Susan Glaspell’s career as a writer of short fiction, novels, and plays spans five decades from the 1890s to the middle of the twentieth century. Publishing her first stories in an age in which naturalists such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, under the influence of Hippolyte Taine, depicted their characters’ determination by “race, milieu, and moment” in no uncertain terms, Glaspell struggled with the question in all of her writing of how much we are made by elements outside our control or to what extent we might not be free after all to create our individual identities. In *The Visioning*, one of her earliest novels, a young female protagonist saves a stranger from drowning herself in the nearby river and invents a life for her:

> It was as if anything could be poured into Ann, making her .... That was a new fancy to Kate; she had always thought of people more as made than as constantly in the making.¹

Here, as in many of her other works, Glaspell combines a critical examination of her place and time with a discussion of the nature of “selfhood,” thus entering into a dialogue with naturalist theories while at the same time insisting on the individual’s power to change and thereby to bring about social change. Moreover, in contrast to authorial voices such as those of Norris, Dreiser, and others, who leave their characters little room for navigation and unambiguously comment on their inevitable doom, Glaspell more subtly renders the influences which contribute to an individual’s make-up through the growing self-awareness of her characters. Indeed, it is in her protagonists’ very potential for self-reflection, and in their need for

personal integrity, that this author roots both her belief in the possibility of individual growth and her hope for social progress.

Susan Glaspell participated in a wide variety of literary, social, and political discourses from the late nineteenth century to her death in 1948, yet today she is best-known as co-founder and major playwright of the Provincetown Players, that “little theater” venture which played such a crucial role in the development of early modern American drama. Moreover, Glaspell is celebrated first and foremost for having given center stage to a host of remarkable female figures who struggle against patriarchy’s imprisoning gender expectations. Since her protagonists are almost always women, Susan Glaspell’s male characters have received little critical attention other than as representations of the patriarchal symbolic order that confine the female self. These men, however, are more than cardboard figures that people the milieu of patriarchy. They often play a vital part in the writer’s ongoing argument of cultural determination versus personal freedom, since many of them share her female protagonists’ sense of imprisonment and express a similar urge to rebel against the existing social order. However, while the men’s rebellious impulses are often presented as parallel to the women’s situation in Glaspell’s works, they never form an identical mirror image. In order to demonstrate how Susan Glaspell complements a gendered experience of life (both male and female) with a more universal understanding of the human condition, therefore, I will discuss the role of male characters in four of her works from different periods, deliberately crossing the genre boundaries between her fiction and her drama which are still prominent in Glaspell criticism today.

*The Visioning* was Glaspell’s second novel, following her 1909 bestseller, *The Glory of the Conquered*. Her first long work of fiction had explored the individual’s relation to the world through “The Story of a Great Love” (the novel’s subtitle) between a woman painter and her scientist husband; in *The Visioning* Glaspell opens up the personal to a discussion of various social and political issues of her day. Katherine Jones, the novel’s protagonist, is an “army girl” through and through. The opening scene introduces her at a game of golf on the Mississippi army base where her brother is currently stationed, pondering the question which of the officers who are “in the habit of proposing to her” she should accept. Katie Jones, Glaspell makes clear from the start, has been given “a comfortable place” in life, with nothing to worry about if she will