The Housewife and the Stage: A Study of Domestic Space and Homemaking in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*

Yuwapa Chaisilwattana[1], *Sivaporn Nakhachai*[2], *Ming Panha*[3], *Maytawee HolaSut*[4] *and Jeffrey Kramer*[5]

[1-5] Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University

Abstract

In this research article, the researchers aim to explore the politics of homemaking and female autonomy in Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* through textual analysis. Radical feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett perceive domestic space and homemaking as patriarchal apparatuses in repressing female autonomy. It is undeniable that domestic space and the housewife's duty of homemaking limit the potential of womanhood. However, to cast domestic space and homemaking as purely mechanics of oppression is also to enforce another kind of limitation on female autonomy. What we propose in this research is a rereading of the women and the domestic sphere in *Trifles* through Iris Marion Young's theoretical framework of homemaking as a process toward female autonomy. To redefine the relationship between women and domestic sphere is to open another area of possibility in which patriarchy could be subverted through its own apparatus.

Keywords: Domestic Space, Susan Glaspell, Trifles, Homemaking, Modern Drama

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้ ผู้วิจัยมุ่งจะพิจารณาการเมืองเรื่องการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่บ้านและอัตตาณัติของผู้หญิงในบทละครองก์เดียวของซูซาน กลาสเปล (Susan Glaspell) เรื่อง *Trifles* โดยการวิเคราะห์ตัวบท นักสตรีนิยมหัวรุนแรงอย่างซิโมน เดอ โบวัวร์ (Simone de Beauvoir) และ เคท มิลเล็ท (Kate Millet) มองพื้นที่บ้านและการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่บ้านว่าเป็นเครื่องมือของปิตาธิปไตยที่ใช้กดขี่อัตตาณัติของผู้หญิง แม้ว่าพื้นที่บ้านและหน้าที่แม่บ้านในการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่บ้านนั้นจำกัดศักยภาพของสตรีเพศ การจัดให้พื้นที่บ้านและการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่บ้านเป็นเพียงกลไกการกดขี่นั้น ถือเป็นการทำให้ผู้หญิงถูกจำกัดอัตตาณัติในอีกลักษณะหนึ่งเช่นกัน สิ่งที่ผู้วิจัยเสนอในงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้คือการอ่านตัวละครหญิงและพื้นที่บ้านใน *Trifles* ใหม่ ด้วยกรอบทฤษฎีของไอริส มาเรียน ยัง (Iris Marion Young) ว่าด้วยการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่บ้านในฐานะกระบวนการอันนำไปสู่อัตตาณัติของผู้หญิง การนิยามความสัมพันธ์ของผู้หญิงกับพื้นที่บ้านถือเป็นการเปิดพื้นที่แห่งความเป็นไปได้ที่ปิตาธิปไตยจะถูกโค่นล้มด้วยเครื่องมือของตนเอง

คำสำคัญ พื้นที่บ้าน Susan Glaspel Trifles หน้าที่แม่บ้าน ละครสมัยใหม่

1. Introduction

Domestic space has always been associated with a site of patriarchal oppression. The patriarchally designated roles of daughter, wife, and mother are first and foremost learned and performed within the domestic sphere. The institutional and ideological bondages of marriage and home are the subjects of radical and popular feminist discourse in the twentieth century. Radical feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett identify the domestic space of the house as the patriarchal apparatus that limits the autonomous potential of womanhood to performing domestic duties of homemaking to sustain the family institution. Beauvoir observes in her book *The Second Sex* (1950) that the preconceived role of women as homemaker impedes female autonomy. The repetitive, mechanical, and endless housebound tasks "permits to women a sado-masochistic flight from herself as she contends madly with the things around her and with herself in a state of distraction and mental vacancy" as "a women is not called upon to build a better world: her domain is fixed and she has only her never ending struggle against the evil principles that creep in it; in her war against dust, stains, mud and dirt she is fighting sin, wrestling with Satan[.]" (Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 438 - 440). As with Beauvoir, Millett cites a similar argument in *Sexual Politics* (1970), in which she vehemently attacks the gender hierarchy in the home where the male is designated to assume the role of the head of the family. The paradigm of male leadership is also structurally repeated in other social institutions such as religion and state. According to Millett, this structure of gender inequality is founded on women's "obligation to adopt the husband's domicile, and the general legal assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female's domestic service and (sexual) consortium in return for financial support" (Millett, 2000, pp. 34 - 35). It would not be wronged to say Beauvoir and Millett's radical feminist arguments call for institutional revolution, and to a certain extent, the abolishment, of the preconceived gender role of women as the homemaker. Female autonomy could not be attained if they are bonded to the trivialities of womanhood in domestic space.

The oppressive image of home and homemaking is also prevalent in the theatre. The metaphorical "house" on stage, especially ones that are furnished realistically, could be said to foreground its patriarchal function as a space of domestic confinement. The carefully arranged furnishers or even those in disarrayed on stage conjure the culturally constructed image that there must be someone, most likely a woman, who is responsible for taking care of the house. In this instance, the house on stage also doubly *houses* a reflection of domestic space in real life as well as the audience's cultural perception of gender role. Indeed, the case could be

argued for Henrik Ibsen's portrayal of Nora in his iconic play *A Doll's House* (1879) as the frontrunner of the changing dynamic between woman and domestic space. Nora's controversial act of slamming shut the door to her relationship with Torvald's house comes to signify, as Quigley have succinctly put, "[Nora's rejection] of her husband, her children, her home, and her social position, along with the society that had taught we how to need such things" (Quigley, 1985, p. 584). Nora's exit of the house via leaving the stage is not just a symbolic rejection of patriarchy, it is also a renunciation of the house as an architectural space. Shanahan postulates that Nora's exit upstage is equivalent to breaking the forth wall of the theatre, a metaphor for a "dollhouse" in itself. Her exit from the boxed world of the stage, Shanahan continues, allows the questioning of the repression of female subject in the theatre (Shanahan, 2013, p. 131). These two interpretations of Ibsen's iconic play undoubtedly affirm its relevancy to contemporary feminist discussion; however, by emphasizing Nora's exit from the stage, they also frame a specific condition for female liberation. To confirm one's autonomy as individual is necessary to reject both the home as ideology and physical space. In short, Nora's autonomy comes at the price of disavowing her domestic roles of wife and mother as well as the physical dwelling of the home. A more venturous question to ask is not how the domestic sphere, both in real life and in the theatre, represses the female subject, but rather how the female subject could procure autonomy within what is traditionally perceived as the patriarchal domain.

One of the play that features the house as a setting and conflict for women is Susan Glaspell's renowned one-act play, *Trifles*. Glaspell enters the American literary scene both as dramatist and writer. She, along with Eugene O'Neill, spearheads the Provincetown Players, a small theatre in Massachusetts that caters to staging experiment drama. Waterman praises *Trifles* as "Susan Glaspell's most enduring play" remarking that its popularity is due to its relatable subject of the Midwestern American farm life that reveals the psychological makeup of its characters (Waterman, 1965, p. 176). *Trifles*, like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, takes place entirely in domestic confinement of John Wright's farmhouse. The plot concerns the inspection of John Wright's death by the male authorities, Sheriff Peters, Hale and County Attorney Henderson, who search the premise for anything that might signifying Mrs. Wright's, also known as Minnie Foster prior to her marriage with the deceased, intent to murder her husband in cold blood. The male authorities are accompanied by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale who are ordered to gather Mrs. Wright's personal items as she awaits further trial. The women are ridiculed by the men for concerning themselves with "trifles" feminine matters such as worrying about Mrs. Wright's fruit preserve or whether to tie or to knot a quilt. As the title of the play implies, it is by

delving through Mrs. Wright's trivialities that the women uncover her motivation for the murder as well as their own opinions of the incident. The end of the play suggests an open-ended sequence that the women will keep the evidence hidden from the male authorities. The plot of the play reads almost like a detective fiction, but not a kind of whodunit where the audience is invited to find the murderer along with the characters. Instead, *Trifles* invites the audience to contemplate the psychology and repression of women's domesticated farm life in Midwest America as they interact with the foregrounded everyday feminine objects belonging to Mrs. Wright's on stage.

Critical readings of the play can be divided into two main approaches: the positivist approach which focuses on tracing the genealogy of the play's origin through Glaspell's biographical information and the textual analysis approach which interprets the dramatic elements such as stage direction and characters' dialogue for symbolic connotations. Ben-Zvi discerns that Glaspell might have adapted the play from an actual murder case of John Hossack, a sixty-year-old farmer in Indianola, Iowa, while she worked as a reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News* (Ben-Zvi, 1992, p. 143). The importance of basing the play on the crime, Ben-Zvi argues, is that it "[reveals] in the telling lineaments of the society that spawned the crime (Ben-Zvi, 1992, p. 142). Ben-Zvi concludes that Trifles is "grounded in a double-focused historical context: the Iowa of 1901 and the Provincetown of 1916; these biographical information is relevant because it reflects how "her writing acts as a palimpsest for the shifting roles of women in the twentieth century, and for her own shifting attitudes toward the possibilities for women and for herself (Ben-Zvi, 1992, p.161). A positivist approach as done by Ben-Zvi provides extended historical and social context for the play; however, it does not provide any alternative interpretation to the portrayal of women other than being a representative voice for gender equality. A textual analysis approach such the one performed by Dymkowski in analyzing the marginalized roles of women in the play through close reading of the text provides a similar interpretation. Dymkowski examines how various dramatic elements function as metaphor for marginality such as using the kitchen as a predominant setting places women on the outskirt of patriarchal power, thus enables them "an alternative power, the power to move beyond what is…male definition of crime and justice and honor (Dymkowski, 1988, p. 95). There are also other works of textual analysis that deal directly with the relationship between women and domestic space. Manuel suggests that *Trifles* could be read as a play that deals with the limitation of how men and women comprehend the stage setting of the country farmhouse as an open text. Manuel establishes that the reason the men

are unable to find any evidence is because they do not share any political or social history of oppression with Minnie Foster - the embodiment of the oppressed women in the play (Manuel, 2000, p. 60). In contrast, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters see the disarray of furniture and personal belongings - signs of unkempt homemaking - as a text to which they are able to read and relate to each of their personal predicaments and eventually awaken their self-recognition as women ensnared in patriarchal order (Manuel, 2000, p. 63). Instead of building upon their awakening to womanhood, Manuel disappointingly concludes that "Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters' revolt is quiet and only effective in the sense that - it seems- they save Minnie Wright from condemnation" as "[their] rebellion here falls back on muted dissent and not overt disruption (Manuel, 2000, p. 64). To Manuel, the women's self-recognition constitutes an induction of patriarchal resistance in which they only just successfully identify their states of repression and the common enemy. Besides being valid interpretations of the play, these works of literary criticism verify our hypothesis regarding the radical feminist stance and women's position in the domestic sphere; female autonomy is attainable "outside" patriarchal space. It seems the solution to the domestic patriarchal oppression in theatre is not so different than those echoed by the radical feminist thinkers. The house remains a site of oppression even in the metaphorical space of the theatre. Continuing this line of argument, to be a dramatic representation of the voiceless women in the theatre or to merely be conscious of their state of being is to reinforce the very state of voicelessness. What we propose in this research is a rereading of the women and the domestic sphere in *Trifles* through Iris Marion Young's theoretical framework of homemaking as a process toward female autonomy through the formation of communal homemaker. To redefine the relationship between women and domestic sphere is to open another area of possibility in which patriarchy could be subverted through its own apparatus.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Iris Marion Young is not widely recognized in the circle of feminist theorists. This is partly due to her versatile and prolific careers as "political thinkers, philosopher, and activist" who contributed "compelling complex theories of justice, social oppression, gender, and democracy that combine insights from phenomenology, psychoanalysis and critical theory" (Ferguson and Nagel, 2009, p. 3). Her oeuvre includes an interdisciplinary range of works from political theory such as *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000) to feminist political though in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (2011). The framework of women and domestic space used in this

research is based on her essay “House and Home: Feminist Variation on a Theme” included as part of *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (2005). The book is devoted to a study of reexamination of feminist philosophies and critical theories. Likewise, Marion Young builds her argument of female ontology in domestic space by rebutting the radical feminist approach of universalizing all housework as patriarchal repression.

Marion Young conceptualizes her argument for home and homemaking by reexamining Martin Heidegger’s notion of home before challenging the domestic roles of women as instigated by Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir. Marion Young summarizes Heidegger’s idea of home as fundamentally founded upon the duality of “preservation and construction” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 125). However, she observes that Heidegger, for whatever reason, focuses only on the notion of construction, of building the place of dwelling, which initiates the emergence of male subjectivity. Women, Marion Young notes, is excluded from the act of building which in turn deprives their emergence as subject. Thus, she concludes from her reading of Heidegger that “a distinction between constructing and preserving, as two aspects of building and dwelling, is implicitly gendered.” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 127). The association of home as a patriarchal domain is even more apparent in the arguments of feminist critics. Here, Marion Young firmly states that she does not deny the arguments of the feminist critics that “the comforts and supports of house and home historically come at women’s expense” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 123). Unlike other feminist critics, Marion Young is “not ready to toss the idea of home out of the larder of feminist values” as the concept of home “also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 124). She remarks that there is a great disparity between the formation of subjectivity within Irigaray’s notion of the gender system as men are able to “[create] property, things he owns and controls” and could “launched on an acquisitive quest for more property”, while women “serve as raw materials, caretakers, and goods themselves to be traded as she is expected “to be the home by being at home”, which in turn “allows him to open on the expanse of the world to build and create” (Marion Young, 2005, 129). It is apparent that Marion Young sees Irigaray’s argument as an extension of Heidegger’s phallocentric perception of home, in which its materialization is founded on men’s desire to reconstruct the home as a symbol of the womb. Excluded from the process of building, women are left to “[cover] herself with jewelry, makeup, clothing, in the attempt to make an envelope, to give herself a place” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 130). From architectural exclusion of Irigaray, Marion Young reexamines the role of homemaking as established by Beauvoir. Marion Young recognizes that Beauvoir’s argument against

homemaking is founded on the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence. As briefly stated in our introduction, according to Beauvoir, housework is “largely confined to life maintenance for the sake of supporting the transcending individual projects of men and children” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 137). Without any room to exercise their individual creativity, women are deprived of any opportunity to form her own subjectivity. It is obvious that what Marion Young procures from these reexaminations is the uncompromising stance against women’s position in the domestic sphere where they are assumed to be a static, non-productive entity, at least until they abandon their patriarchal confinement.

Thus, Marion Young proposes, elaborating on Heidegger’s devalued notion of home, the concept of “preservation”. She states that “preservation makes and remakes home as a support for personal identity without accumulation, certainty, or fixity” and, more importantly “it has crucial human value” (Marion Young, 2005, p.125). Homemaking constitutes what Marion Young defines as preservation as it “[gives] material support to the identity of those whose home it is”**.** (Marion Young, 2005, p.140). She remarks that homemaking is not a gender-specific endeavor, but a rather an essential activity commonly attended by women to establish and preserve her identity and those of her community (Marion Young, 2005, p. 144). The formation of individuals subjectivity - of transcendence - is founded on the recurring life, which sustains the act of homemaking:

> Over and over the things must be dusted and cleaned. Over and over the special objects must be arranged after a move. Over and over the dirt from winter snows must be swept away from the temples and statues, the twigs and leaves removed, the winter cracks repaired. The stories must be told and retold to each new generation to keep a living, meaningful history.
>
> (Marion Young, 2005, p. 143)

She further elaborates how it is a mistake to see the process of preservation as a formation of fixed meaning or identity. Instead, she emphasizes that “creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connection of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 144). It is also useful to note that Marion Young also distinguishes different levels of homemaking. She agrees with Beauvoir that cleaning the dirty bathroom is “the abstract maintenance of species life”, while taking care of and arranging family memorabilia is more “specific and individuated” because the “homemaker acts to preserve the particular meaning that these objects have in the lives of these particular people” (Marion Young, 2005, p. 143). Through Marion Young’s framework of preservation,

female autonomy can be achieved through homemaking and within patriarchal space. More importantly, the notion of home and autonomous identity is extended to, rather than excluded from, women when viewed through radical feminist perspectives such as those of Beauvoir and Millett. Aside from the empowering perspective on homemaking, another distinction that separates Marion Young's argument from her radical feminist forbearers is the possibility of communal autonomy. Women's role as homemaker is a cultural one. This sweeping generalization of gender performance, while confirming radical feminist's notion of domestic oppression, also implies that homemaking is a shared experience among women in that particular culture. If homemaking functions as means of female autonomy, the established network of homemakers hints at the potential of a communal autonomy whereby the community of women are solidified precisely through their shared experience of preservation. Finally, Marion Young's theory of preservation allows us to perform a thorough critical reading of Glaspell's *Trifles* in order to define the female characters' relation to domestic space and more importantly, to create an autonomous community of women, as they sift through Mrs. Wright's possession. Owing to her, it is also possible to reread the relationship between Women's subjectivity and theatre. In the tradition of realism, the theatre is not an illusion but a real space where one comes not to escape from everyday life but to embrace, confront and redefine it through reprioritization of homemaking as a universal subject. In the next section, we will explore how Glaspell sets up the stage direction in the play in order to establish a metaphorical correlation between Marion Young's framework on domestic space and the Wrights' materialized home in the theatre.

3. The Allocation of Domestic Space and Theatre in *Trifles*

This section will elaborate on how domestic space and homemaking are presented in *Trifles* by explicating how Glaspell's stage direction for the play is incongruent with the dialogue. Our aims are to identify how the boundary of home is created both as a physical space on stage and how the male and female characters are perceive and subjected to the discourse of home and homemaking. The neutral starting point is to locate *Trifles* in a drama convention in order to show how the literary elements in the play are connected to one another. Glaspell's drama, Hernando-Real notes, makes use of the realist genre convention to subvert and critique the determinism of various social and cultural conditions that repress the characters in a particular environment (Hernando-Real, 2011, p. 6). What is exceptionally striking about Hernando-Real's observation is the emphasis on the possibility of the characters to overcoming

their seemingly Darwinian deterministic environment as the central theme of Glaspell's plays. *Trifles*, as we have briefly stated in the introduction, falls into this notion of struggle against environmental determinism; that female autonomy is achievable not from exiting the patriarchal space but precisely by struggling within its seemingly fatalistic border.

Glaspell limits the setting of John Wright's farmhouse to the kitchen as documented in the play's stage direction; however, we are also able to grasp its geographical and architectural location in the community via the characters' dialogues. Glaspell's stage direction for the scene creates an interior domestic space in disorder with "a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been to put in order - unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table - other signs of incompleted work" (Barlow, 1985, p. 72). The foreboding atmosphere of domestic disturbance is pushed to the forefront of the play through the disorganized images of unwashed pan, unkempt bread, and unhung dish towel prior to the characters' entrance to the stage. The setting of the scene also connotatively implies that some forms of homemaking is needed to restore order to the house. Beside the disarrayed household items, the scene also consists of other items of homely significance: cupboard, drawer, and rocking chair. This unkempt kitchen functions as the symbolic microcosm of homemaking for the play - a sign of bad feminine housekeeping. There are two entrances and exits to the stage. The first is the rear door on the right of the stage. This is the door in which all the characters make their entrances. The other is the door on the left leading to three steps of stairs, signifying the upward path to the Wrights' bedroom on the second floor. It is useful to note that only the male characters are able to traverse upstairs to investigate the crime scene of the deceased John Wright. The women remain downstairs in the kitchen, with Mrs. Peters designated by the George Henderson, the county attorney, to gather Minnie Foster's personal items on her request. This realistic conception of the stage, to put it bluntly, allocates the domestic scene of Middle Americana to the theatre.

The play's interior is rigorously designed to associate specific rooms with certain genders. The men occupy the upstairs bedroom, while the women are marginalized to the kitchen; a redoubling of women's place under patriarchal repression. Further geographical information of the farmhouse can be found in the characters' dialogue. Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer, informs the county attorney that he was able to know about John Wright's death because he happened to pass by his house and was pondering whether he could persuade his neighbor to join the party telephone (Barlow, 1985, p. 73). The fact that John Wright's refusal to join the community party telephone indicates that he does not want to be

connected with or disturbed by other people as if reinforcing his own state of alienation. The Wrights' excommunication from the surrounding environment is also reinforced by Mrs. Hale's, Lewis Hale's spouse, that she hates coming to visit Minnie Foster prior to John Wright's death because the place "weren't cheerful" and "it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road", before concluding that "it's a lonesome place and always was" (Barlow, 1985, p. 81). The location of the house, as with its residents, is also isolated from the rest of the community. On the subject of the house's evident isolation, Hernando-Real remarks that "the onstage farm can be regarded as a metaphorical grave because it is set in a low, tomb-like site" (Hernando-Real, 2011, p. 115). Keeping the location and its metaphor in mind, the house appears as a site of repression in which its residents are "dead" to and alienated from the community. One suspects that John Wright's penchant for silence could also lead him to suppress any voice raised by his wife as well. Thus, stage setting conveying the interior of the kitchen and the geographical location taken from the dialogue show that the Wright's house can be considered as a patriarchally dominated space, in which the women, who may be present (Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters) or absent (Mrs. Wright) from the play, are marginalized to kitchen - a traditionally feminine space in domestic sphere.

We can also see the extensive orientation of space and gender performance in the characters' action and dialogue. We will start with the male perception of domestic space, focusing on the county attorney. What the county attorney scrutinizes after inquiring Hale of his account of the crime scene is the dirty condition of the kitchen:

> COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.
>
> [*The women draw nearer.*]
>
> MRS. PETERS: [*to the other woman*] Oh, her fruit; it did freeze, [*to the* LAWYER] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.
>
> SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.
>
> …
>
> COUNTY ATTORNEY: [*with the gallantry of a young politician*] And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? (*the women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place*) Dirty towels! [*kicks his foot against the pans under the sink*] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?
>
> MRS. HALE: [*stiffly*] There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.
>
> COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet [*with a little bow to her*] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. [*He gives it a pull to expose its length*

again.]

MRS. HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

(Barlow, 1985, pp. 75, 76)

These sets of dialogue help further essentialize the discourse of homemaking as foregrounded in the stage setting of the play. The county attorney's remark that he knows "there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels" while sarcastically asks for the women's opinion of how Mrs. Wright is "[not] much of a housekeeper" implies not just his perception of a proper farmhouse, but also that of a proper wife. To compare the disarray of Minnie Foster's kitchen to some "Dickson county farmhouses" is to condemn her of failing to meet the patriarchal standard of a goodwife who must keep up with her duty of homemaking. It is as if Mrs. Wright's inability to keep a house clean were somehow also a part of her crime. More importantly, the court attorney's remarks reinforce the setting as a patriarchal space, in a sense that he sees the cleanliness of the kitchen as a metonymy of a proper housewife. The kitchen exists, at least in men's perception, as a separate space from female identity purely to quantify Mrs. Wright's homemaking. She is, thus, a woman who fails as a wife that used to live in John Wright's house.

The women's dialogue also seems to register similar notion of patriarchal discourse in which good homemaking is an indication of proper femininity. We will explore how the women position themselves within the patriarchal discourse of home and homemaking before elaborating on the argument that they are able to subvert those notions in later section. At first glance, Mrs. Hale's defensiveness in the exchange with the county attorney in the above excerpt suggests that she also frames her relationship to housework within the patriarchal mindset. By insisting that there are "great deal of work to be done on a farm" and citing men's negligence for cleanliness as the source of the dirty towel, Mrs. Hale confirms that cleanliness and homemaking are part and parcel of being a proper wife. The kitchen must be cleaned precisely because its purity affirms the subjectivity of wifehood. Furthermore, when the men have left to investigate the crime scene upstairs and out of the boundary of the stage, Mrs. Hale immediately complains that she "hate[s] to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing" before proceeding to arrange the kitchen utensils the court attorney has shoved out of place (Barlow, 1985, p. 77). Her immediate identification with Mrs. Wright's

kitchen could be read as a form of subjectification to the patriarchal discourse of cleanliness; however, it could also be viewed to carry a liberating potential.

As Marion Young has stated that homemaking should not be reduced to a mechanical process of life sustenance designated to be performed by a specific gender, but ideologically expanded to include and preserve the universality of human experience, Mrs. Hale's identification with Minnie Foster's kitchen, in spite of her absence, implies a deeper connection to the American feminine experience of homemaking rather than as an efficient housemaid. Her arrangement of the disorganized kitchen utensils is in itself a form of feminine connection and sharing of common homemaking experience. Mrs. Hale arranges the utensils while speaking about her inner feelings sharply contrast with the male's mode of communication which relies on officiating and impersonal detachment:

> COUNTY ATTORNEY: And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?
>
> HALE: She moved from that chair to this one over here [*pointing to a small chair in the corner*] and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared, [*the* COUNTY ATTORNEY*, who has had his notebook out, makes a note*] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.
>
> COUNTY ATTORNEY: [*looking around*] I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there, (*to the* SHERIFF) You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.
>
> SHERIFF: Nothing here but kitchen things.
>
> (Barlow, 1985, p. 75)

The county attorney's detachment from Hale's disturbing narrative, writing it down calmly in his notebook, shows that what has occurred in the house exist purely as a kind of descriptive information. In fact, the excerpt could be read as an epitome of the men's inability to read home and homemaking as a text, in which the furniture and "kitchen things" embody female ontology. To neglect their representative function is equivalent of denying the existence of Minnie Foster as an autonomous subject. In contrast, Mrs. Hale's attentiveness to these objects via the act of homemaking is equivalent to her manifesting Minnie Foster's on stage, granting her and the audience indirect encounter with the female ontology. If the existence of an autonomous female

is taken into consideration, the domestic space in the play takes on a different meaning. For instance, the condensation of these household furniture and items in this scene suggests that the kitchen is not just a place to cook - an obvious life sustaining activity - but also a space of memory, in which the inhabitant, in this case Mrs. Wright or Minnie Foster, passes her time. To quote an often overused phrase, Minnie Foster's "room of her own" is not separated from her daily tasks of homemaking. To Minnie Foster, putting bread in its box, preserving fruit, or knotting quilt, are not mundane homemaking tasks branded by radical feminist thinkers as repressive patriarchal tasks preventing women from attaining her own subjectivity, instead they are the very activities that allow women to negotiate her identity and selfhood within patriarchal domain. In other words, to gaze upon the wreckage of the kitchen in the opening scene of the play is to acknowledge the very destruction of Minnie Foster's private space. The discrepancy between how male and female characters relate to domestic space proves that the house and its interior are not defined with static meanings and gender performances. Instead, domestic space is fluid and can be contested and redefined at the level of meaning-making through specific action such as the act of homemaking. Hence, if the play is read through the lens of Young's framework of homemaking, it becomes possible to reread and subvert the patriarchal discourse dominating domestic space, and consequently of the theatre as space for female performance. The next section of the research will deal with the effect of homemaking on female autonomy in domestic space by closely analyzing the significance of specific actions incongruent with the ending of the play.

4. Homemaking as Feminine Communal Experience

This part of the research composes of our analysis of the women's roles of housewife and homemaker as containing the liberating potential. We argue that the women's encounter with Minnie Foster's homemaking is not simply an encounter with a femininely identifiable text, but that such moment constitutes the initiation of female writing which in turn reinterpret and redefine the women's patriarchally repressive position in domestic space. Finally, we try to make sense of the ambiguity at the ending of the play and its connection with women's homemaking as a process of creating feminine communal experience.

First and foremost, it is necessary to describe the conditions in which the characters, and to the certain extent the audience, perceive Minnie Foster's abandoned housework from the perspective of each gender. The male characters, which include the country attorney and Mr. Hale, and the female characters, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, are active agencies asserting

gender specific values over their comprehensions of Minnie Foster's story. We will begin with male perspective. Since Minnie Foster is absent from the stage, the audience first learn of her story from Hale's eyewitness account. It should be noted that Hale's account is not purely "his" perspective. It is officially framed by the county attorney's interrogation. The court attorney constantly interrupts Hale's attempts to tell his opinion of the relationship between John Wright and his wife. The county attorney wants Hale to tell only what he sees when "[he] got to the house" or after they have inspected "the lay of things upstairs" (Barlow, 1985, pp. 73, 76). The effect of the county attorney's framing is Hale's "official" eyewitness account, stripped of certain levels of personal impression and identification:

> HALE: Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'How do, Mrs. Wright it's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?'—**and went on kind of pleating at her apron.** Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, 'I want to see John.' **And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh.** I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: 'Can't I see John?' 'No', she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes', says she, 'he's home'. 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead', says she. 'Dead?' says I. **She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth.** 'Why—where is he?' says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that [*himself pointing to the room above*] I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, Why, what did he die of?' 'He died of a rope round his neck', **says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron**. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'—
>
> (Barlow, 1985, p. 74. Emphasis mine)

It should be evident that Mrs. Wright's repeated pleating of her apron in a rocking is a sign of her attachment to homemaking. It could even be read as a residue of patriarchal influence that attaches to Mrs. Wright's role as housewife as, from Hale's narration, she appears to be in a daze unable to function normally despite the death of her patriarchal oppressor. Homemaking remains a patriarchal tool of oppression in a sense that its ideological residue hinders Mrs. Wright's autonomy in this line of reading; a notion which materializes on stage with the presence of the rocking chair. Hale's story marks the indirect encounter with homemaking as patriarchal residue; fortunately this is negated by the female characters' direct enactment of homemaking. It must be noted that, between the two women, Mrs. Hale acts as the main initiator in bridging their homemaking experience with those of Minnie Foster. The first instance of the women's direct encounter with Minnie Foster's homemaking is their consensual

agreement on the state of her jars of fruit preserves as quoted in the previous section. The point of interest in this scene is not just in their dialogue, but their movement on stage. Glaspell dictates that the two women should “move a little closer together” while they inspect the jars of frozen fruits (Barlow, 1985, p. 76). This seemingly trivial directorial gesture functions as the conceit of the play; the women are collectively bonded and identified with one another through homemaking. It additionally paints a contrasting image of Mrs. Wright than the one depicted in Hale’s narrative. Mrs. Wright appears as a regular housewife who cares for her works, no matter how trifling they appear to be in the men’s perspective, as opposed to a psychologically disturbed woman who probably murders her husband in cold blood yet still remorselessly worries about her fruit preserves. The dualistic identities of Mrs. Wright / Minnie Foster attribute to the fluidity of homemaking and domestic space; that it is possible to form a liberated autonomous subject from what appear as trifling and oppressive household tasks; a testimony to the power of the play to function as contemporary feminist text.

Before going further, it is necessary to establish a concrete frame of interpretation for the women’s account of Minnie Foster’s story. The women accompany the men to John Wright’s house to collect Minnie Foster’s personal items upon her request. The items will then be inspected by the county attorney. The detective element comes into consideration when the court attorney declares that his parties are to search for any items that may point to Mrs. Wright’s motive to murder her husband. The play enters a dramatic irony precisely when the men go up the stair to look for evidences. The audience is made to rely on the women’s inspection of Mrs. Wright’s trifle objects to understand her motive; an additional narrative frame is denied, or in this case overlooked, by the men. Thus, the women’s inspection is similar to Hale’s account, at least narrative wise, as it constitutes a kind of secondary text. They are able to form Minnie Foster’s story and identify with their interpretations of her past through their reading of her role and performance as a homemaker. When all is said and done the audience may not be able to learn the objective truth of the killing as the stories relayed to them are from secondhand accounts of different readers. The equating of the Women’s epistemological inquiry of Minnie Foster’s story to Hale’s account as secondhand sources is important because it establishes their positions as readers of text. There is really no difference in their epistemological methods as the outcome of both readings are creation of secondary texts: John Wright deserves to die because of his intensive repression of his wife, while Mrs. Wright is guilty of the crime because of her evident mental instability.

The position of the reader is greatly problematic regardless of gender as it attributes the text they read to be reproductions of Minnie Foster's inner psyche, which then confirms her status as a victim in some forms. Minnie Foster, seen in this light, is no more than a troubled woman who possibly murders her husband on the ground of arbitrary victimhood. Therefore, it would perhaps do justice to Minnie Foster and her role as homemaker by reading the formation of the text - the women's discovery and interaction with her housework as a continuous movement of writing; sharing with each other the communal experience of womanhood. The notion of homemaking as communal and universal experience is emphasized in Mrs. Hale's advice to Mrs. Peters that she should not tell Minnie Foster that her fruit preserves are frozen as she "[knows] how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same things." She also insists that Mrs. Peters take the bottle of fruit to Minnie Foster as proof so that "she may never know whether [her jars of fruit preserve] was broke or not". Mrs. Peters then responds by "[taking] the bottle, [looking] about for something to wrap it in; [taking] petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously [beginning] winding this around the bottle" and speaks "[in] a false voice" stating that the men would laugh at them for getting worked up over a dead canary had they heard their conversation, which implies how she would also cooperate with Mrs. Hale's proposal (Barlow, 1985, p. 85). Mrs. Hale's advice and Mrs. Peters' nervous response, taken at face value, are essentially a perpetuation of lying. However, the women do not perpetuate the "illusion of home", in a sense that without this illusion her past as John Wright's wife would have been pointless; instead, their panics to smuggle the fruit jar reinforce their communal understanding of how this particular object is a material representative of her identity as a homemaker. What should be a confirmation of patriarchal illusion is a shattering of one. The passing of the jar to Minnie Foster, a trivial object understandable only by women, becomes a symbolic assurance that she is not alone in enduring domestic labors, but there is a community of women who understands and identifies with her pain and joy. What Minnie Foster may think of a personal, isolated, and demoralizing trauma of domestic life is in fact a legitimate form of subjectivity to which women could transcend the harshness of everyday reality not by solitary endurance nor abandonment, but as a community of creative homemakers.

The female unification and emancipating potentials of homemaking are embedded in the two women's interaction with Minnie Foster's objects throughout the plot and ultimately provide the alternative solution to the crime. If Hale's eyewitness account represents the male

authority's perception of the crime, the women's account would represent an engagement with her personal history. The communal experience of homemaking transposes to stage with the two women's movement and speed in finding and searching through Minnie Foster's belonging as if the kitchen is their own:

> MRS. HALE: [*eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it*] She was going to put this in there, [*picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things*] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [*gets up on the chair and looks*] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes—here; (holding it toward the window) this is cherries, too. [*looking again*] I declare I believe that's the only one. [*gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside*] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.
>
> …
>
> [MRS. PETERS *takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.*]
>
> MRS. PETERS: She was piecing a quilt. [*She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.*]
>
> MRS. HALE: It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?
>
> (Barlow, 1985, pp. 77-79)

The simultaneous quick movement of Mrs. Hale as she identifies the stories behind household items while delivering her lines is akin to male detective work and contemporary police procedural drama. Mrs. Hale knows the story behind the breadbox and bottle of fruit preserve, even deducting that there is only one left unbroken. Similar observation can be applied to Mrs. Peters as she instinctively identifies Minnie Foster's unfinished quilt while simultaneously bringing along a large sewing basket. Predictably, both women can immediately identify the quilting pattern. The women's rapid movement can be read as a physical recreation of Minnie Foster's homemaking and daily life. If Hale's account depicts Mrs. Wright as a psychologically disturbed housewife, the women's physical movement suggests her to be an efficient one. The communal experience of homemaking is also visible in Mrs. Hale's intertwining story of her experience of working on the farm in the summer. Of course, this level of identification suggests Mrs. Hale's bias toward Minnie Foster, but it is also an evidence of homemaking as meaning-making. Preserving fruit becomes more than just a life-sustaining act, but a literal "preservation", in Marion Young's sense, of the individual memory being preserved and

reconstructed from the past to the present. For the audience to see the characters sifting through Minnie Foster's items is to see their own life being physically reconstructed on stage in the light of passing on the communal experience of women and homemaking.

Other important actions in the play that confirm the communal power of homemaking are the women's interpretation of Minnie Foster's quilts and their discovery of the dead canary; the latter a potential evidence for the motive of the murder. Mrs. Peters finds Minnie Foster's quilt works while looking under the small corner table. Minnie Foster's earlier completed quilt piece depicts an image of a perfect log cabin, symbolizing her happiness, or at least contentment, of marrying into John Wright's household. The latest unfinished piece, the women observe, are at first quilted "so nice and even", then the needlework suddenly turns "all over the place[!]" as if Minnie Foster "didn't know what she was about!" (Barlow, 1985, p. 80). Their frightened reaction to Minnie Foster's unorganized quilt work signify the changes of her mental state from a content housewife to a psychologically unstable person. Again, our point of interest is not how the object conveys Minnie Foster's mental state, but how the two women relate Minnie Foster's homemaking experience to their own. Quilting requires certain level of personal creativity. It is an individual experience more similar to painting or other artistic enterprise than ordinary life sustaining house chores. One's artisanal effort put to quilting resembles a form of self-preservation and individualized autonomy. Indeed, it would not be wrong to state that Minnie Foster's quilting effort is similar to Edna Pontellier's pursuit in painting: both actions essentailize the female autonomy through the subjects' chosen medium. Yet, from our previous observation of the jar of fruit preserve, what should be a personal individualized action transcends to a communal one:

> [*After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant* MRS. HALE *has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.*]
> MRS. PETERS: Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?
> MRS. HALE: [*mildly*] Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [*threading a needle*] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.
> MRS. PETERS: [*nervously*] I don't think we ought to touch things.
> MRS. HALE: I'll just finish up this end. [*suddenly stopping and leaning forward*] Mrs. Peters?
> MRS. PETERS: Yes, Mrs. Hale?
> MRS. HALE: What do you suppose she was so nervous about?
> MRS. PETERS: Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [MRS. HALE *starts to say something, looks at* MRS. PETERS, *then goes on*

> *sewing*] Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think, [*putting apron and other things together*] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.
>
> (Barlow, 1985, p. 80)

Mrs. Hale, in spite of Mrs. Peters warning, goes on to finish and fix Minnie Foster's sewing. Then the women start to converse on Minnie Foster's experience, while sharing their own - opening themselves up little by little. It is as if each encounter with Minnie Foster's housework repeats and reinforces the three women's bond and understanding of one another. Mrs. Hale reworking the sewing functions as a form of non-verbal communication. She, like Mrs. Peters, is aware of Minnie Foster's "nervousness" in the sewing. Her reworking the sewing is not a violation of the owner's work, but a reconfirmation to Minnie Foster that there are other women who sew and comprehend her plight. Mrs. Peters' response that she "sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired" may appear quite defensive, but it serves to highlight the beginning of her willingness to identify with Minnie Foster's domestic experience. Consequently, they agree it is acceptable to take the quilting materials to Minnie Foster as they might bring some comfort to the incarcerated woman.

The women's discovery of the broken bird-cage and the dead canary epitomizes the dynamic relationship between domestic space and homemaking. Mrs. Peter discovers the broken bird-cage in the cupboard. Mrs. Hale then speculated that Minnie Foster might have bought the canary last year before metaphorically comparing her neighbor to the bird as she "used to sing really pretty herself" (Barlow, 1985, p. 81). The women would then discover the carcass of the dead canary wrapped in a piece of silk with its neck wrung to the other side - the exact same posture of John Wright's dead body. The identical postures of the bird and the man, if read through the lens of detective fiction, indicate that Minnie Foster has murdered John Wright to enact vengeance of his killing of her canary - a perfect evidence of her motive for the murder. The women's reaction to this discovery, however, is much more engrossing than a traditional detective fiction trope. Mrs. Hale, as if reprising her role of a hard-boiled detective, concludes that she "knew John Wright" and that Minnie Foster "[choked] the life out of him" as she had to endure "years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful - still, after the bird was still" (Barlow, 1985, p. 84). Following Mrs. Hale's line of speculation, the bird functions as Mrs. Wright's memorabilia of her past as Minnie Foster. The tending of the bird, the quilting of the log cabin, or doing daily housewife's chores of putting bread in the box or preserving fruits - these are evidences of Minnie Foster's homemaking made visible to the audience by Mrs. Hale's identification and reconstruction via theatrical gestures. Mrs. Hale's

encounter with Minnie Foster's personal history is equivalent to reliving her own. The found objects are a parallel universe of "the same things, but different kind of same things" where what happened to Mrs. Wright could have happened to any women in similar community.

Mrs. Peters, on the contrary, is extremely defensive toward Mrs. Hale's detective speculation. She constantly reminds Mrs. Hale that "[the] law has got to punish crime[.] as "[we] don't know who killed the bird" and "[we] don't know who killed [John Wright]" (Barlow, 1985, p. 84). Mrs. Peters' defensiveness could be read as her denial of Mrs. Hale's hypothesis; that her fumbling of the evidence at the end of the play is a deliberate action on her part to collaborate with the authority in letting the law punish Mrs. Wright for her crime. However, we posit that there is great deal of ambiguity in Mrs. Peters' hesitated response to Mrs. Hale's speculation. In fact, *Trifles* is powerful precisely because of this indecisiveness. There is an instance where Mrs. Peters emotionally identifies with Minnie Foster's plight as she remarks that she "know what stillness is" when her family "homesteaded in Dakota, and [her] first baby died - after he was two years old, and me with no other [children]" (Barlow, 1985, p. 84). Her emotional conflict of justice remains - whether to agree with the law or personal vengeance - unresolved even at the end of the play. To Mrs. Peters, the events happened in the house is open to interpretation and could be contested, as suggested by her dismissal of Hale's eyewitness account and Mrs. Hale's hardboiled speculation. Hence, there are three variations of the crime: a murder committed by a mad woman (Hale's eyewitness account), a murder committed by a repressed housewife (Mrs. Hale's speculation), and a murder committed by an unknown assailant (Mrs. Peters' defensive stance). By denying the objective resolution to the crime while challenging their sense of justice, *Trifles* brilliantly invites the audience to engage with the characters' action in search for their motivations. The audience's gaze is designed to be fixated, much like the female characters, to the "trifling" details of the characters' encounter with Minnie Foster's "trivial" acts of homemaking. These almost metaphysical encounters of unresolved "trivialities" bring about another of domestic space not simply as an exclusively patriarchal domain, but more importantly as a site of meaning contestation that can be challenged and redefined to attain what Marion Young has proposed as universal inclusion. In short, domestic space too should be perceived as a kind of open-text befitting the meaning making task of homemaking.

The open-ended ending of the play, where the female characters appear to be hiding the canary from the male authorities, exemplifies the potential of homemaking as communal meaning-making. We would like to stress that in it is necessary to read the scene in context of

the play; as extension of the act of communal homemaking rather than each woman's individual effort to pursue their own agenda:

> (HALE goes outside. The SHERIFF follows the COUNTY ATTORNEY into the other room. Then MRS. HALE rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at MRS. PETERS, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting MRS. HALE's. A moment MRS. HALE holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly MRS. PETERS throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. MRS. HALE snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter COUNTY ATTORNEY and SHERIFF.)
>
> (Barlow, 1985, p. 86)

The stage direction in the excerpt dictates what appears as the women's stumbling attempts to either hide the evidence from the men or to prevent each other from obtaining it. Again, their actions are bathed in ambiguity. This ambiguity is reaffirmed with the last line of the play in which Mrs. Hale answers the county attorney's question of Minnie Foster's quilting intention with "[we] call it - knot it, Mr. Henderson" (Barlow, 1985, p. 86). What is remarkable in this chain of events is not exactly the women's mishandling of the dead bird, but that a reference to homemaking constitutes the final action of the play. The act of knotting a quilt is a cultural code homemaking understandable only to the female characters. The men are obviated from this cultural code, just as much as from the women's method of detective work. Here, the men's oblivion to the code of homemaking in the patriarchal domestic space marks the point which women are included into the boundary of home. Their inclusion does not come from the exclusion of patriarchal value, but of contesting and redefining domestic space via the cultural code of homemaking. Whatever their agendas and personal motives for hiding the dead bird may be, it is undeniable that the women's encounter with homemaking allows them to carve a feminine space inside the house. Their emotional identifications with Minnie Foster's personal history and their reconstructions of it on the stage constitute physical manifestation of her life and of their own; lives that are simultaneously visible to the audience in the theatre.

5. Conclusion

Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* is a triumphant feminist play that calls for a challenge against patriarchal authority in domestic space, propelling homemaking as action of empowerment.

Trifle challenges the notions of realist and naturalist theatre by urging its characters and audience to confront the very limitation of the environment. The solitary setting of the play and its brief running time are metaphorical elements drawing the audience to confront with the physical manifestation of repression. It shows that, once one confronts this state of repression from within, as have the female characters in the play, the domestic environment could be a space of comfort and self-realization. In a way, the play is an inversion of radical feminist stance as it proposes women's challenge on patriarchy not by escaping or abandoning domestic space, but by redefining homemaking as autonomous and communal affirmative action. Our discussion of the play proves that the power relationship between women and domestic space is neither a vertical nor a static relationship. The roles of housewife and mother are unavoidable gender roles in most culture. However, it is also detrimental, as Marion Young has stated, to dismiss all domestic gender roles and homemaking tasks as forms of repression. Mrs. Hale's and Mrs. Peters' reconstructions of Minnie Foster's life on stage are testimony that homemaking is a communally shared experience - manifestation of the homemaker's identity and personal history in her own house.

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