

SUSAN GLASPELL'S *TRIFLES* (1916): WOMEN'S CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE BEYOND THE MELODRAMA OF BESET WOMANHOOD

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Women have been driven mad, «gas-lighted,» for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which validates only male experience. The truth of our bodies and our minds has been mystified to us. We therefore have a primary obligation to each other; not to undermine each other's sense of reality for the sake of expediency; not to gaslight each other.

Adrienne Rich

Susan Glaspell (1882-1948) was a famous dramatist and fiction writer who published ten novels and more than forty short stories.¹ Together with George Cram Cook, her husband, she organized a group of Provincetown actors, known as the Provincetown Players, in 1915, who performed one-act plays in a wharf theater and later in Greenwich village, in New York. Glaspell and Cook's productions were anticommercial and avant-garde and they fostered the first experimental drama in the United States. According to Barbara Ozieblo, their real achievement lies «in their

1. Among her works mention must be made of the play *The Verge* (1921), which dealt with the New Woman and the psychological portrayal of character; and her dramatisation of the life of Emily Dickinson, *Alison's House* (1930), which won her the Pulitzer Prize for drama. For a revisionist study on Glaspell and her importance on forging the new American drama, see Ozieblo «A Struggle Shared: Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill».

single-minded promotion of the American playwright». Not only did they offer a testing arena to young dramatists who reacted against the hegemony of Broadway—especially for Eugene O’Neill and Glaspell herself—, but encouraged «the value of little theatres and their experimental work and so seeding the mature drama in America» (*The Provincetown* 11).²

Trifles was Glaspell’s first play for the Provincetown and was produced at the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown on 8 August 1916.³ The play conveys the emasculating experience of being a farm wife in a lonely, bleak landscape of Iowa during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The main characters—John Wright and his wife, Minnie—are never seen and assume a shadowy presence against which the rest of the characters are pitted, and whose struggle is echoed by the two women figures on stage who realize «the prison house that patriarchy has constructed of marriage» (Ozieblo, *The Provincetown* 18). The play illustrates the tensions that imply being a woman. Minnie has been invisible both to her husband and to the community. While he went out to battle nature, she was forced to stay indoors. Placed against isolation and male violence, she attempted to nurture beauty to sustain life as well as to invent an existence of her own independent of her husband’s male construction of it. Glaspell’s structuring of the play strives to transcend the mere committed exposition of Minnie’s plight and works, instead, through the complicity between the women characters and the audience as they unveil their own existential similarities and pass judgment on the murderer.

The content of this one-act play goes briefly like this. John Wright has been strangled while sleeping. His wife, Minnie, has been taken to prison as she has been held responsible for the murder. The play, initially built on the conventionalised frame of the murder-mystery melodrama, starts the following day when the County Attorney, the Sheriff and his wife, and a neighbouring farmer and his wife arrive at the empty house. While the men go to the upstairs bedroom and to the barn to look for clues that will prove that it is Minnie who has murdered her husband, the two middle-aged rural women are left alone in the kitchen to collect clothes for their imprisoned neighbour. As Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters observe the trifles they find in the messy

2. For a study on the importance of the Provincetown Players and their history as well as for a selection of plays written and staged by them, see Ozieblo’s *The Provincetown Players*.

3. Glaspell tells about the way she wrote the play and the source of her inspiration in her husband’s biography, *The Road to the Temple*: «So I went out on the wharf, sat alone on one of our wooden benches without a back, and looked a long time at that bare little stage. After a time the stage became a kitchen—a kitchen there all by itself. I saw just where the stove was, the table, and the steps going upstairs. Then the door at the back opened, and people all bundled up came in—two or three men, I wasn’t sure which, but sure enough about the two women, who hung back, reluctant to enter that kitchen. When I was a newspaper reporter out in Iowa, I was sent down-state to do a murder trial, and I never forgot going into the kitchen of a woman locked up in town. I had meant to do it as a short story, but the stage took it for its own, so I hurried in from the wharf to write down what I had seen. Whenever I got stuck, I would run across the street to the old wharf, sit in that leaning little theater under which the sea sounded, until the play was ready to continue. Sometimes things written in my room would not form on the stage, and I must go home and cross them out» (Biggsby, «Introduction» 9).

kitchen, they slowly start to patch up together possible pieces of evidence that bespeak the reasons for the crime. When the men return, in a silent act of bonding, they suppress the information they have gathered and the men are left without evidence to condemn Minnie Wright.

According to C. W. E. Bigsby, the play is «a well-observed study of male arrogance and insensitivity»; a play which «works by understatement. The melodrama inherent in the scene is rigorously excluded. It is an ensemble piece, lyrical but spare» (*Critical* 25, 26). Bigsby's opinion is a good example of restrained literary reading, uncertain to point at what stands behind that supposedly «male arrogance». Gilbert and Gubar go to further lengths to describe Glaspell's work. For them, *Trifles* is a play which revolves around two major subjects. It is firstly a study of «the confining environments that frustrate the full development of human potential», and secondly of «the impact of gender on the complex process by which we read and interpret not only literary texts but also social texts» (1351). I agree with this broad definition but I feel it needs some specifying, because *Trifles* is not merely local color drama caught up in the web of the first decades of twentieth-century American regionalism, but rather a direct result of the tenets the American feminist movement was preaching at that moment. In this respect, Helene Keysar's description of the play as a work that «reveals the complexities of women's lives and subverts assumed notions of women's social powerlessness» (22) seems to be more operative to my purposes of analysis. On the other hand and following Gilbert and Gubar's definition, *Trifles'* dramatic effect on the audience rests on building our complicity with the women characters on stage and, as such, the play presupposes a spectator actively involved with it. Paraphrasing Louise M. Rosenblatt's definition of a poem, *Trifles* is what the viewer lives through under the guidance of the text and experiences as relevant to that text.

Arthur H. Quinn, examining the changes which came in drama in the first three decades of the twentieth century, explains that one of the effects of the Great War was a searching scrutiny that resulted in drama in «an examination of the institution of marriage, into the relations of parents and children, and the relations of the individual to society». And though these were no new themes, «the novelty has come in the method of approach». He labels that sort of drama, «domestic drama» by which he means «the play that grows out of complications and conflicts among closely related people, drawn usually from a group not distinguished by acute social consciousness, but more concerned with the personal aspects of the struggle» (207). Helene Keysar provides another name for this type of plays. She refers to them as feminist drama, which became increasingly rare once the vote was won –in England in 1918 (restricted to those over thirty until 1928) and in the United States in 1919– and suffragette plays disappeared. Between 1919 and 1960, the most persistent gesture towards feminism in the theatre was a focus on female characters and the particular obstacles these characters encountered *because* they were women. If for Quinn, Susan Glaspell's productions belong to the group of domestic drama and *Trifles* is one of her best works, since «it is distinctly dramatic, and the effect of the personality of the absent wife is suggested by deft touches» (209). For Keysar, *Trifles* remains the most provocative archetype of feminism in drama. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters gradually uncover the oppression under which Minnie Wright lived with her husband; and «by

making us acknowledge a woman's world, the play exposes a space usually ignored on-stage, and once we see this inner life, the murder appears justified» (25-26). Yet, in this sense, *Trifles* cannot be seen as an exceptional dramatization of the plight of women in the first decades of the twentieth century, since it relates to what Josephine Donovan calls the «cultural feminism» of the nineteenth century which comprised those other veins in this period which went beyond «the fundamentally rationalist and legalist thrust of Enlightenment liberal theory» and which, instead of emphasizing the similarities between men and women, often stressed «the differences, ultimately affirming that feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and a fount of public regeneration» (31).

From the literary point of view, feminist critics have taught us to reread nineteenth-century women's fiction as the embodiment of how domestic ideology articulated itself as a means to effect social and political reform from the private sphere. In this sense, one of the most important and popular books in nineteenth-century America was Catherine's Beecher *Treatise of Domestic Economy* published in 1841. Beecher's book is an attempt to articulate a housekeeping ethics which aims at regulating a systematic domestic economy. «There is no one thing more necessary to a housekeeper, in performing her varied duties, than a habit of system and order» (144), she stated. By performing their household tasks, which in her political phrasing become a way to sustain «a prosperous domestic state», women participate in «the greatest work that was ever committed to human responsibility [...] the building of a glorious temple, whose base shall be co-extensive with the bounds of the earth, whose summit shall pierce the skies, whose splendor shall beam on all lands» (14). Thus, American women's responsibility acquires a Messianic role as their concern for regularity and order in family arrangements is regarded as a patriotic and religious duty. Correct housekeeping becomes a political practice and the home a political model that has to be protected from the fluctuations of the world outside –the marketplace. Family life in American literature is consequently presented as an institution with a potential for reforming society and therefore as separated from and purged of the pernicious vices infecting the public sphere. Women become the sole guardians of this sacred private space, predestined to keep it as a peaceful order in contrast with the disorder outside. The sphere of female activity defined by Beecher and other female educators is thus circumscribed by the boundaries of the home, and consequently the fact whether that domestic ideology extends rather than subverts patriarchal power remains a moot question.

In 1916 retaking the main elements that structured domestic fiction, Glaspell shows in *Trifles* how in a period of political turmoil the American Edenic home becomes a threatening nightmarish space for the alleged security of patriarchal domination and how the separation between the kitchen and polity is but a fictional construct. Minnie Wright personifies the hysterical woman Carroll Smith-Rosberg presents as a rebel against the coercive ethos of will, control, and hard work personified in the ideal domestic woman, whom she sees as the discursive product of patriarchal power. It is true that when Glaspell was writing American women had started to enter into colleges and into professional careers such as teaching and nursing and that these were regarded as the springboard for the recognition of their

political rights. But Minnie Wright is a nineteenth-century American woman living in a rural enclave isolated from the mainstream currents of twentieth-century life, from progress and technological communication. Glaspell dramatizes how the Victorian domestic mystique intersected and collaborated with patriarchal power to delegitimize women's claims to financial, social, and political autonomy.

Yet one of the main questions *Trifles* asks is if the domestic ideology and its concomitant gender oppression render women really powerless. One of the determinant structures of experience that have differentiated women from men has been their assignation to the domestic sphere. The experience of living under different conditions from men –not only limitation to the domestic sphere, but experience of political oppression, their historic economic function as production for use, not for exchange, different experience of significant physical events (childbirth)– has led to the formation of «a particular consciousness, a particular epistemology, a particular ethic, and a particular aesthetic» (Donovan 173). In the domestic sphere women have experienced a sense of personal vulnerability to environmental influence, fostering a sense of being bound to circumstance, of not being in control of one's world, of feeling tied to physical realities that impinge upon their projects. However, in this domestic sphere women were also able to carve out a separate space of their own and to sustain separate cultural traditions, as Minnie Wright shows and Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters recognise. Here it is interesting to turn to Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi's *The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework* (1982). Rabuzzi argues that we should not denigrate the realm of housework, but rather see it as the site of continuing feminine culture as it contributes to the development of a feminine world. In fact, Minnie Wright's crime implies a transformation of the home. Isolated from the everyday world into the rural realm of the male farm, her life is ruled by the primigenial rhythms of the mythical time of seasons –symbolized in the play by her cherished preserves– and, contrary to the typically masculine mode of being, which is that of questing, her feminine mode is that of waiting. Her life does not follow a progressive, linear change, but is repetitious, cyclical, and static (Rabuzzi 143-145, 146). Notwithstanding, *Trifles* attests to the capacity of women in relocating power within the essentialist concepts that define them, that is to say, within the level of immanence.

But *Trifles* goes beyond a mere exhibition of gender oppression. Glaspell's one-act play redefines the dramatic event as something that only exists meaningfully in the mind of the reader/viewer. As Stanley E. Fish provocatively explains of a poem in «How to Recognize a Poem When You See One», in this case if we want to interpret the play, we do not have to decode it, we have to make it (327). And as Wolfgang Iser focuses on the gaps in the text, on what is not expressed, he argues that what is missing from a narrative causes the reader to fill in the blanks creatively. Now the way we fill in these blanks will ultimately depend on gender. Minnie's act of rebelliousness acquires the proportions of specular reality against which the characters of the play and the audience have to produce significance to understand a past that refracts the present. Consequently, the outcome of this confrontation will depend directly not only on the comprehension of immanent feminine signs by women, but ultimately on the

refusal on the part of men to replace a fossilized patriarchal reading of female experience.

In this play we have two women and three men exposed to the same experience –that of reading the text written by Minnie. Some critics on *Trifles* understand the play as a failure on men's part to be competent readers of women's texts. For example, Annette Kolodny observes that, «if the absent Minnie Foster is the 'transmitter' or 'sender' in this schema, then only the women are competent 'receivers' or 'readers' of her message, since they alone share not only her context (the supposed insignificance of kitchen things), but, as a result, the conceptual patterns which make up her world» (42). And for Barbara Ozieblo, *Trifles* evinces how Glaspell shows that «men speak a different language from women and they not only refuse to understand them but they also despise their words and activities» («La mujer» 401). Yet in the play the characters do not seem to behave with such a clear-cut precision. On the one hand, George Henderson, the young county attorney, deviates attention towards the private relationship between John and Minnie Wright on two occasions, both previous to the men's going upstairs to look for facts that corroborate her participation in the murder. Firstly, when Mr. Hale starts to describe John's indifference towards Minnie's wishes, and secondly, when Mrs. Hale points to John's character as gloomy enough to make any place uncheerful. Henderson's willingness to postpone revelation –to enter into a dialogue with the unknown female story– is suspiciously instrumental in furthering silence on a key question –the true nature of John and Minnie's married and family life. On the other hand, Mrs. Hale is aware of the fact that Mrs. Peters and her own reading of the different clues inscribed in the text of the kitchen might not be different from the men's. In fact, when Mrs. Peters desperately tries to laugh off her fears dispelling the ominous truth they have just gleaned from their female reading («Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a –dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with– with –wouldn't they *laugh!*»), Mrs. Hale mutters, «Maybe they would– maybe they wouldn't». Furthermore, she and Mrs. Peters are extremely careful to destroy all indications that substantiate Minnie's murder, showing how unsure they feel of possessing a language of their own that cloaks a hidden meaning.

Two questions need to be asked at this point –why is it that these women react like this? And why do the men refuse to read Minnie's text? As far as the first question is concerned, in the play women are valid because they seem to men to embody a model of stability achieved through complete self-denial. Their exemplary lives of social invisibility are the perfect complement to the political and economic world these men engage in. The only setting in *Trifles* is that of Minnie's kitchen. The trespassing, the *sneaking*, of men into it is perceived by women as a domestic violation, but as research routine by men. The disarranged state of the room scandalizes the attorney and seems to offend his domestic propriety much more than the act of murder disturbs his moral sense. Yet the disorder of the kitchen mirrors the disorder of Minnie's mind as it is perceived by Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, though not by the men as they apparently and only apparently fail to recognize the intimacy between domestic and personal/political issues for women.

Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin's cognitive research on gender and comprehension is helpful now. They suggest that one reason that differences between

women and men are not readily apparent is that women learn to read and understand from a male point of view, a possibility suggested by muted group theory which describes situations in which groups of people exist in asymmetrical power relationships. The theory proposes «that language and the norms for its use are controlled by the dominant group. Members of the muted group are disadvantaged in articulating their experience, since the language they must use is derived largely from the perceptions of the dominant group» (21). In fact, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are those members of the muted group, but they stand at a point of vantage, for not only do they possess a language of their own and are able to recognise it, but most important for the end of the play, they have also been trained and are experts at shaping their reading to the rules defined by the male world. Thus Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters know that the disorder in the kitchen cannot be remedied without reference to the system the kitchen articulates in its modes of gender relationship.

It is in this sense that Minnie's embodiment of the myth of Philomel makes sense. Like her she has suffered violence and has been condemned to silence. Philomel had her tongue cut off as Minnie's pet bird has had its neck wrung and symbolically her voice muted. The repeated comparison between her and a singing bird drawn by Mrs. Hale also brings home the strategy of identification upon which the play is built, since Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters only gain insight into the situation after they identify with Minnie. Hence their reading and the audience's are an example of the reader's-response criticism hailed by Norman Holland. Holland assumes the absolute priority of individual selves as creators of texts. Mrs. Hale succeeds in deciphering Minnie's handwriting in the text that her kitchen becomes because she is motivated by deep-seated, personal, and psychological needs which she transfers to an initially reluctant Mrs. Peters. Both women find in Minnie's text, in Holland's phrase, their own «identity theme» (122), that is to say a replication of their selves as they work out through their neighbour's kitchen their own characteristic patterns of desire.

However, what makes *Trifles*' plot advance dramatically is Glaspell's distinct description of the two women's engagement into that identification and consequently active response. Mrs. Hale has known Minnie since she was young. Married to a neighbouring farmer, she is aware of the oppression to which rural life condemns women. Her first reaction to Mr. Henderson's criticism of Minnie's failure to fit into the model of the ideal housekeeper triggers her immediate recognition of sisterly bonds within a cultural system meaningless to men and which the man's patronizing remark labels as her loyalty to her sex. Mrs. Hale, like the feminist reader, takes the part of the woman writer, Minnie, «against patriarchal misreadings that trivialize or distort her work» (Schweickart 46). But the climactic moment of her recognition arrives when she discovers Minnie's sewing basket and the quilt she was piecing. The disorderly sewing is the clue that tellingly narrates her neighbour's story, as Philomel wove the account of her rape into the tapestry for her sister Procne. Minnie's verbal and existential sacrifice is transposed, as in the classical myth, on the sewing of the quilt. Its chaotic threads tell explicitly the tale justifying her revenge. As expected, other women read her story because they can decipher the common code of quilting since they also share the experience of being reduced to silence by the patriarchal structures of society. It is thus that Glaspell appropriates women's practices in the

home and reveals the subversive potential that is inscribed into them. Minnie's sprawled sewing is not only indicative of the fact that she cannot control her feelings enough to create an orderly art but, most important, the messy stitches of her quilt –her knots– are an evident replication of her knotting her husband. Piecing, according to Schowalter, is «an art of making do and eking out, an art of ingenuity, and conservation. It reflects the fragmentation of women's time, the scrappiness and uncertainty of women's creative or solitary moments» (149). Mrs. Hale recognises that the rambling mixing and matching of fragments is not only the product of an interrupted life, but the gendered metaphor for abuse and exploitation. Moreover, her knots are also reminiscent of two distinctive meanings that the term incorporates. As the Oxford English Dictionary explains, firstly, they are the main point in a problem, the complication in the plot of the drama. In fact, *Trifles* revolves around a question of a murder by knotting and a reading of quilt knotting. And secondly, both issues merge into another sense of the term –that of the marriage tie. Minnie's irregular knots stand then for her attempt to break asunder the bond –or better bondage– to her husband. Hence, the subversion of aesthetic decisions –the disruption of what should be seen as repetitive, obsessive and compulsive in the log cabin pattern of the quilt– reflects the inscription of a new order for women which Mrs. Hale deciphers, though only to restore it to its initial order soon after.

In the same way, Mrs. Peters becomes also a proficient reader of Minnie's text because she finally finds clues in her own life that replicate her neighbour's. The killing of the bird –the death and silencing of the singing voice of Minnie– allegedly by John is the traditional strategy used by the male dominated society to keep itself in power. Mrs. Peters imagines Minnie's desolation when her bird had its neck wrung and remembers her own grief after a young boy killed her kitten and her loneliness after the death of her first child. Yet for her this implies a painful process of conversion since «the law has got to punish crime» and seems to have been alienated from her own potential for sisterly response. Mrs. Peters is a good example of how women have internalized otherness and it has made them unable to speak in the language of the self that arouses fantasies of guilt and anxiety. Mr. Henderson underscores his male sanctioning of the women's acts when he reaffirms Mrs. Peters' definition as a woman «married to the law» thus reconstituting her from the masculine point of view and implicitly warning her of the perils of shedding that definition.

The logical question now is –why do men refuse to read Minnie's text? When they are confronted with the visible signs of Minnie's life, they respond: «Nothing here but kitchen things», «a nice mess», «trifles». The uncovered hidden signs of Minnie's presence –her bread set, her preserves, her clothes, her sewing basket– are ridiculed as women's things. For Henderson, as the embodiment of the voice of authority, it becomes vital to sanction the legend of John's life as that of a good man because that would perpetuate the perceptions and order of the world by the dominant group. Not only this, if men recognised Minnie's text as it is articulated through the signs in the kitchen, they would inevitably be lead to face the fact that subversion to their system is within the possibilities of the dominated group and thus they would suffer the loss of its control. Moreover, this would impinge on their private lives as they would have to apply the lesson to their own home situations. Men would rather

leave Minnie's kitchen disarranged because introducing order into this chaos would ultimately force them to introduce chaos into their apparently tidy private and public selves.

The paradox here is that for Mrs. Hale the only crime that nobody is going to pay for is her ignorance of Minnie, her reluctance to overcome her own disgust and provide some consolation for her loneliness. *Trifles* works by a system of reflections. She and Mrs. Peters solve the mystery because they identify with what they discover. The kitchen text taps their awareness that as women «we all go through the same things». Moreover, the reading of Minnie's text has displayed its potential for giving them a knowledge of their own selves, for putting them in contact with their real situation in life. Minnie's text acts as a mirror in which they recognise each other. Minnie's condemnation to silence is used as a weapon of resistance to give her, contrasting the patriarchal language, a space where she can build up her own self. However, when Mrs. Hale pulls out stitches that are not very well sewed in Minnie's quilt to erase evidence of the murder, she is unconsciously destroying Minnie's radical assertion as an artist. The frustration of the woman struggling to create an appropriate form for her experience within a patriarchal culture increasingly indifferent or even hostile to women's domestic lives is then reinforced. Minnie's story is to such a degree subversive that she ends up in defeat. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters keep silent because, paradoxically, the only way to save Minnie is by adapting to the idiom of the dominant group and to reading like them. Mrs. Hale fears that men are trying to «get her own house to turn against her», and the only way to counteract this act of betrayal is by another act of sedition—turning Minnie's homely text in her favor. Unfortunately, this implies erasing it. As Ozieblo puts it, «although the women rebel against traditional mores, they are all effectively silenced» (*The Provincetown* 11). And Minnie's name stands for that symbolical minimizing that reduces her voice to the «mini» proportions of a miniature.

Mr. Henderson's unwillingness to delve into details is indication of the fact that his suspicions may turn into real evidence, since when men look into the apparent clear surface of domesticity what they are forced to come to terms with is their own oppressive patriarchal structures that can be demolished from the inside, using the strategies they themselves have already provided. As Judith Fetterley puts it, «it is not simply the case that men can not recognize or read women's texts; it is, rather, that they will not» (152). Instead, they laugh off intimations of female truth. «Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was going to quilt it. She was going to —what is it you call it, ladies?», asks Henderson facetiously at the end of the play and thus forcing the women to sanction male control. In fact, when Mrs. Hale ends up the play responding «We call it —knot it, Mr. Henderson», she is depriving the key word of the play —«knot»— of all the polysemic load with which it has appeared on previous occasions and stripping it bare to Mr. Henderson's desire of fastening odds and ends with a binding spell. In a period where women were still politically silenced and invisible, Glaspell's play acquires more disturbing tones as she shows how the seeds of the destruction of patriarchy are profoundly imbedded in the private sphere. She articulates the home as political. Minnie Wright is regarded as a monstrous exceptional case, not to be publicized and thrown openly into the world, but rather to

be inserted back into the domestic order so as not to destabilize social utopian thought on the mystique of the powerlessness of isolated women. In that sense, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters's silence is less an act of sisterly bonding than an act of collective suicide. They recognize themselves in Minnie's story but fail to join her in her struggle to transform society and change the world. Yet the way their perspective becomes fallaciously assimilated into the generic masculine evinces the political oppression under which women lived in 1916 and is a metaphor for the acts of survival they had to undertake in the androcentric world.

Susan Glaspell helped found the modern movement in American drama with this one-act play whose structural restrictions enhance its tensions and meaning. *Trifles* unveils «distinctive and complicated value structures that could constructively alter social relations» (Keysar 27). As such *Trifles* attests to Foucault's related reason in *Discipline and Punish* for keeping prisoners alive, moving punishment indoors, and changing discipline from physical torture into mental rehabilitation. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters's revolt is quiet and only effective in the sense that –it seems– they save Minnie Wright from condemnation. Women's rebellion here falls back on muted dissent and not overt disruption. Hence, the play becomes more of «an awakening to the dilemmas of womanhood» (Ozieblo, *The Provincetown* 19), than a radical tackling of them. Yet as audience witnesses to the process of revelation, we are left with the option to do otherwise if we allow ourselves to read into Minnie's story and see to what extent «we all go through the same things».

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