**GLASPELL, SUSAN (1876-1948)**

Susan Glaspell shaped the development of American modernism not only as an award-winning author but also as a founding member of the Provincetown Players, the groundbreaking theatre company that nurtured other American modernists such as Eugene O’Neill.

Although she spent most of her career on the East Coast, Glaspell hailed from Davenport, Iowa, and attended Drake University in Des Moines. While still a teenager, she began working in journalism; after college, she joined the staff of the *Des Moines Daily News,* covering the State Legislature and criminal trials. Glaspell also began to write short fiction and soon decided to pursue creative writing exclusively, publishing her first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered* (1909), while continuing to place stories in leading magazines.

In 1913, Glaspell married fellow Iowan George Cram (“Jig”) Cook. They relocated to the bohemian enclave of Greenwich Village, spending summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts. There, in the summer of 1915, Cook and Glaspell staged a play they co-wrote, *Suppressed Desires*, a spoof of Freudian psychology. The following summer Cook insisted that Glaspell draft another play. Drawing on a case she had covered in Iowa, Glaspell wrote *Trifles*, a story of spousal abuse and murder. *Trifles* and its short story counterpart, “A Jury of Her Peers” (1917), remain her best-known works; they also became foundational texts for American feminist literature.

Cook then moved the Provincetown Players to Greenwich Village, where, between 1917 and 1922, Glaspell produced nine more plays. Greenwich Village at this time was the epicenter of America’s burgeoning modernist movement; Glaspell’s dramaturgy reflects American modernism’s stylistic experimentation and thematic breadth. *The Outside* (1917), for example, interweaves symbolic language and images to detail the lives of two lonely women, while *The People* (1917), set in the office of a financially strapped publication, veers between documentary realism and elegy. *The Verge* (1921), the story of a woman’s descent into madness, illustrates American expressionism both dramaturgically and scenographically, while *Inheritors* (1921) debates foundational democratic concepts strained by restrictive governmental policies.

Following Jig Cook’s unexpected death in 1924, Glaspell returned to fiction. Adding to the three novels she had already published, including the acclaimed *Fidelity* (1915), she now wrote six more. Three of these—*Brook Evans* (1928), *Fugitive’s Return* (1929), and *The Morning is Near Us* (1939)—appeared on US best-seller lists. While Glaspell explored a range of styles in her drama, her fiction remained primarily realistic, often focusing on challenges facing her female characters. Yet within that form, Glaspell expanded its reach, imbuing some novels with a tragi-comic sensibility, others with poetic language and imagery, and still others with political fervor.

Glaspell also wrote three more plays, one of which, *Alison’s House* (1930), received the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Set in 1899 and loosely based on the life of Emily Dickinson, *Alison’s House* depicts America on the brink of a new century and captures the spirit of revolutionary change that grounds all of Glaspell’s narratives. Both in her own career and in the stories of women’s lives she created, Glaspell championed the powerful and complex intersections of feminism and modernism.

**List of Works**

Ben-Zvi, Linda, and J. Ellen Gainor, eds. (2010) *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, Jefferson: McFarland.

Glaspell, Susan. (1909) *The Glory of the Conquered*: *The Story of a Great Love*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes.

------ (1915) *Fidelity*, Boston: Small, Maynard and Company.

------ (1928) *Brook Evans*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes.

------ (1929) *Fugitive’s Return*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes.

------ (1912) *Lifted Masks*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes. (A collection of short stories.)

------ (1940) *The Morning is Near Us*, London: Victor Gollancz.

**References and Further Reading**

Ben-Zvi, Linda, ed. (1995) *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

------ (2005) *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carpentier, Martha C. (2001) *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Gainor, J. Ellen. (2001) *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-48*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Makowsky, Veronica. (1993) *Susan Glaspell’s Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Ozieblo, Barbara. (2000) *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Papke, Mary E. (1993) *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, Westport: Greenwood Press.

**J. Ellen Gainor, Cornell University**

**Recommended Illustrations**

[](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=1941550&imageID=psnypl_the_4231&total=5&num=0&word=susan%20glaspell&s=1&notword=&d=&c=&f=&k=1&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&sort=&imgs=20&pos=3&e=w)

**Portrait of Susan Glaspell (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library).**

[Available at: <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?keyword=susan+glaspell&submit.x=4&submit.y=6.>]

[](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=1941554&imageID=ps_the_cd63_988&total=5&num=0&word=susan%20glaspell&s=1&notword=&d=&c=&f=&k=1&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&sort=&imgs=20&pos=4&e=w)

**The opening scene from an early production of Trifles (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library).**

[Available at: <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?keyword=susan+glaspell&submit.x=4&submit.y=6.>]

[](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=1941552&imageID=ps_the_cd34_517&total=5&num=0&word=susan%20glaspell&s=1&notword=&d=&c=&f=&k=1&lWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&sort=&imgs=20&pos=5&e=w)

**The expressionist setting for act 2 of The Verge​ (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library).**

[Available at: <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?keyword=susan+glaspell&submit.x=4&submit.y=6.>]