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Place and Gender in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and *Woman's Honor* *

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Abstract

Recognized today as the mother of American drama, Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) plays an important role in 20th-century American literature. Her plays were commercially and critically welcome by the people of her time, but faded from public interest after her death. It is not until feminists in the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement that Glaspell finally reclaims her reputation. Glaspell, portraying the Midwest in her works, is usually labeled as a local colorist. However, this paper re-reads Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916) and *Woman's Honor* (1918) from the perspectives of place and gender in order to explore the interrelationship between the two in Glaspell's works, such as how place identity is associated with gender identity and how gender relations are constructed in a place. In light of such a new reading, Glaspell becomes a feminist geographer.

Keywords: Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*, *Woman's Honor*, sense of place, women and crime

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1.Introduction

Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) plays an important role in 20th-century American literature;[1] particularly, her plays and theater, Provincetown Players founded by her and her husband George Cram Cook (1873-1924), are closely connected with the Little Theatre Movement in America (Gainor, *Susan Glaspell* 10-11). Recognized as "the first modern American theater company" (Ben-Zvi 1), Provincetown Players, which was influenced by European expressionism (Shafer 182), developed several significant and pioneering modern playwrights in the history of American drama. Among them, Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell are the two most outstanding dramatists. Their reputation and status in history are usually described as "O'Neill was the undisputed father of American drama, Glaspell the mother" (Ben-Zvi 1). However, unlike O'Neill's popularity, it is not until the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement that Glaspell's plays finally gain considerable visibility (Ozieblo 14). In fact, her plays were commercially and critically welcome by the people of her time, especially the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Alison's House* (1930), which solidified her status in the history of American drama.[2] Thanks to the feminists' intention to re-read and re-discover texts written by women in the 1970s, Glaspell's works, including plays, novels, and short stories, caught critics' attention again.

Usually considered as a realistic playwright, Glaspell, influenced by the landscape of her home state Iowa in the Midwest (or the Middle West), is good at using the prairie and the flatness of the Midwest as the setting of her works. Her plays are filled with a strong sense of place, such as the Midwestern local color in *Trifles* (1916), *Close the Book* (1917), *Woman's Honor* (1918), and *Inheritors* (1921); therefore, Glaspell is labeled as a local colorist or regional writer (Alkalay-Gut 9). Since the 1980s, as Chris Barker observes, the relation between space and place has been re-examined (*SAGE* 144); place is no longer a land to be merely described or drawn; rather, "a place is understood to be a site or location in

1 Susan Glaspell's birth year is debatable. Some critics argue that she was born in 1882; for example, the editor of *Drama for Students*, David Galens, states, "On July 1, 1882, Susan Glaspell was born in Davenport, Iowa" (217). However, according to new research, it is likely and believed that Glaspell was born in Davenport, Iowa in 1876 (Bigsby 32).

2 Although *Alison's House* won a Pulitzer Prize for Susan Glaspell in 1931, it is considered by many critics not to be her best play (Ozieblo 19). In addition, Glaspell is the second female playwright to receive the Pulitzer Prize, the first one being Zona Gale (1874-1938) for her work *Miss Lulu Bett* in 1921.

space constituted and made meaningful by social relations of power and marked by identifications or emotional investments" (144).[3] In other words, place is a field full of social power, human activities and daily experience. In light of such an understanding of place, feminists, such as Linda McDowell, propose a "feminist geography" to investigate the different experience of men and women in place and the construction of gender in place (McDowell 12). Enlightened by the new interpretation of place and feminist geography, this paper analyzes Glaspell's two one-act plays, *Trifle*s and *Woman's Honor*, to explain how the sense of place is associated with gender relations and how gender relations are constructed differently in a place.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to an exploratory discussion of place and the Midwest of the United States, and it claims that place is never an isolated, fixed and homogenous location because "crime" obviously symbolizes transgression and destruction in a place. *Trifles* and *Woman's Honor* both involve crime cases. The investigation of the crime reveals how women are shaped and constructed by social conventions in a place; therefore, the following two parts study the two plays respectively in the hope of a further understanding of the complicated relationship between place and gender.

2. Reconsiderations of Place and the Midwest

Susan Glaspell has been regarded as a realistic local colorist, and critics admire her contribution to "the canon of Midwestern American literature" and "her use of frontier landscapes and elements of her Iowa upbringing" (Trudeau 144). According to M. H. Abrams, the meaning of local color is "[t]he detailed representation in prose fiction of the setting, dialect, customs, dress, and ways of thinking and feeling which are distinctive of a particular region" (145). From this perspective, Glaspell indeed is a local colorist, who successfully utilizes the life in the Middle West in her works. While *Trifles* is set in a remote rural farm in the Midwest and full of Midwestern dialect, *Woman's Honor* depicts Iowan customs about a woman's reputation. The two plays display a strong sense of the Midwest and illustrate that Glaspell is a master of writing about this region.

Studying a place by examining the specialty of a region, such as the Middle

3 Chris Barker clearly explains the difference between space and place. While space "refers to an abstract idea, an empty or dead space which is filled with various concrete, specific and human places" (*Cultural Studies* 292), places "are discursive constructions which are the target of emotional identification or investment" (293).

West in Glaspell's works, is usually called "a descriptive approach to place" (Cresswell 51). Like the critics who celebrate Glaspell's usage of the characteristics of the Middle West in her works, the proponents of this approach are concerned with "the distinctiveness and particularity of places" (51). This approach indicates the concept of place as "a unique and particular entity" (51). To emphasize the specialty of a place is to highlight the homogeneity of a certain place and to exclude the other simultaneously. Place, in this way, is restricted within a certain region or a setting of an event; place is enclosed and static. Then to conclude that Glaspell's plays are full of Midwestern traits and a strong sense of the Middle West is natural and inevitable since she adapts the Midwest in her works. However, this approach does not take the elements of social construction, such as power, gender, class, and religion, to name but a few, into consideration in the development of a region. This approach thus takes place for granted, viewing it as existing for itself.

In order to review the relation between gender and place, "a social constructionist approach to place" (Cresswell 51) is helpful. As suggested by the title, this approach considers place as a social construction, which emphasizes human forces instead of nature. To describe a place as a social construct is to talk of "the way we experience that place, the meanings we ascribe to it" (30). It is humans who give the place meanings; places do not have an inherent or essential meaning. Hence, when it comes to defining places, it is important to decipher "how these places are instances of wider process of the construction of place in general under conditions of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, post-colonialism and a host of other structural conditions" (51). Place, in this approach, is a discursive construction which is relative with social institutions and power.[4]

If place is created by people, then the sense of place and the identity of place are also socially constructed and man-made. Gillian Rose explicitly explains that "although senses of place may be very personal, they are not entirely the result of one individual's feelings and meanings; rather, such feelings and meanings are shaped in large part by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves" (89). That is to say, the sense of place and the identity of place are not inherent naturally; instead, it is people who produce them through

4 Cresswell explains three approaches to place. In addition to "a descriptive approach to place" and "a social constructionist approach to place," he also points out "a phenomenological approach of place," which "seeks to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessarily and importantly 'in-place'" (51). This paper intends to explore the relationship between place and gender, so the phenomenological approach, which is interested in neither the distinctiveness of places nor the social forces involved in the construction of places, will not be discussed here.

interacting with power relations in social institutions, as Rose explains that "senses of place develop from every aspect of individuals' life experience and that senses of place pervade everyday life and experience" (88).

To emphasize place as a social construction has multiple meanings. First, it helps to examine the interaction between people and place, to discover the power relations under the everyday practices, and to understand how regional ideology constructs people who live there. In addition, this approach avoids understanding place as static site, which is limited within boundaries. "It is socio-spatial practices that defines places," describes Linda McDowell, and "these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion" (4). Talking about a place is not merely the description of the place or the distinctiveness and specialty of it; rather, it is everyday practices that decide place and simultaneously destruct the boundary of it. Interpreted in this way, it is no wonder Cresswell claims, "Places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never 'finished' but are constantly being performed" (37). The process of creating place lasts forever; it is constantly produced by generations following generations.

Feminists, taking this approach to study place, see place as a social construction, and they assert a new approach to place called "feminist geography." Linda McDowell explains the aim and the purpose of a feminist geography as the following:

> The specific aim of a feminist geography, therefore, is to investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness. Thus the purpose here is to examine the extent to which women and men experience spaces and places differently and to show how these differences themselves are part of the social constitution of gender as well as that of place. (12)

Briefly speaking, feminists care about the relationship between place and gender, intending to uncover the taken-for-granted and seemingly natural relation between the two. They believe that women's and men's experiences of place are different and the differences constitute gender relations in society. In other words, gender is constructed differently in place, and the identification of place influences gender relations and interactions. Doreen Massey also argues that "geography matters to gender" (177), and she claims that "geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply

influential in the production of 'the geographical'" (177). For many feminist geographers, to deconstruct the ideology of spatial division of the public and the private particularly is the main target. McDowell confirms that "spatial division" is important "in the social construction of gender divisions" (12). Therefore, gender should be taken into consideration of place and vice versa.

Considering place as a social construction, this paper appropriates the feminist geographers' argument to discuss place from the perspective of gender. Through the lens of such an idea of place, the Middle West in Glaspell's plays no longer serves as the background of the events, but instead it is the main character, the protagonist, who is connected with the developments of the story and characters and who is an embodiment of social and cultural conventions. The Middle West is widely recognized as "the cultural core of the nation" (Shortridge 209), the "heartland" of the United States (209), "the most American part of America" (213), and "the true heart of the country" (213). Famous for treeless prairies, it is characterized as "stability" and "prosperity" and seen as a "pastoral paradise" because of its "ideal mixture of youthful (or Western) and mature (or Eastern) cultural traits" (213). John Fraser Hart observes that people who come to the Middle West are "materialists" and they believe hard work through farming is a virtue (265). Hart (281) and Shortridge (209) both notice the trait of xenophobia in the Midwest, and Hart even further explains that the pressure of xenophobia forces the people there into a single homogeneous life style (281). In addition to the physical homogeneity, which is endless treeless prairies, the inner social exercise is highly homogeneous, too. The homogeneity of the Middle West isolates itself, and isolation simultaneously keeps the place harmonious and peaceful without the danger from the outside (281). Nevertheless, in Glaspell's plays, this harmonious place is destroyed by crimes, which are committed by women. That is to say, the closed, static and stable Middle West in fact is full of conflicts. The female criminals also show that the gender relations in the Midwest are challenged and shaken to be re-constructed.

Place is never static or immobile, and the explosion of crime represents the destruction and possibility of change in a place. Although the Midwest is highly homogeneous, both environmentally and socially, crime displays inner conflicts beneath the harmonious surface. The bursting out of crime symbolizes the break of the connection between people and place and challenges people's identity of place and their sense of place. Thus the events of crime explicitly illustrate what Massey claims, place "is absolutely not static" (155) or what McDowell argues, "places are contested, fluid and uncertain" (4). Cresswell further points out that transgression itself manifests the unnatural and man-made connection between people and place; as long as people lose the sense of identity of place, transgression, such as crime, explodes out. He proposes that "people, things and practices were often strongly

linked to particular places and that when this link was broken—when people acted 'out of place'—they were deemed to have committed a 'transgression'" (27). Glaspell's *Trifles* and *Woman's Honor* are both crime stories. In *Trifles*, a typical Midwestern farmer dies and his wife is suspected to be the murderer. In *Woman's Honor*, a man who is accused of murder refuses to provide an alibi because he has to protect a woman's honor. The crimes in both plays give a sense of fluidity to the seemingly static Middle West, and they indicate that women are no longer satisfied with the positions and the identity that place gives them. Gender relations are then questioned and deconstructed while "the Midwest" is deconstructed, too.

3. *Trifles*: Female Murderers and Detectives in the Kitchen

Premiering in 1916, *Trifles* solidified Glaspell's reputation and status in the history of American drama.[5] The story is based on a true event that happened in Iowa, Glaspell's home state, in 1900, when the dramatist worked as a reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News* (Bendel-Simso 291). *Trifles* is a murder story, and as such is considered a part of the detective subgenre by many critics (Gainor, *Susan Glaspell* 44-45). In the story, John Wright is found dead in his bed, and the major suspect is his wife, Minnie Foster Wright, because she does not wake up when her husband is strangled to death beside her. Three men, including a county attorney, a sheriff, and a neighboring farmer who finds the corpse, and two women, one Minnie's friend and the other the sheriff's wife, come to the crime scene to investigate the case and to gather some personal belongings for Minnie, who now is in jail. Because of gender differences and the men's sexist attitude, which looks down upon women's everyday trifles, the men cannot find evidence or a motive. Meanwhile, due to sympathy and female bonding, the two women, becoming detectives, successfully find the truth and hide the evidence from men.[6]

Critics find the play a good example to explain gender difference and the importance of sisterhood. For example, Suzy Clarkson Holstein suggests "two models of perception and behavior" (282) in the play; Phyllis Mael describes it as

5 *Trifles* was staged in 1916, and then Glaspell rewrote it as a short story "Jury of Her Peers" in 1917. The two works become a classical one-act play and a classical short story, respectively, in the history of American literature.

6 The actual event occurred on December 1, 1900 in Iowa. Margaret Hossack was accused of killing her husband, John Hossack, by an ax while he slept. Without enough evidence, Margaret was eventually released (Stormer 510).

"two different modes of judging" (283). As for the meaning of two women's decision at the end, Karen Alkalay-Gut asserts the significance of "the community of women" (1); Ozieblo names "the importance of women bonding" (66); Beverly A. Smith designates "female bonding" (192). This paper, however, claims that not every woman can develop sisterhood or form female bonding; instead, only women who have a similar geographical background and a similar sense of place can sympathize with each other and create a bonding. Therefore, due to the similar frustration or dissatisfaction arising from the patriarchal gender relations in the Middle West, the two women can recognize the clues and further decide to hide the truth in order to challenge the male-centered judicial system.

Trifles is a detective story; especially, the bleak and closed Middle West provides the crime with a stage. Reading the play from L. David Allen's five elements of a detective story, we realize that "the setting" is the Midwest, Iowa in particular; "the victim" is John Wright, who is strangled to death; "the murderer" is supposed to be John's wife, Minnie Foster Wright; "the suspect" is Minnie; "the detectives" are two women and three men (5). Hence, as one of the five elements of a detective story, the setting is crucial. The best setting is "a closed society" because "all the members of the story are potential suspects" (5). In this way, the isolation of the Midwest offers a closed environment for the setting of a criminal case. Also, because of xenophobia in the Middle West, the murderer is supposed to be within society, which turns everyone into suspects.

Trifles is full of Midwestern color. Arthur E. Waterman delineates "the Midwestern qualities of the play" as the following: "With its precise realism, exact details, accurate dialogue, and conscious awareness of certain Midwestern ingredients, it is local color on stage" (145). The stage is very Midwestern: a gloomy kitchen, unwashed pans, unbaked bread, uncompleted work, an empty rocking chair, a plain table, and a stove that does not work. All of them represent the bleak, empty and closed geographical background of the Middle West. Ozieblo explains that Glaspell is influenced by European expressionism, so the stage is very expressionist, which conveys an idea of "concision" (63). The concision of the setting in the play echoes the emptiness of the Midwest, and the strong sense of place is thus created at the very beginning when the curtain rises.

The Midwestern color is not only emphasized through the stage, but also expressed through the description of John Wright, the absent character who never appears on stage. John is a typical Midwestern farmer, who earns his life by working on the family farm. Hart explains that farming in the Middle West suggests "a Good Thing" (271) because it delivers an idea that "hard work is virtue" (272), and more crucially this "family farm ideology took root and flourished in the Middle West"

(272). John is thus a classical good Midwestern farmer. Mrs. Peters says, "They say he was a good man" (42), and Mrs. Hale replies, "Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts" (42). In addition, like the simplicity of the empty prairie, John likes simplicity and silence. Refusing to share a telephone line with neighbors, he prefers quietness. Mr. Hale talks to County Attorney, "I spoke to Wright about it [sharing a telephone line] once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself . . ." (36). His inclination to silence explains the reason why he kills Minnie's singing canary. Moreover, rejection of a telephone also symbolizes a voluntary isolation from the others; he stays in a simple, silent, and closed environment, which precisely represents the traits of the Middle West.

Doreen Massey argues that geography matters to gender and vice versa, and examining spatial division is a good approach to explore gender development and gender relations in a place (179). Linda McDowell also expresses, "But gender relations are also of central concern for geographers because of the way in which a spatial division—that between the public and the private, between inside and outside—plays such a central role in the social construction of gender divisions" (12). Thus, studying the spatial segregation in *Trifles* reveals the uneven power relations between the two sexes. While John enjoys the reputation of "a good man" in public, Minnie is restricted within the private without a social life. According to Mrs. Hale, Minnie's friend since childhood, Minnie did not communicate with people nor did she join Ladies' Aid. She used to sing in the church choir, but she became completely limited to the house after marriage. What was worse was that John refused to share a telephone line, so she was isolated in the large and empty Middle West. It is obvious that Minnie, without children, is confined to the house alone, and the spatial division further limits her social life and changes her personality. As Mrs. Hale observes, "How—she—did—change" (43).

For many critics, home "is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness" (Cresswell 24), but "home as a fundamental place has been questioned by feminists" (25). Usually considered as women's sphere, home can be a place of abuse and drudgery. Minnie's home is a good example to show that home is a place of psychological and physical abuse for some women. First, restricting Minnie within the house without a social life is a kind of psychological abuse. Although the spatial division is a convention in the patriarchal society, John makes this segregation stricter. He, refusing to have a telephone and killing Minnie's pet canary, requires absolute quietness at home. Mrs. Hale seldom visits Minnie because she explains: "It never seemed a very cheerful place" (39), and "I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it" (39). It

is apparent that Minnie suffers from her husband's psychological abuse at home, but more shockingly, Smith claims there is "the possibility that John physically battered Minnie" (195). The reason that Minnie does not join the church choir or Ladies' Aid may be because battered women tend to isolate themselves from others to avoid revealing how they really live (196).[7] All in all, Minnie, a rural Midwestern woman, is confined to the house; worse, home cannot provide her with safety.

If the Middle West is a closed and static place, then Minnie is "doubly" isolated due to the reason of the isolation of Iowa and her isolation within the house. Place matters to gender; the place of the Middle West gives Minnie a strong sense of alienation, which is shared with rural Midwestern women. Unlike Mrs. Hale who has known Minnie since childhood, Mrs. Peters did not know her before but she gradually understands Minnie when she finds the clues that Minnie leaves in the kitchen. Discovering the strangled canary, Mrs. Peters thinks of her kitten which was violently killed by a boy, and cries, "When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—(*covers her face an instant*) If they hadn't held me back I would have—(*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*)—hurt him" (43). She understands the anger that would lead people to hurt the perpetrator. Furthermore, when Mrs. Peters realizes Minnie's lonely life, she also understands the strong sense of loneliness and isolation because of the memory of her dead son. She explains, "I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—" (44). This sense of loneliness is shared with rural Midwestern women, and due to a similar experience in the same place, Mrs. Peters, the sheriff's wife who is married to the law, finally decides to hide the evidence and cover up the truth.

As Cresswell comments, "transgression" occurs when the link between people and place is broken and when the sense of place is no longer identified by people (27). Similarly, the crime that Minnie commits symbolizes the connection between her and the Middle West is cut off. Minnie's transgression indicates that the sexist gender relation in the Midwest is challenged. Using murder, "the most dramatic way to disrupt the society" (Allen 5), Minnie accuses the patriarchal society in the Midwest, and her violence symbolically destroys the seemingly static and highly homogeneous society. More importantly, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters' identification with Minnie's crime manifests not only the sense of isolation arising from place but also a sense of sisterhood developed from similar experiences in the same place. Mrs.

7 There is no direct and crucial evidence in the play to show that Minnie was physically abused by John, but in the actual case, Margaret Hossack suffered from her husband's physical violence (Stormer 510).

Hale regrets not having visited Minnie, weeping, "I might have known she needed help! I know 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 thing" (44). Like Mrs. Peters who understands Minnie's anger and loneliness, Mrs. Hale also suffers from "the same things" but in different kind of ways. These three women, therefore, in a way are the same. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters could also potentially commit the same crime Minnie commits. Due to similar experiences, the two female detectives hide the dead canary, which serves as an important piece of evidence suggesting a motive for murdering John, and conceal the truth to help the murderess, Minnie. Hence, the sisterhood or woman bonding is created by the same sense of place, which provides women with a similar sense of alienation, the pressure of spatial division, and an inferior status in the social gender hierarchy.

Trifles is rediscovered in the second wave of the women's movement, and it is usually used as an example of "how the bonding between women can combat injustice and domestic violence" (Ozieblo 14). Sisterhood, thus, is a slogan in this feminist movement. Nevertheless, reading *Trifles* from the perspective of feminist geography reminds us of a significant element in creating woman bonding: a similar sense of place for a group of women. It is now well-known that the differences in sisterhood are class, race, and sexuality (hooks, *Feminist* 61), but *Trifles* suggests another disparity: place. Place is characterized by its specialty, like the isolated Middle West; nevertheless, place is never static, and the gender relations developed from place could be challenged and even deconstructed by human effort. Sisterhood shows women's dissatisfaction with the sexist and patriarchal society and their determination to shake the social system. However, the precondition of woman bonding lies in the same sense of place.

4. *Woman's Honor*: Female Suspects in the Room

In *Trifles*, two female detectives, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, based on the similar experience in the Midwest, challenge patriarchal gender relations by hiding crucial evidence from men. In *Woman's Honor*, six unnamed madams, based on the same Midwestern custom, question the meaning of honor by admitting to doing things dishonorable. Like *Trifles*, *Woman's Honor* is about a crime adapted from an actual event.[8] A man, called Gordon Wallace, is accused of murder. He refuses to

8 In 1915, Joseph Hillstrom (Joe Hill) was executed for murder, but historians find that "Hill may possibly have been wrongfully convicted because of his refusal to name—and thereby slander—the (probably married) woman whom he was with at the time of the

give an alibi because he believes that he would destroy a woman's honor by doing so. Without telling Wallace, the Lawyer, Mr. Foster, releases the news to the press in the hope of saving Wallace's life. Surprisingly, many women are willing to provide Wallace with an alibi despite the fact that they must sacrifice their honor to do so. Glaspell played Mrs. Hale at the premiere of *Trifles* 1916; similarly, the dramatist played one of the women, the Cheated One, when *Woman's Honor* was first staged in 1918.

Unlike *Trifles* which clearly is located in the Midwest, Iowa in particular, *Woman' Honor* occurs in "a room in the sheriff's house which is used for conferences" (121). However, *Woman's Honor* is also one of the plays that Glaspell writes for her home state Iowa, and it is also influenced by her experiences as a reporter for a local newspaper in Iowa. This play is based on an Iowan law, which claims that women in Iowa must maintain their "reputation," virtue in other words, in order to keep their social status. Gainor in "*Woman's Honor* and the Critique of Slander Per Se" explains,

> In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Iowa courts entertained a series of cases where female plaintiffs sought redress for slanderous accusations of sexual immorality. The judgments made clear that in Iowa, respectability in women was tied to sexual reputation and that "married women needed to maintain such reputations" to retain their social standing and community membership. (75)

Therefore, the sense of place in *Woman's Honor* is generated from the custom of women's reputation in Iowa, and simultaneously this man-made custom forces local women to identify with it. "Women's honor" is a male-centered idea, and it turns out to be a false consciousness, which local women believe is true, and to generate a strong sense of place for Midwestern women.

As the first part of the paper explains, place is a social construction by human beings, and by implication, the sense of place and place identity are also socially and culturally constructed. Gillian Rose notes that the sense of place is "shaped in large

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murder" (Gainor, "Woman's Honor" 68). Critics are not one-hundred percent sure that Glaspell's *Woman's Honor* is based on this piece of news, but it is certain that Glaspell's plays reflected social and cultural trends of her time (67). That she would have known of the incident when writing the play is not unlikely (68-69). Meanwhile, it is certain that Glaspell's *Trifles* is adapted from the murder case committed by Margaret Hossack, as Glaspell mentions in her works (Ozieblo 60-61).

part by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which *individuals find themselves*" (89, emphasis added). Rose's comment reminds us of Louis Althusser's explanation of ideology. Althusser describes ideology as "a material existence" (165). Performed by people's actions, ideology exists in behavior, practices, activities or customs. When people are doing or acting, they are "hailed" or "interpellated" as subjects (173). In other words, when women adhere to the custom of maintaining their reputations in Iowa, they are "hailed" as Iowan women and they "find themselves" in the gender hierarchy in Iowa. Thus, the sense of place becomes a kind of ideology that restricts women's behavior and shapes women as men wish, yet the "subject" of being a woman in Iowa is in fact an "imaginary" identity, because Althusser explains, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). Thus, women in *Woman's Honor* live in an ideology of a socially constructed sense of place by adhering to this custom in Iowa.

Woman's Honor, like *Trifles*, is a crime story, and appropriating Cresswell's explanation of "transgression" in place, the behavior of committing crime could be understood as a break of connection between place and people who live in it (27). Also, crime symbolizes the bursting out of the inner conflicts beneath the seemingly peaceful society, and it manifests place never be a fixed, static and homogenous region. Using a very different tone from *Trifles*, Glaspell hilariously portrays two different attitudes toward crime committed by women in *Woman's Honor*. Like the absent character, Minnie in *Trifles*, the absent but centered character in *Woman's Honor* is the woman who spends the night with Wallace. In order to shield her honor, Wallace, holding a romantic and chivalric spirit, refuses to tell her name despite the fact that he would die for his decision. However, Wallace's silence is thought "old-fashioned" and "quaint" by his lawyer (121). Mr. Foster releases the news to the press because he expects: "Wives—including, I hope, juror's wives—will cry, 'Don't let that chivalrous young man die!' Women just love to have their honor shielded. It is very touching to them" (124). The contrast between romantic Wallace and misogynic Foster is not merely a comic effect in the play, but it shows the two attitudes in fact are the same. The two attitudes reflect two images of women in a male-dominated society. As described by bell hooks, women are "madonnas or whores" (*Feminism* 85). Because women are madonnas, Wallace has to protect the lady; because women are whores, Mr. Foster has to find her out in order to punish her. Their attitudes toward women's honor are different, but both are derived from patriarchal ideology.

Unexpectedly, six women are willing to provide Wallace an alibi, and their decisions seem hilarious but not without meaning. Although they have different reasons at the beginning, they finally realize that "the concept of woman's honor is a

way to limit and dehumanize women" (Makowsky 173). Different from the men who have names in the play, these women are nameless and only can be identified by their characteristics: the Shielded One, the Motherly One, the Scornful One, the Silly One, the Mercenary One, and the Cheated One. Their names might be "expressionistic" (Shafer 185) or "allegorical" (Ozieblo 37), but it is clear that the names suggest different femininities that patriarchal society conceives. They come to save Wallace's life at the price of women's honor by pretending they are the one whom Wallace spent the night with. The comic effect is generated from the arguments that the six women all want to be the one. The Motherly One claims, "You see, I'm in the habit of trying to save lives" (136). The Scornful One proposes that "if the sacrifice of a woman's honor is going to save a man's life, let me, who have none, nobly sacrifice mine" (138). Meanwhile, the Silly One, in order to fulfill her romantic fantasy toward love like the Shielded One, confuses the lawyer with Wallace, hilariously hugging the lawyer and hysterically shouts, "Darling! I cannot let you die for me!" (131). The Mercenary One even indicates that Wallace can buy an alibi from her by saying, "A business proposition is a business proposition. What a man needs and can pay for –"(142). The sixth woman, the Cheated One, explains that she wants to be the one for her personal experience of being cheated. Every woman is eager and anxious to be the woman who loses honor to save Wallace.

It is not until the Scornful One and the Shielded One ask what woman's honor is that the other women start to redefine it, and then they further form a female bonding. Precisely, when women begin to question the custom in Iowa, they sense that they are performing the ideology of women's honor, which in fact is a patriarchal convention instead of an essential element of femininity. Pointing out the difference between a woman's honor and man's honor, the Scornful One asks the other women: "Did it ever strike you as funny that woman's honor is only about one thing, and that man's honor is about everything but that thing? [*After waiting for the answer which does not come*.] Now woman's honor means woman's virtue. But this lady for whom you propose to die has no virtue" (134). The Scornful One is aware of society's double standard for the sexes: woman's honor means woman's virtue only, but man's honor is multiple. As the Iowan custom defines, a woman's "respectability" refers to "sexual reputation" only (Gaino, "*Woman's Honor*" 75). Realizing social hypocrisy and the sexist idea of woman's honor, the Scornful One concludes, "Why, woman's honor would have died out long ago if it hadn't been for men's talk about it" (139).

In addition, the Shielded One, declaring that women are tired of having their honor saved, encourages the other sisters to give up the male-centered idea of woman's honor. She asserts, "Oh, I hope you women can work out some way to free us from men's noble feelings about it! I speak for all the women of my—[*Hesitates*]

under-world, all those others smothered under men's lofty sentiments toward them! . . . After all [*Growing a little wild*] are we not your sisters? Our honor has been saved so many times. We are tired" (146). The Shielded One reveals women's hypocritical self-sacrifice due to fulfilling the femininity that men require, and her argument is a demand of a "female bonding" (Gainor, *Susan Glaspell* 85). Particularly, she states, "Oh, is it true that women will not help one another?" (151), all the while knowing the answer is "No."

Based on the same convention in a place, women unconsciously exercise the ideology of women's honor. Only when a crime occurs do women start to think of the meaning of the custom and the gender identification developed by their sense of place. Like the women in *Trifles*, the women in *Woman's Honor* also form a sisterhood, a female bonding, which is due to the similar experience in the same place. Gainor comments, "It is here that Glaspell reveals the patriarchal constructs underlying the convention; honor, like other aspects of women's identity, is a male creation foisted upon women but one that they accept begrudgingly or even embrace unquestioningly within male-dominated society" (*Susan Glaspell* 85). Women start to question the convention, but men in *Woman's Honor* still maintain their superiority in gender relations, unwilling to give up the male-centered custom. Wallace would rather die than discuss or redefine the meaning of women's honor with the six women. He ends the play by concluding, "Oh, hell. I'll plead guilty" (156). For him, the absent woman is supposed to be absent forever; otherwise, he cannot fulfill his chivalric romance and the role of savior. He does not redefine the meaning of woman's honor because he agrees with the only meaning of woman's honor, that is, woman's virtue.

5. Conclusion

Of the seven one-act plays Glaspell wrote, *Trifles* is "one of the most frequently anthologized American dramas" (Smith 192) while *Woman's Honor* is "the most broadly comic of her plays" (Gainor, *Susan Glaspell* 82). One deals with the Midwest, and the other describes a convention in Iowa. Both plays deliver a strong sense of place, and the crime stories in them reveal that place is full of inner conflicts. There exists the possibility of change by man-made effort and social construction instead of being static or descriptive only. Due to similar experiences by each in Iowa, the female detectives in *Trifles* find out the truth and challenge the patriarchal judicial system; similarly, because of suffering from the same sexist custom of woman's honor in Iowa, voluntary female suspects in *Woman's Honor* redefine the meaning of honor to question patricidal society.

From this perspective, place and gender interact in Glaspell's plays, and Glaspell's reputation as a local colorist or regional writer should be reconsidered in a new and thorough way. Kent C. Ryden explains that because of insufficient history of the Middle West, the Midwestern regional writer is writing place and history at the same time (513). He further proposes the importance of regional writers in two ways. First, "such a writer takes the region as his or her subject matter, with region construed not simply as territory but also as the prevailing, defining histories which lend identity to that territory" (523). Glaspell, in this light, does not merely describe the place of the Midwest, but she also writes history in order to create a sense of regional identity in the Midwest. Second, regional writers give place meanings "through reconfirming readers in what they already think they know about a region" or "through challenging their assumptions" (523). From this point of view, Glaspell challenges the reader's assumptions of the Middle West by uncovering the complex relationship between gender and place. Therefore, Glaspell is a regional writer who cares about how gender is constructed in a place and how place is gendered. *Trifles* and *Woman's Honor* clearly manifested her feminist geographical idea in the early 20th century.

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蘇珊・葛列絲貝的《瑣事》與《女性的名譽》中的地方與性別

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摘 要

被視為是美國戲劇之母的蘇珊・葛列絲貝（Susan Glaspell 1876-1948）在二十世紀的美國文學占有重量級的地位。她的作品在她在世時受到學界與市場的雙重歡迎，但是卻在她過世之後乏人問津。直到第二波女性主義運動，葛列絲貝的作品再度受到重視。擅長描寫美國中西部的人文地方風景，葛列絲貝常被認為是地方色彩濃厚的的寫實主義者。然而，本文將從「地方」與「性別」的角度重新閱讀葛列絲貝的《瑣事》與《女性的名譽》，試圖探索劇作家如何處理地方與性別的交互關係，例如地方的認同如何與性別認同互動，而性別關係又如何在地方中被建立。這樣的閱讀方式說明葛列絲貝是位女性主義的地理學者。

關鍵詞：蘇珊・葛列絲貝 《瑣事》 《女性的名譽》 地方感 女性與犯罪

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