" (299). Marmaduke is stunned and Bordfelt overjoyed: "Oh, to be a defective! All artists ought to be supported as defectives. Then we'd be free to do real stuff" (299). The play concludes with Marmaduke Jr breaking what is left of the fourth wall, turning to the audience and drinking to "defective artists" (299).

Cook dramatizes a key struggle for artists in *Change Your Style*. While they may decry society's materialism and view work as a "vulgar" compromise, under economic pressure they are willing to compromise the integrity of their work to make a sale. The dilemma is one that Cook took seriously, as is evident from an article he wrote in early 1916. In "A Creditor Nation in Art," Cook discussed the changes

happening in the New York and Provincetown art scenes as a result of so many American modernists being forced to return from Paris because of the outbreak of war. He notes the atmosphere of commercialism that pervaded the conversations of New York artists:

It is not surprising that some of those modernist artists who came back fifteen months ago to their unmodernist country came grumbling about how they hated America. Those whose work is a passion did not love their native land any better after a few evenings among New York artists whose conversation ran for hours on the prices so-and-so got for such-and-such canvases—the sort of selling talk common also among New York writers—a topic curiously deadening to creative feeling.

(7)

In *Change Your Style*, Cook critiques those commercial notions about art maintained by the respectable banker and Crabtree, the academic painter, as a purely materialist view of art. Crabtree and Marmaduke Sr become briefly interested in the New Art when it might become profitable, but then they abruptly drop it after Myrtle Dart returns the painting. The question remains however as to what form of economic support Cook believes artists should have. Marmaduke Jr. is unable fully to live the bohemian dream and artistic credo without accepting an allowance from his father, a member of the bourgeoisie, and what is worse, of the older generation. While bohemians maintain that a state of war exists between them and the bourgeois class, Cook reveals the hypocrisy in this stance, asserting that artists must either allow their works to be commodified by the bourgeois marketplace or, like Marmaduke's

allowance, accept direct support from the materialist class who have no feeling for the creativity of the work.

One important issue, then, is how Cook and Nordfelt represent the character of Bordfelt. The play is based on the history of the two opposing art schools in Provincetown, the legendary “battle” between the academic school led by Hawthorne and the young non-objective artist-rebels such as Nordfelt, Demuth, and William and Marguerite Zorach. Crabtree embodies the established and respectable view of art as a commercial product. Cook gives Bordfelt the lines in the play that defend art as creative expression, as autonomous from economic considerations. In the debate with the banker and Crabtree over the damage to Crabtree’s sales because of the New Art’s gain in publicity, Bordfelt proudly claims, “To be more interested in selling one’s pictures than in painting them is infallible proof that one is no artist at all” (297).

However, the status of Bordfelt, the New Art painter, in relation to the economic question Cook raises in the play is actually more complicated. In the opening of the play, there is an exchange in which Marmaduke explains to Bordfelt that his father would rather have him be a painter like Crabtree than like Bordfelt. Bordfelt retorts, “You! You think you are a painter like me?” (293). This sounds like a joke about the painter’s ego, which would have had a double meaning to an audience of friends as a comment upon Nordfelt’s own attitudes. Marmaduke replies, “No. I am a free spirit, and you—you’re an academician turned inside out. I think about as much of that new art school you make a living out of as you do” (293). Although it is not entirely clear, the implication is that Bordfelt’s post-impressionist art school runs upon the same economic model as Crabtree’s—and is geared towards

the sale of paintings in the gallery system. Also, throughout the play, it is Bordfelt who encourages Marmaduke to get the allowance from his father, presumably to continue his lessons with Bordfelt. This explains Bordfelt's joy at Cook's *deus ex machina* when Marmaduke's father offers renewed support. Bordfelt is portrayed not with the fire of an artistic rebel challenging academic realism, but rather as a jaded elder statesman of artistic vagabondage, who has surrendered at least some of his principles to base economics.

That Cook was satirizing both sides of what he calls in a "Creditor Nation in Art" the "civil war in art" (5) is suggested by comments he makes in this article, in which he specifically refers to the 1915 production of *Change Your Style*:

The Provincetown Players had just acted the first satire of Psychoanalysis, [when they] made this art-war a little more articulate in a skit called "Change Your Style," in which they had fun with "Bordfelt, Head of a Post-Impressionist Art School," and "Kenyon Crabtree, head of an Academic Art School." In the original cast Bordfelt was played by Nordfelt, and Kenyon Crabtree by Max Eastman, but it has been proposed to repeat the piece next summer with Charles Hawthorne, the famous conservative painter, playing the post-impressionist, and Nordfelt playing the academician, so giving each an opportunity to act his conception of the character of his antithesis. This amusing criss-cross is possible because these particular representatives of the art war happen to be good enough sports to enjoy a joke at their own expense. (5)

Although this proposed casting never took place—the revival of *Change Your Style* featured actors from within Cook’s circle—the idea that the roles of Crabtree and Bordfelt could be played by their real-life antitheses suggests that Cook viewed the play as a relatively equal send-up of both positions.

In exposing the financial skeleton of both the new and the old art, Cook targets what Peter Bürger refers to as the “institutions of art,” both “the productive and distributive apparatus” and also “the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works” (22). While Cook’s sympathies are with the young rebels, his satire is directed not at the style but the economic institutions of art, and is perhaps intended as a warning to younger painters. Cook offers humorous rebuke to artists that their claims to stylistic rebellion after all offer few claims to challenging the artistic system. Cook does not propose any real solutions to the artists’ dilemma in *Change Your Style*, but, like *Constancy*, it leaves the argument open-ended for the discussion of assembled performers and spectators in the artist colony.

In this section, I have discussed three of the first four Provincetown Plays from the summer of 1915, because these plays deal specifically with the artist and bohemian values. One play from 1915, Wilbur Daniel Steele’s *Contemporaries*, deals with a substantive issue for Villagers—the arrest of Frank Tannenbaum, an activist who led a group of homeless men into a church. I have not covered Steele’s play in this section because it is not specifically a satire of artist attitudes. When the Players returned in the summer of 1916, they staged further challenges to the followers of beauty and the beautiful life.

Plays 1916

If the summer of 1915 had been a remarkable summer of firsts for the Provincetown group, their second summer in 1916 would become even more legendary. John Reed returned to Provincetown, having missed the previous summer's performances, bringing with him his new love Louise Bryant, and both would contribute scripts; the post-impressionist artists William and Marguerite Zorach joined the group; and it was of course also the summer of O'Neill's first production, *Bound East for Cardiff*. The evening bill in July of 1916 that included the O'Neill world premiere was interesting for other reasons as well. William and Marguerite Zorach designed a completely stylized modernist *mise-en-scène* for Bryant's "morality play," *The Game*. *The Game* thus features one of the earliest examples of set design inspired by post-impressionist art in America—realizing the gestures made tentatively by Cook in his setting for *Change Your Style* the previous year. Of the satires directed specifically at the artistic values of the cognoscenti in this second summer "season" of the company, I have already briefly mentioned two above, John Reed's *The Eternal Quadrangle* and Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood's *Enemies*. Thus, the three plays from 1916 remaining to be covered in this section are *Freedom* by John Reed, *The Game* by Louise Bryant, and *Not Smart* by Wilbur Daniel Steele.

Freedom (1916)

John Reed's second play for the Provincetown group, *Freedom*, while set in a prison and consisting of characters with allegorical-sounding names, is nonetheless a Village play about the commitment, or lack of commitment, of artists to social change. *Freedom* has had a somewhat checkered critical history, in that Deutsch and Hanau, with perhaps no copy of the script available to them, contended that *Freedom* was a "bitter and stirring prison play" (11). Robert Sarlós set the record straight in 1982 by revealing that it was in fact a farce and provided a summary of the storyline. Leona Rust Egan was probably the first to explore the play in any depth, noting that "Reed satirized the poet-poseur, a way of exorcising his own poetic self" (198). Brenda Murphy has recently deepened this exploration of Reed's self-analysis, arguing that in *Freedom* "Reed wrote an early form of monodrama in which the conflicting attitudes and desires within his own personality are anthropomorphized and given full rein to act as characters within the paradigm of a farcical comedy" (*Provincetown Players* 89).

I certainly agree with Egan and Murphy that *Freedom* is one of a number of works in which Reed was "exorcising his poetic self," and, indeed, the conflict in Reed between the poet and the revolutionary—socialism being the reason he abjured the poet—has been noted by nearly all of Reed's biographers. However, I disagree with Murphy here that the plot of *Freedom* is an externalization of Reed's internal psychological state, the characters representing the anthropomorphization of specific feelings, and that therefore by extension the prison setting becomes a metaphor for Reed's mind or personality. More simply, Reed brings to the stage in *Freedom* a well-known metaphor, immediately recognizable to an audience of political radicals

and artists steeped in radical politics, of capitalist society as a prison for the worker, and freedom as the future promise of the revolution. That this metaphor was widespread among Village and Provincetown denizens is clear from a number of sources. A few years after the production of *Freedom*, an incident took place that was recorded by the socialist writer and editor Michael Gold (who was previously known as Irwin Granich). Gold as a young man approached George Gram Cook about contributing a play to the Provincetown (he eventually had three produced: *Down the Airshaft* [1917], *Ivan's Homecoming* [1917], and *Money* [1920]). As Jeffrey Kennedy reports, based on his research in the Gold Papers at the University of Michigan, Gold remembered meeting Cook at a restaurant. Cook insisted that they go to the empty playhouse because "it is easier to talk about a play before an empty stage. One can imagine it coming to life there" (qtd. in Kennedy 281). Cook, having apparently read Gold's script *Down the Airshaft* which is set in a crowded New York tenement, not a prison, then asked Gold, "Your boy is a prisoner in the dungeon of poverty, and beats his wings against the bars. He dreams of an escape to freedom. *Prison—the capitalist prison of our time—is the key symbol of your play?*" "Yes, I think so," I said timidly" (qtd. in Kennedy 282; emphasis added). Thus, *Freedom* offered John Reed yet another opportunity to spoof the artistic ideal in favor of the revolutionary, titling his play with the word that appears so often in all the sacred tenets of the Village doctrine.

Freedom follows Reed's other jibes at bohemianism, the long poem *The Day in Bohemia* (1913), and the play *Moondown* performed by the Washington Square Players in 1915 (written 1913). In *The Day in Bohemia*, much of Reed's satire is

reserved for the habitués of the salon of Umbilicus, “Teaching to all this ripe philosophy: ‘Art is not art that can not published be’” (*Collected Poems* 71). Reed is particularly harsh on the aesthete poets: “(BUFO’s an Art-for-Art’s-Sake out-and-outer,— / We’re fortunate his well is not a spouter)” (72); TRIMALCHIO judges a fellow poet only by his bohemian vices, “And measures such a man, not by his wits, / But by th’ atrocities he commits”; and STEPHON, who cries “Back to Nature,”— goes without a hat / And—never stirs from his steam-heated flat!” (72). It is the poet again who is defrocked in *Moondown*. A young woman’s roommate warns her of the fickleness of poets and how they make women the objects of their love, simply as a way to find material and a muse. Indeed, the young woman is abandoned at the end of the play. It is apparent that the Aestheticist sense of the sacredness of art and the special class of the poet/artist was in conflict in Reed with the socialist and the goals of establishing a classless society. The early Reed scholar Leo Stoller observed that, about 1913,

the essential problem facing Reed in New York at this time was bohemianism. Hindsight demonstrates that bohemianism, with its emphasis on idiosyncrasy for its own sake and its violent opposition to discipline, was an obstacle in Reed’s development towards the revolutionary. (*Collected Poems* xix)

Thus, between 1913 and 1915, when he wrote *Freedom*, Reed’s commitment to revolutionary action grew, and he developed the suspicion that aesthetic bohemia and the poet within him were not necessarily serving that commitment.

In *Freedom*, three would-be prison escapees tunnel into the cell of the prison trusty. The Poet, who composes an ode about the escape, is interested only in aestheticizing the experience; Romancer, whose ideas of escape come from reading adventure stories, puts the others through a series of secret oaths and pledges; and the plain-spoken Smith, “a low brow who just wants to get out” (85), tries to keep the escape moving forward despite the antics of the others. After confronting Trusty at gunpoint, the escape is delayed when Romancer insists on swearing in Trusty, and the gang gives him time to pack up his belongings. Progress is delayed again by Poet who, at the mention of the fact that it is almost dawn, must compose an ode to a prisoner pacing back and forth in his cell. After Poet reads his work and the escapees debate art for art’s sake, Romancer, declaring he is “a man of action” (87), decides to escape through the window, insisting on using a file he has spent three years making by “grinding the edge against my teeth” (87), a rope ladder he’s assembled from rags, and a gun that has been smuggled to him. When Trusty points out to Romancer that the window is unlocked, there is no sentry to shoot, and they are on the first floor, Romancer declares, “It’s an outrage, that’s what it is! Here I’ve been working and scheming and plotting for three years [. . .]. I needn’t say that I am bitterly, bitterly disappointed” (88).

Despite Smith’s cheers at Trusty’s news, “hooray, it’s a cinch! Let’s be on our way!” (88), there now begin a cascading series of defections from the escape now that the goal is at hand. First, Trusty refuses to go. Earlier, he had told the guard it was the Lord’s vengeance that put him in prison, and now he claims he is “a trusty, a man of responsibility in this community; I’ve worked up to it from the bottom” (89)

and he doesn't want to return to "what I was before I come here? [. . .] a tramp, a bum" (89). The Poet is next. Earlier, he has explained, "That's my line, you know—Freedom, Liberty, the Man in the Cage, the Ironing entering into the soul. I have an immense Public—mostly feminine—waiting for me out Yonder" (84). But Poet fears he will lose his audience once he writes about freedom from outside the walls, "I have told you that my line is Liberty. For God's sake how can I write about Freedom when I'm free?" (90). The crestfallen Romancer, who has earlier argued, "If we can't do a thing properly, we won't do it all" (85), finally complains, "What's the use of escaping from a prison you can just walk out of? No man of honor would take advantage of such weakness" (91).

Smith, exasperated by the others' constant debate and worried that the sun is coming up, breaks from the company and announces his intention to go on alone. Romancer accuses Smith of breaking his oaths, trying to save his neck at the expense of the others, and moments later when guards arrive Trusty, Poet, and Romancer all proclaim their innocence and claim to be preventing Smith from escaping. Smith gets the last line in the play, shouting, "There's not a word of truth in it. I was trying to break into a padded cell so I could be free" (92).

There can be little doubt that Reed intended *Freedom* to speak to fellow Village and Provincetown artists, judging by the humorous topical references in the play. When the three escapes first break into Trusty's cell, they force him to hand over his collection of magazines at gunpoint, and they turn out to be suffragette papers. Trusty explains they are sent to him each month by his grandmother, Mrs. Pankhurst—presumably a reference to British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. When

Poet creates his ode, “The Pacer,” the group stumbles into a conversation about American art. Smith attempts to go back into the tunnel and give up on the escape with the line “The judge sentenced me to five years, but he never said I had to listen to that stuff” (87). Smith agrees to stay if Romancer “will choke off that human siphon” (87). Poet is much offended and cries, “That’s what’s the matter with American art” (87), meaning that Smith’s common lack of sophistication prevents him from appreciating the Poet’s work. Smith replies, “That just what’s the matter with it” (87), implying that it is the artificiality of Poet’s style that renders his work insignificant to the average man. Then Romancer, in a metatheatrical moment, suddenly finds the conversation inappropriate for a group of convicts on a bold prison break, declaring, “I never heard of desperate men arguing about Art [. . .]” (87), to which Smith delivers the punch line “Well, I never heard of anybody *but* desperate men arguing about Art” (87).

Reed also targets the classist attitudes of artists and intellectuals. Poet has earlier complained about Smith, “I have never escaped with such a common person in my life” (81). Smith has a similar distance from Romancer, who insists, “We are going to escape like gentlemen, or else we’re not going to escape” (85). When Poet proclaims his mantra “Art for Art’s sake!” (85), Smith maintains, “This is no place for a low brow that wants to get out” (85). In the distance between Poet’s refined sense of art, Romancer’s idealistic fantasies, and Smith’s plain-spoken pragmatism, Reed points up the distance between intellectuals and “the masses” for whom they often claim to speak. Poet’s attitude in particular is a send-up of what Graña calls the “*Cosmic self-assertion*” of the literary man. Because the writer is “a natural

aristocrat” and “is the carrier of the higher values of civilization,” he is due a special status (Graña 60).

Reed parodies the attitudes of Romancer, Poet, and Trusty as ineffectual in leading the average citizen to freedom. Romancer’s love of the fables of heroes prevents him from taking part in the real, and obvious, path to freedom; Poet, consumed by vanity, fears real freedom would put him out of business; Trusty is the Uncle Tom character, a collaborator who has adopted the ways of his captors. The main characters in the play, in fact, are essentially representations of identities corrupted by capitalism. It is Smith who near the end of the play exposes the other three: “You’re playing a little game where the rules are more important than who wins. I’m willing to grant you that you have it on me as far as honor, and patriotism, and reputation go, but all I want is freedom” (91). Smith makes plain that Trusty, Poet, and Romancer are all representatives of conventional western values, and it is of course precisely these conventional values which are attacked by socialists as the ideologies used as justifications for industrial capitalism and western imperialism’s many economic and political infringements on freedom. Smith is also implicated, however, and in his criminal background represents also something of the corruption of the working class man. Although Smith receives more of Reed’s sympathy, the four together are Reed’s sample of the lumpen proletariat, the refugees between classes that produce nothing and are harmful to the worker—the group to which Marx himself assigned bohemians. Each of the characters follows a set of rules of his own creation to keep him under lock and key, and the imprisonment only works because

of the voluntary nature of the self-deception. Reed's farce is finally, then, highly funny agitprop, targeted most directly at the complacency of his fellow cognoscenti.

It is interesting that Reed makes clear the particular school of aesthetic theory being rejected is aestheticism, as exemplified by Poet's dedication to art-for-art's-sake. Here in the context of artistic self-criticism, Reed suggests a parallel with Bürger's theory of the avant-garde. As discussed in Chapter One, Bürger argues,

Only after art in nineteenth-century Aestheticism has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life can the aesthetic develop "purely." But the other side of autonomy, art's lack of social impact, also becomes recognizable. The avant-gardist protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any social consequences. (22)

Reed's specific target of aestheticism here is a particularly strong leftist critique of art as socially inconsequential in the Provincetown Plays. It suggests again that while using primarily naturalistic techniques on stage, the Provincetown writers gravitated towards important issues of the historical avant-garde. Bürger argues that the historical European avant-garde breaks with Aestheticism to "demand" that art become "practical once again," but that this does not mean "the contents of works of art should be socially significant." Rather the demand is directed to the way "art functions in society" (49). Like so many of the other Provincetown Plays, "Freedom" is not simply an artwork with socially significant contents, but rather an artwork with contents that debate the contents of artworks, the ideological relationship between

artists and society. The metatheatric moments in the play turn the audience's attention to the form of the work and the work's contents, the purpose of artists.

It is also interesting to note that within the American context, plays like *Freedom*, *Suppressed Desire*, or *Change Your Style* employ primarily naturalistic techniques, but all show some tendencies in the direction of modernist formal experimentation. Brenda Murphy argues that *Freedom*, along with O'Neill's *Thirst* (written 1914, produced 1916), "while tenuously within the realistic mode, both make a major move toward abstraction, with metaphorical situations and characters that are unabashedly abstract types" (88). I would add to Murphy's observation that in *Freedom*, the intense claustrophobia of the prison cell, in combination with the never used but easily available escape route, suggests something of the Theatre of the Absurd. Additionally, although it is believed no photographs exist of any of the play's performances, *Freedom* was staged in its New York production by the post-impressionist painter B.J.O. Nordfelt, who have may have added non-naturalistic stylization to the simple set. We therefore have in *Freedom* a work that exhibits some and anticipates other characteristics of both modernist and avant-garde theatre. However, Reed does not make a major break with naturalism in *Freedom*. That had to wait for later in the summer with a play by Reed's new love, Louise Bryant.

The Game (1916)

The event that occurred in Provincetown on the evening of July 28, 1916, continues to be of special significance and has perhaps drawn the widest scholarly interest in the Players. On the stage of the Wharf Theatre, the group presented Eugene O'Neill's debut with the first production of *Bound East for Cardiff*. This was

the play O'Neill had read to the group a few weeks earlier. On the same bill was Louise Bryant's "morality" play, *The Game*, and a spoof of bohemians in Provincetown by Wilbur Daniel Steele called *Not Smart* (a local Cape Cod euphemism for pregnancy). After decades of neglect, there has been recent interest in Bryant's play, largely because of its innovative modernist staging. *The Game* is likely the first original American play to use setting and direction based on post-impressionist art.⁴⁷ The Paris-trained American artists William and Marguerite Zorach wanted to try their hands at theatre design when they arrived in Provincetown in the summer of 1916. At some point, Bryant evidently approached them about the play she had written. As William Zorach remembered,

Louise Bryant had written an English morality play called *The Game*. It was not much in itself, but she wanted to produce it and thought an exciting stage set might put it over. I must confess we were as determined to do things our way as the playwrights were to do theirs. Louise said we could do whatever we wished with her play and even asked me to act in it. We were delighted with an opportunity to put on a play and ruthlessly turned an English morality play into a sort of Egyptian pantomime. (45-46)

Marguerite Zorach created a backdrop for the piece that was a stylized rendition of Provincetown harbor; both she and William Zorach then costumed the actors in simple robes and directed them to move in a flat plain like an Egyptian relief—the actors periodically changed stylized poses with their lines. Brenda Murphy has recently provided an excellent in-depth analysis of the Zorachs' work on the *Game*

and the influences on their art. It is not my intention to duplicate her research here; Murphy's argument is convincing that the Zorach's design and direction of *The Game* was largely influenced by the Ballet Russes and their lead designer Léon Bakst, who had recently brought Diaghiliev's *L'après-midi d'un faune* to New York (*Provincetown Players* 97). After the production of *The Game*, Marguerite Zorach created a linoleum block of her stage design with the actors in the foreground, and the print derived from the block was used by the group for years on programs and flyers and appears on a poster behind John Reed in a famous photograph. The Zorachs had diverse Cubist, Fauvist and other post-impressionist influences (Murphy 46-49); regardless of how their work might be categorized by specific movement, Marguerite's rendering of *The Game* became a symbol for the Players' commitment to modernism.

The title of the play, *The Game*, refers to an ancient dice contest over which the allegorical characters of "Life" and "Death" vie for the living. The subjects at the moment are "Youth" and "Girl" who have met at the edge of a precipice where they've each come to end their lives because of unhappiness with former loves. The lovers of the past turn out to be examples merely of "desire," and the two fall in true love when Girl realizes Youth is the author of "beautiful poetry" which she "knows well" (31), and Youth is convinced he can now succeed as a poet with Girl, a dancer, as his muse. The only real suspense in the play occurs when, after having won the life of Youth, Life must play Death for Girl, realizing that without love the poet will surely make another attempt at suicide. In the end, Life is victorious despite Death's

promise that “some day we’ll play for those two again—and then it will be *my* turn” (40; emphasis in original).

The Players, perhaps in an attempt to claim credit for developing modernist staging, always emphasized that *The Game* should be done with the Zorachs’ designs. In the program for the New York production, they inserted a statement explaining the importance of the “synthesis” of dialogue with the setting and movements of the actors: “The Game is an attempt to synthesize decoration, costume, speech and action into one mood. Starting from the idea that the play is symbolic of rather than representative of life” (28). The published version contained an additional notice: “As the gestures and decorations of the play are as important as the written speech and action of the players it is essential the theatres wishing to produce *The Game* should send for photographs and directions” (28). The Players’ statements emphasize the unity of all elements of the theatrical production, therefore suggesting the theories of modern stagecraft then emerging from Europe, such as those advocated by Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia.

Whether or not community theatres applied for photographs and directions is not known; however, I have obtained several typescripts of *The Game* that have recently become available in the William Bullitt papers at Yale⁴⁸ which shed light on the actors’ movement and other issues. Bryant retained three typescripts in her papers, of which one is an incomplete draft and two are complete. The first complete text is clearly a typescript of the published version of the play, and stick figures are drawn in pencil in the margins, representing the positions of each character at specific moments in the play and opening up the interesting possibility that *The Game* could

be restaged with its original movements today. The other complete typescript appears to be an earlier version; it contains multiple strike-outs and revisions, is shorter, and the dialogue and characterizations are less developed than in the published version. It is titled simply "The Game. A One-Act Play," rather than the more sophisticated *The Game. A Morality Play* as in the published version. This earlier script also mentions "The Time" of the play as "Midnight. Bright moonlight illuminates the scene"(1).⁴⁹ It is likely this is the original version of the play produced in Provincetown; this setting detail would explain why Marguerite Zorach painted a moon in her set design. The interpretation of *The Game* that follows is based on the published version, but I will mention a few interesting alternate readings from the earlier typescript as I proceed.

Critics have generally cited the importance of *The Game's* modernist presentation but have almost universally condemned the Bryant script itself as weak. Robert Sarlós calls *The Game* a "rather stiff 'morality' play" (24); Judith Barlow remarks, "*The Game* provides the opportunity for imaginative staging but is scarcely effective drama" (292); Leona Rust Eagan notes that the dialogue is "stilted" (205); Barbara Ozieblo argues, "The merit of *The Game* lies in the departure from realism in both setting and acting" but laments Bryant's "simple pronouncements on love and desire" and "other trifling observations and macho comments" ("Avant-Garde" 9-10). Brenda Murphy calls *The Game* one of the group's "slighter efforts at playwriting during the first two summers," but acknowledges that, because of the collaboration with the Zorachs, it "became their most dramatic experiment" (*Provincetown Players* 95). Kornelia Tancheva agrees with this trend in the criticism, stating that the play

“offered such a synthesis of dramatic text and its theatrical realization that it proved so important in their theatrical enterprise” (158).

Despite the interest of critics in emphasizing the aesthetics of the Zorachs’ stylized presentation, Bryant’s script itself is also important to an understanding of modernist and *avant-gardist* experimentation in Provincetown. The content of Bryant’s play remains a bohemian satire, very much germane to the writing of the other members in the group. Like these other plays, *The Game* presents arguments about the roles of men and women, and, like Reed’s *Freedom*, about the social responsibility of the artist. Bryant more directly confronts the issue of the American artist’s political role and more consciously considers the deficits of the art-for-art’s-sake bohemian faced with the cataclysm of the First World War than any of the other playwrights during the group’s first two summers. While it is true that Bryant’s lines often read as affected "lyrical" musings on the nature of art and love, a sly wit is also apparent in *The Game*. Bryant’s feminist and pacifist sensibilities imbue the play with a level of irony that often challenges the “cosmic” aestheticism of her characters.

There is undoubtedly some artificial dialogue. Youth and Girl speak rather woodenly without contractions. Youth’s attempts at reciting exalted poetry to Girl also seem overwritten. He tells her, “You skim the sea gloriously lifting your quivering feathery breast against the sunny wind” (37). Further, Bryant’s feminism, which is incisive in the exchanges between Life and Death, a subject I will return to below, may run somewhat aground in her depiction of the young artists’ love. Like Youth, Girl is also an artist, a dancer, and such a role had been popularized by modernists’ appreciation of the work of Isadora Duncan. But there is also a sense that

Girl will play the secondary role of muse, interpreting Youth's poetry in dance, rather than as an original creative artist herself. In the original version, she tells Youth she knows his poetry and in her dancing tries "to express what you write" (8). One must wonder if this description of the woman as muse and helpmate is a coded appeal to O'Neill, who would cast Bryant in his one-act play *Thirst* later in the summer, where she would help realize his art through interpretation. Bryant and O'Neill exchanged numerous verses on their love that summer and that *The Game* was part of this exchange is possible, even though Bryant's official boyfriend John Reed acted in it.⁵⁰

Bryant's dialogue may lack finesse, but the critical reaction against the script has been in my opinion overstated. In 1996, I participated in an evening of readings at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum that sought to recreate the night of O'Neill's premiere of 80 years earlier. Many of the organizers for these productions including myself feared the reading of *The Game*, precisely because we recognized the weaknesses of the script from our own readings of the play as well as from reviewing the work of the scholars then available. However, with the plays presented in their original order—*Bound East for Cardiff*, *The Game*, and *Not Smart*—it was clear to everyone who was present that evening, judging by their audible reactions, that the weak link in the chain was not Bryant's play, but *Not Smart*. Steele's farce never got off the ground, eliciting only a few titters, but Bryant's wit had the audience laughing uproariously (*with* the play and not *at* it), and the pathos of her references to the First World War, particularly in the final moment of the play where Life speaks about the casualties on the Western front, left the audience stunned and murmuring sympathetically. This was a reading production, without the Zorachs', or any,

decorative staging. I realize that the variables of performance may affect an audience's reaction, but I strongly suspect our experiment in recreating this historic evening provided a gauge of how the original audiences may have responded to the play.⁵¹ What has happened here is a classic example of problems with textual analysis of dramatic literature: a script which does not read well, *The Game*, played extremely well; a script which reads like a polished comedy, *Not Smart*, did not play well.

The strength in Bryant's script is the banter between the rivals "Life" and "Death." Death calls Life "sister" in the published play, but their interaction almost suggests that they are perhaps an old couple. Bryant makes it extremely clear that cross-gender casting is not possible: Death is a man; Life is a woman. Death is the embodiment not only of mortality, but also unmistakably of the patriarchy as well, and he regards her with the sexism expected of men in a position of authority. This leads to a number of jokes based on the audience's familiarity with the struggles of the New Woman. Life must negotiate with Death as the unequal half of an "equal" partnership—not unlike the sexual relationships portrayed by Neith Boyce. When Life requests mercy on behalf of the lovers, Death replies, "A favor? A favor? Now isn't that just like a woman? I never met one yet who was willing to abide by the results of a fair game" (29). Further, Death maintains, "Oh, I always said the universe would be in a wild state of disorder if the women had any say" (29). In the alternate version, Death complains, "I'm a man, and I'm entitled to my sport. It's all I get, anyway,—this game with you" (3). Death surely views sport as the domain of men and the last line reveals that, brother or not (they are gods after all), the contest is

sexual in nature. These lines, and others voiced by Youth, are intended to be transparently sexist for the audience, a continuation of the metatheatrical humor of the Liberal Club and other early Provincetown plays. These self-referential moments remind the audience of the contemporary Village struggles over sex and gender equality and thus of the theatrical construct in which they are participating. Indeed, if *The Game* is intended to be Bryant's entry into the Provincetown battle of the sexes, it may be significant that Bryant makes Death a man, because she was likely aware, since *Bound East for Cardiff* had been previously read to the group, that O'Neill's dying sailor Yank in the play preceding hers has a vision of death as a woman in a fever dream.

In addition to entering the Provincetown dialogue on sexual politics, Bryant avails herself of the opportunity in *The Game* to deliver a number of other meta-dramatic "in-jokes" directed at and intended for her captive audience of artists. Life, in fact, is constantly complaining about "geniuses" and when Life finds Youth perched on the cliff, she delivers the one-liner: "Ungrateful spoiled children [. . .]. They always want to commit suicide over their first disappointments" (29), undoubtedly calculated for its effect on an audience of artists. Life's final exchange with Death at the end of the play is also the perfect expression of the Greenwich Village idea of *living for the moment* (Cowley 61). Although Death swears he will return to win and therefore end the lives of the lovers at a later date, Youth exhorts, "Yes. But we will have *lived*" (40; emphasis in original).

In her many references to artists, Bryant introduces the major theme of the play, which is of critical importance to the Provincetown group—the struggle to

justify art and the “beautiful life” in the face of the slaughter going on in Europe. *The Game* is, in fact, one of only two plays in the first two summers of the company to mention the war (the other reference is a single line in *Suppressed Desires*), despite Hutchins Hapgood’s observation that it was the war that preoccupied the group at this time (*Victorian* 391). In Bryant’s play, it is the woman, Life, who struggles with the relevancy of art, particularly in the opening and closing speeches. While critics have dutifully acknowledged the references to contemporary events in Europe in these scenes, such comments are often represented merely as asides. I would suggest that these speeches frame the story of the two lovers, making the justification for art theme the central issue in the play.

Bryant’s theme is framed in the opening scenes between Life and Death as a question: Why does Life make such a fuss over a single pair of artists while thousands of soldiers are dying in France? Life declares, "[. . .] I want these two, whether I win or lose. I really must have them. They are geniuses—and you know how badly I am in need of geniuses right now" (29). Life’s opening bid to win the lovers from Death is to trade them for the heads of states of the warring nations: “I’ll give you Kaiser Wilhelm, the Czar of Russia, George of England and old Francis Joseph—that’s two to one” (30). Of course, Villagers opposed American entry into the war on ideological grounds because they believed that the war would be fought by the workers for the imperialist aristocracies and capitalist bourgeoisie. Bryant’s audience would have taken particular pleasure in Death’s response: “You’re always trying to unload a lot of monarchs on me when you know I don’t want them” (30).⁵² The implication is that in war Death is thirsty only for the blood of the young.

Bryant's revisions for the published version leaves out several lines from this speech that would have delighted her audience, tying American capitalists to the war machine:

Sometimes, Life, I wish you were a man. You are so sentimental. Now if you were a businessman—like Rockefeller or Morgan [*sic*] you'd play as hard for kings as you do for geniuses. Why Rockefeller has told me himself many a time that he had no use for geniuses—wouldn't have one in his factory or in his offices or anywhere about him. He says they're always stirring up a rumpus and never sticking to business. He is one of my best friends on earth, he certainly sends me a great many souls from the mines of Colorado [. . .]. (3-4)

One can imagine Bryant abandoning these lines for legal reasons in her published play, but they contain numerous self-referential moments. The obvious reference to the hostility of industrial capitalists to modern artists is both self-affirming and self-critical. Politically and aesthetically, artists struggle with the bourgeoisie, i. e., they are always causing a “rumpus,” but they are also incapable of holding a job or “sticking to business.” Bryant could be on sure footing with her audience that the condemnation of the American captains of industry for their preoccupation with saving European monarchs would be condemned by artists devoted variously to the anarchist and socialist ideals. The idea that the capitalists are on a first-name basis with Death, and Rockefeller is one his “best friends on earth,” could not help but strike a chord with her audience. Finally, there is the allusion to the mines of Colorado, what Richard Hornby in his theory of meta-drama would call citations of a

“recent” and “controversial” event and “a real-life reference” because Reed, acting the part of Death, had recently returned from covering the massacre of six miners in the Ludlow, Colorado, strike, where he had been jailed for his efforts.

After this exchange, Life offers Death a “regiment of soldiers” to stall for time until the lovers can meet. Death exclaims, "Soldiers! What do you care about soldiers? Look at your figures again. You've been losing millions of soldiers in Europe for the past two years—and you're much more excited about these two rattlepated young idiots” (31). At this point in the play, Life is unable to provide a justification for the relative importance of her two favorites, whose art does nothing to affect the soldiers’ loss of life. Bryant here fears what Bürger calls “the social inconsequentiality of art” (*Theory* 22). Certainly the art-for-art’s-sake doctrine and the bohemian doctrine of the beautiful life are hard to justify in that they cannot contribute to ending the disaster of civilization represented by the war.

Life finally wins the game and Youth and Girl are to be set free with the play ostensibly ending on a happy note. But this happy ending is undercut when Death once again raises the issue of the soldiers. Life laughs it off: “O, soldiers don't matter one way or the other to me; but some day the dreamers will chain you to the earth, and I will have the game all my way" (41). Sacred Art, Life implies, will conquer even death. However, in the final lines of the play, Life, left alone on stage, breaks the fourth wall, turns to the audience of artists and declares in a poignant moment: "I must never let him know how much I mind losing soldiers. They are the flower of youth—there are dreamers among them. . . ." (42). The original ending is similar but

more topical for 1916 because it mentions American volunteers in the European conflict:

I must never let death find out how much I mind losing
soldiers...especially the volunteers....They are so young and strong . .
.and there are always dreamers and geniuses among them....I must
find a way to stop wars...perhaps Youth will help me. (13)

In the ending of *The Game*, Bryant seems hard put to defend the artistic mission of her bohemian lovers in the face of so many lives lost in the war. Like many of the other Village plays, *The Game* never really comes to a conclusion about what the role of culture should be when civilization seems bent on destroying itself. Bryant had more than a lingering nostalgia for the beautiful life, and suggests that the added cost of the war is that artists, the “dreamers” (42), are among the soldiers who perish. She cannot quite abandon categorizing artists as a special class. However, Bryant is equally critical of art-for-art’s-sake in view of overwhelming social realities. The praxis of Bryant’s own work integrates political reality, both the war and the women’s’ struggle, into the bohemian dream. Just as her future husband John Reed would ultimately abandon poetry for social action, Bryant would soon abandon creative writing for a time to follow Reed into journalism, choosing the life of action over the life of art.

The issue of the role of creativity during war remained on the minds of the Provincetown Players. A subscription circular for the Players’ third New York season, (two years after the New York production of *The Game*) 1918-1919, contained an appeal for the continuing importance of art, of theatre, in time of war.

Presumably written by Cook, the flyer first mentions a justification for theatre as entertainment, as “relaxing the strains of reality” in dark times. However, unsatisfied with this reason alone, the circular goes on to explain,

One faculty, we know, is going to be of vast importance to the half-destroyed world—indispensable for its rebuilding—the faculty of creative imagination [. . .]. The social justification which we feel to be valid now for makers and players of plays is that they shall help keep alive in the world the light of imagination. (1)⁵³

It is interesting to note about this statement, first, that the Players felt they needed to provide a “social justification” of their work to subscribers. This fact reveals their assumption that their Village audiences expected the theatre to exemplify an interdependency between art and world events. Second, however glad we may be that the Players continued their mission to create plays after the United States entered the war, the principle cited in the circular would not have been acceptable to Village radicals a few years earlier. We must recognize the entirely different expectations of American artists before the war, who believed that not only could the world of art be changed in the new era but that such art itself logically would cause social change, with the more limited aspirations of post-war cultural modernism.

Not Smart (1916)

Wilbur Daniel Steele’s contribution to the Players’ second summer, *Not Smart* (July 24, 1916), shared the bill with *The Game* and *Bound East for Cardiff*. William Zorach remembered that with the designs and direction he and Marguerite had

provided for Bryant's play, *The Game* "made a hit" (46).⁵⁴ There is no record of the audience's reactions to the original performances of *Not Smart*; however, Jeffery Kennedy cites a letter from Steele to his father on the morning of the bill's opening, July 28, 1916, complaining that Edward ("Teddy") Ballantine whom Steele was "rehearsing" as the lead in *Not Smart*, "doesn't understand the part, and the whole thing falls flat (it's a comedy supposedly) and I'm in despair. I'll never do another" (qtd. in Kennedy 136). It is thus possible that *Not Smart* fell "flat" when the play was performed that night as well. When the Provincetown Players agreed to move to New York at the end of the summer, they attempted to recreate their most successful evening by staging *Bound East for Cardiff* and *The Game* on their first New York bill, but *Not Smart* was replaced with another comedy of bohemian manners, Floyd Dell's *King Arthur's Socks*. This decision was probably strategic—by featuring Dell's play they may have hoped to lure an audience of Villagers familiar with Dell's Liberal Club plays to their new theatre (which they would establish on the same block with the Liberal Club). The decision may also reflect that they doubted the viability of *Not Smart* either for the problems encountered with the lead, or because the references in the play were local to Provincetown and not New York. Later, in February 1919, *Not Smart* was revived with the talented James Light (later co-artistic director of the company) and was a success, receiving positive reviews from Heywood Brown in the *New York Tribune* and Jon Corbin in the *New York Times*.⁵⁵ It was also revived again in December 1919.

Not Smart is set in the living room of a "typical shore cottage—the rented kind" (243)—which indicates that it is the abode of vacationing intellectuals from the

Village. The main characters, Milo and Fannie Tate, are textbook examples of radicals who are struggling to adapt to the new, liberated codes of modernism, particularly the New Sexuality. In the opening scene, Milo reads a story to Fannie from a popular magazine in which the hero gives up his pursuit of a beauty he's pursuing with "Ankles and so on" (243) because of a sudden thought of his wife at home. Milo is infuriated by the writer's compromise with conventional morality and, demonstrating his allegiance to the modern values of free love, "groans feebly" (243) at the magazine. Milo complains that the kind of Puritanism represented by the story is the "problem with American society"(244). He is outraged that a couple would "coop"(244) their spirits up by adhering to old-fashioned marital fidelity: "They're all the same. That's what's the matter with America! Thank God—er—that is—the *gods*—nothing like that can ever happen to *us*" (244; emphasis in original). Milo, nearly forgetting that he is a true polytheistic Village pagan, defines the qualities of an advanced "modern" couple. Like the male bohemians in *Constancy* and *Enemies*, Milo seeks Fannie's assurance that they are above such antiquated morality:

MILO. I would have followed that ankle, wouldn't I? [. . .] And then,
when I came back to you enriched, bringing the spoils of a
profound experience, Fannie—you wouldn't mind?

FANNIE. Mind? Why should I mind, Milo? Can a thing of that sort
tamper with the essential qualities of our relationship? No. No!
(244)

Fannie wishes to be seen as no less modern than her husband and promises that she will not be weighted down with old fashioned feelings of jealousy. For Milo and

Fannie, the question is purely academic at this point in the play, and Steele soon tests his moderns.

Milo, not satisfied with his wife's response, carries things a step farther. He boasts to Fannie that the only difference between her faith in the new "theories"(247) and his own belief in them is that he is "willing to put them into practice in the home" (247). Fannie, smoking casually, only half hears Milo's declarations. Steele then relies effectively on a humorous device similar to the one Glaspell and Cook employ in *Suppressed Desires*. Like Henrietta Brewster, Milo is shown to be incapable of employing his theories in practice as easily as he claims. Although he proudly declares that Fannie should be as free as he and hopes she would meet a "nice chap" (245), as soon as she suggests someone (the couple's un-intellectual neighbor, Mort Painter), Milo is predictably consumed with jealousy. However, he quickly covers his reaction, by stammering, "I'm afraid it would raise a bit of the devil in the Painter house, Fannie; that's all. You know, Mrs. Painter isn't exactly—our kind" (245).

At one level, Milo's assertion here is that he and Fannie are of a "kind," a class of practitioners of the new theories of sexuality, what would later in the century be called "swingers." However, the comment shows Steele parodying the snobbishness of Village types in general to those of more conventional views. "Our Kind," ordinarily an expression of social caste among Anglo-Saxons, is here transplanted to the Villager, a perfect encapsulation of the sense of special treatment some moderns believed themselves due as advanced livers and thinkers. For this reason, I chose "Our Kind" as the title of my 1994 master's thesis on the Village satires of the Provincetown Players. Milo's attitude about "Our Kind," both in his elitism and his

sense of the importance of his mission, is similar to the ideals Caesar Graña detected in the nineteenth-century literary bohemian and called "*Cosmic self-assertion*." This view Graña defines as the belief by the "literary man" that he "is a demi-god, a natural aristocrat. He holds world-meaning in the palm of his hand and is the carrier of the higher values of civilization. Therefore, special respect is owed him and special freedom should be granted to him" (68). Greenwich Village bohemians applied such ideals of the aesthetic bohemian to their social experiment in living unconventionally.

Brenda Murphy has recently argued that in *Milo and Fannie*, Steele is actually parodying the "modern" marriage of Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood (*Provincetown Players* 59), and Hapgood in fact was known to use the phrase, "Our Kind" in just the elitist sense that Milo does in the play. Hapgood and Boyce's letters from about 1904 onward detail the difficulties in their marriage. Hapgood attempted to practice a type of free love called "varietism" and although he outwardly recommended the practice to his wife, he became extremely jealous when she developed an attachment—never consummated—to an old Harvard classmate of his—not unlike Milo's reaction to Mort Painter in *Not Smart*. Boyce scholars suggest the troubles in the Boyce-Hapgood marriage underlie the plays that Boyce wrote and those that Boyce and Hapgood collaborated on for the Provincetown Players as was discussed in the section on *Constancy* in this study.

While Steele is most critical of the Milo/Hapgood character, he also suggests that the Fannie/Boyce character is prone to modernist pretensions. Fannie has as much difficulty actually putting into practice her freedom as does Milo. She smokes

at home early in the play, but in a later scene, when the neighbor Mrs. Painter stops by, Fannie jumps about the stage frantically trying to extinguish her cigarette so as not to be seen engaging in the liberated and unconventional activity. Milo stops her and tells her to wear her badge of independence proudly. She obeys and docilely remains smoking in front of the chagrined Mrs. Painter.

As an example of a woman who Milo might find a source of cosmic fulfillment which would bring him back to his marriage “enriched” (244), Milo lapses into paens to the natural innocence of the couple’s servant girl, Mattie, a working-class native of Cape Cod. Milo believes she is a poetic being, “living close to the throbbing heart of Mother Earth, feeling the life-pulse of the Cosmos—” (247). Her very simplicity, her lack of education, and her upper-class breeding make her an object of reverence as Milo exalts her: “She’s got something we’ve lost” (248). Meanwhile, Fannie protests that Mattie might actually be closer to the “throbbing heart of the kitchen range” (247), and the stage directions emphasize Mattie's indolence and stupidity.

When Mrs. Painter drops in, she is prompted to talk about her husband’s suspicious absence and is forced to confess to her friends that he has run off after impregnating the couple’s servant. Meanwhile the girl was shipped off to a home for unwed mothers. Milo rails against the ludicrousness of the Painters’ attempts to maintain respectability, arguing that the three should enjoy the “unfolding hour of the miracle” of the child’s birth in a ménage. Soon it is discovered that Milo and Fannie’s servant, Mattie, is “not smart,” and Fannie and Mrs. Painter jump to the obvious conclusion that Milo is the father. A series of high-jinks ensue, including Milo's

attempts to ship Mattie off to a home for wayward girls in New York, despite his earlier complaints about such compromises with bourgeois morality. Fannie breaks down, unable to maintain the façade of her modernist pretensions, and then develops a cool insistence (265) that Mattie remain with them as Milo had earlier advised the Painters. Finally, it is revealed what none of the summer people had suspected: Mattie is respectably married to a local peasant, Mr. Snow. *Not Smart* ends with Snow entering and demanding that Mattie leave with him and Fannie, having realized Milo's innocence, showering Milo with much undeserved praise: "I promise to never doubt you again as long as I live" (272).

In *Not Smart*, Milo is left in the position of many of the protagonists in these Village satires, with his theories about the New Sexuality coming back to haunt him. As Floyd Dell recalled, it was the New Sexuality above all that Village modernists clung to, even in the face of absurdity:

Our Anarchist friends themselves had seemed to lay more stress on the importance of Freedom in the relations of men and women than in the other relations of human society; and however conventional might be their own modes of life, in this as in other respects, yet it was always of their defection from the ideal in this particular that they spoke with the most chagrin. To live on rent, interest and profit, as some of them did, was a matter that lay lightly on the anarchist conscience; but to have become respectably married to the woman one loved, was a cowardly surrender to the world, which they could hardly forgive themselves. (*Intellectual Vagabondage* 159)

Of course, in *Not Smart* Steele parodies the pretensions of Milo and Fannie as free lovers, suggesting ultimately that the human connections of marriage and sexuality have deeper roots than the “new theories” can account for. In relation to the new sexuality, Steele also targets twin modernist precepts: paganism and primitivism. As his slip about “the gods” makes clear, Milo’s beliefs in finding “something we have lost” in a woman he perceives as closer to “heart of mother earth” is part of his need to pay homage to polytheistic paganism, a cardinal precept of Village modernists. In his listing of the Village code, Malcolm Cowley defines the *idea of paganism* as “The body is a temple in which there is nothing unclean, a shrine to be adorned for the ritual of love” (60) and such was often tied to notions of sexuality and free love, implying a binary opposition to Christian morality. Paganism was influential in both the literature and philosophy of the period and its sources diverse. Nietzsche, who was widely read by Provincetown Players Steele, Hapgood, Cook, O’Neill, Glaspell, and Barnes among others, idealized a return to polytheistic paganism in his rejection of Christianity, arguing for the replacement of the “thou shalt nots,” with pagan affirmations: “Paganism is that which says yeah to all that is natural, it is innocence in being natural, naturalness” (*Complete Works* 123). In *fin-de-siècle* literature, paganism was connected with sexuality and the search for “beauty” through the influence of Walter Pater’s famous “Conclusion” to his book on the Renaissance. As literary historian Damon Franke (*Modernist Heresies*) noted about British literature of the 1890s, writers of “decadence” “wallowed in various forms of sexualized paganism, and welcomed the comparison to the late stages of ancient Greece and Rome” (147). Franke views much of Pater’s theme as one that

focuses on the evolution of the focus in western art from the afterlife to present experience and notes how this particularly influenced writers of decadence and later modernism:

Pater's aesthetic treatise became a staple of the "art for art's sake" movement and its desire to harmonize form and content. As literary experiments with paganism became more daring, the sexuality of various primitivisms that affirm "this world" came to the foreground, and their implicit critique of Christian asceticism led to charges of indecency in the work of Hardy, Joyce, and Lawrence. (143)

American modern and modernist writers also advocated pagan sexuality; Max Eastman, editor of *The Masses* and founding Provincetown Player, described his autobiography in terms of a conflict of paganism and Puritanism, or "the story of how a pagan and unbelieving and unregenerate, and carnal and seditious and not a little idolatrous, Epicurean revolutionist emerged out of the very thick and dark of religious America's deep, awful, pious, and theological zeal for saving souls from the flesh and the devil" (qtd. in Wetzsteon 51). The popularization of the idea of the pagan resulted in numerous pop-cultural references to the concept including the dances sponsored by *The Masses* and dubbed "Pagan Routs" by Floyd Dell and the later modernist poetry magazine *Pagan* and subtitled "a magazine for eudaemonists," i.e., hedonists. Malcolm Cowley even notes that, in the later postwar period of the Village, paganism was commercialized and "encouraged a demand for all sorts of products, modern furniture, beach pajamas, colored bathrooms, with toilet paper to match" (62).

If paganism suggests a “return to nature,” the rolling back of modern society to reveal some authentic self, it is one of pre-Christian but European origin. The related concept of primitivism idealizes the “natural” state of non-white races. Milo also mentions primitivism in a retort to his wife: “Look here, Fannie, you’ve talked as primitive as anyone” (250). Primitivism was characterized by an obsession with stripping away the veneer of civilization through means such as psychoanalysis and, in modern painting and sculpture, breaking down perspective and other post-Renaissance staples of Western art. Primitivism advocated the aesthetics of “simple” non-Western cultures, particularly African, as more expressive and closer to nature than the over-civilized West.⁵⁶ Brenda Murphy has noted the influence of Primitivism in *Not Smart*, suggesting recent exhibits of Cubism sponsored by Marius de Zayas a possible influence. Steele obviously parodies Milo’s idealization of Mattie as having a more primitive connection to nature; in fact, losing himself in his paen to the girl, he catches himself suddenly revolted by the own chthonic nature of the attraction: “I feel a strange spiritual bond with that creature—something drawing me—irresistibly—like the pull of green things and the damp earth—weird—almost—ah—Pliocene—ugh [. . .].” (248).

Art historians Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton (basing their work in turn on Marilyn Board, Carol Duncan, and Patricia Mathews) point out the thinking behind Gauguin’s Europe towards non-native peoples and how this was particularly inflected by Western male assumptions of gender:

For any Westerner [. . .] escape into the realm of the primitive was frequently cast as a quest for a mythical reunion of mind and body,

intellect and instinct, which were supposedly torn asunder with the development of civilization. On the scale of overarching generalizations, Western culture was deemed to be masculine and rational, while non-European cultures were categorized as feminine and instinctual. Within such discourses distinctions between European and non-Western men and women were also subjected to primitivist terminology [. . .]. The dark-skinned women of Tahiti or Africa [. . .] are viewed as the very embodiment of sensuality, the natural women whose sexual energy mirrors that of the fecund forest surrounding them. Through sexual contact with the black woman, the European male seeks a redemptive union of mind and body unrealizable through contact with her European counterpart. (174-175)

One unanswered question about *Not Smart*, though, is whether Steele's parody suggests that Milo's prejudice is simply classist, ethnocentric, or racist. Early in the play, Milo interrupts Fannie when she reminds Mattie to address her as "ma'am": "Why *should* she say ma'am? After all, my dear, you know she is—" (247; emphasis in original). Milo does not finish his thought, but presumably this is a reference to the politics of class—as a modernist intellectual, Milo must adhere to some form of leftist politics, which challenges the relationships of servants to their employers. The implication is that as "advanced" people, Mattie should be treated as an equal, but what actually makes her an "inferior" is not specified. Neither "Mattie" nor her husband "Snow" have names readily identifiable with an ethnic group. Working class Provincetowner residents then as now could be of Anglo-Saxon descent; White

Electricians, Inc., in Provincetown is owned by a family of Mayflower stock, and Snow is an English name. However, I tend to agree with both Brenda Murphy and Jeffrey Kennedy that Mattie and Snow are probably Portuguese, the most common immigrant group in Provincetown. If racial prejudice is intended, old-style Anglo-Saxon bigotry against darker, southern Europeans is the likely implication. Thus Steele parodies Milo for radicalizing the locals, employing the same condescending attitudes towards Mattie as many whites did towards African Americans. This may be a coded dig at a broader racism in the Provincetown group as well. On the evening of the group's first New York performances in October 1916, Edna Kenton mentions the company's "colored" seamstress, who was named Mattie, and her husband "Honeybunch" who became the theatre's footman (*Provincetown Players* 49). Kenton does not mention where or for whom Mattie worked before this time, but since *Not Smart* was written only a few months earlier, it is possible Mattie was known within the Players' circle of acquaintances. Also on the subject of race, it should be noted while most Portuguese that settled in Provincetown were Caucasian, a minority of these settlers, called "Bravas" by the white immigrants, were half Portuguese and half African fisherman from the Cape Verde islands.⁵⁷

If Mattie is a coded representation of an African American servant, the fact that she should not be anything like Milo's romanticism of her "simplicity" is demanded by the form of the play—she is, after all, actually quite a bit "smarter" than the summer colonists' having married and followed her own traditions despite not being from the right "kind" of people. Steele critiques the eurocentrism and romanticism of primitivism, exposing the silliness of the application of the theories

Milo espouses. Steele's parodying of free love, paganism, and primitivism and the potential racial overtones of the character of Mattie suggest that criticisms in the play may be taken seriously. *Not Smart*, then, is part conservative indictment of Village pretensions and a valorization of traditional Christian morality, but it also questions sophisticates commitment to equality.⁵⁸

One issue that should be considered before making this assessment is the quality of the script. *Not Smart* like *Suppressed Desires* stands out in the Provincetown's first two summers as being a more complete play—more polished and professional—than a number of the other scripts. Like *Suppressed Desires*, we have only the published version of *Not Smart* to read. There is no typescript in the Glaspell and Cook papers of *Suppressed Desires*, nor “sheafs of papers,” as Edna Kenton described the original text. Likewise, there is no typescript of *Not Smart* in the Wilbur Daniel Steele papers. However, three other plays from the first two summers—Boyce's *Constancy*, Steele's *Contemporaries* (not covered in this study), and Cook's *Change Your Style*—survived only as typescripts until published by Heller and Rudnick in 1991. Similarly, until the recent manuscript of *The Game* surfaced, this play was only available in the later published and much revised version. Each of these typescripts contain numerous self-referential or metadramatic allusions to people, places, or ideas in the immediate purview of the Players themselves, and in the case of *The Game*, as pointed out in this study, there are additional metadramatic citations not found in the published version. Thus, one might speculate that early versions of *Not Smart* or *Suppressed Desires* may have contained further examples of such allusions.

Regardless, in evaluating these plays we must consider the specific context of these performances in Provincetown and New York amid artists who were engaged in a process of self-analysis. Criticism, even from an ostensibly conservative viewpoint, would no doubt be taken by the participants in the spirit of the other Provincetown summer productions—as ideas for the artistic community to evaluate. *Not Smart*, like *Suppressed Desires* highlights the hypocrisy of those pretending to live under standards not their own. It is not only that the kind of free love Milo Tate claims to believe in is incompatible with his bourgeois marriage, but that such modern theories badly or incorrectly interpreted are hardly modern at all. Like the Reed character in *Constancy* and the Hapgood character in *Enemies*, Milo Tate’s pretensions to free love are revealed as hypocritical and the Victorian double standard is the *de facto* rule. As in Boyce’s *Constancy*, the male partners in bohemian relationships have no trouble using Village codes or beliefs as a cover for old-fashioned Victorian philandering. Indeed, as Beatrix Hapgood Faust, the daughter of Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, whom Milo and Fannie may be modeled on, recalled

I loved my father but could not agree with his view of women, even before I knew anything at all about his extramarital affairs [. . .].

When father called himself a Victorian in the modern world [the title of Hapgood’s memoir], he was bang on target. (qtd. in Trimmerger, *Intimate Warriors* 235)

Susan Glaspell indicated that the Provincetown Players were in part a reaction to the “patterned plays” of Broadway (*Road* 248), but in their first summers in

Provincetown the Players did usually avail themselves of the formula of the problem comedy. Taking their inspiration to create critiques of the intelligentsia from figures like Crothers and Shaw, the Players adapted these forms. Whereas realistic problem plays might feature a critique of intellectuals for the general public, following the Liberal Club tradition the Provincetown Players adapted these styles before an audience of the participants, their fellow intellectuals. The self-referentiality of this critique therefore becomes part of the self-critical crisis of American modernism. In terms of form, theatrical paradigms normally associated with realistic theatre are inverted as the audience is made a contributor to the total performance. Metadrama was a tool for the American intelligentsia who questioned the social relevancy of its activities, of the ability of art and changes in personal lifestyles to help in the various political and social causes of the age and to halt the war in Europe. Thus the Provincetown Players were creating a theatre of intellectual analysis in the tradition of metadrama, identified by scholars such as Lionel Abel, Richard Hornby and June Schlueter. While famous for their association with O'Neill's early tragedies, a form of theatre which requires the audience's emotional absorption in the characters, they in fact created many works which frequently interrupt the narrative progress of otherwise realistic scripts with the estrangement caused by literary self-reference and occasionally real-life reference. Such references were valuable to the participants, and they suggest that these plays moved away from autonomous art, which is typified by its practitioners' belief in the historical transcendence of the work and towards an avant-garde interaction between art and what Burger terms "everyday life." I do not want to belabor the point. The aesthetics and politics of the early Provincetown

Players (1915-16) were decidedly mixed between naturalistic, modernist, and other styles. These productions should be regarded as an example of what Gainor (cited in Chapter 1 of this study) terms the “cultural hybridity of the American avant-garde,” which despite its very different appearance bears some interesting similarities to theories of the avant-garde discussed by European cultural critics.

In the early musings about the artist, life, and sexual politics that were performed by the group in Provincetown, the first American plays to consider the personal as political emerged. Against the fear that their own Little Renaissance of the 1910s had become frivolous, the Provincetown Players began to experiment with traditional theatrical methods, with modernist stylization, and with a peculiarly anti-artist art, seeking an American artistic and social rejuvenation. In plays such as *Constancy* and *Suppressed Desires*, radicals were confronted with the excesses of faddish intellectual ideas and the problems that sexual experimentation and sexual equality brought to their marriages. Cook’s *Change Your Style* evinces an understanding of the commodification of art works and itself experiments with a form that—because of its dependency on the recognition of the characters by a specific audience—resists such commodification and questions the autonomy of art. In *The Game*, Louise Bryant challenged the fin-de-siècle notions of artistic genius and graphically highlighted the crisis of this group of American modernists, whose despondency over the war led to a creative response to self-criticism.

The early work of the Provincetown Players thus challenges us to redefine the historical *avant-garde* in American terms. While the group’s plays combined naturalist, modernist, and *avant-garde* methods drawn from European and American

contexts, their use of performance and the very hybridity of this project must be considered in part avant-gardist in attitude. Here is a theatrical praxis that sets out to criticize institution art and seeks to integrate art and life while at the same time being highly aware of its own precarious position in relationship to the community of which it is a part.

Chapter 3: The Drama of Indeterminacy⁵⁹

Chapter Two of this study examined the evolution of Greenwich Village satire in the early plays of the Provincetown group in the summers of 1915-1916. I presented the self-referentiality of these plays as evidence of a crisis in early modernism brought about in part by the difficulty American cultural radicals had in positioning themselves at the outbreak of war in Europe. I have argued that the self-criticism of modernism, the disregard for theatrical illusionism, the interdependence of performers and spectators, and the implicit or explicit left politics of these plays mark them not only as important early modernist plays, but as incipient American avant-garde works as well. Certain parallels appear between the anti-Aestheticist mocking of bohemianism in the Provincetown satires and theories developed by European cultural critics such as Peter Bürger. Bürger's characterization of avant-garde art as a critique of "art as institution" can be related to the Provincetown Players critique of the artist. I also identified these Provincetown productions as part of a therapeutic process that suggests the use of theatre as part of the life of the artistic community, echoing Bürger's concept that the aim of the avant-garde was for art to be "reintegrated with the praxis of everyday life" (22). I have made these arguments despite the fact that most of the satires staged by the Provincetown Players were, with the notable exception of Louise Bryant's *The Game*, realistic in form, i.e., their settings, characters, and dialogue essentially adhered to naturalistic theatrical conventions even when exaggerated for comic effect.

The unusual presentation of *The Game*, however, was the first volley by those in the Provincetown Players who agitated on behalf of non-realistic modernist

experimentation—the subject of this chapter. Some of the original membership, and more and more of the younger writers who were attracted to the company's professed belief in experimentation after its opening in New York in 1916, were interested in non-realistic, poetic, or expressionistic theatre. In addition to the modern artists William and Marguerite Zorach who were responsible for the *mise en scène* of Bryant's play, poets such as Alfred Kreymborg, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Maxwell Bodenheim, and Wallace Stevens soon contributed verse dramas to the company. These writers and artists formed a splinter group from the original players. Led by Kreymborg and the Zorachs, they created highly stylized productions appropriating new forms in pursuit of both a modernist aesthetic and a continuation of the avant-garde bohemian critique. The influences and means of expression that these writers sought in challenging realism were as varied as their own backgrounds: Cubism and Futurism for the Zorachs, Craig's theory of marionette theatre in the case of Kreymborg, *comedia del arte* and medieval romance for Edna St. Vincent Millay and, later, European expressionism for O'Neill and Glaspell.

I will argue in this chapter that regardless of the individual method what underlies and leads us to identify all these experimental plays ultimately as *avant-garde* is their leftist-inspired meta-theatrical critique that challenges the institutional relationships of artists and audiences, mixing stylization with a self-reflexive commentary on the theatrical and artistic process itself. The focus in this chapter is on the plays that both resisted the conventions of realism and continued the Village tradition of metadrama. I am not attempting an exhaustive study of all of the formally experimental plays of the Provincetown Players in this chapter. Rather, I focus on two

of the most unusual modernist writers associated with the company: Alfred Kreymborg and Djuna Barnes. I explore some of their short, but complex modernist and avant-garde works at greater length than in previous studies, focusing on these playwrights' combination of avant-garde and modernist politics and aesthetics. The plays that will be examined in this chapter include Alfred Kreymborg's *Lima Beans* (1916), *Mannikin and Minnikin* (1918), *Jack's House* (1918), and *Vote the New Moon* (1920); and Djuna Barnes' *Three from the Earth* (1919). Because Alfred Kreymborg was instrumental in centering the energy of the group of formalist experimenters at the Provincetown, a disproportionate share of the chapter is allocated to discussing his work.

King of the Commonplace: Alfred Kreymborg's Proletarian Verse

Speaking of himself in the third person in his autobiography *Troubadour*, Alfred Kreymborg described his affectionate but antagonistic relationship with Harriet Monroe, founding editor of *Poetry* magazine, this way: "Although she finally accepted a group of Krimmie's poems, Monroe still avoided praising his work as a poet and contented herself with admiring his effort as an editor" (*Troubadour* 227). Monroe's judgment has proved to be a prophetic assessment of Kreymborg's reputation. Despite his own output of verse and his significant participation in the *Others* group of modernist poets in New York, Kreymborg is perhaps best remembered today as the editor of several little magazines associated with modern poetry: *Glebe* (1913), co-founded with Man Ray, which published Pound's first Imagist anthology; *Others* (1915), which launched Kreymborg's friends William

Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Mary Caroline Davies, Wallace Stevens, and Mina Loy; and *Broom* (1921), co founded with Harold Loeb in Rome, which showcased expatriate American modernists in its early issues. Kreymborg also edited *The American Caravan* series of poetry anthologies with Paul Rosenfeld, Lewis Mumford, and Van Wyck Brooks in the late 1920s and oversaw a popular anthology of American poetry called *Our Singing Strength* (1929).

The quality of Kreymborg's own oeuvre is certainly mixed. Some of his *vers libre* experiments seem to fall flat and others exhibit a holdover of romantic sentimentality. However, he also experimented with many new modernist techniques and his writing deserves further scrutiny. Russell Murphy, author of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry on Kreymborg, points out that several of the poet's early efforts published in 1916 in the 142-page collection *Mushrooms*, show an "admixture of *vers libre* forms, imagist description, and a Whitmanesque fervor for—if not sentiment over—the lot of common folk" (196). Murphy suggests that the poem "Nocturne" might be at home in Stevens's *Harmonium* collection; another poem, "Image," is "a masterful rendering of an ideogram in the 'radiant node' tradition of Ezra Pound" (196); and Murphy concludes that "if there is an old-style sentimentality to be found in the section of poems addressed to the poet's nieces and nephews and [. . .] the poet's mother, there is also a sufficient dose of modernist irony" in a number of pieces in the collection (196). Murphy also praises Kreymborg's collections *Blood of Things* (1920) and *Manhattan Men* (1929), which contain dada-like depictions of urban images, and poems written from the point of view of various objects found on city streets. Murphy contends that in poems such as "Electric Sign," Kreymborg

produces “a worthy machine-age addition to the quest for self-knowledge which Whitman had infused into American poetry” (196). Such representations of urban subject should be expected of Kreymborg who was an intimate of the circle of expatriate European artists known as New York Dada—Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Mina Loy, Albert Gleizes, and Juliet Roche.

Not only has Kreymborg’s work been ignored by critics of modern poetry, but it has also been neglected by drama scholars interested in, and sometimes baffled by Kreymborg’s early verse plays produced in association with the Provincetown Players. Kreymborg’s plays, in fact, often grew directly out of dialogues in his poems. Consequently, I will offer readings of some of his early *vers libre* to explore his whimsical comedies. Most previous critics of Kreymborg’s plays from this period have also not consulted the early series of newspaper articles he produced on contemporary writers and artists for the *New York Morning Telegraph* between 1914 and 1915.⁶⁰ These articles reveal much about the young Kreymborg’s attitudes towards art, poetry, the avant-garde and, most importantly, what Russell Murphy identified in Kreymborg’s later writings as “the lot of the common folk” (196). Kreymborg’s concern with the ordinary citizen and the worker, even in his earliest writing, is connected to his developing awareness of insurgent politics. Already evident in Kreymborg’s early poems and newspaper critiques is the same identification with the downtrodden that will evolve for him into a full-blown proletarian politics and criticism of capitalism by the 1930s when poems such as “America” will appear in the collection *Proletarian Literature in the United States* (1935, 1941), edited by the socialists Joseph Freeman and Granville Hicks. Twenty

years later, Kreymborg's politics would earn him a blacklisting by the House Un-American Activities Commission. In *Troubadour*, published in 1925, Kreymborg is virtually silent about his political views. This is likely because as noted by Malcolm Cowley and discussed in Chapter One of this study, the radical political views of prewar Village bohemians were not fashionable for the jazz age generation. Additionally, Kreymborg deliberately omits some persons and events from *Troubadour*, and there is reason to question his chronology at other points.⁶¹ Thus, the reevaluation of Kreymborg's unique oeuvre that I offer in this chapter, based on an exploration of his neglected early poetry and overlooked criticism, is necessary to reveal how his politics inform even his love-themed experiments on the stage of the Provincetown.

Kreymborg formulated his proletarian aesthetic with a lexicon that emphasizes the ordinary. An autobiographical poem in *Mushrooms* tells the story of Kreymborg's father naming the infant Alfred after the English king. Kreymborg accepts the mantle of "king of the homespun" (137), an epithet of Alfred the Great's for having assisted a peasant woman in baking bread in an apocryphal tale.⁶² Kreymborg thus claims for his poetic kingdom the ordinary and the domestic, which as I will demonstrate below became the mainstay of his creative expression in his earliest verse. This declaration of the ordinary echoes a phrase more well known to Provincetown scholars, Kreymborg's comment that his otherwise non-realistic and experimental verse play *Lima Beans* (1916) was meant to be a "fantastic treatment of a *commonplace* theme set to a stylized rhythm" (*Troubadour* 242; emphasis added). I interpret these statements of the commonplace as manifestos of Kreymborg's

modernism—ideas that reveal the unique and seemingly paradoxical problem of his writing—how to create new modernist form inspired by the European avant-garde while expressing poetry in a common American idiom that remains true to ordinary American folk and an egalitarian politics that serves them. In fact, Kreymborg’s interest in European modernist experiment is always tempered by his sense of the quotidian and plain American language. In the period just following his involvement with the Provincetown Players, Kreymborg was in Europe editing *Broom* for Harold Loeb when he resigned to return to America. As Cathy Barks has commented, “Kreymborg [. . .] decided not only that America was essential to his identity as an artist, but also that he wanted to produce a kind of art which would speak to America’s middle class, especially the small town and back roads sections of it, that very part of American society most derided by fellow modernists” (248). Later, Kreymborg would go on the road to that small town America with a modernist puppet theatre—trying to take culture out of the elite world of New York and little magazines and to the streets. Kreymborg’s populist attitude in dialogue with the stranger developments of modernism is evident in his early plays like *Lima Beans* and *Jack’s House* as well. Therefore, in this section, I will first briefly outline Kreymborg’s lesser-known early career, then examine his first produced verse play, *Lima Beans*, in context with several key early poems and the early newspaper essays to provide a broader understanding of Kreymborg’s aesthetics and politics than has yet been considered in print.

There is a Charles Weston photographic portrait of Kreymborg, in which he appears, as always, in a dark suit with a tie, his characteristic toothbrush moustache,

and a stoical expression. However, behind his subject Weston has captured a child's balloon ascending. The image suggests perfectly the mix of austerity and whimsicality in Kreymborg—what I will argue is in fact a wry and rebellious infantilism—that lies behind his dignified façade. Although, Kreymborg wielded the axe as editor on the poetry of the master modernists of his generation, he was apparently quite soft-spoken. The poet Robert Creeley referred to him as “dear Alfred Kreymborg” (Creeley), and Marianne Moore seemed surprised to find Kreymborg mild-mannered upon their first meeting. She noted to William Carlos Williams that her editor “is of middle height, quiet, dignified, dry, unpuffed up, very deliberate and kind; he was dressed in [a] black suit with the suspicion of a white check in it [. . .] wearing a new pair of shoes, very plain and rather fashionable, nothing deluxe” (104).

Kreymborg was a native New Yorker, the son of German immigrants who made their living and later contracted cancer from rolling cigars in their tobacco shop on the East Side of Manhattan. At an early age, Kreymborg became a chess prodigy and at 20 tied José Capablanca, future world champion, in a New York State semi-final round. Kreymborg's games were recorded in the chess magazines of the day, which have since been digitized and are today studied by players on the Internet (*Chess Notes*). Leaving high school in his second year, Kreymborg eschewed chess for music, becoming a self-taught musician and eventually landing a job in a store that recorded and sold piano rolls. Discovering literature, again on his own, he read widely and cites Whitman as his greatest influence after Browning, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov (*Troubadour* 112-13).⁶³ As Kreymborg asserts in *Troubadour*, his first

attempts at writing were naturalistic prose, and in 1905 he completed a story, *Edna*, a fictionalized version of a real encounter with a New York prostitute. The tale was not published until ten years later, when it was seized upon by the Greenwich Village promoter and publisher Guido Bruno.⁶⁴ Bruno added the subtitle “The Girl of the Streets” to the story without the author’s knowledge, and this has perhaps led to the impression *Edna* is a rather grim Crane- or Dreiser-influenced naturalistic novella. In fact, the story is a satire, both a humorous and ultimately a sad look, not only at the life of the prostitute, but also at the motivations of the protagonist, a would-be reformer. Even in this early work, Kreyborg is already expressing a criticism of capitalism and a frustration with reform politics. The narrator, a Prufrock-like self-caricature of the author (9), is both morally above approach and sexually repressed. He refuses sex, but pays for the time with the prostitute only to learn her story as a “sympathetic sociologist” (27). If he spoofs the naturalistic writer, Kreyborg also reverses the expectation of discovering the stereotype of the “prostitute with the heart of gold.” Instead, she is exposed as a materialistic teen with the soul of a drummer, an advanced representative of a larger America in which everything is for sale:

One detail stood out from all the rest with dissonant clearness; She, like the whole of her class, was mercenary—like practically the whole of society, thought he. He did not concern himself with what the whole world would have whispered in connection with his conduct; public opinion rarely troubled him. But this one thing, this business above everything, did. He seemed to see it everywhere; in other street women beckoning him as he went along, in the crowds making a business of

their pleasure-hunting and even inside himself, in his desires, his ambitions and his ideals themselves. Everywhere, everything spelled commercialism. (27)

In this early effort, three themes of Kreymborg's become apparent which appear in his later writing: first, his sympathetic but humorous take on the life of everyday people; next, his willingness to satirize the high-mindedness of literary ideals; and finally his rejection of American capitalism. Kreymborg stated that *Edna* could not be termed "an immortal achievement," yet he believed it more successful than two further attempts at prose following it. He then chose to experiment with a series of prose poems, which he self-published as *Love and Life, and Other Studies* (1908).

In 1912 the painter Marsden Hartley introduced Kreymborg to the circle of painters and photographers associated with Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery 291, including Edward Steichen, Marius De Zayas, Charles Demuth, William and Marguerite Zorach, Samuel Halpert, and Man Ray (126-28). Like other American moderns, Kreymborg welcomed the chance to exchange ideas in a bohemian atmosphere. He felt at this time that although "the true artist is a hermit [. . .] this energy is futile unless it reach consummation through the response of a number of intelligent recipients" (128). At about this time, Kreymborg also landed the first of a series of day jobs that he describes as contributing to his artistic development. He became the editor of *Musical Advance*, the pet project of a wealthy benefactor, Franklin Hopkins, who had plans for replacing the symphony orchestra with ensembles composed of a new family of instruments created by crossing the mandolin with the lute. Hopkins soon failed at his various enterprises, but Kreymborg picked up editing experience on

the journal and left with one of the sample instruments. Continuing to experiment in free verse, Kreymborg set a number of his compositions to music, and the “mandalute” became the signature sound of many of his poetry readings and later puppet presentations throughout his career.

Even before his association with *Musical Advance*, Kreymborg had dreamt of a periodical called the *American Quarterly* to publish the work of the new poets facing constant rejection from contemporary editors, but he had not been able to finance the venture. In 1913, while staying with Man Ray and Samuel Halpert in a cabin in the New Jersey palisades and inspired by the “little” magazines then emerging from Chicago, *Poetry* and *The Little Review*, Kreymborg and Ray decided to found a journal called *The Glebe*. Glebe, Old English for soil, would represent the breaking of the ground of the new generation of American writers and artists (*Troubadour* 155). Kreymborg put out word of the new magazine to his friend the poet John Cournos, then living in London, and soon a strange package arrived in New Jersey, wrapped in thick butcher paper. The package contained a complete issue of the magazine, pre-selected and arranged by Ezra Pound, and titled *Des Imagistes, An Anthology*. When an accident destroyed an old printing press Kreymborg and Ray had been planning to use for *The Glebe*, a printer recommended Kreymborg search for a sympathetic publisher in “the Village” (158). Despite having grown up in Manhattan and having contacts with Stieglitz’s 291 circle, Kreymborg had not heard of Greenwich Village at the age of 30 in 1913. Making up for lost time, he would soon plunge into bohemia and avail himself of the many opportunities offered there.

In the Village, Kreymborg met Charles and Albert Boni, who owned the Boni Brothers bookshop next to the building that housed the Liberal Club and would soon also be the home of the Provincetown Players. The Boni brothers, who would later found the Modern Library with Otto K. Liveright, agreed to finance *The Glebe*. Kreymborg meanwhile attended the first meeting of the Washington Square Players as they broke off from Dell's Liberal Club performances (discussed in Chapter 2 of this study), and he gave poetry readings and a lecture on Debussy at the Liberal Club. He was soon taken under the wing of the nefarious "P. T. Barnum of the Village," Guido Bruno. Bruno was reviled by Villagers for his tireless commercialization of the Village to tourists, but he must also be credited with publishing in his monthly chapbooks the oddest and most idiosyncratic of the young literary experimenters, including Kreymborg and Djuna Barnes. Bruno agreed to bring out three sequences of Kreymborg's free verse and *Edna*, all of which appeared in 1915. By early 1916, the publisher John Marshall issued a complete collection of Kreymborg's verse under the title *Mushrooms: A Book of Free Forms*, which included the original sequences and many new poems.

Kreymborg moved at a frenetic pace in this period, launching one project after another in rapid succession. He began to lose interest in *The Glebe* when the Bonis put pressure on him to publish more work by Europeans (*Troubadour* 162).

Kreymborg, like the other cultural movers and shakers of his generation, George Cram Cook, Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Ezra Pound, Harriet Monroe and many others, believed that America was on the verge of a national renaissance in the arts, and despite a keen interest in cultural developments in Europe, these writers and editors

were cultural nationalists who saw their role as encouraging a modern American culture. Kreymborg thus gravitated to a new circle of friends more sympathetic to his ideals whom he met first at a party at the studio of Louise and Allan Norton, the editors of the poetry magazine *Rogue*, and then in the literary salon of Walter and Louise Arensberg at their studio on West 67th street. This circle included the Nortons and the Arensbergs, the poet Donald Evans, Carl Van Vechten, and Wallace Stevens. Because of the war in Europe, the Arensberg set began collecting refugees and soon added Marcel Duchamp, Frances Picabia, Jean Crotti, Albert Gleizes and Juliette Roche, and Mina Loy and Arthur Cravan who also became the core of the group that would later be called New York Dada. Kreymborg apparently humored Arensberg's interest in him as a fellow chess player, and soon the two agreed to found a new journal that Arensberg would fund and Kreymborg edit: *Others* (*Troubadour* 171).

Others would be perhaps Kreymborg's greatest editing contribution to Modernist poetry. As Suzanne Churchill has recently remarked, *Others* "helped launch the careers of many of the most innovative and influential modernist American poets. Providing an open forum for unknown writers, this low-budget *salon des refuses* helped instigate modern poetry in America, providing a stage for the seemingly harmonic convergence of artistic genius known as modernism" (1-2). While planning the magazine in 1915, Kreymborg met Gertrude Lord (whom he calls Christine in *Troubadour*). Lord had supplied a modern dance interpretation to accompany a reading Kreymborg gave at the home of the art critics Charles and Caroline Caffin. Alfred and Gertrude acknowledged an attraction and the two were married in June 1915. In July, the newlyweds rented a cabin in Grantwood, New

Jersey, not far from Man Ray and Halpert. Both at their cabin and in the following year when the couple relocated to Bank Street in New York, the Kreymborgs' home became the center of the world of *Others*. With the exception of Wallace Stevens who rarely left Hartford, Connecticut, poets who were published in *Others* and the artists of the Arensberg set gathered for legendary Sunday picnics at the Kreymborgs'. They included William Carlos Williams (who lived in nearby Patterson, New Jersey), Alanson Hartpence, Skipwith Cannell, Maxwell Bodenheim (recently arrived from Chicago), Marianne Moore, and Mary Caroline Davies, with regular visits also from Duchamp, Jean Crotti, Man Ray and others. Two trips to Chicago at this time also allowed Kreymborg to meet Harriet Monroe, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and Edgar Lee Masters.

Not content with writing and editing the new poetry, Kreymborg had several times floated the idea of creating a theatre for the purpose of producing free verse dramas. When his marriage to Lord dissolved, Kreymborg rented a loft on 14th street with the aim of creating a little theatre there. Although this venture never materialized, Kreymborg soon wandered into MacDougal Street to explore a theatre company his friend the painter William Zorach had told him about. The Zorachs, recently returned from the summer 1916 plays in Provincetown where they had created the décor for Louise Bryant's *The Game*, were anxious to do more theatre work of an experimental, as opposed to naturalistic, nature (Zorach 45). Kreymborg had recently written *Lima Beans*, and William Zorach encouraged him to submit it to the Provincetown Players. "We're strong on realism and weak on fantasy,"

Zorach told him, “Maybe you can supply the latter” (240).

Lima Beans (1916)

Kreymborg was impressed with the Provincetown Players. “These fellows were not effete, like the lamentable Washington Square Players, nor was there any likelihood that they would be taken up by Broadway to be broken on the wheel of popularity” (240), he remarks in *Troubadour*. However his submission of the script of *Lima Beans* caused a controversy within the Players’ ranks, which was briefly alluded to in Chapter 2 above. Despite their pledge to be an experimental laboratory for American theatre, in voting on plays for the upcoming season the Players rejected *Lima Beans*. This led to the now famous incident at a company meeting. John Reed, arguably the most politically radical member, defended Kreymborg’s script, arguably the most aesthetically radical project yet submitted. Reed threatened to resign if *Lima Beans* were not produced, and a compromise was reached where Kreymborg could produce the play as long as he directed and cast it himself, using none of the Players’ regular actors.

Kreymborg accepted the challenge and turned to fellow *Others* poets Mina Loy and William Carlos Williams who were, he believed, “well versed in technicalities of free verse” (243) and William Zorach to cast the three characters in the play. The Zorachs also designed a black and white checkerboard background for the play with “spots of color supplied by some bowls and ornaments” (*Troubadour* 243), and likely also decorated the curtain, which Kreymborg required to be painted in “festoons of vegetables” (*Lima Beans* 131).⁶⁵ Williams recalled that they would

often have to wait in the cold narrow hall at the Playwright's Theatre for a chance to rehearse while James O'Neill, legendary portrayer of the Edmond Dantes was "yelling out direction and suggestions to his son and the actors. Very moving" (*Autobiography* 139). Williams also recalled the strange relationship of Mina Loy and Kreymborg:

Mina was very English, very skittish, an evasive, long-limbed woman too smart to involve herself, after a disastrous first marriage, with any of us—though she was friendly and had written some attractive verse. I remember her comment on one of Kreymborg's books, *Mushrooms*—something to the effect that you couldn't expect a woman to take a couch full merely of pink and blue cushions too seriously. But when the Provincetown Players had accepted Kreymborg's play, Mina had consented to take the lead. I was to play opposite her. (*Autobiography* 138)

For Bryant's play *The Game* in the summer of 1916 the Players had given the Zorachs *carte blanche* to turn a fairly conventional script into a modernist theatrical spectacle, so the group seems not to have objected to modernist stylization *per se*. It must have been Kreymborg's idiosyncratic style which met with resistance. Written in his own odd free verse and deliberately childlike, *Lima Beans* is sometimes indecipherable, often absurdly whimsical, and is as much dependent on movement as dialogue. The characters bob up and down like marionettes, underscoring the childlike nature of the verse, and other traditional dramatic elements are simplified or satirized. Thus there is a plot, of sorts, although the story is clearly de-emphasized

for the establishment of the emotional mood between the characters, which includes not only the leads, but according to Kreymborg's script, the curtain.

Lima Beans premiered on December 1, 1916, between O'Neill's experimental monologue, *Before Breakfast*, and a new naturalistic Neith Boyce play, *The Two Sons*. Kreymborg thought his play an unqualified success and noted that it received 16 curtain calls. Zorach, acknowledging the vegetable theme of the play, handed Kreymborg a bouquet of vegetables rather than of flowers (*Troubadour* 244). William Carlos Williams recalled it as a "qualified success" (*Autobiography* 139), and Edna Kenton who, as a member of the Provincetown's powerful executive committee, may have been one of those initially opposed to the script, regarded it in her history of the company with respect—if at some distance. "Here was a clear case of what fine synthesis an experimental stage could give," Kenton wrote, "when a poet wrote, when poets spoke and when a poet-painter painted. It is not a drop from any height to add that that most beautiful set asked of our treasury only thirteen dollars and eighty-five cents" (*Provincetown Players* 44, 46).⁶⁶ Kreymborg's first verse drama proved successful for Village audiences and *Lima Beans* had productions across the country. Kreymborg and his second wife Dorothy Bloom later toured with a version of the play using puppets created by New York puppeteer and Provincetown actor Remo Bufano, and Bufano continued with his own productions of *Lima Beans* at least into the early 1920s ("Mail Bag").

Yet despite this apparent success, *Lima Beans* fell into the same critical black hole in the decades that followed as many of the Provincetown's other works. The first attempt to rediscover Kreymborg's experiments had to wait nearly fifty years

until Elizabeth Weist's 1965 dissertation, *Alfred Kreymborg in Art Theater*. Moody E. Prior pleaded in *The Language of Tragedy* in 1966, the year of Kreymborg's death, that the playwright's "early work is in the tradition of expressionistic verse drama and should be taken seriously" (qtd in Valgemaë 23).⁶⁷ The first section of a scholarly book to examine Kreymborg's dramaturgy, Marti Valgemaë's *Accelerated Grimace: A History of Expressionism in American Drama*, did not appear until 1972. While *Lima Beans* has received brief but sympathetic treatments by Robert Sarló and Barbara Ozieblo, the play had not received an extended literary analysis from Valgemaë's in 1972 until Brenda Murphy's *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* in 2006. While these few, but important essays have begun to look seriously at Kreymborg's dramaturgy, none of these critics has examined *Lima Beans* in the context of Kreymborg's early poetic sequence, *Mushrooms*—although the play is in fact an expansion of a short dialogue poem in this collection called "Scherzetto"—or have read Kreymborg's early newspaper reviews.⁶⁸ Both of these sources reveal that Kreymborg was developing his proletarian aesthetic of the "commonplace" at the time of the composition of *Lima Beans*. The following lengthy analysis of the play I present connects Kreymborg's politics with the hybridity of the two competing strains of modern American experimental theatre: modernism and avant-garde/expressionist performance.

Plot and Minimalism

Lima Beans was perhaps the first intentionally minimalist work of American theatre. In his "fantastic treatment of commonplace themes" (*Troubadour* 242), Kreymborg deliberately contrasts the simplicity of the story of an everyman couple

with the methods of its presentation, which include free verse, dance, music, and modernist staging. Ostensibly, the play, unfolding at “Five-thirty, p.m., American village time” (131), dramatizes a domestic dispute over the cuisine on a young couple’s sparse table. The wife has purchased green beans from a street huckster and substitutes them for the husband’s beloved limas because “love needs a change every meal” (133). Shocked at the change in routine, the husband storms out. However, soon the vegetable seller reappears and the relieved wife purchases and prepares lima beans once again. Domestic harmony is restored when the husband returns delighted at the sight of the conventional meal, although he is now contrite and would have been willing to suffer the wife’s experiments. The plot is linear, but the elapsed time of a day or so is compressed, and plot elements are reduced to skeletal elements or presented symbolically, such as when the huckster simply tosses the bag of limas in at the window to represent the negotiation and purchase. Kreymborg employed a multitude of modernist strategies to present this simple story. In the following sections I will examine the specific techniques Kreymborg employs in his “fantastic treatment.”

Musical Schema

Kreymborg subtitled *Lima Beans* “a Conventional Scherzo,” and the work is part of a project he long toyed with—adapting musical structure to verse (*Troubadour* 118). In music, the scherzo is usually the second or third movement in a symphony. The Italian term means “joke,” and thus the scherzo is usually a light-hearted piece, originally derived from the minuet, and built on the alternation of a principal recurring theme with contrasting episodes, sometimes offering a kind of musical

comic relief to the more serious themes of the overall composition. The scherzo is also frequently written for trios. In *Lima Beans*, there are three characters and the pattern of episodes in the play is based on alternating contrasts with the refrain of the conflict over dinner. Kreymborg describes the scenes as the play unfolded opening night:

The play began. People started to giggle [. . .]. Then came Zorach's booming sing-song about the vegetables. Bill Williams entered, [. . .] and the colloquy with Mina followed rhythmically and naturally [. . .]. Then followed the row over the bowl of string beans [. . .]. the collapse of the wife, and then the *rondo*—Mina alone, and the *second duet*, with its forgiveness and reunion. (*Troubadour* 244; emphases added)

Thus, on the surface *Lima Beans* appears to be an abstraction of an ordinary domestic situation. Yet the strong musical schema provides a substitute for traditional methods of organizing a drama. Kreymborg's use of the musical schema here not only identifies the play as modern but suggests we should really recognize it as the first "High Modernist" American drama and treat it to a more detailed analysis.

Cultural critics have identified this combination of surface fragmentation in representation with a controlling aesthetic schema as one of the central tropes of the modernist text. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argue that in modernism "The world, reality is discontinuous [. . .] but within art all becomes vital, discontinuous, yes, but within an aesthetic system of positioning" (25). Borrowing terminology from narrative theory, we can employ Brian Richardson's definition of a

high modernist tradition in fiction in which “plot ceases to be dramatic, characters are no longer stable subjects [. . .] chronology is insistently non-linear, closure becomes problematic, poetic description and symbolic figures abound [. . .] aesthetics supersedes reference and the goal of creating an organic, artistic unity replaces that of depicting social relations” (294). Such artistic unity is often made dependent on a metaphor structure borrowed from another source. Joyce’s schema for *Ulysses* is perhaps the most famous instance of the technique. To the extent that I believe Kreymborg follows this pattern, it may appear that I am arguing Kreymborg would best be seen as a high modernist, striving to create an autonomous art work that despite experiment in form relies on an internal aesthetic unity—the symphonic “scherzo.” In fact, like other pieces done by the Provincetown, Kreymborg’s modernism is tempered by his contact with the European avant-garde, and I would suggest that the work be seen as a hybrid. One wonders if Kreymborg’s subtitle for *Lima Beans*, “a conventional scherzo,” relies less on the musical definition of “scherzo” than on the original meaning of the term “scherzo” as a “joke” and thus the play is intended as a joke on theatrical convention.⁶⁹ Kreymborg’s experiment seems not only novel but challenges some of his audience’s expectations about modernism.

Movement

Perhaps the most striking element in the stylized presentation of *Lima Beans* is the movement of the performers. Kreymborg directed his actors, and even at one point the curtain operator, to move in time to the verse dialogue, (although he emphasized “more the sense than the rhythm of the lines”) recounting how William Carlos Williams chided him for using a baton to tap out the rhythm at rehearsals

(*Troubadour* 243). Kreymborg also included elaborate stage directions with the published version of the play to suggest his overall conception of the movement:

Lima Beans might be defined as a pantomime dance of automatons to an accompaniment of rhythmic words, in place of music. [. . .]
Husband and wife might be Pierrot and Columbine, if that nomenclature suits you better, or preferably, two marionettes. [. . .]
Pantomime in the form of a semi-dance of gesture, in accordance with the sense more than the rhythm of the lines, is modestly indulged by husband and wife, suggesting an inoffensive parody, unless the author errs, of the contours of certain ancient Burmese dances. (131)

The source and significance of Kreymborg's characters and their "dance of automatons" has been variously traced. The use of Pierrot and Columbine-like characters is likely symptomatic of theatrical trends of the era, particularly a revival of *comedia del arte* in early modernist art theatres (Segel 134). It is possible that this influence came through the poet John Rodker's harlequinade *Dutch Dolls*, published in the October 1915 issue of *Others*, as Brenda Murphy has suggested (104). In any case, the adaptation of human actors to marionette-like movement poses interesting problems of interpretation and classification for Kreymborg's work.

Whereas the Zorachs' direction of *The Game* had justified its movement as a form of animated Egyptian relief, Kreymborg's conception of the automaton pantomime is arguably more fully modernist. In *Troubadour*, referring to *Lima Beans*, Kreymborg explains, "As he had written the present scherzo with puppets partly in mind—dancing in accordance with the rhythm of the dialogue—he could

have performed it with wooden beings” (242). *Lima Beans* seems to presage a number of future American modernist works, then, that depict mechanistic or machine-like characters or robots. Harold B. Segel, in tracing the history of puppets, automatons, and robots on the European stage describes the evolution of the work of the Czech writers Karel and Josef Capek, who produced the legendary robot play *R.U.R.* in 1922. Segel notes, “Long before Karel Capek wrote *R.U.R.*, both brothers gave ample evidence of a literary interest in puppets and the possible ramifications of the puppet figure” (299) in a number of their early short stories. Segel goes on to trace an evolution that leads directly from the literature of the automaton figure of nineteenth-century romanticism to the modern mechanized robots in *R.U.R.*, *Metropolis*, and other continental modernist works. It is likely, then, that Kreymborg’s play represents a similar evolution on the American stage, a transition between characters like the Tin Woodsman of *Oz* to the mechanized and masked automatons of 1920s Madison Avenue in O’Neill’s *Hairy Ape* and the numeralized workers in Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine*, to cite a few examples.⁷⁰

Kreymborg’s choice of marionette-like movement for his automatons is interesting because this was one major flash point between modern staging as represented by theatre practitioners and theorists such as Edward Gordon Craig and avant-garde performances mounted by groups such as the Italian Futurists. In the 1920s, Kreymborg would conduct a long correspondence with Craig, and it is likely that in his earlier verse plays he may have attempted to employ somewhat literally Craig’s theory of the *übermarionette*. Like several of the theatre visionaries at the turn of the last century, Craig was determined to take the theatre out of the hands of

commercial managers and matinee idols and put it in the control of an artist, which for Craig was the designer or director (Cheney 44). Craig stressed the individual freedom of this creator and believed that the actors, rather than driving the production with star power, should function as components of the artist's overall vision. "The actor speaks the lines provided—he has no right to use his own judgment, he is a marionette," Craig asserted (Cheney 44). Kreymborg apparently adapted the idea of the actors as marionettes but shifted the creative freedom from the designer to the playwright (although collaborating on the production design with the Zorachs).

While it is certain that he was very interested in Craig's *übermarionette*, Kreymborg was almost certainly aware of futurist experimentation as well. The Italian Futurists, deifying the machine, had begun to experiment with various versions of mechanizing the performer. Early productions included having human performers function and make the onomatopoeic sounds of machine parts. Similarly to Craig, Futurist director Enrico Prampolini called for the abolition of the performer in *Futurist Scenography* and *Futurist Scenic Atmosphere*, two manifestoes from 1915, and Futurists mounted a number of marionette productions. Kreymborg likely discussed futurist theatre with his leading lady, Mina Loy. Loy's involvement with futurism lasted only two years (1913-15), but as Julie Schmid has noted "these were undoubtedly the most prolific years of her artistic career" (1). Although Loy rejected futurism because of its misogyny and fascist leanings, she continued to experiment with a feminist-informed aesthetic that worked with many of the same materials (Schmid 1). Kreymborg was familiar with Loy's first published poetry in Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, published her controversial "Songs To Joannes" in *Others*, and would

undoubtedly have read Loy's two futurist *syntesi* (short "synthetic" plays) *Collision* and *Cittàbapini* published together as *Two Plays* in a 1915 issue of *The Rogue*, the New York journal backed by Walter Arensberg that preceded *Others*. How deep an interest Kreymborg had in the avant-garde is not known, but his allusion to automatons in his description of the mechanistic movement of the actors as marionettes seems futurist-leaning, and there are other futurist influences in the play as well—particularly the odd requirements for the curtain, which I will address in a separate section below. First, I wish to examine Kreymborg's stylized dialogue and verse text of *Lima Beans*.

Dialogue

If Kreymborg was influenced by futurism in the movement of his characters, he was, like Loy, probably in the process of only loosely adapting some of their techniques. His work has more in common with the expressionists. Marti Valgemaë in a *History of Expressionism in American Drama* has suggested that the disjointed phrasing in much of Kreymborg's dialogue is reminiscent of European expressionism, and Valgemaë notes that in *Lima Beans* there is "considerable pantomime, a strong ritualistic element pervades the work, and the dialogue is not only lyrical but greatly abbreviated and disconnected [. . .] here is an attempt, furthermore, at visual communication of verbal rhythm," (20) and as he continues, "touches of expressionistic distortion and objectification" (20). Valgemaë does not explore these points at length, but we can see from a few sample passages that Kreymborg's unusual dialogue varies substantially from scene to scene in the play. Some portions of the script feature melodic stanzas, with fairly regular, if

unconventional, metrics. Others are more traditional; Barbara Ozieblo has praised Kreymborg's effective use, of *stichomythia*—the ancient Greek technique of characters completing one another's speeches within the metric pattern (*Provincetown Players* 28). Still others Kreymborg himself calls "sing-song," such as the wife's setting of the table:

Put a knife here,
place a fork there—
marriage is greater than love.
Give him a large spoon,
give him a small—
you're sure of your man when you dine him. (132)

Yet other exchanges in the play are disjointed or employ repetition in ways alien to naturalistic dialogue. An example occurs when the wife tries to delay the husband into sitting down for dinner—afraid of his reaction when he will discover green beans on his plate:

HE (solemnly). And now!
SHE (nervously). And now?
HE. And now!
SHE. And now?
HE. And now I am hungry.
SHE. And now you're hungry?
HE. Of course I am hungry.
SHE. To be sure you're hungry, but

HE. But?

SHE. But!

HE. But! (135)

The absurdly heightened tension in the scene reads like a child's parody of the moment of secret revelation in melodrama rather than the realism championed by most artistic theatre practitioners, including the Provincetown Players. Also, Kreymborg's metric patterns are shifting throughout the play, in some places almost stanzaic, in others strings of monosyllables. There are also sudden outbursts in the play that seem out of character for its otherwise light-hearted theme, reminiscent of speeches in European expressionist pieces, such as the husband's rejection of the wife when the bowl of green beans are served: "Was there some witch at the altar / who linked your hand in mine in troth / only to have it broken in a bowl? (137), or his continued curse of the despised green beans, called his "maladiction" in Kreymborg's stage directions, as "Worms, / Snakes, / Reptiles, Caterpillars" (137). Walter H. Sokel notes that characteristic Expressionistic dialogue

suddenly changes from prose to hymnic poetry and rhapsodic monologue, completely interrupting the action. Lyrical passages alternate with obscenities and curses [. . .]. Language tends to be reduced, in some plays to two- or one-word sentences (the "telegraphic style"), to expletives, gestures, pantomime. (xiii)

Kreymborg's dialogue in *Lima Beans* exhibits many of the characteristics identified by Sokel. There are sudden shifts in the verse between lyrical passages and curses, a reduction of communication to one- or two- word sentences and, of course, an

emphasis on pantomime in the marionette-like movement of the main characters. One additional aspect of expressionist technique noted by both Valgemaë and Sokel is the religious, ritualistic, or hymnic quality. A religious element pervades *Lima Beans* and has been the major avenue of literary interpretation of the play.

Marriage Theme

Elizabeth Weist was the first critic to explore the play as a form of marriage song, which portrays various everyday domestic aspects of marriage as a form of ritual. Weist claims, "Kreymborg presents his little domestic tragedy, which is really a comedy, in the form of a religious ritual. The housewife is handmaiden to a god [. . .] whom she serves with the ancient mysteries of favor-gaining foods" (168). Kreymborg's stage directions, Weist points out, often use the term "rite" or "ritual" to describe the wife's actions—the setting of the table, the preparation of food—all of which are represented as serving the god Hymen in connection with the functioning of the marriage. Brenda Murphy, working along similar lines as Weist, classifies the play as a form of epithalamium, a pastoral derived from classical bridal songs to Hymen. Kreymborg's ostensible theme, in fact, is an exploration of the mysteries of love. It is after these two opening scenes—the wife's adventure with the huckster and the husband and wife revealing their blind and puppet-like acceptance of the dictates of society's roles—that the two exchange a whimsical dialogue about the nature of their love. "Why is a kiss?" the husband asks, to which the wife can only answer "love." And "Why is love?" he asks. "I don't know" she replies. This exchange appeared verbatim earlier as a stand-alone poem called "Scherzetto" in the

1915 edition of *Mushrooms*. Scherzetto is presumably the diminutive of “Scherzo,” the subtitle of *Lima Beans*.

Brenda Murphy argues that true to the epithalamium, the play’s subtext reflects Kreymborg’s concern with the sexual nature of marriage. Murphy states, “At the literal level, the play is a little parable about marital forbearance” (110). However, she adds, “Kreymborg’s text also figures more mischievously at the metaphoric level. The vegetative profusion obviously suggests the procreative character of the marriage, and Kreymborg uses the lima bean and the string bean as metaphors for female and male sexuality” (110). Murphy concludes that “in offering the string beans in place of his beloved limas, the suggestion is that the Wife is offering him some variety in their love-making that does not include intercourse” (110).

More evidence can be mustered to support the idea that Kreymborg’s sometimes childlike verses do make oblique references to sexuality. This submerged sexuality is evident in poems of his *Mushrooms* cycle, published a few months before *Lima Beans* was staged, such as “Mood,” in which the speaker racializes the “free-spirited night,” who beckons him to leave the bourgeois safety of his room with the “stealthy [. . .] dangerous undulation” of her “smooth black limbs” (46). This aspect of Kreymborg’s poetry may also be emblemized by the cover illustration to *Mushrooms* created by William Zorach. Zorach’s linoleum cut, which Kreymborg describes as an “appropriate cover design” (*Troubadour* 209), presents a male and a female figure surrounded in a mushroom patch. The undersides of the larger mushrooms resemble giant sprocket wheels—suggesting the hybrid mixture of nature

futurist images that were part of Kreymborg's aesthetic. While the traditional phallic association with the mushroom is not emphasized, surprisingly the heads of the abstracted figures, depicted leaning against one another, appear to be suggestive of genitalia. The head of the female figure is elongated resembling a phallus, and the dark face of the male figure appears beside it as an open oval, a "yonic" image. This transgendered image may seem at first alien to the rather old-fashioned sentimentality of some of Kreymborg's poems, yet there is an echo of this sexuality in *Lima Beans* as well. Brenda Murphy postulates reasonably that the green bean, associated with snakes, is a phallic symbol, and the husband's praise of the lima as "soft, soothing, succulent" (136) is evidence of the lima as a female sexual symbol. However, Murphy omits the opening lines of the stanza about the lima, in which the husband asserts that the lima is a "kingly bean" and the "godliest of vegetables" (136). Thus Kreymborg's text, although clearly alluding to an undercurrent of sexuality, cannot be easily resolved along lines of sexual symbolism.

There are other gender reversals in the play as well, which problematize straightforward interpretations. Although, Hymen is cited as the god that presides over the marriage, during what Kreymborg refers to in his stage directions as the husband's "maladiction" (136), the curse delivered to rid the house of the "accursed legume" (137) of the string bean, the husband makes the oblique reference to a "witch" performing their marriage (137). The husband then condemns the wife nastily for straying from his domestic expectations: "You have listened to a temptress—" (137). Yet we know that the wife has not acquired the offensive string beans from a female "temptress" but rather from the male vegetable huckster,

originally played by the big-bodied William Zorach, outside the window of the couple's one-room apartment. It is unclear whether the terms "witch" and "temptress" of the maladiction are intended as insults directed at the wife, in which case the husband is suggesting that the wife has acted as if she has been in some sense possessed, allowing the witch in her to direct her hand in marriage, and the temptress in her to procure the green beans. The husband may be suggesting instead that just as the previous rituals in the play were "consecrated" in the name of Hymen, the wife's decision to stray from the limas has invoked another god, a mysterious female temptress. Kreymborg gives us few further clues as to the identify of the witch. As the husband continues his maladiction, he damns the "elongated, cadaverous, throat-scratching, greenish caterpillar" (137) "in the name of Hymen," the string bean and the witch are now associated with serpents and things of the earth:

Worms
Snakes, reptiles, caterpillars,
I do not know from whence ye came,
But I know wither ye shall go.
My love,
My troth,
My faith,
Shall deal with ye.
Avaunt,
Vanish,
Begone
From this domicile,
Dedicated,
Consecrated,

Immortalized

In the name of Hymen!

Begone! (137-38)

The invasion of the domestic sphere by the green bean is now apparently associated with a chthonic goddess who usurps the male Hymen, a gender symbolism which appears both to reverse the obvious phallic and yonic symbols of the beans themselves and also to reveal a misogynist strain on the part of the husband in his fear of procreative power. This turn in the gender symbolism also seems to undermine another possible interpretation of the husband's wrath—that the switch to green beans is an allegory for the Fall. The chthonic and serpent-like nature of the string bean fits the biblical analogue, but not the female gender of the “witch.” Kreymborg, however, clearly wishes to maintain the tone of religious ritual in the maladiction with the allusion to John 8.14,6, Christ speaking to the Pharisees “whence he came, and whither he shall go” in the husband's casting out of the green bean. Ultimately, the witch may be Kreymborg's analysis of the psychology of the husband—who assumes the origin of the unrest is feminine whenever his masculine privilege is challenged. However, a final allegorical interpretation of the characters in the play and the purpose of the rituals surrounding marriage may not be clearly determined.

Kreymborg gives us no further clues.

Politics and the commonplace

Kreymborg is fairly consistent in satirizing the gender politics between Mr. and Mrs. Lima, especially the husband's overblown need to assert his authority. During the initial argument over the limas, the husband is angered by his wife acting

independently and diverging from the marital norm because it constitutes a challenge to him as *pater familias*, an assault on his metaphoric castle:

You would dethrone it?
You would play renegade?
You'd raise an usurper
in the person of this
elongated, cadaverous,
throat-scratching, greenish
caterpillar—? (137)

He calls her "Traitress," as he storms out. However, the husband's need to assert authority in the domestic sphere is directly contrasted with his role in the industrial world outside the home. When the husband attempts to justify his role as breadwinner, he describes his life as slavery to capitalism:

I perspire tears and blood drops
in a town or in a field
on the sea or in a balloon
with my pick axe or fiddle,
just to come home
footsore, starving, doubled with appetite
to a meal of—string beans? (135-36)

The verse here is Whitmanesque, particularly in the reference to "blood drops" and the connection to labor. In "Calamus," Book VI, "Salut Au Monde," Whitman calls to the colonized peoples of the world and specifically to enslaved Africans in similar language: "You own'd persons dropping sweat-drops or blood drops" (147). The husband's allusion is, then, to male privilege but reveals he is also a wage slave.

Indeed, the small one room apartment, the meager supplies, all suggest the young couple is poor.

Kreymborg was not a card-carrying member of any political party or movement. However, his sympathies with the plight and life of the average worker surface here in *Lima Beans*, despite his stated intention to write a play on a “love theme” (*Troubadour* 218). His sympathies with the common folk are not only derived from Whitman, but are also a result of his understanding of Whitman’s most famous apostle, Horace Traubel. Kreymborg interviewed Traubel for a May 1914 article in the *New York Morning Telegraph*. Kreymborg admired in Traubel his approach to the common people and lamented that Traubel was popular with only a few intellectuals. This passage from the article is telling for what it says about Kreymborg’s own sympathies:

And still, he [Traubel] who is a man of the streets more than any man of the streets, who writes exclusively about the man of the streets to the man of the streets, is read only by a few high-brows. Can you account for it? All this fierce, passionate love for his brother man, all this vigorous battle of humanity for humanity, all this simplicity, bigness and littleness and highest of all this devotion to liberty communism and optimism—the three-handed god the mob continues to yell for so theatrically—and the mob does not read him. No one anywhere has so much contempt for the great man who shuns the crowd. Nietzsche sings the aristocrat, the individual; Traubel sings the crowd, the crowd as a unit, democracy, the crowd as individuals,

liberty. Nietzsche sings in aristocratic metre; Traubel in the metre of the streets. (7)

The characters in Kreymborg's play—despite the unusual presentation—are intended to be ordinary folk. A reference Kreymborg makes in *Troubadour* suggests something of his conception of “Mrs. Lima.” (243) He remarks that the “super-sophisticated” Mina Loy was “sniffing at the commonplaceness of the marriage theme,” and although the part of the wife was “much too light for Mina’s worldly experience” it “nevertheless appealed to her sense of comedy” (243). Perhaps Loy was really objecting to the fact that the wife is so complacent with her husband. Williams and Loy also supplied their own costumes. Kreymborg remarks Loy made her own décolleté creation in green which was beautiful but “not in keeping with Mrs. Lima” (243). The beautiful Loy was renowned for her bohemian fashions and was the toast of New York at the time. Kreymborg does not say why Loy’s costume was not in keeping with the character, but I interrupt his comment to indicate Mrs. Lima is intended to be and dress as a working-class housewife.

The burly vegetable Huckster is another character of the street absorbed into Kreymborg’s mythology; the Huckster is a trickster figure in the play, creating dissension in the marriage through his seduction of the wife into purchasing the green beans, but his origin is apparently in the poet’s observation of an ordinary worker. One of Kreymborg’s Whitmanesque portraits of the common folk in the street in *Mushrooms* is entitled “Sunday”:

There came along
Down the lane
Waddling genially,

Nodding amiably,
Like a girl
On her way to Sunday school
With her prayer book,
(save
that he led a small cart
quite as inoffensive as himself
laden with corn and potatoes and cauliflower
and cheerful beets)
his rhomboid head
mounted by a pyramidal straw hat—
there came
an old thin horse, alone
and so absent-minded,
he did not return my bow,
but waddled on,
veered off into another lane
and disappeared. (85)

A reader familiar with the Provincetown Players and interested in Kreymborg's dramaturgy will undoubtedly recognize the importance of two passages in the poem. The first is that the offering of vegetables on the cart matches fairly closely the Huckster's call in *Lima Beans*:

I got tomatoes
I got potatoes
New cabbages,
Cauliflower
Red beets,
I got string beans [. . .] . (138)

Second, Kreymborg's attempt to insert geometrical shapes into the description of the vegetable seller sounds very much like several lines from a play he later produced in association with the Provincetown Players, *Jack's House*. Subtitled a "Cubist play," *Jack's House* opens with dialogue about geometric shapes: "triangles, rhomboids, etc." (65). Such lines undoubtedly emerge from Kreymborg's discovery of modern art in Stieglitz's 291 circle (a poem in *Mushrooms* is dedicated to Cézanne) and are evidence that he is experimenting with bringing cubism into his poetry. It is also interesting to note that Kreymborg's simile about the "inoffensive" street vendor once again crosses genders; he is "Like a girl / On her way to Sunday school / With her prayer book" (85). The nature of the Huckster has changed from the genial neighbor of the poem to the more mischievous trickster, and the crossing of genders suggests he is perhaps also a Tiresias figure.

Parody and Metadrama

Kreymborg's juxtaposition of ordinary workers and experimental modernism in *Lima Beans* appears to be the fruit of ideas he had been working out for sometime. In his March 1915 column in the *New York Morning Telegraph*, Kreymborg reviewed Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. He began by spoofing Stein's language and imagery but concluded with praise for her choosing her "words for their inherent quality rather than for their accepted meaning" (6). The sentiment feels familiar for a reader who knows *Lima Beans*: Kreymborg begins with a common domestic struggle—a husband welcomes his wife home from a downtown shopping trip, speaking in ordinary everyday phrases. At the sight of the wife's new hat, the husband barks "Where did you get that thing?"(6) The wife answers in Steinean language:

Colored hats are necessary to show that curls are worn by an addition
of blank space, this makes the difference between single lines and
broad stomachs, the least thing is lightening, the last thing means a

single flower and a big delay a big delay, that makes more nurses than
little women little women. (6)

The Steinian exchange is repeated for various items in the department store, all quotations from the prose poems of *Tender Buttons* with the bourgeois husband becoming more and more exasperated by his wife's replies.

What the example of the Stein piece points to is how, despite a certain sentimental naiveté at times, Kreymborg is himself a trickster, and part of the charm of *Lima Beans* lies in its parody of theatre. After its short but noteworthy run with the Provincetown Players, *Lima Beans* subsequently had performances in St. Louis and Chicago in 1918 where it was generally well-received by the literati. A reviewer for *Reedy's Mirror* called it an example of a "new dramatic form" (qtd. in "Toy Tragedies" 105). In the monthly *Current Opinion*, a reviewer seemed to have his tongue planted firmly in his cheek when he reported of *Lima Beans*, "One is torn and lacerated over the feelings of the husband who comes home and finds string beans instead of lima beans. His eulogy of lima beans and his contempt of string beans is one of the most pretentious things in modern literature. It ranks with the well-known soliloquy of Hamlet. It reveals depth and power, but the tortured soul of the wife is no trivial thing either." Although the reviewer continues by criticizing Kreymborg for the happy ending, he/she notes that the play "is a more or less satiric farce conceived in the gayest possible whimsical spirit; and it was set and acted in the same mood" ("Toy Tragedies" 105). *Lima Beans* struck the reviewer, then, as a parody of marital relations Punch and Judy style. The reviewer's decision to have fun with serious theatrical conventions, comparing Mr. Lima's speech to Hamlet's soliloquy, is also

germane, it seems to me, to the kind of playfulness with convention Kreymborg succeeded with in *Lima Beans*.

In *Troubadour*, Kreymborg mentions that of the naturalistic plays done by the Provincetown Players, his favorite was *Cocaine* by Pendleton King (246). King was a talented writer whose death shortly after the war was mourned by his friends in Greenwich Village. In *Cocaine*, a down and out boxer and his live-in girlfriend confront destitution. The play evolves in grim deterministic terms until the two resolve to kill themselves by turning on the gas in their squalid flat. However, at the end of the play they realize they haven't paid the gas bill. One can see how Kreymborg was attracted to the humor of the play's O. Henry twist, but he may have also been interested in the play because it depicts the struggles of a poverty stricken couple, a subject Kreymborg stages in several of his verse plays. In fact, *Lima Beans* reads like a minimalist version of a naturalistic play with its domestic setting, impoverished characters, and the way in which the characters, perhaps because of their automaton-like movements, appear to be acting out a deterministic fate. Moreover, throughout the play there are many instances that deliberately mock the conventions of naturalistic and even classic theatre—the compressed timeline mocks the Aristotelian unities, the exaggerated speeches that appear to reference a classical mythology but which lead ultimately in no particular direction, the deliberate reductionism of the plot and set contrast with the well-made play and the drawing room play, and the verse parodies of “slice-of-life” dialogue. Many of these features were, of course, staples of the kind of naturalistic plays the Provincetown was producing at the time.

There are also deliberate references to melodrama in the piece, such as when the husband tosses the bowl of string beans out the window and the stage directions tell us "The customary crash of broken glass, offstage, is heard" (138), a reference to stage convention not realism. For young Kreymborg "vaudeville had become his favorite form of entertainment" (140). Here at the center of Cook's temple to Dionysus and to drama of literary high seriousness, Kreymborg inserts the Variety Theatre, only with a wink, rather than with a boot as the Futurists, writing Manifestoes on the Variety theatre, had done. Kreymborg's use of melodrama here is an example of what Richard Murphy, a scholar of European expressionism, calls a counter-discourse (99) or counter-text (136) to realism, a technique used in much European avant-garde performance in the first two decades of the century. Thus, while never reflecting the destructive nihilist energies of European avant-garde movements, Kreymborg seems to be after a kind of light deconstruction of theatre, one of the "institutions of art," to use Peter Bürger's terminology. It is an "inoffensive parody" as he states, but is still a parody, a version of what Alfred Jarry had done in *Ubu Roi*—negating ideas of honor and idealism through a schoolboy lampoon of *Macbeth*.

Lima Beans ends with two metadramatic moments that comment on the nature of theatre and problematize what is otherwise a straightforward happy ending for the couple. First, a moment occurs when the actors playing HE and SHE break the fourth wall and turn to the audience: HE points at the audience "with warning." She nods quickly and the two put their heads together staring "wide-eyed" at the house. He whispers something in her ear, and she nods with secret "uproarious delight"(143).

Perhaps the lovers are giggling about the audience's own domestic foibles, but no explanation or further dialogue is provided. This brief gesture to break down the barrier between performer and audience is reflective of Kreymborg's desire to breakdown the barriers between elite modernist experiment and ordinary Americans. At least one person chose to participate. When Williams offered Loy a dainty "china-doll kiss," someone in the audience yelled "For God's sake, kiss her!" (*Autobiography* 139). This moment of deliberately foregrounding the theatrical device calls attention to the work as scherzo, as a joke about conventional plays.

Next, the curtain, which Kreymborg lists as a character in the *dramatis personae*, descends halfway and, apparently spying the lovers, "quivers" over them as they kiss. Kreymborg's personification of the curtain here is a futurist touch—reminiscent of some of the futurist synthetic pieces, such as Marinetti's "They're Coming" where the props are the main characters (Goldberg 26). The couple signal frantically for the curtain to stop, but Kreymborg's stage directions explain "curtains cannot see—or understand?" (143). Kreymborg is not simply being willfully obscure, but informing the audience that he is being so, that the play will not satisfy the audience with an ending. Not only does Kreymborg refuse to reveal the key to *Lima Beans* at this moment, but more importantly he makes it clear that that is how the piece should be presented to the audience—that the ending should be a *self-conscious* moment of theatre experimentation for both audience and performers.

Richard Murphy, in *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, seeks to readdress a blind spot in Bürger's theory to include expressionism as a type of avant-garde, which fulfills Bürger's main criteria—a self-critical refutation of the social

inconsequentiality of aestheticism, a rejection of the autonomous art work in favor of art somehow merged into everyday life, and an ideological critique of the social institutions of art. A similar sentiment is expressed by the theatre scholar David Graver, although alternate views, such as that espoused by Brian Richardson that expressionism should be recognized as a category separate from both the avant-garde and high modernism, offer another approach to the narrowness of Bürger's theory. Murphy, arguing for the inclusion of expressionism in the avant-garde states,

It is precisely in this sense that the expressionist text must be considered as avant-garde: not only does it cast off the conventions of organic form, as Bürger maintains, but it also consistently refutes and subverts the imposition upon it of any reading which would transform it into the equivalent of an "organic" work providing a sense of order, harmony and totality. The "meaningless" artifact of the historical avant-garde (such as Duchamp's "found-object") prods the audience into supplying what is missing, confronts it primarily with its own automatized expectations (by frustrating them), and thereby provokes the audience's realization that its own horizon of expectations has been thoroughly conditioned by the "institution of art." (94)

This theoretical language is, of course, inordinately sophisticated for a discussion of the ending of *Lima Beans*. Nonetheless, I think there is an important point to be made here. It is not simply enough for a work to avoid closure or have ambiguity in its resolution to be expressionist. For Murphy what is required is that the audience recognize consciously that "its own horizon of expectation has been thoroughly

conditioned by the institution of art.” Kreymborg asks us as audience to participate in an aesthetic and ideological critique of “modern” theatre in this first instance of American avant-garde theatrical experiment.

Jack's House (1918)

Kreymborg and the Zorachs hoped that, after the success of *Lima Beans*, the Provincetown Players would be more open to producing experimental and verse dramas, and the group did accept two more poetic plays suggested by Kreymborg in the spring of 1917. The first was a collaboration by *Others* poets Maxwell Bodenheim and William Saphier called *The Gentle Furniture-Shop* and the second was Bodenheim's *Knotholes*. However, Kreymborg's next play, *Mannikin and Minikin*, was passed on by the play-selection committee (and would eventually premiere as a curtain raiser for *Lima Beans* in the Midwest). Unable to make headway with the Players' "absorption in naturalism" (*Troubadour* 242), Kreymborg and the Zorachs decided to form their own company and lease the playhouse for their productions. Under the banner of the Other Players, Kreymborg, the Zorachs, Kathleen Cannell (a dancer and wife of poet Skipwith Cannell), the young composer Julian Freedman,⁷¹ and Edna St. Vincent Millay joined forces to create an evening of alternative entertainment. At this time, Kreymborg also either lost or rejected the first verse play by Williams Carlos Williams, *The Old Apple Tree*,⁷² which caused a split in their friendship:

Kreymborg lost the manuscript. I was sick over it. He just didn't know what had happened to it. Then I had another small play and he and I

were to present a bill at the Bramhall Theatre. A wonderful chance.

But nothing happened. I was busy with my work and thought there'd been a delay of one sort or another. (*Autobiography* 140)

Instead, Kreymborg had apparently met Millay and because of her popularity, both as the author of the well-known poem *Renascence*, and now as a beauty and actress in Greenwich Village, accepted her Vassar morality play *Two Slatterns and a King*. (Williams misremembered the play as *Aria da Capo*, which was a later production.) According to Williams, Kreymborg's motives were pecuniary: "he was embarrassed and said he was broke, and a man had to try to make a dollar here and there" (140).

The Other Players bill opened on March 18, 1918, and included Kreymborg's *Manikin and Minikin*; *Static Dances*, a performance by Rihani (Kathleen Cannell); Millay's *Two Slatterns and a King*; and Kreymborg's *Jack's House* with music by Freedman and Cubist décor by the Zorachs. The evening, Kreymborg wrote "was an intoxicating success. So were the other evenings. So was the Saturday matinee. Crowds came to each performance" (250-51). Kreymborg's friends from the Arensberg circle, the New York Dadaists Albert Gleizes, Juliet Roches, Marcel Duchamp, and Francis Picabia, all came and enjoyed the performance with Gleizes "mincing and miming down the aisle to the accompaniment of Jack's jaunty ditty which he sang like a Boulevardier" (251). The evening's success put some cash in the Other Players' treasury, and the group decided to move the show to an uptown theatre on East Twenty-eighth street. Here the bill failed within days, and the company lost not only their profits from the MacDougal Street run, but also their original principal, ending the organization. The work of the Other Players has been recently analyzed in

detail by Brenda Murphy, so it is not my intention to be comprehensive here. My interest is to show specifically that despite Kreymborg's taste for amusement and child-like simplicity, his political awareness was growing during the first phase of his experimental dramas, and to assert that such experiments were challenging enough to the institutions of art to constitute an emerging avant-garde in the American theatre. I will briefly review *Jack's House*, then I will discuss Kreymborg's last play produced by the Provincetown Players, *Vote the New Moon* (1920).

Kreymborg subtitled *Jack's House* "A Cubic-Play" and his aim was a further synthesis of the arts begun with *Lima Beans*, providing the Zorachs with an opportunity for a Cubist-based stage design and geometrical movement for the actors who became like a living Cubist painting. William Zorach remembered:

One of the most interesting things Marguerite and I did was Alfred Kreymborg's *Jack's House*—I think it was the first Cubist play ever produced in New York. We designed and painted the scenery, made the costumes, and produced the play. I doubt if anyone remembers it now, but it was a major accomplishment. The critics were excited over *Jack's House*. There was much publicity and the scenes and sets were reproduced in color in the Sunday supplements.⁷³ (46)

Both the text and the performance of *Jack's House* were a continuation of Kreymborg's attempt in several poems in his *Mushrooms* collection to incorporate Cubist geometric shapes into his verse. Before a curtain of "a fantastic cartoon in design of squares, triangles, rhomboids" (65), Jack is found singing about his love while reading from a large book marked HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS. His wife does

not speak throughout the play, but merely pantomimes her reactions. The couple lives in a one-room house and the play is not unlike *Lima Beans* in its portrayal of the difficulties of young newlyweds. The “jaunty” lyrics that caught Gleizes emphasize the couple’s poverty:

We have no dishes
To eat our meals from.
We have no dishes to eat our meals from.
Because we have no dishes
To eat our meals from. (68)

While lyrics set to music often require repetition that would not be used in ordinary speech, the repetition here seems to be a continuation or advancement of the techniques of *Lima Beans*. The simple images of dishes/meals, derived from the commonplace and everyday, are repeated to construct a more elaborate linguistic structure. This is reminiscent of Stein’s technique of the “continuous present” and suggests Kreymborg may have continued to follow Stein after his 1915 review of *Tender Buttons*. Stein would repay the compliment, writing a positive review of Kreymborg’s *Troubadour* in 1925.

The action of the play is primarily pantomime as Jack attempts to convince his young wife to perform household chores such as cooking, washing up, and sweeping. He indicates that she should resume making some unfinished cushions on the couch, but the wife wanders to the window and traces shapes “Idly, like a child” (70). After struggling with her to get her work basket to continue the sewing, the husband looks for more chores and his wife beckons him to wash the windows. He stops, though, in

a sentimental Kreymborg moment because the window has shapes drawn on it in the fog from his wife's breath from the previous vignette:

Our window is stained
With the figures she has blown on it
With her breath (74)

Jack is finally able to win his wife over to making a home through a dance and love song. She picks up the sewing for the couch pillows and curtains for the windows. Jack continues to perform chores, however, and it appears that in terms of marital politics the work will be shared—a small concession to feminist ideals. It is clear the couple will now be happy in their nest. The songs that accompany these activities emphasize color and texture and are reminiscent of some of Stevens poetry from the era:

She has two green pillows
On our black couch.
They should be cerulean bolsters
On a lemon silk divan
And you would not
Challenge me that
She has two green pillows
On our black couch, (72)

Brenda Murphy has described the couple as bohemian artists (120). Although there are no specific references to creating art objects as such in the play, Jack seems to be boasting of the bohemian lifestyle that requires only pillows on a black couch instead

of the “lemon silk divan” of the bourgeoisie parlor. This interpretation also explains why Jack holds the cushions “tenderly,” declaring

We have many, many children

I would sing you of,

But would not call

Them any, any children. (73)

Kreymborg purposefully did not have children with either his first or second wife in order to focus on his writing, so it is likely that here he presents the notion that artworks are the “children” of artists. This traditional procreative metaphor for artistic production was one that Susan Glaspell also wrote about, although from a very different perspective, and which I will discuss in Chapter IV.

In choosing Julian Freedman as the composer for *Jack's House*, Kreymborg remarked that the young composer had “an unusual talent for comedy with an undercurrent of tragedy” (246). Kreymborg called *Jack's House* a “tragi-comedy in the language of a primer” (246). It may be hard for one to understand the reference to tragedy in the whimsical piece, but in the concluding lines, in another metaphor of childhood, there is a sense that the moment of young love, the early days in marriage, are ephemeral:

This room

Is our cradle.

It will rock

In our memory

No matter what we grow to. (75)

Brenda Murphy concludes the following about Jack's House:

Kreymborg's conception of the "one-room home" is more than a hymn to love and home. It is a statement of bohemian values in opposition to those of the middle class, and an assertion that bohemia's lifestyle can produce just as much of a home as the conventional middle-class domesticity that most of the residents of Greenwich Village had fled in choosing to live as free-spirited artists. (121)

Murphy believes the play is "mildly subversive" in asserting the benefits of the bohemian life over those of the bourgeoisie. I agree; however, this assumption makes the theme of the play less challenging in some ways because it does not critique the bohemian values as the earlier Village plays discussed in Chapter One of this study do. Nonetheless, we can see that Kreymborg has extended the conversation about the Village artist in remarkable ways in *Jack's House*.

Murphy assumes Kreymborg was targeting a middle class audience. However, the play failed with this audience on Twenty-Eighth street. As Zorach remembered, "the public was indifferent. They found it confusing and it meant nothing to them. It certainly was not a success as far as he public went, and the theater has to have a public" (46). In fact it was within the context of the Village that the play was successful, and Kreymborg calculated who might come to see it:

[. . .] the bill was too "high-brow" to appeal to the average units of the huge theatre-going public of the day. One was conscious that members of the foreign population, and particularly artists who followed modern trends, would try to enlist their immediate circles.

Through one source and another, this or that member of the group had engaged the active sympathy of men like Albert Gleizes and Marcel Duchamp, the French painters, Carlos Salzedo, the Italian harpist, Nicolai Sokoloff, the Russian conductor, Adolf Bolm, the Russian dancer, Alfred Stieglitz and 291. And there were, among readers of *Others*, a number of people who would not be intimidated [. . .] . Besides these, adherents of other experimental groups might be expected to appear at the box-office—*The Seven Arts Crowd. The New Republic, The Nation, The Masses.*” (249-50)

It is within this context that *Jack's House* takes on some of the concerns of avant-garde performance—with the archetypical avant-garde figure Duchamp in support of the effort. In the presence of all experimental New York modernists, the performance of the modern work with its structural unities also serves a contextual conversation. By virtue of their understanding of the experiment, the audience participated in the production in this way. Perhaps this is the reason that Kreymborg had Jack deliver all of his monologue directly to the audience. As in *Lima Beans* where Kreymborg was combining high modernist, expressionist and futurist techniques, *Jack's House* is yet another example of self-conscious expressionist experiment that forces the audience to reconsider that “its own horizon of expectation has been thoroughly conditioned by the institution of art” (Richard Murphy 94).

Further, Kreymborg certainly challenges the individual institutions of the different mediums that he uses for the production. In his remarkable drive towards complete intertextuality and synthesis, he was able to create a new type of

experimental theatre. This spirit was surely contagious and likely influenced other theatre practitioners in New York even if the public remained “indifferent.”

Kreymborg’s minimalist ambition in *Jack’s House* is to continue the ideal of using ordinary subject matter— young marrieds, household chores— and provide them with the most unusual treatment. This is a reversal of the work of classical tragedy that employs conventional methods to explore the fate of larger-than-life characters.

Kreymborg perhaps anticipates Arthur Miller and his use of the common man as a fit subject for tragedy here. Although *Jack’s House* expresses unity as a work, the collaborative nature of the production bringing together the Zorachs, Freedman, the text and actors is unreproducible—because those specific artists and the specific radical contexts for of the art is no longer available. Experimental theatre practitioners may create autonomous works of art, yet each artist’s contribution is unique, so much so that it would be difficult to mount the production today.

Vote the New Moon (1920)

Kreymborg’s last play for the Provincetown Players, *Vote the New Moon*, is the first of his verse plays to deal explicitly with politics. Kreymborg dedicated the work to John Reed and Louise Bryant; the inscription reads, “for a mere Russian picture postcard” (6). Perhaps this was also a nod in the direction of the man who had defended his *Lima Beans* four years earlier, but one wonders about Kreymborg’s thinking in dedicating to the most radical of his friends a political satire that was a burlesque of the American electoral process. *Vote the New Moon* is subtitled “A Toy Play” and takes place amid giant toy building blocks with characters dressed like rag

dolls that act like Jack-in-the-Boxes and lacerate each other with a brutal rhythmic speech and occasionally with hammers on their heads. The play is another example of Kreymborg's reduction of traditional dramatic elements to simplistic and deliberately infantile components, but it is much darker than his previous dramatic experiments. It may be a child's dream but it is a nightmare. Here the childishness of the characters, the dialogue, and the *mise en scene* all parody American party politics.

The play opens with the Town Crier standing before the gates of a dark town explaining that "a burg is blind sans burgomaster" (8). An election must occur so that the new moon will rise. As in his other plays, Kreymborg employs a metatheatrical device to remind the audience they are participating in an experiment. The Crier explains to the audience "You wouldn't be there, and I wouldn't be here— / if this were not a play, and it did not have a plot [. . .]" (8). The Crier next explains each house: the one painted blue belongs to the Burgher, the one painted blue to the Burgess, and then in two more houses reside the candidates—one in a house of blue, one in a house of red. Down the lane runs a grotesque purple line of blood, to the river, "the mystic little stream where we throw them when they're through— / ex-burgomasters and defeated candidates!" (9). Here the bodies of the rejects are gobbled up by a bizarre monster catfish "half of Him fur, half of Him scales" (9). The Burgher and Burgess pop out of their houses and the Crier engages them in a rhythmic dialogue in which they answer sometimes individually, but more often as a Duo, emphasizing the lock-step nature of their thinking, patriotic talk learned by rote. In this instance, Kreymborg's odd rhythms are particularly effective because they help to emphasize the automaton-like nature of the Burger and Burgess as they are

directed through a series of predictable questions and responses by the Town Crier.

The Crier is making sure they “are ready” for the election:

Are you ready for the vote?—pinch yourselves!

We— are—

Scratch your heads—kick yourselves!

We— are—

Then where are your party flags?—flown? / —eh? (11)

Two pennants “wriggle” up the Citizens’ flag-poles. The Crier asks if they will vote “as always” (12). The Burgher, “always for the Blue,” declares for the Blue candidate; the Burgess, “always for the Red,” declares for the Red candidate. The opposing parties begin to rap each other on the head with their “party hammers” as the Crier demands they “lilt” for their candidates because “old as you are—age as sleepy and stupid as yours—habit, itself, forgets itself” (12). The Crier turns to the audience during the voting and explains “we’ve had up to the present era of our realm, seventy-two blue moons and seventy-two red!” (13). It is clear by now there is no real difference between the candidates, and the vote is a sham. The Crier reveals Kreymborg’s own suspicions about the election process:

Insofar it will determine definitely and irrevocably—

not alone who shall be our new burgomaster—

but which shall be our seventy-third!

which definite and irrevocable decision is elicited,

you see—by the simplest, the most naïve

process in history—

of—one for the blue—one for the red—
of citizen smiting citizen on the head—
until one or the other falls insensible—(13)

By the time the Crier finishes his speech, something incredible has happened. Simply from exhaustion, the Citizens have somehow reversed their votes. “Bones of dead moonbeams— / what treachery is this? [. . .] Blood of the sacred stream— / what regicide is this?”, the Crier exclaims. They reply “We’re tired [. . .] Of old moons— / We want— [. . .] A new moon!” (14). The citizens recognize that blue or red their votes have little real effect. They demand “change” and the Crier threatens them with being marched “into the river—into the Fish!” (15). However, the Burgher and Burgess encourage each other in solidarity. Ignoring them, the Crier raps on the doors of the huts of the candidates, who emerge “thin and sleepy” and enquiring with mild interest as to which of them had won the election. They learn the election has been interrupted, but the Crier puts them through the ordinary paces of candidacy. They obey in rhythmic movement the Crier’s description of a “dignified” candidate—clearly a satire on the marketing of American party nominees:

Make of your lips
a hard straight line;
parallel with them your eyes;
make of your cheeks and chin
two straight right angles,
and of your ears and nose
two more;

have the part in your hair
diameter your head,
forehead, nose, lips and chin;
stick your arms
to your thorax and thighs. (17)

The candidates are nonplussed that their rhetoric refuses to budge the citizens in the normal way: “My eloquence—“ “My slivery phraseology—“ “My golden rhodomontade—“, “Non-sufficient?” ask the Red and Blue candidates (21). Finally, with the Crier and the Candidates unable to convince the citizens to vote, “*from the river . . . there comes an ominous crescendo*

[. . .] *Darkness shrouds the scene. . . a weird violet light creeps from the river. . .*”

(25-26). The spirits of the dead possess the Burger and Burgess and now instead of resisting, they cry “One for the purple” and kill the candidates. The image of “*a complete purple resemblance. . .with appendages of whiskers, fins and tail. . .*” (27) appears. The Crier begs to be spared from “My Master—King—“ (27), and the Catfish enters the town hall as the new burgomaster. The Crier announces him:

The new M-moon!
Purple!
Color of kingship!
Woe!! (28)

The Crier climbs to the bell tower of the town hall and rings tower but the stage directions read the bell tolls “more like a dirge, than a paean [. . .]” (28).

Vote the New Moon was a success and this was captured in a brief review in the Greenwich Village periodical *The Quill* by its editor Arthur H. Moss. The review also demonstrates the dubious reputation Kreymborg sometimes enjoyed: "'Vote the New Moon,' by Alfred Kreymborg, a satire; almost clever enough to excuse Alfred's multitude of literary atrocities; acted with spirit; took us back to the early days of the Washington Square Players" (24).⁷⁴ The savagery with which Kreymborg directs his surrealist attack on the corruption of the American election system may seem out of place for the Kreymborg whose previous concerns were primarily the love yearnings of young married couples. However, Kreymborg, like many Villagers, was a fellow traveler of the left, much in sympathy with radical labor and, to a degree, with anarchism and socialism. Something of his politics can be seen in a January 1915 interview with his friend, the "anarchist" poet "Adolf Wolff," who had just been released from prison. It is worth quoting at length here:

There are many poems of labor, one of the best of which is "The Toilers." The idea is splendid, and in expression, one of Wolff's most successful bits. It is a good thing to wear in one's inside pocket, while walking the streets along toward evening when the factories, as Maxim Gorky expressed it, "vomit forth" their "vermin." Besides it is a worthy example of rhyme and metre.

Crouching they cling like vermin
to the earth
and with their bleeding fingers
scrape the earth

but for a little dust, this suste-
nance,
a little dust mixed with the sweat
of brow,
the blood of fingers and the tears
of pain.

“’Tis not for them the sun shines gloriously,
the flowers bloom, the fruit hangs,
on the tree;
’Tis not for them the birds and poets sing,
or lovely women smile,
they have to crouch and cling and
seat and scrape
but for a little dust—their suste-
nance. (7)

This is Wolff’s poem, but in Kreymborg’s selection of it as Wolff’s best, Kreymborg’s sympathies with the working class are clear. Kreymborg was one of only a very writers to work with the Provincetown Players who were from working class origins and completely self-educated. Floyd Dell was another notable example.

How Kreymborg went from his populist belief in the people to the portrayal of the citizens as patsies in *Vote the New Moon* can be explained in several ways. First, the Citizens of the toy town are Burgher and Burgess, i.e., they are bourgeois representatives of the town in the European tradition; they are not modern workers.

The Crier variously refers to them as dolts, idiots, imbeciles, and adelpates both for falling for the sham elections year after year and also for attempting to resist the system and inviting the wrath of the monster of tyranny. That Kreymborg's sympathy with the people leads him to suspect the bourgeoisie can be seen in a number of his other works as well. In his unproduced prose play *Uneasy Street*, which was written about the same time as *Vote the New Moon*, Kreymborg created a black comedy in the folk play tradition. It begins with an Undertaker, Mr. Woundy, and a Flower Shop owner, Mr. Lemon, conversing about the townsfolk and develops into a bizarre wager in which the Undertaker bets the flower seller he can't actually fall asleep in one of the coffins in his funeral parlor show room. Both the Undertaker and the flower seller profit from the townsfolk; however, the undertaker, an obvious symbolic death figure, has to wait for them to die, a prospect he is often gleeful about. Meanwhile the flower seller, presumably a figure of the artist, can enjoy weddings and christenings as well as funerals. Kreymborg employs the medieval dance of death motif—language that emphasizes all of the townsfolks' various ages and professions and that they will all eventually come to Mr. Woundy. Although Kreymborg intends the characters to have symbolic significance, it is also clear that his sympathies are against the petite bourgeoisie undertaker, whose profits are made on the misery of the people. The opening scene, while telling of Kreymborg's politics, also displays the lesser known black humor that appears in his plays:

MR. LEMON. Well, and how's business, Neighbor Woundy?

MR. WOUNDY. Still slow, Lemon

MR. LEMON. Why, I thought that Mrs. Smock—

MR. WOUNDY. No. Mrs. Smock didn't croak. That fool, Dr. Small,
managed to pull her through.

MR. LEMON. Hm! That's rather bad for you.

MR. WOUNDY. It's bad for you too, Lemon. She's got heaps of
generous relations.

MR. LEMON. Still, I can't complain

MR. WOUNDY. How so?

MR. LEMON. There's been four christenings lately. Little Edward
Peacock, the Saddler twins and—

MR. WOUNDY. Children, thank God, keep on coming.

MR. LEMON. And then there's them two weddings on Perry Street—

MR. WOUNDY. Of course, weddings go right on.

MR. LEMON. And the church sociable at St. Hon's and the
Greenwich fair and

MR. WOUNDY. Of course, of course! (67-68)

In *Vote the New Moon*, the target of Kreymborg's satire is the affluence and predatory nature of the petite bourgeoisie who support the oligarchs and, unwittingly, may become the pawns of tyrants. There is no difference between the candidates because both are hand-picked by the same socio-economic class and neither represents the diversity of the population, the common man.

Another target of Kreymborg's satire in the play is no doubt related to contemporary events—and this again makes the dedication to Reed and Bryant interesting. Kreymborg's questioning of the American election process came not only

in an election year, 1920, but in the midst of the crackdown on radical parties in Greenwich Village during the “Red Scare” of 1919-1920. The career of the perennial socialist candidate for president Eugene V. Debs had ended, limiting the choices to the two main parties. Anarchists were largely divided between those who believed in participating in the elections and those who believed that participation legitimized the system. To the extent that Kreymborg was aware of anarchism, he was sympathetic to the anarchist criticism that the vote does not matter because there is no real difference between the political parties.

Kreymborg’s view that the major parties are indistinguishable may have come from a practical experience with the Democratic party. Brenda Murphy has traced a remarkable connection between the playwright and Wilson’s election in 1916. In *Troubadour*, Kreymborg remarks that while working as secretary to a Wall Street broker, Mr. Kraus, who was Hungarian and spoke broken English, Kreymborg was asked to write a speech that would be submitted for a competition; the winner’s speech would be read by New York ex-governor Martin H. Glynn at the Democratic National Convention in St. Louis that year. Kreymborg complained “I don’t know one party from the other.” “If I had to go to the chair for it, I couldn’t tell them apart,” he told Kraus (203). After Kreymborg’s boss arranged for him to go to the Republican convention in Chicago, which Kreymborg exploited as a chance to visit the offices of *Poetry*, and he heard Republicans jingoistic references to “Americanism,” he realized that he could only approach a theme on which he had “the sharpest antipathy,” through “carefully veiled satire,” (205) an act of insurgent bohemianism. Kreymborg “prayed” Kraus would not detect his humor and, in any

case, it was very unlikely their speech would be accepted by the DNC. It was selected, however, and it became the keynote address at the convention. Brenda Murphy's scholarship reveals that Kreymborg's speech was responsible for shaping the Democratic Party platform for 1916.

What Kreymborg does not say [in *Troubadour*] is that the speech caused a sensation at the convention, "one of the most dramatic scenes in the history of national conventions," in the opinion of the *New York Times* reporter. The official keynote of the convention had been designated as "Americanism" in order to counter the Republican charges that Woodrow Wilson was not enough of a patriot. [. . .] What took the Party leaders by surprise was the "spontaneous and electrifying enthusiasm" of the crowd when Glynn spoke of peace. [. . .] that it was an immemorial American position to stay out of war even under provocation." (140)

Like most members of the intelligentsia and most Greenwich Villagers, Kreymborg was opposed to the war on pacifist grounds, and indeed he expressed his view on the subject in a poem in *Mushrooms*, which demonstrates the same kind of protest in cartoonish violence seen in *Vote the New Moon*. The poem is called "Cheese, 1914."

Rats overrun his cellar.

He salts their cheese with poison.

The excellent cannibals eat each other.

The eaters die with the eaten.

Some such pleasant fodder

(he claims it brings on asthma)

ought to be carelessly strewn about

for these hungry inventors of war. (*Mushrooms* 88)

Kreymborg's pacifist stance on the war was not apolitical in Greenwich Village; most members of Kreymborg's generation believed the war represented a conflict of the captains of industrial capitalism and aristocratic Russia against a militarist Germany; all three were forms of government that exploited the "vermin" of the factories, now as front-line cannon fodder.

Some of have seen Kreymborg as apolitical before the DNC speech, but this is an over-simplification. *Troubadour* is a creative text in which Kreymborg creates his character "Krimmie" and thus should be regarded skeptically. Because the radical views of pre-war Villagers were no longer fashionable with the jazz age young people for whom Kreymborg was writing in 1925, he cast himself as a bewildered innocent. In fact, while not a card-carrying member of any radical political movement, he was very much aware of them. Kreymborg saw himself as a follower of Whitman and knew that his hero had refused to acknowledge himself a socialist when, near the end of the poet's life, he was asked to by Horace Traubel (Robertson).⁷⁵ No doubt Kreymborg refused likewise, but he was a great admirer of Traubel's biography of Whitman and of Traubel's poetry and never objected to Traubel's connection of communism with American optimism, liberty, and democracy ("Traubel American" 7).

Further, Kreymborg's statement that he could not tell the two major parties apart is a criticism that has often been mounted on both the right and left, but more

frequently on the left, by intellectuals throughout the twentieth century and down to the present day. Americans during the progressive era appeared to have a variety of choices for political leadership but not so in the 1916 and 1920 elections. In 1912, the Republican president William Howard Taft ran against former president Theodore Roosevelt with his independent Progressive (“Bull Moose”) Party, the Democrat Woodrow Wilson, and the Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs. Debs more than doubled his share of the electorate between 1908 and 1912, from 420,000 to 900,000 and his form of socialism, in which he used a great deal of rhetoric about Christian charity, was becoming more and more respectable (Diner 222-23). With the Republicans split in 1912, Wilson won. In 1916, running on American neutrality and fears of the war, Wilson was re-elected and even picked up votes from the intelligentsia, including Villagers like John Reed and George Cram Cook. Radicals were soon dismayed, however, when Wilson moved towards war, as many suspected he would.

During the war, the Wilson administration suppressed radical political groups and institutions in Greenwich Village. Members of the staff of *The Masses* were tried for sedition in two separate cases. Emma Goldman’s Anti-Conscription League was suppressed and she was deported, and by 1919, in a paranoia sparked by the Russian revolution, the first “Red Scare” went into full swing in New York. The Wilson administration—a Democratic administration with a majority in both houses of Congress—suppressed widespread strikes and “law enforcement officials led by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer tightened their repression of political radicals, arresting and often deporting alleged revolutionaries” (Diner 241). *Vote the New*

Moon may have originated with an unwitting troubadour's involvement in a political convention, but it does not explain the nightmarish qualities of the play. These emanate from a belief that the danger in a corrupt democracy is that the populace will become exhausted and welcome stronger leaders who promise dramatic change.

Djuna Barnes and the Language of Female Performance

If Kreyborg and the Other Players had consolidated the Provincetown's reputation for being the site of the most experimental modernist theatre, they had still not prepared New York for Djuna Barnes. Barnes's *Three from the Earth* premiered, appropriately for the play's strangeness, on Halloween 1919, on the first bill of the Players' sixth season. The evening also featured O'Neill's last surviving one-act play, *The Dreamy Kid*; a comedy called *The Philosopher of Butterbiggins* by American-born but British-raised playwright Harry Chapin, who had been recently killed in the war; and an old-fashioned social comedy, *Getting Unmarried*, by Winthrop Parkhurst (the title of which presumably plays on Shaw's *Getting Married*). Barnes contributed two more one-act plays to the Provincetown later in that season, *Kurzy of the Sea* (1920) and *An Irish Triangle* (1920). Of Barnes's three plays produced by the Provincetown, *Three from the Earth* is the darkest, the most experimental, and the most significant. The play is clearly related in theme and imagery to the puzzling style of Barnes's mature writing, such as her 1936 novel *Nightwood*, and her final dramatic work *The Antiphon* (1958). *Three from the Earth* is grotesque, highly allusive, and disturbing in that Barnes's brief psychological exploration of incest is charged with an erotic subtext. Little studied in this play thus far, however, is

Barnes's stridently atheistic dismissal of religious and philosophical systems in her analysis of human suffering. In fact, Barnes uses *Three from the Earth* to explore the inadequacies of systems of meaning for women who depend upon patriarchal definitions of identity. Moreover, in performance, the strange dialogue of *Three from the Earth* baffled, mystified, and divided critics in 1919, achieving what no other Provincetown play did before or after it—a true European-style avant garde *scandale*.

Three from the Earth is a metadrama. The play opens in the boudoir of Kate Morley, “an adventuress, a lady of leisure” (15), who has also been an actress. Out of place in the room are three farm boys, “peasants of the most obvious types” (15), who wait “clumsy and ill-clothed” (15) in their Sunday best on a couch for Kate's arrival. Despite their appearance and rustic speech, however, “their eyes are intelligent” and, although the boys “have a look of formidable grossness and stupidity, there is, on second observation, a something beneath all this in no way in keeping with this first impression” (16). We later learn, strangely, that the boys are familiar with Friederich Nietzsche, Albrecht Dürer, Rémy de Gourmont, and Anatole France. Kate enters in a sumptuous gown: she is a woman used to “adulation and the pleasure of exerting her will” (16). Kate recognizes the boys as the Carson brothers. She is at first polite and pretends not to recall any connection to them, but the brothers make clear they are aware she previously had an affair with their father. What ensues is a stilted dialogue of utterances connected only tenuously to the dramatic situation and filled with non-sequiturs, archaic exclamations, and expressionist-like exhortations.

Kate grudgingly recalls the boys' father as “mad,” wearing “a green suit with rats crawling on his shoulders” (24), and derides the boys' mother as a “dancing girl

and prostitute.” The brothers tell Kate they have come in part to get a look at her, to see how she “walked, and sat down,” and how she “crosses her legs” (19), but their primary objective is to retrieve letters their father had sent her. Because Kate is about to be married to a Supreme Court judge, she forestalls them: “tell me how you live” (23), she asks. The boys describe farm life and, importantly, their connection to the earth: “We go down on the earth and find things, tear them up, shaking the dirt off [. . .]. Then there are the cows to be milked, the horses—a few—to be fed, shod and curried [. . .]” (23). After a series of obscure rants by Kate about the boys’ father and his habit of calling himself “the little father” and “the great emperor,” (24), she suddenly asks if they are aware they may have had different mothers. “Why, great God, I might be the mother of one of you!” (24), Kate exclaims.

The boys next reveal that their father has taken his own life, perhaps in grief over Kate’s impending marriage. Then John, the youngest, points out a framed picture of Kate with a baby. He asks, “You have posed for the Madonna?” (26) Kate brushes aside the implication of motherhood, replying that she was merely playing the role in an amateur theatrical called “Crown of Thorns.” John removes the photograph from the frame and discovers it reads “Little John, God Bless him” on the back. This clue implies that John, at least, is Kate’s son. The play ends as John quite suddenly takes Kate in his arms and kisses her on the mouth, presumably incestuously. Her cry of “Not that way! Not that way! Not you!”⁷⁶ ends the play.

Alexander Wollcott’s *New York Times* review of *Three from the Earth* is a favorite of Provincetown scholars and conveys the controversial reaction the enigmatic play had with New York drama critics:

Three From The Earth is enormously interesting, and the greatest indoor sport this week is guessing what it means. We hasten to enroll in the large group that has not the faintest idea—a group that includes such pundits as Burns Mantle, Clayton Hamilton, and, we suspect, the cryptic author herself. [. . .] It is really interesting to see how absorbing and essentially dramatic a play can be without the audience ever knowing what, if anything, the author is driving at and without, as we have coarsely endeavored to suggest, the author knowing either. The spectators sit with bated breath listening to each word of playlet of which the darkly suggested clues leaves the mystery unsolved. The trick of hinting at things which are never revealed, of charging an act with expectancy never satisfied, of lighting fuses that lead to no explosion at all.

Woolcott goes on to write a parody of the play called “Free from the Birth.” In her review for the *New York Tribune*, Rebecca Drucker stated, “*Three from the Earth* is proof that movement and light and color and semi-intelligent sounds may be fascinating in the same way that dreams are fascinating. Its purpose may be only to convey a dream.” S. J. Kaufman in *The Globe* was equally mystified but proclaimed that Djuna Barnes had “arrived” and, with O’Neill’s and *The Dreamy Kid*, the evening at the Provincetown was not about “a theatre,” but rather proof that “THE Theatre” had arrived in America: “We anticipate all sorts of disagreement as to the strength of *Three from the Earth*. That is one of its strengths. Even now as we write

the power, the simplicity, and withal the incalculable depth of it still has us enthralled.”

The mystification over the play’s meaning extended not only to “uptown” theatre critics but divided Village and literary writers as well. Scottish poet Allan MacDougall, then visiting New York, had been sitting in as guest theatre reviewer for *The Quill*, a Greenwich Village monthly edited by Village bard Bobbie Edwards. MacDougall opted not to write a review of this bill, and a writer identifying him or herself only as “the deadhead” makes the following comment: “The Provincetown Players in their first bill presented four one-act plays, three neither good nor bad enough for words and one by Djuna Barnes. If you praise it you will forfeit Allan MacDougall’s friendship. Liking both, we are in difficulties” (“In the Theatre”).

Interestingly, the reviewer completely overlooked the opportunity, taken in almost all other reviews of the Provincetown Players that appeared in *The Quill* over more than ten years, of praising the new O’Neill play on the same bill, *The Dreamy Kid*, in the wake of the Barnes controversy. The review by the “deadhead” is interesting in light of the issue of the “inscrutability” of Barnes’s play. Were Villagers in on the secret that eluded uptown critics? That Barnes selected the play for inclusion in her *A Book* (1923) and again for the volume’s republication suggests she was relatively happy with the final script, but perhaps she also agreed with S. J. Kaufman that an understanding of the play might be dependent on further study of the text. The question that arises then is whether Barnes’s early plays were intended essentially as closet dramas, a view taken by some scholars such as her biographer Phillip Herring. However, as the performance of *Three from the Earth* had a

tremendous impact on its original audiences, this play at least cannot have been intended only for private reading. I agree with scholar Susan Bay-Cheng who suggests that both are true, Barnes's early work is meant to be performed but a complete grasp of the meaning of the works may not have been possible for an audience in a single viewing. As the nod to Barnes given by the reviewer for *The Quill* suggests, I think it likely, however, that Villagers may have been cued in to a number of her references: including the play's rejection of Christianity, allusions to Nietzsche, and the general conflict between wholesome (i.e., bourgeois) and sophisticated urban or bohemian values.

Although the play was ignored with the rest of Barnes's work for many years, a number of scholars have now followed Woolcott in searching for the elusive "key" to the play's meaning. Since the revival of Barnes criticism in the 1980s, brief readings of *Three from the Earth* have appeared by Cheryl J. Plumb, Anne Larrabee, Joan Retallac, Philip Herring, Sarah Bey-Cheng, Susan F. Clark, and Brenda Murphy. While all of the approaches taken by these scholars have merit, in searching for a single "key" to unlock Barnes's secrets, scholars have often failed to acknowledge the polyvalent intertextual nature of the work; the play in fact requires not one but multiple "keys" for its explication.

A good deal of Barnes scholarship focuses on her life story (as documented primarily by her biographers Andrew Field [1983] and Phillip Herring [1993]) to reveal private references that explain much that is murky in the play's imagistic dialogue, odd characterizations, and disjointed allusions. In this approach, the sexual abuse that occurred in Barnes's family and her hatred of her father, as well as her

repugnance towards her half-brothers, all surface in the play, while various characters are modeled on their counterparts in the Barnes family. I believe that understanding her biography is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for explicating *Three from the Earth*.

Barnes was brought up primarily on a farm in Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York, and later in the Bronx. Her father, Wald Barnes, was married to Djuna's mother, Elizabeth Chappell, but when Djuna was five years old he moved his mistress, Fanny Faulkner, into the household. Wald had children with both women, and Djuna grew up with both her brothers, half-brothers, and half-sister in an unusual environment. The family was dominated by its matriarch, Zadel Barnes, Wald's mother. Zadel was a published novelist, poet, critic, and literary figure whose work had appeared in *Harper's* and other literary magazines between 1871 and 1889, and it was likely that Wald's ideas of free love originated with Zadel. Zadel and her second husband Alex Gustaphson took the young Wald with them to the *fin de siecle* literary salon life in London in the 1880s, where they knew Lady Wilde, the young Oscar Wilde, and Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor, among various other figures.

Wald became an amateur but proficient poet, composer, and artist. After the family's return to the United States and the establishment of his polygamous household, Wald elected to home-school his children in literature and music in an attempt to prevent any contact between them and neighboring farmers or townfolk. In this odd ménage, some level of child abuse took place, the degree and frequency of which is not entirely known. Djuna was likely the object of long-term sexual abuse by her grandmother, Zadel. Further, a violent incident, possibly a rape, occurred to

Barnes when she was about sixteen. Barnes's biographers and critics attempt to work backwards from the recounting of this event that occurs under various guises in much of her mature writing, such as her 1928 novel *Ryder* and her late full-length play *The Antiphon* (1958), to discuss the actual incident, but evidence is contradictory.⁷⁷ What is known is that by eighteen Djuna was induced to marry Percy Faulkner, the brother of her father's mistress, who was three times her age. This relationship lasted only a few months, before Djuna returned to the farm. In 1912, the family relocated to Long Island, and Wald decided under Zadel's influence to divorce Elizabeth and marry Fanny. Djuna, her mother, and her full brothers were packed off and sent to live with relatives in the Bronx, although it had been Elizabeth Chappel's money which had bought the land. Djuna was forced to help support her family even as she attended art classes at Pratt Institute and the Art Student's League. By 1915 Djuna had discovered Greenwich Village.

That Barnes's life affected her writing is certain. In the case of *Three from the Earth*, Brenda Murphy has pursued the biographical "key" in great detail, noting that Barnes's plays represent "her imaginative expressions of a deeply troubling personal history that obsessed her as an artist" (151). Murphy notes the parallel between the three brothers that appear in Kate Morley's boudoir and Barnes's half-brothers. She connects the Carson brothers' father in the play with Wald Barnes. As Murphy asserts, "Barnes gives her [Kate] a diatribe against the 'mighty righteous and original father' who is responsible for the young men being 'ugly, clumsy and uncouth'" (153). Murphy connects the mother of the boys in the play that Kate calls "a prostitute" with a "gross stomach" to "the obese Fanny Barnes" (153). Finally, the

Carson boys' strange speech about how their father "whispers" to them—"If you meet anyone, say nothing; If you are asked a question, look stupid—" (*A Book* 20)—is a reflection of the security measures Wald Barnes attempted to enforce to conceal the family's situation. Murphy thus concludes that "The father-daughter incest that was Barnes's 'crown of thorns' comes full circle in *Three from the Earth*, with the suggestion of mother-son incest initiated by John" (154) at the end of the play. Murphy finds the fact that reviewers or audiences had difficulty with the play understandable in the light of the play's reliance on "Barnes's private experience" (154).⁷⁸

Further evidence for the biographical interpretation of the play can be found as well. The brothers in the play are described as having "large hanging lips" (15), and this is a feature that Barnes endows her title character Wendell Ryder with in her 1928 novel *Ryder*, generally regarded as a biographical work about her father (Herring 265). Wendel Ryder/Wald Barnes also kept white mice. Finally, when the brothers inform Kate of their father's death, she asks, "did the dogs bark?" (27) This is undoubtedly also a reference to Wald Barnes/Wendel Ryder who kept hounds in the house that Djuna slept with as a child (Herring 35) and a folk belief that dogs bark when their owner dies.

However, Barnes's play is not only the autobiography of her experience, it is also the autobiography of her mind, of her education under her father and thereafter. Jane Marcus has called Barnes's writing the "political unconscious" (222), and what emerges from this unconscious in *Three from the Earth* are not only the life events but the language of Barnes's struggle. The smattering of literary writers that the

Carson brothers are familiar with in the play bespeaks the esoteric home schooling that Wald Barnes provided for his children. I will investigate a number of the allusions buried, or half-submerged in the script.

Critic Sarah Bay-Cheng, in the most recent analysis of the play, cautions us not to stop at a biographical interpretation of *Three From the Earth*. Bay-Cheng's focus is on the women characters of the play, and she notes that both are identified by Barnes in some way as performers:

The performance of the female body is a frequent motif throughout Barnes's dramas, often presenting women as self-consciously theatrical. [. . .]

Indeed both women mentioned in the play—Kate and the sons' deceased mother—have theatrical pasts. The mother is described as a prostitute who “was on the stage” [. . .] while Kate's theatrical experience is remembered (and visualized) through a photograph of an amateur performance as the Madonna in “Crown of Thorns.” In an ironic twist, Barnes thus casts the prostitute as mother, while the seductive adulteress plays the Madonna. (130)

Bay-Cheng thus introduces two other possible “keys” to the exploration of *Three From the Earth*—an interpretation of the play based on a metaphor of performance, which is significant but needs to be explored in more detail, and a Freudian interpretation of the relationship between the sons and their two “mothers” in the play, one representing the Madonna and the other the Prostitute—the famous complex Freud describes in *On Narcissism* in 1914. More evidence can be mustered for a

Freudian interpretation of the play as well. In the dialogue about the photograph of John, which appears to be evidence he is Kate's son, leading up to the concluding incestuous kiss, the characters appear to recognize infantile eroticism, a reference to Freud's theories of infantile sexuality—a well-known topic in Greenwich Village:

JOHN.—However, the baby had nice hands—

KATE.—[*Looking at him.*] That is true.

JAMES.—But then babies only use their hands to lift the breast, and
occasionally to stroke the cheek—

KATE.—Or throw them up in despair—not a heavy career. (26)

By the time of Barnes's last produced short play, *The Dove* (1926), developed at Smith College and brought to New York by the Studio Theatre, Inc., as part of "The Little Theatre" festival in 1926, Brooks Atkinson could write of Barnes's play that it was a "crisp little essay on abnormality, filled with all kinds of Freudian significances and probably was incomprehensible to most of the audience." However, critics in 1919 did not pick up on the Freudian references in *Three from the Earth*. One wonders why Villagers, who had earnestly debated Freud and seen Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires*, would not have recognized these Freudian suggestions.

What these recent critical approaches to the play demonstrate is that biography and psychology are two critical pathways to understanding *Three from the Earth*, two of a potential array of "keys." Yet these approaches are, by themselves, only partially satisfactory. No critic has yet explored the influence of Barnes's literary and philosophical sources in the piece. In fact, Barnes mentions four authors in *Three from the Earth*: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Goncourt, and France. Additionally,

Guido Bruno, who saw the play and conducted an important interview with Barnes shortly thereafter, believed Barnes had quoted from Oscar Wilde, Guy de Maupassant, and Immanuel Kant as well. Bruno believed Wilde was Barnes's major influence, and described the *mise en scène* of the production as reminiscent of Beardsley, whom he took as the greatest influence over Barnes's drawings (384). Indeed, the language of the play certainly suggests Wilde's *Salomé*, and there is ample evidence that Barnes knew Wilde's play and in general was influenced by the decadents.⁷⁹ In addition to these literary and philosophical sources, it is clear that religion was a major preoccupation of Barnes in creating the piece. This direction, too, has been little explored by critics except as a cursory reference to the play within the play, "Crown of Thorns." Critics have overlooked Barnes's fragmentary but frequent Biblical allusions; *Three from the Earth* is steeped in references to, and the language of both the Old and New Testaments. I will explore Barnes's religious and philosophical allusions in the remainder of this section.

What is revealed in a close reading of *Three From the Earth* is that the allusions Barnes makes are rarely complete quotations as Bruno thought. Instead, Barnes creates a pastiche of her private reading, part satire and part homage, in which phrases are borrowed, meter cut and pasted in almost a free verse style, and citations are elided or fragmentary. Nonetheless, the echoes of Barnes's sources remain. The following critical scene of the play serves both as an example of Barnes's language and as evidence of the overlapping textual layers in the play, ultimately revealing the philosophical and religious systems of meaning Barnes interrogates. The exchange

occurs when Kate recognizes the three boys as the sons of her former lover (and perhaps her own sons):

KATE. Strange, I've been prepared for every hour but this—

JAMES. Yet I dare say you've never cried out.

KATE. You are mistaken. I've cried: "To the evil of mind all is evil—

“

HENRY.— Ah ha, and what happened?

KATE. — Sometimes I found myself on my knees—

JAMES.— And sometimes?

KATE. — That's enough, haven't we about cleared all the shavings
out of the carpenter shop? (28)

In the first line of this exchange, “I’ve been prepared for every hour but this,” Kate echoes the hour of Christ’s suffering on the cross. Barnes repeats a popular phrase in English evangelical religious writing, the idea that Christ had “prepared for that hour,” (Maurice 335) and popularly rendered as “the hour of need,” or “the hour of trial,” although the line does not occur exactly this way in the New Testament. Despite contemporary critics’ difficulty with the play, the general drift of these lines as a debate about Christianity is obvious. I will return below to the issue of Barnes’s Christian symbolism, but first it is important to parse Barnes’s language for references to the Old Testament. After Kate admits she is not prepared, one of the brothers, James, upbraids her for failing to pray. He speculates that she has never “cried out.” James employs the archaic phrase “cried out,” a favorite of Barnes,⁸⁰ which is employed by supplicants seeking respite from their suffering throughout the

King James translation of the Bible. The phrase appears in several places in various books including *Numbers* 20:16: “When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt: “The same sense of “cry out” is conveyed by Psalm 88, a very dark verse in which the speaker’s prayers are not answered:

O lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:
Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;
For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the
grave. (Psalms 88:1-5)⁸¹

The phrase “cried out,” is also used by Oscar Wilde throughout *Salomé* such as when the princess wonders why John the Baptist does not cry out at his execution (63). Reacting to James’s accusation that she has not “cried out,” Kate replies that she has, but instead of a supplication to God, she has cried this strange phrase, “To the evil of mind, all is evil.” This seems to be the key phrase of the play. Kate’s response here is placed in quotation marks in the script apparently to indicate that this is something she has said earlier, but the quotation marks suggest the line is itself a quotation, perhaps from a psalm or one of Nietzsche’s epigrams (which are mentioned elsewhere in the dialogue). In reading the authors that Barnes and/or Bruno associate with *Three from the Earth*, as well as by using various extensive full-text searches of literary databases, I have not been able to identify a verbatim source for this line. It does seem close to several sources, however, including Genesis. In Genesis 6:5, the Lord viewing the fallen world, identifies evil in man’s mind: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts

of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 11). This passage occurs just before and as explanation for the preparation of the flood. Much of Barnes’s language in *Three from the Earth* moreover suggests further passages of Genesis including the play’s title. In Verse 12, the Lord sees that the earth “was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth,” and the connection in Biblical language between sins of the flesh, a corrupt sexuality, and the “earth” is established. Then in Genesis 18, verses 20 and 21, God threatens destruction once again because of this corruption of men “of the earth”:

And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great,
and because their sin is very grievous;

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether
according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will
know. (Gen. 18)

Barnes echoes at least two phrases in this passage. Here, it is the corrupt, not the chosen who “cry out,” and there is a movement to “go down” upon the earth, again reminiscent of the Carson brothers who “go down on the earth.” Here “crying out” is relevant to God’s vengeance. Further, the idea that the Lord will “go down,” as well as other passages in *Genesis* 19 where Abraham bows before the Lord suggest the language, not only of the three Carson brothers who “go down on the earth,” but also the titles of two major sections of Barnes’s prose masterpiece *Nightwood*, the “Bow Down” chapter and the “Go Down, Matthew” chapter. Barnes was concerned with what Jane Marcus (221) has called “abjection” in *Nightwood*, but this is something we see in Kate Morley as well. In Genesis, Abraham is unsuccessful in

securing a pardon for Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities are soon destroyed. Only Lot and his family are permitted to escape. In *Three from the Earth*, Kate, frustrated at her brothers' doltishness, calls them "columns of flesh" (24). The allusion is reminiscent of Lot's wife, who is of course turned into a column—a pillar of salt—for looking back while Lot and his family flee the destruction of their city (Gen. 19.26). With their mother gone and their husbands destroyed for not leaving the city, Lot's three daughters then plan to seduce their father and become impregnated by him—a parallel to the incest theme in Barnes's play. The daughters once again "cry out," which is described in Genesis 19.31: "And the firstborn [daughter] said unto the younger, / Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth." Thus, the corruption of the earthly flesh is intensified as incest as the daughters' plan unfolds. The incest is plotted precisely because they lack "three [men] from the earth" (Gen. 19.31). The echo of Lot's daughters may also be found in Barnes's play where Kate Morley remembers a funny man with "three flaxen-haired daughters with the thin ankles" (18).

The Old Testament allusions are completed by Barnes with the association of the boys' offstage father as the "mighty righteous and original father" (23) and "The great Emperor" (24), a reference to an authoritarian God. Kate's diatribe against the boys' father could be spoken by Barnes against her own father who subjected her to an abusive upbringing; however, Kate's ranting against the Carson father is parallel to her refusal to be abject to God in her "crying out." The anger seems directed at the unanswered prayers:

Well, to have a father to whom you can go and say, “All is not as it should be”—that would have been everything. But what could you say to him, and what had he to say to you? (24)

Kate’s questioning of the father’s response suggests the Christian allegory. She has not been “prepared” for the hour of her trial and the father does not answer, similar to Christ’s moment of doubt on the cross. Earlier, Kate has acknowledged that she “suffers,” apparently because of her willingness to move on from past lovers to more successful ones (the boy’s father was merely a chemist; her fiancé is a Supreme Court judge) and so there is some association with Kate as a Christ figure. We learn Kate was also in an amateur production of “Crown of Thorns”; however, in this production she played the Madonna. That Kate is associated with both Christ and Mary shows Barnes’s unwillingness to anchor her character to a single allegorical figure, and mirrors the difficulty that Kate herself has in generating meaning about her suffering from the Judeo-Christian god. When, in the pivotal scene, where the brothers ask Kate if she has “cried out” to God, Kate tells them that “sometimes” she “fell to her knees”(28), i.e., she clearly adopts the attitude of prayer and perhaps makes a momentary capitulation to traditional worship. However, when James asks her what happened on other occasions, she replies, “that’s enough” and “haven’t we cleaned all the shavings out of the carpenter shop” (28), an obvious reference to her desire to forego or at least forego discussion about Christianity. Audiences at the Provincetown may not have had the opportunity to follow the allusions in detail, but they would have understood this apparent dismissal of traditional religion as a source

of meaning for Kate, a process many modernists themselves were undertaking in their own lives for various metaphysical and political reasons.

Kate has earlier introduced the subject of religion into the play when she asks the boys about their lives. They make clear their father does not allow them to attend church—for fear of contact with neighbors. She asks, “Religion?” (21). Henry explains, “Enough for our simple needs” (21), to which Kate scoffs, “Poor Sheep!” Later, when the boys criticize her as a gold-digger, Kate remarks, “Thank God I had not ideals—I had a religion.” Kate maintains the boys would not understand her religion, which is not, as Henry suggests, about charitable works, giving “shoes to the needy” (21). The question Barnes leaves hanging is just what is Kate’s concept of religion, and what is the meaning of her “crying out” the strange epigram about good and evil: “to the evil of mind, all is evil.” Earlier in the play when Kate exclaims “Curse Life!” (26), James responds with an accusatory reference to Kate’s dependence on philosophers: “And from time to time you place your finger on a line of Nietzsche or Schopenhauer, wondering: ‘How did he say it all in two lines?’ Eh?” (26) Barnes’s Greenwich Village audience would certainly have recognized the arena of this debate—both Cook and O’Neill were known to carry heavily marked copies of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* respectively. Kate’s claim seems to be apparently understood in the light of the contemporary challenge to Judeo-Christianity posed by the philosophies of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Her epigram, “to the evil of mind all is evil,” also suggests Schopenhauer’s Pessimism.

Philosophy

James's rather flippant quip that Kate Morley's devotion—that is, her religion—might be to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer has not been taken seriously or explored by any critic of *Three From the Earth*. However, Barnes was likely familiar with these philosophers during her Greenwich Village period. Her “common law” husband between 1917 and 1919, Courtenay Lemmon, was a philosopher. Barnes mentions Nietzsche in one of her newspaper portraits of Greenwich Village (*New York* 234), as well as in the play itself. There is also compelling archival evidence of Barnes's interest in these writers. The Djuna Barnes Papers at the University of Maryland contain Barnes's library as it existed near the end of her life. She owned a copy of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, a 1914 edition that she could have owned in her early Greenwich Village days, in which a number of passages, particularly epigrams, have been marked in pencil or pen, and in one case with a typed stamp. No volume of Schopenhauer exists in Djuna Barnes's personal library, but in the last twenty years the Barnes Collection has been growing as descendants of Barnes's siblings, particularly her nephew Kerron Barnes, have donated additional material to the collection. Included in these Barnes family papers are all of Wald and Zadel Barnes's books that Djuna would have presumably had access to as a child and may have been used for the Barnes's children home schooling. Among this collection is a series of periodicals called *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Philosophers*. Schopenhauer is featured in the November 1904 issue. Someone in the Barnes family has marked passages in the volume and made occasional comments in the margins (although not Djuna herself).⁸²

As I will show in this section, Djuna Barnes did not end her speculation on suffering with these philosophers, and should not be considered a disciple. However, these philosophies are sources of Djuna's private reading that lie behind the "inscrutable" language in *Three from the Earth*. The analysis of suffering which she begins in this play, and some of the Nietzschean outlook which pervades it are also strong links between the early work and the long chapter on the same theme in Barnes 1936 novel *Nightwood*, "Go Down Mathew." Therefore, with the risk of this section sounding like a primer in German idealist philosophy, I think it worth reviewing relevant aspects of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's epistemologies used by Barnes.

The pamphlet on Schopenhauer in the Barnes family collection at Maryland was written by Elbert Green Hubbard, an American writer, artist, and philosopher most famously associated with the Arts and Crafts movement and who founded the Roycroft arts colony. It may be Hubbard's Schopenhauer then that Barnes knew. One of the earliest passages in Hubbard's summary of Pessimism, which was marked in pencil by someone in Barnes's family, refers to Schopenhauer's conception of the will contained in volumes such as *The World as Will and Representation*. The marked passage reads, "Will, as the source of life, is the origin of all evil" (146). Hubbard's distillation of Schopenhauer's thought sounds like the more epigrammatically inclined Nietzsche, and moreover sounds strikingly similar to Kate Morley's exhortation that "To the evil of mind, all is evil" (28) in *Three from the Earth*. Because Schopenhauer saw the experience of all life in the will, and the will as an inherently selfish instinct, Hubbard explains in another passage marked in the margin,

“Schopenhauer was the only prominent writer that ever lived who personally affirmed that life is an evil—existence a curse” (150).

Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer of course, rejects any sense of shame surrounding the will because of his rejection of the ideal world.⁸³ Nietzsche rejects the dualistic notion Schopenhauer still supported of a platonic world of ideals and a world of appearance, accepting instead the existence of an actual world where perceived phenomena are objects possessing Kant’s “thing-in-itself” identity. Thus Nietzsche wants us to accept the earth, the realm of the self—and particularly of the body with all of its desires. For Barnes this world is always portrayed as the animal in man—nearly all of her characters are symbolized by at least one but often multiple animals, such as the rats and dogs of *Three from the Earth*. Kate Morley’s rejection of Christianity and her embrace of the selfishness of the gold-digging lifestyle, the skeptical attitude of the religious Carson brothers towards such a philosophy, and the stage directions for Kate’s entrance—“*she has an air of one used to adulation and the pleasure of exerting her will*” (17)—all suggest that Barnes intends to depict Kate as a Nietzschean super woman, anticipating Susan Glaspell’s exploration of this theme in *The Verge* (1921), which I will discuss in Chapter IV. Yet Barnes distances herself from a pure acceptance of Kate’s lifestyle—Kate often suffers from her conscience for her actions, and it is clear her lifestyle is driven by the fact that she is a woman; these are the steps a woman has to take to exert her will. Kate’s only avenue to power has been a kind of performance, on and off the stage. Barnes paints Kate as a victim of the suffering imposed by the patriarchy but simultaneously faults her for a lack of willingness to accept her desires and live life genuinely, rather than play roles for

men—thus perpetuating appearances instead of accepting the actual world. Barnes may also be appropriating the concept of woman as actress from Nietzsche, a misogyny he declares in several works. I will return to this point below, but first I wish to review the passages marked in Barnes's copy of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, the 1914 Helen Zimmern translation.⁸⁴ The following epigrams are marked with an X, a check, or a vertical bar in a variety of pens: fountain and blue, black, red ball point:

78: "He who despises himself, nevertheless esteems himself thereby, as a despiser" (87).

119: "Our loathing of dirt may be so great as to prevent us cleaning ourselves—'justifying' ourselves" (93).

144: "When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature. Barrenness itself conduces to a certain virility of taste: man, indeed, if I may say so, is 'the barren animal'" (97).

My intention is not to comment on each of these quotations; however, I think the general drift of Barnes's interest in Nietzsche is clear, and the sound of these passages is very reminiscent of the lines in *Three From the Earth*. Barnes is concerned with everything Nietzsche says about women and about self-loathing. Barnes likes to disassociate signifiers from their signifieds, but she is never able completely to detach them; the associations remain in her prose from these readings.

In “The Natural History of Morals,” Nietzsche discusses the difference between “having” and “possessing” a thing—using a woman, a wife, as his first example. Barnes marked the entire following passage:

As regards a woman, for instance, the control over her body and her sexual gratification serves as an amply sufficient sign of ownership and possession to the more modest man; another with a more suspicious and ambitious thirst for possession, sees the “questionableness,” the mere apparentness of such ownership, and wishes to have finer tests in order to know especially whether the woman not only gives herself to him, but also gives up for his sake what she has or would like to have—only then does he look upon her as “possessed.” A third, however, has not even got to the limit of his distrust and his desire for possession: he asks himself whether the woman, when she gives up everything for him, does not perhaps do so for a phantom of him; he wishes first to be thoroughly, indeed, profoundly well known; in order to be loved at all he ventures to let himself be found out. Only then does he feel the beloved one fully in his possession, when she no longer deceives herself about him, when she loves him just as much for the sake of his devilry and concealed insatiability, as for his goodness, patience, and spirituality. (116-17)

Kate Morley may “act” for the men in her life but she is clearly never “possessed” by them in the subservient fashioned described here. Nietzsche goes on in this paragraph

to talk about rulers who also need to possess those they rule. He then discusses charity. Barnes again marks the section:

amongst helpful and charitable people, one almost always finds the awkward craftiness which first gets up suitably him who has to be helped [. . .] . With these conceits, they take control of the needy as a property, just as in general they are charitable and helpful out of a desire for property. (117)

Charity is, of course, specifically referred to in the play. Kate explains her “religion” is not about “shoes to the needy” (25) . Finally, Barnes marks the next passage where Nietzsche continues his discussion of the power of ownership and uses the example of parents and children:

Parents involuntarily make something like themselves out of their children—they call that “education”; no mother doubts at the bottom of her heart that the child she has borne is thereby her property, no father hesitates about his right to subject it to his own ideas and notions of worthy. Indeed, in former times fathers deemed it right to use their discretion concerning the life or death of the newly born (as amongst the ancient Germans). And like the father, so also do the teacher, the class, the priest, and the prince still see in every new individual an unobjectionable opportunity for a new possession. (117)

Kate Morley is not a possession. Here is the Nietzsche that Barnes rejects. In the play, Kate rebels against “the righteous and original father” (23), a protest against such ownership. One other passage marked by Barnes might also suggest *Three from the*

Earth—the one in which Nietzsche rails against the concept of “disinterestedness”;

Barnes marks the passage:

There have been philosophers who could give this popular
astonishment a seductive and mystical, other-world expression
(perhaps because they did not know the higher nature by experience?),
instead of stating the naked and candidly reasonable truth that
“disinterested” action is very interesting and “interested” action [. . .].
(163-64)

Kate Morley calls her self-interest her religion in *Three From the Earth*. She represents Barnes’s attempt to portray a female woman of will that at once participates in and rejects, because of gender, the source of the philosophy that undergirds her actions, and Barnes is both echoing Nietzsche and parodying him. Barnes did not own any other volumes of Nietzsche, but another passage seems consistent with the sorts of issues Barnes highlights in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This passage is from the *Gay Science*:

Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not have to be first of
all and above all else actresses? Listen to physicians who have
hypnotized women; finally, love them – let yourself be “hypnotized by
them”! What is always the end result? That they “put on something”
even when they take off everything. Woman is so artistic. (374)

Nietzsche, who criticizes appearance and champions the thing-in-itself of the actual world, attacks performance—what he perceives as dishonest and the defining characteristic of woman. Barnes likewise had issues with women and performance,

although she transforms this Nietzschean value into a social critique; she was particularly troubled by women who made their livings or identities by performing for men—as Barnes was critical of the men demanding this.

On December 28, 1913, Barnes published an interview with Mimi Aguglia; with her characteristic love of beasts, she titled it “The Wild Aguglia and her Monkeys.” Aguglia was currently starring in a revival of Wilde’s *Salomé* and was causing a sensation with her Dance of the Seven Veils. Barnes’s portrait of Aguglia (with whom she became good friends) is a mixture of sympathy and mockery. Aguglia had been in Italian productions of *Electra*, but because opportunity to “play tragedy doesn’t exist in America” (21), Mimi claimed she would “begin with the less subtle emotions” (21)—in fact she went on to become a stage and screen siren. Barnes seems dubious of Mimi’s talents—perhaps because she does not support suffrage—a question Barnes put to all of the women she interviewed in her newspaper work. Barnes records Mimi discussing her pet lion and playing with her pet monkeys—evidently part of the production which Barnes calls the “six Aguglias.” Barnes’s comments also undoubtedly reflect her own ethnic attitudes when she states that Aguglia “gathered handful, armsful, of monkeys to her, and cried over them in Italian and spoke to them of the good of spaghetti” (21). Barnes then writes sympathetically but with tongue-in-cheek about the histrionics of Mimi’s pride in her performance in the Seven Veils:

Slowly, with feet that curled, she came, brown and spangled, and shaking with tinsel [. . .] swaying prophetically [. . .]. She took her balance on the brink of the well and offered John her soul in all the

shapes that a heroically tragic woman could offer it, and was scorned. From every staccato scream, from every sudden-reached crescendo of misery, from every backward head shake and every troubled posture, in ever lunge and the spasms of her dancing, she was putting her pride back. This was the epic of undulating spaghetti, turmoil of tragic chiffon, damp spurning feet. (21-22)

The Aguglia interview ends with the histrionics of Salomé's death. However, death, the absence of God, and the suffering of a professional actress are the themes that Barnes strikes again in her interview with young Gabrielle Deslys. Deslys had run off from a convent at sixteen to become a music hall dancer, became the mistress of the king of Portugal, a spy for the French during the first world war, and thrilled Americans with her dancing. As Alyce Barry notes, though, her real talent "was that of an extravagant celebrity greeting stage door crowds in plumaged dresses and hats of osprey feathers" (38). While slyly mocking her French pretensions, Barnes allows Gaby to say, or puts words in Gaby's mouth that directly expose women whose fame is based on the male gaze. Barnes asks her "about her life" (41):

Life is very terrible," she said quietly. "Very terrible and very sad and very hopeless, and yet I do not want to seem ungrateful. Do you quite understand? I have had such a big success—in a money way. I have been so happy to amuse. I have such patience with your men, the young who do not understand, and your old, who do not want to. It sounds ungrateful when I say, through all the mask of laughter of my reputation, that the world is a very bitter place [. . .] . Nobody reading

this will believe it but Gaby had hopes of becoming something far different from the woman the public believes her.” (41-42)

The conversation then takes a strange turn, towards a discussion of religion, and Gaby has to admit, “Oh, but I love my theatre— [. . .] —oh, more than—[. . .] —more than my god” (42). Barnes ends the interview with a rather lengthy commentary on the audience:

Sometimes it will be “we” who go see her and the friends of the friends, and they will all applaud. And will be, as I was, a trifle mystified at the number of single gentlemen who manage to be minus a family between two and six. Stout men, who glower upon the rest of the audience through heavy-rimmed spectacles [. . .] shallow, thin gentlemen in spare morning coats [. . .] . Middle aged and old, all crowding to the front, unsandwiched by the slender shoulders of their womankind. [. . .] and the three women in the audience look the house over to discover the one who has escaped them. (47)

Three from the Earth is another Village metaplay that self-consciously explores performance, specifically the performance of the female body. When the play within the play is discussed, Kate Morley, who was played originally by the Provincetown’s most well-known amateur actress and Barnes’s housemate, Ida Rauh, dismisses her acting and the play she had appeared in as a mere “amateur theatrical” (26). Djuna Barnes has her character John reply derisively, “Yes, I presumed it was amateur—“ (26). Thus Barnes explores the performing woman on a plain of systems of meaning handed down from religious and metaphysical training. These explain her suffering

and help explain her identity—at the same time Barnes rejects the patriarchal authority of these sources, of “the great original father” as limiting to that identity—insisting upon the inauthentic performance.

Conclusion

In Chapter I of this study, I quoted from theatre scholar Arnold Aronson. Following continental theorists, Aronson argues the following:

And it is true that by the second decade of the twentieth century American playwrights were beginning to incorporate avant-garde elements from European models: aspects of symbolism, expressionism, and surrealism found their way into the plays of Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Alfred Kreymborg, John Howard Lawson, Elmer Rice, and, of course, O’Neill, and would emerge in more sophisticated forms later in the century in the works of William Saroyan, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and others who employed Strindberg-like inner landscapes, dream sequences, flashbacks, poetic language, lyric realism, symbolic settings, and archetypal characters. But all these writers continued to work within a basically realistic framework and psychological character structure [. . .]. Avant-garde elements could be found *within* the new plays, not as a basis for creating the plays. The fundamental building blocks of a radical European avant-garde became mere stylistic conceits in the hands of most American playwrights. (2-3)

In this chapter, I have examined a number of Alfred Kreymborg's minimalist verse plays and one highly expressionist work by Djuna Barnes. Nothing I presented here directly challenges Aronson's statement that these authors worked "within a basically realistic framework and psychological character structure" (2). All of these plays have varying degrees of psychological development of their characters and a clear beginning, middle, and end—although the endings of *Lima Beans* and *Three From the Earth* challenge the notion of closure and the modernist autonomous work. I have shown that avant garde elements are used in these works, but the works are not composed exclusively of them. On the other hand, I hope this chapter shows that Aronson mischaracterized the situation in early experimental New York theatre. Avant-garde techniques were not employed "as mere stylistic conceits" by Kreymborg and Barnes. Rather, both playwrights sought a fusion of techniques radically to challenge naturalistic theatre as well as the presumption of a separation between audience and performer. Through reduction, estrangement, and metadrama, Kreymborg and Barnes presented an ideological critique of social assumptions about theatre, about the common people, and about women under patriarchy. Rather than a strict separation between High Modernism, Expressionism, or the Avant-Garde or a simple taking "within" a realistic play of avant-garde techniques, in the way a dream sequence is often handled, these experimenters created hybrids, what J. Ellen Gainor calls the cultural "hybridity" of the early American avant-garde" ("How High" 14).

A more accurate way to think about this period is as one of the first contacts between an emerging modernist drama and the avant-garde; borrowing a phrase from Marjorie Perloff, this was the first "avant-garde phase" of American modernist

theatre. In her article “The Avant-Garde Phase of American Modernism,” Perloff discuss the intersection between the New York Dadaists and the Arensberg salon, Stieglitz’s Gallery 291 group, and William Carlos Williams. Perloff demonstrates the carry-over in some of Williams poetry that, “embedded in a disjunctive, didactic, theoretical prose, represents a fusion of Futurist/Dada typography with Romantic lyric subjectivity” (214). However, she stresses how Williams’s use of a romantic nature setting in certain poems was “quite alien to the urban avant-garde” (215) and that Williams’s use of Dada subject matter was short-lived. She argues that after Walter Arensberg moved to California in 1921, disbanding his New York circle, the avant-garde phase was over. Perloff does not treat any of Kreymborg’s poetry, although I suspect the dadaist influence survives long into his verse. In any case, Perloff’s point is that it was an historical moment of contact between modernism and avant-gardism which produced aesthetically and ideologically challenging work that challenged not only traditions but our assumptions about the institutions of art.

Chapter 4: Critiques of the Artist by Cook, Glaspell and O'Neill George Cram Cook

In Chapter One of this study, I provided a background to the history and issues surrounding the terms “modernism” and “avant garde.” In Chapter Two, I examined the early artist satires of the Provincetown Players and described how these plays might be viewed contextually as a critique on modernism and as incipient avant gardism. In Chapter Three, I examined in detail several of the more formally experimental plays by Alfred Kreymborg and Djuna Barnes. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze two significant full-length works by Provincetown founders George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell and to compare such works to Eugene O'Neill’s attitude about the artist during his involvement with the Provincetown Players. George Cram Cook was, like many of his contemporaries, a cultural nationalist, and the Provincetown Players were a project that attempted to bolster American cultural and national identity through the promotion of American works. Therefore, I will begin this chapter with a look at Cook and the idea of national identity.

In his landmark study, *Theatre, Society and the Nation* (2002), S. E. Wilmer tells us that his purpose is an “attempt to widen the discussion on cultural nationalism by demonstrating the importance of drama and theatrical performance in having contributed to and in continuing to influence the process of representing and challenging notions of national identity” (1). Indeed drama is essential in understanding the formation of national identities and this is no less true in twentieth-century American drama than in other literatures. Wilmer traces the construction of

such a national identity for America in a history of our theatre from native American performances and colonial entertainments through anti-war and anti-establishment theatres of the 1960s.

Wilmer's chapter on the Patterson Silk Workers Strike Pageant of 1913 is particularly interesting in that he contrasts traditional patriotic pageant celebrations in America with the counter-normative effects of left political theatre and demonstration. Wilmer describes various early twentieth-century public performances such as the Chautauquas, "annual cultural events, where national touring organizations sent out packages of events lasting from three to seven days, consisting of public speeches, musical numbers, plays and other events [. . .]" (99). He also notes the agenda of such mainstream spectacles: "While professing such foundational ideas as freedom of religion and equality, the dominant values expressed in Chautauquas were Protestant and capitalist" (99). Such events served to reaffirm "American values," as well as encourage the assimilation of immigrant groups. However, Wilmer argues that American drama "increasingly responded" to patriotic performances with "the agitation for improved working and living conditions" (100). One of the earliest and certainly the largest scale responses was the Patterson Silk Strike Pageant.

The strike by silk workers in Patterson, New Jersey, for shorter working hours and higher pay had been organized under the banner of the International Workers of the World. The strike had been at a stalemate for weeks and workers were struggling with strike pay. Two workers had been killed by police and almost 1500 arrested when Big Bill Haywood, the IWW leader, met with intellectuals in New York at the

salon hosted by patron of the arts and writer Mabel Dodge. Present were a number of future Provincetown Players. This was during Dodge's affair with the poet, leftist journalist, and future communist John Reed, whose work with the Provincetown Players was discussed in Chapter Two of this study. Also at Dodge's salon was the professional theatre designer Robert Edmond Jones (destined to work with Eugene O'Neill among many others and who was also present for the first plays of the future Provincetown Players in 1915). Dodge, Reed, and Jones resolved to stage a reenactment of the Patterson strike, as well as the shooting and funeral of a worker onstage at Madison Square Garden, employing hundreds of the actual strikers as performers. The performance sold out the Garden's 15,000 seats and succeeded in publicizing the plight of the strikers, although it was unsuccessful in ending the strike with terms favorable to the workers. Wilmer concludes that "the Paterson pageant subverted the conservative pageant (such as the Chautauqua's) for revolutionary purposes. By contrast with normal pageants emphasizing national unity and instilling national pride, the Paterson pageant dramatized class warfare" (101).

The story of the Patterson Pageant underscores several issues regarding the role of theatre in the formation of American national identity in the early portion of the twentieth century. First, mass performances were a viable means used by members of both left and right political wings to attempt to influence public opinion. Second, the organization of the pageant shows the cooperative relationship between Greenwich Village intellectual bohemians and left labor activism. This was the balance Malcolm Cowley ascribed to the prewar Village as discussed in Chapters Two of this study, between "two types of revolt, the individual and the social—or the

aesthetic and the political, or the revolt against Puritanism and the revolt against capitalism—we might tag the two of them briefly as *bohemianism* and *radicalism*” (66). Although the relationship between the two revolts was tenuous, it was ultimately one of the key traits of the pre-War Village. The other issue here, though, is one of theatre historiography. Wilmer discusses the Patterson Pageant with its overt politics, but he does not consider other theatrical interventions, such as those happening in the infant art theatre movement, as both “challenging and representing” to the rise of a modern American national identity. Although few productions by the Provincetown Players were overtly propaganda for the proletariat—Michael Gold’s work with the company is a notable exception—George Cram Cook’s drive to establish an American theatre reveals a politics concerned primarily with national culture.

In Chapter Two, I cited an article Cook wrote called “A Creditor Nation in Art,” in which he celebrated the return of American painters and sculptors to New York during the First World War. When Cook wrote for the *Friday Literary Review* of the *Chicago Evening Post* prior to moving to New York in 1913, he reviewed books by both European authors and Americans, but he was acutely conscious, like many who participated in the Chicago Renaissance of 1908-12, that a larger national cultural renaissance was needed and imminent in the United States. Susan Glaspell quotes Cook making the following statement, prophetic in some ways about his future efforts for the Provincetown Players:

An American Renaissance of the Twentieth Century is not the task of ninety million people, but of one hundred. Does that not stir the blood

of those who know they may be of that hundred? Does it not make them feel like reaching out to find each other—for strengthening of heart, for the generation of intercommunicating power, the kindling of communal intellectual passion? (*Road* 224)

This statement, in which Cook makes clear his feelings that artists and writers are an elite subset of the population, was the foundation for his theory of group creativity he expanded during the founding of the Provincetown Players. Edna Kenton, a friend of Cook's and Glaspell's from Iowa who became central in the Provincetown Players administration, explains the founding of the company in terms of Cook's twin themes of American culture and group identity: "From the beginning it [the Provincetown Players] centered about the origin of a native drama—the 'group spirit' that mothered it—and it was boldly affirmed that only from a group working together for the expression of an idea held in common could the native drama of a people be born" (*Provincetown Players* 14). Cook and Neith Boyce prepared the following oft-quoted formulation of the mission of the Provincetown Players:

One man cannot produce drama. True drama is born only of one feeling animating all the members of a clan—a spirit shared by all and expressed by the few for the all. If there is nothing to take the place of the common religious purpose and passion of the primitive group, out of which the Dionysian dance was born, no new vital drama can arise in any people. (*Road* 252-53)

Thus, unlike the Washington Square Players—who had initially rejected Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires*—and most "little" theatres springing up

across the United States, the Provincetown was exclusively dedicated to the production of American works. This can also be seen in the famous “resolutions” at their first organizational meeting in September 1916: “That it is the primary object of the Provincetown Players to encourage the writing of American plays of real artistic, literary and dramatic—as opposed to Broadway—merit” (27). Cook’s religious impulse was Dionysian, but his politics were also clear—drama will serve the quest for the national identity of modern America.

The Athenian Women (1918)

In March of 1918, George Cram Cook produced the Provincetown Players’ first full-length play, his *The Athenian Women*. This was a notable accomplishment; one-act plays were the staple of the little theatre movement because of the impracticality of rehearsing, funding, and mounting full-length productions. Cook was a lover of ancient Greece, who attached his work as director, actor, and manager of the players to Dionysian inspiration—derived from both a scholarly interest in classical literature and from reading of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*. In *The Athenian Women*, Cook combined the story of Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* with Thucydides’s account of the courtesan Aspasia and her relationship with Athenian leader Pericles, to explain the fourteen year peace during which the Athenians accomplished the building of the Acropolis. The overt purpose of Cook’s play is clear: it is an anti-war allegory. That Cook had the war in mind is made clear by Susan Glaspell who reported that the summer before Cook was writing the play, he was reading simultaneously both the daily news about the war in Europe and the Greek historian

Thucydides, quoting aloud the ancient historian's words, "In all human probability these things will happen again" (*Road* 267). In Cook's play, the situation of the Peloponnesian war is described in terms that sound very much like the First World War. In his preface to the published version of the play, Cook tells us:

Like the war which began three years ago, the Peloponnesian War was a long time brewing; it actually began with the invasion of Plataia, a small state whose neutrality, like that of Belgium, had been guaranteed by all the chief belligerents. The leading sea-power then as now fought in the name of democracy against the less democratic great power of the land. (2)

However, in addition to the war allegory, Cook also uses his rather talky play to work out a series of ideas involving art, politics, and the role of both in the creation of national culture. Susan Kemper in her dissertation, the only in-depth analysis of Cook's plays, prose, and poetry, traces Cook's written opposition to the war in his columns and articles for the *Friday Literary Review* from 1914. The thematic conflict of the play is the choice between war and beauty, which Kemper believes Cook implies "cannot hold sway at the same time; yet these contradictory impulses constitute a given in human society, and in the mind of most individuals as well" (123). This thesis is fine as far as it goes, but Cook is also specific in his designation of who is responsible for beauty—a special set of artists surrounding Pericles and Aspasia—and this arrangement mirrors the ideas Cook had expressed about the task of the "one hundred" chosen to bring about a creative renaissance in America. Thus we can see in *The Athenian Women* not only an allegory of the senselessness of war,

but an attempt on Cook's part to work out the interconnectedness between the greatness of a national culture and the political realities of empire. Cook wrestled with the economics and politics of art and posited that national culture and national identity were both created by and challenged by those with a specific destiny to do so. In the end, Cook gives us a tragedy of the Greeks who are not able to choose peace, prosperity, and cultural development, an allegory of America's difficulty in constructing its own national identity peacefully and building its own cultural monuments.

Glaspell quotes Cook on the genesis of the idea for the *Athenian Women*: Cook wrote her that he had wept at a production of *Lysistrata* in New York. To a friend he

tried to explain it as due to feeling through the Greek play something which was in Greek life and is not in ours—something we are terribly in need of. One thing we're in need of is the freedom to deal with life in literature as frankly as Aristophanes. We need a public like his, which itself has the habit of thinking and talking frankly of life. We need the sympathy of such a public, the fundamental oneness with the public, which Aristophanes had. We are hurt by the feeling of a great mass of people hostile to the work we want to do. (*Road* 249-50)

The Athenian Women premiered on March 1, 1918, and ran for seven performances (the typical run for a Provincetown Players' bill). Though Cook centers the play around the four main characters, there were thirty-plus roles and, as Jeffrey Kennedy points out, the production "was the largest yet attempted by the

Players on many levels. While three different sets would be common for a Players' bill, the staging and costuming of twenty-five performers, five of which performed multiple roles [. . .] [was] the real challenge, particularly considering the size of the Players' stage [then the parlor of a Brownstone]" (424). Nina Moise, the Players' first professional director, directed the play, which Provincetown member Edna Kenton noted was done by grouping the actors in such a way that "at no moment of the play did the little stage seem cluttered or overfilled. It was a real triumph in production against staggering physical odds" (71). Ida Rauh, the Provincetown's most well-known actress, called "the Duse of MacDougal Street," was given the lead as Aspasia (indeed Cook may have written the part with her in mind), and Cook himself played Pericles. Heywood Broun, reviewing for the *New York Tribune*, approved of the production overall, citing particularly Rauh's performance, (qtd. in Kennedy 427-28). He also believed that the two lead roles were "not well matched" and that the "part of Aspasia is so much better written and so much better played," than was that of Pericles, causing "that tinge of conflict" to be "absent" from the play (qtd. in Kennedy 428). Cook's Pericles, appeared to Broun as not "much more than a very recently commissioned second lieutenant in the reserve corps" (qtd. in Kennedy 428). Broun complimented Marjory Lacey Baker, however, who as Kallia, he believed had "an extraordinary moving voice and an easy grace and presence" (qtd. in Kennedy 428). Broun was impressed the Players were able to place all their actors on the twelve-foot stage, but felt the script was limited by "the too obvious attempt to state present-day problems in terms of Greece, causing the spectator to hurtle 'out of the illusion'" (qtd. in Kennedy 428). The Players also moved a production uptown for

the first time when *The Athenian Women* was transferred to the Bramhall Playhouse on East 27th Street and staged for the Women's Peace Party of New York.

The plot of *The Athenian Women* comes from Cook's contention that a real-life event/person must have spurred Aristophanes's writing of *Lysistrata*, the bawdy story of the sex-strike by the women of Athens to stop a war, and that Aspasia, who would become Pericles's new wife just prior to the Thirty Year Peace of 445 B.C., was the most-likely candidate. The plot, then, has as its main players Aspasia, a foreigner in that she is not of Athenian blood and whose profession is courtesan; her lover Lysicles; Pericles; and Kallia, Pericles's wife.

In Act I, we meet the wise Aspasia who is instructing Lysicles to stop the re-election of Pericles because he seeks war with Sparta. Kallia is brought by a friend to Aspasia to seek her wisdom and power of influence. The act dramatizes the solidarity of the women and the work for peace in ancient Greece, but there are numerous references throughout these scenes that refer to the World War, or in which Cook uses metatheatrical moments or jokes to communicate specifically to his Greenwich Village audience. Before the arrival of the aristocratic Kallia, a slave Eunice and a servant Rhodopis gossip about their upcoming visitors:

RHODOPIS. More of these virtuous dames who come to be shocked.

EUNICE. The young ones really want to hear Aspasia's gospel.

RHODOPIS. What they want is a peek at a little depravity. Slummers!

EUNICE. The cooped up married women have begun to envy us our freedom. (28)

This exchange would have had obvious resonances for the Villagers in Cook's

audience who complained about “slummers” and the commercialization of their Latin Quarter on a regular basis. The discussion of women’s rights, too, is calculated to interest the contemporary audience. Cook could count on many members of the Village’s feminist organization, the Heterodoxy Club (to which his wife Susan Glaspell belonged), to be in attendance. Thus he presents a somewhat detailed discussion of women's rights in which Kallia takes up the traditional position that women should leave politics to the men, or as her friend Antiphone puts it, the women of Athens believe women “should be in the home” (36), and Aspasia challenges conventional marriage as servitude. Aspasia’s stance on gender equality makes her part of a small minority of liberated free-thinkers in Athens and thus reveals the lineage of Cook’s play in the Village comedies discussed in Chapter Two of this study, which often featured the conflict between conventional and unconventional modern attitudes. One of the issues debated in Cook’s play also is whether “intelligent” women can be fit mothers—a cardinal debate about the woman artist during the progressive era:

HERMIPPOS. That's it. You Ionian women are dangerous to the city
because you make yourselves intelligent and charming at the
expense of the future.

ASPASIA. Must it hurt the future to have its children born of
intelligent and charming women?

KALLIA. Yes, if the women's personal life is so absorbing that they
decline to sacrifice any of it for the children.

ASPASIA. My mother did not sacrifice any of her interesting life for

me. She let me share it. We sat at table with philosophers —
hunters keen on the trail of the causes of things. (38)

The belief that women could not be both mothers and artists or intellectuals was of vital concern to the females in Cook's audience. In giving Aspasia these lines, Cook declares his allegiance to the feminist view. As noted in Chapter Three, in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche had said when a woman is interested in scholarship, there is "something wrong with her sexual nature" (97), and in general the bohemian lifestyle was seen as inconsistent with bourgeois child-rearing practices — one reason the women of the village embraced alternative educational methods such as Montessori. The issue was given a tragic dimension in another Provincetown Players production, Rita Wellman's *Funiculi-Funicula* (1917), where Wellman shows the abandonment and death of a child by her bohemian parents, suggesting subversively that there is no natural bond between mother and child (Black, *Women* 53). Meanwhile on Broadway Rachel Crothers would have her sculptor heroine capitulate to tradition, abandon her career, and stay home to take care of her wayward teenage daughter in *He and She* (1920). Moreover, the issue of the artist woman with children goes beyond practical considerations; it is connected to the powerful nineteenth-century metaphor of literary production as procreation, as documented by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal study *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Since the artist's works are considered his "children," there is an inherent problem with the woman artist, a competition set up for women between their literary and human offspring. Glaspell would provide the deepest exploration of this issue of any play by the

Provincetown Players in her expressionist drama *The Verge* (1921), which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Act I ends with Aspasia convincing Kallia to carry out her plan of peace. The women of Athens are to partake in a three-day feast to Demeter at “Artemi's temple on the summit,” (78) where they will cover “the whole hill with a thousand tents” (78). The women are then to come back into town in a procession on the third day, but Aspasia convinces Kallia, “You shall not come back! You shall stay together in the Temple, touched by no man, till men make peace with Thebes and peace with Megara, peace with Corinth, and everlasting peace with Sparta! (80). Act I concludes with Aspasia and Kallia forming a bond as women and friends in solidarity against the war. Only then does Aspasia learn Kallia is the wife of Pericles. Thus Cook sets up the sex strike in terms of an anti-war sisterhood, which would have resonated with the feminists in the audience who belonged to or supported the Woman’s Peace Party. In January of 1915, three thousand women meeting in Washington, DC, formed this pacifist organization with Jane Addams elected as president. In April 1915, Aletta Jacobs, a suffragist in Holland, asked the Woman's Peace Party to send representatives to an International Congress of Women in the Hague. Founding Provincetown Player Mary Heaton Vorse was one of the American delegates. The idea developed at the congress was to split the warring nations along gender lines, to build solidarity between allied and axis women. This project ultimately failed as most women chose to support the war effort in their respective countries. Additionally, many women believed masculine aggression was at the center of the war; Virginia Woolf called it “this preposterous masculine fiction” (76). In Cook’s

play, Aspasia claims she will make Athens greater “Perhaps by making ridiculous that perpetual masculine arrogance which breeds perpetual war” (34). Through Aspasia and Kallia’s bond, Cook rewrites his own contemporary history portraying the effort of the Women’s Peace Party as successful.

Act II, entitled “The Women’s Peace,” is the story of how the women of the Thesmophoria enact Aspasia’s plan. The women occupy the temple and send away all authorities who try to dissuade them until they know for certain that there are negotiations for peace underway with Sparta. Pericles himself comes before the gates and speaks to Aspasia, who, in a series of speeches convinces him that he has allowed the practicality of warfare to detract from his original imaginative vision for Athens. She reminds him that he has spent on war the money that could have built the Parthenon, the national symbol of Greece; thus, war is posited as a destructive power diametrically opposed to the creative power *and* to the national greatness of a culture. Pericles has told Aspasia: “My purpose is the greatness of this city— My means to it are the means of the actual world—power through victorious war. What is false is your dream of another kind of world. It may be more beautiful, but it is not so!” (100). However, Aspasia advocates art as the means to national identity. Aspasia’s reply is to “conquer” with a superior culture:

A ring of conquered neighbours [sic] will not make Attica safe.

Conquer them as often as you please and they will still revolt. Another spear undoes what a spear has done. Instead of ringing us round with fear and hatred, let trowel and chisel and brush create meaning to master Megara, beauty to conquer Corinth. (172)

Pericles succumbs to Aspasia's charms, both the power of her ideas and her beauty. He wants her to help him in his drive for military dominance, but now with her entreaties to him as "a creative man" (170) and with the power of "chisel and brush" wins him over to the promise of creation—in the guise of a "dream of the city beautiful": rather than the warrior, "Athens shall become Artist" (207-08), she explains. Aspasia then shows him how to stay in power using a broad program of peace-time building and cultural achievement in the development of the acropolis and the glory of Athens.

Susan Glaspell, in *The Road to the Temple*, has stressed how Cook was devoted to the concept of the ideal city. Cook had briefly known Maurice Brown in Chicago in 1913, who developed what was perhaps the first American "little" theatre. Browne saw the arts in religious terms, linking theatre to St. Augustine's image of the city of God. Cook apparently adapted this idea to his own quasi-religious feelings about Dionysus (Sarlós 11). The ideal city is also an idea with deeply American cultural roots from a country constantly in the midst of expanding and creating new communities. It appears in a number of works by Cook or Glaspell—most notably in Glaspell's *Inheritors* as a college built on a hill in the Iowa landscape. The city beautiful idea was a challenge by early modernists to the industrialization and lack of cultural development in many of America's emerging cities. The myth of the shining city was also embodied in the 1893 Columbia Exhibition in Chicago.

Cook, a socialist at some points in his career, is aware that the creation of a national identity through civic works is connected to the realities of politics in Athens, and by analogy like those of the United States is about compromise. In

achieving the city beautiful Aspasia is only too willing to give up another dream—equality for all Athenian citizens. Aspasia had formerly been lovers with Lysicles and the two had plotted a communist uprising in Athens. Susan Kemper devotes a great deal of space in her analysis of the play discussing the historical leaps that Cook makes in assuming that anything like a Communist movement existed in Athens. Cook took this idea from Aristophanes, and Kemper sees this as a naïve misreading of the conservative Aristophanes parodying of the idea of communal property (132), rather than as evidence that such a movement existed. Cook argues Lysicles was a communist because he instituted the first tax on Athens when he ruled with Aspasia after Pericles's death. Cook defended the historical leaps he made in the play stating in the preface that a play need only “be true to its own orbit” (2) and not therefore literally to history. That communism in *The Athenian Women* is consistent with the trajectory of the play's metadramatic discourse, which along with the references to feminism, the woman artist, and pacifism, shows Cook targeted his audience of Village cognoscenti. It is immaterial whether a communist movement in Athens is historically accurate, but its insertion in the play has a great deal of bearing on Cook's view of what the interrelationship between art and politics should be.

When Aspasia wins Pericles's attention, she must justify her new aristocratic friend to her lover Lysicles. At first she attempts to explain that Pericles has both artistic vision and political connection:

Pericles is not a soldier only. He shall be a poet who works in realities, a dreamer who makes his dreams come true. No man has had a fairer vision for

a city. To embody it he alone has the connections, the traditions, the political power, . . . the skill to lead. (194)

Aspasia must assuage both Lysicles's personal jealousy and his fear that in turning away from him Aspasia is turning away from the promise of political revolution as well.

ASPASIA. The communism we dreamed is not the only truth. [. . .]

Pericles too sees truth.

LYSICLES. With the same old needless sacrifice of all the poorer citizens? The slaves to remain slaves? All those the mind of Pericles is unable to realize as human—nothing to be done to give them human lives—in order to go on piling up great fortunes for the few?

ASPASIA. Perhaps now it is the few who must bring beauty into the world; and later a time when the many shall share it. Wealth can be in common only as a result of a harmony of men's minds. If Athens makes herself a work of art, she will come to have the artist-mind, which out of discordant things shapes harmony. (196)

This statement is manifesto. That it is “the few” who must “bring beauty in the world,” mirrors Cook's belief in an American renaissance brought about by the “one hundred” for the 90 million cited in the beginning of this chapter. It is the perfect expression of Cook's bohemian philosophy and the group ideal of the Provincetown Players. Cook clearly postpones the reevaluation and subordinates it to the aesthetic ideal. Cook had earlier written a novel, *The Chasm*, about the conflict between

Nietzschean aristocratic thinking and socialist equality. In *The Athenian Women*, he blithely defers political change, and indeed makes it dependent on cultural rebellion. Further, the artist and the nation-state become one for Cook, at least as Pericles understands the purpose of cultural works. This is also symbolized by the personal relationship he develops between Aspasia and Pericles. As Pericles proclaims to Aspasia, “The Truce of Thirty Years shall be sworn to, and carved on stone, and the stone set up. Athens shall become Artist. But the Artist which is a City shall not be born save of the love between you and me!” (206). Although he romanticizes it, Cook is here aware of the price of a society’s commitment to its cultural identity and, in the Nietzschean vein, is unapologetic. As Barbara Ozieblo has pointed out, Cook had “appropriated Nietzsche’s aristocratic vision of culture as a unifying force that dissipates conflict” (132). In fact, one senses Cook wants to sidestep the issue of politics altogether, but in the end he produced a modernist treatise on the greater importance of culture over political action. Sidestepping revolution is probably indicative of a split between the aesthetic bohemians and the political radicals in the village, which would become almost complete after 1919, but Cook did not retreat completely into aestheticism either. Art serves the identity of the nation-state and has a clear public role. Whether he intended the play as the last word on the role of art in civic life is unclear, but that he certainly intended it as a commandment to American artists, as is clear in the following speech by Aspasia, who calls out to the audience of modern artists, writers, and humanist intellectuals: “Listen, you carvers and builders, shapers of form! This means that Athens must be made the foremost city, not by her soldiers, but by you!” (210). Cook, though, seems blissfully unaware that the project

in *The Athenian Women* of building the national identity of Athens or America might easily be co-opted by the very nationalistic and philistine forces he wishes to overthrow, nor does he seem aware that national culture is often used in pro-war propaganda.

At the end of Act II, although he has now joined Aspasia, Pericles remains furious with his wife Kallia for her stand against the war and promotes Aspasia as his muse on his civil projects. However, Aspasia pleads to Pericles on Kallia's behalf. Ultimately, Aspasia can not stop herself from falling for Pericles, and Kallia leaves as an embittered enemy of the couple, the women's solidarity of the sex strike now broken. Fourteen years pass between Act II and III, during which time Athens under Pericles becomes the city of beauty and perfection that Aspasia had helped him dream about. There are lyrical, wistful moments as the artists who have created the buildings and works of art sit with Pericles and Aspasia to reflect on what they have created. Phidias, in charge of the public art work, Ictinos, architect of the Parthenon, and Mnesicles, architect of the Propylaia, Pericles and Aspasia are the ideal bohemian collective, Jig Cook's *Republic*. While Plato throws the poets out of his ideal city, Cook dreams of an artist-led republic—in which free-thinking vanguardists succeed in creating and controlling culture.

However, Kallia, her son by Pericles called Xanthippos, and others use false accusations in an attempt to bring down Pericles and Aspasia as Athens once again drifts towards war. Echoing many of the “conventional characters” in the earlier Provincetown plays about cultural conventionality and modernism, Kallia bitterly questions the social usefulness of the artist: “It is a charming irony. It will end these

artists who build superfluous temples to the gods and worship nothing but the work of their own hands” (234). When Aspasia meets with Kallia, hoping to join forces again for the cause of peace, she is able to assuage some of Kallia’s resentment and replies with the most significant anti-war speech of the play:

Democracy! Aristocracy! Don’t you know in your heart,
Kallia, that there is no other such disaster as this war of
exhaustion which has been the nightmare of our lives? It will
bring into the world evil which outweighs a thousand fold the
good which victory can bring to either democracy or
aristocracy. . . . (308)

Kallia is moved enough by this to admit she is “torn in two,”(316) but it is too late; Athens kills some prisoners from Thebes and the war begins. The play ends in the house of Pericles as it is storming outside, Aspasia and Pericles are there with their artist-friends. Aspasia laments: “O Pericles—our great bright circle—this life which has created beauty—we have been but a candle burning in the darkness—a point in space—a bright ripple on a black wave—a boat on a shoreless sea!” (316).

Cook suggests that the power of an elite group of artists to both “represent” and to “challenge” the existing national identity cannot succeed on aesthetic grounds alone. Although beauty is an effective force against war in Cook’s world, it has no lasting power in the cyclical history of war. Cook, though, seems somewhat naïve in his connection with bohemian culture’s ability to create national identities. Even if such over-reaching is possible. Cook provides only the taste of the artist as a mediation for the aristocratic discharge of power. *The Athenian Women* contains

many of the core ideas of George Cram Cook, one of the first true visionaries of the American theatre, but it is also a manifesto which is unconcerned with critiquing institutions of art, and rather glorifies the sublation of them by the artists. Although, *The Athenian Women* embraces much of the radical politics of Village modernists—feminism, pacifism, communism—

it may also represent the moment at which Cook reaches the limits of his belief in experiment; this is replaced instead with the program of national culture—an issue I will take up in the Conclusion of this study in discussing the demise of Cook's Players.

Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook

Tickless Time (1918)

At the end of the Provincetown Players' third New York season, 1917-1918, and after the relative success Cook had had with the company's first full-length production of *The Athenian Women*, Glaspell and Cook retired to Provincetown. There they wrote their last collaboration, *Tickless Time* (1918), which would be presented in New York in December and later used as a curtain opener for the Broadway production of *The Emperor Jones*. *Tickless Time* is set in "a garden in Provincetown" (275), where an artist couple, Ian and Eloise Joyce, vow to throw all of their clocks and watches into a hole and bury them and to tell time naturally via the sun. They believe that "The sun-dial is...a first hand relation with truth" (278) and removes the mechanical mediation of the clock imposed by modern society. Meanwhile, Ian and Eloise's conventional friends Alice and Eddy look on in

disbelief. It is a successful comedy with some effective jokes, such as when the Joyce's cook, Annie, tries to time her onions by the sundial. Reviewer Heywood Broun called the play the "best piece"(9) on a bill that also included O'Neill's *The Moon of the Caribbees*. *Tickless Time* is more personalized than Glaspell and Cook's earlier collaboration on *Suppressed Desires*: Ian Joyce is based on Cook himself: the base of the sun-dial sculpted by Cook still survives in the Glaspell-Cook garden in Provincetown.⁸⁵ The genesis of the play, according to Barbara Ozieblo, was a return in the Glaspell-Cook marriage to easier ways and to the kind of tossing of lines back and forth that had initially engendered *Suppressed Desires* in 1915. Ozieblo believes they created the script in August 1918, but Glaspell then made major revisions in the fall in Provincetown while Cook returned to New York and worked on the Players' move from 139 to 133 MacDougal Street (129). Ozieblo ascribes the concern of the play to Cook's "personal fear of aging," which he "transferred into an obsession with the mechanics of timekeeping [. . .]" (136).

Several Provincetown scholars, including Ozieblo and Murphy, doubt that the work on *Tickless Time*, a throwback to the spirit of the earlier village plays, could have been artistically satisfying for either Cook with his recent accomplishment of *The Athenian Women*, or Glaspell, who was now working on her first-full length play, *Bernice* (1919). There is, though, an interesting turn in *Tickless Time*, a mild modernist appreciation of mechanization and a critique of the romantic conception of nature and the city/country dichotomy that imbued early modernism.⁸⁶ In the critique of the romanticism of the artist, the play anticipates Glaspell's major expressionist achievement, *The Verge* (1921), which will be the next play examined in this chapter.

In *Tickless Time*, Ian Joyce believes the sundial will bring him closer to a "universal" time, and to an escape from the "machine" time of clocks. Ian claims, "When you take your time from a clock you are mechanically getting information from a machine. You're nothing but a clock yourself....But the sun-dial—this shadow is an original document—a scholar's source" (278). More than simply a quaint or old-fashioned method of counting the hours, for Ian the sundial represents the rebellion against modern society and that society's dependence on standardization, philistinism, and industrialization. Standard time, Ian explains, symbolizes "the whole standardization of our lives. Clocks! Why, it is clockness that makes America mechanical and mean" (281). Standardization of time is apparently particularly detrimental to the artist: Ian exclaims, "Clock-minded! Who thinks of spinning worlds when looking at a clock" (281). Once again Glaspell and Cook spoof key ideas of the bohemian artist. As Caesar Graña has noted, the anti-mechanization spirit of bohemians is descended from nineteenth-century fears that industrialized society's ability to "objectify the world" was potentially destructive to human experience.

Literary men decried [objectification] [. . .] seeing in this power a chill, analytical obsessiveness, which would destroy the integrity of human experience, not only intellectually but psychologically. Romantic philosophers warned against the spirit of measurement because of what it did to human knowledge, splitting it into isolate parts. (68-69)

Glaspell and Cook poke fun at the earnest idealism of Ian, and reflect what must have already been a common metaphor in modernist circles, seven years before Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, of society dehumanizing the individual as a machine. Further, Ian's fear of "the spirit of measurement" with respect to time is specifically connected to modernist notions of the inviolable self, as Matei Calinescu has observed:

Modernity in the broadest sense, as it has asserted itself historically, is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the sets of values corresponding to (1) the objectified, socially measurable time of capitalist civilization (time as a more or less precious commodity, bought and sold on the market), and 2) the personal, subjective, imaginative *durée*, the private time created by the unfolding of the "self." (5)

Glaspell and Cook satirize this core tenet of modernism, suggesting it is not realistic to focus exclusively on the self or on the cosmic experience sought by artists; one has to be in touch with the rest of the community. In fact, the couple's pledge to follow sun-time is questioned when Eloise worries about being able to make it to her dentist appointment on time the next day, and it turns out that a complicated graph needs to be followed in order to adjust the sundial to standard time throughout the year.

Glaspell and Cook thus critique another of the key attributes of the modernist bohemian's code, the idea of self-expression in the character of Ian Joyce. This is the ideal that Caesar Graña, whose theory was discussed in Chapter Two, has termed "cosmic self-assertion" (67-68). Bohemians believed that "the literary man is a

demi-god, a natural aristocrat. He holds world meaning in the palm of his hand and is the carrier of the higher values of civilization" (67-68). Ian wishes not only to be free of the mechanizing forces of modern society, but isolates himself in the special sense of "creativity" denoted by early modernists' beliefs. Ian wishes to live in a beautiful relation to the universe. He believes that in relating to "true" astronomical time, he can establish a personal relation to the cosmos. "I have the feeling as of having touched vast forces" (280), Ian claims when he sets up the sundial, "To work directly with worlds—it lifts me out of that little routine of our lives which is itself a clock" (280).

As in a number of the Provincetown satires, another source of humor in *Tickless Time* is the conflict between the Provincetowners' views and those of "conventional" people. Since it is sun-time which is "true" and the world that is false, philistines are seen by these sophisticates as living essentially on an inferior plane. In his dealing with those who have not been initiated, Ian adopts a condescending and superior attitude reminiscent of Graña's "natural aristocrat." However, Ian and Eloise have some difficulty explaining their theory to their friends. Eloise is afraid Alice and Eddy, who had given them a cuckoo clock as a wedding present, "might not understand our burying their clock" (283). Like Stephen and Mabel in *Suppressed Desires*, Eddy and Alice's "more conventional" views bring the play to a bathetic climax. They remind the Joyces of the literary rebel's isolation within bourgeois society—if Ian and Eloise live by "true time" while the world remains "false," then, as their conventional friend Eddy asks, "How will you connect up with other people?" When Ian replies he will only connect up with others on "true time," Eddy remarks,

"I'm afraid you'll be awfully lonely sometimes" (295). The isolation and sense of "superiority" of the modernist artist in relationship to others presented so playfully here will be explored again by Glaspell in *The Verge*.

In the last scene of *Tickless Time*, Glaspell and Cook rely on stereotypes of class that seemed borrowed from Wilbur Daniel Steele's *Not Smart*, where the moderns idealize the native Provincetown people as primitives who have a closer connection with the cosmos in their simplicity. Mrs. Stubbs, the cook, comes out in support of "sun-time." Ian remarks approvingly, "the simple mind has beauty" (315), while Eloise, by this time exasperated with her husband, exclaims, "I want to be simpler" (315). The curtain falls as Eddy and Alice dig up the watches and Mrs. Stubbs concludes, in mock rustic wisdom: "Well, *I* say: let them that want Sun time have Sun time and them that want tick time have tick time" (315).

What is ultimately perhaps most interesting in *Tickless Time* and which links it to Glaspell's full-length works in a way her earlier satires of the Village did not, is the specificity of the parody of the romantic quest for truth, of the possibility of an essentialized nature obtainable simply through the rejection of mechanization. In making this turn against the strain of romantic genius that seeks pastoral idylls, they align themselves with the avant-garde. The New York Dadaists in 291 were embracing the machine and technology far in advance of most of their American contemporaries. If Ozieblo is correct that Glaspell was primarily responsible for the final script of the play, we can see a change in Glaspell's thinking that leads her away from the positive social effects of a new national culture, her husband's project, and

towards a new interrogation of the romantic myth of non-conformism and creativity. This direction leads to Glaspell's most discussed play (aside from *Trifles*), *The Verge*.

Susan Glaspell

"Pollen" (1919)

In 1919, Susan Glaspell published a story called "Pollen" in *Harper's Magazine*, with a protagonist named Ira Meade, a breeder of hybrid corn. Ira Meade bears a strong resemblance to a later character, Ira Morton, in Glaspell's 1921 full-length play *Inheritors*, and both the play and the story deal with American isolationist politics and fear of immigration. This particular set of relations has been admirably explored by Noelia Hernando-Real, who argues that *Inheritors* is Glaspell's "original reply to the isolationist and xenophobic national identity" (186) in the post-World War I environment in the United States. However, there is another aspect to the relation between the Ira Meade of Glaspell's magazine story and the Ira Morton of her drama, the metaphor for creativity associated with both characters: Glaspell presents the creation of hybrid vegetation as a metaphor for artistic creativity, and both Ira characters seem to develop an obsession bordering on madness with their experiments. While Glaspell addressed the problems of the artist, especially the woman artist, in a wide array of her works, the specific elements of the two Ira stories are a special case that need to be explored together. This analysis leads not only to a consideration of "Pollen" and *Inheritors* but also to a consideration of another play of

Glaspell's in which creation of a hybrid strain of vegetation is clearly a metaphor for the creative process, *The Verge*.

What is fascinating about the character of Ira Meade is that he is transformed in Glaspell's two works not only from short story to play, but also from comedy (the prose piece has an apparently happy ending) to the tragedy of *Inheritors*. Moreover, Ira is transformed not only in genre but in gender as well; if he is also a forerunner of Claire Archer of *The Verge*. Glaspell, in seizing upon the vegetative metaphor of hybridization for artistic production, subverts two contradictory yet pervasive metaphors for artistic and literary creation found throughout Western literature. First, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identified in their classic study, *Madwoman in the Attic*, "the pen is a penis": Literature as practiced at least until the twentieth century was a profession that excluded women and whose "major practitioners in their commentaries on the mental process of writing declared women unfit for the occupation" (5), often using language overtly or subliminally suggestive of male sexuality to describe *écriture*. On the other hand, as identified in an important feminist essay by Susan Stanford Friedman, many writers both male and female employ the metaphor of pregnancy to describe artistic creation. As Friedman points out, "this metaphor remains controversial with women writers and readers: it is seen by some as a natural corrective to their exclusion from literary production, and as a natural outgrowth of what French feminists have termed 'writing from the body'" (50). Yet diverse women writers and critics have also rejected this comparison, Friedman notes, "citing the essentialist nature of a biologically based-theory of language and creativity which might be used to reinforce patriarchal identifications of

women as defined only through their reproductive capabilities” (50). I believe it is this last dilemma that occupied Glaspell’s thought in identifying and challenging the relationship of women artists and feminine creativity in her prose and dramaturgy of the early 1920s including “Pollen,” *Inheritors*, and *The Verge*.

“Pollen” opens with the identification of Ira Meade as someone who has eschewed human relations, which throughout the story is connected to absent or broken communication through language: “Ira will do it ‘his own way,’ Mrs. Mead used to say [. . .]. When you spoke you had a feeling that what you had said hadn’t come into direct communication with what he was thinking” (446). Ira, avoiding friends and girls in school, develops precociously in math and becomes a rural scientist. While his friends chase a nag, “Ira became deeply absorbed in the activities of a certain machine as one who had no concern with horses” (446), Glaspell tells us. Just at this moment of his discovery of technology, Ira simultaneously “became more of a farmer than he had been,” as he begins to employ new techniques with the land: “He took to spraying his acres. And trying rotation of crops and doing things to the soil that had never been done to Mead soil before” (447). Soon Ira’s corn is winning prizes at the state fair.

At the realistic level, Glaspell borrows her material from historical context. Policies to introduce modern methods of farm production in American agriculture, called “scientific farming,” were introduced under the administration of Theodore Roosevelt and continued into the New Deal Era: “The Department of Agriculture undertook new research, developing hogs that fattened faster on less grain, fertilizers that boosted grain production, hybrid seeds that developed into healthier plants,

treatments that prevented or cured plant and animal diseases, and various methods for controlling pests” (Diner 121). Such efforts were often met with resistance by many farmers; more efficient methods, many feared, would result in more produce on the market, lowering prices, which is, in fact, what happened over time (Diner 122). Ira Meade’s obsession with machines and mathematics suggests that it is Yankee ingenuity and technology that most interest him in the production of corn. Yet, his obsession with new varieties also appears as a metaphor for modernist artistic experimentation, where new methods of expression were challenging tradition—a persistent theme of Susan Glaspell’s. For Ira, his corn is his art. It is what makes him different from his neighbors, and he begins to derive a sense of superiority from his unique talent:

[Corn] [. . .] was more exciting than there might seem any reason for its being. To study his seed—compare, reject; choosing that which was best, or those kernels of new life which had in common interesting differences from the old life; then to give soil the care that would give seed every chance, to watch over it when it began to grow, guarding it from all that could hurt its health, giving it those things which would let it realize its possibilities to the utmost—to do this was something more than doing his work well—though it was also the incontrovertible testimony that he did do his work well. The corn proved Ira Mead’s supremacy over Balches and Dietzes and all the other people around there. (448)

This sense of superiority is related to the elitism of the moderns, what Caesar Graña

termed the “natural aristocrat” and which Glaspell and Cook gently mocked in *Tickless Time*. However, in “Pollen” Glaspell is more skeptical of isolation. In fact, in Ira’s sense that he does not need communication with others to achieve acts of creation, Glaspell mirrors the attitude of nineteenth-century male writers about the process of writing. While Ira ignores the girl at the neighboring farm who has some romantic interest in him, he relishes his experiments as a form of single sex male procreation:

All Dietzes would have opened wide their eyes at the idea that Ira Mead had that sense of what has been and what may be in which is rooted the instinct of fatherhood. “Some *joke!*” Dietzes would reply. “Why, all he cares about is *corn!*” (448)

Glaspell also questions the connection between this “fatherhood” and God the father. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously identified the misogynist strain in the writing about writing left by many canonical authors since the Renaissance as a reference to divine powers on the part of the poet:

Defining poetry as a mirror held up to nature, the mimetic aesthetic that begins with Aristotle and descends through Sidney, Shakespeare, and Johnson implies that the poet, like a lesser God, has made or engendered an alternative, mirror-universe in which he actually seems to enclose or trap shadows of reality. Similarly, Coleridge's Romantic concept of the human "imagination [. . .]" is of a virile, generative force which echoes "the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" while Ruskin's phallic-sounding "Penetrative Imagination" is a

"possession-taking faculty" and a "piercing...mind's tongue" that seizes, cuts down, and gets at the root of experience in order "to throw up what new shoots it will." In all these aesthetics the poet, like God the Father, is a paternalistic ruler of the fictive world he has created.

(5)

In the last example given by Gilbert and Gubar in this passage, one should note that Ruskin employs a vegetative metaphor for male creation—the metaphor Glaspell turns to frequently, not only in “Pollen,” but also in *Inheritors* and *The Verge*. In fact, Ira Meade’s obsession with (pro)creation in “Pollen” (and that of his counterpart Ira Morton in *Inheritors*) seems analogous to that of Claire Archer in *The Verge* and her hybridization of flowering plants.

“Pollen” ends happily as many of Glaspell’s stories crafted for magazine readers do. Ira finds that he cannot control the process of cross-fertilization because nature, earlier identified in the story with God, takes back the power of procreation as the wind blows the pollen to neighboring fields. Only at this moment does Ira recognize *and* Glaspell represent the reproduction of the corn as sexual reproduction: “There it came—procreative golden dust, the male flower that was in the tassel blowing over to the female flower hidden in the ear” (450). Although at first Ira hates the gold dust, he soon relents and agrees to help his neighbors with their crops. The story ends with Ira knocking on the door of the neighboring farm girl, earlier identified as being a person of many words in contrast to his few, and thus he accepts language, human connection, and sexual reproduction as powers larger than himself.

Inheritors (1921)

If Glaspell follows conventions for magazine fiction by providing a happy ending for “Pollen,” three years later in *Inheritors* she is less willing to believe issues of national and sexual politics can be so easily resolved. Although primarily naturalistic, *Inheritors*, Glaspell’s second full-length drama, continues to demonstrate her interest in modernist formal experimentation. The first act takes place on the Fourth of July, 1879, in a town “just back from the Mississippi” in the Middle West (104). The characters and the action are meant to typify pioneer and American values. Grandmother has fought the Indians but defends them with respect. Her son Silas Morton, a Civil war veteran, resists the entreaties of a carpet bagger and decides to donate a piece of land—a hill near the town—to found a college for the future good of the people. Silas has befriended a fellow veteran, a man originally from Hungary who has lived the American immigrant dream, named Felix Fejevary. In Acts II and III, Glaspell, experimenting with a violation of Aristotelian unities, fast forwards to 1920. We lose the characters we have come to know, and the rest of the action takes place with their descendants.

Now in the midst of the Red Scare and the anti-immigrant hysteria of the early 1920s, most of the second generation is shown to have retained only a debased version of the values on which the vision of the town and the college—and therefore America— were based. Felix Fejevary II is president of Morton College and knuckles under to pressure from a state senator to deport two Hindu students who are protesting and demanding, ironically, independence from Britain. Fejevary also agrees to silence an outspoken professor who had been defending a former student

imprisoned as a conscientious objector. It will be left to Madeline Morton, the granddaughter of the man who donated the land for the college to stand up for and eventually go to prison in support of the South Asian students; Glaspell's heroine has inherited the true American spirit from her grandfather, an example of the modernist use of the trope of the generation-skipping trait. Unfortunately, though, Madeline's father, Ira Morton, will not help her; he wants to retain his farm to continue his obsession with developing new strains of corn, so he will not mortgage it to pay for her defense.

What is interesting about Glaspell's adaptation of her prose character Ira Mead to the stage as Ira Morton is that she does not use the earlier Ira as a sketch for the latter, nor does one sense that Ira Mead exists in a parallel fictive history but, rather, Glaspell tells Ira Morton's story in such a way that it could easily be the sequel to Ira Mead's life. The story is sequential. If "Pollen" ends with the successful union of Ira and Mary Balch, *Inheritors* takes place at a future time when Mary (now Madeleine, the mother of Madeleine the heroine of the play) has died, as has the couple's first born son Fred. The exposition provided sounds like it could have occurred between the end of "Pollen" and the opening of *Inheritors*. In a conversation with Senator Lewis, Felix Fejevary describes the bizarre situation of Ira Morton.

FEJEVARY. No, Ira is not a social being. Fred's death about finished him. He had been—strange for years, ever since my sister died—when the children were little. It was—(again pulled back to that old feeling) under pretty terrible circumstances.

SENATOR. Isn't there something about corn?

FEJEVARY. Yes. His corn has several years taken the prize—best in the state. He's experimented with it—created a new kind. They've given it his name—Morton corn. It seems corn is rather fascinating to work with—very mutable stuff. It's a good thing Ira has it, for it's about the only thing he does care for now. Oh, Madeline, of course. He has a daughter here in the college [. . .] she's a great girl, though—peculiar. (121-22)

When we meet Ira Morton, Glaspell's Gothic stage directions suggest that Madeline is quite aware, not only of her father's eccentricities but that the state of his mental health has deteriorated:

IRA MORTON [. . .] *enters* [. . .]. *He seems hardly aware of MADELINE, but taking a chair near the door, turned from her, opens [a] sack and takes out a couple of ears of corn. As he is bent over them, examining them in a shrewd, greedy way, MADELINE looks at that lean, tormented, rather desperate profile, the look of one confirming a thing she fears.* (143)

Ira's obsession with experimentation drives him both to the brink of madness and to an obsession with ownership—the signature of the romantic artist's work.

Metaphorically, the Ira Morton/Mead character is Glaspell's representation of the darker side of the romantic artist's self-absorption and isolation. Glaspell is exploring and ultimately critiquing the notion of genius derived from nineteenth-century romanticism. That modern artists, despite their protests of anti-traditionalism, still relied on the concept of genius is generally accepted by literary historians. Andrew

W. Smith quoting M. H. Abrams, expresses a view which connects the modernist view of romantic genius to a particular sense of isolation:

there was in romanticism, as there would be for the exiles and expatriates who led the modernist movement, a strong attachment to the idea of the “poet’s painful but necessary isolation, in his creativity” (Abrams 1953: 281). Even more so to the “stereotype of the poète maudit, endowed with an ambiguous gift of sensibility which makes him at the same time more blessed and more cursed than the other members of a society from which he is . . . an outcast” (103). (260)

Ira Morton is Glaspell’s portrait of the decline of romantic genius—debased, self-consumed, isolated and unable to interact with family or anyone in the human community. She constructs the deep wound in the psyche—the deaths of wife and child—and the notion that the artist is “special and set aside from others.” Contrary to modernism’s ostensible break from late Victorian romanticism, the model of individual creativity practiced by many modernists stressed individual consciousness in opposition to community. While Glaspell explores the alienation of the artist-woman in a number of her works, the specific portrait of Ira Mead/Morton she creates serves to critique the central tenet of modernism: male procreative ability. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, the male artist’s central tenet is the metaphor of single sex male creation. Glaspell’s gender politics are advanced in comparison to other modernists and look forward to another age, postmodernism, where skepticism that the artist possesses unique genius and the belief that this elevates “the artist above the run of humanity” is tempered by an understanding of the male generative myth of writing

and that such a myth excludes the woman writer.

The Verge (1921)

Ira's mental disintegration, connected to an excess of romantic imagination and an obsession with science, has a counterpart in Claire Archer's state in Glaspell's *The Verge*. The connection has been noted by several critics, including Veronica Makowsky, who observes, "Claire, like Ira Morton, expresses her autonomy and creativity through her plants, and, also like Ira, she is jealous of her private space" (78). It is undoubtedly in *The Verge* that Glaspell explores and critiques the isolation of the artist in the greatest depth of any of her dramatic works, and it is in this work that she focuses on gender and the reproductive metaphor of the romantic genius in the greatest detail. Glaspell began writing *The Verge* in the summer of 1921 in Provincetown. As Barbara Ozieblo has noted, "Glaspell's disenchantment with her world is manifest in the very subject of *The Verge*. The story of a woman's struggle with the norms and expectations of society [. . .] vibrates with Glaspell's private dilemmas as woman and writer" (182). For this subject, Glaspell chose to abandon many of the tenets of naturalism and embraced modernist theatrical methods, particularly expressionism.

Glaspell had already been incorporating expressionist touches in her work. A satire on the famous conflict at editorial meetings of *The Masses*, which Glaspell called *The People* (1917), evolves from village satire to something new as Glaspell employs symbolic characters and poetic dialogue. The staff of the magazine—characters based on the editors Max Eastman and Floyd Dell, journalist John Reed,

and artist John Sloan, among others, are represented by Glaspell as “The Firebrand,” “The Earnest Approach,” or the “Light Touch.” The play becomes even more expressionistic when “The Woman from Idaho” arrives, who apparently represents the spirit of the people and of the heartland, and provides a poetic dialogue. In *Woman’s Honor* (1918), a play which begins as a broad comedy, Glaspell inserts a parade of symbolic characters that represent different aspects of woman exploited under the patriarchy, such as “the Shielded One,” “the Scornful One,” “the Motherly One,” etc. However, *The Verge* is the most expressionistic of all Glaspell’s work. The stage directions call for a set and *mise en scène* that is twisted and angular:

The Curtain lifts on a place that is dark, save for a shaft of light from below which comes up through an open trap-door in the floor. This slants up and strikes the long leaves and the huge brilliant blossom of a strange plant whose twisted stem projects from right front. Nothing is seen except this plant and its shadow. A violent wind is heard. (58)

In ACT II, Claire’s tower is described equally as twisted:

A tower which is thought to be round but does not complete the circle. The back is curved, then jagged lines break from that, and the front is a queer bulging window—in a curve that leans. The whole structure is as if given a twist by some terrific force—like something wrong. (78)

According to Barbara Ozieblo, Kenneth Macgowan “somewhat grudgingly acknowledged that *The Verge* was the first example of expressionism on the American stage” (188). Macgowan is correct if we limit his comments to full-length plays and, of course, ignore Glaspell’s shorter works I have just mentioned and

Kreymborg's and Barnes's shorter works discussed in Chapter Three of this study. *The Verge* certainly predates *The Hairy Ape* (1921), *The Adding Machine* (1923), *Processional* (1925), and *Machinal* (1928). Ozieblo notes the play "reminded its reviewers of the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), which had drawn a great deal of attention when it opened in New York in early 1921" (188). *The Verge* also became extremely popular with the Village's feminist club, Heterodoxy, as well. As Linda Ben-Zvi explains,

The women of Heterodoxy [. . .] had long been concerned with issues facing independent women, and their discussions certainly provided both inspiration for Susan's play as well as a ready, empathetic audience. It is not surprising therefore that the group heartily embraced her play and devoted an entire meeting to discussing it.

(249)

Because of this debate about the play, the run was extended by eighteen days at the Provincetown Playhouse, then was taken over by the Theater Guild who moved it to the Garrick Theatre. It then reopened in Macdougall Street after the Provincetown Players' production of Theodore Dreiser's *The Hand of the Potter* closed several weeks later (Ben-Zvi 251). Controversy over *The Verge* continues to draw more Glaspell criticism than any of her other plays or prose works, with the exception of *Trifles*.

In Act I of *The Verge*, we meet Claire Archer and the three men in her life, symbolically, Tom, Dick, and Harry. Tom "Edgeworthy" is a spiritual explorer who truly understands Claire's quest to break free of forms and "go beyond," but who has

been a platonic friend only; Dick is a modern artist with whom Claire has recently had an affair; and Harry is her pragmatic and literal husband, an aviator who she married for his adventurousness. We learn that there is concern that Claire is spending too much time in her lab and acting “peculiar.” In Act I, Claire's greenhouse space is invaded by the men because the main house is cold—all of the steam heat has been diverted to maintain Claire’s experiments with hothouse flowers. The humor in the scene is caused by the comic behavior of the men, who act as if they are in a romantic comedy, trying to eat their breakfast in the greenhouse and arguing about the availability of the salt for their eggs. Meanwhile Claire, sounding like a character in a Kokoshka play, speaks strange introspective dialogue, which occasionally is rendered in stanzas that clash with the naturalistic speech of her husband and friends.

Claire expresses her need to achieve “outside” or “otherness” with her creations. These are numerous hybridizations of flowering vines, each one intended to push the plant beyond its previous genetic limits. The pinnacle of her achievement when the play opens is the “Edge Vine” whose name suggests the pushing beyond borders Claire so actively strives for. However, Claire’s obsession with new forms soon causes her to tear up and kill the vine because it is “running back to what it broke out of” (62), a reversion to a previous genetic state. Similarly, Claire rejects her own daughter Elizabeth as too set in the Puritan codes of culture and conduct she has learned in boarding school and from her aunt—the genetic inheritance of the blue blood in Claire’s New England lineage. With the edge vine abandoned, Claire now hangs her hopes on a new flower, the “Breath of Life,” which represents Claire’s pledge to break limits, go to the edge, disassemble any form or limitation. As she

declares, “[. . .] it can be done! We need not be held in forms molded for us. There is outness—and otherness” (64).

Claire’s experimentation is generally regarded as a metaphor for modernism’s disruption of figurative realism and naturalistic conventions. However, in the following conversation with Dick, a modernist painter, Claire articulates a more radical agenda than the painter:

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 together—mad new comings together, and we would know what it is to be born, and then we might know—that we are. Smash it [. . .]. As you'd smash an egg. (64)

It is not just that Claire is articulating an utterly anarchist process of creation/destruction more abstract than Cubism, for example, but that she does this as a woman. In a dialogue with Dick, Claire’s husband laments the direction her experiments have taken:

HARRY. It would be all right if she'd just do what she did in the beginning—make the flowers as good as possible of their kind. That's an awfully nice thing for a woman to do—raise flowers. But there's something about this—changing things into other things—putting things together and making queer new things—this—
DICK. Creating?

HARRY. Give it any name you want it to have—it's unsettling for a

woman. They say Claire's a shark at it, but what's the good of it, if it gets her? What is the good of it, anyway? (65)

Of course, the irony in the line for Glaspell's feminist audience members is that women are always known for creating, i.e., for producing children. What Harry cannot grasp is a woman "creating" anything else—art, for one. In fact, I suspect Glaspell is deliberately offering a response in *The Verge* to the popular conception that a woman can not be an artist without sacrificing her natural procreative and nurturing powers, a subject that has emerged in other Village plays discussed in this study including her husband George Cook's *The Athenian Women*. I would suggest that Glaspell, though, is making a direct response to the notions about women artists discussed in other recent plays, most notably Rachel Crothers's *A Man's World* (1913) and *He and She* (1920). In the latter, produced the season before *The Verge*, Crothers portrays a woman sculptor who must surrender her art and a large commission to take charge of her unruly teenage daughter. Glaspell deliberately reverses this situation in *The Verge* when Claire's daughter Elizabeth visits from boarding school. Elizabeth is so boring that we ask not whether Claire is fit to be her mother, as her husband and sister do, but rather whether Elizabeth is fit to be Claire's daughter. As Elizabeth claims, "But you see I don't do anything interesting, so I have to have good manners" (74). When Claire asks her what she has been doing at school, she replies, "Oh—the things one does" (74). Elizabeth wants to help her mother, believing her experiments will add to the "wealth of the world" (75), and she is completely unprepared for the intensity of her mother's declaration of experiment for experiment's sake:

ELIZABETH. 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!

ELIZABETH. But, mother—of course you are. To produce a new
and better kind of plant—

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

ELIZABETH. But—but what are they then?

CLAIRE. (*as if choked out of her*) They're different.

ELIZABETH. (*thinks a minute, then laughs triumphantly*) But what's
the use of making them different if they aren't better? (75-76)

Claire's husband Harry and sister Adelaide will conclude at the end of Act I that Claire is not able to take care of Elizabeth; Adelaide admonishes Claire, crying, "A mother who does not love her own child! You are an unnatural woman," (84). Claire rejects the role of mother—as she will later reject the role of wife and mistress. However, Glaspell's portrait of the extreme of the dilemma of the artist woman and child does not ultimately reinforce the view that Claire is incapable of caring for her child, but rather that it is her choice to not do so. The scene does not reify the idea of an essentialist concept of woman with a mystical bond between mother and child, but rather suggests this connection is socially constructed.

Claire's distancing herself emotionally from Elizabeth and her family connections is followed in Act II by a scene in which Claire physically isolates herself in her cracked tower, where Adelaide and Harry intrude to confront her about meeting a nerve specialist. The debate takes an interesting turn when Glaspell raises

once again the issue of the superiority and isolation of the romantic artist:

CLAIRE. (*the first resentment she has shown*) You two feel very superior, don't you?

ADELAIDE. I don't think we are the ones who are feeling superior.

CLAIRE. Oh, yes, you are. Very superior to what you think is my feeling of superiority, comparing my—isolation with your 'heart of humanity.' Soon we will speak of the beauty of common experiences, of the—Oh, I could say it all before we come to it.

(80)

This is a metadramatic moment in the play; it is no longer a drama just about an artist's isolation, but about the conversation about artist's isolation. The aristocratic stature of Claire's creative distance is presumed from the outset, with the conventional characters assuming she feels cultured and superior. Yet Claire is beyond this and no longer cares, other than to block the recourse to concepts of universal human nature or morality to which she presumes her interlocutors will resort.

At the end of Act II, Tom "Edgeworthy" visits Claire in her tower. He intends to tell her he is going away to India forever to follow a spiritual path. Tom and Claire have a spiritual bond—his pursuit of religion is an attempt to "go beyond" the world and gives him insight into her needs of "otherness." So far he has loved her platonically so that their relationship remains on a plain beyond ordinary love. By leaving, he believes he will preserve the uniqueness of their relationship. Tom asks Claire, "Isn't it our beauty and our safeguard that underneath our separate lives, no

matter where we may be, with what other, there is this open way between us? That's so much more than anything we could bring to being" (85). But now Claire, always breaking the norm, decides to consummate their relationship. She moves gradually closer and closer to him. Tom tells her, "You stand alone in a clearness that breaks my heart" (86), but he doesn't want an ordinary sexual relationship with her: "We'd only stop in the country where everyone stops." He emphasizes that he is the "lover" of her "apartness" (86). The scene is interrupted by the sound of a phonograph Harry is playing below in the house and is not resolved.

In the climactic scene in Act III, Tom returns, having made up his mind to be with Claire. They kiss and the possibility of both physical and spiritual union exists. However, at the last moment, Tom loses his sensitivity to Claire's resistance to form as he changes and becomes more typically male—protective and possessive— "I love you, and I will keep you—from fartherness—from harm. You are mine, and you will stay with me! (*roughly*) You hear me? You will stay with me!" (99). Claire exclaims, "No! You are *too much!* You are *not enough.*" Finally she cries ironically, "Breath of Life—my gift—to you!" (99) as she strangles him, resisting any final capitulation to structure suggested by their union.

Glaspell connects Claire to the notion of genius by vesting in her God-like powers over her creations—and eventually power over Tom's life. Claire sings the following lament just prior to the murder:

I've wallowed at a coarse man's feet,
I'm sprayed with dreams we've not yet come to.
I've gone so low that words can't get there,

I've never pulled the mantle of my fears around me
And called it loneliness— And called it God
Only with life that waits have I kept faith. (98-99)

The loneliness of the artist is Claire's connection to the divine. She is Glaspell's experiment, a woman creator who usurps the traditionally male role of divine artist. Barbara Ozieblo, in an important article about the play, identifies the combination of madness and God-like power in Claire. Claire's respectable sister Adelaide attempts to convince Claire to play the part of the "dutiful mother and wife," but as Ozieblo explains, "Claire is too close to transcendence to take heed; now on the brink of uncovering her latest experiment, the plant she calls 'Breath of Life,' she is staggered by fear of retaliation from the God whose life-giving powers she has appropriated [. . .]" (116). Ozieblo goes on to compare *The Verge* to Ibsen's *A Doll House*:

Claire does not merely slam the door behind her; she encroaches on forbidden territory in her passion to create new life forms. In a man her Nietzschean over reaching would be considered a normal function of aggression; in a woman it amounts to the arrogation of faculties reserved for God—and for men. Claire has rejected the roles of wife, mother, and mistress that are open to her and rebels against the suppression of self that society would enforce upon a woman, only to discover that the penalty is total alienation. (117)

Ozieblo's identification of the "arrogation of faculties reserved for God—and for men" suggests that Claire is a promethean figure, stealing the fire reserved for the Gods. The theme explored by Glaspell through the characters of Ira Meade and Claire

Archer and the issue of artistic creation as procreation are highly reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Ur-text of this debate, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Interestingly, J. Ellen Gainor connects George Cram Cook's play *The Spring* with his wife's work in *The Verge*, suggesting that in the latter, Glaspell developed an idea of Cook's to write a play based on the life of the alchemist Paracelsus (*Susan Glaspell* 144-45). Paracelsus's attempts to create an infant from male sperm alone are referenced by Mary Shelley (Roberts 70). Gainor also cites English scholar Julie Hollidge, who observed *The Verge* was in the "Faustian literary tradition," which includes *Frankenstein* (qtd. in Gainor, *Susan Glaspell* 161).

Indeed, Glaspell deconstructs the male Promethean myth in *The Verge* with materials similar to those used by Mary Shelley. Marie Mulvey Roberts, in "The Male Scientist, Man-Midwife, and Female Monster: Appropriation and Transmutation in *Frankenstein*," examines the relationship between authorial gender, the Promethean creation, and the conception of romantic genius. Like Glaspell's characters, one remembers Shelley's Victor Frankenstein was a man of science. Roberts maintains Shelley "allegorizes the way in which science is not always in control of its metaphors by reminding us that men can lose control of the monsters they themselves create" (59). Moreover, Roberts sees that the Frankenstein monster, "of woman born in a literary sense, is a dire warning of the dangers of solitary paternal propagation"(64)—the theme which Glaspell also explores.

Much of Roberts's article offers details about the relationship of romanticism to "solitary propagation," its exploration by male writers, and Mary Shelley's reappropriation of the myth. It is productive to quote Roberts at length here:

Mary Shelley's creation of a fictional monstrosity rejects an Aristotelian identification between women and the monstrous by showing that male creativity can itself produce monsters [. . .]. At the same time, the Frankenstein creation may be seen as a trope for the monstrosities produced by the female imagination; such monstrosities are shaped by patriarchal anxieties surrounding the woman writer who has shifted her creativity from the exclusively biological to the cerebral. Not surprisingly, male Romantic artists and scientists who appropriated the female experience of pregnancy and birth through metaphoric [. . .] language encountered such deep-seated concerns.

(59)

When discussing the woman writer shifting "her creativity from the exclusively biological to the cerebral," Roberts suggests the arena Gilbert and Gubar's history of male writers' claims for literary production to be off-limits to women. As Roberts continues,

Literary creativity was another route by which solitary male propagation could generate a "higher" form of life. I am thinking of the Romantic movement's mystification of creativity and genius—an aesthetic grounded in a mystique that is biologically and culturally male and through which the Romantic poet is heralded as inspired and God-like. Myths of origin and creation are central to the Romantic consciousness and provide a matrix for a rhetoric of reproduction.

(65)

Glaspell critiques this view of male (pro)creativity in *Inheritors*; the “higher” form of life Ira Morton has created can not compete with an actual woman, his daughter Madeline.

However, feminine monsters offer a challenge as well. For Roberts, one strategy to counter male romanticism for women writers is through androgyny (Roberts believes the Frankenstein monster is essentially androgynous [69].) Glaspell hints at androgyny in *The Verge* as a further development from the romantic artist’s gendered creation metaphors first introduced in the short story “Pollen.” We must note that unlike the corn in her story “Pollen,” which initially is solely created by a man, but which later is represented through the reproduction of both sexes (when Ira presumably marries the Balch daughter), Glaspell does not comment on the gender of Claire’s creations themselves: both the Edge Vine and the Breath of Life are described in the stage directions in symbolic language apparently designed significantly to test the skills of the scenic artist (Cleon Throckmorton, who created the demanding set for the Provincetown Players’ production). However, the language that describes the plants is absent of gendered metaphors; Glaspell uses neither the phallic image nor the metaphor of pregnancy associated with many of the writers identified by Gilbert, Gubar, and Friedman.

Roberts’s conception of androgyny, she argues, opens up new territory for the female writer:

the androgyne is a potentially potent resource for women writers, especially if it is perceived as a refractory symbol capable of bearing endless permutations, rather than as a nexus for gendered polarities.

By keeping its polyvalency in sight we are prevented from defaulting into a perception of androgyny as a signifier for a dyadic reductionism that seeks to privilege the male principle. On this model the female principle emerges as dynamic instead of passive and thus escapes the dichotomous positioning with the male in which it is identified as “the other.” (69)

Roberts’s analysis of Shelley is germane for Glaspell’s Gothic expressionism. Glaspell inverts the privileged male principle of divine creation by casting a woman as an extreme example of the romantic genius of science and showing the fear the male characters have of the monsters of feminine creation. However, Glaspell nonetheless resists, as Claire resists, the stereotypical fears of the woman artist as “unnatural woman” by embracing and then transcending these social constructions. Inspired by Mary Shelley, Glaspell uses androgyny as one method to challenge what Roberts calls the “male reproductive discourse” (71). Claire’s obsession in *The Verge* is, if for nothing else, for polyvalency and the possibility of “endless permutations.” Ultimately, to break with the romantic conception of the artist and the metaphors for solitary or sexual procreation, Glaspell deconstructs her own play and thus prevents gender binaries. The conclusion of *The Verge* reveals Glaspell’s suspicion of the tidiness of the high modernist work, a work that celebrates experimental form but that in its structural unities asserts its autonomy. Glaspell, in fact, parodies modernists in the character of “Dick,” the artist with whom Claire has had an affair. As Sharon Friedman points out:

Claire's lover, Dick, an unmistakable parody of a high modernist, also fails to comprehend Claire's vision and establish an intimate bond beyond an illicit affair. An artist lost in abstraction, he can only appreciate the formal properties of something new, but not the life of it. (51)

The formal experimentations of the modernist that appear to be in sympathy with Claire's desire to "smash things up" are too pat. Claire's vision can never be contained in a single work of art; this is clear in Claire's willingness utterly to destroy her creations as soon as they settle into form. As Richard Murphy argues, and as was mentioned in Chapter Three of this study, the ending of an expressionist play not only resists closure but, by making its audience conscious of their participation in an argument about form, provides a critique of the institution of art—or of theatre or modernism—defying autonomous structure.

Glaspell thus critiques the mad scientist, the mad genius model of artistic inspiration, in *The Verge*, what has been called "the mad genius controversy," "the tendency[. . .] to regard the genius' alleged propensity for dangerous thought and action as rooted in a pathological condition," where the genius is "seen as a victim of compulsion—a compulsion dictated by his own particular constitution" (Becker 36). Simultaneously, by depicting a woman as usurping the traditional role reserved for men, Glaspell creates a powerful feminine character who is in utter defiance of the roles and social structures imposed on her. Although Glaspell relies on naturalistic convention to provide her play with a climax, she does not provide final closure as to the meaning of that conclusion. Are we supposed to find Claire reprehensible as the

furthest extension of creative genius, of the artist modeled on the myth of solitary male procreation? Do we instead identify with Claire's insurgent desire to wrest the creative fire from the male gods and produce the androgyne as a compromise principle of creation? In "Pollen," sexual reproduction symbolizes the success of the experiment and communion with others. In *Inheritors*, experimentation is obsessive—a product of an unhealthy isolation—that ultimately works against the daughter Madeline, a product of a sexual union and the upholder of the virtues of the community. *The Verge* appears at first consistent with these other works; again the isolation of genius works against the child of sexual union and also against all creative products of the experiment. However, Claire's human child is a failed experiment. Sexual union is prevented through the murder of Tom because Claire will not allow her feelings for Tom to solidify, to form a stasis with traditional gender power relations. To resist procreation as a woman's natural destiny in 1921 was a subversive strike against convention and consistent in other ways with Glaspell's gender politics. In the ending of *The Verge*, Glaspell does not resolve the issue of the romanticism of the mad scientist; she shows both the limits of genius—and also a compelling usurpation of Promethean fire by a woman.

Eugene O'Neill

I wish to conclude my survey of the Provincetown Players' metaplays of modernism by discussing several plays by Eugene O'Neill. The play which most closely fits the expressionist model discussed in this chapter in reference to Susan Glaspell's *The Verge* and in the previous chapter of this study in addition to the plays

of Alfred Kreymborg and Djuna Barnes, is, of course, O'Neill's expressionist *The Hairy Ape* (1922), the last of his plays produced by the original Provincetown Players. However, because *The Hairy Ape* has received a great deal of criticism and because comparisons between *The Hairy Ape* and *The Verge* such as that by Brenda Murphy have recently been made, I wish to explore instead a less-well known path in O'Neill's writing for the Provincetown Players—three plays that directly show O'Neill's interest in the kinds of self-referential issues about the artist that engaged the other writers for the Players. These three plays are *Bread and Butter* (written 1913-14), completed before O'Neill's involvement with the Provincetown Players, and *Before Breakfast* (1916) and *Now I Ask You* (written 1916, revised 1917), both completed in O'Neill's first year with the company.

O'Neill appeared in Greenwich Village in the fall of 1915 after his seafaring days, his brief first marriage to Kathleen Jenkins, his year at Princeton, and his days hanging out in the waterfront dive, Jimmy-the-Priest's. He frequented dive bars on the edge of the Village, removed from the more central tea-shops and restaurants with their pirate, gypsy, or Arabian themes *à la bohème*. O'Neill spent much of the winter 1915-16 on the edges of the Village at Luke O'Connor's saloon (known as the Working Girls' Home) at the junction of Greenwich and Sixth Avenues with Eighth Street and then more famously at the "Hell Hole," the Golden Swan saloon, another Irish bar at Sixth Avenue and Fourth Streets. Here the young poet-playwright associated with the mix of teamsters, truck drivers, thugs, artists, pimps, gamblers, and streetwalkers that frequented the Hell Hole, where he was a regular in the dimly lit backroom, reciting poetry and writing verse imitative of Beaudelaire (Sheaffer 70).

One of the people O'Neill met here was the homeless anarchist Terry Carlin. Carlin taught O'Neill how to live on the street, how to squat in empty apartments, and how to survive on the free lunches offered to Hell Hole regulars while paying for whiskey with money from panhandling (Gelb and Gelb 319).

As the heat of the summer of 1916 hit New York, Carlin and O'Neill ventured to Provincetown, where Carlin first introduced O'Neill to Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce, who likely invited him to Cook and Glaspell's cottage. According to Susan Glaspell, the company was stunned by a reading of *Bound East for Cardiff*, a script from 1914 that O'Neill had brought with him. They then produced the play on July 28th, which became O'Neill's world premiere. However, on his way to Provincetown from New York, a journey by steamer and railroad, and likely while he was in Provincetown or living in a shack in nearby Truro with Carlin, O'Neill worked on two new plays: the monologue *Before Breakfast*, which was probably written in early July before the premiere of *Bound East for Cardiff* (Floyd 99) and was staged by the Provincetown Players in New York in the fall of 1916, and O'Neill's earliest surviving comedy, *Now I Ask You*, based on an earlier melodrama of his, *Servitude* (written 1914). O'Neill would revise and copyright *Now I Ask You* in the spring of 1917 (Floyd 103), but it has never been produced.

Bread and Butter (1913-14)

O'Neill also had created one earlier drama featuring an artist hero called *Bread and Butter* before meeting the Provincetown Players. This play opens as a comedy on the domestic life of the Brown family, the father a self-made hardware store

merchant, and O'Neill scholars Virginia Floyd and Robert Dowling liken the play to the opening of O'Neill's only produced comedy *Ah, Wilderness* (1933). The last act ends tragically, however, in a somewhat sudden change of mood and plot. In Act I, we meet the whole of the Brown clan, including John Brown, the son who was able to go to Princeton and whose father now plans to send to law school. However, John is a sensitive artist who is "*an altogether different type from the other members of the family; a finer, more sensitive organization [. . .] his naturally dark complexion has been burnt to a gold bronze by the sun. His hair, worn long and brushed straight back from his forehead, is black, as are his abnormally large dreamer's eyes, deep-set and far apart [. . .] when he experiences any emotion his whole face lights up with it*" (123). John announces to the consternation of his father that he wants to go to art school rather than pursue a career in law. John also announces he has become engaged to his sweetheart Maude Steele, which causes a reaction from his older brother Edward, who has long been in love with Maude. Finally, Steele, John's father-in-law-to-be, pays a call, and, convinced John could make a fortune in advertising, encourages Brown to send John to Art School in New York for a year while Maude waits.

Act II takes place a year and a half later in John's studio in New York and we meet his three bohemian roommates—Babe Carter, Steve Harrington, both painters, and Ted Nelson, a writer. John looks older, less confident, and his face exposes "*lines of worry*" and "*an unhealthy city pallor*" (135). John is paid a visit by his father who tells him to return to suburban Bridgeport where Steele has made him a job offer.

The father also discovers Babe Carter and John's sister Bessie are developing a secret relationship of which he disapproves, although John defends the match.

John's roommates inform Grammont, the head of the art school, a character O'Neill likely based on the painter Robert Henri, that John's father may try to convince him to return to his family. Earlier Grammont tells John, "Never in my long experience as a teacher have I met a young man who gave finer promise of becoming a great artist [. . .]. He has the soul, he has everything" (139).

In the conversation between John and his father, we learn that he disapproves of the nude drawings hanging in the apartment, and we are reminded of the basic tensions between bohemia and the philistinism of the middle-class with its Puritan fear of artists' models. "There may be other attractions to this career of yours besides a lofty ideal" (144), his father snipes. Grammont enters and Brown insinuates the only reason for his wishing to retain John as a student is for the tuition money. Grammont leaves, exhorting John, "Be true to yourself, John, remember!" (148). Brown, additionally concerned by the drinking in this environment, cuts John off from his allowance: "Starve awhile, and see how much bread and butter this high art will bring you!" (148-49). Act III takes place again at the artists' studio four months later. Maude and Mrs. Brown arrive to try to convince John to return home. Brother Edward also appears, accusing John of seeing low women and cheating on Maude. John initially refuses to go home again, not wanting to return a failure from his art career, but this nearly forces a split between him and Maude. They reconcile in the final scene, and he agrees to go with her, marry her, and accept the job offer from her father.

Act IV takes place two and a half years into Maude and John's marriage, and it is here the play shifts from Broadway comedy to a bleak O'Neill tragedy. Maude "*is still pretty but has faded, grown prim and hardened, has lines of fretful irritation about her eyes and mouth and wears the air of one who has been cheated in the game of life and knows it; but will even up the scale by making those around her as wretched as possible*" (166). She has become a nag to John, who responds by spending most of his time drunk at taverns leading to rumors about other women. John is suffocating in the philistine small town atmosphere. Maude discusses divorce with Edward, now the Mayor and on his way to Congress. Edward eggs Maude on, of course, promising to be there for her. John's sister Bessie, now happily married to John's old roommate Babe Carter, pays a visit, and informs him of his old roommates' now-burgeoning art careers. Learning of the unhappiness in the marriage, Bessie encourages John to run away with her and Babe to Paris. However, John explains to Bessie that he has lost all ambition now. After a final screed from Maude on how she will never give him a divorce, John Brown climbs the stairs and shoots himself with a revolver in his bedroom.

Travis Bogard believes the portrait of marriage in *Bread and Butter* is "modeled after Strindberg's denunciation of the marital state, the play expands its focus to include a depressing picture of its hero's attempts to live a creative life in a middle-class American society" (35). Bogard also believes that the play is similar to other of the early plays that O'Neill later disavowed, noting "the emphasis on the need for individual freedom to pursue a creative life recalls certain of the early arguments in *Servitude*, and the animosity displayed toward the materialists has a parallel in the

view taken of the husband in *Recklessness* and the Business Man in *Fog*” (37). However, Bogard argues *Bread and Butter* “contains none of the concept of ironic fate, nor the sense that a blind spirit controls the affairs of men. There is no expression of the Dionysian immersion of the will, and, for once, O’Neill does not permit the social context of the play to give way to private exploration” (37). Bogard does acknowledge the importance of O’Neill’s self-portrait here for his future work and that the character of John Brown resembles Robert Mayo in *Beyond the Horizon* and Dion Anthony in the *Great God Brown*. The conflict of the two brothers over the girl, and the fact that each is forced to live the life the other should have led—John wishing to leave home and pursue the artistic life but forced to stay; Edward, who wished to have the life in Bridgetown, is being led by his career away to Washington—is very similar to *Beyond the Horizon*. However, throughout *Bread and Butter*, there is little introspection on the part of the characters, little in the way of obvious psychological forces influencing their behaviors, or a sense of high tragedy; it is rather a play of social ideas after the manner of Shaw’s or Ibsen’s more topical plays.

Thus *Bread and Butter* can be seen to be part of the early modernist self-analysis of the artist that the Provincetown Players were very much engaged in, an analysis of the effects of the modern on young middle-class adherents of the American Renaissance, but there are significant differences as well. Robert Dowling has pointed out the following about *Bread and Butter*: “The play is, at bottom, a conflict between bourgeois expectations and modernist individualism [. . .] the Brown sitting room is hopelessly middle-class, devoid of any artistic *élan* [. . .]” (1: 83). Further,

in comparing the philosophy espoused by Richard Miller in *Ah, Wilderness!* and John Brown in *Bread and Butter*, Dowling concludes that Brown espouses the doctrine of philosophical anarchism that O'Neill had also adopted at an early age, particularly as represented by German philosopher Max Stirner and his most popular text *The Ego and His Own* (1844):

John intones the egoist's line in Act 2 that "[Bessie's] duty to herself stands before her duty to you." "Rot! Damned rot!" Brown rejoins, "only believed by a lot of crazy Socialists and Anarchists" (142). John continues with a line that might have come directly from Stirner, who held ownership of the self, what he called "ownness," above all considerations: "You consider your children to be your possessions, your property, to belong to you. You don't think of them as individuals with ideas and desires of their own" (143). (1: 34)

As important early O'Neill self-portraiture and as anarchist-idea play, *Bread and Butter* is O'Neill's first contribution to the genre of the artist play, a genre I have argued existed prior to the advent of the Provincetown Players but was applied in specific new ways owing to the contexts of their productions. However, we must acknowledge that *Bread and Butter* lacks the context of a production with fellow artists. It is self-reflexive for O'Neill and important to the autobiographical development of his work, but it is not part of a conversation about the role of the artist with an audience that had the same concerns. Interestingly, though, *Bread and Butter* has some strong resemblances to *Change Your Style*, George Cram Cook's satire of bohemian modern artists discussed in Chapter Two of this study. As in Cook's play,

we have the antics of the bohemian roommates, the bourgeois father who visits and threatens to cut off the allowance if fine art is not abandoned in favor of a practical career, and the conflict between the bourgeois father and the head of the art school over the cost of an art education and motivations of the instructor. It is highly unlikely George Cram Cook read O'Neill's play while composing *Change Your Style* in 1915 because the two did not meet until 1916. The similarities may be explained in a common source, but so far I have not located it. An important difference between the two plays is that Cook presents us with a detailed explanation of the artistic philosophy of free-expression. In temperament this is very much related to the philosophical anarchism of O'Neill's John Brown and Grammont, but Cook is more focused on the social and economic situation of art, in addition to the foibles of his characters. In the quick sale and return of his abstract painting, young Marmaduke has allowed it to be interpreted by his prospective customers, first as the "Eye of God" then as "the eye of the navel," but he does tell them, "It doesn't represent anything. It's just itself. It doesn't imitate anything. It's pure creation" (294). Moreover, Bordfelt's comment at the end of the play, no doubt tongue-in-cheek, about artistic endowment nonetheless expresses Cook's real attitude: "All artists ought to be supported as defectives. Then we'd be free to do real stuff" (299). In the subscription flyers Cook prepared and distributed each season for the Provincetown Players, he often reminded his audience the theatre was "not endowed" (Provincetown Players. Subscription Circular.). He mentions it so frequently that I am certain that he would have, like Bordfelt, welcomed a public endowment—a liberal socialist idea about art in culture.

Thus Cook is more interested in the issue of art in the play, and is less concerned with the conflict of characters. O'Neill creates a situation that involves artistic ambition, but he is more concerned with the fate of a character whose ideals have been stifled and who is forced to live a life not of his own choosing. In fact, John Brown tells us little of his ideals about art—his pursuit of it is really what Hitchcock called the MacGuffin, the element the character is motivated by but that the audience doesn't care about. In fact, O'Neill began writing *Bread and Butter* in 1913, the year of the Armory Show exhibition of modern art, but he chooses Impressionism for John's painting style. O'Neill was either not aware of the Armory Show or was deliberately trying not to be contemporary; he references a well-known Parisian school a suburban audience would be familiar with, suggesting he was thinking of a middle-class audience for the play. This is contrasted with his later farce, *Now I Ask You*, in which the painter is part of the very recent American Synchronist school. Thus *Bread and Butter* is less concerned with aesthetic theories and politics than other Village plays. Therefore it is not a "self-critique" of modernism—what I have argued in Chapter Two may be considered as incipient avant-gardism.

Before Breakfast (1916)

Travis Bogard connects the portrait of marriage in *Bread and Butter* with O'Neill's reading of Strindberg, particularly *The Father*. Bogard believes O'Neill imitates the Swedish master by portraying marriage as a prison which suffocates the individual. *Before Breakfast* continues this examination of marriage, Bogard writes,

and is primarily an imitation of another Strindberg piece, *The Stronger* (1888-89). O'Neill follows his model by composing a monologue, which "is spoken to a silent listener by a woman who seeks to triumph in a sexual battle" (77). But Bogard also calls O'Neill's effort a "paltry affair" when compared to the original because O'Neill often inserted autobiographical characters in his imitations of Strindberg, and thus "missed Strindberg's sophistication" (77).

If *Before Breakfast* interests O'Neill scholars, it is usually as a technical experiment. Provincetown Player Edna Kenton quoted O'Neill that he aimed to test "how long an audience will stand for a monologue. . . . How much are they going to stand before they begin to break?" (44). The play is thus often seen as a sketch for O'Neill's longer ground-breaking monologue *The Emperor Jones* of four years later. However, what is also clear about *Before Breakfast* is that it reflects O'Neill's first expression of his contact with Greenwich Village and the Provincetown Players. In *Before Breakfast*, O'Neill advances his own critical stance towards the life of the "downer" artist and the myth of the bohemian life. It thus resembles the other "He and She" plays of Dell, Glaspell, Cook, and other Players. O'Neill's playlet offers a self-criticism of the lifestyle he led in the Village about this time, and offers a critique of his Village poet's aspirations as an alcoholic and an aesthete whose poetic yearnings succeed in attracting women to his maternal needs, continuing his dissolution and aiding his avoidance of social responsibility. It is a criticism of one type of aestheticist bohemia—although O'Neill is also unremittingly savage in his satire of the philistine housewife as well.

In the play, a shabbily dressed Mrs. Rowland nags her husband, who is offstage shaving. Her biggest complaint is that all he does is drink “and loaf around bar rooms with that good-for-nothing lot of artists from the Square” (393) or spends his time “writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy” (393) rather than trying to find a job so the couple can pay the rent on their cold water flat. Such barbs are directed towards a Village audience, rather than the imagined Broadway audience of *Bread and Butter*. The play is primarily naturalistic in its determinism—it depicts the squalor of the flat and the character of Mrs. Rowland, the vivacity and sexuality of her youth being erased by the financial and spiritual poverty of her life. She is described by O’Neill’s stage directions with hair a “*drab-colored mass on top of her round head*”(393) and as otherwise worn down: “*She is of medium height and inclined to a shapeless stoutness, accentuated by her formless blue dress, shabby and worn. Her face is characterless* [. . .] . *She is in her early twenties but looks much older*” (393). Mrs. Rowland is everything the sparkling dream of garret life is not supposed to be, and the only outlet she finds for her frustrations is to ridicule her husband’s practical failures in pursuit of artistic recognition: “You say you can't get a job,” she harps. “That's a lie and you know it. You never even look for one. All you do is moon around all day writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy—” (393). Alfred remains invisible, worn down and erased, but for one glimpse of his hand as he reaches around for a bowl of hot water. Famously, O’Neill made his last onstage appearance as the hand in the Provincetown Players’ production in the fall of 1916. The hand is also effeminate. O’Neill describes it as the hand of an aesthete: “a sensitive hand

with slender fingers. It trembles and some of the water spills on the floor” (395).

Alfred is a poet so delicate as to be vulnerable to the slightest disturbance, let alone the wife’s verbal barrage. He is reminiscent of the Aesthete poet in John Reed’s long poem “A Day in Bohemia” discussed in Chapter Two of this study.

If there is plot in the sketch, it revolves around the wife’s finding a love letter in her husband’s coat pocket from a “Helen.” O’Neill’s stage directions indicate that the wife is actually delighted at the discovery because it gives her more ammunition to use on Alfred and results in her signature speech:

I knew all the time you were running around with some one [. . .].

Who is this Helen, anyway? One of those artists? Or does she write poetry, too? Her letter sounds that way. I’ll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? (396)

Helen, as it turns out, is pregnant and the wife wants to know if she will go to “one of those Doctors” (397). It is the wife’s final harping on Helen, in fact, that pushes Alfred over the edge. Mrs. Rowland indicates she would never let him go, never divorce him after “all you’ve made me go through” (398)—very much like Maude Steele of *Bread and Butter*. Finally, when she calls Helen “a common street-walker” (398), we hear a “stifled groan of pain from the next room” (398) and as Mrs. Rowland looks into the bathroom she discovers Alfred dead on the floor from having sliced his throat. The play ends as she runs shrieking into the outer hallway.

Undoubtedly, as Travis Bogard suggests, there is more than a little autobiography in O’Neill’s playlet. The story the wife gives of her seduction by the

poet, sounds not unlike what might have occurred in O'Neill's first marriage, and some of the details of Alfred's life sound like O'Neill's. "I've a good notion to go home," the wife threatens, "if I wasn't too proud to let them know what a failure you've been—you, the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard graduate, the poet, the catch of the town—Huh!" (397). Of course, O'Neill was the millionaire actor James O'Neill's son and a Princeton drop-out who had recently taken playwriting at Harvard. The philistine Mrs. Rowland provides the back-story that Alfred married her after "getting her into trouble"(395) as O'Neill had with Kathleen Jenkins. Mrs. Rowland was apparently enamored of Alfred's artistic persona and dreams: "I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through!" (397).

This autobiographical identification with the character of the poet—and the actual participation by O'Neill as the hand of the poet—are typical of the kinds of self-referentiality seen in the other Provincetown Players artist satires. The play may have been an opportunity for O'Neill to emulate Strindberg with a technical experiment that incidentally includes references to bohemia. However, I would suggest that O'Neill may have deliberately chosen *The Stronger* as a model precisely because he was attempting to write a Provincetown satire. *The Stronger* is already a bohemian comedy: Strindberg's characters, Madame X and Mademoiselle Y, are actresses who meet at a sophisticated café for theatre women.

In *Before Breakfast*, O'Neill's self-referential comments about "artists at the square" would have undoubtedly provoked guffaws from an audience of artists and writers in the Playwright's Theatre on MacDougal Street in 1916, as would the

portrait of the poet aesthete, who is unable to speak up concerning all the things about which Villagers were known to be so vocal—new love, the importance of poetry, the justification for the bohemian subculture. Meanwhile, Mrs. Rowland’s drabness is a sign of the price of conformity and the oppression of Philistine culture. Perhaps O’Neill was attempting to create a play that he could use as a first submission to the Provincetown Players but then changed his mind and presented them with *Bound East for Cardiff* instead. The references to bohemia in *Before Breakfast* may instead simply be the result of O’Neill absorbing realistic local elements from his new environment. In either case, the proximity of the creation of the play to his meeting with the central cabal of Village elite represented by the Players, and the self-critical nature of *Before Breakfast* identify it as O’Neill’s contribution to the bohemian artist drama. Like a number of the other Provincetown satires, O’Neill critiques the art for art’s sake side of bohemianism—aestheticism—but he is less concerned with the “social inconsequentiality” of aestheticist art that Burger identifies in the avant-garde. However, O’Neill does imply the over-indulgence of the poet in the bohemian lifestyle makes him less fit for human relationships; similarly to Glaspell’s critique of “genius,” O’Neill is aware of the failure of aestheticist artists to find community.

Now I Ask You (1916-17)

O’Neill called *Now I Ask You*, his earliest surviving comedy, a “Three Act Farce-Comedy” and apparently began it during the summer of 1916 in Provincetown when he joined the Provincetown Players. He abandoned it in New York in the fall and resumed composition in March-April of 1917 (Floyd 103).⁸⁷ The play is

remarkable for a number of reasons. First, O'Neill seems to be in a remarkably good mood throughout the piece—there is a threatened suicide, for example, but the gun is not loaded. Virginia Floyd deems it a rewrite of the earlier *Servitude*, and says that it is “about a woman’s twofold desire to realize her potential as an individual and to escape the slavery of the marriage bond” (103).

In a prologue, we watch Lucy Ashleigh put a revolver to her head while the voices of her husband Tom Drayton and her friend Leonora Barnes are heard in the hallway. The gun goes off as the curtain comes down, so the audience does not learn the outcome. The action of the play begins sometime before and leads up to the fateful moment. Lucy, as it turns out, is a devotee of all the new theories of the Little Renaissance and tortures her conventional fiancé Tom and her parents Richard and Mrs. Ashleigh with her theoretical antics and the various long-haired Greenwich Village types she drags home to their respectable suburban villa. Mrs. Ashleigh explains her daughter to her father as a girl who is not in any real trouble but “its her youth—effervescence of an active mind striving to find itself, needing an outlet somewhere” (403). The dialogue in the first act provides a catalogue of all the new movements, something that resembles the first Village farce, Dell’s *St. George in Greenwich Village*, discussed in Chapter Two of this study. Ashleigh suspects her daughter of having “written another five-act tragedy in free verse” (405) of bringing home “another Greenwich eucalalie,” “another tramp poet,” or another “long-haired sculptor smelling of absinthe” (405); he asks if his daughter has “gone in for psychoanalysis again?” (405) or “disinterred another Yogi mystic in a cerise turban” (405);

or gone off to “an anarchist lecture” (405). When we meet Lucy, there are references to Nietzsche, Synchronist painting (412), Russian novels (414), and free love (417).

Lucy resembles Henrietta Brewster of Cook and Glaspell’s *Suppressed Desires* in that one imagines, as indeed it turns out, that she is never quite capable of putting into practice all the new theories, particularly those dealing with sex, that she preaches. Virginia Floyd notes that Lucy’s “contradictory appearance reflects her inner dichotomy; she is an introverted closet conservative but an extroverted, vocal rebel” (103). O’Neill’s stage directions tell us that “*Lucy is an intelligent, healthy American girl suffering from an overdose of undigested reading, and has mistaken herself for the heroine of a Russian novel*” (414). Before Lucy appears, we meet her conventional fiancé, Tom, who is insensitive to many of her interests. His future mother-in-law warns him that the only way to succeed with her is to support everything Lucy does until she herself sees reason. The two then participate in a cover-up worthy of a Congreve play as they assume their roles for Lucy, which despite her protests against marriage as an institution eventually leads to the couple’s acceptance of the mother’s suggestion that they make their own marriage contract. The contract, as drawn up by Lucy, assures each mutual “freedom” in the relationship.

In Act Two, Lucy and Tom are married and have their own home in the suburbs, but Lucy continues to invite Villagers of interest to the house. Two of these are Gabriel, a poet, and Leonora Barnes, a Synchronist painter and friend of Lucy’s we’ve met at the end of Act I, who reputedly cohabitate together in the Village. Although she does not resemble Djuna Barnes physically, Barnes was famous for her

bohemian costume in the village and knew O'Neill, so this may be an homage to his colleague. Gabriel has used his poetry to ingratiate himself into an emotional connection with Lucy, which has drawn the concern of her mother. To restrain this situation, Mrs. Ashleigh puts Tom up to accompanying Leonora to the theatre. However, it is made clear to the audience that Leonora and Gabriel are deliberately "making love" to their hosts to keep their invitations coming in order to mooch dinners; dinners are apparently a sparse commodity in their Village studio. What is also foreshadowed in Act II and revealed in Act III is that Gilbert and Leonora are actually secretly married—mirroring the story of some famous Village couples including founding Provincetown Players Ida Rauh and Max Eastman. Act II ends with Tom and Leonora on the way to the theatre, Mrs. Ashleigh helping to engineer the situation so that Lucy is left with Gabriel. Lucy, predictably, is unable to conquer her jealousy, but Mrs. Ashleigh and Tom miscalculate the intensity of her reaction and, in an epilogue we are brought back to the scene of her attempt with the revolver. The curtain comes down again and the shot is heard. After a pause, another shot is heard. The curtain rises and Lucy is seen collapsed on the floor as her friends rush in. But within minutes the chauffeur appears with a blown tire from the waiting automobile in front of the house, explaining the sounds, and Lucy is found to have only fainted.

Few O'Neill scholars have commented on *Now I Ask You*. Travis Bogard discusses it in context with other plays that O'Neill wrote after his Harvard 47 Workshop with George Pierce Baker, plays tightly plotted and conventional in a Broadway vein. Bogard says that the play "is in a conventional sense a better made

play than its predecessor *Bread and Butter* and has a certain interest in that, along with *The Movie Man*, it is the only surviving comedy from O'Neill's early years" (56). He also calls O'Neill's prologue with Lucy with the gun to her head "a startling coup de théâtre" (56). Robert Dowling believes that *Now I Ask You* reflects "O'Neill's and the Provincetown Players' view that bohemianism had been co-opted by affluent would-be radicals attempting to escape from bourgeois ennui" (1: 382) and is similar to other Provincetown Players early comedies such as Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires* (1915), Neith Boyce's *Constancy* (1915), Boyce's and Hutchins Hapgood's *Enemies* (1916), and John Reed's *The Eternal Quadrangle* (1916). To this list we should also add George Cram Cook's *Change Your Style* (1915), John Reed's *Moondown* (1913; produced by the rival Washington Square Players in 1915), and Rachel Crothers's Broadway play *Young Wisdom* (1914)—all plays mentioned in Chapter Two of this study. Although O'Neill was not in Provincetown in 1915, he probably saw all of the Provincetown satires after his arrival in town in July of 1916—the legendary summer of the premiere of *Bound East for Cardiff* and his love triangle with Louise Bryant and John Reed. A revival of *Suppressed Desires* was produced on July 17th at the Provincetown Players' Wharf Theatre. Reed's *The Eternal Quadrangle* shared a bill with the revival of *Constancy* on August 8th, *Change Your Style* was revived with *Bound East for Cardiff* between August 21st and 25th, and *Enemies* was mounted on an undetermined date in late August, according to Robert Sarlós's research (170).

Lucy Ashleigh of *Now I Ask You*, who believes she is a Russian heroine and suffers from "too much undigested reading" (414), is a staple character type of these

social satires of ideas. She resembles particularly Henrietta Brewster in Glaspell and Cook's *Suppressed Desires*, the protagonist who encourages her husband and sister to be free of their repressions until her psychoanalyst tells them they may be attracted to each other. Lucy's character and the relationship between Lucy and her Mother is also reminiscent of Rachel Crothers's *Young Wisdom*. Crothers's heroine Gail Claffenden is reading books on theories of free love and birth control, which she keeps under her bed to hide from her parents; however her mother is secretly tolerant of some of these issues. Likewise, Mrs. Ashleigh is willing to be thought of as part of the older generation, hostile to the new ideas of her daughter; but Mrs. Ashleigh is actually sympathetic to Lucy's youthful idealism:

It's the old, ever young, wild spirit of youth which tramples rudely on the grave-mound of the Past to see more clearly to the future dream.

We are all thrilled by it sometime, in some way or another. In most of us it flickers out, more's the pity. In some of us it becomes tempered to a fine, sane, progressive ideal which is of infinite help to the race.

(411-12)

Besides the fact that this is startlingly optimistic for a character in a Eugene O'Neill play, it shows that the conflict in the play is not simply between Philistinism and conventionality, but between an excess of zeal for new ideas that runs counter to an individual's actual needs.

Lucy's conventional fiancé Tom also has a counterpart in Crothers's comedy. As *Young Wisdom* begins, Gail Claffenden has a conventional fiancé, who is put off by her desire to practice "Trial Marriage"—living together before marriage vows.

Gail is a bit of a firebrand as is O'Neill's Lucy Ashleigh, but deep down, Gail like Lucy also wants a good marriage. Gail meets an artist, her ideal romantic partner, who nonetheless is an upstanding hero who won't allow Gail's virtue to be compromised or allow anything to happen that would be untoward for a middle-class audience. Gail and the artist elope to be married with her mother and all the other characters in tow, except for the father. As Collette Lindroth has suggested, this ending gives is a wink in the direction of feminism; tradition and the patriarchy have been challenged but no moral taboos violated. O'Neill's heroine marries her conventional sweetheart, but the conflicts are very similar. Despite the antics caused by the unconventional arrangement, in the end O'Neill guarantees sexual propriety and a monogamous marriage.

In addition to the *Suppressed Desires-Young Wisdom* parallel, there are similarities between *Now I Ask You* and a number of the other Provincetown satires. The details of the marriage Lucy works out with Tom, forcing him to sign an agreement guaranteeing mutual freedom on the part of the partners, is reminiscent of Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood's playlet *Enemies*, an account of their own struggles with an open marriage, as well as the parody of Boyce and Hapgood's relationship in Wilbur Steele's *Not Smart*. *Not Smart*, which was on the bill the evening of O'Neill's premiere of *Bound East for Cardiff*, was discussed in detail in Chapter One of this study. Lucy's contract includes "no children by our union [. . .] I know you 're far too intelligent not to believe in birth control" (422) and other conditions Tom is forced to read and agree to:

TOM. [reading] Our union is to be one of mutual help and individual

freedom. Agreed. Under no conditions shall I ever question any act of your's [sic] or attempt to restrict the expression of your ego in any way. Agreed. I will love you as long as my heart dictates, and not one second longer. Agreed. I will honor you only in so far as you prove yourself worthy of it in my eyes. Agreed. I will not obey you (with a smile). According to the old formula it isn't necessary for me to promise that, Lucy [. . .] . For sociological reasons I shall have no children [. . .] in our economic relations we shall be strictly independent of each other. Hmm. Agreed. I may have lovers without causing jealousy or in any way breaking our compact as herein set forth. Lovers? Hmm, that must be your part, too.

LUCY. But you agree that I may, don't you? (422)

Compare this exchange to Steele's Milo and Fannie Tate. When Milo Tate tells his wife, Fannie he would have brought back to her "enriched" the spoils of another lover, he asks her, "you wouldn't mind?" (244). Fannie replies, "Mind? Why should I mind, Milo? Can a thing of that sort tamper with the essential qualities of our relationship? No. No!" (244).

There are also echoes of Cook's *Change Your Style* in *Now I Ask You*, as when the conventional characters, the fiancé Tom and Mr. Ashleigh, are confronted by a Synchronist painting by Leonora Barnes. Ashleigh asks, "*(disgustedly)* What's it supposed to be, I'd like to know? [. . .] You must have it upside down" (413). This joke, although perhaps already a cliché in the Village, has likely been lifted

directly from *Change Your Style*, where it occupies a central part of the plot involving the sale of the young painter, Marmaduke Marvin Jr's work. In *Now I Ask You*, Tom goes on to call such work "tommyrot" and states, "I can't make out whether it's the Aurora Borealis or an explosion in a powder mill" (413). This joke is a reference to the New York press's reaction to the 1913 Armory Show, where Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* was called "an explosion in a shingle factory" (Brown 170). O'Neill here makes a highly contemporary reference to the current situation in the visual arts, which he had earlier ignored in *Bread and Butter*.

In Act II of *Now I Ask You*, the trite poet Gabriel uses various kinds of romantic drivel on Lucy, including speeches about taking her away to "the mountain tops, to the castles in the air" (436). Once Leonora and Tom head out to the theatre together, Gabriel becomes genuinely jealous of his wife, as Lucy is becoming of Tom.

LUCY. —It was you who said you loved me.

GABRIEL.—But I say that to every woman. They know I'm a poet and they expect it—

LUCY. And does your conceit make you think I took you seriously—had fallen in love with you? Oh, this is too disgusting! (458)

This exchange is typical of Village parodies of the Aesthete poet and reminiscent of John Reed's play *Moondown* in which a Village girl waits with her roommate for her lover, a poet she has met that day, to arrive. It becomes clear that the poet is not going to show; he has not really been in love with her but only used the emotion of the

experience to be able to generate verse: “Of course he won’t come. He’s back in his dinky studio chewing off a lyric about you” (9).

Several O’Neill scholars have suggested that *Now I Ask You* is based on the love triangle that developed during the summer of 1916 between O’Neill, Louise Bryant, and John Reed. Virginia Floyd points out resemblances between Bryant and Lucy Ashleigh:

The two have a number of shared attributes, including physical appearance. Louise contributed a drama entitled *The Game* to the Provincetown Players’ repertory. Lucy is a would-be playwright. Louise was obviously influenced by Reed and his anarchist friends, particularly Emma Goldman. Lucy’s father calls his daughter “our lady anarchist.” Louise lived with Reed that summer and seemed reluctant to marry him. Lucy, like her prototype, finds herself attracted to two men: Tom Drayton, a good-looking, trusting individual like Reed, and Gabriel Adams, an impoverished poet with long black hair, a thin, intelligent face, and “big soulful eyes.” (105)

Floyd concludes the poet with the “soulful eyes” is O’Neill and assumes a connection between *Now I Ask You* and Reed’s play of that summer of 1916, *The Eternal Quadrangle* (105). However, as Brenda Murphy has recently shown, Reed’s play is not about the Reed-Bryant-O’Neill triangle, but most likely about Reed’s relationship with Mabel Dodge and her husband (61). Moreover, reading the tortured letters and poetry written in the depths of his love for Louise Bryant, I find it difficult to believe O’Neill could treat of the affair with Bryant in a comic mood as late as the spring of

1917 with Louise now married to Reed (although the affair with O'Neill continued). The antics in Act II and III of *Now I Ask You*, which feature Mrs. Ashleigh conspiring to bring Tom and Leonora together causes a quadrangle, and is reminiscent of Reed's play. There is, however, an important difference between *Now I Ask You*, *The Eternal Quadrangle*, and *Change Your Style*. In Reed's play, the wealthy Fortescue is trying to pair his wife off with a lover in order to get some peace. Similarly, Boyce and Hapgood's *Enemies* and Boyce's *Constancy* specifically treat the issue of the extramarital sex of their woman characters. However, like *Young Wisdom*, *Suppressed Desires*, and *Not Smart*, the humor in *Now I Ask You* is derived precisely from the fact it is inconceivable for the heroine to be guilty of a sexual transgression. There is an assumption of an audience which expects conventional morality to be upheld—i.e., O'Neill is obviously writing for a Broadway audience. The humor is derived from the tension between free ideas of sexuality and the fact that the heroine cannot violate the basic laws of a woman's honor (and indeed such a play would not pass the censors either). While *Suppressed Desires* and *Not Smart* follow the same Broadway formula as *Now I Ask You*, these plays had something *Now I Ask You* did not—an audience of fellow moderns. O'Neill's well-made play derives humor from treating the new theories derisively and features a heroine who is rescued at the last moment from a would-be defiler in an attempt to entertain an Uptown audience. This is not the type of play Walter Parry discussed that generally appeared in the Village before 1918 and which “had their audience among the very same villagers about whom the plays were written,” before 1917 (312). Further, the example of the recently surfaced early version of Bryant's *The Game* discussed in Chapter Two

above, suggests to me that the initial productions in Provincetown were substantially cruder than the revised published versions of the plays we have today. I have looked for and cannot find early manuscripts or typescripts of *Suppressed Desires* and *Not Smart*. That Bryant made substantial revisions to versions of *The Game* may indicate earlier versions of the other Provincetown plays may have contained more topical allusions or references to audience members, were probably less polished, and may have been bawdier. Both Glaspell and Steele were professional writers and revised according to accepted standards to have their work published. Similarly, *Now I Ask You* appears to be an effort directed exclusively at a sale. However, it is fascinating to see O'Neill's interaction with the bohemian satire and to see him actively engaging with the ideas of the little renaissance before he at least believed that he had put these aside.

In the previous chapters of this study, I made several observations about the plays of the Provincetown Players, which have either not been discussed or have not been given the focus that I believe is warranted. The argument made in Chapter Two was that the early artist plays of the Provincetown Players exhibit a high degree of self-referentiality, and represent a self-critique by the intelligentsia of its own artistic pretensions. Further, I pointed out that this critique is similar to that cited in Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* as part of the program of the historical avant-garde. I therefore concluded that these were proto-avant-gardist works, and the participants in the productions were more interested in process than product and in the everyday life of the community than in creating professional autonomous works of theatre. Given

the contexts of the performances of plays like George Cram Cook's *Change Your Style* and Neith Boyce's *Constancy*, we can understand that much of the meaning of these plays was conveyed by their authors through techniques of metadrama. I have pointed out that such works are not directed towards a model of theatre that in Brechtian terms would emphasize "absorption." The audiences were asked to follow narratives, but never rarely able to be able to be completely absorbed in the story or characters without encountering frequent self-referential jokes or ideas.

In Chapter Three of this study, I discussed how the early, highly allusive expressionist/poetic plays of Kreymborg and Barnes continued this meta-theatrical tradition of the early Village plays. Kreymborg deliberately parodies the "high art" nature of the Provincetown Players over-reliance on naturalism in plays like *Lima Beans* and *Jack's House*. Kreymborg's proletarian politics lie behind his deliberate minimalism and his frequent references to the experience of the common New Yorker discussed in this chapter. Meanwhile, employing decadence and a feminist reworking of Nietzsche, Djuna Barnes's early expressionist and linguistic tour de force, *Three from the Earth*, explores the woman as social performer (Barnes)—a metadrama that anticipates Glaspell's in depth exploration of a woman's Nietzschean obsession in *The Verge*. These plays contain many naturalistic elements themselves, yet the self-conscious nature of the expressionist experiment should be seen as a mixture of modernist and avant-garde objectives.

In Chapter Four, by examining the work of three of the major Provincetown playwrights, I have attempted to show the evolution of the Village metaplay, or the survival of the essential qualities of this form, into longer dramas. The plays studied

in this chapter also exhibit a strong self-referential commentary on the artist. However, neither Cook's, *The Athenian Women* nor the three O'Neill plays examined in this chapter offer the same kind of challenge to theatrical tradition and ideology as Glaspell's *The Verge*. *The Athenian Women* demonstrates the imaginative exploration of the theme of group creativity that Cook had expressed in the early days of the Provincetown Players. He champions cardinal values of the Little Renaissance and of his Village audience in tipping his hat to feminism, bohemianism, and anti-pacifist politics while creating his dream city as a metaphor for a cultural Renaissance in America, an American identity reshaped by the pursuit of beauty over violence. However, Cook is quite blasé in the way he tables equality for civic monuments, emphasizing national culture not only over the private vision of aesthete artists, but over cries of rebellion. Many of Cook's ideas about modernism are thus revealed, and although his vision for American culture and the drama deserves to be recognized more than it has, Aspasia's use of Pericles's aristocratic connections and raw power to achieve her ends is troubling to this writer.

However Cook, along with Glaspell, retained the ability to laugh at his pretensions and spoof his own Modernist romanticism in *Tickless Time*. This short piece, which seems a throwback to the earlier *Suppressed Desires*, points instead to Glaspell's turn towards the representations of expressionism and avant garde modernism in *The Verge*. *The Verge* represents Glaspell's most extensive exploration of the female artist as outcast and her most complete critique of the male romantic genius. Glaspell parallels Mary Shelley in critiquing the extremes of feminine creativity, which is everything male thinking fears—a woman artist who will be a

poor mother, an “unnatural woman,” and sexually promiscuous—but at the same time one can not help detecting in Claire Archer an act of existential defiance of the social restraints placed on women. While there is a three-act structure to *The Verge*, Glaspell so intertwines her critique of the modernist/romantic work with its unities that the ending of the play not only rejects conventional closure—we don’t know at the realistic level, for example, whether Claire is truly mad—but it makes its audience self-consciously aware of the process of theatre experiment in which it is being asked to participate. Thus, while one can understand that the naturalistic qualities of the play and its literary text are unlike dadaist and surrealist performance art, it is very difficult for me to see this play—as Arnold Aronson insists we must—as part of a monolithic tradition of American realistic theatre. Glaspell is in open defiance of this sort of a standard. We may not be able to classify *The Verge* as avant-garde anti-art in complete opposition to the institution of theatre; on the other hand the play refuses classification either as realism or high modernist theatre, rather accomplishes the most sophisticated work of the hybrid experimental avant-garde in formal daring and advanced feminist thought.

In examining O’Neill’s relationship to the Provincetown Players, I reviewed some interesting parallels between the self-critical and self-referential portrayal of artist characters in his plays and those of other Provincetown Players, such as George Cram Cook, Wilbur Steele, and John Reed.⁸⁸ I also confirmed one of the ironic facts of O’Neill’s interaction with the Provincetown: while they are most famous for discovering him, he is actually the writer who least embodies the founding ideal of the company, as noted by scholars such as Robert Sarlós and Louis Sheaffer, among

others. O'Neill's discovery was momentous—but many of the plays he was writing were not plays for a little theatre. Both *Bread and Butter* and *Now I Ask You* O'Neill's own experience as a artist, or ideas he absorbed in Greenwich Village, but they do so clearly for the purposes of entertaining Broadway audiences. *Before Breakfast*, the one play that he wrote with the Provincetown Players that refers to Greenwich Village characters and situations, was primarily a sketch that allowed him to continue his exploration of Strindbergian marriage themes. However, this play, belongs with the *S. S. Glencairn* plays as the beginning of O'Neill's mature writing and not with the two unproduced Broadway plays about artists.

During the organizational meeting in September 1916 at which the Provincetown Players chose their name and adopted a constitution, the prevailing attitude was one that emphasized group creativity and group organization. At the end of the meeting, however, O'Neill insisted the playhouse in New York be called the "Playwright's Theatre." Robert Sarlós has made much of O'Neill's request; he believed it symbolized O'Neill's focus on the individual creative artist, rather than the group, and therefore it is ironic the group would be known most for its most famous individual member. O'Neill was always committed to the creation of professional theatre. "It seems fair to suggest," Sarlós commented, "that with the appearance of O'Neill and, with him the promise of lasting works of theatre art, gradually the concern with creation for its own sake (i.e., orientation toward process) became coupled with interest in the works created (i.e., orientation toward product)" (32). I believe the use O'Neill made of the ideas of the Little Renaissance and of his own

experience as a young writer that I have discussed in this chapter bear out Sarlós's view. This is significant, though, because in contrasting O'Neill's activities to those of the other writers in the group, it becomes clear their notions of experiment were not always product-oriented. Rather, there was in the Provincetown Players a hybrid mixture of experiment with theatrical technique that ranged from leftist ideological self-criticism to expressionism's concern both with theme and form—and to high modernist works focused precisely on "product."

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this study I have argued that certain plays produced by the Provincetown Players should be considered avant-garde, not only because of their ideological critiques of conventional society and their expressionist aesthetics, but because of their self-reflexive nature which represents an extended critique of modernism. Arnold Aronson has claimed that the use of avant-garde materials by Provincetown playwrights reduces the radical techniques of the avant garde “to mere stylistic conceits” (3) in plays that remain primarily realistic. While the Provincetown’s playwrights certainly mixed conventional modes of presentation with avant-garde techniques, their self-conscious exploration of the possibilities and limitations of modern theatre, which in the most experimental of their plays challenges the ability of the modern to represent experience not only resemble aspects of the European avant-garde, but become significant antecedents of postmodernism. The strong metadramatic elements in the Provincetown plays force their audience’s awareness of the works as fictions, an awareness which draws the audience to question whether other of their key assumptions, such as “the modern,” “the bohemian” or the “woman artist,” are similarly constructed fictions.

The early artist plays of the Provincetown, which I have termed proto-avant-garde, challenge not just specific bourgeois “institutions of art” but also critique the ideological underpinnings of modern culture and interpersonal relationships.

Constancy, *Suppressed Desires*, *Change Your Style*, and *The Eternal Quadrangle*, among others, reveal the Players as sophisticated moderns using performance as a method of investigating the lack of their art’s social impact. Despite the primarily

naturalistic form of these scripts, I see them as nonetheless representing a process similar to that identified by Peter Bürger, with respect to the European avant-garde, as a “moment of self criticism” (22), an ongoing critique of modernism. The Provincetown Players, at least within their own community, sought to reintegrate art into the “praxis of everyday life” (Bürger 22). These writers used performance as an intervention to question their everyday relationships and their individual identities, exploring the imbalances in gender roles, the social responsibility of artists living in freedom from ordinary social conventions, and the ineffectiveness of the aesthetic life on political realities. In Hutchins Hapgood’s comment that Provincetown performances were at once “sweetly personal” and “sweetly social” we should recognize that, as more than mere coterie plays, these early artist sketches anticipate the complex relationships between the personal and political that were generally ignored in high modernist works but which have come to dominate discussions of theatre and literature in our own era.

Writers such as Alfred Kreymborg, Djuna Barnes, and Susan Glaspell followed upon the playful attitude toward the parameters of theatre displayed in the early Provincetown satires by more consciously employing European expressionist avant-garde techniques. The light-hearted approach taken by Kreymborg in his pioneering verse plays for the Provincetown Players and the Other Players was an early volley in the war of abstraction and stylization that developed in New York throughout the twentieth century. Kreymborg parodies our expectations of legitimate theatre to spoof the realist strain in modernism and to advance a politics in sympathy with the lot of the common folk. In his avowed distaste for Nietzsche’s aristocratic

thinking, Kreymborg creates a proletarian modernism which, geared towards community, subverts the expectations of modernist “difficulty.” While Kreymborg experiments with modernist devices, such as monologue, hymnic verse, automaton movement, and more, he shares with the avant-garde a distrust of the elitism of some modernist strategies.

In fact, Kreymborg’s use of modernist techniques, paired with an ethic of appealing to the man in the street, less resembles modernist theatre than the political theatres that emerged much later in the century. Soon after his involvement with the Provincetown, Kreymborg would go on the road to middle America with puppet versions of all his plays. It is a move which anticipates that of the better known political theatres of the 1960s. Peter Schumann, founder of Bread and Puppet Theater, for example, according to John Bell, “felt the avant-garde scene [of early 1960s New York] was limited by a certain elitism, and took his puppets into the streets of New York City to play for strikes and antiwar demonstrations and in community centers and city parks” (377-78).

While Alfred Kreymborg’s and other Provincetown writers’ expressionist experiments demonstrate a relationship between the company and avant-garde critique, the examination of the three major Provincetown writers George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, and Eugene O’Neill offered in this study shows the opening of a divide between the group’s modernist and avant-garde strains. Cook’s and the Provincetown Players’ first full-length drama, *The Athenian Women*, was clearly crafted in part to continue the self-reflexive process among American writers which had begun in Provincetown. Cook’s play engages the political views of his audience

on the emancipation of women, the resistance to American involvement in the European war, and on a socialist future for the nation. However, I argue that part of Cook's vision of insurgent artists reveals a naïve compromise with the ruling aristocracy, advancing an aesthetic agenda before a political one—rather than as an example of the synthesis between art and politics noted as the pre-war Village's major characteristic. Cook's attitude here suggests the later, less politicized phase of American modernism of the 1920s and 1930s, and signals the beginning of the end for the first avant-garde phase of the American theatre. In *Change Your Style*, Cook had presented an avant-garde critique of the economics of patronage in the visual arts, but *The Athenian Women* reveals him gravitating towards a tragic vision not unlike that of Eugene O'Neill.

O'Neill's early politics of philosophical anarchism were very much in alignment with the radical politics of the Village intelligentsia, but as I have shown, he also participated albeit briefly in the avant-garde phase of the Provincetown Players. Two full-length works, *Bread and Butter* and *Now I Ask You*, deal self-critically with the role of the artist, but for either purely commercial ends or as a partial working out of ideas about character that will become much more profound in later works such as *Beyond the Horizon*. *Before Breakfast* does show O'Neill considering the aimlessness of bohemianism as destructive, although he is less interested in the social consequences of this than other Players. The self-reflexivity in O'Neill's early artist plays is significant for the development of the autobiographical characters in his later works such as Richard Miller in *Ah, Wilderness!* and Edmund Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

It is in plays such as Susan Glaspell's *The Verge* and Djuna Barnes's *Three from the Earth*, however, where we see a full-flowering of an expressionist and avant-gardist rejection of both conventional society, i. e., the patriarchy, and the forms of representation that support it. While these plays contain elements of naturalism and high modernism, to label them simply as modern or modernist blunts their political content. Neither Glaspell nor Barnes suggests that aesthetics should be considered before a change in social relations, as Cook posits in *The Athenian Women*; freedom and recognition for the individuality of women remain paramount in both Glaspell's and Barnes's dramaturgy. In *The Verge*, Glaspell leaves us with a profound challenge to the ethos of the artist as conceived in romanticism at the same time that she empowers Claire Archer to seize all of the power normally reserved for men in the creative process. Likewise, Barnes's Kate Morley is to be despised for performing; Kate "acts" various roles for men to establish her social power, and yet she is ultimately sympathetic in her struggle to succeed and to survive in a world not designed for a "woman with will" (*A Book* 10).

Both Glaspell and Barnes invoke the modernist sublimation of religion to metaphysical philosophy, i. e., they depict the suffering of their characters in biblical terms, but replace a divine origin of existence with numerous allusions to the actual world of Nietzsche. Both playwrights, however, then redirect Nietzsche's critique of representation to comment on the suffering endured by women to advance their identities. The stakes are much higher for women in these Nietzschean dramas than for characters in the early artist comedies, but these plays are also founded on a similar self-reflexive attitude towards the audience. By combining experimental

theatre and advanced gender politics, Glaspell's and Barnes's works resonate more with the feminist theatre and performance art of the period from the 1960s to the 1990s than with the high modernist drama of their era. Many modernist works, including O'Neill's works from the mid-1920s, present Nietzsche's philosophy significantly less critically.

The European expressionism which undoubtedly influenced Glaspell and Barnes is not itself always considered part of the avant-garde (Peter Bürger's examples come almost exclusively from dada and surrealism). Richard Murphy, however, in *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* argues not only for the inclusion of expressionism as an avant-garde movement but also for its foundational role in creating postmodernism. Murphy claims by representing themselves as fictional—through metadrama and other techniques—the expressionist avant-garde parodies its own narratives, in essence “re-writing” them:

Like postmodern parody, the avant garde's response—its strategy of writing—denies any claim to objectivity either in the “original” (i.e., the text it re-writes), or in the new, parodic counter-discourses it creates. This produces a level of self-reflexivity (another vitally important characteristic of the postmodern) which constantly points to the arbitrariness of the constructed world, yet does so simultaneously in way, as Hutcheon says of postmodernism “that admits its own provisionality”(13) as well. In other words, like postmodern parody, the expressionist avant-garde's revolutionary re-writing of the world not only reveals the inherent fictionality of all existing cosmologies,

meta-languages and master-narratives, but most importantly insists at the same time upon the provisionality of its *own* claims to truth. (263)

In Glaspell's and Barnes's expressionist work for the Provincetown, we see the furthest extension of the use of self-referentiality of any of the company's writers. Barnes reduces and chaotically recombines the language of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Genesis that offers fundamental "cosmologies" and renders them as a metalanguage unspeakable for her protagonist. Thus Barnes places these systems as fictions in view to be questioned by her audience. Glaspell dramatizes a symbolic progress toward the climax of *the Verge* in which various cosmologies appear to be continually threatened, such as the male as single sex creator, or appear to be developing towards inevitable catastrophe, such as the isolation of the woman artist and her moral descent, but these patterns are resisted and not completed by Clare Archer or Glaspell. American expressionism can therefore also be seen as questioning systems of meaning and representation, particularly those used for creating art, and it thus serves as a constituent or foundation for postmodern performance.

The Provincetown Players' exploration of identity and representation needs to be reappraised in the history of American experimental theatre. While the importation of European surrealist and dadaist performance in the 1950s and 1960s undoubtedly influenced a generation of American avant-gardists, it is also likely that American theatre experimenters throughout the twentieth century were very much aware of groups like the Provincetown and saw in their own work a continuation of

the Provincetown's and George Cook's idealism. It is known historically that the politics and productions of certain theatre companies were directly influenced by the Provincetown Players. Jasper Deeter, who acted and directed for the Provincetown Players, founded and ran the Hedgerow Theatre outside of Philadelphia for three decades. Deeter produced in repertory Susan Glaspell's Provincetown play *Inheritors* (1921), with its condemnation of American isolationism, xenophobia, and reactionary politics. Through Deeter, Eva Le Gallienne discovered the play and performed it in repertory at her Civic Repertory Theatre in New York from 1926-1935. But in addition to the influences of the Provincetown Players on the generation of theatre that came immediately after them, I believe their particular genre of modern experimental American theatre influenced subsequent generations of Americans experimental companies.

Some evidence of this influence may be found in the history of Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre. After the Second World War, theatres in New York that continued the challenge to Broadway commercialism begun by the Provincetown Players soon coalesced into the off-Broadway movement. By the late 1950s, however, according to historian Sally Banes, these theatres were producing "bourgeois traditional drama" and plays by a "previous generation of American playwrights," and were "no longer an outlet for new methods of staging" (40). Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, founded in 1951, became one of the few off-Broadway group's to evolve into a venue for the new insurgent movement off-off Broadway in the early 1960s.

However, when Beck and Malina moved the Living Theatre to 14th street in 1959, signifying the theatre's transition to an off-off Broadway venue, they chose three plays for their repertory: Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise*, Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, and *Many Loves*, a verse drama by William Carlos Williams (Banes 41). Although Williams never had a play produced by the Provincetown Players, it was Alfred Kreymborg who was Williams's inspiration for exploring the dramatic form and who pioneered the first productions of verse plays in New York with his *Lima Beans*. The choice of the Williams play demonstrates that as late as 1959, experimental theatre artists in New York connected the idea of modernist formal experiment—begun by the Provincetown Players—to their own challenges to realist aesthetics.

Future Directions for Research

A complete study of the revolt against realism on the American stage has yet to be written. The first American modernist plays to experiment with *mise en scène* inspired by the European avant-garde and to employ verse in part as a device for estranging the audience from everyday language took place in Chicago. I have mentioned Brör Nordfelt's design of the production of the *Trojan Women* for Maurice Browne's Little Theatre and Cloyd Head's silhouette play *Grotesques*. Works such as these as well as the collaboration of poet Maxwell Bodenheim and playwright (later screenwriter) Ben Hecht on plays such as *Mrs. Margaret Calhoun* (1917) have had little recent commentary. Additionally, the use of expressionist staging for

political purposes was not confined to the self-conscious modernists in Chicago or Greenwich Village. Broadway playwright Beulah Marie Dix's pacifist *Across the Border* (1914) also demonstrates the influence of expressionism in its nightmarish depiction of a claustrophobic farmhouse on the Western front. The Provincetown Players were the most important group of the era to pursue experiments which challenged not only tradition and conventional politics but also the nature of their own modernism. However, in future efforts to explore this era, we should consider all the playwrights using formal experimentation to advance a politics that both "represents and challenges" American identity and politics.

Marjorie Perloff has called the era of interaction by American poets Williams and Kreymborg and photographers Stieglitz and Steichen with the French artists Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and the New York dadaists the "avant-garde phase of American Modernism," and it is appropriate that this concept now be extended to the Little Theatre movement. Our understanding of the period, of theatre history, and of the development of modern and experimental theatre artists who, in S. E. Wilmer's terms, both "challenge and represent" (99) American national identity and politics, would be greatly enriched by such a reconsideration.

Notes

¹ In regards to the Provincetown Players and modernism, Ozieblo is a notable exception and does consider theories of the avant-garde and modernism in relation to several plays by women modernists of the company. However, she states that she does not want to enter the theoretical debate between the two terms (“Avant-Garde and Modernist” 1).

² Although post-World War II American drama is not my area of expertise, there is some evidence of the experimental modernism of the First World War era in the lineage of the later period. By the late 1950s, off-Broadway theatres, which had been inspired by the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players were seen as too bourgeois to younger experimenters. Julian Beck and Judith Malina’s Living Theatre was one of the few off-Broadway theatres to move into the radical world of off-off Broadway in the 1960s. The watershed moment of this transition was the Living Theatre’s move into quarters on 14th street in 1959. One of the first three plays staged at this location was a verse drama by William Carlos Williams. Williams was not a Provincetown Players member; however, he had acted in Alfred Kreymborg’s *Lima Beans* at the Provincetown in 1916 and had submitted at least one play, which was apparently not produced because Kreymborg lost the script (Williams, *Autobiography* 140). For information on the Living Theatre, see Banes 40-41. Kreymborg’s relationship with Williams will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this study.

³ Watson’s *Strange Bedfellows* focuses on the network of Americans involved in the formative years of international modernism at home and abroad. Other studies

such as Donald Egbert's, "The Idea of the Avant-Garde in Art and Politics" are older uses of the term for the radicals of this era.

⁴ Although Bürger does not specifically associate the "critique of art as institution" with the dadaist concept of 'anti-art,' a number of scholars make this assumption (Graver 7-12).

⁵ These distinctions have not been explored in depth with regard to the Provincetown Players. Two studies that do explore these ideas in relation to the history of American drama are Aronson and Robinson. I will discuss both of their studies towards the end of this chapter.

⁶ I believe that all published scholarship that references this play, including all work on the Provincetown Players, as well as Douglas Clayton's biography of Floyd Dell, rely on the plot summary Dell provides in his autobiography *Homecoming*, whereas I am using the manuscript from the Dell papers at the Newberry Library.

⁷ See Eagan, especially Chapter 3, for the Provincetown history cited in this passage and following.

⁸ Robert Sarlós quotes Louis Schaefer citing a letter from Neith Boyce that dates the first performances as July 15. (Sarlós 14, n18).

⁹ Hartley is sometimes thought to have been there during the first performances, but Kenton lists him as joining in 1916, and it is clear from internal evidence in his recollection "The Great Provincetown Summer" that the piece refers to the summer of 1916 of O'Neill's premiere (*Provincetown Players* 177-180).

¹⁰ It was the first production by the Provincetown Players to use “New Art” design. Founding player Brör Nordfelt had designed a set for a production of *The Trojan Women* for Maurice Brown’s Little Theatre in Chicago in 1914 (Sarlós 10).

¹¹ Cheryl Black, "Technique and Tact: Nina Moise Directs the Provincetown Players." Much of this article deals with Moise's innovations with the Provincetown Players and O’Neill’s appreciation of her direction.

¹² Jeffrey Kennedy. "Research Project." The Provincetown Playhouse. Retrieved 23 June 2001 <<http://pages.nyu.edu/~jqk2598/provincetown.html>>.

¹³ At the end of the deliberations on September 5, 1916, O’Neill made a motion that the Provincetown Players’ New York venue be named “The Playwright’s Theatre,” and this motion passed. However, the constitution itself calls it “The Provincetown Players Theater,” and the sign which hung above the theatre at least as early as the nineteen twenties read “Provincetown Playhouse” (Kenton, *Provincetown Players* 28,81).

¹⁴ 1922 is the year of the publication of both *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, which Michael North, quoting Gilbert Seldes claims, “has been taken as signifying a definitive break in literary history.” North also cites 1922 as the year Pound suggested as the beginning of a new calendar to recognize the dramatic change in Anglo-American cultural direction (3).

¹⁵ According to Ozieblo, Carol Hanisch first expressed that the “personal is political,” which was adopted by the women’s movement in the 1970s (“Political” 13). Ozieblo used this title for a collection of essays on American drama. *Staging a Cultural Paradigm: the Personal as Political in American Drama*: 14.

¹⁶ Heller and Rudnick also emphasize the importance of the concept of the “new” to this generation. They argue that they employ “the terms used by the generation of 1915 themselves to define and differentiate themselves from the past” when they subtitled their collection, “the New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art, and the New Theatre” (Heller and Rudnick 1).

¹⁷ There are many attempts to define the distinctions between naturalism and realism. For the purposes of analyzing dramatic technique the two terms are used here interchangeably, although strictly speaking naturalism is usually referred to as a type of realism and their philosophical outlooks may be quite different. William Demastes in *Beyond Naturalism* notes that both Eric Bentley and David Rabe see “the apparent essence of realism is an underlying scientific empiricism,” (3) that is, an “objective” recording of everyday life. Demastes points out that in “Naturalism, empiricism in general is replaced by determinism in particular” (3). Demastes also cites Bentley’s view that “Realism embraces all writing in which the natural world is candidly presented [. . .]. Naturalism is one of many permutations of realism” (3-4).

¹⁸ See Parry, especially chapters 9 and 11-14.

¹⁹ The best account of the reasons for, and Rodman’s involvement with the split in the Liberal Club is still Keith N. Richwine’s 1969 dissertation; see pages 93-103.

²⁰ For the most complete list of members, see Richwine 117-118.

²¹ Deutsch and Hanau in *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* combined the era of George Cram Cook’s direction (1915-1922) with a later era of the theatre in the 1920s, perhaps solidifying in the public’s mind that this was one continuous

organization. Susan Glaspell strenuously objected to the use of the name Provincetown Players by the later organization and makes clear in her biography of her husband, *The Road to the Temple* (1927) that his theatrical vision was separate from the later group. Robert Sarlós in his 1982 study thus reasserted the independence of Cook's tenure, and scholars have typically followed this course since. My point, though, is that the comic problem plays—typically spoofs of bohemians and intellectuals that the Provincetown staged in their early days—are almost all influenced by Dell's work (indeed most of the future Provincetown playwrights acted in Dell's plays), so I suggest we look at the pre-1915 era to understand the 1915-1918 era of the Provincetown more fully. That Cook recognized the importance of this influence—or at least an appetite for this type of play on the part of his New York audience—is clear from the deliberate inclusion of a Dell bohemian spoof, *King Arthur's Socks*, on the first New York bill for the Players in the fall of 1916.

²² For a discussion of the debate between Hapgood and Dell, see Sarlós 53-54.

²³ Lionel Abel coined the terms “metatheatre” and “metadrama” in 1963.

June Schlueter has noted the increased focus on metadramatic techniques in modern theatre and discussed metadrama as “self-conscious art” with an expressed “disregard for the dramatic illusion” (2-3). Richard Hornby also provides an extensive study of the types and influence of the tradition, and metadrama is often seen as a component in much avant-garde and post-modernist theory.

²⁴ The prologue survives in Dell's papers in an early prose version and what are apparently later versions in verse. It was omitted altogether from the text of the play when it was published in *The Masses* as *Priscilla and the Dragon*.

²⁵ Lionel Abel traces metatheatre to Shaw rather than Ibsen (with the possible exception of *Peer Gynt*), noting, “There is an intellectual structure in most of Shaw’s important plays that we do not find in Ibsen at all [. . .]. The *Don Juan in Hell* episode (a complete play in itself), *Pygmalion*, and *Saint Joan* are not comedies, but metaplays” (11).

²⁶ Thank you to Brian Richardson for pointing out the parallel with *The Frogs*.

²⁷ Dell makes reference to the Billiken, a wooden charm statue resembling a Buddha that became a popular kitsch object in the 1910s. A play on the name Billiken also likely inspired the title of one of Alfred Kreymborg’s plays produced at the Provincetown, *Manikin and Miniken* (1918).

²⁸ Contemporary trends in realism following Ibsen, Abel finds, follow the tradition of tragedy but without a real appreciation for fate. Therefore the two “contemporary trends” are realism and metatheatre and, evidently, he prefers the latter. Abel finds Ibsen “absolutely lacking in ideas” (110), but “Shaw had an interest in expressing ideas” (111).

²⁹ Dell did write a play more directly aimed at the suffragettes, *What Eight Million Women Want*, that Henrietta Rodman threatened to boycott (*Homecoming* 247). This is the only one of Dell’s Liberal Club plays apparently not in his papers at the Newberry Library.

³⁰ Jeffrey Kennedy discusses Edna Kenton’s claim that *Suppressed Desires* “remained in sparse notes and mainly in memory” and that a finished version of it emerged only in Provincetown (qtd. in Kennedy 65). This claim seems to conflict

with Glaspell's that the script had been submitted earlier that spring to the Washington Square Players (*Road* 250).

³¹ In a letter, Boyce describes submitting an unnamed play to a theatre company in early 1915 (Egan 122, n40). However, Jeffrey Kennedy points out that Boyce's reference to her script being rejected because "the manager has just failed" is "difficult to interpret in that context" (59). Kennedy presumably means that Boyce's letter does not seem to reflect a submission to the Washington Square Players, who neither had a "manager" in the sense of a commercial theatre manager, nor had they "failed" (also a commercial theatre term) in January of 1915, the date of Boyce's letter. In fact, the Washington Square Players' first production did not open until February 1915 (Richwine 142). Also, internal evidence in *Constancy* makes it clear that the scene between the two characters Rex and Moira, thinly veiled portraits *roman a cleft* style of Dodge and Reed, is based on a real-life encounter that had only occurred in January 1915. This trail of evidence therefore suggests *Constancy* was not the play Boyce referred to in her letter.

³² Kennedy has noted, based on the edition of Boyce's autobiography by Carol DeBoer-Langworthy, that Boyce's interest in writing plays dates back to 1899, and her and her husband's belief in challenging the commercial theatre of Broadway with more literary plays dates as far back as 1904 (Kennedy 58). I pointed out in Chapter One that the famous statement normally attributed to Cook that drama is "not the work of one man" but the work of a "clan," is attributed to both Boyce and Cook by Edna Kenton, a close friend of Cook.

³³ This is in the Provincetown circular announcing their move to New York, cited in Chapter One.

³⁴ Tancheva cites Kenneth Macgowan's *The Theatre of Tomorrow* for her definition of the unified modernist work of theatre, which is to be based on a synthesis of all the elements and controlled by a single creative artist (156, n12). Macgowan's view is undoubtedly derived from European theatre visionaries like Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia. Craig's theory of the über-marionette envisioned the artist (director or playwright) as a puppet master. Appia's ideas of the unity of the presentation likely derive from Wagner, such as the latter's idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or unified artwork (Aronson 21; Simonson 27-54). Boyce may have been aware of the European theorists, but she was also likely familiar with alternatives theories of performance. She was aware of Italian futurism during her stays in Italy, including one trip with Mabel Dodge. As Carol DeBoer-Langworthy points out, Boyce also had intimate friendships at this time with two avant-gardists, Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy (17, 22)

³⁵ Reed had been in Provincetown the previous summer of 1914 –living in a silken tent on the Atlantic side of the Cape with Dodge—and would return in 1916 with his new lover and later wife, Louise Bryant. He was in Central and Eastern Europe between April and October of 1915 (in fact imprisoned in Galicia in Poland in June on his way to Russia). Reed traveled primarily with the artist Boardman Robinson to research what would become his book *The War in Eastern Europe* (1915), which Robinson would illustrate. Dodge, in the process of developing a new relationship with the painter Maurice Sterne, enjoyed hearing of Reed's exploits, but

had Hutchins Hapgood write Reed for her in late June to ban him from Provincetown that summer (*Movers and Shakers* 381-83). Although Barbara Ozieblo believes Dodge and Sterne witnessed the first Provincetown performances (*Susan Glaspell* 75), Dodge, who was dividing her time between the Hapgood cottage, a cottage she herself had rented on Commercial Street, and the Peaked Hill Bars life saving station on the Atlantic dunes some distance from town, never mentions the performances of 1915. It is possible that she was not in town on the night of July 15, or it is possible that she avoided gatherings of Villagers in the East End of Provincetown where the Hapgoods, Cook, and Glaspell stayed. Various social intrigues or machinations may have left her on the periphery of this social circle, leading her friend Hutchins Hapgood to remark in his memoir that Mabel was a “poison distributing center” that summer (*Victorian* 391). Also, Hapgood remarked, “Mabel came to the theatre to scoff and went away in the same mood, to her little self-styled elite that consisted of haughty dry-rot” (*Victorian* 394-95). This latter comment of Hapgood’s suggests Mabel did not attend the first performances in the Hapgood cottage, but only came to the Wharf Theatre later that summer, but it is unclear. It is also not clear from Hapgood’s comments, that, if the latter case were true, whether or not Dodge actually stayed through the performances.

³⁶ Margot was also the name of Floyd Dell’s girlfriend at the time who was perhaps in the audience.

³⁷ Jeffrey Kennedy has also pointed this out (151-52).

³⁸ *Suppressed Desires* has often been cited as one of the earliest dramatizations of Freudian theory on stage. David Sievers in his seminal study *Freud*

on *Broadway* credited it as preceded only by Alice Gerstenberg's *Overtones* (1915) produced by the Washington Square Players that spring (*Overtones* was written in 1913 but not produced until 1915) (58). However, *Overtones*, while Freudian in its presentation of characters representing the unconscious of other characters, does not specifically mention or develop Freud's theory, nor does it address psychotherapy through the process of psychoanalysis. Thus Barbara Ozieblo has claimed that for Cook and Glaspell *Suppressed Desires* "won them the distinction of being the first dramatists to deal imaginatively with the ideas of Sigmund Freud" ("Introduction" 14). I believe the first mention of the term "psychoanalysis" in an American play, although again without a dramatization of its precepts, is likely that in Floyd Dell's Liberal Club spoof *St. George in Greenwich Village* (1913). This was, of course, only privately performed.

³⁹ The irony, as Susan Glaspell continues in *The Road to the Temple*, is that *Suppressed Desires* went on to incredible popularity with community theatres across the country. In fact, it was one of the few pieces for which Glaspell and Cook received regular royalties (Ozieblo, *Susan Glaspell* 92).

⁴⁰ For a detailed look at the correspondence between Cook and Reed over this incident, see Kennedy 92.

⁴¹ Cook's published melodrama is *In Hampton Roads* (1899), written with Charles Eugene Banks. Cook's unfinished manuscript of *Prostitution* is in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. The humorous premise of this play is Shavian—a respectable upper middle-class Midwestern woman advocates a solution to the scourge of prostitution requiring all of the respectable housewives to hire the

town's prostitutes as domestics. There is also a melodramatic subplot of the travails of two young lovers.

⁴² Elsewhere I have expanded on the fact that although Glaspell may have been aware of Crothers, Glaspell's feminism was of a particularly different sort. Crothers's feminism was decidedly centrist, whereas Glaspell's has been compared with French feminist theorists of the 1960s. See Eisenhauer, "She and She: Rachel Crothers and Susan Glaspell's Turn to Playwriting."

⁴³ Glaspell described her attendance at Broadway plays in a much-quoted passage in the *Road to the Temple*: "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" (248). The ostensible purpose of the passage is to indicate where Cook derived his motivation to challenge Broadway commercialism and create insurgent theatre (248). The passage, however, also reveals that the couple was attending Broadway plays. Chronologically, such attendance must date from Cook's arrival in New York in 1913; thus, the couple saw plays in the 1913-1914 and the 1914-1915 seasons. *Young Wisdom* was playing in the spring of 1914 and perhaps briefly that fall, and *Suppressed Desires* was written in February or March of 1915.

⁴⁴ Gainor refutes the idea of a conservative ending on other grounds (*Susan Glaspell in Context* 34).

⁴⁵ "Figures on the Beach" is reproduced as the cover to Heller and Rudnick's *1915: The Cultural Moment* and appears on page 208 of that volume. The caption on page 208 gives the date of the painting as 1916. Perhaps Cook saw an early study for

Figures on the Beach in 1915. On the other hand, if the painting was finished in 1915, it may be that Heller and Rudnick have misdated the painting in their book.

⁴⁶ These identifications have been made before and most of the caricatures are easily recognizable to scholars familiar with the Provincetown Players or Eugene O'Neill. I want to provide sources for two of the more obscure references. The association of Kenyon Crabtree with Kenyon Cox was made by Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick (273), and the identification of Marmaduke Marvin Jr as a portrait of Fred Marvin was made by Leona Rust Egan (134).

⁴⁷ Brör Nordfelt, the post-impressionist painter who was a founding member of the Provincetown, had designed the set for a Chicago Little Theatre production of Euripides's *The Trojan Women* for Maurice Browne in 1914 (Sarlós 10).

⁴⁸ A box of Louise Bryant's papers had been "lost" for about sixty years. These papers have recently been accessioned by the Manuscripts and Archives Division, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University and are now available in the William Bullitt collection (Bullitt was Bryant's third husband and the papers were donated by their daughter). For an interesting narrative of how the papers were "lost" and rediscovered see Roazen.

⁴⁹ I have paginated the thirteen pages of text of the TS, omitting a page number for the title page.

⁵⁰ For a concise account of the exchange of poems and letters between O'Neill and Bryant that summer, see Egan 206-15, as well as O'Neill's and Bryant's biographers. Several previously unpublished poems written by O'Neill to Bryant were discovered in Bryant's papers at Yale University and published (see Roazen).

⁵¹ For more detail on the relative success of the original productions of *The Game* and *Not Smart*, see the section in this chapter on *Not Smart* below.

⁵² Reed's last play for the Provincetown Players, *The Peace That Passeth Understanding* (1919), is a send-up of the Peace negotiations at the end of the war spoken by caricatures of the heads of states of the victorious nations.

⁵³ The entire text of the subscription circular for 1917-1918, Third New York Season, from the Berg Collection is as follows:

Seven of the Provincetown Players are in the army or working for it in France, and more are going. Not light-heartedly now, when civilization itself is threatened with destruction, we who remain have determined to go on next season with the work of our little theatre.

It is now often said that theatrical entertainment in general is socially justified in this dark time as a means of relaxing the strain of reality, and thus helping to keep us sane. This may be true, but if more were not true—if we felt no deeper value in dramatic art than entertainment—we would hardly have the heart for it now.

One faculty, we know, is going to be of vast importance to the half-destroyed world—indispensable for its rebuilding—the faculty of creative imagination. That spark of it which has given this group of ours such life and meaning as we have is not so insignificant that we should now let it die. The social justification which we feel to be valid now for makers and players of plays is

that they shall help keep alive in the world the light of imagination. Without it the wreck of the world that was cannot be cleared away and the new world shaped.

With no endowment, no angel, and no seeking of publicity, the Provincetown Players have been sustained through two seasons by their subscribers. Of these there were 550 the first year, 635 the second. To enlarge and improve as we now should we ought to increase this number to 1,000. (

⁵⁴ Evidence suggests that *The Game* was not successful in its New York premiere: a review by Stephen Rathburn in the *Evening Sun* recently uncovered by the Gelbs called it “so amateurish that the less said about it the better” (qtd in Gelb, *Monte Cristo* 583). However, Jeffrey Kennedy quotes from an interview with Kathleen Cannell who played Life in this performance. Cannell states that Reed was very sick from his kidney ailment and having a great deal of difficulty on stage with his lines (204), which may account for the production’s difficulties.

⁵⁵ Heywood Broun. “Satirist Should Select Rapier as Weapon.” *New York Tribune*, February 23, 1919: VII, 1. John Corbin, *New York Times*, February 23, 1919: Sec. 4: 2. See Kennedy 579 for a detailed discussion of these two reviews.

⁵⁶ Brenda Murphy has argued that Steele is specifically parodying in *Not Smart* the brand of primitivism suggested by Picasso’s work with African sculpture and brought to New York by Marious de Zayas in 1914. She explains De Zayas’s justifications for Picasso’s work as “based on the assumption that the intellectual

capacity and development of Africans was inferior to that of Europeans and Americans” (*Provincetown Players* 59).

⁵⁷ There is even some speculation that due to Atlantic currents, fisherman from the Cape Verde islands may have discovered the fertile fishing grounds of George’s Banks off Cape Cod prior to the English arrival in 1620.

⁵⁸ Brenda Murphy calls Steele, who was the son of a Methodist minister, the “most conservative of the [Provincetown] group both aesthetically and ideologically” (*Provincetown Players* 56), and notes that the “difference between Steele and the people he is making fun of [Boyce and Hapgood] is that he has no problem expressing his belief that Mattie is inferior” (60) in his stage directions.

⁵⁹ The title of this chapter is inspired by Marjorie Perloff’s *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*.

⁶⁰ Suzanne Churchill cites five of the pieces, but not those used in this study and not for the purpose of analyzing Kreymborg’s politics.

⁶¹ Kreymborg states that he met the artists of the Stieglitz circle at Gallery 291 in 1912 but that he had not heard of Greenwich Village until 1913. Also, Suzanne Churchill, in an article predating her book-length study of *Others*, believes that

[. . .] *Troubadour*, betrays its mythologizing tendencies: Kreymborg rarely dates events, occasionally changes names, and frequently distorts the record. As Gertrude Stein suggests in a review, *Troubadour* constructs "very nice," "very pleasant," and "very satisfying" identities for its principal agents: "In this history of us of himself and us Kreymborg makes us makes himself and each one

of us different enough so that some one can know us." In particular, Kreymborg 's idealistic history glosses over gender issues and sexual tensions, which Modernist criticism has only recently begun to uncover. ("Making Space")

Additionally, Churchill points out that Kreymborg "neglects" to mention the poet Helen Hoyt, an *Others* contributor and guest editor, in *Troubadour*, although the two were in love and likely had an affair at the end of Kreymborg's first marriage in the spring of 1916. I suspect Kreymborg omitted Hoyt because the affair occurred after he had already met Dorothy Bloom, the woman who would become his second wife in a marriage lasting more than 45 years. See Churchill, "Making Space for *Others*: A History of a Modernist Little Magazine."

⁶² In the last poem in *Mushrooms*, "Misterman Kreymborg," the poet describes how his father chose the name Albert for him at random from a city directory. However, Hermann Kreymborg then looked up the name to see its history and found the story associated with King Alfred the Great (apocryphal and actually derived from a Roman tale). An old woman, calling from an adjoining room to her kitchen in which she can hear a visitor has just entered, scolds the visitor for not removing bread that is obviously in danger of burning in the oven. The visitor, actually King Alfred, not only removes the endangered loaves, but tends the remaining ones until the matron returns. In the poem, Kreymborg humbly dons the mantle of his namesake and becomes "king of the homespun."

⁶³ In a letter, Marianne Moore discussed her meeting and visit with Alfred Kreymborg and Gertrude Lord, noting the large portrait of Whitman that Kreymborg

kept in his home. The other remarkable thing about the incident is that the Kreymborgs actually served Moore lima beans (105-6).

⁶⁴ When the novella was published ten years later by Guido Bruno, a tireless promoter of Greenwich Village bohemia, as *Edna: A Girl of the Streets*, Bruno was hauled into court on obscenity charges. He was defended by the notorious Frank Harris and, after the case gained notoriety through Harris's friend George Bernard Shaw, was eventually acquitted (Kreymborg, *Edna* 3-10).

⁶⁵ For a full discussion of the curtain, see Kennedy 222-23.

⁶⁶ Kreymborg reports the figures as \$2.50 (*Troubadour* 243).

⁶⁷ It is unfortunate that neither Weist or Moody were apparently able to interview Kreymborg before he died in 1966.

⁶⁸ Weist does mention Kreymborg's poetry, but she does not explore his theme of the commonplace nor relate it to his left of center politics as I do here.

⁶⁹ Cheryl Black originally made this suggestion to me about the play's subtitle.

⁷⁰ In fact, while Kreymborg's was the first play at the Provincetown to show this side of modernism, it may also be worth pointing out, as Edna Kenton does (*Provincetown Players* 87), that the Players also produced what is probably the first robot play on any stage, three years before the premiere of *R.U.R.*, a social satire by Robert Allerton Parker entitled *5050*.

⁷¹ I contacted the family of Julian Freedman in search of the music for *Jack's House*. I wish to thank Mr. Peter Poor, Freedman's nephew, and Mr. Michael Deming, his grandson, for making time for me. Unfortunately, none of Julian

Freedman's personal papers have survived. I subsequently discovered the music for "Our Window," a quiet tune apparently played when Jack discovers the shapes his wife has left on the window glass, in the Greenwich Village periodical *The Quill*. The jaunty opening number that had Albert Gleizes "mincing" down the aisle has been lost.

Julian Freedman was part of a very interesting family of the arts in America. Kreymborg had been introduced to Julian by the composer's sister, his good friend Bessie Breuer (née Elizabeth Freedman), then working for the *New York Tribune*. Elizabeth and Julian were the children of rabbi, cantor, composer, and choir leader S. A. Freedman, who wrote a book on harmony and counterpoint published in Yiddish in Cleveland in 1918. All of S.A. Freedman's papers were destroyed by a house fire in 1926.

Bessie Breuer went on to become a successful novelist and screenwriter. Her first novel, *Memory of Love* (1935), was made into a film in 1939 entitled *In Name Only*, starring Cary Grant and Carole Lombard. Julian Freedman continued as a composer, producing among other works *The Thief Who Loved A Ghost*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, April 11, 1951, and also a book, *Teaching Piano To Your Child*, published in 1948. Interestingly, Kreymborg comments on Freedman's lackadaisical working habits and inability to make deadlines in *Troubadour* (246). When I asked his grandson, Michael Deming, if Freedman's papers were extant, Deming replied Julian "wasn't the type" to save papers, the implication being that such work would be counter to the spirit of his personality.

Bessie Breuer married the American ceramic artist Henry Varnum Poor, son of the landscape painter of the same name, who were part of the Poor family that founded the Standard and Poor Index on Wall Street. Breuer and Henry Poor had two children, Peter Poor, a television producer famous for his work with Walter Cronkite among others, and Ann Poor, a noted nautical painter.

⁷² Brenda Murphy has suggested this play was *The Comic Life of Elia Brobitza*, which was published in *Others* in 1919.

⁷³ I have looked for the supplements in the major New York newspapers during the weeks surrounding the performances, but have not been able to locate any. This is likely due to the fact that the supplements were not microfilmed in the copies of the newspapers available at the Library of Congress. I hope a further search in New York, where other local editions may have been microfilmed, will produce these photographs.

⁷⁴ The complete review of the evening's bill provides a marvelous insight into the life of the Provincetown Players productions in their heyday:

“In the Theatre: The second Nighters.”

The Provincetown Players.

“Vote the New Moon,” by Alfred Kreymborg, a satire; almost clever enough to excuse Alfred's multitude of literary atrocities; acted with spirit; took us back to the early days of the Washington Square Players.

“Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise,” by Wallace Stevens; wish some intelligent soul would tell us what it was all about; as an actor, William Dunbar is a good translator from the German.

“Pie,” by Lawrence Langner: amusing trifle old-fashioned pie-comedy; did Christine make the pie used in the play?

We evidently picked the wrong night to see these plays. The theatre was filled with a large and exceedingly noisy party of Slummers and a large loutish person, you know the kind called “The Life Of The Party” continually hogged the limelight. However we were grateful to the dog that strayed in and woofingly announced his presence during the Stevens play. The Players acted the first and third plays with more pep than they displayed in the previous bills, particularly spirited being the work of Jimmy Light, Remo Bufano, Alice Rostetter and Eda Heineman. A.H.M. [Arthur H. Moss] (21)

⁷⁵ After reading an article on “Walt Whitman as Socialist Poet” that Traubel brought to his attention, he willingly admitted, “I find I’m a good deal more of a socialist than I thought I was” (43). But when Traubel would press him about the socialists’ political program, Whitman always refused to commit himself: “Of that I’m not so sure,” (44) he told Traubel. “I rather rebel. I am with them in the result—that’s about all I can say” (Robertson).

⁷⁶ “Not You” added by Barnes in pencil in her copy of *A Book* (Special Collections, University of Maryland).

⁷⁷ Barnes reconstructed an incident that occurred to her as a child in various guises in her fiction and in correspondence to friends throughout her lifetime. She told the poet George Barker that she had been raped by her father as a young girl, but told another friend, James Scott, that she was raped by an Englishman “three times her age” with her father and mother doing nothing to stop it (Herring 53). She was married to the brother of her father’s mistress at 18. Father-daughter incest is the theme of her late complex drama, *The Antiphon*.

⁷⁸ Although she devoted most of her analysis to this biographical approach, Murphy notes that the biographical detail in the play is connected to a larger Barnes sense of the “mythic” and to an analysis of the “primitive” (154).

⁷⁹ Barnes was certainly familiar with Wilde: Wald and Zadel Barnes were part of a literary salon in London in the 1880s where Zadel had been close to Lady Wilde, Oscar Wilde’s mother (Herring 12). Barnes’s drawings are highly reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley’s (as Guido Bruno noticed). Barnes saw the production of *Salomé* starring Mimi Aruglia, as she describes in her interview with Aruglia cited later in this chapter.

⁸⁰ Barnes uses the phrase “cried out” in the Helen Westley interview.

⁸¹ Unfortunately, the Barnes family bible is held by, but not currently available at the University of Maryland, Special Collections Department. All references in this chapter are to the online edition of the *The Holy Bible: King James Version* in my Works Cited.

⁸² Thanks to Beth Alvarez for identifying the handwriting in both texts.

⁸³ Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large provide a succinct explanation of Nietzsche's view of "real" and "apparent" worlds:

At the center of Nietzsche's work is an attack on modes of thought, such as Platonism and Christianity, which posit a dualism between a "true" world and a merely "apparent" one. In such modes of thinking the "true" world is held to be outside the order of time, change, multiplicity, and becoming—it is a world of "being"—while the world of change, becoming, and evolution is held to be a false world, a world of error and mere semblance. (*xxxi*)

⁸⁴ Nietzsche thought this best translation of his work into English, and praised Zimmern although she was Jewish.

⁸⁵ Mr. Steven Taeber, the owner of the Glaspell-Cook cottage, asked me to help him move the base, sculpted by Cook with Greek-inspired goddesses, so he could plant tomatoes. He believed the bronze dial was either stolen by neighborhood teenagers and thrown in Cape Cod Bay or perhaps donated to a World War II scrap drive. (Susan Glaspell did donate a brass plaque that had been mounted near the site of the Wharf theatre in honor of Cook during the war.)

⁸⁶ J. Ellen Gainor offers a very interesting examination of this play, in which she locates its nature vs. industrialization theme in the tradition of the American pastoral (*Susan Glaspell in Context* 16). My interpretation is similar; however, I locate the play's critique of romanticized views of essential relations with nature in the context of the general parody of modernism the Provincetown Players were engaged in as a troupe.

Marcia Noe and Robert Marlowe have compared *Tickless Time* with *Suppressed Desires* and argue that the two plays “have much in common. Each play enacts a search for truth, a quest for self-actualization, and an attempt to escape from conformity, all characteristics of the early twentieth-century zeitgeist” (52). Further, they point out that “Paradoxically *Tickless Time* both reflects and undermines modernist thinking” (53). I very much agree. Both Cook and Glaspell collaborations are part of the long list of short plays that critique modernists and their ideas in the Provincetown Players canon discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. In my 1994 master’s thesis, I stated, “The Provincetown movement, then, was not an organic outgrowth of the prewar Renaissance but in many ways a critique of it; it was almost a counter rebellion” (12).

⁸⁷ Robert Dowling believes:

O'Neill was broke at the time and wrote this plot-driven farce to be a money-maker. Never taking it seriously, in the summer of 1918 he encouraged his second wife Agnes BOULTON to rework it herself. "It's not my sort of stuff," he told her, "but it's a damned good idea for a popular success. Take it and use it if you can—it needs something to be done to it, and you might be able to fix it up. Either a novel, or even a better play than it is now" (qtd in Boulton 192). O'Neill seems to have made this suggestion as a quid pro quo for co-opting her idea for a short story, "The Captain's Walk," and turning it into his own one-act play *WHERE THE CROSS IS MADE*. (1: 381)

⁸⁸ Robert Dowling made the suggestion of comparing the plays and is also aware of these similarities.

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