CHAPTER II

Portrayal of the New Woman

The concept of the ‘New Woman’ was a feminist ideal that came into existence after the 1900s in America. However, the idea of the ‘new woman’ was not confined to the United States.¹ British-American writer Henry James popularized the term “New Woman” to account for the increase in the number of independent, educated and career-oriented women in Europe.² According to historian Ruth Bordin, the term New Woman was intended by him to characterize American expatriates living in Europe – women of affluence who exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own.³ The term New Woman especially referred to those women who lived life on their own terms and exerted autonomy over their personal, social, or economic life.

The New Woman was gradually becoming an active participant in the public sphere in America as a member of various organizations and the workforce but she was also often depicted exercising her control in the domestic and private spaces in literary, artistic and theatrical representations. The suffragette movement of the nineteenth century that worked towards achieving women’s democratic rights paved the way for the emergence of the New Woman as a concept of resistance.⁴ There was a wide opportunity for women in education and employment sectors as America became more industrialized. In 1870, women in the professions were only 6.4% of the United States non-agricultural workforce; this rose to 10% in 1900, then 13.3% in 1920.⁵ Many women started attending colleges and universities. Some pursued professional education and became doctors, journalists, law practitioners and professors often at Bryn
Mawr, Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley and Barnard – the Seven Sister Schools. After graduating, many of these women chose independent, professional careers over family.

The first three decades of the twentieth century America and the United States witnessed radical changes in industry, politics and social life most of them fostered by women’s organization. The most significant change in the 1920s was the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment that granted voting rights to women in the United States. Apart from this, with the introduction of gas for cooking, electricity, telephone, the domestic life of women was drastically changed. By the early decades of the 20th century, technologizing of women’s domestic sphere developed an increasing emphasis on work outside the home. A large number of women joined factories and shops but under deplorable condition since most of the labour unions were dominated by men. Gradually women started to form their own labour unions to improve wages and working conditions. Another important development was the admission of women to colleges and universities. Once educated, the job market opened up for women and most of them preferred independent, professional careers over family.

The New Woman asserted her sexual autonomy even though this was quite difficult to practice in reality as the American society then disapproved of any sign of female radical behavior. For women in the Victorian era, it was regarded immoral if any women practiced sexual activity outside marriage. Implementation of changes in the Divorce law during the late nineteenth century was an opportunity for the New Woman who could have a divorce and retain her economic independence. Moreover, many divorced women of that period remarried.
The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the “new poetry” and “new criticism” and many new experiments with techniques and ideas. The “new woman” was also a product of the twentieth century America. It is significant to mention that World War I was instrumental in the emergence of the ‘new woman’ because during the war women who were earlier confined to the space inside their home came out to join the work force as men were busy in the war. The idea of the “new woman” has been variedly represented and analyzed. It is pertinent to understand what actually the concept of the “new woman” embodies. The word New signifies a novel approach towards the idea of woman in America in the 1920s. The “new woman” is not just a flapper or a bloomer-wearing bicyclist but she embodied a more meaningful and profound concept of woman.

Social scientists and historians have started to deal with the 1920s into their works and they too emphasized the positive roles played by women and their increased participation in various spheres of American life. The histories published in the early 1930s by Charles and Mary Beard, Frederick Lewis Allen and Preston William Slosson represented women belonging to the pre-suffrage and post-suffrage new women, and their accounts emphasized the changing social position of women during the 1920s. According to Beards, “Women now assumed an unquestioned role in shaping the production of goods, material, humanistic, literary, and artistic….powerful arbiters in all matters of taste, morals, and thinking.” (753-758) Women were capable of exerting their influence in politics whereas their economic and social independence rendered them powerful members of the society. However the Beards were critical of the consequences that were to follow due to their emancipation. It was obvious that there was a resistance towards the authoritative voice of the fathers and women were defiant to conventions,
ending their marriages in divorce. Most women demanded unconditional equal rights in all spheres of American life.

Slosson observes that American women were accepted in political, economic and social life. But the crucial point relates to areas that are conventionally known as women’s spheres. Slosson emphasizes more on the domesticity of a woman’s life commenting on her concerns with family, home and fashion. He characterizes the women of that period with special attention to their fashion and costume. He talks of how women started to follow new trends in fashion and behavior with shorter skirts, use of cosmetics, public smoking and drinking and so on. The ‘breezy, slangy, informal’ flapper represented the era for him and these women were content as suffrage was achieved and there was less involvement of women in politics then with few exceptions of women who continued to demand equal rights. According to Allen, during the 1920s women did not vote but they were engaged in various kind of job, whether it was working in a factory, office or even at home. The potential for working and the economic independence that was to follow jeopardized the authority exercised by male members of the family. Women could not stop themselves from wanting more of what she had and she was all set for the revolution, the revolutionary ideas as formulated by Freud calling forth new sexual freedom that changed the outlook of many American women. Allen observed how the changes in fashion were symbolic of the profound changes in the ideals of American femininity. These historical views about women influenced most representation of women in the 1920s as flappers more engaged in matters of clothing and sex rather than with political concerns of the day.
Talking about fashion of the American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *Harper’s Bazar* offers information worthy of notice. Harper’s Bazar is an American fashion magazine founded by the Harper Brothers that came into being in 1867. The name of the magazine was changed to *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1929. The magazine published topics on fashion, crafts and design, patterns for home embroidery, cartoons, poems, advertisements and so on. Many interesting observations were made about the ‘new woman’ in some poems that accompanied cartoons depicting stereotypes of the New Woman in a magazine named *The San Francisco Call*. (See Appendix II)

The fashion magazines of the times represented the changes visible in women’s education. Suggestions were made in an 1893 issue of the Harper magazine to include dresses for graduation ceremony in schools, colleges and universities. The presence of a large number of commencement dresses suggest that a considerable number of women were receiving education and the fashion magazines were reflecting this emerging trend in the history of American women. Women were also interested in various outdoor activities such as swimming, mountain climbing, basketball, tennis, skating and so on. (See Appendix III) Bicycling was one of the most popular sports of that era and women were increasingly interested in this activity. However riding a bicycle wearing a skirt was difficult and therefore a need was felt to improvise the clothes for women. Bloomers were introduced which were shorter bell-shaped dress with baggy pants that gathered at the ankle. (See Appendix IV) The popularity of the bicycle made a direct impact on the New Woman as it created a new opportunity for them to explore new places, expanding their horizons and to ride wherever and whenever they wanted. The image of the New Woman in a bicycle was portrayed in various magazines and art and it became an iconic image in various representations of the times. Patricia Marks says,
“As a New Woman on a bicycle… she exercised power more fundamentally, changing the conventions of courtship and chaperonage, of marriage and travel.”(174)

Various historical accounts suggested that women had rejected political emancipation once they achieved the voting rights in 1920 and were content with their new found sexual freedom. Accounts and analysis of changes in women’s status during the 1920s mostly depicted issues concerning fashion and sex which seems to be limited in its approach. Difference was seen in the writings by women who were engaged in dealing more with the economic and political rights than talking about the just the flapper. In 1933, Inez Haynes Irwin, in *Angels and Amazons*, provides a convincing history of the progress of women in America. Reflecting on the initial years of new freedom, Irwin found four organized feminist activities ‘worth remembering’: work for child welfare, self-education as voters, influence on world peace, and the struggle for equal legal status for women. (411) Sophonisba Breckinridge’s history titled *Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of the Political, Social and Economic Activities* offers an important document of socio-economic and political life of American women. Her account has been called as “a monument of the chastened social science of the thirties.” (410) Breckinridge’s perspective was different in the sense that although historians described women as emancipated and satisfied with the milieu in which they lived but they were in fact dissatisfied with the times since they found themselves restricted in the field of employment given the choice of only nursing and teaching, often subjected to hostility by the male co-workers and were often doubted of their sexual orientation. Breckinridge’s history provided the information which has enabled historians to review and revise the issues on women’s emancipation during the 1920s.
The ‘new woman’ was an urban phenomenon. And it can be best studied when situated within the milieu of the Provincetown Players of the Greenwich Village, a little theatre group of the early 19th century, who were a community of the politically engaged intellectuals and artists expressing a state of mind which showed a radical departure from traditional customs and beliefs in America. As historian Christine Stansell observes, the bohemians embraced the concept of modernism creating:

the first full-bodied alternative to an established cultural elite. . . . They developed an unrivaled vision of feminism – with its powers to recast men’s and women’s lives – as a critical ingredient of modern culture. . . . They injected into politics of the left a new cultural dimension, as well as psychological identifications between working-class and middle-class people. . . . They made Greenwich Village into a beacon of American possibility in the new age. (3)

The relationship between feminism and Provincetown Players has been suggested not only by theatre historians but social historians as well who have identified several members of the company as feminist activists. The image of the new woman is resonant in Cheryl Black’s reference to the feminists of the Village who had ‘short hair and no corsets and who smoked in public and said damn out loud.’ They also agreed with Charlotte Perkin Gilman that “woman’s place was everywhere”. The issue of the new woman is dealt with by many American dramatists that include James Herne, Eugene O’Neill, Jesse Lynch Williams, Rachel Crothers and George Kelly among others. Although the concept of the ‘new woman’ was an important issue of the times, it was mainly the women dramatists of the Provincetown Players who had talked a great deal about it.
In this chapter I shall study the problems that are central to the experience of the ‘new woman’ in America. The chapter will also deal with the important issues of the times such as double standard, gender roles, separate spheres and tension surrounding women’s economic independence within the strictures of patriarchy. I shall discuss some of the selected plays of Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell and Rachel Crothers and analyze how the dominant traits of the “new woman”, that is, her search for ‘self’ has been delineated in their plays. Interestingly Eugene O’Neill is one of the few male American dramatists of the Provincetown group who had written some plays based on the concept of the ‘new woman’. An attempt will also be made to study Strange Interlude by O’Neill to see how this concept has been portrayed by a male playwright. The figure of the new woman characterizes most of the plays of the period and this chapter will examine how the emergence of a vital consciousness of the ‘new woman’, an attempt ‘to make things new’ (borrowing Ezra Pound’s trendsetting remark, “Make it New!”) has been treated in varied ways.

Susan Glaspell’s The Verge (1921) offers an interesting study of the ‘new woman’ in which Claire, the protagonist, struggles to break free from conventions. Claire Archer, the new woman, is portrayed as a scientist who is working on a project to create new plant forms that will spawn new life. She is described as a ‘woman of science’ who is totally dedicated to her research work with plants:

...has uncovered the plants and is looking intently into the flowers. From a drawer she takes some tools. Very carefully gives the rose pollen to an unfamiliar flower. ⁹ (TV, I, 39).
The play develops around the blossoming of her new creation called the ‘Breath of Life’ which is a symbol of Claire’s own discovery of her identity. As the title itself suggests ‘verge’ is about reaching a limit. Claire is attempting to reach that limit and go beyond life and death, or for that matter, transcend all boundaries and attain something meaningful in life that would not follow old conventions or rules which might threaten her independence that she is seeking to achieve. In the process of creating ‘new’ life she is on her quest to find a ‘new’ meaning of life for herself. Claire is in her laboratory pollinizing, crossing between various flowers for fragrance:

I want to give fragrance the Breathe of Life (faces the room beyond the wall of glass)-the flower I have created that is outside what flowers have been. What has gone out should bring fragrance from what it has left. But no definite fragrance, no limiting enclosing thing. I call the fragrance I am trying to create Reminiscence. (her hand on the pot of the wistful little flower she has just given pollen) Reminiscent of the rose, the violet, arbutus—but a new thing—itself. Breath of Life may be lonely out in what hasn’t been. Perhaps someday I can give it Reminiscence. (TV, I, 39)

Glaspell’s choice of a botanical metaphor, Breath of Life deals with the creation of a new plant species which is free from earlier characteristics and modes of development to show the transformation of a human being. This also expresses Claire’s sexual identity and an attempt to transcend that identity which ultimately leads her to the verge. She refuses to confine herself to stagnant ‘norms’ or ‘forms’ and attempts to create new meaning, new forms, and a new reality. Her ideas and goals are limitless and it is this boundlessness that she seeks to preserve throughout the play. Claire Archer is seen by a
critic, Arthur Waterman, to be Glaspell’s “most extreme rendition of the individual’s reaction against convention to seek her own meaning from life.” He refers to her more specifically as

…the most radical woman ever presented on the American stage . . . [who] delighted feminists who saw her as the personification of their own desire for an independent life. (Waterman, 79)

Claire rejects the “feminine” role of an ideal wife and a sacrificing mother and performs the “masculine” role of creator and destroyer. Women have generally been associated with nature, for example mother earth, who is subdued and controlled by men to attain power over life. Women, like nature, are considered as an unexplored territory which is yet to be explored and violated by men. Glaspell subverts this traditional belief of men dominating nature who is passive like women. In case of the play The Verge, it is a female, Claire, who controls, regulates and destroys ‘Egde Vine’, an earlier creation of a plant species, suggesting mastery and domination over nature. The consequence of moving against the traditional role may impinge on her sense of well-being; or conversely, madness may serve as an escape from her failure to fulfil an assigned role. In a sense, Claire’s madness at the end of the play helps her to create vistas beyond the understanding of those who would restrict her. In this context one might recall Gilbert and Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic and its significant discussion of the female artist’s attempt at escape from the “prison of the male text” by dismantling the mythic conceptions of woman as either angel or demon. Claire, the new woman, is an artist for she is working to do something creative, significantly ‘creating life anew’. She has to constantly fight against the conventions or the stereotypical men in her life Tom, Dick
and Harry, the names being carefully chosen by Glaspell. At the end of the play, Tom urges Claire to stop trying what they cannot do and he says, “I’m here to hold you from where I know you cannot go. You’re trying what we can’t do….I will keep you—from fartherness—from harm. You are mine, and you will stay with me! (roughly) You hear me? You will stay with me!” (TV, III, 86).

Claire is troubled by the fact that Tom wishes to ‘hold’ and ‘keep’ her. She feels threatened by the thought of being a captive and follow the course of life that would constrain her identity and restrict her individuality. She chokes him to death and “in the frenzy and agony of killing” says that it is her ‘gift’. This scene can be analyzed in relation to the destruction of Edge Vine, her previous experiment because she realized that “It isn’t—over the edge” (TV, I, 57) suggesting the lack of transcendence. The same happens in Act III with Tom, who lacked “otherness” that Claire was searching for. She calls the murder a ‘gift’ because finally she has made herself free and there is none to stop her in her search of a new plant or life for herself. The new plant is the most important artistic improvisation in the play because it is a fitting corollary to the search for ‘newness’ of identity. This is representative of many of the new women who were struggling hard to do something unconventional and make a mark for themselves.

At the end of the play, Claire is persuaded by her friends and family to withdraw her quest of discovering new life forms. Her husband goes to the extent of bringing in a “neurologist” to treat her so called ‘queer’ attitude. Stephen J. Bottoms, one of the few directors to work on this play recently has commented that “The Verge is best described as a ‘queer,’ hybrid play that refuses to settle into a single pattern as adamantly as Claire refuses to settle for a fixed gender identity.” (Bottoms, 23) Ben-Zvi relates the meaning of the word ‘queer’ used by Susan to show the unconventional behaviour of women,
“Queer is exactly the word Susan, in her later writing, would have her arbiters of society use in disparagement to describe female protagonists who break with convention or have women proudly apply to themselves, when they wished to distinguish their lives and values from those they observed around them.”(36)

This is reflected in a conversation between Claire and her sister, Adelaide.

ADELAIDE: A mother cannot cast off her own child simply because she does not interest her!

CLAIRE: (An instant raising cool eyes to ADELAIDE): Why can’t she?

ADELAIDE: Because it would be monstrous!

CLAIRE: And why can’t she be monstrous—if she has to be?

ADELAIDE: You don’t have to be. That’s where I’m out of patience with you Claire. You are really a particularly intelligent, competent person, and it’s time for you to call a halt to this nonsense and be the woman you were meant to be!

CLAIRE: (Holding the book up to see another way): What inside dope have you on what I was meant to be? (TV.II, 61)

When Adelaide comments about Claire of being an ‘unnatural’ woman, Claire retorts saying that at least it saves her from being a ‘natural’ one. In the entire play, Claire’s longing for “otherness” has been repeatedly called “queer.” One could identify Claire with Queer theorist Carol Queen’s assertion,

“It is the queer in me that . . . lets me question the lies we were all told about who women are, who men are . . . the queer in all of us clamors for pleasure or change, will not be tamed or regulated, wants a say in the creation of a new reality.” (20-21)
The Verge may be regarded as a glaring example of queer theatre if we consider Laurence Senelick’s argument on queer theatre as “grounded in and expressive of unorthodox sexuality or gender identity, antiestablishment and confrontational in tone, experimental and unconventional in format.” (21) According to Eve Sedgwick, queer might not include the formation of sexual identity based only on the choice of object. Many queer theorists have theorized queer as a verb and not necessarily a noun. For Nikki Sullivan, to queer means to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to de-legitimize, to camp up—heteronormative knowledge and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them.” (vi) Laurence Senelick has similarly identified a “queer” aesthetic in theatre, relating to content and form: “Queer theatre is grounded in and expressive of unorthodox sexuality or gender identity, antiestablishment and confrontational in tone, experimental and unconventional in format, with stronger links to performance art and what the Germans call Kleinkunst, that is revue, cabaret, and variety, than to traditional forms of drama.” (21)

Going by the standards set by these theories, Glaspell, as a dramatist, is definitely an early proponent of queer theatre. Glaspell used the word ‘queer’ long before it appeared in theories and came to be generally related with ‘homosexual’. Glaspell’s biographer, Linda Ben-Zvi, observes that Glaspell had adopted the word ‘queer’ to represent women who break with conventions most importantly any stereotyped gender behavior. Her experiments with the plant forms and not accepting the natural form of creation can be seen as a move towards the violence of natural creation and a fixed locus of identity. Claire’s horticulture becomes a vantage point for liberating herself from the conventions
that dictates the behaviour of women. However her husband, Harry, does not approve of her inappropriate and radical behaviour,

HARRY: Oh, I wish Claire wouldn’t be strange like that, (helplessly) What is it?
What’s the matter?
DICK: It’s merely the excess of a particularly rich temperament.
HARRY: But it’s growing on her. I sometimes wonder if all this (indicating the place around him) is a good thing. It would be all right if she’d just do what she did in the beginning—make the flowers as good as possible of their kind. That’s an awfully nice thing for a woman to do—raise flowers. But there’s something about this—changing things into other things—putting things together and making queer new things—this—
DICK: Creating?
HARRY: Give it any name you want it to have—it’s unsettling for a woman. (TV, I, 41)

*The Verge* offers a radical critique of normality through Claire’s personality which constantly struggles to ‘break through’ patterns of life forms or it can also be interpreted as an attempt to transcend the constraints of her times.

CLAIRE: Plants do it. The big leap—it’s called. Explode their species—because something in them knows they’ve gone as far as they can go. Something in them knows they’re shut in to just that. So—go mad—that life may not be prisoned. Break themselves up into crazy things—into lesser things, and from the pieces—may come one sliver of life with vitality to find the future. How beautiful. How brave. (TV, I, 48)
In this process of mutation she herself mutates into a new kind of woman who efforts to leave behind biological, social and linguistic barriers. The play is replete with ideas that call for change and create something new. Claire says about her experiment early in the play, “I’m not so sure—that I do. But it can be done! We need not be held in forms moulded for us. There is outness—and otherness.” (TV, I, 40)

The entire play is suggestive of the pattern motif on the visual and verbal levels. It is symbolically presented through constant reference to patterns and emphasis on the act of pattern-breaking. Glaspell makes it evident at the beginning of the play in the elaborate stage design which also becomes an important aspect of study. In the first act of the play, the set description is as,

The frost has made patterns on the glass as if—as Plato would have it—the patterns inherent in abstract nature and behind all life had to come out, not only in the creative heat within, but in the creative cold on the other side of the glass. And the wind makes patterns of sound around the glass house (TV, I, 32)

Again in the second act which takes place in her tower, there is also mention of a pattern, “…a marvellous pattern on the curved wall” (TV, II, 59). The stage setting of the greenhouse as well as the tower serves as a background to the action of the play. The stage action similarly brings forth the pattern motif and a persistent attempt to break that pattern. Explaining the motive of her experiment with the plant form, Claire says, 

(not reached by ELIZABETH) Out there—(giving it with her hands) lies all that’s not been touched—lies life that waits. Back here—the old pattern, done again, again and again. So long done it doesn’t even know itself for a pattern—in
immensity. But this—has invaded. Crept a little way into—what wasn’t. Strange lines in life unused. And when you make a pattern new you know a pattern’s made with life. And then you know that anything may be—if only you know how to reach it (TV, I, 57).

Later she reflects on the thought, “Yes, but why does the fabric of life have to—freeze into its pattern? It should (doing with her hand) flow.....” (TV, II, 69) She is obsessed with the idea of patterning, things falling into earlier patterns and towards the end of the second act she breaks into free verse:

Stop doing that!—words going into patterns;
They do it sometimes when I let come what’s there.
Thoughts take pattern—then the pattern is the thing.
But let me tell you how it is with me. (it flows again)
All that I do or say—it is to what it comes from,
A drop lifted from the sea.
I want to lie upon the earth and know.
But—scratch a little dirt and make a flower;
Scratch a bit of brain—something like a poem. (covering her face)
Stop doing that. Help me stop doing that! (TV, II, 72)

Glaspell is quite innovative as far as the language of the play is concerned. She has coined many terms like “allness”, “otherness”, “myselfness” and so on. Elaine Showalter’s ideas regarding ‘the specificity of women’s writing’ could be related to Glaspell’s use of language in the play which challenged masculine standards in terms of the writing style and language by creating an independent art towards diction. Claire’s
speech patterns shows her inability to find words that can truly speak of her inner self. She finds inadequacy in traditional speech and fails to communicate. Many scholars find Glaspell making a link between women’s freedom and language. In “Susan Glaspell’s Contributions to Contemporary Playwrights,” Linda Ben-Zvi discusses Glaspell’s ability to forge “women-centered” drama with its own language and distinct point of view. Ben-Zvi maintains that language oppresses women unless they invent their own dialects to signify their distinct meanings. As Gainor comments that Claire breaks away from sentences into verse, in the hope that she will come closer to what she wants to express, but she finds poetry equally confining.

Let us consider Glaspell’s use of semiotics in the language of the play. Glaspell’s use of dashes, pauses and repetition has been compared to “l’écriture féminine.” Marcia Noe comments on Glaspell’s potential to ‘write the body’ in The Verge by bringing a similarity between Claire’s language and that of Helene Cixous. Claire’s use of illogical, disjointed, rhythmic speech shows the inadequacy of language and “no matter how hard [Claire] tries to break outside the old forms, all she gets is another form”. (Noe, 139) Noe makes a comparison of Claire with Cixous by stating that although Cixous,

“made up her own tongue” she is still with a tongue, a language, a form of discourse. No matter how destructive, rebellious, or innovative she becomes, she is still imprisoned within language…If she tries to explain her enterprise, she must do it with language, within the very structures she is trying to break out of. If she doesn’t explain or define it, she has no way of validating its existence. (Noe, 140)

Glaspell might have struggled with the same difficulty and therefore she projects Claire
who experiments with all forms of language, prose and poetic, but fails to communicate as she says, “All that I do or say—it is to what it comes from…” (TV, II, 72) Through Claire, Glaspell might be suggesting that any single dramatic form or style may restrict the artist and it is only through continuous experiments with forms, realist or expressionist, can an artist explore genuine creativity.

The women dramatists, who have chosen to work in a genre that is explicitly public and restricted to women, portray the experience of a woman as an outsider, objectified and alienated individual and this is a prominent theme in women’s drama. Susan Glaspell was able to express this kind of a dilemma faced by the ‘new woman’ Claire in *The Verge* and show the various facets of a woman’s consciousness. By breaking away with the conventional theatre, she experimented with forms such as realism and expressionism to delineate the psychology of women. For June Sochen, these “victims of a male-centered culture” symbolized the “frustrated woman in American culture . . . who could find no legitimate means of self-expression.”

In *The Verge*, Glaspell has worked towards reflecting the emergence of a vital consciousness of Claire, the new woman, with the help of her innovative dramaturgy, theatrical experiments and dialogues. The play’s treatment of a woman’s identity and her search for self is far ahead of the times in which the play was written.

The quest for one’s identity is a prominent theme in her another play named *Inheritors* which was produced by the Provincetown Players in 1920. The protagonist of this play, Madeline, is one of the best sketched characters who portray the image of a new woman. The central problem of the play lies in the fact that the search for identity is threatened by the society in which she lives. The setting of the play is a Midwestern college campus which was established by an idealist called Silas Morton and another
person named Felix Fejevary who was exiled for his involvement in the Hungarian revolution. The play begins in 1879 with a vivid description of the Blackhawk war of 1832 between United States and the Native Americans. The character, Grandmother, who is the mother of Silas Morton, was involved in the war and mentions that she was ‘heavier then.’ She has been presented as a very strong woman who is although old now but ‘her spirit remembers the days of her strength.’ (Inh, I, 91) She talks of how she participated in the war, “We used to fight with anything we could lay our hands on-dish water-whatever was handy.” (Inh, I, 91) The opening act also gives a commentary on the importance of learning. According to Silas, “It’s not the learning itself-it’s the life that grows up from learning. Learning’s like soil. Like-like fertilizer. Get richer. See more. Feel more.” (Inh, I, 100) He believed so much in the learning process that he decided to give away the hill in order to build a college there. The next act begins in 1920 and we are told about the financial problems that the Morton College is going through due to its expansion work. Felix Fejevary junior, the son of the Hungarian revolutionary, is one of the members of the Board of Trustees. He tries to convince the Senator Lewis that the State should take appropriate steps to ensure the growth of the college. The Senator agrees but puts one condition before him; he wants the idealist and a radical Professor, Mr. Holden to go away. He is able to convince Holden but the problem arises when Madeline Morton, grand-daughter of Silas Morton, supports the Hindu students in their struggle for independence. The play closes as Madeline leaves for a court hearing and it is implied that she will surely be sentenced with imprisonment.

In this play Glaspell criticizes a number of issues through a historical moment in the American society. She highlights her dissatisfaction with the patriarchal society, a world in which man is weak and easily succumbs to pressures by sacrificing his ideals. She
also questions the various myths of the American male culture, for example, the frontier myth, the myth of learning and progress and most importantly the myth of male superiority. Glaspell was Midwestern by birth and she had first-hand knowledge of a Midwestern life. In this play she has debunked the typical male frontier myth where a white man protects his wife from the savage natives and fights against barbarity. In the play, the Grandmother was rather sympathetic towards the natives whom she considered as ‘friendly when let be.’ (Inh, I, 91) She used to give cookies to the natives and admits that they would have to death once if the Indians would not have been there. She also tells how the white men had ‘roiled them up’ and forced them to leave the land, the land that Blackhawk and his Indians loved. Grandmother had noticed and understood how the white men were also similarly attached to the land but she also disliked the violent nature of men and says, “Seems nothing draws men together like killing other men.” (I, 94) She recalls how she used to feed the strangers and work hard all day long chopping wood, carrying water, tending horses and hens and many other household chores. Being self-reliant, the Grandmother experienced the pioneer life of a woman who remembers, “We worked. A country don’t make itself. When the sun was up we were up, and when the sun went down we didn’t.” (Inh, I, 94)

Although the Grandmother does not conform to the ideals typical of a new woman but she certainly is a strong-willed lady whose ideals were manifested in the later generation through Madeline. In this play, it is Madeline whose ideals and values are seen as promising in comparison to all the other male characters in the play. The leading men in the play, for example, the Senator and the members of the Board of Trustees are conservatives who resist any kind of social or political change. The Senator says, “But we don’t want radical human beings.” (Inh, II, 112) Moreover the men in the play are
against the women who are fearless and frustrate the male expectations. Madeline is truly a ‘new woman’ who voices against the injustice done to the Hindus in their motherland and fights with them without thinking about her family.

Madeline is projected as a new woman who is a carefree girl and loves to play. She is always carrying a tennis racket with her and is less bothered about the family’s reputation when she joins the Hindu revolutionaries. Her first act of revolt was to hit a policeman with her tennis racket when he harassed the Hindu students for howling over deportation. She was immediately taken to prison for this childish act but was released with the help of her uncle, Felix. Madeline is shocked to know that Felix has not done anything for the Hindus and she is concerned over their deportation. She speaks of her feelings for her Grandfather Silas Morton, her love for the college and what she regarded as the true spirit of American democracy. Her views get reflected in the argument between her and uncle, Felix Fejevary:

MADELINE: (in a smoldering way) I thought America was a democracy.

FEJEVARY: We have just fought a great war for democracy.

MADELINE: Well, is that any reason for not having it? (Inh, III, 141)

When persuaded by Fejevary not to get further involved into the mess and tries to stop her, Madeline replies, “You think you can keep me in here?” She is resolved and has no intention to step back from her alliance with the students. Her quest for identity and discovering her own ‘self’ is possible only through the fulfilment of what her grandfather had dreamt about the college. She is truly ‘the inheritor’ of the ideals that Silas Morton had valued in his life. Silas was inspired by his friendship with the natives and his generous spirit had dreamt of building a college on the hill where girls and boys
would learn and have a vision of what life could be. It was also a means of atoning for the wrong done to the natives by the white men. Madeline works for realizing this dream of her grandfather and she says, “My grandfather gave this hill to Morton College - a place where anybody - from any land - can come and say what he believes to be true!” (Inh, IV, 143)

Glaspell also questions the American Dream which is essentially a man’s dream by making Madeline, a woman, work for the realization of that dream. She is undeniably a new woman who will achieve self-definition of her life and identity by the essence of her being a true American. Glaspell’s The Verge is an overt feminist play and the same issues are touched upon in Inheritors. Both the protagonists are restricted by social and moral boundaries but both find out means through which they can explore themselves and a life that they have decided for themselves. Claire’s stature as a woman is reminiscent of Madeline and her need for freedom. Both women had undergone physical and mental imprisonment but they chose the former so as to escape from being a captive of society’s rules. They reject the conventional roles of a traditional woman in their effort of changing and ‘making something new’. Glaspell has dealt with many crucial issues of the times, not just the social problems but the political matters as well. These two new women of the early twentieth century are representatives of all the women who voice against the laws of the patriarchal world and deal with them in their own ways.

The experiences of a new woman in a patriarchal world and her response towards the conflict about double standards were dramatized by various American playwrights; chief among them was Rachel Crothers. She depicted the feminist concerns of the day dealing with issues that were familiar to the audiences of those times. Her plays also
raise questions about the impact of women’s economic independence upon conventional
gender roles as well as her own individuality. In many of her plays the quest for identity
is delineated through a character’s writing or art which works as a medium for
expressing her thoughts and views regarding the society she lives in. A detailed
discussion of her plays will enhance our understanding of Rachel Crothers’s treatment
of women and their position in early twentieth century America.

The prominent theme in Crothers’s plays is the evolution of a woman’s character and
the conflict that she faces when given the choice between ‘feminist’ or ‘feminine’ roles.
The difference between Glaspel and Crothers’s treatment of women is that Crothers’s
characters do not commit murder or suicide nor do they reside on the realm of insanity.
But they definitely experience the inevitable conflicts that accompany the development
of new gender roles. The New Woman is generally a smart working lady who is
independent in her making her choices and decisions. But her identity is thwarted by her
love for a man who is incapable of changing certain ways of his own life as required by
the women to reconcile with her new sex roles. Lois Gottlieb observes that one way of
solving this conflict is either to be indifferent towards her desire for romantic life or
reconcile the problems by changing her individuality and not the man’s.

Crothers’s, *A Man’s World* (1910), which was subjected to much criticism, depicts the
life of a New Woman named Frank Ware. She is the central female character with a
man’s name who writes successful novels. It is important to note that she takes the
identity of a man to voice her concerns of the times. Her novels deal with gruesome
realities of the poor women who live on New York’s Lower East side. Frank highlights
the poverty stricken life of these women who are forced into unwanted pregnancies and
prostitution as they are unable to cope up with the expenses of daily life due to their low
wages. Frank falls in love with a man named Malcolm Gaskell who is a reporter and her progressive views are evident in Act I in a conversation she has with him. Frank says, “I began to balance men and women very early—and the more I knew—the more I tho’t the women had the worst of it.” *(AMW, I, 35)*

As a child she had travelled to various places with her father who was also a writer and therefore she was exposed to the injustice of her society. Frank and her father befriend an unmarried woman who is impregnated by a man who left after eventually after having an affair. Frank realizes the pitiable condition of the lady who has to suffer a lot of disgrace. The woman dies of childbirth and the baby boy is adopted by Frank whom she calls Kiddie. Frank raises the issue of double standard in her book titled “The Beaten Path” in which she protests against the social and moral codes that condemns sinful women but are indifferent towards the sinful men. After many years it is revealed that Kiddie is Gaskell’s son and Gaskell had left Kiddie’s mother without having the knowledge of her pregnancy and now denies agreeing that he has committed a wrong deed. Frank cannot accept this attitude of Gaskell and overlook his early promiscuity:

GASKELL: I wanted to knell at your feet and worship you. That’s the way all men feel towards good women and you can’t change it…A man wants the mother of his children to be the purest in the world.

FRANK: Yes and a man expects the purest woman in the world to forgive him anything—everything. It’s wrong. It’s hideously wrong. *(AMW, III, 99)*

Another character in the play called Clara Oaks who is an unsuccessful miniaturist serves as a foil to Frank’s personality. Clara thinks of marriage as a means to escape from her financial problems. She appreciates Frank’s independence and attitude towards life but laments her own condition:
CLARA: If I were like you—you’re so strong and independent—you believe in women taking care of themselves.

FRANK: I believe in women doing the thing they’re most fitted for. You should have married, Clara, when you were a young girl—and been taken care of all your life. Why didn’t you? Don’t you believe in that?

CLARA: No man has ever asked me to marry Him...I’m just one of those everlasting women that the world is full of. There’s nobody to take care of me and I’m simply not capable of taking care of myself. I’ve tried-God knows I’ve tried—and what is the use?...I could marry anything that could pay the bills...\( AMW, III, 86 \)

Clara’s view of life is in sharp contrast to Frank’s who is a new woman challenging the traditional views of life. It is important to remember that various factors were responsible for the portrayal of New Woman on stage. The factors include women’s education and employment, the feminist movements, increase in divorce rate and so on. One of the significant themes dealt with at theatres with reference to the new woman was the double standard. Women started demanding for moral equality realizing the degradation of men which was not attended at all. A move was taken towards demanding an equal moral standard for men and women both and that men should also be pure and chaste as expected from women. Although a new woman challenged the traditional concept of womanhood but she was still believed to be morally superior to men and expected to check the ongoing promiscuity of men. The difference however lies in the fact that women demanded the right not to forgive men for infidelities on the grounds that they are men. The traditional idea that true women sacrifice themselves was challenged by many New Women and Frank is no exception. The decision that Frank takes to reject her lover because Gaskell does not repent for his deeds is justified within the context of the play. We know Frank as a modern, independent and educated
woman who cannot stand the double standards of the society and Gaskell’s attitude towards his past is so casual that it irritates Frank often. He takes no responsibility for his past actions and states that he has been simply leading a ‘man’s life.’ Frank therefore finally decides to reject him and her decision is regarded as morally right because of Gaskell’s irresponsible and unrepentant attitude.

Through the New Woman, Frank, Crothers depicts the challenges faced by these women who attack double standards and create a new life for themselves rejecting the dominant gender ideology. Like many plays of the progressive era Crothers’s A Man’s World throws light upon the social and moral codes of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Frank, being a writer, has a platform from which she can give voice to matters of public concern and take a step towards rethinking and challenging the social conventions of the times. She leaves the man she loved once for the sake of her self-dignity and does not want to reside in ‘a man’s world’ where there is sexual freedom for men and the moral standard is applied only to women. Frank’s decision to reject Gaskell can be regarded as a bold step towards the reversal of the usual pattern in which “erring men easily won forgiveness from their mates.”

In He and She (1920), Rachel Crothers represents the dilemma of a New Woman, Ann Herford, who is stuck between her role as a wife and an artist. Unlike Frank, Ann is already married and has a child but she is unable to reconcile between her private and public life. The fact that she has won a commission for a frieze has unsettled her family life because her husband has lost the same commission. Both Ann and her husband Tom work as sculptors and Tom appreciates his wife’s talent but at the same time he cannot accept his defeat in the competition where he participated that resulted in the victory of his wife. Ann feels threatened that her family will be devastated if differences are
created between her and her husband who is already feeling overshadowed by Ann’s success. Tom also fears that his wife’s ambition might lead her to a separate world where she would disregard her husband and her family due to her professional career. During the early decades of the twentieth century we see a rise in the number of female professionals. Many women worked under low wages due to financial problems of the families but there were women who chose careers as doctors, lawyers, artists and so on. Women who worked at factories did it out of necessity to support their families and it was not known that they could grow passion for such kind of works. But women who were professionals threatened the existence of the family and relationships because society believed that eventually a professional woman would be disinterested in the family matters and disregard the man as the head of the family. Ann’s presents a similar situation in He and She and there is Dr. Remington, Ann’s father who throws light on the challenges faced by a New Woman:

A woman of genius puts in her work the same fierce love she puts into her child or her man. That’s where her fight is—for one or the other of them has got to be stronger in her. It isn’t a question of her right to do things—nor her ability—God knows—plenty of them are beating men at their own jobs now. Why I sometimes think she’ll go so far that the great battle of the future will be between the sexes for supremacy. But I tell you—she has tragedies ahead of her—the tragedy of choice between two sides of her own nature. (HS, III, 939)

Ann’s final decision to give up her commission does not suggest any defeat on her part as an artist who is incapable to work in a public sphere but rather it highlights the choice that a woman makes to establish her identity and her worth as a human being. The dilemma that Ann faces is dramatized by Crothers brilliantly; the conflict is not just
between her role as an artist or a mother but more importantly it is conflict between the ways in which she would assert her individuality as a woman. It is interesting to observe that like other women of Crothers’s plays, Ann too regards art as a means to express her female identity. The conversation between Ann and her husband shows Ann’s reflection on art and feminism:

TOM: You’re cut up now—but if you should give this thing up—there’ll be times when you’d eat your heart out to be at work on it—when the artist in you will yell to be let out.

ANN: I know. I know. And I’ll hate you because you’re doing it—and I’ll hate myself because I gave it up—and I’ll almost—hate her. I-I know. I know. You needn’t tell me. Why I’ve seen my men and women up there—their strong limbs stretched—their hair blown back. I’ve seen the crowd looking up—I’ve heard people say—“A woman did that” and my heart has almost burst with pride—not so much that I had done it—but for all women. . . (HS, III, 928)

The play also documents the changing attitudes of women towards themselves and their families. Crothers creates a character, Daisy Herford, similar to Clara Oaks in A Man’s World. Daisy is Tom’s sister who stays with him and she works as a secretary who is successful in her career. People think that Daisy is least concerned about marriage because she is independent herself but gradually it is revealed that Daisy desperately wants to depend upon a man because she is tired of taking care of herself. She says, “Ann and Ruth both have men to depend on them if they want them. I’m taking care of myself because I’ve got to-and I must say this soul tragedy of choice stuff makes me a little tired.” (HS, III, 940) But Ann presents a total contrast to Daisy’s views as Ann believes that the ability of a woman to support herself is one of the best things for her as
far as the security of her life is concerned. She says, “There isn’t a single hard thing that can happen to a woman that isn’t made easier by being able to make her own living.” (HS, III, 939)

Ann’s perspective of life is influenced by her identity as a woman who is not just a mother or a wife but also an artist. She values art and considers it as a means to establish a woman’s potential. The treatment of the New Woman in Ann Herford is unique in the sense that she does not leave her commitment as a woman to be a successful artist but prioritizes her role as a mother to save her teenage daughter who was infatuated by a man and planned to elope with him. Ann sacrificed her career to look after her daughter and console her at the time of crisis. A common argument of the 1920s was that if mothers concentrated entirely on their professions; their child and family would feel neglected and the same happened with Ann’s daughter Millicent. Ann is already projected as a successful artist in a male-dominated profession and now it was necessary that she also fulfils her duty as a mother. Crothers therefore makes the reassurance that when required a New Woman would not neglect or sacrifice her role as a mother. If she had to choose between her career and family, the New Woman would prove that she is a true woman by taking up the traditional responsibility of a mother.

Another play that portrays the New Woman figure is *When Ladies Meet* (1932). In this play Crothers explicitly relates a woman’s life with that of her art. Mary Howard is the ‘new woman’ in the play, a successful novelist who considers art as her life. Her novel deals with the life of woman who is love with a married man and finally she goes to his wife to talk about the matter frankly. Mary is of the opinion that if two women are involved with the same man and if the man seems to be totally changed by his new found love then the women can come to a mutual understanding and decide a way of
life that would not ruin either of their lives. Mary’s approach and perspective of life is different as well as radical in the sense that she has an alternative view to the relation between the sexes. The novelist is a young lady, a ‘new woman’ who offers a new idea of how to maintain a relation in such dire circumstance. Mary is a middle-aged, attractive and independent woman who has found her love in a married man, Rogers Woodruff who happens to be her publisher. Mary and Rogers’ wife, Claire, finally meet for a discussion and thus we have the title of the play “When Ladies Meet”. After the meeting both these women realize the flaws in Rogers and are no more interested in staying with him. The meeting turns out to be significant as both discover that Rogers lacks the commitment that is required to make a relationship successful.

In *The Female Imagination*, Patricia Meyer Spacks says, “women dominate their own experience by imagining it, giving it form, writing about it…They define, for themselves and for their readers, woman as she is and as she dreams.”¹⁹ She also claims that the life that one imagines through writing offers a means of changing the experience of one’s life when real world presents challenges to one’s self-determination. Mary, in the play, finds it problematic to deal with complications of a man-woman relationship and her novel also portrays the same difficulty faced by women who are value their work, identity as well as relationship with a man. Mary attempts to redefine the relation between sexes through her writing. It is the women who play active roles in her novel and decide the fate of the man-woman relationship and her writing becomes a means of stating her own point of view and redefining her own life. Like Mary’s novel, Crothers’ plays portray women who are active individuals and their lives are motivated by new thoughts and ideas. The women in Crothers’ plays, especially *When Ladies Meet*, share a common experience that not only affects their relationship with the man
but their views of themselves and each other. More importantly, women’s writing or art for that matter seems to be significant as it provides a scope for their evolution and self-development.

Interestingly, the ‘new woman’ figure was associated with ‘fallen woman’ due to her subversive and radical nature that defied societal rules and conventions. Crothers changes this notion in the play *When Ladies Meet* by portraying Mary in a different light. Dramaturgically the play subverts a fallen woman figure and reframes it into a fallen man figure. The play is an interrogation of the fallen woman trope and its presence in the society of the 1920s. The so-called fallen woman in the play is Mary but she is not a prostitute, a woman who is generally regarded as fallen. Mary is a career-oriented woman, a successful novelist who is having an affair with her publisher who is married. Her character is questioned because of her illicit relation with a married man. The dramatic conflict in the play arises when Mary denies her fallen woman status and there is also a sense of ambiguity as the archetype is equated with a woman like Mary. Mary seemingly justifies her own position by validating the position of her heroine in the novel that she wrote. The novel revolves around a similar story with that of Mary’s life; the protagonist in the novel has an affair with a married man and Mary argues with Rogers saying that the situation is logical and realistic. In the novel, the meeting of the two women, the lover and the wife of the man she loved, ultimately decides the fate of the man. In the meeting, the woman who proves to share the strongest bond of love with the man stays in the relationship and the other woman leaves him. In this case, it is the women who determine the future of the sexual pursuits of the man they both loved. The play and the novel within the play validate female sexual desire in a society that forbids them from doing the same. Mary opines that the lover of the husband is ‘good’ and
‘decent’. Mary’s efforts in romanticizing and justifying the illicit love of the couple in the novel suggest her unintentional defence of her own situation. In the play Mary steadfastly claims that she is neither common nor a mistress. She also refuses to accept that Rogers affair outside marriage is impure or immoral. Mary’s statement that she is not a mistress is powerful as it is antithetical to the views with which society regards such women. Her refusal to accept the fallen woman status speaks of her attempt to find a new identity for herself devoid of society’s judgment. Mary is representative of all the women of the 1920s and 30s who are self-determinate and focused with their individual lives and identities. Mary’s identity crisis resulting due to the conflict with society’s definition of a fallen woman is explained by her friend Bridget,

I tell you this is an awfully hard age for a good woman to live in. I mean one who wants to have any fun. If you’ve still got the instincts for the right and wrong that were pounded into you when you were a girl—what are you going to do with ‘em?...And they just get you mixed up—and hold you back—so you’re neither one thing nor the other. Neither happy—and bad—nor good and contented. You’re just discontentedly decent—and it doesn’t get you anywhere. (WLM, 23-24)

Through Bridget’s dialogue, Crothers highlights an important issue of the times—the presence of good and fallen figures of women in the society’s terms of morality. Bridget makes the point clear that good women do not have fun unlike fallen women whose lives are happy and contented. Crothers indirectly validates the sexual desires of a woman if that is related to the person’s contentment and happiness. The problem arises when Mary tries to view herself as ‘good’ despite the fact that she seeks to fulfill her sexual desires and society expects women not to pursue the same. The question that
remains unanswered is that whether Mary can prove herself to be good and live her life contentedly at the same time.

However, Mary depends on Rogers and Claire to validate her status as ‘good woman’ whose desires are not fallen but honest. Mary goes through a moment of doubt when she meets Claire and understands that she might be guilty of Claire’s sadness and she says,

I keep putting myself in her place...It’s all my fault anyway. I had no business to let it get as far as this...I’d give my soul if I were standing beside you like this – forever – never to be alone again. It’s the aloneness that frightens me. (WLM, 39-43)

Here Mary resembles Molly in Ourselves who also expresses her desire of not being alone. Both these characters are marked by their sexual desire and their inclination towards companionship but they belong to very different walks of like. Molly is a prostitute who longs to be with Bob who is a pimp whereas Mary and Rogers occupy a decent position in the social ladder. Both Mary and Molly are cast into a state of fallen-ness and by doing this Crothers questions the definition of fallen woman by showing resemblance between the morality of a prostitute, Molly and a ‘new woman’, Mary almost twenty years later and examines society’s sexual double standard for a wider range of women than previously thought.

The encounter of Mary and Claire and their discussion of the predicament that were to follow them led to their rejection of Rogers as a husband or a lover. The meeting was a kind of enlightenment for both the ladies who understood each other’s position well and decided to leave Rogers on similar grounds. Mary says to Claire, “it was right - to me – till I saw you . . . I didn’t know what I was doing – to you” (WLM, 132). Claire reveals to Rogers, “I’ve always been glad to have you back before – and thankful it was over –
always thinking of you – never of her – but now – I’ve seen her . . .” (WLM, 133). The women acknowledge the idea that female sexual desire should be followed responsibly considering other women. Both of them rejected male sexual desire because Rogers was devoid of any responsibility. At the conclusion of the play, Rogers is depicted as a fallen man from women’s perspective and according to the sexual standard or rules of women. Yvonne Shafer rightly observes that When Ladies Meets does not suggest “a plea for more sexual freedom for women, but for an end to adultery and seduction on the part of men” (30).

Crothers offered women a distinctive voice on the American stage at the time of the feminist movements and celebrating the independence of New Woman and examining the position of women in America mostly during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Crothers’s characters challenge the injustices of patriarchy and also depict the conflicting choices that an independent woman has to make. She most often faces a dilemma between her professional career and her traditional duties at home. The issues central to the idea of the New Woman has been justly portrayed by Crothers in many of her plays, such as, Nice People, Mary the Third and Young Wisdom.

The play Young Wisdom deals with the young people’s tendency of experimenting new things in life. Crothers’s concern here is about the institution of marriage and one’s freedom of choosing a husband and marrying not out of a sense of responsibility or hedonism but of one’s own free will. The New Women of the period were experimenting with the idea of open marriage and love. The play concerns two sisters, Victoria and Gail who are preoccupied with the concept of ‘trial marriage’. Victoria returns from college where she had gathered advanced knowledge and ideas and wants to experiment with them. She convinces Gail that she should not marry her fiancé until
she has experimented trial marriage and premarital sex with him to ensure that they have a happy future together. This highlights women’s place in a society that is constantly changing and creates an argument regarding ‘changing mores’. Through this play Crothers exposes the realities about women that were in conflict with Victorianism and represented the values of a New Woman who were not contended with complete domesticity or autonomy. Crothers, however, does this within the boundaries of the Victorian belief that women were the protectors of moral values in a society. Gail finally realizes that she should marry her fiancé for love and not live in sin and dishonour. Moreover, Crothers used the genre of comedy that made the treatment more feasible. Comedy became a medium through which taboo subjects such as sex and sexual desires mostly of women could be treated. Although filled with much humour, the play deals with a detailed discussion on the institution of marriage and certain important issues related with it. Crothers social comedies like *Mary the Third*, *Expressing Willie*, *Let Us Be Gay* and *As Husbands Go* reflect the manners and mores of the early twentieth century America.

In *Nice People* (1921), Crothers presents three young flappers namely Theodora (Teddy), Eileen and Hallie who belong to extremely rich families and spend money lavishly. The flapper of the 1920s was a sharp contrast to the previous Victorian image of femininity as keepers of home, hearth and morality. A flapper is a stylish, impudent, libertine young woman of the Jazz age who usually wore short skirts and had boyish bob hairstyle. She drank and smoke in the public and offered a complete opposite notion of womanhood as depicted by the Gibson girl of the Gilded age who were respectable women mainly devoted to finding a suitable husband and being the creator of a happy home. The protagonist of the play, Teddy, is engaged with Scottie but she feels that she
does not love this man anymore. Teddy is not convinced if Scottie really loves her and is not drawn to her just because of her wealth. She incidentally meets a man named Billy Wade who shows her the simple and happy country life spending days raising chicken. Teddy falls in love with this man and enjoys the economic independence that she has earned in this rural life and way of living. When her father offers her economic support, Teddy says,

I’d like to see you try. Why do you want to dispose of me? Let me do it myself. First of all, I want to be left alone to think. Men aren’t everything on earth…Regardless of you – or any other man in the world, I’m going to take care of myself. (NP, III, 184)

At the end of the play Teddy and Billy decide to marry on the condition that they will live together without financially assisting each other. The New Woman was primarily concerned with economic independence demanding respect and responsibility as a career woman. Teddy is an example of a New Woman who stressed on the desire to make a new life for herself where she would make her own living and have self-fulfilment.

The portrayal of the New Woman on American stage sparked interest among the audience with the production of James Herne’s Margaret Fleming in 1890. A number of plays dealt with the ‘woman question’ during that period. The early plays focused on the issue of double standard but later the attention shifted to the idea of women’s growing economic independence and liberty. Jesse Lynch Williams’ Why Marry? (1918) offers an interesting study on the issue of woman’s changing status during the 1910s and 1920s. The play centres around a ‘new woman’ named Helen who is a scientist. Dr. Hamilton, her colleague, shows progressive attitude towards women when
he says, “When you work with women of ability you learn to respect them so much that you quite lose the habit of insulting them.” (WM, I, 38) Helen’s brother named John, however, believes that marriage and career cannot be maintained equally, “That’s all very well in theory, but who’ll take care of your home when you’re at work and who’ll take care of your work when you’re at home? Combine the two and you’ll fail at both.” (WM, I, 39) Helen’s uncle, Uncle Everett, is a judge who is unhappy in his marriage and wants to divorce his wife knowing the fact the promise of loving each other till their last breath is already broken. John is against Everett’s decision as he does not believe in divorce and has a romantic idea that one marriage in thousand ends in divorce. The Judge corrects John by citing the present census report which states that one marriage in ten ended in divorce. As women started getting increased job opportunities, there was a high rise in the divorce rate which influenced the portrayal of women on stage during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1870, for instance, there were 29.6 divorces per thousand marriages, but by 1900 there were 81 and by 1922 131 divorces for each thousand marriages.20 The issue of woman’s independence was naturally involved. Since women were granted more legal grounds for divorce than men (such as non-support), more women than men sought divorces. By 1929, 71.3% of American divorces were granted to women.21

The play, Why Marry?, is one of the keenest observations on the issue of marriage and divorce. Divorce was no longer regarded as a social evil. The growing emancipation of women encouraged them to revolt against their dissatisfaction with marriage and divorce was the result of an unhappy marriage. The play is a detailed discussion on the advantages and drawbacks of marriage. The Judge holds the opinion that marriage must
adjust itself to the New Woman; a new woman will no more compromise with her life simply because she is a ‘woman.’ The Judge says,

Women like Helen are a new proposition to men like you. . . . She’s the New Woman. We’re at the dawn of a new era, John; women are going to do what they believe is right, not what we men tell them to believe is right. (WM, I, 40)

Helen, the New Woman in the play, is well aware of the importance of the career in her life and therefore she initially refuses to marry Dr. Hamilton because she believed that marriage would ruin both their careers and their successful professional life as doctors. She also knew that marriage demanded women to ‘obey’ their partners and Helen would never conform to such a life of subservience. Uncle Everett is right when he says that old marriage is not compatible with a ‘new woman’ and that a self-supporting girl like Helen will object to obey a man like Hamilton. At the closing scene of the play, Helen marries Dr. Hamilton and he declares that she is now a ‘good woman’ and respectable in the eyes of the society. However, the Judge says “beware” and warns the society to be ready for unexpected experiences because women like Helen are not going to be constrained by the institution of marriage. The play not only highlights the increased demand of independent women for an end of the double standard but also comments on the conflict between career and family that was one of the pertinent issues of the times.

Before the twentieth century the general attitude in the depiction of female characters on the stage was often flat and conventional. They were mostly depicted in two extreme images – one projection was the idealized virgin and at the other end was the victim who transgressed that ideal. The approach towards women was rather sentimentalized than a sensitive attitude. The concept of the “new woman” replaced the
earlier stereotypical notions of women. The ‘new woman’ is mostly seen as an individual who thinks for herself, stands on her own, questions earlier preconceptions, finds solutions to her problems and asserts sexual autonomy for herself. She emphasizes on her individuality and reiterates the fact that she is unique and therefore different from the rest. To look at the treatment of the new woman by a male Provincetown playwright, I have chosen Eugene O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* which deals with the new woman, Nina. The play was quite popular for the issues it dealt with and was greatly welcomed by the audience as *Strange Interlude* (1928) played on Broadway six performances a week for one and a half years without a vacant seat in any performance even in hottest weather. It is generally believed that American drama gained a certain degree of maturity in the 1920s especially with the plays of Eugene O’Neill. The general attitude in the depiction of female characters on the stage was often flat and conventional. They were mostly depicted in two extreme images – one projection was the idealized virgin and at the other end was the victim who transgressed that ideal. The approach towards women was sentimental rather than projecting a sensitive attitude to the problems she faced. The concept of the “new woman” replaced the earlier stereotypical notions of women. The ‘new woman’ is mostly seen as an individual who thinks for herself, stands on her own, questions earlier preconceptions, finds solutions to her problems and asserts sexual autonomy for herself. She emphasizes on her individuality and reiterates the fact that she is unique and therefore different from the rest. The ‘search for self’ is a dominant character of the new woman and Nina Leeds in O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* possesses all these traits.

The physical appearance of Nina is one of the perfect exemplary of a ‘new woman’ who usually had many characteristic traits of masculinity:
Nina—enters and stands just inside the doorway looking directly at her father with defiant eyes, her face set in an expression of stubborn resolve. She is twenty, tall with broad square shoulders, slim strong hips and long beautifully developed legs—a fine athletic girl of the swimmer, tennis player, golfer type. Her straw-blond hair, framing her sunburned face, is bobbed. Her face is striking, handsome rather than pretty, the bone structure prominent, the forehead high, the lips of her rather large mouth clearly modelled above the firm jaw. Her eyes are beautiful and bewildering, extraordinarily large and a deep greenish blue. Since Gordon’s death they have a quality of continually shuddering before some terrible enigma, of being wounded to their depths and made defiant and resentful by their pain.23 (ST, I, 494)

The play begins against the backdrop of World War I and we are given a glimpse of the wars taking place in the minds of the characters. From a conversation between Professor Leeds, Nina’s father and Marsden, a novelist we come to know that Nina’s fiancé, Gordon Shaw, has been shot down in the war. Nina is utterly frustrated because feels she has been cheated and the world of illusions and idealism she imagined, crashed with the death of Gordon. She is awakened to a new realization that the world of experience is not similar to the idealism she had fostered earlier in her life. Then she sets on her quest towards finding her ‘self’ and a purposeful ‘meaning of life.’

NINA: What use is my life to me or anyone? But I must make it of use—by giving it! (Fiercely) I must learn to give myself ... give and give until I can make that gift of myself for a man’s happiness without scruple, without fear, without joy, when I’ve accomplished this I’ll have found myself, I’ll know how to start in living my own life again.” (ST, I, 500)
Nina Leeds is the daughter of a puritan, New-England professor. Her father stands for the rigid puritanical force which forbids her, in the past, to give expression to her inner self. According to her, Professor Leeds is

The Professor of Dead Languages is talking again … a dead man lectures on the past of living … since I was born I have been in his class, loving-attentive, pupil-daughter Nina … my ears numb with spiritless messages from the dead … dead words droning on …(ST, I, 497)

The repetition of the word “dead” speaks for Nina’s innate desire of ‘will to live’. One can relate Nina’s rebellion to what Edwin Sapir had summarized in the American Mercury the “anti-Puritan revolt” of the 1920’s as a “generalized revolt against everything that is hard, narrow and intolerant in the old American life and which sees in sex repression its most potent symbol of attack”24. It is her frustration and guilt that has led to rebellion. She realizes her own responsibility of fostering ‘spiritless messages’ of the past. Her “sickness” is what Kierkegaard would call “in despair to will to be oneself.”25 He discusses that if in despair an individual wills to be oneself, there is defiance. This is what exactly happens with Nina; since Gordon’s death, we see her “defiant eyes”. (ST, I, 494) It is for the first time in American drama that we are listening to a woman who tells us that despair, too, can be a way of life, but one must be brave enough to welcome and tread on it and also acknowledge the responsibility of the falsehood in oneself. Nina, in a moment of awareness, declares “It’s too late For lies!” (ST, I, 495)
Throughout the play, Nina, the new woman, craves to “live on” who is not only in revolt against the established structures of the society but also desires to find a meaning for her own life. She says,

No, I was the blindest! I would not see! I knew it was a stupid morbid business, that I was more maimed than they were, really, that the war had blown my heart and insides out! (*ST*, II, 527)

Being frustrated and disillusioned by the war and her inner conflicts, she takes a resolution to live life on her own terms. She defies all authorities as the crumbling down of her traditional structure of beliefs made her re-evaluate all values. Nina makes up her mind of sacrificing her life to treat the wounded soldiers of the war but this was not accepted by her father. Professor Leeds says, “You’re not yourself.” Nina’s answer is quite significant here, “No, I’m not myself yet. That’s just it. Not all myself. But I’ve been becoming myself. And I must finish.” (*ST*, I, 500) Nina’s standing by her choice and her declaration of freedom to be ‘herself’ can be seen as a revolt against the restrictions placed on her. O’Neill has depicted the complexity of human life through the character of Nina. She searches for her ‘self’, but at the same time is constantly threatened with the idea of non-being as she is surrounded with the idea of death. She then comes to a realization that human life on this earth has no intrinsic meaning or order. It is upon us how we project that meaning in our lives. She, therefore, embarks on her journey to search a new concept of morality which will infer meaning to life. She puts forward a new concept of God, the Mother and says,

The mistake began when God was created in a male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, but men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods—the
Boss—has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God, the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life’s rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace! (ST, II, 524)

Through Nina’s personality O’Neill has created a modern woman who is driven by a strange life-force. Here I would like to mention G.B. Shaw’s concept of the Life Force which states that Life is a vital force or impulse that moves towards attaining greater power of contemplation and self-realization and this is possible through Creative Evolution which ensures to create something better and greater beyond the life forms that has already developed. This kind of a life force is quite discernable in Nina’s speech:

... my child moving in my life ... my life moving in my child ... the world is whole and perfect... all things are each other’s ... life is ... and this is beyond reason ... questions die in the silence of this peace ... I am living a dream within the great dream of the tide ... breathing in the tide I dream and breathe back my dream into the tide ... suspended in the movement of the tide, I feel life move in me, suspended in me ... no whys matter... there is no why ... I am a mother ... God is a Mother ... (ST, V, 564)

Her life is driven by the force that she feels while bearing her child with Ned Darrell, her lover. This step was taken by her in order to create a better species of humankind through scientific experiment. She reiterates the idea that God is a mother and we can see that she herself assumes the role of God, the creator. It is this creative power or
rather force in her that leads her to a better power of contemplation and self-realization. It is for the second time that Nina rejects the traditional notion of God being a male.

Throughout the play she gives way to unconventional relationships and seeks multiple possessions of men’s lives. In portraying a new image of a woman, O’Neill creates a unique concept of power. The nature of Nina’s problem is that she does not find any single relationship in her life satisfying, and here O’Neill highlights an important aspect of the ‘new woman’, that is, her need to have multiple male relationships as she finds none creative and self-satisfactory. She married Sam and gets pregnant with his child but she aborts it because Sam’s mother believes that insanity runs in the blood of the family. Here O’Neill brings to light issues like abortion which had hardly been discussed in American drama before. Nina then takes a bold step of sleeping with Ned Darrell, the doctor, with whom she decides to conceive a healthy child through scientific experiment. She perceives Marsden as her father and in whom she finds peace that she is so desperate of.

NINA (more and more strangely triumphant): My three men! ... I feel their desires converge in me! ... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb ... and am whole ... they dissolve in me, their life is my life ... I am pregnant with the three! ... husband! ... lover! ... father! ... and the fourth man! ... little man! ... little Gordon! ... he is mine too! ... that makes it perfect! ... (ST, VI, 616)

There is a sense of possessing all these men in her life and she feels triumphant in this scene because she feels she has supreme power over all her three men. But later this
sense of triumph is replaced by a tragic sense of self-recognition and awareness of the limitations of the self i, “My having a son was failure, wasn’t it? He couldn’t give me happiness...” (ST, IX, 681) At the end of the play, we see that, after fighting against all the trials and tribulations of life, Nina hopes ‘to belong’ after having passed beyond power and desire. She finally discovers a haven of love and peace with Charles Marsden.

NINA: (with a strange smile) Strange Interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father! ... You’re so restful, Charlie, I feel as if I were a girl again and you were my father... I wonder is our old garden the same? ... It will be a comfort to get home, to be old and to be home again at last – to be in love with peace together – to love each other’s peace – to sleep with peace together! .. to die in peace! I’am so contentedly weary with life! (ST, IX, 681-82)

Eugene O’Neill has depicted the predicament of a generation through Nina’s journey between despair and faith. Nina, the new woman, has been shown in two states of being. In the initial acts she is portrayed as a woman who is defiant, bold and vindictive. As the play progresses her character evolves. Her despair is the despair of a generation. But the faith and hope that she fosters at the end of the play is the faith of an individual. She is a “new woman” who has tried to forge an independent existence for her but she transcends the stereotypical figure to emerge out as a vital, living character. If we go back to the first act of the play where she proclaims her ‘quest of the self’ and finding a ‘meaning in life’ we find that in the closing act this struggle is finally over. The play comes full circle when she declares that she is free to ‘die in peace’ (ST, IX, 682).
The early twentieth century was life changing for American women and Sophie Treadwell was an important voice to mark the societal shift at the turn of the century. The feminist movement marked an important event in the history of the nation after women were granted the right to vote. The role of women drastically changed in the spheres of domestic and public life. There was an emergence of a new consciousness among women that questioned the traditional roles of a wife and a mother and sought new possibilities and experiences in their individual lives and careers. However with the rise of women’s participation, there was a resistance seen from the conservative American male who regarded the flappers as immoral and outrageous. An article named “Your Daughter and Her Job” in *Good Housekeeping* states that young women who were engaged in domestic chores such as knitting and cooking were well prepared for the future and such women “following normal biological and social instincts which end in mating and mothering.” In contrast, girls seeking employment “risked losing their ‘domestic instincts’ and their ‘feminine interests.’ They would fail at becoming good wives and mothers” (Gourley, 35).

Along with the flappers a new group of women emerged known as the ‘new woman’ who like the flappers might not have just dressed in a shocking and revealing manner but her attitude and behaviour was just as startling and challenging. Women like Coco Chanel proved an inspiration to hundreds of women to explore their inner beauty, fashion and sexuality. As the feminist movements became more popular in America, there was a sense of fear among the conservatives that the moral values and traditions of the nation would fall apart. Although there were resistances but the ‘new woman’ stood upright for the causes they believed were important to establish themselves as an individual. This image of the new woman was represented in various art and culture
including theatre. American drama presented the success of the women’s movement and reflected on the rise of modern American women during the 1910 and throughout the 1930s. The struggles for suffrage, campaign for prohibiting alcohol and support for social activism during the First World War are instances of how women performed various roles in America that changed their lives radically. The Roaring Twenties witnessed the participation of women in numerous professions securing their lives being independent. A significant decline in marriage rate was seen as more women entered the workforce. The divorce rate, on the other hand, increased. The new women reigned for quite some time championing women’s right to vote, securing power in politics and business, participation in the workforce, engaging in sports and so on. But the image of the ‘new woman’ suffered a downfall “partly because of the conservative backlash prompted by the economic and social turmoil of the late 1920s and early 1930s. A decline in women’s enrolment in colleges and in their participation in the work force and professional fields all contributed to an increasing return to traditional domestic roles for women after 1920” (Bywaters 99).

Although the decline was visible in the participation of women and the marriage rate had also started to rise but there was prevalent a change in the attitudes of women towards society’s norms of traditional behaviour and role of women because the Victorian image of womanhood was challenged by the image of the ‘new woman’. Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal* (1928) appeared at a time when the emergence of the new woman had already suffered a setback. The play chronicles the life of a new woman named Helen Jones who struggles against a system that is dominated by male-mechanized society. She is initially referred to as a Young Woman and Treadwell introduces her at the beginning of the play in this manner,
Of these characters, THE YOUNG WOMAN, going any day to business. Ordinary. The confusion of her own inner thoughts, emotions, desires, dreams cut off from any actual adjustment to the routine work. She gets through this routine with a very small surface of her consciousness. She is not homely and she is not pretty. She is preoccupied with herself—with her person. She has well-kept hands, and a trick of constantly arranging her hair over her ears. (Mac. 1)

Treadwell represented many ‘new woman’ figures in her plays who challenged the conventions set by the society and tried to break free from it. Myra Light in Gringo, Zizi Powers in Ladies Leave, Mary in Lone Valley, Lily Laird in For Saxophone are representations of a woman’s personal struggle for freedom. Treadwell’s uniqueness in presenting the ‘new woman’ character is best seen in Machinal. The novelty lies in the fact that Helen is an ‘ordinary woman’ and the subsequent evolution of her character makes her a ‘new woman’. The non-traditional women who challenged old conventions was quite expected but Treadwell, in this play, presents a more dangerous version of a new woman, an everywoman who is changed by the societal pressures to act differently. Critic Barbara Bywaters states that someone like Helen Jones is not a non-traditional ‘new woman’ of the feminist movement that the society has to fear but she is in fact a docile and ordinary woman who is transformed by society’s pressures. Therefore women like Helen are more dangerous and damaging because the threat cannot be realized as the enemy always stays within and cannot be counteracted. This aspect of the character of Helen makes the play unique and radical for the time in which it was written. Helen’s struggle to seek her identity and transcend the barriers imposed upon her by a loveless marriage and traditional feminine roles form the crux of the story. The
search for identity is resonant through the play as the Young Woman desires a better life by being free from the clutches of the male-dominated society. Treadwell captures the struggle of the protagonist and her inner turmoil by using expressionism as a medium to delineate her spirit and feelings. “The expressionistic form – flat characters, repetitive dialogue and action, numerous short scenes, harsh audio effects, confusion of inner and outer reality – is the perfect medium for presenting the life of a young woman who asks an impersonal society ‘Is nothing mine?’” (Barlow. Machinal. viii). The play is about a woman’s struggle to search her own self in a mechanized world which is unfriendly, the Adding Clerk says, “She doesn’t belong in an office.” (Episode One. 3) There is a constant buzz of typewriters, telephone, machines and these sounds represent an “assaulting environment, but they are also the voices of [the Young Woman’s] fragmented, dissociative state. She is as mentally crowded as she is physically in the subway . . . The voices of the other office workers dramatize a confused stream of self-hostility, internalized judgment and panic” (Cotsell, 278).

The atmosphere that Treadwell creates in the play not only presents the Young Woman’s view of the world around her but also represents a unique feminist experience that “appeals to the subconscious minds of her audience, especially those of women” (Dickey 11). It is pertinent to mention that Treadwell’s plays were mostly influenced by her association with various thinkers and artists. She was a member of an elite group that held discussions at the Park Avenue home of the Walter and Louise Arensberg and artists like Isadora Duncan and Marcel Duchamp were also involved in this group. “At the core of the beliefs held by Treadwell and the artists at the Arensbergs’ salon was a shared demand for ‘the new in life and art: new forms, new sexual values, new freedoms unhindered by old rules’” (Crunden, xii). Treadwell’s engagement with the
Lucy Stone League allowed her to develop a voice against America’s conservative views on sexuality and promote her feminist ideals which she represented through her works. Her affiliation with this organization was influential in shaping and changing the course of modernist art:

The League encouraged married women to retain their maiden names and take up separate residences from their husbands in order to maintain an autonomous identity, both practices which Treadwell adopted on her move to New York. Such activism led to newfound sexual freedoms, especially those originating in openly discussed pre- and extra-marital relations as well as in the previously taboo subject of birth control (Gainor and Dickey, 45).

In *Machinal*, the Young Woman is engaged in a sexual affair which not only reflects the changing attitudes towards sexuality but also speaks of Treadwell’s belief that one can achieve freedom and peace if one’s sexual life is satisfying. Treadwell was influenced by various psychological theories especially of Freud’s whose study helped her understand the reason behind many emotional troubles. She was “drawn to the psychoanalytic theory that sexual fulfilment and openness led to an emergence of the authentic self” (Dickey and Lopez-Rodriguez, 76).

The Young Woman’s sexual experiences with her husband, George Jones and her lover, Dick Roe are entirely different. In Episode Three, during their honeymoon, the Young Woman enters the room, nervous and unresponsive to her husband who tells her some dirty jokes. She is described as the one who “is very still, but her eyes are wide with a curious, helpless, animal terror” (*Mac*, 26). In Episode Six, the situation changes completely when she is with her lover,
She really wears almost exactly the clothes that women wear now, but the finesse of their cut, and the grace and ease with which she puts them on, must turn this episode of her dressing into a personification, an idealization of a woman clothing herself. All her gestures must be unconscious, innocent, relaxed, sure and full of natural grace (Mac, 50).

The Young Woman says, “I never knew anything like this way! I never knew that I could feel like this! So-so purified!” (Mac, 51). It is ironic that she calls this feeling as ‘purified’ in spite of this being an illicit affair. The reason behind such a reaction from her is that she feels no emotional connection with her husband who treats sex as a business transaction while Dick makes her feels special, an emotional attachment she has never felt with her husband. The Young Woman feels stifled in the relationship with her husband who is self-centered and arrogant and she experiences romantic and sexual liberation only through her relationship with her lover. The affair was an opportunity for the Young Woman to discover a satisfaction she never imagined was possible and it also gave her a chance for self-discovery. This condition explored by Treadwell in Machinal is an example of the lives of many American women of the 1920s.

It is quite apparent from the study of the plays that the concept of the ‘new woman’ has been differently treated by Glaspell, Crothers, Treadwell and O’Neill. O’Neill’s portrayal seems to embody the traits not only of a ‘new woman’ but other women as well. Glaspell is far more radical in her treatment of the concept. Her ‘new woman’ is unique, far removed from the conventional female traits and Glaspell delineates this with her exceptional use of innovative language, use of space and an experimental theatre form. Crothers’s depiction of the new woman suggests a kind of idealism that is resonant in most of her plays. Most of the women change their moral standards only to
realize at the end that the change does not lead to happiness. They look for ideal relationship and when they fail at the end, they make compromises. Treadwell’s treatment of the ‘new woman’ or everywoman is different in the sense that most of the plays are written from her personal experiences of the situations in which she had placed her characters. Plays like *Le Grand Prix, Constance Darrow, The Settlement* and *O Nightingale* comment on the tensions and dilemma faced by working women who deal with men who are uncomfortable to see their women as equals. These issues reflect in Treadwell’s other plays as well which she had experienced first-hand.
Notes

1. The concept of the ‘new woman’ is believed to have prevailed in Britain earlier. Literary representations of the new women in English society date back to Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) and Elizabeth Barret’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), which discussed a woman’s struggle between the roles, played in conventional marriage and the possibility of a woman becoming an independent artist. The emergence of the ‘new woman’ in drama that seemed to have influenced American drama is the Norwegian playwright, Ibsen’s plays such as *A Doll’s House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). Although the idea of the new woman was prevalent in various countries I will deal with its influence particularly in America and American drama.


4. In 1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony started their campaign for women’s suffrage in the United States. Stanton and Anthony established the National Women Suffrage Association in 1869 and the same year also saw the birth of American Women Suffrage Association which discussed the discrimination faced by women in the society, emphasized on women’s equal opportunity with men and their right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote in 1920. These years of struggle and the following years saw the rise of the image of the ‘new woman’ in America.

5. Lavender, Catherine. *The New Woman*. City University of New York, 2012, p. 34
6. The amended Matrimonial Causes Act of 1876 and the Guardianship Infants Act 1886 gave women the right to claim custody over their children in case of legal separation or divorce. Earlier divorced fathers always gained custody of their children.

7. I call it an urban phenomenon because the new women were well educated, informed and empowered. They enjoyed all the luxuries of a city life like playing sports, smoking cigarettes, driving an automobile and so on. These images of the ‘new woman’ sprang up in various advertisements, popular fiction, cartoons and poems as well.


10. Although the act of creation is generally associated with women because of her birth-giving powers but here the reference is made to the creation of various conventions and restrictions which are impinged upon the female by the male section of the society.

11. See Phyllis Chesler’s discussion of the “madness” of Zelda Fitzgerald, Ellen West and Sylvia Plath, three women at odds with the female role, in Women and Madness, New York, 1972, p.15

12. Although Glaspell does not use the word mutation in the play but she often refers to the concept of the evolutionary leap evident in the translation of Hugo de Vries’ Die Mutationstheorie (1910). “The theory of mutation assumes that new species and varieties are produced from existing forms by sudden leaps” (p vii)
13. Using the word ‘queer’ in relation to Susan Glaspell’s play is to show an oddity of behavior or difference in the preconceived notion of a female’s identity. Claire, the new woman, in *The Verge* is seen as different or unconventional female in so far as the traditional idea of a woman is concerned. She emerges out to be a transgressed figure that breaks away from established norms. There is no such reference of homosexuality or lesbianism in the play as is understood in present queer theories.


16. This term is borrowed from medical studies by Una Chaudhuri in her analysis of the theatrical representation of space in its relation to dramatic development. Geopathology stands for the configuration of a stage space where place becomes a problem for characters.

17. Progressive era refers to the time period between 1890 and 1920 when America experienced the growth of industrialization leading to a large number of immigrants who came mostly from south-eastern Europe. As a result people faced immense problems relating to employment, health, sanitation and so on. A number of reformers tried to settle the condition through various socio-political reforms and improve public health, sanitation, education, working class condition of the American and also conserve the environment. Many amendments were passed during the Progressive Era which includes the Sixteenth Amendment (1913) relating to income tax, the Seventeenth Amendment (1913) relating to selection of Senators, the Eighteenth Amendment (1919)
dealing with the prohibition of the sale of alcohol and the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) which led to the rights granted to women to vote.


21. Ibid. p.86


Work Cited:


