

# Psychological Domestic Violence against Woman as Reflected in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*

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## Abstract

Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) was one of the pioneering American female playwrights who evolved into visibility at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the twentieth. She had celebrated in her personal and literary life the advent of the new woman striving to fulfill her dreams in a hostile and intensive world. Glaspell based her first dramatic play, *Trifles*, on an actual murder case she covered while working as a journalist.<sup>1</sup> She may write her piece, *Trifles*, as an explanation for why a woman may murder her husband. In her attempt to explain, Glaspell created the character of Minnie Wright who is oppressed by her husband to the extreme. To fully free herself, Minnie escapes by way of strangling her husband to death. Thematically speaking, Glaspell's *Trifles* handles women's issues in a time where women like Minnie Wright were often forced to remain with "either father or husband just to have a roof over their heads. The life of a solitary woman without male protection was not an attractive option."<sup>2</sup>

In *Trifles*, the troubled marriage of the Wrights has culminated in Minnie Wright strangling her husband, John. The men vainly look for signs of violent rage, but the women, with growing empathy, are able to recognize the signs of quiet desperation under which many women of their time were forced to live. Glaspell contrasts male and female perspectives throughout the play, and engages the audiences' sympathy firmly on the side of the women. Susan C. W. Abbotson indicates that "We are asked to witness Mrs. Wright's life rather than Mr. Wright's death, and we are shown that the true 'crime' has been the way she was being subjugated and 'destroyed' by her marriage."<sup>3</sup> Mr. Wright sees women as a submissive group whose concerns hold

little importance. Thus, in their search for hard evidence to convict Mrs. Wright, they repeatedly overlook the existing evidence that the two women uncover, dismissing such evidences as mere “trifles.”

Once a woman marries, she loses her former identity, along with her maiden name, and she becomes subsumed by her husband which is a kind of the limitations that a patriarchal society has placed on their gender. Standing in the kitchen, the center of every farm wife's existence, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters soon piece together the clues to events that continue to elude the men. This elusion is a kind of identification with what Mrs. Wright has done. It provokes discrimination of a sex which is violated for a long time and seeks liberation.<sup>4</sup>

This paper deals with Susan Glaspell as a great American female playwright who was interested in writing about women issues. Her play, *Trifles*, deals with the big problem that was very obvious in American society at her time, i. e., psychological domestic violence against women. It consists of an abstract, an introduction, one section, and a conclusion that shows the findings of the research.

## **Introduction**

Susan Glaspell (1876-1948), one of the pioneering American female playwrights, graduated of Drake University in 1899 at the time when it was difficult for women to get a university degree not alone to vote. A descendent of an Iowa family, she shared with her ancestors “their independence, integrity, idealism, and practicality.” She depicted these values in her literary career. Working as a journalist provided her with a great wealth of knowledge especially about her region. Moreover, she became interested in depicting Midwestern themes especially the isolated women characters like the farm-wife of *Trifles*.<sup>5</sup>

The life, thought, and writing of Susan Glaspell are characterized by vivid contrasts and sharp ambiguities, identified by Mary Papke as her “dualist and conflictual vision of human experience,”<sup>6</sup> thus presenting a challenge for those readers who are anxious to pigeonhole early twentieth century women into an essentialized compartment as feminists. Glaspell was undoubtedly a feminist of her times, but she was also a modernist reformer who firmly believed that she could improve society, not by marching with

zealous acolytes but by bringing attention through her writing to the injustices and social ills that troubled her.<sup>7</sup> *Trifles*, as typical of Glaspell, expresses women's fears as well as hopes for modern times and modernist art.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Glaspell's play *Trifles* (1916) is one of the early attempts of an American woman playwright to tackle the women's psychological, social, and economic problems. Glaspell's one-act play, short as it is, discusses very serious issues about family life and the role of woman in it. Elaine Hedges, in her essay entitled "Small Things Reconsidered" points out:

"Women's role, or 'place' in society, the confinement and isolation, the psychic violence wrought against them, their power or powerlessness vis a vis men, are not concerns restricted to Glaspell's time and place. But these concerns achieve their imaginative force and conviction in her story by being firmly rooted in, and organically emerging from, the carefully observed, small details of a localized way of life."<sup>9</sup>

*Trifles* might be the most famous American play about a woman who kills her abusive husband. Originally produced on August 8, 1916 by the Provincetown Players, *Trifles* has at least become Glaspell's most famous work. A *New York Times* reviewer in the late 1920s noted that the play had become a "staple among little theatre companies."<sup>10</sup> This one-act play dramatizes the arrival at the empty Wright farm of three men: County Attorney George Henderson, Sheriff Henry Peters and Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer and the two women: Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, the men are searching for evidence that will explain the murder of John Wright and his wife's involvement in it; the women are gathering some personal belongings to take to Mrs. Wright who, as main suspect of the murder, is waiting for trial at the county jail.<sup>11</sup>

In the story, John Wright is found dead in his bed, and the major suspect is his wife, Minnie Foster Wright, because she does not wake up when her husband is strangled to death beside her. Because of gender differences and the men's sexist attitude, which looks down upon women's everyday trifles, the men cannot find evidence or a motive. Meanwhile, due to sympathy and female bonding, the two women, becoming detectives, successfully find the truth.<sup>12</sup>

According to Mary E. Papke, Arthur Hombrow of *Theatre Magazine*, the play was “ingenious, particularly in its presentation of feminine ways of knowing.” Others praised *Trifles* for its suspense and applauded the subtlety of the tragedy. After seeing a production by the Washington Square Players, critics noted that it was “the most absorbing play” the company had ever performed. Negative reviews seem to say more about the acting than the script, though at least one reviewer critiqued the “homespun” nature of the play.<sup>13</sup>

In *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, Linda Benz-Zvi argues that Glaspell used *Trifles* to react to John Hossack's murder trial, which she covered in 1900 and 1901. John Hossack, “a well to do farmer,” was killed in his sleep on the evening of December 2, 1900.<sup>14</sup> Margret Hossack, John's wife, told authorities that someone must have broken into their home and killed her husband. She had heard the front door shut and had seen a light in the room next to their bedroom. After investigating the light and the sound, she returned to the bedroom to find John murdered. Although authorities initially believed Margret, they soon found proof that told another story. A neighbor reported that Margret had asked him to “get rid” of John some time ago. Others noted that there had been significant conflict in the home. When the police heard these stories and found the murder weapon underneath the family's corn crib, they arrested Margret.<sup>15</sup> According to Ben-Zvi, Glaspell covered the trail from Margret's arrest to her conviction. Initially, Glaspell followed the trends in her day, fitting Margret into stereotypes of women who kill. Of Margret, Glaspell wrote, “Though past 50 years of age, she is tall and powerful and looks like she would be dangerous if aroused to a point of hatred.”<sup>16</sup>

Years later, Glaspell, probably feeling guilty over her part in the public “lynching” of Mrs. Hossack, decided to write a play that would criticize the social system which denied women the same rights as men, but at the same time demanded greater duties of them. This one-act play, *Trifles*, was followed a year later by a short story, *A Jury of Her Peers*, in which Glaspell tried to analyze further some of the elements she considered had not been made clear enough in *Trifles*. These two works were undoubtedly her attempts “to clear Mrs. Hossack's name and make amends for her tardy understanding and her

inability to help at the time.”<sup>17</sup> In *Trifles*, Mr. Hale contends that “women are used to worrying over trifles”<sup>18</sup> when the women in fact start putting the evidence together proving why Minnie murdered her husband.<sup>19</sup> That’s why the title of the play is connected to that very line of Mr. Hale. Holstein says,

*Trifles* is a deceptive play: deceptive because, like its title, it seems simple, almost inconsequential. Yet the play represents a profound conflict between two models of perception and behavior. An exploration of the play reveals a fundamental difference between the women’s action and the men’s, a difference grounded in varying understandings of the home space. That difference culminates, finally, in the establishing of two competing ethical paradigms.”<sup>20</sup>

Veronica Makowsky calls the play a “modernist revenge tragedy.”<sup>21</sup> Referring to the Hossock trial, Ben-Zvi points out that with *Trifles* Glaspell “finds the dramatic correlative for revenge. Rather than use an ax, this abused wife strangles her husband a punishment to fit his crime.”<sup>22</sup> She goes further to point out that the juries “on the stage” and in “the audience” will agree with this punishment and “presume the wife’s right to take violent action in the face of violence done to her.”<sup>23</sup> These descriptions of the play are troubling, revealing society’s attitudes about women who kill their abusive spouses. There is nothing in the play to suggest that Minnie was crying out an act of revenge. Glaspell’s descriptions of Minnie prior to her marriage and after the murder do not suggest that Minnie was a vengeful character. It is more likely that the reading of revenge stems from a contemporary preoccupation with revenge, one that is particularly problematic for women on trial for killing their abusive husbands are more likely to be convicted if the murders appear to be acts of revenge.<sup>24</sup> A reading of *Trifles*, using contemporary legal theories on women who kill, would argue that John had trapped Minnie in a cycle of violence. Evidence of John’s violent nature suggests that he could have killed her at any moment. Instead, Minnie acted on behalf of herself, defending her life from John. Some contemporary feminist scholars might also point out that Minnie was near the point of insanity when she committed the murder, while others would want to avoid labeling her “insane” and simply discuss the murder as “self-

defense.”<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Schneider points out feminist legal theories have tried to show that women who kill their abusers are acting rationally by defending themselves.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, feminist legal theorist Martha Chamallas warns us that identifying murder that is “self-defense” as “revenge” makes it very difficult for women who have killed their husbands to receive fair treatment in court.<sup>27</sup>

### **Section One: Psychological Domestic Violence against Woman in Glaspell's *Trifles***

Violence against women has been recognized as an important social and human rights issue that affects all cultures and societies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.”<sup>28</sup> Women are in general more likely to be victims of violence compared to men and are more significantly affected by the consequences of violence relative to men. Violence increases women's vulnerability to ill-health and disability and limits their contribution to socioeconomic development of society. Specifically, it contributes to an increased risk of injury, death, and a series of physical, emotional, and social problems.<sup>29</sup> From a feminist perspective, men commit violence against women because they want to dominate and control women.<sup>30</sup>

According to mainstream culture, maintaining traditional feminine behavior was often imagined as important in the stability of the home and if not observed often leads to disastrous consequences as in the example of Mrs. Wright. The house, closely identified with women and their environment, becomes important as a location of the domestic struggle. However, the violence in the Wright's home undermines old-fashioned perceptions that blame inappropriate female conduct as the reason behind the destruction of a stable home. Susan Glaspell used domestic violence as a motif to arouse questions concerning motives that lead women, who are relegated to the house, to become physical aggressors. In *Trifles*, the simple farmhouse which appears as a background to this domestic violence situation becomes an instrument that directs the audience not to condemn the wife for the crime, as the motive displayed through the careful scrutiny of the

domestic space reveals a life of abuse. According to Oziebelo, the play casts all the female figures as rebels, but the women are silenced because the play offers no solution.<sup>31</sup>

*Trifles*, which is situated in a small village, discusses the dilemma of a young woman, Minnie (the name itself suggests the shrinking of this woman's identity and her negation, she has become a Minnie human), who finds herself entrapped in a dispassionate marriage to a very restricted and joyless farmer. She is driven by an act of insanity to kill him because he has killed her canary. Killing of the canary, which might be conventionally viewed as trivial, initiates the act of the killing of the husband. Although incomparable, these two actions show the degree of anger and hatred inherent inside the doers. After marriage, John Wright "writes" the script for Minnie's life according to what he considers "right." John transforms the domestic sphere into a woman's prison, and solitary confinement. He will not allow Minnie money to dress decently enough to attend church and its women's association. Not yet satisfied that his control over Minnie's life's plot is total, he destroys the domestic sphere as he damages the bird cage. Further, he apparently believes that he breaks Minnie's spirit as he breaks her pet canary's neck since, as many critics have noted, the unmarried Minnie has sung beautifully in the context of the communal art of the choir.<sup>32</sup>

The title of the play is illuminating because it depicts a conventional patriarchal view about women as beings who are interested in trifles or trivialities. Ironically, those same trivialities come to reveal or construct the truth which is only apparent for the woman characters in the play but not for the men. It seems that Glaspell tries to view the world of her play through a woman's point of view or perspective which is basically intuitive. While the men: Mr. Peters, the Sheriff and Mr. Henderson, the Attorney, are searching for logical important clues for the crime, they ignore the small (trifling) details. The women, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale are concentrating on, like a left over piece of bread, partly cleaned table, a guilt which is sewed badly, and most importantly a dead canary in a sewing box. Glaspell may suggest that the truth could be perceived in different ways and not always logically.<sup>33</sup>

That's why Glaspell is revealing two different points of view which are contrasted with each other: the masculine, logical main stream view prevailed for centuries in life with a feminine, private and intuitive one. She comes to emphasize the point that women look at life and things differently, and this is perhaps Minnie's dilemma. The husband's ignorance and disrespect of his wife's needs and his conventional reliance on her weakness blind him to the monster he has eventually turned his wife to. Psychological violence leaves its scars on the soul as the physical violence leaves its scars on the body. In both cases, violence aims at silencing or muting the voice. That's why the husband's killing of the canary (the eliminating of its voice which used to please Minnie) is an act of silencing the voice of the wife, an act of negation. As a victim, the wife has reacted in the same way through eliminating the husband's victimizing voice. Minnie's silencing of her husband's voice is a reaction to the killing of her canary that represents her solace and refuge. It had been a substitute for Mr. Wright lack of children and other friends. The canary symbolizes Mrs. Wright, particularly her cheerful side that was destroyed by the oppressive marriage. Mr. Wright was strangled. He was killed in the same way that he killed the bird. This displays that Mrs. Wright killed her husband as a revenge for killing her bird.<sup>34</sup> The couple is childless, and John kills the only other life in the house, i.e., the canary his wife brings to sing to her and ease her lonely life since "not having children makes less work- but it makes a quiet house and Wright out to work all the day and no company when he did come in." (12) Being itself a symbol of freedom, the bird represents Minnie's hope for freedom from her cage-like house.<sup>35</sup>

By the time they find the damaged birdcage and the dead canary, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale know the truth: John Wright drives his wife to murder him by isolating her from her friends and depriving her of beauty and song.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Wright understands her husband's action as a symbolic strangling of herself, his wife. It is not just because he kills the bird, but because she herself is a caged bird and he strangles her by preventing her from communicating with others. When the men return, the ladies hide what they see as evidence of Mrs. Wright's guilt. The discovery of the strangled canary and broken bird cage suggests that Minnie was habitually silenced and dominated



by her husband; and that conflict between the Wrights may often have been resolved through violence.<sup>37</sup>

The sympathy of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters arises not only from sisterly solidarity but from the two women's self-identification as mothers, in contrast to the childless Minnie. Love, particularly maternal love, is associated with sound and its absence with silence. Mrs. Hale wonders "how it would seem never to have had any children around," and Mrs. Peters can tell her: "I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died. . . ." (10) They realize that the pet was a kind of child-substitute for the solitary Minnie; the canary's voice was to displace the silence of a coldly authoritarian husband and replace the sounds of the unborn children. Mrs. Hale notes, "If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful — still, after the bird was still" (26). Mrs. Peters even remembers a similar loss and response: "When I was a girl —my kitten —there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes —and before I could get there —If they hadn't held me back I would have —hurt him" (25). Their maternal feelings not only help Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters understand the importance of the canary to Minnie, but also help them direct their solicitude toward Mrs. Wright herself through the memory of Minnie as a vulnerable, pretty young girl who loved singing in the choir. Mrs. Hale makes the identification clear when she states that Minnie "was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and —fluttery. How —she —did — change" (22). Mrs. Hale finally places the blame for that change on John Wright: "She used to sing. He killed that, too" (25). Through the traditional literary metaphor of the bird's song as the voice of the soul, the women acknowledge that John Wright not only killed Minnie's canary, but her very spirit. Adrienne Rich justly observes that "powerless women have always used mothering as a channel — narrow but deep —for their own human will to power." Similarly, Glaspell is not idealizing motherhood or maternal feelings here but demonstrating that these rural women have no outlets for expression aside from domesticity focusing on children, though Minnie Wright lacks even that. After noting John Wright's nullity as a husband, Sharon P. Friedman states, "If a husband and children are the

determinants of most women's lives, then Minnie has nothing; she is nothing." <sup>38</sup>

John likes simplicity and silence. Refusing to share a telephone line with neighbors, he prefers quietness. Mr. Hale talks to County Attorney, "I spoke to Wright about it [sharing a telephone line] once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself . . ." (36). His inclination to silence explains the reason why he kills Minnie's singing canary. Moreover, rejection of a telephone also symbolizes a voluntary isolation from the others; he stays in a simple, silent, and closed environment, which precisely represents the traits of the Middle West. First, restricting Minnie within the house without a social life is a kind of psychological abuse. Although the spatial division is a convention in the patriarchal society, John makes this segregation stricter. He, refusing to have a telephone and killing Minnie's pet canary, requires absolute quietness at home. Mrs. Hale seldom visits Minnie because she explains: "It never seemed a very cheerful place" (39), and "I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it" (39). It is apparent that Minnie suffers from her husband's psychological abuse at home, but more shockingly, Smith claims there is "the possibility that John physically battered Minnie." The reason that Minnie does not join the church choir or Ladies' Aid may be because battered women tend to isolate themselves from others to avoid revealing how they really live. All in all, Minnie, a rural Midwestern woman, is confined to the house; worse, home cannot provide her with safety. If the Middle West is a closed and static place, then Minnie is "doubly" isolated due to the reason of the isolation of Iowa and her isolation within the house. <sup>39</sup>

In a subsequent comment on Minnie's plight, Mrs. Hale describes not only the physical isolation of the Wright farmstead, but the emotional isolation that shaped Minnie's personality and precipitated her act of violence. She says, "I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful- and that's why I ought to have come. I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie

Forster sometimes.” (42) Minnie's plight is represented by Mrs. Hale as a spiritual death, symbolized in the strangling of her songbird companion. "Alienated from her husband, powerless and silenced by . . . her marriage . . . Minnie is an unseen woman long before she murders John Wright". Unseen both "literally" and "metaphorically," Minnie becomes a surrogate for all the invisible women in Glaspell's society.<sup>40</sup> Although it is too late for the two women to help Minnie, Glaspell does give them the power that comes from choice: they choose silence – that is, they choose not to disclose what they have found. In their decision to hide the motive for murder that they have found, and in their coming together, bridging the class difference that separates them socially, they mitigate “the effect of isolation upon the human spirit and [affirm] the importance of the human community for the individual,”<sup>41</sup> thus exemplifying the importance of women bonding and working together that the feminists of the 1970s advocated. For Karen F. Stein, “solving the murder is not a disinterested act [for Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters], but a cooperative endeavor which leads them to a knowledge essential for their survival as females in a hostile or indifferent world.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the canary and the cage which symbolize Minnie's imprisonment and suffering, Glaspell uses other symbols to highlight the suffering and victimization of her protagonist. The reference to bottles of broken preservers shows how Mrs. Wright is much like these preservers. She herself stays on the shelf, alone on the farm, until the coldness of her marriage and her life breaks her apart.<sup>43</sup> The single intact jar symbolizes the one remaining secret, the motive to complete the prosecutor's case."<sup>44</sup> "Preserves' explode from lack of heat, a punning reminder of the causal relationship between isolation and violence."<sup>45</sup> The quilt which is badly sewed refers to her agitation. The missed stitches reflect her nervousness or tension. Minnie, as symbolized by the dead bird, liked singing, but her husband disapproved. The unfinished quilt is another example that suggests the oppression of her creativity and contributes to her despair. The insufficient housework is not simply an indication that Minnie was a bad homemaker. Rather, her husband seems to have denied her the freedom to exert her creativity, with the result that Minnie felt just like the dead bird - robbed of the right to be herself.<sup>46</sup>

It is realized at this point that Minnie strangled her husband as retribution for the killing her joy, the bird, and years of abuse by her husband. The men in this story possess a shallow view of women's intelligence and value. While the men were looking at the situation from an exterior perspective, the women were looking on the inside, at all the small things, the trifles to find the real evidence and motive.<sup>47</sup>

It does remain questionable why one would take a human life in exchange for the life of an animal. The focus here should be on the psychological damage that occurs when a person is isolated from others on a social level. Psychologically speaking, isolation affects the brain. People who are isolated from the outside world, people who are lonely, have a neurological imbalance. This may explain why Mrs. Wright, being confined to her farmhouse without any visitors or friends and the result is her imbalanced behavior. Loneliness or social isolation could quite possibly have led to a depression that consumed Minnie, particularly when she was deprived of her only source of happiness and comfort in her cold, lonely life. Her only way to freedom was the removal of her tormentor and oppressor. Overall, in a way or another psychological state which was the outcome of her isolation led her to think of revenge and to strangle her husband with the rope.<sup>48</sup>

Glaspell does not seem much concerned with the moral or legal implications of Minnie's action or even the two ladies hiding of the evidence which might convict her, but which might bring justice to the murdered husband at the same time. She is more concerned with the psychological consequences of persecution, isolation, and violence on woman especially. The alliance of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters to protect Minnie, although morally and legally wrong, stems from their sense of injustice done to this young woman who used before her marriage to be the symbol of youth and beauty. What is astonishing is the fact that these well-intentioned women have become themselves criminals. They do not consider the consequences of their action. Despite the consequences, the play shows a very daring example about the power of women when working together united by a pledge of sisterhood. Also, the play advocates the importance of paying attention to that often of forgotten, private world of women.<sup>49</sup>

Minnie's absence, however, is more than just a theatrical device that allows this piecing together of bits and pieces of information. The fact that neither she nor her husband, the victim of her supposed time, is present allows Glaspell to manipulate the information in such a way that the audience empathizes with her and with the two women who are on stage observing the details in the kitchen.<sup>50</sup>

The onstage home stands for the metaphorical death- in- life state of Minnie, and how her liveliness had been killed off by her husband and the farm.

In *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters see in Minnie's alleged murder of her husband her means of releasing herself from the suffocating farm.<sup>51</sup> Minnie is not a traditional heroine who must die at the end of the play; instead, she is a modern tragic figure who is a great sufferer. She is a pathetic figure and deserves not only the other two women's sympathy in the play but the audiences' sympathy as well.

As a conclusion, *Trifles*, despite its sympathy for female characters, is not an anti-male play as much as an attempt to awaken audiences to the dilemmas of womanhood at a time when women were still considered second-class citizens. Feminism was in its infancy, and even its supporters were at times ambivalent about where it might lead. The rebellion of Glaspell's woman is consequently minimal; Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters protect Minnie, but they never speak openly to the men in her defense. Minnie ends up still locked in prison, even though there is a slim chance that she may escape punishment.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Susan Glaspell is one of the American female playwrights who deals with predicaments of women in the American society at her time where the male characters used to deal with women as unimportant creatures compared to men. That's why Glaspell calls her protagonist Minnie to refer to this fact. Minnie's husband considers her nothing; therefore, he isolates her from communicating with the people of their region and the result is that she has become a person who cannot feel her existence normally as other female characters in her society. Mr. Wright has pushed her to commit a crime after being a very nice woman. He uses psychological violence against her by isolating her in

a hollow place and preventing her from any social activity as other women. This reflects how much violence affects people to the degree of being aggressive and more as happens to Minnie Wright who has been driven to kill her husband.

That's why Glaspell wrote her masterpiece *Trifles* to deal with the suffering and the dilemma of American women and created the character of Minnie Wright, the protagonist of the play. The play examines the institution of marriage. Minnie, as a trapped bird in a bleak farmhouse, is a symbol of women who are trapped in loveless marriages to harsh men. Though she is the central figure in the play, Minnie never appears onstage. She is only referred to by the onstage characters. The picture of the absent Minnie is built on the comments of the two women in her kitchen that are reinforced through the tightly knit symbolism of the play. Minnie's name is derived from the German word for love, and, of course, her maiden name, Foster, is resonant of care and nurture. Her married name, Wright, is an ironical pun on her rights under the law, on that old dream of finding a "Mr. Right".<sup>53</sup>

To sum up, *Trifles* epitomizes early modernism's attitude. It rejects what is bad from the past, while preserving what is good. The time is a time of women's rights and their revolt to attain liberation from patriarchal confinement. And the art is also a break from conventional structures. It's symbolic, suggestive, ironic, and satirical to cope with modernism and complexities.

## Notes

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## العنف النفسي البيتي ضد المرأة كما تجلى في مسرحية

سوزان كلاسييل "التوافه"

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### الخلاصة

كانت سوزان كلاسييل واحدة من كتاب المسرح الأمريكي الإناث الرائدات اللاتي عرفن في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر وبداية القرن العشرين. وقد دعت في حياتها الشخصية والأدبية الى ظهور المرأة العصرية التي تناضل من أجل تحقيق طموحاتها في عالم متشدد مع جنسها ومعاد لها. وقد اعتمدت كلاسييل في مسرحيتها الأولى، "التوافه"، على قضية جريمة حقيقية غطتها حين كانت تعمل كمراسلة صحفية. وقد كتبت مسرحيتها تلك كتوضيح للسبب الذي من أجله تقتل المرأة زوجها. وفي محاولتها تلك، أوجدت كلاسييل شخصية "مني رايت" التي كانت مضطهدة من قبل زوجها الى أقصى حد. ولكي تنقذ نفسها من ذلك الأضطهاد، قامت مني بشنق زوجها حتى الموت. وفكرة مسرحية "التوافه" تعالج قضايا المرأة في وقت كانت النساء، مثل مني رايت، تُجبر على البقاء أما مع الأب أو الزوج كسقف فوق رؤوسهن. ولم تكن حياة المرأة بدون حماية رجل بالحل المرغوب فيه.

وفي مسرحية "التوافه"، أدى الزواج المضطرب لعائلة رايت الى أن تقتل مني زوجها، جون. ففي تلك المسرحية قام الرجال بلا فائدة بالبحث عن أدلة للغضب والعنف، بينما كانت النساء، مع تزايد التعاطف لديهن تجاه مني، قادرات على تمييز علامات اليأس والأحباط الذي كانت تُجبر الكثير من نساء عصرهن على التعرض له. وقد قامت كلاسييل بعرض وجهتي نظر متناقضتين للذكور والإناث على طول المسرحية وقد جذبت تعاطف الجمهور بشدة بجانب المرأة. وقد أشارت الناقدة "سوزان أبوتسن" باننا مدعوون لنشاهد حياة السيدة رايت أكثر من موت السيد رايت وكذلك لنرى بأن الجريمة الحقيقية

كانت هي الطريقة التي دُمّرت بها حياة السيدة رايت بزواجها، لأن السيد رايت كان يرى النساء كمجموعة منقادة للرجال ولديها اهتمامات تافهة. لذلك، في بحثهم لأيجاد دليل دامغ لأدانة السيدة مني، كان الرجال يغفلون بصورة متكررة عن الدليل الذي وجدته النساء والذي اعتبروه مجرد "توافه".

وفي ذلك المجتمع، بمجرد أن تتزوج المرأة فإنها تفقد هويتها السابقة واسمها الذي كانت تحمله قبل الزواج وتندرج تحت اسم زوجها وهذا نوع من التقييد الذي فرضه المجتمع الذكوري على جنس الأنثى. وحين وقفت السيدة هيل والسيدة بيترز في المطبخ، الذي يعتبر مركز وجود حياة أي امرأة ريفية، قامت بتجميع القرائن للأحداث التي حدثت في البيت، بينما لازالت تلك القرائن بعيدة المنال بالنسبة للرجال. وكانت تلك المراوغة نوع من غض النظر عما فعلته السيدة رايت. وهذا نتيجة التمييز العنصري للجنس الذي وُجدَ لفترة طويلة وتصرفهن كان نوع من المطالبة بالحرية.

يتناول هذا البحث سوزان كلاسبيل ككاتبة مسرحية أمريكية عظيمة اهتمت بالكتابة عن قضايا المرأة. ومسرحيتها، "التوافه"، تعالج مشكلة كبيرة كانت في المجتمع الأمريكي آنذاك وهي العنف النفسي البيئي ضد المرأة. والبحث يتكون من خلاصة، مقدمة، فصل، وخاتمة توضح ما توصل اليه البحث من نتائج.