

City of Lake and Wind

At the turn of the twentieth century, Chicago, Illinois, was one of the fastest growing cities in the United States; the city's determination to succeed was characterized by what many referred to simply as "Chicago Hustle." Known variously as "The Gem of the Prairies," "The Windy City," and "Porkopolis," Chicago was the financial, political, social, and cultural center of America's "hinterlands." The city's booming economy drew international immigrants, but its increasingly visible interest in the arts, evidenced by new theaters, opera houses, schools, artists' studios, and gallery spaces, attracted ambitious and artistic men and women from across the American Midwest. Though it remained marginal or even invisible to many on the East Coast of the United States, during the early decades of the twentieth century Chicago was home to a literary and artistic revolution that has come to be known as the Chicago Renaissance. In a brief tribute to the city, Topeka, Kansas, native Jane Heap acknowledged the vast possibilities Chicago offered its most talented citizens, as well as the inevitable challenge of its distance from the Atlantic Coast, and the acknowledged artistic centers of the United States:

Chicago: the gateway to the arts for all young things of the west, the middle-west, and the middle-east who discover that they are spiritual brothers of Picasso, Joyce, Stravinsky, Brancusi, etc. City of lake and wind, of Michigan Avenue, of violent emotions, especially disappointment.¹

A rejection of the nineteenth century's conservative social mores and artistic values defined the literature and art of the Chicago Renaissance. Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay worked against Victorian ideas about literature by employing the plain speech of average Americans in their writing. Architects working in the city, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan, and others of the Chicago School, employed new forms and methods, attempting to define a uniquely American design. Artists involved in the city's lively and busy art scene gathered to support new work in groups including the Chicago Society of Arts and Crafts at Hull House and the Arts Club of Chicago, a group that promoted Postimpressionist art.

Recognizing the importance of the city's artistic renewal, literary women such as Harriet Monroe and Margaret Anderson endeavored to create magazines that might promote the finest of the new work being produced in Chicago and bring it into conversation with that of national and international writers and artists. Poet Harriet Monroe, assisted by gifted women including Alice Corbin Henderson and Eunice Tietjens—both poets and editors in their own right—edited *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, the first American magazine devoted exclusively to poetry. Writer and editor Margaret Anderson founded the *Little Review* with the intention of publishing the best work available, regardless of literary taste or fashion. After just a few issues, Anderson was joined by artist Jane Heap, who shared Anderson's commitment to supporting new, provocative art and literature and to challenging literary audiences to

expand their vision of the arts. Both magazines published the work of the finest writers of the period, including Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and H. D. The *Little Review* also included artwork by Constantin Brancusi, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Francis Picabia, and Fernand Léger. The success of *Poetry* and the *Little Review* changed the face of literary publishing in the United States.

Poet Ruth Stephan followed in the footsteps of these influential editors, founding, with her husband John Stephan, *The Tiger's Eye*, a journal dedicated to publishing the work of thought-provoking new writers and artists, and to generating and encouraging aesthetic discussion among artists, critics, and audiences. Curator Katherine Kuh promoted conversation about modern art among museum goers and art students by showing the work of modern artists in her galleries and by providing strategies for viewing and interpreting non-representational art in her books about modern art and artists. Art critic Blanche Matthias explored the work of modern artists, including that of Georgia O'Keeffe, in Chicago regional and national magazines.

Though the early twentieth-century little theater movement arguably began in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and Greenwich Village, New York, Chicago dramatists participated in every area of the movement's transformation of American drama. Playwright and novelist Susan Glaspell wrote novels in Chicago before moving to the East Coast where she was a founding member of the Provincetown Players. She returned to Chicago late in her career, as the director of the Midwest Play Bureau of the Federal Theater Project during the late 1930s. Playwright, director, and actress Mary Aldis founded the Lake Forest Players and led the company through several seasons of successful productions in their small theater outside of Chicago as well as limited engagements in New York and other cities.

A "second generation" renaissance took place in Chicago during the 1930s and 1940s, especially among the city's African-American population. Like Harlem in the 1920s, Chicago in the 1930s was the site of a vital African-American artistic community. Based in the South Side neighborhood known as "Bronzeville," a thriving group of writers, entertainers, and artists created a new renaissance. Fiction writer and playwright Marita Bonner, poets Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks, and novelist Richard Wright lived and worked in the city, exploring the lives and voices of Chicago's African-American community. Composer and pianist Margaret Bonds and dancer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham rejuvenated traditional art forms in music and dance.

In spite of the diversity of the artistic landscape of Chicago in the first half of the twentieth century, the phenomenon known as the Chicago Renaissance is thought of largely as a literary movement.

While the most celebrated writers of the movement are men, poet Sara Teasdale was undoubtedly one of the most popular writers associated with the Chicago Renaissance; her many volumes of poetry often went into several printings and unlike that of some of her contemporaries, her work remained in print for decades. Teasdale was known for her skillful use of traditional poetic forms at a time when many of her fellow writers were experimenting with free verse poetry and unconventional language use. She expressed no interest in the language experiments of the high Modernists; throughout her writing life she worked almost exclusively in long-established meters and rhyming structures and she was considered a masterful practitioner of the sonnet.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Teasdale was almost fifteen years younger than her closest sibling. Perhaps because her parents were very protective of her as a child, Teasdale was a shy and anxious girl; she suffered from sometimes acute nervousness and was prone to frequent illness. Throughout her life, the poet struggled with increasingly debilitating anxiety. As a young woman, she went for the first time to a sanitarium where she was administered a “rest cure,” which severely restricted her activities and contact with family and friends. Teasdale found such seclusion calming and healing and returned to the hospital periodically throughout her adult life.

As a result of her frailty and poor health, Teasdale did not start school until she was nine years old. She attended a highly regarded girls’ school where teachers encouraged Teasdale and her classmates to pursue their interests in writing and art. After graduating from high school, she and several school friends formed an informal artists’ group called the Potters. The group, which included painters, photographers, writers, and designers, met regularly to discuss members’ work and the work of admired artists and writers. Though their families and community might have been inclined to view their interest in the arts as a charming pastime, the Potters took themselves seriously as artists and were determined to promote their work. To that end, they began to publish a journal, *The Potter’s Wheel*, each issue of which was a handmade, one-of-a-kind assemblage of poems, paintings, photographs, designs for clothing, stained-glass windows, and other objects, among a variety of additional images and expressions.

The Potter’s Wheel caught the attention of a local journalist, Frances S. Porcher, who wrote an article about the Potters and their work in the *Mirror*; “it is at once a surprise and genuine delight,” Porcher wrote, “to run across a coterie of talented girls who are earnestly getting something worth having out of their artistic bents and artistic temperaments.”² She singled out Teasdale, praising her poetry and acknowledging both her achievements and her potential. “Sara Teasdale . . . will be heard from,” she wrote; “hers is the perfect literary spirit.”³ The poet was encouraged by the notice and the critic’s admiration of her work:

Sara was so pleased with the praise in the *Mirror* about her work that she sent a little fantasy to [the editor]. It was the first thing that she had submitted to be published. In a few days she received a gracious letter of acceptance and a check.⁴

The poems published in the *Mirror* were later included in Teasdale's first published collection, *Sonnets to Duse and Other Poems* (1907), a homage to the celebrated actress Eleanora Duse.

As a young woman, Teasdale began to travel, first with her mother and later on her own, visiting Chicago, New York, Africa, and Europe. During her trips, she often met other writers and soon developed an extended community of friends, especially in Chicago's vibrant literary scene. Chief among these were the poets Vachel Lindsay and Eunice Tietjens and editors John Hall Wheelock and Harriet Monroe. Of meeting Teasdale early in her career, Monroe wrote, "She was as delicate as a lily, but under the white-petaled perfume one felt in her presence an impassioned intensity of feeling which her brief lyrics were then beginning to express."⁵ Tietjens and Teasdale shared a close friendship and often spent hours together talking about poetry. Of one conversation that took place at dusk on a summer evening, Tietjens wrote, "I could scarcely see Sara then, but her voice came from the shadow, warm and clear, speaking with a depth of human understanding and a beautiful spiritual honesty that lifted me to another world."⁶

Teasdale was in love with John Hall Wheelock, but the two enjoyed only a close friendship and never a romance; Vachel Lindsay, on the other hand, hoped to marry Teasdale. Though she considered his proposal, at the same time she was also entertaining a proposal from Ernst Filsinger, a businessman she met through Tietjens. Teasdale finally decided to marry Filsinger, though she maintained a close friendship with Lindsay. In 1915, the couple moved to New York City; later that year, Teasdale's second book, *Rivers to the Sea*, was published to considerable critical acclaim and tremendous popular success—the volume sold out several editions and was reprinted numerous times. Later books were equally successful; *Love Songs* won the Columbia Poetry Prize in 1918, and her 1920 volume *Flame and Shadow* met with praise: "Here is another steel-strong, defiant intellect, answering the riddle of the universe with song."⁷ Her next volume, *Dark of the Moon* (1926), was said by many to include Teasdale's strongest work to date. Poetry editor Harriet Monroe praised the collection:

Dark of the Moon, like its predecessors, has a personality in it. And when a powerful and engaging personality finds a truly lyric expression with the completeness recorded in successive groups of Sara Teasdale's best poems, we have a seemingly indestructible combination, a prophecy of what we short-sighted and short-lived mortals call immortality.⁸

Periodically throughout her writing life, Teasdale suffered lengthy bouts of writer's block. During these breaks in her own work, Teasdale edited a number of anthologies, including a collection of poetry by women, *Answering Voice: One Hundred Love Lyrics by Women* (1917), and anthologies of poems for children, *Rainbow Gold: Poems Old and New Selected for Boys and Girls* (1922) and *Stars To-Night: Verses New and Old for Boys and Girls* (1930). She began, but never completed, a biography of Christina Rossetti, a poet whose work had influenced Teasdale's early writing.

As the 1920s drew to a close, Teasdale's nervous condition worsened and she became increasingly depressed. She felt more and more alienated from her husband and eventually divorced him in 1929. Her loneliness and depression were fueled by the suicide of Vachel Lindsay in 1931. In January 1933, Teasdale committed suicide in her Fifth Avenue apartment. Her last collection of poems, *Strange Victory*, was published later that year.

Sara Teasdale found an ardent supporter of her work in editor Harriet Monroe. Founder of the influential little magazine *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse* and a poet herself, Monroe was one of the most important literary editors of the twentieth century. She was born in 1860 in Chicago, the daughter of a lawyer with a successful practice and considerable wealth. Her family lived comfortably until after the Chicago fire of 1871, when Monroe's father was unsuccessful in rebuilding his law practice. As a teenager, Monroe fell seriously ill and was sent to Washington to recuperate in the mild climate and to attend classes at a convent school. The teachers at her new school continued the literary education that had begun in her father's library, where Monroe had read Shakespeare, Shelley, Dickens, and other classics of English literature.

Monroe returned to Chicago after graduation and found work as a journalist, writing articles about the arts and literature for both small community newspapers and major citywide papers. She met and developed friendships with many in Chicago's arts communities, including writers, artists, and patrons of the arts. During frequent trips to New York City and other East Coast cities throughout the 1880s, Monroe met many of that region's finest writers and artists; she began writing reviews and arts pieces for New York newspapers as well as those in her hometown. Through her writing and her literary activities, Monroe became a well-known figure in the Chicago art world and a nationally recognized literature and arts critic. Along with the reviews and articles she wrote professionally, Monroe also wrote poetry. She was in her late twenties when her first poem was published. The same year, she was asked to write a poem to celebrate the opening of the new Chicago Auditorium. A few years later, Monroe was invited to write a poem in honor of the opening of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition; her poem, "The Columbian Ode," was presented at the fair's dedication ceremony.

During the next twenty years, Monroe continued to write; she also traveled extensively and taught occasional classes. But it wasn't until 1911, when she was fifty-one years old, that Harriet Monroe began the project that would be her most significant contribution to American letters. That year, she began raising funds from Chicago's wealthiest arts patrons and from artists and writers to support the publication of a magazine dedicated exclusively to poetry. At that time, there were no such publications in the United States. Poetry was sparingly published in popular magazines, but it was not widely published in journals or in many newspapers.

Monroe raised enough money through her network of personal and professional connections to fund her magazine for five years. Chicago poet Alice Corbin Henderson joined the editorial staff and the women went about compiling the first issue. Monroe solicited work from a long list of poets, including Ezra Pound, who was then living in London. Pound responded that he would certainly contribute and that he would also gladly act as "Foreign Correspondent" for the magazine. In October 1912, Monroe published the first issue of *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*.

As an editor, Monroe selected a wide range of contemporary poetry, including traditionally formal verse, regional or "local color" writers, African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance, international poets, and the formal and linguistic experiments of American writers, much of whose work arrived in the *Poetry* office via Ezra Pound. Because of the diversity of work she published, "*Poetry* [stands] as a monument not to the best of modern poetry but instead to the editor's inclusiveness—her desire to link as many writers as possible in a diverse community of modern poets."⁹ Monroe, who often stated that "poetry cannot sing into a void," chose for the magazine's motto Walt Whitman's famous assertion: "To have great poets, there must be great audiences, too." She sought to create a large readership by publishing an extremely wide-ranging selection of the poetry being written in her time.

Monroe could be a severe and exacting editor. She enjoyed the heated discussions she and Alice Corbin Henderson had in the magazine's office, and the magazine included both women's opinions and arguments about modern poetry in regularly published editorial comments. Eunice Tietjens, who joined the staff of the magazine shortly before Henderson's health required her to leave Chicago, described Monroe's editorial style in her memoir *The World at My Shoulder*:

It took time for me to realize how deeply human and warm-hearted Harriet Monroe was, beneath her often prickly exterior. She grew less austere, less prickly with time, but even to the end there were moments when she froze the blood of the unknowing. I have seen her look up over her glasses at some timid young thing who had with inward quaking offered a distilled essence of soul for her editorial consideration, and

blast him, or her, with a caustic criticism so devastating that visibly the edges of his soul, seared and curled, like the edges of an egg frying in a too hot pan.¹⁰

In spite of her high standards, keen eye, and sometimes acerbic tongue—or perhaps because of these—Monroe commanded the respect of the poets whose work appeared in her journal; Marianne Moore praised the editor's "valor, her goodness to us all, her imperviousness to plebeian behavior, her affection, the subordinatingly humorous trace of indulgence—one would not call it scorn—in her attitude to suggestions bearing on literary self-protectiveness."¹¹ Ezra Pound, with whom Monroe shared a complex and often contentious relationship, wrote:

Measuring by space and time, the elasticity of her perceptions and the freshness of her interest were those of a great editor, and no one more acrimoniously differed with her in point of view than I did, so, I think, no one is better to testify to her unflinching sincerity, to the unflinching purity of her intentions.¹²

During the 1920s and 1930s, Monroe traveled all over the world, spending considerable time in China and Europe. It was on a trip to Argentina to attend an international convention of poets and writers that Monroe passed away in 1936. She was seventy-six years old then, and *Poetry* had been publishing for nearly twenty-five years. In that time, the magazine had published early work by poets who were to become the most influential writers of the twentieth century and it had printed for the first time many of the most important poems of the period, works that would become touchstones of Modernist poetry. "During the twenty-four years of her editorship," Ezra Pound wrote of Monroe's work at *Poetry*, "perhaps three periodicals made a brilliant record, perhaps five periodicals, but they were all under the sod in the autumn of 1936, and no other publication has existed in America where any writer of poetry could more honorably place his writings."¹³

Eunice Tietjens became Harriet Monroe's associate editor at *Poetry* in 1913. A poet, novelist, editor, and anthologist, Tietjens was born Eunice Hammond in Chicago in 1884. She was raised in Evanston, Illinois, until she was thirteen, when her father died and she and her siblings traveled with their mother to Europe. They spent considerable time in Germany, Switzerland, and France; Eunice Hammond received much of her education in these countries, studying at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne, the University of Geneva, and the Froebel Kindergarten Institute in Dresden. Though she never earned a college degree, through travel and informal and formal schooling Tietjens received an extraordinary education in the arts and literature, and she developed near-native command of several European languages. Her siblings, too, benefited from their unique educational experiences and, like her, made significant contributions to the arts and to their communities. One of her sisters was a concert

cellist and another was a Christian missionary in the Far East; her brother was the inventor of the Hammond organ.

She was nineteen when she married Paul Tietjens in Paris. An American composer, Tietjens was well known for his collaboration with novelist L. Frank Baum on a musical version of Baum's popular novel, *The Wizard of Oz*. Shortly after they were married, the couple had two children; they returned to the United States and settled in New York. Tietjens devoted herself to raising her two daughters and occasionally wrote essays for local and community publications. After their oldest daughter died at the age of four, the couple separated. Tietjens returned to her childhood home in Evanston, where she found a job teaching kindergarten classes. She soon discovered that she was unsatisfied by that work; she began to look for alternative careers that she might find challenging and fulfilling. Encouraged by her friend, the writer Floyd Dell, she decided to pursue writing professionally.

Her poems began to appear in *Poetry* in 1913 and Harriet Monroe soon invited her to join the magazine's editorial staff. Years later, Monroe remembered her striking appearance: "Eunice was tall and dark . . . and her olive skin and midnight eyes were emphasized by a heavy mass of dark brown hair."¹⁴ The two women developed a close personal friendship and an effective editorial collaboration that lasted for many years. An extremely generous editor, Tietjens had a style that contrasted with that of Monroe, an editor who was not likely to treat would-be contributors with kid gloves. According to Monroe, Tietjens was "tender toward the hapless aspirants whose touching letters and worthless verse might move us to tears of sorrow or mirth, but never to acceptance."¹⁵ Tietjens eventually became an associate editor with the magazine and she continued to work there on and off for the rest of her life.

Tietjens traveled extensively throughout her life. Among her many lengthy trips was a six-month journey to the Far East, where she stayed with her sister, a missionary in China, and toured extensively in China and Japan. During this trip, Tietjens developed an abiding love of Chinese culture and of eastern religious traditions. These topics were the subject of her first collection of poems, *Profiles from China*, published in 1917. The same year, Tietjens, who regularly contributed articles to the *Chicago Daily News*, requested a position as an overseas correspondent for the newspaper. She was granted the position, and was sent to France as a war correspondent. She was deeply affected by the devastation she witnessed in Europe during the year she spent as a reporter there. This did not, however, dampen her interest in international travel. Her many journeys and experiences abroad continued to be a subject of her writing when she returned to the Midwest.

Though her work is no longer read widely, Tietjens was a poet of considerable note in her time. Her interest in modern poetry and in changing expectations about what poetry might be is evident in the fact that her work was noted for its rejection of poetic speech and restrictive traditional forms. One contemporary reviewer wrote, “that old fashioned type of mind that enjoys the same things repeated in the same form ad infinitum will have no use for Mrs. Tietjens when she vigorously kicks what she regards as the swaddling hands of rhyme aside.”¹⁶ More recently, literary scholars have commented that, of all the women writers associated with the Chicago Renaissance, she “came closest to adopting a colloquial voice.”¹⁷

After gaining some experience with *Poetry*, Tietjens had an opportunity to get involved with the beginnings of another Chicago magazine, Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review*. Tietjens was moved by Margaret Anderson’s idealism, enthusiasm, and her commitment to the art and literature she believed in. In the magazine’s first years, when Anderson struggled mightily to keep her project going in spite of her lack of financial backing, Tietjens was one of several friends who came to Anderson’s rescue; she pawned the engagement ring her husband had given her and gave the money to Anderson. “Eunice Tietjens came out, bringing a diamond ring,” Anderson wrote. “I don’t want this anymore. Sell it and bring out an issue.”¹⁸

Like Eunice Tietjens, Margaret Anderson was devoted to supporting modern literature. The magazine she founded and edited, the *Little Review*, was one of the most important and influential literature and art magazines of its time. Anderson began the magazine with little money, and producing it kept her perpetually broke. She was regularly evicted and so moved often, a process that was quite simple considering the fact that she owned just a few articles of clothing—a white blouse that she kept perfectly clean, the black suit she wore daily, and a blue dressing gown. Astonished that Anderson was continually able to find supporters and funds to produce the magazine, Eunice Tietjens referred to it as “a monthly miracle.”

What Anderson lacked in capital, she more than made up for with enthusiasm and style. Her spirit and commitment were the defining force of the *Little Review*. Tietjens, who met Anderson at a launch party for the magazine, remembered her first impression of the *Review* and its editor: “Seldom in this all too practical world has there been an adventure like the early days of the *Little Review*. . . . We all knew that [Margaret Anderson] was the burning core of the matter. And burn she did.”¹⁹ Anderson’s charm and passion were legendary; “Margaret herself was the adventure,” Tietjens wrote. “She was so unbelievably beautiful, so vital, and so absurd!”²⁰ Once, when the two friends went for a swim in Lake Michigan before sunrise, Tietjens remembered that Anderson looked like “some antique goddess of

dawn.” When their swimming woke a neighbor who shouted at them to be quiet, Tietjens observed, “that is the trouble with goddesses in a workaday world. They are seldom appreciated.”²¹

Anderson was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in a comfortable, middle-class family. Her interest in literature and the arts developed as a child, and as a young woman she enrolled at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, to pursue studies in these areas. Before taking a degree, Anderson dropped out to pursue a career as a writer; she moved to Chicago with big ambitions and plans to start her own magazine. Anderson remembered her impression of the city and lake when she arrived: “Chicago: enchanted ground to me from the moment Lake Michigan entered the train windows. I would make my beautiful life here. A city without a lake wouldn’t have done.”²² That Anderson had very little money did not slow her down. With the support of friends, the first issue of the *Little Review* was published in 1914.

The magazine’s motto, “Making no compromise with public taste,” appeared on the cover of each issue, announcing Anderson’s commitment to publishing the best work available, without regard to fashion or convention. The magazine included work by unknown writers, political extremists, including Emma Goldman, and radical social commentary, such as Anderson’s own article in defense of homosexuality. “Practically everything the *Little Review* published during its first years,” Anderson wrote, “was material that would have been accepted by no other magazine in the world at the moment.”²³ Anderson regretted that she could not pay contributors in those days; though she didn’t “consider it good principle for the artists to remain unpaid,” she wrote, “it’s a little better than for him to remain unprinted.”²⁴

In 1916, Margaret Anderson met Jane Heap, a woman well known in Chicago’s artistic circles for her interest in modern art and literature and her unconventional dress—she was among the first women in that or any other city to wear short cropped hair and dress in men’s trousers. Though she was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas, Heap had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and she was trained in mural design and painting in Germany. In her art and her person, Heap rebelled against the Victorian sensibility that still prevailed in Chicago, even among many of its forward thinking artists.

Anderson was struck instantly by Heap and her compelling ideas and conversation; “Jane Heap is the world’s best talker.”²⁵ Of their endless discussions of literature, art, and psychology, Anderson wrote, “My mind was inflamed by Jane’s ideas because of her uncanny knowledge of human composition, her unfailing clairvoyance about human motivation. This was what I had been waiting for, searching for,

all my life.”²⁶ Anderson immediately made Heap co-editor of the *Little Review*; the two women fell in love and boldly lived as a lesbian couple at a time when such unions were not often openly displayed.

In spite of its cultural revolution, the art and literature of the American Midwest were somewhat marginalized on the national and international art scene. Thus, in an effort to raise the *Little Review's* profile, Anderson and Heap moved the magazine to New York. Though they again struggled financially, artists and writers who hoped to gain entry into the magazine's pages sought them out and engaged them in evening-long discussions of art and culture. They enlisted Ezra Pound as a foreign editor and began to publish the work of more European and expatriate writers. They successfully elevated the magazine to the international arts scene, making it a fundamental component of the Modernist movement.

In 1918, the *Little Review* began to serialize *Ulysses*, James Joyce's extremely controversial novel. The editors were charged with obscenity and, after a drawn-out legal battle with the United States Post Office, convicted and fined in 1921. The trial was difficult on both women in many ways. The New York journalistic and literary communities disappointed them by doing nothing to support their publication of Joyce's work despite their off-the-record agreement about the importance of his writing. Interactions with their lawyer, a man who admitted he was disgusted by their lesbianism, were complicated and uneasy. The trial contributed to their continuing financial trouble; after receiving generous assistance from many friends over the years, they were reluctant to ask for additional loans. They published issues of the *Little Review* more and more irregularly; Heap and Anderson's relationship eventually began to fall apart.

With the tenth anniversary of the magazine in 1924, Anderson suggested they cease publication. Heap disagreed and decided to continue the journal without Anderson's co-editorship. Jane Heap edited the journal on her own; she shifted the magazine's focus to the visual arts by including more work by painters and sculptors, especially those associated with Dadaism, Surrealism, and other modern art movements. She eventually opened the Little Review Gallery through which she organized and curated a major exhibition of “machine-age” art and architecture in 1927. She was also actively involved in the organization of an international theater exposition in 1926.

Around the time of her separation from Heap and the *Little Review*, Anderson met Georgette LeBlanc, a Parisian opera singer and moved with her to France. She continued to write and edit books, and she developed close relationships with other women writers in Paris, including Kathryn Hulme, Janet Flanner, and Solita Solano. Like these friends, she became interested in the theosophy of Russian mystic George Gurdjieff; intrigued by his ideas and theories about human consciousness, she studied with

him in France at his Harmonious Institute for the Development of Man. Heap also became interested in Gurdjieff's theories of developing human consciousness and the life disciplines he preached and she, too, studied at his institute. Her work with him made Heap reconsider her ideas about art and her role in artistic production and promotion, and she determined that art and aesthetic experiment were an insufficient foundation for her life and work. She ceased publication of the *Little Review* and closed the Little Review Gallery.

Heap apparently never lost her compelling skill as a conversationalist. Of their meeting in France, Gertrude Stein described an encounter not unlike Anderson's descriptions of the endless hours of conversation she shared with Heap in their early days in Chicago. "Jane Heap turned up one afternoon. . . . Jane Heap sat down and we began to talk," Stein wrote. "She stayed to dinner and she stayed the evening, and by dawn the little ford car Godiva which had been burning its lights all night waiting to be taken home could hardly start to take Jane home. Gertrude Stein then and always liked Jane Heap immensely."²⁷

For her part, years after leaving the *Little Review*, Anderson still remembered Heap's intellectual and conversational powers. In 1958, she wrote to her friend Kathryn Hulme about Heap's "formulation" of ideas:

No one else ever made ideas in words count as she could. . . . When I reread her pieces in the [*Little Review*] *Anthology* I realize that things were said in that magazine that no other literary critics in the country were saying. Such simply-expressed ideas, and so true; though the truth of them seems almost secondary to their invention; and they were so seemingly simple that one always thought "Everyone must have said that"; but then found that no one had.²⁸

Anderson's own talents as a writer and thinker are evident in a letter from her friend Kathryn Hulme, regarding a manuscript of Anderson's latest work. Referring to herself as "krokodile," a nickname used by her close friends, Hulme wrote:

I love you for sending these pages. And, as you may have guessed . . . they came at a most perfect and auspicious moment when shocks and [alarms] were rending this krokodile and it wanted only to crawl into some dark dank place . . . and there were your pages. Your incalculably priceless gift of rapture.²⁹

Some twenty years after the last issue of the *Little Review* was published, Chicago native Ruth Stephan founded *The Tiger's Eye*, a new art and literature journal that was not unlike the *Little Review* in its

commitment to publishing the best new art and poetry available. A poet and novelist as well as an editor and publisher, Stephan promoted and published writers including William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore. *The Tiger's Eye*, which Stephan edited with her husband, painter John Stephan, also included work by the day's finest painters and sculptors, including Mark Rothko, Constantin Brancusi, Alexander Calder, Barnett Newman, Kay Sage, and Alberto Giacometti.

The daughter of Charles R. "Pop" Walgreen, the founder of the Walgreen's pharmacy chain, she was raised in a family "which embraced the conventional attitudes of Chicago's business world and showed scant understanding or sympathy for the contemporary arts."³⁰ In spite of her father's disinterest in her early artistic ambitions, she admired him intensely and as a child and young woman she endeavored to please him. Her pursuit of a life in the arts was delayed by a decade in part because of her father's insistence that she attend a local college instead of an East Coast school as she had hoped.

After just a year at Northwestern University, Ruth Walgreen dropped out to marry Justin Dart, a Northwestern football star who was to become her father's assistant and second-in-command of the growing Walgreen's chain. Like her father, her husband actively discouraged her literary ambitions: "On their honeymoon, Justin told her that she had no value to anyone other than himself, and that her function was to get pregnant and promote his career. For five years, she bore sons and boosted their father." Her deference to her husband and father eventually began to erode; "something within her asserted itself, [and] Ruth's bearing and boosting gave way to verve and verse."³¹

In the mid 1930s, she enrolled in classes at the University of Chicago and began writing poetry in earnest. Her work was soon accepted for publication in major national magazines, including *Harper's* and *Poetry*. During this time, her marriage began to come apart. When the couple separated and later divorced, Pop Walgreen, much to his daughter's shock, sided with her husband; when Walgreen died a few years later, his daughter learned that she had been disinherited and that her father had left much of his wealth to her ex-husband. Ruth Stephan was deeply wounded by her father's treatment; media attention and gossip among her Chicago community caused her further grief.

Shortly before her divorce was finalized, the poet became romantically involved with John Stephan, an artist she had known for several years. They married in 1939; John's understanding of her creative drive and his encouragement of her talents had a profound positive effect on Ruth Stephan and her work. After a protracted custody battle over Ruth's children with Justin Dart and after the birth of their son, Ruth and John Stephan relocated to Westport, Connecticut. There, Ruth Stephan found a lively community of writers; among this supportive group, she developed increasing skill as a writer.

In 1947, Ruth Stephan's first volume of poetry, *Prelude to Poetry*, was published. The same year, she and her husband collaborated to begin *The Tiger's Eye*. The couple's editorial policies were defined by their interest in diverse modes of writing and making art, and their awareness of the questions facing artists in the wake of World War II. After the devastation of the war, "the direction of art and even the very possibility of meaningful creative work were open to question," Pamela Franks notes in *The Tiger's Eye: The Art of a Magazine*:

At the same time, the postwar moment, perhaps paradoxically, allowed for an idealistic internationalism and an optimistic faith that open dialogue among artists and the art public could be productive, and that aesthetic value transcending medium and cultural and historical context could be possible. These beliefs were ultimately the foundation of *The Tiger's Eye's* editorial philosophy, as well as the motivating force for confronting the questions of their time.³²

The editors described the principles defining their editorial practices in a series of statements published in the magazine. In these remarks, they asserted their disinterest in artistic fashions and in promoting a particular group of writers and artists; "the selection of material will be based on these questions," the Stephans wrote in the first issue: "Is it alive? Is it valid as art? How brave is its originality? How does it enter the imagination?"³³ Believing that each piece in the magazine should be judged on its own merit and not on the name or reputation of the artist or writer who made it, the Stephans included the table of contents not in the front of the magazine as is customary, but in the center of each issue, detached from the work displayed in the journal.

Editing, publishing, and distributing the magazine was a terrifically labor-intensive process, and John and Ruth Stephan both found little time to pursue their own creative work. The appreciation of both contributors and readers was gratifying to the editors, but after nine issues, they decided to cease publication, at least temporarily. Two additional issues were already being planned when the magazine ceased publication; language was to be the theme of issue ten, and photography was to be explored in issue eleven. Though the magazine was published for only two years, in that time it had earned the respect of artists and critics, developed an international readership, and acted as an important site of aesthetic expression and discussion. In a letter to John years later, Ruth recalled the role the magazine played in the life they lived together as artists:

Art and literature, it has been a path together, *The Tiger's Eye* a way station we paused to build, while our constant discussions and observations, our travel and reading shared, our appraisals and staunch support

of one another's striving, has become a double path in art, but each within view, and walking in calling distance of the other.³⁴

After *The Tiger's Eye* ceased publication, Ruth Stephan had considerably more time to devote to her own writing; her two most successful books, both historical novels about Queen Christina of Sweden, were written in the decade following the final issue of the journal. Thoroughly researched and skillfully written, *The Flight* (1956) and *My Crown, My Love* (1960) earned her the praise of contemporary critics. Her compelling presentation of Christina was in part the result of her narrative technique; both novels were written in the first person, as Christina's own memoirs. "This is a carefully wrought and psychologically persuasive book," Orville Prescott wrote in the *New York Times*. "It is an artful performance that should not be overlooked."³⁵ Another critic described the sequel, *My Crown, My Love*, as "fascinating reading."³⁶ Stephan's own identification with Christina's story contributed to her accomplishment in so successfully drawing the character. "Whether Ruth was fully conscious of it or not," John J. Stephan wrote of his mother's novel,

she depicted a Christina whose life and character mirrored her own: the adulation of a strong father, an affinity for masculine pursuits and a disdain for feminine frivolities, restlessness in the face of family pressures and regal (corporate) conventions, abdication and flight to an emancipating environment, financial dependence on estranged relatives, and—above all—a determination to see true art prevail over opportunism.³⁷

During the 1950s and 1960s, especially after divorcing John Stephan in 1961, Ruth Stephan traveled widely in South America and Asia, where she developed an abiding interest in Zen Buddhism. During this period, she also became active in the American civil-rights movement. Though she wrote several books of poetry and fiction and participated in the making of several films during this period, none of these achieved the success of either *The Tiger's Eye* or her novels about Queen Christina.

If Ruth Stephan supported contemporary artists by publishing their work in *The Tiger's Eye*, curator Katharine Kuh further advanced their work by exhibiting and selling it at her Chicago gallery. A visionary and forward thinking curator and art historian, Katharine Kuh was a persuasive advocate for modern art in the United States. As a principal curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the nation's leading museums, Kuh shaped the reception of contemporary art among countless art viewers and buyers. Additionally, Kuh's books about the subject educated many about the projects of various modern artists and artistic schools.

Kuh was born in St. Louis in 1904 and she lived in the Midwest for much of her life. She moved east to attend Vassar as an undergraduate; there she studied with and was influenced by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the first curator at the Museum of Modern Art. Kuh later returned to the Midwest to pursue graduate study at the University of Chicago. In 1935, she opened the Katharine Kuh Gallery in Chicago, the first private gallery in the city to promote avant-garde and modern art. Kuh exhibited the work of many American and European artists whose work was not well known in the region and, in many cases, in the United States at large, including Fernand Léger, Stuart Davis, Paul Klee, and Vasily Kandinsky. In the nearly ten years she ran the gallery, Kuh developed a reputation as an ardent supporter of both the most accomplished and the most marginalized contemporary artists. In response to her invitation to exhibit work at the Kuh Gallery, painter and photographer Man Ray wrote, “I would love to have a show in Chicago at your place, as [Frank Perls tells me] you are about the only one really interested in contemporary work.”³⁸

A year after the Kuh Gallery closed in 1942, Katharine Kuh became the first curator of the Gallery of Art Interpretation at the Art Institute of Chicago. Later, as the curator of Modern Painting and Sculpture, she became the Institute’s first curator of modern art. During her career at the Art Institute, Kuh built a world-class collection of international modern and contemporary art, helping to make it one of the leading museum collections in the United States; among the important pieces she added to the collection is the monumental Matisse painting, *Bathers by a River*. Many artists were well aware of Kuh’s influence and of the importance of her support of their work; in a letter to the curator, Mark Rothko wrote, “I have no doubt that in you my pictures have one of their best friends.”³⁹ In spite of her great success and influence as a curator, Kuh viewed her role as one that was necessarily secondary to the work of the painters and sculptors whose art she collected and exhibited. “It is the painter that counts and the work that he does,” Kuh wrote. “After all is said and done, the people who organize collections are quickly forgotten.”⁴⁰

Equal to Kuh’s contribution as a curator was her work as an educator and art critic. Throughout her career, Kuh taught art history courses and she was, for a time, a member of the faculty of the University of Fine Arts in San Miguel, Guanajuato, Mexico. She also regularly published articles in magazines and worked as an arts editor for the *Saturday Review* and *World Magazine*. Still more important were Kuh’s books on the subject of modern art, including *Break-Up, The Core of Modern Art* (1965), in which she explored fragmentation in modern art, arguing that “the urgency with which modern writers, composers, sculptors and painters have smashed orthodox form is so universal as to have become the trademark of our period.”⁴¹ In 1962, she published *The Artist’s Voice, Talks with Seventeen Artists*, her often cited collection of interviews with artists including Georgia O’Keeffe and Marcel Duchamp.

Artists joined critics and students in praising Kuh's books about contemporary art; Duchamp called Kuh's work "wonderful," and congratulated her on her skillful and accessible discussion of abstract art: "the common error of all art books, to 'explain' art in the very inadequate jargon of the critic, has been here successfully avoided."⁴²

Modern artists also found an ally in Blanche C. Matthias; an art critic, colorist, and sometime poet, she pursued her interest in various arts as a dedicated amateur. A dilettante, in the best sense of the word, Matthias's wealth enabled her seriously to practice and study art and literature without needing to make a career of her work. This is not to say that she was a dabbler or mere enthusiast; Matthias was well respected as a regular art critic for the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* and *Chicago Evening Post*, and her poetry, essays, and criticism appeared often in local, national, and international magazines, including *Prairie*, *Poetry*, and *transition*.

The only child of a wealthy family, she was born in 1887. She attended private schools where she received a thorough education in the arts. At nineteen, she married Russell J. Matthias who would later become the president of a lumber company. She was a "glamorous, sophisticated woman with journalistic ambitions," one scholar has written; upon meeting her, people were impressed by her "confident worldliness, stylish appearance . . . [and] dark romantic looks."⁴³

Matthias had sufficient money and leisure to travel extensively; journeying to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, South America, and the Pacific Rim, she was truly a world traveler at a time when few westerners went beyond predictable European vacations. An abbreviated list of places Blanche Matthias visited between the world wars might include Calcutta, Bombay, Darjeeling, Monte Carlo, Ceylon, Shanghai, Canton, Tokyo, Nagasaki, Java, Burma, and Madras, as well as the Philippines and the Netherlands. Matthias often kept journals and wrote extensive letters during her travels, recording her experiences and impressions of the places she visited.

As an art critic, Matthias championed the work of several important artists, including Alfred Stieglitz and other members of his circle. Her criticism of Georgia O'Keeffe's work was especially important; her review of O'Keeffe's 1926 exhibition in New York, which she supplemented with quotations and observations from an interview with the artist, "reintroduced information into the criticism that [O'Keeffe] believed fundamental to an understanding of her work. . . . Matthias provided the first straightforward account in a newspaper article of the specifics of O'Keeffe's background and formal training."⁴⁴ In response to the criticism of O'Keeffe's work, which up to this point had focused largely on attempts to psychoanalyze the artist, Matthias argued that O'Keeffe's work was "not an attempt to

reveal, as so many people suggest, some morbid mood or some attitude toward sex, nor is it a desire to attract attention by outward display of the exotic.”⁴⁵ O’Keeffe’s work had been misunderstood by critics, Matthias suggested, because:

Most of those whose business it is to understand art and relay it to the public were of the masculine gender, and O’Keeffe’s simplicity was profoundly feminine. . . . They were . . . so unprepared for direct contact with the art spirit of a woman that they got all cluttered up and frantically searching for the magic key which was to illumine their habit-stunted minds.⁴⁶

Matthias’s art criticism extended to reviews of the theater; the stage performers she valued and supported included dancer Katherine Dunham. Seeing Dunham perform for the first time, Matthias found herself “electrified, joyously so.” She so enjoyed the dancer’s performance that she went to see her dance on many occasions:

Each time we returned to see Katherine Dunham and her group we were filled with wonder. The spirit which made gesture into an art of glittering possibility, or of spontaneous reaction to just life with its magic of yeas and nays, when that life meant love and story, plantations, hot jazz, rhumbas, boleros, and was suddenly turned into a reason for being.⁴⁷

Katherine Dunham, a dance innovator, influential anthropologist, and committed social activist, was born in Chicago in 1909. Of mixed African, Native American, and French-Canadian heritage, Dunham was a pioneer in both the study and performance of African and African-American dance. As an undergraduate student at the University of Chicago and a graduate student at Northwestern University, where she earned a Ph.D. in anthropology, Dunham combined academic research and a love of dance in her study of ritual dances. Her scholarship did not prevent Dunham from performing; she was still an undergraduate when she helped to found the Ballets Nègres, among the first all-African-American dance companies in the United States. When the Ballets Nègres ran out of money and collapsed, Dunham founded the Negro Dance Group. The company was invited to perform at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1934 and the success of this performance won Dunham an invitation from the Rosenwald Foundation to apply for a travel grant to study native dances in African and West Indian cultures. After winning the prestigious fellowship, Dunham traveled and studied in Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, and Martinique. She had not yet completed her bachelor’s degree.

Dunham’s experiences during her nearly two years of travel became a foundation for the rest of her career. As a participant–observer in ancient dance rituals and religious dance ceremonies (Dunham was

initiated as a voodoo priestess while working in Haiti), Dunham learned the origins of many traditional dances and rituals. She began to draw connections between these dance forms and popular African-American dances, including the black bottom and the cakewalk. Her research as a Rosenwald fellow would ultimately yield two books and a major dance concert.

Returning to Chicago, Dunham began graduate study in anthropology, and she formed the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. The company's first major show was based on Dunham's research in Martinique; Dunham choreographed, directed, and danced in the show. The success of this dance concert launched her to fame and she was soon choreographing and performing new shows. In 1940, the company performed *Tropics* and *Le Jazz Hot* in New York City. Dunham's dance style was a sensation among theatergoers. Though it was originally scheduled for just two weeks, the show was so popular that its run was increased to nine weeks. Many audience members and critics recognized the significance of Dunham's achievements beyond mere entertainment; *New York Times* critic John Martin wrote:

Her performance with her group last Sunday at the Windsor Theatre may very well become a historic occasion, for certainly never before in all efforts of recent years to establish Negro dance as a serious medium has there been so convincing and authoritative an approach.⁴⁸

Dunham and members of her troupe were invited to perform later that year in the all-African-American musical *Cabin in the Sky*, a production directed and choreographed by George Balanchine and starring Ethel Waters. Dunham, who acted and sang in addition to dancing in the production, played Georgia Brown and, as one critic put it, "throughout the evening it is Miss Dunham's chief business to sizzle." The show was hailed as a "rare evening of theatrical delight."⁴⁹ After a long run on Broadway and a successful tour, Dunham began work on another show, *Tropical Review* (1943). The program toured the United States for two years; that it defied simple description is evident in one headline: "31-Year-Old Artist of 'Tropical Review' Uses Shoulders, Hips and Gams to Interpret Sex, Humor, and Boredom; Changes Costumes 14 Times and Smokes Fake Cigar."⁵⁰

In 1945, Dunham bought a mansion at 14 East 71st Street in New York City where she intended to open a dance studio and school. The city took notice of her arrival: "she is the first of the Negro race to own a residence in the East 60s or 70s between Fifth Ave and Park Ave," the *Amsterdam News* noted. "For nearly a century this area has been monopolized by the biggest names in the financial and social world."⁵¹ In spite of some controversy, the Dunham School of Dance and Theater quickly became one of the most influential dance schools in the United States. Her school did not prevent Dunham, however,

from taking her company on successful international tours with performances in South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Suffering from increasingly painful arthritis, Dunham was eventually forced to retire from performing. In 1964, she joined the faculty of Southern Illinois University. In nearby East St. Louis, Illinois, Dunham founded the Performing Arts Training Center, an innovative community arts center designed to help local African Americans—including the city's gang members, black militants, and petty criminals—learn about African culture and heritage and African-American arts and history. Her work at the center with some of the area's tough residents, which Dunham believed would build a greater sense of community, was sometimes dangerous and led to numerous exchanges with the local police. Nevertheless, with classes in dance and art and its museum of artifacts Dunham and her dancers gathered on their world travels, the center aided in educating members of the community.

The author of several books about her life and travels, Dunham has collected a long list of honors and awards for her achievements as a dancer, writer, educator, and community activist. Her accomplishments, which include film performances, the choreography of a New York Opera production of *Aida*, the training of some of the country's finest dancers, and the compilation of some of the twentieth century's most important research in the area of traditional dance have made Dunham a well-loved member of many communities of artists and scientists.

Much as Katherine Dunham's work transformed American dance, the contributions of Midwestern writer Susan Glaspell revolutionized American theater. A playwright and novelist raised in Davenport, Iowa, Glaspell was a central figure in the revolutionary little theater movement of the early twentieth century. In her lifetime, she was considered as important a writer and theatrical pioneer as her colleague and contemporary, Eugene O'Neill.

Glaspell began writing seriously as a young woman; after high school, she joined the staff of the *Davenport Morning Republican* where she wrote a local society column. Unsatisfied by this work, after a few years she enrolled in classes at Drake University. Her interest in writing remained strong and after completing a bachelor's degree, she returned to journalism, this time as a legislative reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News*. Her experiences covering governmental news at the statehouse would influence her later writing, especially her early fiction.

She began writing fiction seriously during her twenties; her early works include a series of short stories in which the writer explored the social dynamics and local politics of an imaginary midwestern town

much like Davenport, Iowa. The plots and characters of these stories were often drawn from her years as a journalist. She came to be known as a midwestern regional or “local color” writer. During this period, she continued her education, taking graduate classes in literature at the University of Chicago and eventually earning a Ph.D. She published her first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*, in 1909, after some ten years of serious writing. Over the next few years, she published another novel, *Visioning* (1911), and a collection of short stories, *Lifted Masks* (1912). In these books, she began to explore women’s lives in the restrictive and repressive culture of the period; she would continue to pursue these and related themes in her later work.

Around this time, Glaspell met and fell in love with George Cram Cook. A married writer and socialist activist, Cook was, like Glaspell, a Davenport native. She was deeply influenced by his socialist philosophy and she began to consider connections between capitalism and misogyny in American culture. After a few years, Cook divorced his wife and married Glaspell. Like many midwestern artists of the time, the couple fled the repressive culture they found in the Midwest; they moved to New York where they joined a thriving community of artists and writers living a bohemian lifestyle in Greenwich Village.

In New York, Glaspell began writing plays; at the time, Broadway was showing only flashy, overproduced melodramas, and she was unable to get her subtle, character-driven work produced on stage. Finally, she and her husband decided to stage plays on their own. While vacationing in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in July 1915, they presented their collaboratively written play *Suppressed Desires* in the summer cottage of their friends Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood. *Suppressed Desires* was a farce about bohemian Greenwich Village’s fascination with Freudian analysis. “Those were the early years of psycho-analysis in the Village,” Glaspell wrote; “you could not go out to buy a bun without hearing of someone’s complex.”⁵²

Their play was part of a double bill that evening with *Constancy*, Neith Boyce’s comic play about Mabel Dodge. Both comedies were enhanced by the fact that the audience gathered in the impromptu theater included vacationing Villagers who would have easily recognized characters in both plays as barely disguised members of their community. The plays were so successful among the invited guests that the players were encouraged to do other performances; they staged these more public shows in a fish house on the wharf in Provincetown and became known as the Provincetown Players. After the success of their 1915 shows, the group determined to build a more formalized season for the next summer. Committed to both noncommercial theater and theatrical experiment, Glaspell participated in all aspects of the company’s work—from writing to acting to set building. She also solicited plays, including work from the then

unknown playwright, Eugene O'Neill (later, as his fame grew, many in the theater community credited Glaspell with "discovering" O'Neill).

During the summer of 1916, the Provincetown Players staged eleven original plays, each with a budget of less than fifteen dollars. One of the season's successful plays was *Trifles*, Glaspell's play exploring gender, justice, and the law through the story of a woman who murders her violent husband and the two women who understand her motive based on subtle clues they find in her kitchen. Their husbands, police investigators, ignore the signs of the murderer's abuse at her husband's hand. Glaspell played one of the leads in the first production of this play, which was later the basis of her important short story, "A Jury of Her Peers" (1927). Like *Trifles*, many of Glaspell's plays were charged with the tension between her experiences in a small, midwestern town and bohemian Greenwich Village, and what each represented in terms of opportunities available to women and the societal expectations placed on them in their communities. From the distant vantage point of New York City, she explored the lives of midwestern women, often offering a critique of the old-fashioned social roles her characters are forced to adopt.

By the time the summer of 1916 came to an end, Glaspell and Cook were determined to bring the Provincetown Players to New York, a move that would expand the reach of their experiment in non-commercial theater and generate greater exposure for their plays and playwrights. The company began performing to small audiences in a Greenwich Village theater in 1917. Their mission, according to the artistic statement published in their playbills, was to

afford an opportunity for actors, producers, scenic and costume-designers to experiment with a stage of extremely simple resources—it being the idea of the Players that elaborate settings are unnecessary to bring out the essential qualities of a good play.⁵³

During the next several years, the Provincetown Players produced eleven new plays by Susan Glaspell. She was at the center of noncommercial theater throughout New York: "Of all the playwrights connected with the little theater movement in this city," one *New York Times* critic wrote, "probably none of them is more closely affiliated therewith than Susan Glaspell. . . . There are four major little theaters in New York, and Susan Glaspell is . . . the only playwright who has had plays produced in all four of them."⁵⁴ Critics and audiences found her work to be smart and witty; though they were often clever, her plays generally explored socially relevant themes, especially issues related to women's lives and experiences, and the effort to change gender roles and expectations that was taking place among feminist activists in the United States. Her 1921 play, *The Verge*, for instance, is the story of a woman

whose divine discontent with all the old, patterned existence around her (discontent with her stupid first husband, her jolly second husband, her throw-back daughter, the civilization into which she has been born and the outlets the physical world provides) finally drives her yearning and creative spirit over the edge into insanity.⁵⁵

This psychological drama caused such a stir in New York that when it was to close at the Provincetown Playhouse, the Theatre Guild, “impressed by the qualities of *The Verge*... and also by the hot discussion which the play has provoked among the elect and the merely mystified,”⁵⁶ added matinee performances of the play to its program in spite of its own busy performance schedule.

After nearly a decade with the Provincetown Players, Glaspell and Cook began to feel that the group was becoming too commercial and they decided to leave in 1922. Glaspell began to turn away from theater, returning to fiction writing in earnest. Before long, the couple left New York for a long vacation in Greece; their trip eventually turned into a permanent relocation. During their second year there, Glaspell wrote to her friend Neith Boyce, encouraging her to visit:

I think you will never be sorry if you come to Greece. I cannot recommend it for comforts and conveniences, but I call it the most rewarding country I know anything about. We have lived around the villages, with peasants, and endured more hardships, than one need endure. After all it is not necessary to lie on the floor, for you can confine yourselves to places where there are beds. . . . You will love Delphi, in fact you had better come right along without thinking too much about it.⁵⁷

In 1924, George Cram Cook died suddenly in Greece. Glaspell, devastated by the loss of her husband, returned to the United States, settling first in Provincetown and later in Chicago. For years after Cook's death, Glaspell was unable to write. When she began to work again, she wrote some of the most successful plays of her career, including *Alison's House*. Glaspell was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for this play in 1931. Though many of her novels, plays, and stories have fallen out of print in the years since her death, Glaspell's contribution to American theater and literature was recognized by many of her contemporaries. Of Glaspell's work, Brooks Atkinson wrote in 1931:

For nearly a quarter of a century she has been a force for good in the literature of this country. Like Willa Cather, who also comes out of the Middle West, Miss Glaspell has been seeing life steadily and seeing it whole without sacrificing an artist's pride or a lady's decent sweetness. Those who come from that wide, freely populated territory, where farming is still a basic industry, are likely to have a breadth and tenderness of mind that is no longer common among Eastern writers.⁵⁸

Like Susan Glaspell, Mary Aldis was also active in the noncommercial theater of the early twentieth century. A Chicago woman of varied talents, Mary Aldis was known as a poet and as “an able dramatist and water colorist.”⁵⁹ Aldis, a dynamic force in the little theater movement, was the founder of the Lake Forest Players and, in many cases, the company’s director, stage manager, playwright, and costume designer. A “petite, dark, vivid”⁶⁰ woman, Aldis was the lead actress in several of the company’s productions. She was a patron of the arts as well as an artist: “Mary Aldis [played] Lady Bountiful to many Chicago artists,”⁶¹ Eunice Tietjens wrote of her friend’s generosity. One friend believed that “for her too much wealth had been a handicap—with a discreet amount of poverty she might have better developed her talents.”⁶²

In addition to theatrical works, Aldis authored a novel and collections of poetry. “Mary Aldis typifies the women poets of Chicago,” Lisa Woolley noted in *American Voices of the Chicago Renaissance*, “in that her style varies widely from one poem to the next.”⁶³ Contemporary critics often praised her writing. “As a dramatic poet Mrs. Aldis has few equals in present-day poetry,” poet Amy Lowell wrote in her review of Aldis’s *Flashlights* (1916). She continued:

She is almost as stark as Mr. Masters, and more pitying; and if she has neither the broad sense of society *en masses* of Mr. Sandburg, nor the masterful detachment of Mr. Frost, she is in some ways more pathetic than either. There is a tender, feminine compassion under all the vulgar misery of her stories, which tears at the reader’s heart and makes these poems sharp with anguish.⁶⁴

Floyd Dell described Aldis as a writer “who, happily, is one of those who go out to the highroads and in the bypath of life and bring back odd and interesting stories about other people, rather than one of those who sit in a corner and study the delicate and shifting color of their own moods.”⁶⁵

In Chicago, she was perhaps best known as the founder of the Lake Forest Players. Harriet Monroe recounted the group’s beginnings:

A less costly local effort for dramatic art was maintained a little later for six or eight summer seasons by Mary Aldis. . . . While her husband was in Europe one springtime, she tore out partitions in an old frame cottage on their Lake Forest place, and converted it into a practicable little playhouse, with a tiny stage, tiny dressing rooms, and seats for about one hundred persons. This done, she proceeded to make actors out of some of her neighbors, in the fashionable suburb, in some cases with extraordinary success, holding them to a rigid schedule of rehearsals, and soothing agitated amateur nerves by posting a motto in the green room, “Remember, this is for fun.”⁶⁶

Aldis was responsible for writing, translating, or adapting many of the company’s plays, but the group also performed work by playwrights from Provincetown and New York. Under her direction, the company

performed at national little theater festivals and competitions in New York City.

Chicago's contributions to innovative American theater were not limited to the little theater movement. Composer Margaret Bonds was an important contributor to the development of classical and musical theater in twentieth century America. Her collaborations with poet Langston Hughes and her modern musical adaptation of Shakespearean texts broke ground in American theater, providing audiences with realistic and unsensational representations of African Americans on stage.

Margaret Bonds was exposed to art and music from an early age. Her mother Estelle C. Bonds was herself a musician, a skilled organist, and a music teacher. Perhaps more influential on her daughter, however, was the Sunday afternoon salon Estelle Bonds hosted in her Chicago home. African-American writers and artists, and especially musicians, gathered in the Bonds home to discuss art and aesthetics and perform for one another. The weekly meetings regularly included local artists and performers as well as visitors from around the country. Through her mother's gatherings and connections, Margaret Bonds claimed that she met every living composer of African descent. Chicago was at that time home to some of the finest African-American composers, including Florence B. Price, one of her earliest teachers.

Her talent was evident when she was a child; her first significant piano composition, "Marquette Street Blues," was completed when she was just five years old. As a young woman, she studied at Northwestern University, where she earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in music. She was still an undergraduate when her song "Sea Ghost" was awarded the Wanamaker Foundation Prize in 1932. The year of her college graduation, 1933, Bonds became the first African-American soloist to perform with the renowned Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The same year, she was invited to perform at the Chicago World's Fair.

In spite of her success in Chicago, her opportunities were limited in the Midwest. In the late 1930s, she moved to New York City, where she worked for a music publisher and studied at Juilliard. During this time, she wrote several successful popular songs, including songs recorded by Glenn Miller and Charley Spivak; she also began performing piano concerts around the United States, in Canada, and on radio broadcasts. Her concerts often included her own arrangements of traditional African-American spirituals; by creating and performing new interpretations of these songs incorporating jazz and ragtime rhythms, Bonds helped to generate new audiences and greater appreciation for traditional African-American musical forms. She is often credited with recovering and revitalizing this central element of African-American history and culture; many scholars count this as her most important contribution to American music.

In 1941, she wrote a composition for Langston Hughes's famous early poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which was to become her most popular song. She set several more of his poems to music in the 1950s, including "To a Brown Girl Dead" (1956), and "Three Dream Portraits" (1956). Bonds and Hughes also collaborated on several large projects, including "The Ballad of the Brown King," (1954), a significant choral work written for the Christmas holidays, and *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1959). A theatrical adaptation of some of Hughes's poems, *Shakespeare in Harlem* was performed at the White Barn Theater, one of several theaters for which Bonds served as musical director throughout her career. Though it wasn't a traditionally narrative play, *Shakespeare in Harlem* was emotional, "without a sacrifice of the exuberant aspect of black American culture." The play was, "a fair and engaging lyric portrait of the black experience."⁶⁷ *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson described her score as "subdued but stirring."⁶⁸

Bonds also wrote the musical settings for the Federal Negro Theatre's 1936 production of *Romey and Julie*, a romantic musical comedy based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Along with *Shakespeare in Harlem*, this was the most successful of her large musical theater projects. Other theatrical projects included ballets and musical dramas. Throughout her career, Bonds accompanied important African-American singers, including Muriel Rahn and Leontyne Price; it was Price, in fact, who commissioned and recorded Bonds's well-known arrangement of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." In addition to setting poems by Langston Hughes, Bonds also composed music for texts by Robert Frost, John Dos Passos, and W. E. B. Du Bois. She was a versatile musician and composer who used her art to celebrate African-American history and culture.

Because of the cultural limitations they perceived in Chicago, Bonds, Glaspell, Stephan, and others left the Midwest before achieving their full potential as artists. Though the city sometimes felt restrictive to its artists and the region itself was considered secondary to many on the East Coast, the writing, art work, and performance of the Chicago Renaissance left a lasting mark on modern literature, art, and theater; it is impossible, for example, to imagine a discussion of Modernist literature without considering the tremendous influence of *Poetry* and the *Little Review* or a study of the little theatre movement that did not acknowledge the contributions of Susan Glaspell as both playwright and theater community advocate. As a center of the New Negro Movement, Chicago was essential in the continuing development of twentieth-century African-American arts and letters. The women of the Chicago Renaissance and their varied accomplishments are crucial to understanding the rich and complex story of American art and literature in the twentieth century.

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