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EDITED BY
JUDITH E. BARLOW

Women Writers
of the
Provincetown Players




A COLLECTION OF SHORT WORKS

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Rehearsal photograph, Norma Millay and Harrison Dowd
in Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo*, 1919.



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excelsior editions

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Introduction

During the opening years of the twentieth century, women's designated place in the theater was in the audience. Dorothy Chansky, in *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*, cites sources which estimate that women comprised 70 to 80 percent of playgoers at the time, and matinees were instituted to reach these viewers. As she also notes, many commentators lamented the feminization of the theater. Critic Clayton Hamilton, for example, considered all audiences "uncivilized and uncultivated" but reserved special disdain for women because they "are by nature inattentive."

More astute observers, however, blamed dramatists and producers—rather than spectators—for the sorry state of the American theater. Susan Glaspell, one of the founders of the Provincetown Players, complained: "Those were the days when Broadway flourished almost unchallenged. Plays, like magazine stories, were patterned. . . . They didn't ask much of *you*, those plays." In her autobiography, Glaspell's colleague Neith Boyce lamented that "books and plays" as well as social conversation at the turn of the twentieth century suffered from "an indirectness, a polite evasion of what it was all about." With a few exceptions, notably Rachel Crothers's early dramas, most works by the era's small group of successful female playwrights shared this cultural timidity.

Both the American stage and women's place on it would soon undergo a fundamental change with the advent of the "Little Theater Movement." Political radicalism and artistic innovation went hand in hand: when silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, called a strike in 1913, New York artists and intellectuals joined with them to stage a fund-raising pageant. Both the Moscow Art Theatre and Dublin's Abbey Theatre toured this country early in the century, helping spawn the hundreds of troupes that quickly sprang up across the United States. Chansky places these theaters "among many national reform

projects, as Americans in all parts of the country sought political and social changes in the years from roughly 1890 into the 1920s.”

Provincetown Players historian Robert K. Sarlós adds that “the impact of outstanding women was perhaps greater” than that of men in creating the “cultural awakening” of which this theatrical revolution was a part. Mabel Dodge hosted a salon at which intellectuals, revolutionaries, poets, painters, and self-styled prophets discussed such controversial topics as “sex antagonism.” Activists and artists like Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, Isadora Duncan, and Gertrude Stein challenged traditional notions about society and the arts, including women’s roles in both. Feminism was in the air as women fought for civil liberties that included equality in marriage and the right to vote.

The most important of the Little Theaters that emerged just before America entered World War I was the Provincetown Players, which began as an informal group of friends on Cape Cod in the summer of 1915. The vast majority of Little Theaters produced dramas by (nearly always male) modern European and British playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov, and George Bernard Shaw. But the Provincetown Players—which would dub its New York City venues “The Playwrights Theatre”—was dedicated to supporting work by American dramatists and involving them in the productions. The first of the group’s “Resolutions” was “to encourage the writing of American plays of real artistic, literary and dramatic—as opposed to Broadway—merit.” During its seven-year run the group produced nearly one hundred plays by some fifty dramatists; it broke its commitment to native drama only twice, to perform Arthur Schnitzler’s *Last Masks* and to include Gustav Wied’s *Autumn Fires* in a semi-official “spring season” in 1921. Sarlós justly argues that “from the perspective of drama alone, it was the single most fruitful American theatre prior to the Second World War: it introduced more native playwrights, had a greater impact on audiences and critics, and a longer life than any similar group.”



By the second decade of the twentieth century, Provincetown, Massachusetts, was a favorite summer haunt of the “bohemian” set—painters, sculptors, poets, and others seeking to lead unconventional lives. Situated at the tip of Cape Cod, the area boasted a beautiful seacoast, dunes, and relatively low rents. A few years later America’s artists and intellectuals would flock to Paris, but World War I kept most of them on this side of the Atlantic. Greenwich Village was their winter home and, often, Provincetown was their summer retreat.

The group that became the Provincetown Players was scarcely composed of social outcasts: most were middle class and many were college educated.

The Players came from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds—including the Irish American O’Neill and several Jewish members—but all were white. Still, they saw themselves as radicals who opposed the status quo of their conservative hometowns and dedicated themselves to supporting artistic innovation, questioning the capitalist system, reevaluating relations between women and men, and challenging traditional sexual mores.

The birth of the Provincetown Players was not particularly auspicious, although in retrospect the first performance has taken on the aura of theatrical legend. In July of 1915, a collection of friends came together to stage *Constancy*, Neith Boyce’s comedy about a love affair between two members of their “set,” and *Suppressed Desires*, a Freudian spoof by George Cram (Jig) Cook and Susan Glaspell that had been turned down as too “special” by the already established Washington Square Players in New York. *Constancy* (which, according to some scholars, was also a Washington Square “reject”) was performed on the balcony of a house rented by Boyce and her husband, Hutchins Hapgood; the audience sat in the living room. For *Suppressed Desires* the spectators turned their chairs around to face the center of the room. The bill was repeated for a larger audience in September in an old fish house on a nearby wharf, which would also serve as a theater the following year.

In the fall of 1916, after a second summer of performances, the Provincetown Players organization was formally born. The group carved a theater—with reputedly the most uncomfortable auditorium benches in New York—out of a rented brownstone at 139 Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village. A few years later they relocated to larger quarters at 133 Macdougall Street, a building that had previously served as a stable. George Cram Cook was a prime mover in the founding of the Provincetown Players, and he remained the president of the organization until he and his wife, Susan Glaspell, left for Greece in 1922. With their departure, the Players came to an end—even though a tenuously related company calling itself the Provincetown Playhouse continued on for seven more years. Unquestionably, the most significant dramatist the group introduced to the world was Eugene O’Neill, who had fifteen works performed by the Provincetown Players and would eventually become the only American playwright to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. But the prominence of O’Neill and Cook should not be allowed to overshadow either the important theatrical accomplishments of the women writers of the Provincetown Players or the fact that, working in a wide range of capacities, women were in many ways the backbone of the group.

Thirteen of the twenty-nine individuals listed in the original Provincetown Players incorporation papers were female. In her pioneering book *The Women of Provincetown, 1915–1922*, Cheryl Black identifies “more than 120 women [who] were associated with” the group during its seven-year life. Most of these were feminists committed to social change as well as artistic experimentation; in fact, they saw the two as mutually supportive. Mary Heaton

Vorse, a fiction writer, labor activist, and feminist journalist, represented the Woman Suffrage Party of New York City at an international women's peace conference in the Netherlands in 1915. She owned the Provincetown wharf on which the first summer seasons of plays were performed, and she continued to be an active member of the Players for many years.

Novelist, critic, and editor Edna Kenton was one of the founders of Heterodoxy, an influential feminist discussion group that began holding meetings in 1912 and included such other Players as Susan Glaspell, Eleanor Fitzgerald, Ida Rauh, and Helen Westley. Heterodoxy—which lasted until 1940—was composed of activists who met regularly to consider issues ranging from birth control, suffrage, and education reform to the arts, especially theater. Historian Dee Garrison believes that the organization's luncheon discussions “brought together the largest group of intellectually exciting American women ever gathered in one room.” Kenton served on the Provincetown Executive Committee from early 1917 until the Players disbanded in 1922; among her jobs was reading and selecting plays for performance. In a 1914 article in the journal *The Delineator*, Kenton tackled the ever-present challenge of defining *feminism*, characterizing it as “*any woman's spiritual and intellectual attitude toward herself and toward life. It is her conscious attempt to realize Personality; to make her own decisions instead of having them made for her; to sink the old humbled or rebelling slave in the new creature who is mistress of herself.*”

Ida Rauh was a feminist and socialist who held a law degree, worked for the Women's Trade Union League, and supported birth control. Rauh not only performed more than two dozen roles in Provincetown plays but also directed several productions and was for a time one of the chief administrators of the organization. A slightly later addition was Nina Moise, who worked with the group in 1917 and 1918. According to Sarlós, “Moise could not singlehandedly turn the performances professional even had she wished, yet her expert control made an impression on the Players, and they were never the same thereafter.” The role of the modern director was still emerging in the commercial theater, and the director's position was further complicated at the Provincetown Players because of the group's original plan to have authors stage their own works. Although staging credit cannot always be established, Black's estimate that nearly half of the Provincetown productions were directed by women seems accurate. This is an astonishing percentage considering the underrepresentation of women as directors on the commercial stage—then and now—and Moise was largely responsible. During her year and a half with the Players, Moise directed or codirected at least nineteen plays, including several by Glaspell and O'Neill, and eventually became the first of the company's producing directors—at the munificent salary of fifteen dollars a week.

M. Eleanor Fitzgerald came on board in October of 1918 and served as the group's secretary-treasurer for many years, although keeping the books seems an unlikely job for an anarchist friend of Emma Goldman's. Provincetown historians Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau record that Fitzgerald did fund-raising and bookkeeping, answered phones, sold tickets, and generally undertook jobs no one else would or could do. Marguerite Zorach—who, according to biographer Marilyn Friedman Hoffman, “was the best known woman artist of her generation in America” at the time—designed sets for the group. Women also did most of the costume design although costumers, including Jig Cook's mother, Ellen, rarely received credit. And last but certainly not least, Christine Ell ran the restaurant that served as the group's main gathering and eating spot.

Interestingly, women also served as the original historians of the Provincetown Players. Edna Kenton wrote a revealing chronicle that was finally published some eighty years after she composed it, and Susan Glaspell's *The Road to the Temple*, although primarily a biography of husband George Cram Cook, is a valuable record of the group's personal relationships and professional accomplishments. Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau misleadingly yoked the Provincetown Players with the later group bearing a similar name, but their 1931 book, *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre*, kept the memory of the Players alive long after the company had disbanded.



Cheryl Black observes that “although many little theaters were founded and directed by women, they produced very few women dramatists.” The Provincetown Players was a notable exception. More than one-third of the works performed by the Players were written or coauthored by women, a percentage that few theaters can match even a century later. Many of the women whose plays appeared on the Provincetown stage—including Susan Glaspell, Neith Boyce, Louise Bryant, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Djuna Barnes—were active members who directed, acted, painted sets, and served on essential committees. Others, like Mary Carolyn Davies, Rita Creighton Smith, Edna Ferber, and Bosworth Crocker, had little or no connection with the Players besides having their works performed by the group.

The Provincetown Players' bylaws specifically stated that the group would “not necessarily limit their choice of plays to those written by active members.” That gave a great deal of power to the people who decided what would appear on each bill. During the early years, submitted scripts were read aloud and the entire membership voted on which to present. Edna Kenton reports, however, that this practice was ended before the 1916–17 season because “the group had already rebelled against the boredom by staying away.” A play

selection committee was appointed, and Kenton claims that “Susan Glaspell and I were the only members of the group who really read every play that came to us during those six years.” Some works were rejected because they required huge casts or elaborate scenery that could not be accommodated on the tiny Provincetown stages, but otherwise Glaspell, Kenton, and their colleagues were free to select dramas that interested them. Apparently they had a large number from which to choose, even if most had little or no theatrical merit. Kenton wrote a 1922 note to a journalist begging her not to reprint “the ‘Provincetown Players Want New Plays’ story! It was good press stuff, but we are being littered again at the close of the year with movie scenarios and the written out yearnings of the inarticulate would be dramatist!” With Glaspell and Kenton as the prime script readers, it is not surprising that comedies and dramas about women’s restlessness in oppressive marriages, the absurdity of the double standard, and the plight of “spinsters” in a society that values women for their youthful beauty found a sympathetic home on Macdougal Street. Further, female playwrights were surely attracted to the Provincetown by the presence of strong actresses to portray their protagonists and by the chance to have their work directed by women who shared their feminist concerns.

The most important woman dramatist in the group was Glaspell herself, who saw eleven of her plays on the Provincetown boards. She remains the best known of the Players sisterhood, but Glaspell had plenty of female company: Neith Boyce and Rita Wellman each had four works performed; Djuna Barnes and Edna St. Vincent Millay contributed three apiece; and plays by Edna Ferber, Alice Rostetter, Evelyn Scott, Mary Carolyn Davies, Florence Kiper Frank, Louise Bryant, Grace Potter, Mary Foster Barber, Bosworth Crocker, Rita Creighton Smith, and Alice Woods filled out the bills.

The vast majority of works performed by the Provincetown Players were one-acters. These were easier for novice dramatists to compose and simpler to rehearse and stage since most required small casts and minimal sets. Among writers represented in this volume, only Susan Glaspell contributed full-length dramas to the group. My decision to focus on short plays unfortunately excludes the work of Evelyn Scott, whose *Love* was performed by the Players early in 1921. Scott’s drama, like O’Neill’s later *Desire Under the Elms*, is a modern rendering of the Hippolytus story in which a woman and her stepson are attracted to each other. Scott (born Elsie Dunn) was a prolific author in several genres whose writing, according to biographer D. A. Callard, won a dubious compliment from William Faulkner: “pretty good, for a woman.”

I have included in this anthology one example from each of the women who had a short play presented by the Provincetown Players. The dozen works were chosen for their individual quality and because as a whole they showcase the range and depth of female writers’ contributions to the group. A thirteenth play, Rita Wellman’s *The Horrors of War* (1915), appears in the appendix. Although this is without doubt an early version of *Barbarians*, staged by the

Players in 1917, I have placed *The Horrors of War* in an appendix because it is impossible to know precisely how this script, copyrighted under the pseudonym Rita Leo, might differ from *Barbarians*, which is apparently lost. While I cannot be positive that the other texts included in this anthology exactly match the words spoken on the Provincetown boards, questions raised in this case by the change of title and nom de plume run deeper.

Some one-act works from the Players repertoire have apparently not survived, including Grace Potter's *About Six* and Alice Woods's *The Devil's Glow*. Black cites Potter as "a suffragist and psychoanalyst who had studied with Jung and Rank." Little is known of *About Six* except the description of the set—"A Disorderly Flat in New York." In a 1963 interview, Provincetowner James Light told Robert Sarlós that Potter's play was a "snappy, witty domestic comedy," but his memory is suspect. According to a 1918 article by Edna Kenton in *The Boston Transcript*, *About Six* was "another play of New York's underworld, written with realism and understanding." Novelist and magazine writer Alice Woods (Ullman) was a friend of Eugene O'Neill and his second wife, Agnes Boulton. Biographers Barbara and Arthur Gelb report that O'Neill encouraged her to adapt one of her stories into a short play titled *The Devil's Glow*, but that script too has disappeared. More puzzling is the case of Florence Kiper Frank's *Gee-Rusalem*, which the Players performed in 1918 on a bill with Millay's *The Princess Marries the Page* and O'Neill's *Where the Cross Is Made*. The surviving script of this comedy, in the Library of Congress, satirizes the single "new woman," Freudian psychology, and the eugenics movement—and Zionism, assimilationism, anti-Semitism, and communism as well. However, this script is three acts in length and includes several characters not listed in the Provincetown playbill. Almost certainly the *Gee-Rusalem* presented by the Players was a much shorter version, the text of which has apparently been lost.



An acquaintance of such feminist activists as Henrietta Rodman, Crystal Eastman, and Emma Goldman, Neith Boyce was a successful fiction writer when she helped found the Provincetown Players, which produced three of her plays in addition to one she coauthored with her husband, Hutchins Hapgood. A year after Boyce's *Constancy* became the first work staged by the collection of friends that would evolve into the Players, her *Winter's Night* (1916) premiered. Following a paradigm popular in literature throughout the ages, *Winter's Night* is a triangle play about two men in love with the same woman, Rachel Westcott. As in Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*, which may well have been influenced by *Winter's Night*, the men are brothers. Boyce, however, adds a new twist to an old story: The problem is not that two siblings are in love with one woman, or that the woman chose the wrong suitor, but rather

that she married at all. Instead of dreaming of Prince Charming, Rachel yearns for the life of an artisan in a bustling city.

Where *Winter's Night* is a realistic tragedy about rural marriage, Louise Bryant's *The Game* (1916) is a heavily symbolic morality play. Taken together, these two early Provincetown offerings mark the wide stylistic range of women's writings on their stage. A journalist first and foremost, Bryant spent only half a year with the group before leaving for Russia; her books and articles about the revolution there comprise her most enduring legacy. The success of *The Game* has been largely attributed to the striking abstract scene and costume designs of Marguerite and William Zorach, but the text holds its own as a fantasy about two despairing artists—a poet and a dancer—who find hope in each other. And while *The Game* may represent the opposite stylistic pole from *Winter's Night*, it is scarcely a romantic story of young love—a story, in fact, rarely found on the Provincetown stage. In Bryant's emblematic world, shadowed by the specter of war, the characters' fates are determined by a roll of the dice, and love can be selfish as well as fleeting.

Another abstract work, Mary Carolyn Davies's parable *The Slave with Two Faces* was performed in late January 1918. The Players staged only this work by Davies, a poet and fiction writer with limited ties to the group. Like *The Game*, *Slave* emphasizes the role of chance in our lives, portrays existence as a constant battle between the forces of life and death, and stresses the importance of individual integrity. On another level, *Slave* is an allegory about the dangers of conventional feminine roles, a central theme in many Provincetown plays by women. Threatened by the menacing figure of Life, the First Girl survives because she refuses to be intimidated into giving up her pride and independence. As the Second Girl learns to her horror, merely the *appearance* of subservience to a “master” is deadly.

On a lighter note, roughly half the works included in this volume are comedies. *The Rib-Person*, *Woman's Honor*, *The Widow's Veil*, *The Baby Carriage*, *Aria da Capo*, *Kurzy of the Sea*, and *The Horrors of War* are witty disproof of the cliché that women (especially feminists) lack a sense of humor. A talented writer of drama, fiction, and biography, Rita Wellman saw four of her works performed by the Players, including *Funiculi-Funicula*, a contemporary melodrama about self-absorbed parents; *Barbarians*, a sardonic spoof of warfare and soldiers (see *The Horrors of War* in the appendix); and *The String of the Samisen*, a tragedy based on a samurai legend. Wellman's “farce satire” *The Rib-Person* (1918) lampoons Zelma, who rejects the conventions of marriage and motherhood while remaining happily dependent on men—a “new woman” in some ways, perhaps, although certainly no feminist. But in the characters of Doris, an accomplished if stereotypically gruff foreign correspondent, and the comically earnest Lucile, Wellman offers us a glimpse of some of the positive alternatives to marriage from which women could choose, alternatives that became more numerous with the advent of World War I.

Rita Wellman was the first of the Provincetown writers to reach Broadway when *The Gentile Wife* opened in December of 1918. It was Susan Glaspell, however, who would win a Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Alison's House*, written several years after the Players' demise. With her husband George Cram Cook, Glaspell was one of the group's founders; in addition to her roles as a script reader and writer, she proved to be among their most gifted and popular actresses. The eleven plays Glaspell wrote or coauthored for the Players range from the amusing (most notably *Suppressed Desires* and *Tickless Time*, her collaborations with Cook) to the profoundly tragic, like *Trifles* and *The Verge*. The seriocomic *Woman's Honor* (1918), which critic Edwin Bjorkman characterized as "a farce that cuts more deeply than many tragedies," occupies a central place in the Glaspell canon. When a young man accused of murder refuses to reveal the name of the lover who could provide him an alibi, a procession of women offer to play the role. As characters with names like the Cheated One and the Shielded One gather on the stage, they reveal how they have suffered from a patriarchal concept of "honor" that defines their integrity wholly in sexual terms.

Rita Creighton Smith's *The Rescue* (1918) owes little to the Freudian theories that were a major topic of conversation in intellectual circles at the time, theories that Glaspell and Cook satirized in *Suppressed Desires*. It does, however, probe the concept of madness in ways that would later be echoed in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Smith, an aspiring dramatist, was not an active member of the Provincetown group, although she may have submitted *The Rescue* to them. Equally likely, one or more Players might have seen it performed at Harvard in 1916 or read it in George Pierce Baker's *Plays of the Harvard Dramatic Club*. *The Rescue*'s protagonist is young Anna Warden, who has returned to the grim New England home of her paternal ancestors. What makes Smith's exploration of the subject of madness particularly intriguing is her depiction of the Hawthornesque house in which insanity dwells, a house adorned with pictures of dead relatives. Just as Neith Boyce presents rural domesticity as stultifying in *Winter's Night*, Smith paints her aristocratic Puritan world as lethal. Anna Warden's "prison" is grander than Rachel Westcott's farmhouse, to be sure, but both characters believe that escaping to cities and pursuing careers offer their only chance for happiness.

Alice Rostetter, a teacher who went on to write several dramas for young people, apparently saw the Provincetown theater primarily as a place to hone her acting skills: she performed the role of Mrs. Phelan in her own comedy, *The Widow's Veil* (1919), and acted in about a half dozen plays by others. Rostetter's *Veil*, one of the wittiest and most original works staged by the Provincetown Players, takes the form of a discussion between young Katie McManus and her neighbor, Mrs. Phelan, carried on across a tenement air-shaft. Married only ten days, Katie is worried about her ailing husband. The

worldly-wise Mrs. Phelan “comforts” her with stories of death and dying, eventually providing a widow’s veil in which Katie looks particularly attractive. Rostetter is clearly mocking the vanity and shallowness of her female characters, but she is also offering a sardonically unromantic view of marriage: after less than two weeks of wedded life, widowhood holds a certain appeal for this harried bride.

Bosworth Crocker’s *The Baby Carriage* (1919) is another comedy set among the working classes. Even though Crocker (a pseudonym for Mary Arnold Crocker Childs Lewisohn) was not a member of the Provincetown Players and at first did not even know that they were rehearsing her script, she was certainly familiar with the group through her husband, critic Ludwig Lewisohn. *The Baby Carriage* finds Goldie Lezinsky—an immigrant Jewish mother of three young sons—pregnant with what she hopes will be a daughter. The play concerns her attempts to persuade her husband, a struggling tailor, to let her buy the expected offspring a secondhand baby carriage. Hung on this spare plot is a battle between a practical, ambitious woman who wants her children to rise in American society and an unworldly man who shuns assimilation and prefers reading the Talmud to sewing trousers.

Sharing the bill with *The Baby Carriage* was Mary Foster Barber’s naturalistic *The Squealer* (1919). How the Provincetowners acquired *The Squealer* is unknown, although Barber was living in New York City at the time of its production and might well have offered them the script. At the center of *The Squealer* is Margaret Kerrigan, the strong-willed wife of a miner who has joined the radical Molly Maguires, a group of Irish American coal miners who protested working conditions in the late nineteenth century. A drama about labor strife was almost guaranteed to appeal to the Players, several of whom (most notably John Reed and Susan Glaspell) had been involved in the 1913 march and pageant in support of striking silk workers in New Jersey. But *The Squealer*’s portrait of the Molly Maguires is not particularly positive, and the issue at hand is personal loyalty rather than economic fairness. When Margaret learns that her husband has betrayed his fellow workers—using her need for him as an excuse—she refuses to compromise *her* honor by aiding him. Like Tani, the protagonist of Rita Wellman’s *The String of the Samisen*, Margaret contradicts the popular assumption that women value romantic love above all else. *The Squealer* also presents an ironic contrast to *Woman’s Honor* that Glaspell must have appreciated, for “woman’s honor” in this case has nothing to do with chastity.

Edna St. Vincent Millay was already an acclaimed poet when she joined the Provincetown Players, and she would go on to become the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in poetry. Millay not only proved a popular actress with the group but even persuaded her two sisters and mother to join her. Millay’s earliest works presented by the Players—*The Princess Marries the Page* and *Two Slatterns and a King*—were originally written and staged when she

was a student at Vassar. Her third was *Aria da Capo* (1919), an antiwar parable that embeds a tragedy in a seemingly lighthearted harlequinade. Composed immediately after the conclusion of World War I, *Aria* is an intricately woven critique of middle- and upper-class aesthetes who blithely debate the merits of artistic movements while ignoring the deadly conflicts around them. Millay succeeds in presenting an engaging comedy that not only illustrates the dangers of capitalism and the ease with which war arises, but indicts the members of the audience for the destruction enacted onstage. One of the best plays to appear on the Provincetown stage, *Aria da Capo* foreshadows Walt Kelly's famous *Pogo* cartoon: "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Edna Ferber was still another future Pulitzer Prize recipient whose work was produced by the Provincetown Players. Although she would win her award for fiction, her collaborations with George S. Kaufman made her an important figure in the American theater as well. Ferber knew several Players but was dismayed to learn that the company was rehearsing an unauthorized adaptation of her short story "The Eldest." In the end, Ferber herself provided a stage version. It is not surprising that the Players were attracted to *The Eldest* (1920), a realistic, distinctly antiromantic tale in the tradition of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, Eugene O'Neill's *Before Breakfast*, and even Neith Boyce's *Winter's Night*. In this bitter love triangle, the middle-aged protagonist, Rose, spends her days slaving for her ungrateful parents and siblings. She carries a torch for Henry, a long-ago suitor who left her because she would not abandon her family. When he returns, however, he woos Rose's much-younger sister: by the rules of the double standard, Rose is an old maid while Henry is a desirable mature man.

The final play in this anthology comes from Djuna Barnes, a modernist novelist, poet, dramatist, and painter who was one of the twentieth century's most original voices. Barnes was an active member of the Players, and during their so-called "season of youth," 1919 to 1920, a trio of her comedies appeared on their stage: *Three from the Earth*, in which a female "adventurist" is confronted by the sons of a former lover; *An Irish Triangle*, a droll defense of the benefits of adultery; and *Kurzy of the Sea* (1920). *Kurzy* follows the fortunes of young Rory McRace, who masks his fear of the female sex by making preposterous demands for a prospective wife; he believes he deserves "a Queen or a Saint or a Venus," although he himself is a lazy fisherman of limited intelligence. Rory's encounter with a "mermaid" reveals not only that his view of the partner he deserves is egotistically inflated, but that the net of marriage is one in which some women do not wish to be caught.



The women whose works were presented by the Provincetown Players were in many ways a special group. Though they hailed from as far west as Washington