

Rethinking female identity in glaspells trifles english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Representation of female issues and relations is the focus of most plays by Glaspell. Her fascination with feminism, revealed in her early experiences as a short story writer, may comprise a reason of her obscurity owing to the fact that the process of canonization has always been conditioned to serve the interests of dominant power structures, chiefly patriarchy. Her most notable work in this regard is *Trifles* (1916) which has been considered a classic feminist by many critics. As she describes in the biography of her husband, *The Road to the Temple*, she based the story upon a murder trial she had to cover as a reporter (196). It was later developed to a short story called *A Jury of Her Peers*[1]; however, the play is under discussion in the present thesis due to its pertinence to Butler's theories. The play starts with describing the scene as a " gloomy kitchen" of an abandoned farmhouse in which a murder has taken place. The action starts with the entrance of the Sheriff, Mr. Peters, the County Attorney and a neighboring farmer, Mr. Hale. Being accompanied by their wives, they come to provide evidence which would charge Mrs. Wright with her husband's murder. While male characters leave the kitchen in the mistaken belief that there is " Nothing here but kitchen things", women remain in the kitchen noticing vital trifles that men ignored (38). Observing the mess in the kitchen, they deduce the bleakness of Minnie Wright's life. When they discover a dead canary in a little box, they conclude that Minnie had good reasons to kill her husband. Sharing a sense of desperation, women hide the evidence and resolve not to tell anyone about the proof they found. As a psychological profile of a desperate woman, *Trifles* has been extensively anthologized and regarded as a fundamental piece in women's studies. It has been frequently performed by various theater

companies, and it was adapted for a movie by Sally Heckle which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1981. This chapter is aimed at shedding critical light on *Trifles* and *The Outside* in respect of the presented female identity by Glaspell. *The Outside* (1917) is another play by Glaspell which is devoted to women's issues and their representation too. It is the shortest play of Glaspell which is not much written about despite its deep philosophy, as Papke calls it " Glaspell's first serious and highly philosophical drama of idea" (31). Rich in symbolism, *The Outside* is famed for its fusion of realism and symbolism which accentuates Glaspell's experimentalism (Gainor 75). The play deals with two women, taking refuge in an abandoned lifesaving station, try to extricate themselves from the great experienced loss. Considering Glaspell's chief preoccupation with spatial significance, the play starts with her detailed description of a former lifesaving station in which there is a dead body brought by lifesavers to revive him to life. Captain's command to keep trying to bring the victim back to life starts the only action of the play. When Mrs. Patrick, the present owner of the former station, enters, she gets angry asserting that " This is my house! And--I want my house to myself" (49). Now left by her husband, Mrs. Patrick lives with Allie Mayo who does not utter any " unnecessary word" since the death of her husband (51). In spite of Mrs. Patrick's constant refusal to reconnect to life, Allie is suddenly awakened to the necessity of being attached to the life. After a verbal struggle with Mrs. Patrick, Allie manages to save her life in opposition to male lifesavers who failed at saving the victim's life. Scholars such as Kristina Hinz-Bode and Ben-Zvi have extensively compared *The Outside* to *Trifles* in various terms of theme, characters and technique.

Having much in common, the two plays are taken to be analyzed in terms of female identity in this chapter. As the title of thesis suggests, the study involves both construction and deconstruction of female identity with an eye to Butler's theories of gender construction. In the first section of this chapter, Glaspell's attempts to deconstruct the oppressive imposed female identities are observed. Glaspell challenges the limiting female constructions through the notion of resistance implied by her protagonists and queerness which includes her characters, language and themes. Her plays are also explored semiotically, concerning the significance of symbols and language to deconstruction end. The second section, which is devoted to the construction of female identity, deals with Butler's theory of performance that how performativity can construct new gender identities under certain circumstances. Referring to the double edged nature of performance, Glaspell's dramaturgy is explored both in terms of construction and deconstruction of female identities.

3. 1 Performance as Revolution: Deconstructing Constructed Female Identities

According to Elaine Aston, the fact that feminism has regarded theater as a sign-system would provide revolutionary potential for theatrical space (28). Besides, feminist theater has always been associated with challenging the sign of woman through its unfixing strategies. Marginalized by patriarchal impositions, women playwrights consider theatrical space as a golden opportunity to express their inarticulate desires. These plays tend to present alternative modes of female identity which are not determined by the restrictive discourses. Perhaps that is why female dramatic works have been

the most obscure realm of women's literary achievement. Following the same patterns, Glaspell seeks to rearticulate women's position by destabilizing the discursive powers which limit women's position as a subject. However, Glaspell's dramatic works are not explored here only for the sake of their feminist strands. Aside from the subversive strategies of feminist theater, the concept of "performance" is well connected to transformation and destabilization, according to Butler. Defining gender identity as constituted by "the stylized repetition of acts", Butler affirms the possibility of any subversion through the inevitable iteration happening in the repetition of acts: If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 271) Drawing on the performance theory as a politically subversive repetition, the present study indicates Glaspell's theatrical strategies, both in her *Trifles* and *The Outside*, which emerges as a critique of existing female identities. Addressing the issues of identity and women's subject position, the two selected plays undermine any element of fixity in female identity. On one hand, Glaspell's protagonists show resistance to the dominant hegemony and try to escape the restrictive definitions imposed on them. On the other hand, Glaspell's innovative theatrical techniques and language lead to the deconstruction of any normative concept including identities and power relations.

3. 1. 1 Deconstruction Through Resistance

Resistance is the most prevalent theme in most of Glaspell's works, including *Trifles* and *The Outside*, which is dramatized through her female protagonists. The most evident type of resistance is the female characters' opposition to patriarchal authority which is imposing its restricted definitions of female identity on women. Both Minnie and Mrs. Patrick oppose the patriarchal internalized perception of a woman by their struggle to earn an independent identity. Minnie Wright, the protagonist of *Trifles*, perfects the theme of resistance to patriarchal hegemony by killing her husband. The concept of killing itself is a kind of revolting against formalities, which is accentuated if it is done by a woman. In traditional lexicon, woman is described as passive, weak and in need of men's protection. Ben-Zvi in her "' Murder, She Wrote": The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*" states that "Women who kill evoke fear because they challenge societal constructs of femininity-passivity, restraint, and nurture" (19). Discursive Patriarchal frameworks grant female's identity by the virtue of their relation to men than through their desired individual identities. Therefore, Minnie is not only defying the rules of conduct, but she is also violating the rules of given gender entities. She has risen against humiliating treatment of men like Mr. Hale who believe "women are used to worrying over trifles", or county attorney and sheriff who keep mocking female concerns during the play. Committing murder by a woman is a fierce opposition to the trifles, mostly attributed to the women by men. Portraying a woman killing a man, Glaspell is questioning the ontological nature of femaleness much the same as Butler who calls for the deconstruction of gender categories. Butler repeatedly

stresses the need for resistance in her works such as *Gender Trouble* in which she asserts that "[t]he task is [...] to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148). However, to consider the murder of a man as the main feministic focus of this is to oversimplify the issue. Killing a man, as a member of patriarchy, by a woman is actually a kind of resistance to the fixity of hegemonic thoughts. This performance encourages the diversity of meaning and unsettles any apparently stable dichotomy between superior/inferior, active/passive, true/false, and man/woman. From this perspective, meaning is subject to constant negotiation and change like female identity which escapes any fixity. As to *The Outside*, there is no explicit resistance to patriarchy such as murdering a man. Its female characters prefer isolating themselves from the community in order to "gloss over loss and fear" they have experienced from their unattached status. As McBride maintains, Allie Mayo as a widow and Mrs. Patrick as an abandoned woman were resisted by people who initially welcomed them "as transitional members of the community" (167). However, to some critics, women can benefit considerably from this isolation. Christine Dymkowski believes that this shared experience of being "outside the mainstream of life" not only promotes the feeling of sisterhood among women, but it also provides them with an opportunity to recreate their lives (qtd. in Hinz-Bode 92). Moreover, Ann E. Larrabee in her article on *The Outside* holds that this is the exile which calls forth a "creative potential" for Allie (78). This isolation also exists in *Trifles* when Glaspell opens the play describing the scene as a "gloomy kitchen" in an "abandoned farmhouse" (36). Mr. Wright also

preferred isolation " saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet" (36). However, his isolation was quite different from Mrs. Patrick in *The Outside*. As inferred from the play, Mr. Wright is reclusive, " close", and " a hard man" who " wouldn't like the bird--a thing that sang" (*Trifles* 36-42). He decided to be alone at his inclination, while for Mrs. Wright it was not a matter of free will as Mrs. Hale describes her singlehood to be so different from her marriage life. As Mrs. Hale contends, " She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir"; however, she turned to a shabby miserable woman after her marriage (40). Mrs. Hale's self-reproach to her reluctance to visit Minnie in late years is also indicative of Minnie's isolation: MRS HALE:

(shaking her head) I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house--it's more than a year: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful--and that's why I ought to have come. I--I've never liked this place [...] I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now. (*Trifles* 38, 42) Perceiving her loneliness, female characters mention her childlessness too: MRS HALE: (with a slow look around her) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around

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MRS PETERS: (something within her speaking) 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) Childbearing is of major importance in most of Glaspell's plays in spite of being offstage in all her

works.[1]This particular concern and refusal to representing it onstage can be a reflection of Glaspell's personal experience of being childless. In *Trifles*, childlessness is marked by death, " stillness", and immobility intensifying Mrs. Wright's isolation and motivation to commit a murder. It also contributes to Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters to feel empathy with Minnie because they have experienced themselves how lonely one can feel in a miserable situation like being in their isolated farms without any children. Regarding *The Outside*, Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo are also childless and isolated. From an essentialist point of view which considers maternity as an indispensable feature of femaleness, a childless woman is a not a female in its true sense. In this way, Minnie and Mrs. Patrick are resisting the patriarchal essentialism since they do not comply with its imposed definitions of a woman. This childlessness contributes to other discussions such as queerness and nonconformity which is reviewed in the following sections. Numerous scholars such as Hinz-Bode have declared the evident opposition between men and women represented in Glaspell's dramas including *Trifles* and *The Outside* (88). Nonetheless, this opposition is no longer a matter of interest to feminists or poststructuralist such as Butler. What counts is that women can challenge governing hegemonic systems like patriarchy by doing what men, as the regarded superior ones, were not able to do. This is how the illusory identities, attributed to men and women, are deconstructed and revealed to be mere constructs that are imposed on each subject without having any essence. Taking for granted the constructional nature of gender identities, Butler aims " to examine in what ways gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts, and what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of

gender through such acts" (1990a: 272). Both *Trifles* and *The Outside* deal with such transformative acts which lead to the deconstruction of imposed female identities. The patriarchal regulatory definitions of female identity are widely disseminated in *Trifles* through which male characters keep teasing females. County attorney, sheriff and Mr. Hale are constantly associating women with trivial things causing discomfort to women: COUNTY ATTORNEY: ... (_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. (38) Assuming kitchen things trivial and unimportant, men are actually belittling women in the play which suggests the close relation between women and kitchen. Although the association between women and kitchen is a traditional oppressive one, which the present study resists because of its deconstructive quality, it is taken here due to certain hints offered in the play. Firstly, the fact that women stay in the kitchen throughout the play implies the idea that kitchen is the place of women. [1] Therefore, kitchen or any "kitchen things" is equal to women and femaleness. Additionally, it is the female characters' treatment which calls forth such assumption. When Mrs. Hale condemns male characters' scorn saying that "I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing", she is admitting that kitchen is women's territory (39). Male characters' construction of female identity culminates in a scene in which they assert restrictive definitions of womanhood: SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves. COUNTY ATTORNEY: I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about. HALE: Well, women are used to

worrying over trifles. (38)Or in another scene when county attorney is blaming Minnie for the mess in the kitchen as if it is women's duty to do the housework:(_The_ COUNTY ATTORNEY, _after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky_.)COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.

...

COUNTY ATTORNEY: ... 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? (38)Why are kitchen things of no importance? Why is it believed that women worry over trifles? Is housekeeping one of female duties? Who concluded such conceptions? In Gender Trouble, Butler has answered such questions by referring to Foucault who discussed the productivity of power relations. Foucault, in his The History of Sexuality, affirmed the multiplicity of power or law which is not only oppressive and prohibitive, but it can also produce the subjects which it represents. Drawing on Foucault, Butler believed that there is no place out of discursive powers, and gender identities are constructed through theses powers. Therefore, these female attributes are determined by the dominant discursive powers which help them to persist. There is no essence in the belief that women are associated with trifles or kitchen things. These assumptions are just assumptions; they are constructed images which have been naturalized through iteration. Butler has refuted the belief that there is an external power source which imposes certain identities. She

believes this ascribing involves a complex internal process of performative acts which permits possible subversions. On this account, it has been sought to deconstruct the imposed female identities through the very mentioned constructs. The notion of resistance to hegemony and stability of identities is intensified when male characters utter what a woman is and how she should be. While men have associated women with trifles, they have involved themselves in serious activities. Minnie Wright committed a murder; Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale became members of a jury of which they were probably deprived at that time. The kitchen which was supposed to be unimportant turned to a court of justice in which Minnie was acquitted. Women's conversation which was mocked for being worthless turned out to an opportunity for female unity in order to hide the evidence against Minnie. Another resistance of Glaspell's female characters concerns the construction of female identity in relation to its dependence on patriarchy. When county attorney asserts " Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising ... a sheriff's wife is married to the law", he is identifying Mrs. Peters with her husband (45). In other words, attorney is constructing a kind of female identity which Mr. Peter favors too. However, it was the sheriff's wife who aided and abetted the cover-up of the murder. The one who was supposed to act like her husband and obey the rules violated the law and also the constructed identity imposed on her. She actually " destroy[ed] the notion that a woman is her husband" (Ben-Zvi 1995: 37). In *The Outside*, there also exist discursive constructions of female identities represented by male characters such as lifesavers. Following the traditional conceptions of a woman, male characters call the female ones " crazy" and ironically " cheerful" (49-50).

Not being accustomed to women's expressing their anger, Bradford maintains that "... the sea is friendly as a kitten alongside the women that live here" (48). Tony also mentions another stereotypical description of women which Mrs. Patrick and Mayo do not fit: TONY: A woman--she makes things pretty. This not like a place where a woman live. On the floor there is nothing--on the wall there is nothing...BRADFORD: [...] In my opinion the woman's crazy--sittin' over there on the sand--(_a gesture towards the dunes_) what's she _lookin'_ at? There ain't nothin' to _see_. And I know the woman that works for her's crazy--Allie Mayo. She's a Provincetown girl. She was all right once, but—(49)It seems that Tony and Bradford regard women "all right" in case they conform to those constructed identities. Much the same as *Trifles*, women are identified with men. The only time men of the play consider women "all right" is when they remember them with their husbands: BRADFORD: This Patrick woman used to be all right. She and her husband was summer folks over in town. They used to picnic over here on the outside. (50)In similar fashion, when Mrs. Patrick asked to stay alone in the old lifesaving station, the shopkeeper was so astonished that said "November--an empty house, a buried house, you might say, off here on the outside shore--way across the sand from man or beast"(51). To those who believe in the stable heterosexual hegemony, living an independent life without a man is a threat to the dominant hegemony. Apart from feminist reading, this departure is regarded as a threat due to the fact that it is challenging the discursive systems of value such as heterosexuality. However, Bradford calls it "runnin' off to hide herself" because of her husband's death, as he supposed (51). Although it is not directly mentioned

in the play, she might have escaped from the dominant resistance provided by the people of her town for not having a husband which was probably considered an abnormality. Anyway, Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo did rebel regardless of being intelligible or unintelligible. The most distinct resistance is the fact that women accomplished what men were not able to do as it goes with *Trifles*. Lifesavers were not able to save the man's life; conversely, women, who were mostly associated with death and burial by men, could return to life. The performative act of naming women is another way of constructing female identities to which Glaspell's female characters showed resistance. Throughout *Trifles*, the only two female characters are just called by their married names as if they are only identified through their husbands. To Butler, even these seemingly petty details are highly influential in female identities construction since they are performative acts which are consistently iterated. To Butler, naming is a kind of linguistic performative act which situates the subject within the discourse. In her *Bodies That Matter*, she holds that "The name orders and institutes a variety of free-floating signifiers into an "identity"; the name effectively "sutures" the object" (208). Butler presents naming not only as an authorizer, but she believes that it can also "deauthorize a set of social and sexual relations" through repetition since naming "confirms [identity's] fundamental alterability too" (208-26). Calling women only by their married names, which relates them to men, equals taking away their individuality. On the other hand, Mrs. Peters and Hale keep calling Minnie both by her first and last name which indicates their struggle to obtain an identity unaffected by discursive impositions. The female protagonist of *The Outside* is also known

only by her surname, Patrick, while lifesavers are called by their first names, Tony and Bradford. However, this assumption does not apply to Allie Mayo, another female character who is identified by her first name. This difference stems from their dissimilar levels of awareness; Allie Mayo is much more conscious than Mrs. Patrick as she is the first one who recognizes the necessity of coming back to life. Consequently, she is more concerned with individuality and independence, so first name is of more significance for her. Basically, naming is a matter of great import for Butler since it is strongly related to recognition and being recognized especially when it deals with construction of gender identities. Butler believes " recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject" (1993: 226); however, she believes this formation is not neutral, it is " a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (2004: 33). As it is manifested in the plays, naming male and female characters are so different, which indicates the power relations behind this recognition. Recognition is of great value for Butler to the extent that in most of her works she has explored it in various complex contexts. On the necessity of recognition, she asserts in an interview that " without certain substantial forms of recognition, our lives continue to be at risk" (141). It is her *Subjects of Desire* (1987) in which she heavily draws on Hegelian concept of recognition. However, its role in resistance and subversion is the salient point of this study. Recognition is the initial step for any transgression since it is through recognition that a subject can figure out its position and the fact that it has been oppressed or not. Similarly, there is a moment of recognition for female characters of both *Trifles* and *The Outside* which provoke their resistance to the conventional

definitions of a woman. As soon as Mrs. Peters and Hale recognize Minnie's loneliness, they get to empathize with what she was going through which resulted in their united assistance to her. As Butler considers recognition of oneself as a member of sexual minority "a necessity for survival", it was through female characters' recognition that Minnie may have survived (1999: xxvi). The unity between women and Mrs. Patrick's survival was all due to Allie Mayo's recognition in *The Outside*. Some critics believe that it was the presence of lifesavers or the Captain's efforts which brought women back to life (Biggsby 27, Hinz-Bode 90). Despite that, it was Allie herself who gained awareness after viewing the ceaseless struggle of life and death in the outside. The theme of resistance in most of Glaspell's plays is intensified by the growing affinity between its female characters. In *Trifles*, Glaspell displays the structural opposition of male and female assumed worlds in parallel with the development of a good rapport between women. During the course of the play, the more male characters treat women with contempt, the closer would be the affinity between them: COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.(_The women draw nearer_.)

...

HALE: Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.(_The two women move a little closer together_.)

...

COUNTY ATTORNEY: 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: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see...The gradual development of a

mutual understanding is perceptible in stage directions as the women approach. In both *Trifles* and *The Outside*, female characters' recognition leads to a special bond of sisterhood which has empowered them to flout convention. It is through the recognition that Mrs. Peters and Hale realize what Minnie has undergone has been experienced by them too. Czerepinski confirmed such affinity stating that "ultimate knowledge comes from feeling, from an understanding based on shared experience and identification" (148). The following extract indicates one of the moments when Mrs. Hale finds out they have so much in common: MRS HALE: (_eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box [...]) 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. [...] this is cherries, too. [...] (_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. (39) While conversing on Minnie's quilting, Mrs. Peters identifies with her saying that "I don't know as she was so nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired" (41). Mrs. Peters realizes Minnie was as tired as her; they were possibly both tired of their husbands, roles, or of the imposed identities on them in general. Female characters keep drawing parallels between their lives and Minnie's one until Mrs. Hale puts it directly that this situation exists for all women: MRS HALE: 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) Mrs. Hale regards herself culpable for

leaving Minnie alone which made her kill her husband. On the other hand, Mrs. Peters " recognizes her own disenfranchisement under the law and her own potential for violence" (Ben-Zvi 2002: 34). Therefore, she decides to defend Minnie's position which is indeed her own position. The last sentence of the play indicates their steely determination to protect Minnie: COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*_facetiously_*) Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies? MRS HALE: (*_her hand against her pocket_*) We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson. (CURTAIN) (45)Mrs. Hale closes the play declaring their decision which is to " knot it". There have been several interpretations of the word " knot" by critics; however, as Hernando-Real asserts " knot" is an emblem of women's unity and coalition (325). Moreover, it also can be considered as the symbol of resistance to hegemony, and also the challenge launched on dominant discursive powers. This collective resistance occurred by the virtue of female characters' awareness. This understanding happens only if one considers him/herself as a social being just as Butler states " it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings" (2004: 2). Thus, if women get to be aware of their shared condition as a subject, they can manage to politicize the struggles to present their desired identities. This feeling of affinity restrains them from living in isolation as with Mrs. Patrick's case in *The Outside*. However, the mentioned developed rapport in this study has nothing to do with the sisterhood of second wave feminism. It is of the researcher's interest due to its relevance to Butler's notions of collectivity. To Butler, performative acts that construct gender identities are " a shared experience and " collective action". She

refuses the "individually oriented view of acts" as she believes "within feminist theory the very category of the personal is expanded for include political structures" (1990a: 276). In her discussion of recognition, Butler emphasizes the significance of collectivity holding that "true subjectivities come to flourish only in communities that provide for reciprocal recognition, for we do not come to ourselves through work alone, but through the acknowledging look of the Other who confirms us" (1987: 58). This necessity of coalition is also manifested through the plays. In both plays, female union is seen as a means of opposing the dominant systems of value. As Butler emphasizes the necessity of collective action for any political struggle, women's mutual support appeared as a crucial element in empowering them to bring about the intended socio-symbolic changes. Thus, collective identities replace the isolation of the characters which paves the way for Butler's "collective future". Resistance has been a recurrent theme in most of Butler's works as well as Glaspell's. In most of her works, Butler has been constantly insisting on the necessity of resistance. In her *Undoing Gender*, she states "If I am someone who cannot be without doing, then the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence" (3). She affirms the necessity of taking an action against the existing norms based on her theory of performativity. Further, she encourages violating the accepted norms: There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. ... if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which

recognition is conferred. It may well be that my sense of social belonging is impaired by the distance I take, but surely that estrangement is preferable to gaining a sense of intelligibility by virtue of norms that will only do me in from another direction. Indeed, the capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them, an ability to suspend or defer the need for them, even as there is a desire for norms that might let one live. (2004: 33) Her considerable attention to the need of taking distance from the norms parallels the last sentences of *The Outside*: MRS PATRICK: (_bitter, exultant_) Savers of life! (_to_ ALLIE MAYO) You savers of life! 'Meeting the Outside!' Meeting--(_but she cannot say it mockingly again; in saying it, something of what it means has broken through, rises. Herself lost, feeling her way into the wonder of life_) Meeting the Outside!(_It grows in her as_ CURTAIN _lowers slowly_.) (56) Mrs. Patrick's final repetition of " Meeting the outside" is indicative of Glaspell's stress on not keeping inside the regulatory norms and " meeting the outside". It seems that both Butler and Glaspell are asking for rebellion against the normative constructions. However, Butler has always remarked on resistance in terms of survival. The interrelation between resistance and intelligibility has been so critical to Butler that she keeps mentioning the consistent presence of normative structures. She believes in our existence " in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose" (2004: 33). Following Foucault, she asserts that even resistance is an " effect of power" (1997: 93). Despite her special emphasis on the necessity of resistance, she contends: This does not mean that I can remake the world so that I become its maker. That fantasy of godlike power only refuses the ways we are constituted, invariably and from the start, by

what is before us and outside of us. My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution (2004: 3) According to Butler, there is a complicated relation between norms and agency that requires a close attention. She considers conforming to the norms both of necessity and danger: When the norm appears at once to guarantee and threaten social survival (it is what you need to live; it is that which, if you live it, will threaten to efface you), then conforming and resisting become a compounded and paradoxical relation to the norm, a form of suffering and a potential site for politicization. The question of how to embody the norm is thus very often linked to the question of survival, of whether life itself will be possible. (2004: 217) Thus, it is obvious that she does lay stress on resistance, yet if it is collective and intelligent. Intelligent resistance is not only to Butler's liking, postmodern politics has also regarded survival as their focal point. Baz Kershaw, a professor in theater and performance studies, believes in subverting the dominant powers from within, "rather than (falsely) assuming a position of attack beyond or above the given" (Goodman and de Gay 259). In this regard, Minnie's act of murder is not a proper resistance since the open-endedness of the play suggests no certain sign of her survival. On the contrary, Mrs. Peters and Hale's act of resistance can be considered as an appropriate one through which Glaspell is asking for women's political and intelligible rebellion. She is also depicting an intelligent resistance by criticizing the way Mrs. Patrick has detached herself from the community in *The Outside*. In spite of the wide gap between her and Butler, Glaspell seems to have a deep understanding of resistance in her plays. Of course *Trifles*' protagonist rebels, but it is not an intelligent one. Accordingly,

The Outside seems to be much more mature than Trifles which was written earlier in time. This section has explored how Glaspell deconstructed the given definitions of female identity through the means of resistance. In the light of Butler's theories, resistance is not considered as a simple rebellion; it is taken as a transformative tool which works out under certain conditions. The simplest form of resistance in the selected plays is female characters' rebellion against patriarchal hegemony which led to attacking the traditional definitions of women as passive and inferior. The theme of resistance was further accentuated by the collective recognition which politicizes a collective social transformation.

3. 1. 2 Deconstruction Through Queerness

It was in 2005 that Cheryl Black called Glaspell's dramaturgy " queer theater" for the first time. At first sight, there seem to be no possible link between Glaspell and queer theory, yet Black proves her queerness in broad terms. However, what is meant by queer requires further clarification since the recent term of " queer" has been so controversial that resists any fixed definition and has been consequently reissued in several aspects. Regarding the adopted approach in the present study, queer is used in its deconstructive contexts drawing on Butler's and other poststructuralists' theories. As mentioned in the second chapter, queer is taken as any treatment outside the bounds of normative structures. According to David Halperin, the contemporary gender theorist, " Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an

essence." (62) Furthermore, Halperin's notion of queer seems to be the closest to Glaspell's. Glaspell uses the term of " queer" five times in Trifles all of which refer to nonconformity and abnormality: HALE: Well, she looked queer. COUNTY ATTORNEY: How do you mean--queer? HALE: Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

...

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 PETERS: No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats--being afraid of them...MRS HALE: My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

...

MRS HALE: 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-- ... (37-44)This term is only used once in her less queer play, *The Outside*, which refers to Mrs. Patrick's unconventional behavior. Ben-Zvi also confirms that Glaspell used queer " to describe female protagonists who break with convention" (2005: 36). Thus, the concept of queer under discussion is not exclusively of sexual identities; it involves the transgression of any fixed category.[1]In other words, when it is claimed that Glaspell's theater is queer, it means it is different from traditional forms of drama in terms of content, form, and techniques.

Laurence Senelick describes a queer theater as the one "grounded in and expressive of unorthodox sexuality or gender identity, antiestablishment and confrontational in tone, experimental and unconventional in format..." (qtd. in Black 2005: 51). In the same way, Glaspell's dramas including *Trifles* and *The Outside* have been considered queer not only owing to her queer female protagonists who are mostly absent too, but also due to her professional skill in destabilizing the fixity in gender identities and hegemonies. As with Butler's emphasis on performativity, Black believes that the recent queer theory discusses the queerness of performative acts rather than being as an essence. In this respect, Jill Dolan contends that "To be queer is not who you are, it's what you do, it's your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment" (qtd. in Black 2005: 50).

Glaspell's female protagonists also act queerly in order to prove the superficiality of gender identities imposed by dominant ideologies. As Butler theorized that we can construct and reconstruct identities through performance, Glaspell indicates the potentiality of her dramaturgy to lay gender identities open to reconstructions. It is not only the content of her plays through which she queerizes gender identities; her innovation with language and the employment of offstage as the protagonists' position also intensify the notion of queer in the plays. The analysis of queerness in Glaspell's *Trifles* and *The Outside* fall into two main categories of "Nonconformity" and "Absent protagonists" due to the fact that the characters' nonconventional actions, queer presentations, and the innovations with language all fit into the category of "Nonconformity".

Additionally, her employment of absent protagonist's technique is so prominent and effective that deserves a separate section.

3. 1. 2. 1 Nonconformity

Nonconformity, multiplicity, and transitivity are the prevalent concepts in Glaspell's plays rendering them queer. The first prominent feature, which has been the earliest concern of queer theorists, is Glaspell's radical critique of the heteronormative social institutions such as marriage. *Trifles* provides the readers with a broken marriage which ends up with a murder. Mrs. Hale has frequently affirmed their loveless marriage by describing where they live as "lonesome" and cheerless: MRS HALE: (_looking about_) It never seemed a very cheerful place.

...

it's a lonesome place and always was.

...

there'd been years and years of nothing (39-44) Comparing Minnie's singlehood to her married life, Glaspell is also depicting the failure of this heteronormative imposed institution: MRS HALE: She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that--oh, that was thirty years ago.

...

MRS HALE: (_not as if answering that_) I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang.(40, 44) The challenge to heteronormativity is not only expressed by the

characters; Glaspell's impressive presentations also suggest the frustration of their marriage as the emblem of the imposed heterosexuality. Firstly, her description of the " gloomy kitchen" of " an abandoned farmhouse" implies the bleak surrounding. Then, County begins the play entering the stage while he is rubbing his hands which suggests the coldness of the weather corresponding to the indoors: MRS PETERS: My, it's cold in there. HALE: Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there. (44)The protagonists of both plays, Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Patrick, are childless. On the one hand, their childlessness implies the broken loveless marriage in both plays.; and on the other hand, it affirms their queerness. Viewing queer as anything " which is at odds with the normal", Halperin believes that " some married couple without children" are queer too (qtd. in Sullivan 43-4). Consequently, the female protagonists of both plays are queer in this respect since they are both childless. In this respect, *The Outside* is not as radical as *Trifles* since Allie's husband is dead and there is no sign of their troubled marriage; however, its protagonist is an isolated woman whose husband had abandoned her. Once again, heterosexual conventions go wrong. *Trifles*, in which there are more elements of queerness, questions another heteronormative institution called " law". When Mrs. Peters and Hale turn the kitchen into a court, they dissent from the repressive heteronormative law which neglects critical issues led to such disasters: MRS PETERS: I know what stillness is. (_pulling herself back_) The law has got to punish crime, Mrs Hale.

...

MRS HALE: [...] Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that? (44) This representation reveals that law is another discursive institution which only reinforces dominant systems of thought and value. In this way, Glaspell queerizes the imposed heterosexual institutions considered to be fixed and natural for long. They are not only heterosexual institutions against which Glaspell demurs; she also calls normative gender constructions into question. When female characters of *Trifles* manage to protect an accused of murder, they are actually revolting against conventional definitions of womanhood, some of which are expressed by male characters such as Mr. Hale's statement that "women are used to worrying over trifles" (38). Moreover, Mrs. Peters, the sheriff's wife who is normally supposed to obey the rules, violates the discursively imposed identity on her in order to protect a woman under suspicion. On the other hand, male characters' failure to see what women notice is another act of defiance against discursive norms since men have been traditionally associated with superiority and power. The same thing happens in *The Outside* when lifesavers get frustrated at saving the victim's life, while Allie Mayo, who is called queer and crazy by men, manages to give Mrs. Patrick a new life. In this way, Mrs. Patrick, Hale, and Mayo do not conform to the female stereotypes any longer. This nonconformity brings about multiplicity which queer theorists have always desired. The recurring theme of conformity is not only restricted to characters; Glaspell has intensified this notion even in respect of her scenic descriptions. She begins the play describing a kitchen and its kitchenware which she maintains

throughout the play. Additionally, kitchen is the only place which is shown on the stage where the most critical moments happen. This bold presentation of kitchen things renders domesticity one of the pivotal themes of the play. Yet the queerness of this feature lies in the fact that " Glaspell presents domesticity as dystopia". Despite the fact that domesticity connotes warmth, love and security, Glaspell depicts it as " gloomy", " lonesome" and cold which happens to be a place of " violence", " revenge", and murder (Black 2005: 55). This dissociation points up the queerness of her dramaturgy which is the same story in *The Outside*. The play is located in a life-saving station which is ironically void of any life, and more queer is that Mrs. Patrick chose it as a shelter to let herself die. The presence of a dead body on the stage also turns the life-saving station to a burial place. The notion of unconventionality culminates in the very title of *Trifles*. Glaspell queerizes trifles by making a crime story out of them. Quilt, dirty towels, a bird cage and fruit preserves are all of paramount importance in taking or saving someone's life. This queer representation contributes to the deconstruction of the identities which are illusorily taken to be natural and essential. Queerizing performance has been Butler's focal point so that she introduces parody and drag as means of challenging " what are taken to be the foundations of gender" (Salih 67). Jill Dolan and Nikki Sullivan also defined queer as a verb, " to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to de-legitimize..." (qtd. in Black 2005: 50). With respect to Butler, Jill Dolan and other queer theorists who theorized queer more as a verb than a noun, Glaspell's plays are also studied through the lens of performativity. To exclusively consider the protagonists' actions, Glaspell's dramaturgy is

regarded as queer too. Mrs. Wright is queer since she killed her husband in the specific context that women were deemed to be trivial and unimportant. Initially, Mrs. Peters was an ordinary woman who followed the restrictive imposed rules of patriarchy as a sheriff's wife, while she eventually turned to be queer by defying the law and convention. Mrs. Patrick, in *The Outside*, refuses to save a man's life as her privacy was invaded. Thus, it is their performance which makes them queer; there is no being or essence for queerness. To follow what Lawrence Senelick stated about queer theater, the queerness of Glaspell's dramaturgy ought to be traced.[1]As mentioned in her biography in the first and second chapter, Glaspell was a nonconformist herself both in her personal and theatrical life. She attended Drake University in Des Moines in 1895 " when less than 2 percent of American women attended college" . As Ben-Zvi quotes from one of her classmates, there was " a tang of wildness about Susan—something untrammelled, untamable" that distinguished her from the others (2005: viii). Her reporting career at the age of twenty was queer enough to detach her from the community concerning themselves mostly in trivial affairs. What made her more unconventional were the issues she covered as a reporter including legislature and murder cases. Joining unorthodox clubs, delaying her marriage until thirty-seven years old, and then falling for a married man were other nonconformities for which she was famed. She was also queer for her being childless according to Halperin's definition. Living in Greenwich Village, known as a bohemian capital, and her close association with the Provincetown Players, the experimental theatre, had their own effects on her queer theater. After her husband's death, once again she flouted social

conventions as she got involved with a much younger man. There biographical nonconformities were reflected in her works, two of which were explored here. However, her queer dramaturgy is not restricted to the content; there is a kind of innovation in terms of form and language which intensifies her queer theater. According to Gainor, *The Outside* "is a blurring of forms": the combination of "expressionist, symbolist, and poetic images and language" (2004: 18). *Trifles* is also an innovative blending of realist, naturalist, symbolist, and expressionistic features. Drawing on Howell's definition of a realist play, Hernando-Real affirms its realist features (79). On the Other hand, Ben-Zvi declares Glaspell's employment of "expressionistic touches to externalize Minnie's desperate state of mind" (2005: 174). Additionally, numerous critics have confirmed the symbolic side of *Trifles* so that it has been an inseparable discussion of the play. Regarding the form and dramatic techniques, her subversive employment of offstage as the focal point is another queer element of her dramaturgy. Despite the fact this distinctive technique is only featured in her *Trifles*, *Bernice*, and *Alison's House*, it is explored in a separate subsection of this chapter. Firstly, it is the feature that brought her a great fame in dramatic studies. Secondly, it also applies to the mainstream of this study which is queer theory and deconstructionism. Thus, it requires further exploration although it is not employed in *The Outside*.

3. 1. 2. 2 Absent Protagonist in Trifles

The fact that Glaspell distinguished herself by the employment of absent protagonists has been acclaimed by several critics such as Arthur

Watermann who regarded this technique as " Susan Glaspell's most effective and most characteristic dramatic technique" (qtd. in Hernando-Real 284). Sarah Emily Morrow also studies *Trifles* as an instance of absent characters as proximate cause. She claims that Minnie is the second proximate cause of the onstage action since it was on account of her absence that " Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale [...] learn[ed] about themselves and their status within the community of women" (28). Lucia Sander is another critic who explores Glaspell's experimentation of absent character under the title of " invisibility effect", which she prefers to call " i-effect". She argues how this invisibility gives Glaspell an advantage to provide the audience with " a lesson on, or a performance of what the theatre is all about". Drawing on Phelan, she regards *Trifles* as " a staging of the effect produced by the theatre upon the audience" (28-32). Studying several critiques, there is a common ground in all these explorations. The fact that Glaspell's employment of absent protagonist is the representation of women's marginality in patriarchal societies has been the earliest and the simplest interpretation stated by several critics such as Sander. However, there is something more significant in this innovation. Turning marginality to the focal point is Glaspell's act of queerizing in some respects. On the one hand, she is queerizing dramatic conventions which laid stress on the protagonist as the central character. On the other hand, she is queerizing feminism in terms of male gaze which has always been a critical issue for feminists. Traditionally speaking, female body has been subjected to objectification by male gaze. This objectification implies the fact that the viewer is an active subject, while the object of the gaze is passive and inactive. Heidi Schmidt even extends this objectification

to the notions of " possession, dominance, and control" (35). She believes the viewer can objectify, dominate and control the object of gaze with reference to Butler's statement that " at the moment in which our gaze apprehends her, she is there, there for the instant in which she is there. And the gaze by which she is apprehended is the gaze through which she is banished."(qtd. in Schmidt 36) In *Trifles*, Glaspell challenges this theory by leaving her female protagonist offstage. Although the female protagonist is present in *The Outside*, Glaspell (dis)engages the spectator in the play of gazes in another way. There is a male dead body on the stage throughout the play. As the curtain rises, there is a corpse in the center of the stage where the main action occurs. The corpse is partly seen at most moments of the play reminding the traditional female image as the object of male gaze. However, this time a man turns out to be the object of female gaze. This transformation subverts subject's positions so that female is not always a passive object of male gaze. Consequently, the dominant position is subverted. This subversion indicates the asserted in her discussions. In this respect, Butler has also introduced parody as a means of subverting normative constructions. Drawing on Butler and Linda Hutcheon who believes parody is a kind of repetition which includes difference, this absence can be a parody too (37). Considering the absence of the protagonist as a parody, Glaspell's dramaturgy is a kind of queer performance that reveals the nature of all sexual identities (Salih 96). In this way, Butler's view on body is fully perceived. In *Undoing gender*, she holds that " The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (21). The public and political

aspect of body is manifested through Glaspell's employment of absent protagonist which brings about the deconstruction of given identities. Applying this technique has been to Glaspell's advantage due to its potentiality to remain open to future debates including identity politics and alienation effect. Czerepinski, in her article on Glaspell's absent characters, asserts that this absence leads the audience to take up the protagonist's position (Ben-Zvi 2002: 9). Abbotson also declares that Minnie's absence "serves as a symbol of all women trapped in loveless marriages" (262). Drawing on Czerepinski, Abbotson, and Butler, it is assumed that this absence can underline the notion of collective identity. The fact that Minnie is not present on the stage provokes the thought that anyone can be in Minnie's situation. This potentiality deepens the play by extending it to public and political spheres since it can apply to anyone. That is how an apparently domestic drama can apply to a wide range of subjects in order to politicize an act of resistance to the dominant norms. In this regard, Ben-Zvi states that: "By not physically representing Minnie on the stage, [Glaspell] is able to focus on issues that move beyond the guilt or innocence of one person. Since the audience never actually sees Minnie, it is not swayed by her person but, instead, by her condition, a condition shared by other women who can be imagined in the empty subject position" (2002: 35). On the contrary, Susan Kattwinkel argues that this absence defers the spectator's identification (qtd. in Gainor 2004: 100). This disruption of the identification process is comparable with Brecht's alienation effect which aimed at promoting a critical awareness among the audience. As Elin Diamond asserts, theatrical distancing effects release "the spectator from imaginary

and illusory identifications [and] -these are crucial elements in Brecht's theoretical project" (306). This technique offers the spectators an opportunity to ponder on the play and get aware of the artificiality of discursive constructs just like theatrical presentations. Feminist playwrights have disrupted dominant ideologies with the aid of this created awareness, as Dolan states: " Brechtian technique in feminist hands can fragment the realist drama into component parts and expose its gender assumptions for critical inspection." (111). Thus, this absence can operate as a means of defamiliarization highlighting the queerness of Glaspell's dramaturgy. Another implication of absent protagonist is making room for multiplicity. Drawing on Braidotti, Butler celebrates multiplicity along with other queer theorists: The line from Spinoza through Deleuze that Braidotti follows [...] argues that the will to live, the affirmation of life takes place through the play of multiplicity. The dynamic interaction of multiple effects brings forth transformation itself. For those who claim that a multiply constituted agent is diffuse or scattered, it should be said that for Braidotti multiplicity is a way of understanding the play of forces that work upon one another and that generate new possibilities of life. (2004: 193) To Butler, multiplicity brings about " dynamism of life" since it opens up much more possibilities of transformation. It challenges hegemonic power structures and their seemingly stability as queer theory does (194). Glaspell's experiment of absent protagonists is creating this desired multiplicity in order to deconstruct the presupposed identities. In view of the fact that queer feminism has stressed making room for multiplicity, Glaspell's theater can be considered as a queer one. As queer theorists deconstruct the notion of

woman as a natural being, Glaspell indicates that Minnie is nothing but a linguistic concept and a social artifact.

3. 1. 3 Deconstruction Through Semiotics and Language

As it was mentioned in the second chapter, language is a topic of concern to gender theorists including Butler, who has even been criticized for her "over-attention to language" (Salih 11). In her *Excitable Speech and Bodies That Matter*, she argues how identities are constructed in the regulatory discursive systems such as language. She draws on Austin's theory of performativity, Althusser's interpellation, and Foucault's agency in her theories of language. As a poststructuralist, she employs Derrida's notion of language as incomplete and open-ended, so she concludes that subjects are also involved in a ceaseless process of (de)construction since they are constituted through language. Refuting Austin's "felicitous performativity", she asserts that "an act is not a momentary happening, but [...] the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions" which can call forth a transgression (1997: 14). To Butler, language is actually a "political arena" through which she introduces the strategy of subversion. Accordingly, it has been sought to explore Glaspell's dramaturgy in terms of Butlerian notions of language and semiotics. To the fact that resistance, transgression and subversion are of both Glaspell and Butler's interests, Glaspell's employment of words and signs are studied in order to observe how given identities are constructed through complex power relations. In the selected Glaspell's plays, Language and semiotics are indicative of these power relations which are either reinforced or challenged. In respect of

language and power relations, Butler regards " the semantic and linguistic changes [...] as necessary to the linguistic future of certain marginalized or oppressed communities"(Salih 117). Moreover, semiotics is of a greater importance in theater since it designates the meaning it produces, so the intelligent rearrangement of the signs can provide the theater with subversive potentialities. Thus, both plays are semiotically and semantically studied in order to prove the embedded Butlerian deconstructive elements.

3. 1. 3. 1 Semiotic Reading of Trifles and The Outside

Many critics have performed a semiotic analysis on Glaspell's works such as Carpentier who considers Glaspell the writer of " a female semiotic", or Hinz-Bode whose study on Glaspell is based on semiotics and language theories (2001: 2). In both Trifles and The Outside, symbolism plays a pivotal role in the emphasis of Butlerian theories; however, Trifles is much richer in symbolism comparing to the latter. As Trifles starts with an expression of cold weather and " abandoned farmhouse", audience get aware of the bleak mood that dominates the rest of the play. However, what defamiliarizes the audience from the beginning is the presentation of " the gloomy kitchen", " unwashed pans", the messy kitchen, and " incompleting work" onstage (36). Conventionally speaking, the kitchen and kitchen things cannot be associated with coldness and bleakness, yet Glaspell deconstructs such discursive assumptions by painting a gloomy picture of domesticity. This initial defamiliarization prepares the audience for the later deconstruction that proves women do not always conform to the imposed conventions. As claimed by several critics, this cold and tense atmosphere also reflects the

Minnie's (standing for all women) oppression, rejection and subjugation. Her jars of preserves which break because of coldness emphasize a loveless situation and the isolation which resulted in her explosion just like the preserves (Ben-Zvi 2002: 35). The connection between Minnie and the preserves is accentuated by women's attempts to protect what remains of the preserves just as they choose to protect Minnie. Another distinct object in the play which underlines Minnie's melancholic life is the "quilt", which is closely connected to Minnie. Quilt is a symbol of warmth which is absent in Minnie's marriage life. Furthermore, it was Minnie's faulty stitching on the quilt which led the women to recognize her state of desperation. In "Murder She Wrote", Ben-Zvi also remarks on the symbolic aspect of Wright's name. She argues the existing pun in Minnie's surname is two folded. At the one hand, it reveals the irony of her deprivation of individual "rights"; and on the other hand, it refers to her "right" to free herself from the brutal suppression imposed by her husband. Taking a different point of view, these interpretations also apply to Mr. Wright since his surname is Wright. Discursively speaking, it is Mr. Wright's socially sanctioned "right" to control his family (34-5). This lack of closure and multiplicity is another common ground with poststructuralists like Butler who prefers openness and fluidity to closure and fixity. Another commonality lies in the way Mr. Wright was murdered. Considering the way Mr. Wright was murdered on the bed, Hernando associates it to Minnie's childlessness. Following Hernando, if bed is considered to be the proper place "where procreation is verified" in the heterosexual institution of marriage, murder in bed is a radical critique of imposed heteronormativity. This assumed defiance to heteronormativity

suggests another connection between Butler's theories and Glaspell's dramaturgy (254). The bird is another prominent symbol of *Trifles* which is an emblem of Minnie's desired identity. As Mrs. Hale states "...she was kind of like a bird herself--real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and--fluttery." (43) The bird has been compared to the single Minnie who loved life and loved to sing as she wanted as an individual. Yet after her marriage, her desired identity was suppressed as the bird was strangled by her husband. To Minnie, the canary was more than a bird ending her loneliness; it was a part of her identity which was lost owing to her subjection to the dominant discourses. She seems to be trapped like the bird in the cage. This entrapment is reflected in the setting of the play which is confined to the kitchen, and her rocking chair which keeps moving backwards and forwards, while it is in the same position (Hernando-Real 99). Regarding her imprisonment in the kitchen, the apron, that she asks Mrs. Peters to bring her in jail, intensifies the notion of kitchen as a prison to Minnie. As Hernando claims, she needed her apron only to feel comfortable and "more natural", as Mrs. Hale and Peters conclude, since her home was not much different from the prison (151). The restricted movements of the rocking chair also symbolize the perpetual confinement of the subjects in the normative structures on which Butler has laid particular stress. Butler has frequently referred to the existing "matrix of power and discursive relations" which is impossible to escape (1990b: 42). She believes likely transgressions and subversions happen within and through these power structures. This inevitable involvement is comparable to the rocking chair which is neither fixed nor free. The fact that gender identities are both constructed and

deconstructed in these power frameworks is also analogous to the back-and-forth movements of the chair. On the one hand, gender (identity) is constructed in a "highly rigid regulatory frame" through a set of stylized repeated acts; and on the other hand, the very repetitious acts provoke the likely deviations (1990b: 33). This coincidence is manifested through the ceaseless struggle of life and death in *The Outside* too. The constant struggle between forces of life (construction) and death (deconstruction) is symbolically enacted through the fight between sand and bushes to overcome each other. Regarding the initial defamiliarization of *Trifles*, *The Outside* also starts with an "enstrangement", staging a corpse in a life-saving station. From the very beginning of the play until its end, there is a corpse onstage which turns the life-saving station into a place of burial instead (Hernando-Real 252). Once more Glaspell's presentation deconstructs the given concepts, indicating their discursive construction.

3. 1. 3. 2 Words Matter: Language, Communication, Dominance

What fascinated Hinz-Bode to write her *Anxiety of Expression* was Glaspell's distinct treatment of "language both as a theme and ... a means for her aesthetics as a dramatist" (1). On the one hand, there is her experimentation with language which made a "great contribution to American dramatic language" (Ben-Zvi 1982). As Larabee states, Glaspell's masterly innovation with silence and "invisibility effect" transforms marginality into a site of linguistic freedom and creativity (qtd. in Hinz-Bode 100). This distinct feature makes her dramaturgy queer enough to be studied in Butlerian terms.

Moreover, there are several parallels between Glaspell's and Butler's view of

language. According to Hinz-Bode, Glaspell regards language not simply as a system of signs representing preexisting concepts; Conversely, " Glaspell favors an understanding of language as constitutive articulate contact over the principles connected with the model of language as a representative system of signs", in the manner of Butler . Hinz-Bode supports this claim by giving an example of *The Outside* in which, Allie's situation does not matter until she puts it in words (97). Likewise, Mrs. Hale and Peters become aware of their subjugation in response to what male characters say about women in *Trifles*. Women's empowerment and the subversion of authorities come on the heels of what men have expressed about imposed female identities. Still, language is not only a means of their survival; Glaspell has employed it to reflect the subversion of power relations. Observing the beginning of the play, female characters are either keeping silent or reinforcing men's dictations (Hernando-Real 328): MRS PETERS: (_starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice_) Mr Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up ... They say it was such a--funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

...

MRS HALE: That's just what Mr Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand. MRS PETERS: Mr Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or--sudden feeling. (40)On the contrary, the more they gain power and control, the less they repeat men's doctrine. In this regard,

Hernando-Real states " Later in the play [...] Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters begin their utterances with " I think", " I knew", " I know", " I guess" [...] and consequently they start using the pronoun " I" more often than before (328). The final words of Mrs. Hale, " We call it-knot it, Mr. Henderson", also indicate the significance of language and its close connection to power. Discerning female characters' decision to both " act" and " name", Ben-Zvi believes the " control of language" has initiated their sociopolitical dominance. She regards the " control of language, a first step in political ascendancy" (2002: 39). Comparatively speaking, this interpretation proves the general parallelism between Glaspell's and Butler's view of language as constructional. In both *Trifles* and *The Outside*, Glaspell is depicting how the sharply defined roles can construct normative identities for women as Butler regarding language not simply to " name a pre-existing body, but in the act of naming it constitutes the body" (Salih 84). That is why Allie chose isolation " to protect [her] individual authority over the creation of meaning (Hinz-Bode 97). On the other hand, Glaspell also affirms the potentiality of subjects to constitute the language, as in *Trifles*. Accordingly, Butler makes a distinction between " Sovereignty and responsibility" holding that " speakers are formed by language as much as they form it" (Salih 84). In Glaspell's dramas, particularly in *The Outside*, communication and language are means of survival; Allie Mayo attempts to revive Mrs. Patrick through communication. Allie, who was initially known for not saying " an unnecessary word" and having " a prejudice against words", concludes that there is no way out of communication and the dominant discourse. Similarly, Butler insists on the impossibility of escaping discursive power relations

including language. To her, even subversion has to take place in the discourse since "the norm in its necessary temporality is opened to a displacement and subversion from within" (2004: 47). In spite of this interpretation, Glaspell's use of silences, pauses, and the stillness of the characters has been the center of attention among critics. In this regard, Sander calls her *Trifles* "a testimony to the power of silence in the theatre" and Bigsby remarks on the dramatic effect of Allie's initial silence in *The Outside* (34). Glaspell's experimentation with language has been explored in different aspects. Some feminists have approved of her poetic and broken language as it provides a detachment from the restrictive patriarchal hegemony. These silences, long pauses and hesitations lead to multiplicity and indeterminacy which are threats to any hegemonic discourse. The silence of her absent protagonist, Minnie, is the culmination of this disruption so that it can even be called queer. As it was previously discussed, this queerness makes the audience more awake to give it a deep thought rather than being emotionally involved. On the other hand, these silences provide the audience with more gaps to be filled, so they ought to give their undivided attention to the play. Ben-Zvi believed this broken language, employed by female characters, indicates their struggle to recognize their subject position or probably to have a language of their own, as Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Accordingly, male characters, as the representatives of discursive society, are more voluble in the plays to the fact that they are deceived by the illusory fixity of dominant discourse. In this manner, Ben-Zvi associates verbal dexterity with superficiality in Glaspell's plays (1982). Gainor likewise regards the male realistic language as the representative of "

the male world of literal drowning and rescue" which is juxtaposed with female language standing for " female process of symbolic salvation" (79). Furthermore, staging the gaps and silences is also indicative of the exclusionary process involved in the constitution of subjects in a patriarchal society since language is not generated only by the speaking subjects. According to Butler, " language is a citational chain preceding and exceeding speaking subjects who are retroactively installed by and in discourse" (Salih 104). Thus, silent characters can stand for the women (or minorities) who are silenced by the patriarchal language (or any oppressive discourse). However, a dramatic deconstruction takes place when the very oppressed women succeed to do what men cannot.

3. 2 Performance as Revolution: Constructing Deconstructed Female Identities

Taking Butler's theories into consideration, it becomes obvious that performance is a double-edged process. While gender identities are constructed through performative stylized acts, they can also be dismantled through other performative acts such as drag or parody. Therefore, performance can both reinforce and undermine power structures. In the first section of this chapter, Glaspell's attempts to deconstruct the given female identities have been displayed. This section is dedicated to explore how these deconstructions can construct new female identities. However, this constitutive potentiality differs from Judith L. Stephens's simplistic remark that Glaspell is " reinforce[ing] the status que" (285). Glaspell is actually exploring how the discursive power relations drive women to act or speak like that (Ben-Zvi 2002: 40). Drawing on Hegel, Butler's theories contain a

trace of dialectic understanding. For instance, she remarks on homosexuality based on its relation to compulsory heterosexuality, or she believes any deconstruction is a kind of construction itself (Lloyd 20). Thus, Glaspell is not only flouting the conventional female identities, she is also presenting a new definition of a woman. Staging a woman killing her husband and women refusing to save a man's life is constructing a female identity which is no longer obedient to patriarchal hegemony. Although they seem quite queer at first glance, they incorporate into discursive acts by repetition. Following Butler, any revolt against the constructed identities is at risk of renormalization: If gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (1990a: 271) That is why Butler insists on the necessity of resistance against dominant ideologies. However, it is an oversimplification to think that Glaspell is simply inviting women to kill their husbands as Minnie did. As mentioned in the argument over the concept of resistance, Glaspell herself takes notice of survival and intelligibility by leaving her *Trifles* open-ended and condemning isolation in *The Outside*. Assigning central positions to women, she is actualizing how women can achieve power without violent or radical acts like murder or isolation. In fact, she is reminding the audience of the constructional nature of identities and the fact that they can be reconstructed anew. She is presenting alternative forms of female identity offering women the possibility to free themselves from normative structures of meaning. The repetition of such performances

normalizes the identities which were initially refuted as queer and leads to a different manner of construction. Butler considers these repetitions as instruments of cultural hegemony after being domesticated and recirculated. In conclusion, this chapter has explored how Glaspell deconstructs the given female identities in her selected plays, which leads to certain alterations in the subsequent female constructs. There have been two main sections in this chapter, each analyzing the (de) construction of female identity in Glaspell's *Trifles* and *The Outside*. As seen in the chapter, the arguments have drawn heavily on Butler's theories of gender construction through performativity and queer theory. The first section, "Deconstructing Constructed Female Identities", has been divided into three subsections. The first subsection, "Deconstruction Through resistance", has dealt with the concept of resistance in Glaspell's plays. Female characters' opposition to patriarchal hegemony was depicted as the heart of resistance in the plays. Killing husband, high efficiency in comparison to male characters, being childless, and overstepping the defined patriarchal bounds are instances where female characters disrupt the normative hegemony. The notion of recognition and how it mobilizes collective action has been also discussed. The next subsection, "Deconstruction Through Queerness", has explored the queerness of Glaspell's plays in terms of queer theory. This argument has included two parts: one dedicated to nonconformity of characters and their acts, and another devoted to her distinct technique of absent protagonist in *Trifles*. The third and last subsection was "Deconstruction Through Semiotics and Language" studying how Glaspell semiotically deconstructs the apparent fixed identities, and the role of language in this deconstruction. After

enquiring into Glaspell's dismantling strategies of deconstruction, the next section has examined the second function of performance as a means of constructing identities. To sum up, the whole analysis has confirmed that Glaspell's plays work on two levels: while they negotiate the fixity of identities, they present the audience with new figurations of female identity. Moreover, the following chapter also takes Butlerian issues into account to prove how Glaspell construct and deconstruct female identities in her *Bernice* and *The Verge*.