
Recruits in the ‘Army of Women’: Mary Heaton Vorse and Susan Glaspell

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Abstract

The histories written about the Provincetown Players cite the aesthetic influences of Europe’s independent theatre movement and the cultural and political ideas that informed the plays of this experimental theatre group that developed in Provincetown and New York’s Greenwich Village in the second decade of the twentieth century. Border crossings between aesthetics and politics abound. These histories cite the ties of the Players to the various progressive organizations in close proximity—both in spirit and geography: the Liberal Club, the radical publication *The Masses*, and various feminist groups, including the Women’s Peace Party, Heterodoxy, the Lucy Stone League, to name just a few. Recent histories have focused on the unprecedented numbers of women who participated in the Provincetown, and their biographies provide additional evidence of the strong connections between their theatre activity and their social activism of the period. This paper will examine the intersections and intertextualities in the life and works of labor journalist, political organizer, and international feminist Mary Heaton Vorse, whose Provincetown wharf provided the original stage for the Players in 1915, and Susan Glaspell, founding member and one of the principal playwrights for the Players. Although they lived starkly different lives, Vorse and Glaspell were among the “army of women” that Vorse envisioned as changing the “customs of the world,” and in the process, the “world would change them.” Vorse traveled to war zones in Europe during the First World War to report on the atrocities, attended the Women’s Peace Congress, became an editor of *The Masses*, and devoted her life to reporting on labor strikes, beginning with the Lawrence textile workers’ strike in 1912. Glaspell devoted her life to creating fiction and drama. I will argue, however, that their friendship allowed Glaspell to see and interpret through her writing the personal /political costs of a life that transcended the boundaries established for Vorse early on, and that resonate with the particular struggles of Glaspell’s protagonists in *Bernice*, *The Verge*, and *Inheritors*.

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