

INHERITORS

By Susan Glaspell

Adapted by Iris Smith Fischer

Editor's note

Working on Susan Glaspell's *Inheritors* has been a pleasure. Her idealism, her location-specific sense of United States history and the character of the Midwest, the timeliness of her ideas in this new age of anxiety--all of these things have kept me engaged. I believe they will engage contemporary audiences as well.

Glaspell wrote *Inheritors* probably in 1919-1920¹, at the age of forty-five, yet her protagonist, Madeline Fejevary Morton, is turning just twenty-one, and the play's sensibility is similarly youthful. Glaspell's characters Silas Morton and his granddaughter, Madeline, feel their way forward into new ideas and startling redefinitions of themselves. The stops and starts of the dialogue—often complained of by reviewers--constitute one of the play's biggest challenges in production but are essential to its character and tone. Feeling my way forward along with the characters, I was reminded of the excitement of discovery—not to be told a thing is true, but to discover it for oneself. In such a way do young readers “discover” their own classics while skimming the shelves of the local library on long summer days. Susan Glaspell's

¹ J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-48* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 115.

characters, in much the same way, seek an idiom, at once personal and public, through which they work out their ideas, perceptions, and beliefs. Emerson, Whitman, Lincoln, Darwin, and Arnold all have a place in the world of *Inheritors*, illuminating the personal landscape in which Madeline makes her way. What she inherits defines that landscape; but how she perceives and expresses herself shapes her choices.

I have tried to preserve the idiom of Glaspell's seekers while removing repetitions that would hinder the understanding and irritate the sensibilities of contemporary U.S. audiences. Glaspell's original play can take three to four hours to perform; the current text has been reduced by more than one quarter. While paring unnecessary connective tissue in the dialogue, I have left the stage directions largely untouched. A few words and phrases in brackets have been added to assist with comprehension. Several minor characters (Doris, Fussie, Emil) appear more briefly now; Harry has been omitted. Overall, I hope to have retained the complexity of Glaspell's major characters and the richness of the issues and circumstances she created.

This production edition is based on Glaspell's original American publication, *Inheritors: A Play in Three Acts*.² I'd like to thank The Susan Glaspell Society for making this edited script available on their website; thanks also to Gwen Claassen of the University of Kansas College Word Processing Office for her technical assistance. I am particularly grateful to J. Ellen Gainor for her wise encouragement and support. She made the original suggestion, in a listserv discussion of plays relevant to life under the Patriot Act, that it was time for a production of *Inheritors*. During her 2004 visit to the University of Kansas, I directed a staged reading on March 6, with Professor Gainor

² (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1921).

providing an introduction.³ The reading was repeated on March 4, 2005, directed by Erin Jones and co-sponsored by the Glaspell Society, for the conference “Writing, Teaching, Performing America.” The cast of the 2005 reading is reproduced below.

--Iris Smith Fischer
Lawrence, Kansas
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³ I based the staged reading on the British edition of *Inheritors* that appears in C.W.E. Bigsby’s *Plays by Susan Glaspell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), a four-act version that offers Professor Bigsby’s helpful introduction and notes.

Notice

Professionals and amateurs are requested to acknowledge the editor, Iris Smith Fischer, and The Susan Glaspell Society in any program or advertising connected with a production of this version of *Inheritors* by Susan Glaspell.

Please include the following note in the program:

“The script for this performance was adapted from the original by Iris Smith Fischer, in cooperation with The Susan Glaspell Society (<http://academic.shu.edu/glaspell/inheritors.html>).”

Report any production to:

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CAST

[NARRATOR	Kim Miller]
SMITH	Colin Elliott
GRANDMOTHER, SILAS MORTON's mother	J. Ellen Gainor
SILAS MORTON	John Staniunas
FELIX FEJEVARY, 1st	Arnold Weiss
FELIX, son of Felix Fejevary, 1 st	Stephen Moles
[FELIX FEJEVARY, 2 nd , a banker	Ron Wilson]
SENATOR LEWIS, a state senator	John Younger
HORACE, son of FELIX FEJEVARY, 2 nd	Stephen Moles
DORIS)	Laura Leffler-McCabe
) college girls	
FUSSIE)	Shelley Manis
MADLINE FEJEVARY MORTON	Christina Schafer
ISABEL FEJEVARY, wife of FELIX FEJEVARY, 2 nd	J. Ellen Gainor
HARRY, a student clerk	Colin Elliott
Professor HOLDEN	Allan Hanson
[VOICE	John Younger]
IRA MORTON, son of SILAS MORTON	John Staniunas
EMIL JOHNSON	Colin Elliott