



Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" From Feminist Point of View

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Having appeared as a reaction to the patriarchal society that imposed clear, well-defined, and skilfully explained roles and expectations, feminism is concerned with the questions of how women are treated in the society. Women were allotted the domestic domain, within which they could express themselves solely as mothers, wives, and mistresses of the households. Social roles were limited while the political ones were out of the question. In this regard, literature, as well as other humanitarian directions such as religious studies, served as a tool of oppression because for a long time, literature was subjected exclusively to the male gaze. By mirroring the existing order, the literature affirmed it even further. It could hardly have been the other way until women received an opportunity to write themselves. The late nineteenth century was a period prolific in the prominent female writers such as Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Fanny Fern. In the early twenties century, Susan Glaspell and Virginia Woolf made a significant contribution to the field of the feminist writing. Glaspell's most famous story is a one-act play "Trifles" that depicted how male prejudice and disregard of the female trifles resulted in an oversight of who the real murderer in the crime was. The works of the modern feminist scholars such as Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Luce Irigaray, Suzy Clarkson Holstein, and Judith Fetterly help see Glaspell's play through the prism of the feminist theory as a critique of the patriarchal society, in which she lived, and which belittled women and confined them to a narrow spectre of roles. "The Greenwich Village Bookshop Door" informs that Glaspell and Cook together with the renowned Eugene O'Neil were the fathers of a new style American Theater (Bradford). It was the most prolific time in Glaspell's career. Moving to New York they experimented with realism and satire. There Glaspell found like-minded people who encouraged her to touch the topics of

feminism and socialism in her writings (Jabboury 4).

Susan Glaspell was not a pioneer in the female writing. Following in the footsteps of Kate Chopin and Katy Fern, Glaspell also was open in her literary work. Bibliographers note that Glaspell was influenced mainly by the female figures in her family, including her mother and grandmother. After having graduated from Drake University, Glaspell had worked as a reporter for the Des Moines News for less than two years. Later on, when having enough stuff for her creative writing, Glaspell quit the job and focused on her new career of a writer. In a few years, she published her first two novels, *The Glory of the Conquered* and *The Visioning*. In her 30s, Glaspell got infatuated with George Cram Cook, whom she later married (Bradford). Cook was a freethinker and a nonconformist, despised social norms and was a rebellious soul. Having come from a conventional background, Glaspell was drawn to the man. They shared similar political and social views. However, Cook was a heavy drinker and recurrently unfaithful to Glaspell. It was not a happy marriage, and Glaspell used her work “as an outlet to vent the anger she felt toward Cook’s behavior” (Jabboury 3). In such a way, Glaspell had first-hand knowledge about the binary condition of the women’s life and conflicts with traditional gender roles.

In “Introduction: On the Politics of Literature,” Judith Fetterley claims, “American Literature is male. Our literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate” (564). Indeed, being written mainly by the male authors, literature shaped the world to be more convenient for men on “the pretense the literature speaks universal truths through forms from which all the merely personal, the purely subjective, has been [...] transformed through the medium of art into the representative” (Fetterley 564). All the more, even sporadic women’s voices in literature were important in demonstrating another reality, the everyday, in which women lived. Susan Glaspell chose to show the women’s plight in an unconventional way. On the basis of a simple

detective story, Glaspell built a sophisticated construction where every detail highlighted the purpose. From the title to symbolism to the themes and the conflict, everything emphasized the existing situation in the society oppressing women by men.

Her most famous play is “Trifles” based on a real life story of a middle-aged woman Margaret Hossack who beat to death her husband with an axe. Neighbours testified that John Hossack, a 59-year-old Iowa farmer, was abusive. There was not enough evidence and Hossack was released (Bradford). For that one-act play, for her one-act play “Trifles,” Susan Glaspell chooses not to narrate it in a linear fashion but instead tells the story in the reverse order. The play’s theme is the relationship between men and their women and the way of how indifferently or coldly husbands treat their wives. That is the ultimate reason of why Mrs. Wright has killed her husband, but the reader learns about it backward when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters find out the details that point to the character of the Wrights’ relationship. As the play is unfolding, the reader comes to understanding how hard Mrs. Wright’s life was. Mrs. Hale remembers Minnie Wright as a cheerful girl who “wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang” (Glaspell 1902). After Mrs. Wright got married, her life became dull and lonely; she did not have enough money for pretty clothes, felt shabby, had no children, and her husband was not compassionate at all (Glaspell 1898). The highlight of her recent life was the purchase of a canary, but even a chirping bird was wiped out by the unbearable husband.

At the beginning of the play, Wright’s attitude to his wife is summed up by a farmer Hale’s remark, “I didn’t know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John” (Glaspell 1894). The indifference to his wife’s feelings is later confirmed in a sequence of the following episodes. By looking around the kitchen, the ladies find more pieces of evidence that reveal the psychological state of Mrs. Wright and the nature of her married life. At first,

Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale find the quilt Mrs. Wright was making and notice that one block of it has erratic stitches. Mrs. Peters is not sure that it should be a sign of Mrs. Wright's nervous state. The agitated stitching can happen if a woman is very tired. Next, they find an empty bird's cage. At that point, Mrs. Hale recalls that John Wright was a hard man "like a raw wind that gets to the bone" (Glaspell). The ladies agree that a canary could cheer up Minnie Wright somehow but at that moment, they find a dead bird with a wrung neck wrapped in silk in a pretty box. Now Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters understand that cruel Mr. Wright deprived his wife of a last solace, and the poor woman could not bear it. Eventually, the nice and cheerful canary that was found dead in a pile of silk cloths was intended by the author as a metaphor of the Wrights' marriage where the young and pretty wife was driven to the murder of the cold and indifferent husband.

If the author had narrated the story in a chronological order, the accent would have fallen on the murder. However, Glaspell wanted to emphasize that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the women's lot was terribly hard, and sometimes loneliness and poor treatment could lead to irreversible consequences. "By telling the events in retrospect, by having the women detectives piece together what happened, Glaspell leads us to focus not only on the murder but, more important, on the developing bond between the two women and their growing compassion for the accused" (Kennedy and Gioia 850). By closely examining Minnie Wright's everyday life in a lonely house, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters put themselves in her shoes and come to a conclusion that she needs the protection they can provide by destroying those hardly visible to men pieces of evidence against the woman.

In "Introduction: Feminist Paradigms," Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan sum up on how women felt under the male dominance, "[T]o be a woman under such conditions was in some respects not to exist at all" (765). Glaspell's play is a good illustration of how women were oppressed by men on a daily basis. The

play begins with the title “Trifles.” It is the first ironic indication at how insignificant details may turn out very important. In the play, the men set the dismissive tone of their communication with the women from the very beginning. At first, Farmer Hale says, “Women are used to worrying over trifles” (Glaspell 1896). By repeating their wonder at women’s ability to worry over trifles for several times, the sheriff exclaims, “You can’t beat the women! Held for murder and worryin’ about her preserves,” thus, showing men’s insensitivity and failure to understand how hard domestic labor is (1896). Later, Mrs. Hale clarifies, to what every woman can relate, “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” (1896). When County Attorney inquires about something important to indicate any motive, the sheriff easily says, “Nothing here but kitchen things” (1896). At that point, all important evidence against Mrs. Wright was found by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale in the kitchen.

Such continuous dismissal of women hurts and alienates them. At the same time, women need to adapt somehow to such conditions. Luce Irigaray calls it “the path of mimicry” (797). It is better for women to play their roles with full understanding “assum[ing] the feminine role deliberately” (787). In Glaspell’s “Trifles,” such mutual influence is vividly shown through the side remarks. While the county attorney chirpily asks Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, “Well ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or know it?” the author’s comment is read “as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries” (Glaspell 1901). Meanwhile, Mrs. Peters apologetically explains the men’s boorish behaviour as “[o]f course they’ve got awful important things on their minds” (1899). Irigaray explains, “If women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply absorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere” (Irigaray 797). In the “Trifles,” the reader sees how the function failed, and the main female character stopped mimicking and released herself from the oppression.

The feminist lenses help see how much and in what regard women were oppressed. It is indicative that in the scene of naming the Wright's kitchen as not "a very cheerful place" the county attorney is quick to conclude that Mrs. Wright did not have "the homemaking instinct" (Glaspell 1897). Of this fact, Gayle Rubin says, "The analysis of the reproduction of labor power does not even explain why it is usually women who do domestic work in the home, rather than men" (773). It is hardwired into people that homemaking is the female domain, and Glaspell pinpoints it, especially through the character of the county attorney.

Rivkin and Ryan say, "The long tradition of male rule in society... silenced women's voices" (765). One of the methods is treating simply and making fun of the women's concerns and opinions. The county attorney keeps a light tone by talking "facetiously" and "with the gallantry of a young politician" (Glaspell 1903; 1895). He treats women with bows and laughs when he sees the apron and the quilt pieces to be taken to Mrs. Wright remarking "I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out" (1903). Such attitude was a mistake that resulted in a failure to solve the crime. A similar mistake was the attitude of Mr. Wright, which turned fatal to him. Mr. Wright did not even deem it necessary to take a patronizing tone with his wife. He was downright rude and a bore at that! Next to him Minnie Wright stopped being herself, her life grew dimmer, her clothes became shabbier, and she quit singing. Glaspell stresses that the last straw was not even herself silence but the canary,

Mrs. Peters: [in a whisper] 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 (*italics mine*) (Glaspell 1901).

In that episode from Mrs. Peters' childhood, one can see a commentary on the societal division of feminine and masculine roles. It is acceptable for boys

to be violent toward animals while girls are to be reticent of their emotions and get used to staying silenced. Conditioning begins in early childhood but also oppression of little females. The logic behind is that boys should be raised the way it is natural for them – essentialism, while girls' natures are corrected and moulded to fit the constructionist ideal (Rivkin and Ryan 768).

Fetterley refers to the situation between men and women as “a culture that gives white men power over women, horses, and niggers,” “the power that marriage puts in the hands of men,” “ownership of women ... as the index of power” (566, 567). With this regard, a logical question arises what men did with that power. In Glaspell's play, Mr. Wright preferred seeing his wife submissive and quite. It used to be a frequent role for a woman. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar clarify it by the fact that women were kept under control by the made-up roles of an angel and demon (812). The scholars explain that being the angel-woman includes being quite, “She should do [the good of others] silently, without calling attention to her exertions” because otherwise woman would reveal her egotistic side (816). If a woman stops thinking about others, she automatically begins thinking about herself and it could not be tolerated. However, Gilbert and Gubar remark that “to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead” (817). The reader sees in the character of Mrs. Wright, a person without the *joie de vivre*, almost dead inside. When he saw her last time, John Hale describes Mrs. Wright as “rocking back and forth” in the rocker with a “queer” look (Glaspell 1894). The reader's general idea of Mrs. Wright's queer life is reinforced with the county attorney's references to the neglected kitchen. However, Mrs. Hale makes it clear that it is more Mr. Wright's fault that the place is not cheerful than Mrs. Wright's. As the cold and insensitive man, he isolated his wife from the world and himself and made her life miserable.

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Gilbert and Gubar explain the angel/devil opposition as devilishness existing in every woman (818). Inasmuch as women were supposed to manage their domestic sphere, they were capable of scheming and plotting. The scholars note that the Victorian men were aware of that their women were capable of expressing the anger and rage. That is how the flip-side of the angel-woman was manifested itself. Gilbert and Gubar point out, “The monster may not only be concealed behind the angel, she may actually turn out to reside within the angel” (820; italics by author). What is interesting here is that Glaspell emphasizes the men’s role in waking the monster up in their women. Women develop demonic characteristics under the circumstances of male oppression. Gilbert and Gubar remark that a woman should kill the imposed image of both the angel and monster (812). Being oppressed into the angel-woman, Mrs. Wright was driven to the last measure of turning into a monster and killing her oppressor. Upon coming to realize the terror of Minnie’s life, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters grow quite as they reflect on their similar lives, “[Mrs. Hale]: I know how things can be – for women...We all go through the same things – it’s all just a different kind of the same thing” (Glaspell 1902). However, unlike Mrs. Wright, these ladies had not yet been pushed to the limit. Glaspell writes in the male-dominated genre so she decides to star women in major roles making them more prominent than men. While feeling superior the men turned out fruitless and needless.

Glaspell does not present Mrs. Wright’s act as a fall. On the contrary, Mrs. Minnie Wright is the only woman in the play who has a first name. The two other women are viewed through the prism of their husbands’ activities and are called by their family names; thus, they are presented as a part of their

family clans but not independent individuals. They even act on their assumed identities. The sheriff's wife is more inclined to be obedient to the law unlike the farmer's wife, who is more flexible according to the circumstances. When Mrs. Hale fumed indignantly at rummaging through Mrs. Wright's house in her absence, Mrs. Peters objected, "But Mrs. Hale, the law is the law" (Glaspell 1899).

Another field of tension is the way the men regard women's domestic labor. It is a ubiquitous opinion even now that the household chores are a piece of cake, and women only chat and do nothing all day long. Therefore, the county attorney took the liberty of remarking about the messy state of Mrs. Wright's kitchen, "Not much of a housekeeper" (Glaspell 1896). Mrs. Hale takes Mrs. Wright's side saying, "There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm" and "Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be" (Glaspell 1897). Mrs. Hale feels solidarity with her neighbour and would not want herself somebody to rummage around in her kitchen.

According to the feminist critics, traditional patriarchal rhetoric usually allots the role of the sacrificial scapegoat for women (Fetterley 565). In such male-oriented literature, oppressive women torture victimized men who eventually escaped them. Fetterley writes, "In such fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself" (565). Such viewpoint is confirmed by Gilbert and Gubar with their angel/demon opposition. Men believed that women had only two and very exaggerated roles. On the contrary, Glaspell makes her female characters believable and easy to identify with. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, the country women who are left by their men to their kitchen things. They worry about the fruit being frozen, the mess in the kitchen, erratic stitches on the quilt, and many other female matters. Meanwhile, the men are busy with their men's business. They

visit the barn, look around the farm, and otherwise investigate the crime. It is supported by Gilbert and Gubar who remind that the masculine ideal is action while femininity is expressed through passivity (815).

Behind their generated activity, the men in the “Trifles” overlook crucial clues to solve the crime case. Because of their irony and patronizing attitude, the men misunderstand the explicit dialog of women about knotting and quilting. Without a habit of taking women seriously, a banal dialogue between Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters does not reveal its second layer to the men. In the last scene of the play, the county attorney jokingly teases the ladies saying, “At least we found out that she was not going to quilt it” completely missing the point that in that context, to knot meant to strangle her husband to death (Glaspell 1903).

However, Glaspell does not allow the men to revel in their superiority. While they think high of themselves and humiliate women, Glaspell reveals the prejudice and rigidity of their minds, which prevent them from solving the case. A literary critic, Suzy Clarkson Holstein believes that different perspectives are the reason behind different reactions of men and women “grounded in varying understandings of the home space” (282). The men arrive at the Wright’s as at the scene of crime and, following their linear logic, investigate a room by room. Skipping the kitchen they believe “there was nothing important” there “only kitchen things” (Glaspell 1896). Contrastingly, women “arrive at a home” (Clarkson Holstein 282). Keeping quiet and hardly saying anything at the beginning of the play, the women also did their investigation, however. Gathering together the things they wanted to hand over to Mrs. Wright, her neighbours pieced the puzzle and discovered her secret. That ability to hold their tongue when they are expected to do so is, according to Clarkson Holstein, their empowerment (285). It allows the women to come to their conclusions and act upon them. Another factor of assistance is their ability to relate. Clarkson Holstein explains, “Their

perspective impels them imaginatively to relive [Mrs. Wright's] entire married life rather than simply to research one violent moment" (287; italics by author). Such deep knowledge and sympathy is possible because the women can empathize with what another one of them experiences. "We all go through the same things – it's all just a different kind of the same thing," explained it Mrs. Hale (Glaspell 1902). Clarkson Holstein concludes, "[T]heir way of knowing leads them not simply to knowledge; it also leads to the decision about how to act on that knowledge" (282). At that, Clarkson Holstein objects that the women help to divert suspicion from Mrs. Wright only on the basis of the same gender (288). The women's open-mindedness and lack of a specific purpose in visiting Mrs. Wright's house resulted in a mutual decision to cover for her. It was a spontaneous decision based on the immediate evidence and their perspective on the situation. Similarly, Clarkson Holstein argues that it is more the men's professions that prompt them to interpret the law in a different way, but not just their gender attitudes (288).

Most critical readings of Glaspell's "Trifles" agree on the presence of bonding between the women resulting in the response to continuous male domination. Glaspell sets the scene at the very beginning of the play by showing how the men's rudeness brings the women together. With every dismissive and condescending gesture or word of the men, the women drew closer together. Glaspell specifically remarks it in the author's commentaries (1896). On the one side, it can be read as a masculine perspective, as if women are so individually insignificant that they need each other to constitute some power (Jabboury 15). On the other side, Glaspell explicitly showed how women could manifest their strength even when being ridiculed. Latifa Ismael Jabboury writes that even in the early twentieth century, when women had few rights and were still oppressed by men, Glaspell "wished to show the women of her time that they had more power than they realized" (16).

Glaspell's "Trifles" is packed with symbolism. The play opens with the view of

the unkempt kitchen with “unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table – other signs of incomplete work” (Glaspell 1894). While the county attorney is quick to judge, the absent mistress of the house as incompetent, the arrived ladies are aware of that it is more a sign of the emotional commotion. There are five active characters in the play: three men and two women, which cannot but reflect the fact that women were an oppressed minority in the early twentieth century. The major characters of Mr. and Mrs. Wright are behind the scenes. Therefore, Mrs. Wright becomes an invisible not only for her husband, who continuously ignored her, but also for the audience, and, as a projection, for the society.

Only males and Mrs. Wright have first names. The men are introduced at the beginning of the play with their full names as full members of the social life. Mrs. Wright proved her existence by killing the oppressive husband, and Glaspell underlines the importance of this act by calling her Minnie from time to time. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale are still submissive and humble wives of their husbands; therefore, they are called by their husbands’ names. In fact, the characters’ names can also be read symbolically. Just like with the knot, Glaspell likes puns. When Minnie Foster gets married, she becomes Mrs. Wright and a person without many rights. Wright means that from now on, she will have to stand up for her rights. Finally, Mrs. Wright dares to exercise her right “to free herself against the societally sanctioned “right” of her husband to control the family” (Jabboury 7). Meanwhile, Minnie’s name has a narrower definition of being minimized in the eyes of John and society. On a larger scale, “the name of “Minnie Wright” refers to the minimal right the woman has in her society” (Jabboury 8).

From the conversation between the county attorney and Mr. Hale, the reader understands that the now-deceased Mr. Wright was a taciturn person who was even against installing a land line in his house believing “folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet” (Glaspell 1894). For his

wife, the situation was deplorable: their house was in the valley, far from neighbours. They had no children and hardly any visitors. Therefore, the reader understands that Mrs. Wright's life was full of troubles and devoid of pleasures. When the county attorney begins dismissing remarks about the state of the kitchen and females' "worrying over trifles," women drew together. That is how this female bond begins, which will culminate in the knot at the end of the play.

The kitchen symbolizes Mrs. Wright's domain. It was as cold as her relationship with her husband. All objects found in the kitchen are also meaningful for the character of Minnie Wright. The bottles of fruit can have a number of interpretations ranging from a symbol of coldness and isolation to a symbol of hardships of her futile life when she labors in the sweat of her brow, and the result of her toil is destroyed by the frost of her marriage. A single bottle of cherries left can be interpreted as the last secret left unrevealed after the police had snooped Minnie's house (Jabboury 10). The women took the bottle with them hiding it under the cloths, just like they hid from the men the knowledge about the found evidence. Next metaphor is the quilt symbolizing Mrs. Wright's life. By taking the decision to either quilt it or knot it, Mrs. Wright chose her fate. Instead of matching scraps of discarded material for the quilt meaning that she would try to mend her marriage troubles, she chose to knot it "meaning that she would decide rejecting her life as it exists because that life was "not it" and she would do something to change it" (Jabboury 12). The erratic stitches on the quilt also reflected Minnie's nervous state. Probably, after the bird had been killed, Minnie sat down to quilt in an attempt to take her mind off these tragic things.

Minnie Wright must have taken the killing of her pet bird as a grief loss. The couple did not have children. Lonely people often subconsciously regard their pets as a surrogate of their non-existing children. Therefore, for Minnie, her husband strangled not only a source of solace but also a projection of a child.

Additionally, the bird and the cage are another metaphor for Mrs. Wright and her life under her husband's domination. Mrs. Hale compared the young Minnie Foster, before she married the abusive Mr. Wright, to a sweet but timid and fluttery bird (Glaspell 1901). Jabboury quotes Makowsky who said that traditionally "the bird's song [was interpreted] as the voice of the soul" implying that "John Wright not only killed Minnie's canary, but her very spirit" (10). Therefore, the reader can see the complex three-level metaphor of a bird in a birdcage. On a physical level, it was a pleasure for the lonely woman; on the metaphysical level, it was a child-substitute, and on the spiritual level, it was the image of Minnie herself.

The birdcage is a traditional metaphor for "the role of women in society; the bird being woman and the cage is the male dominated society" (Jabboury 12). With the demise of her pet-bird something snapped inside of Minnie and either she broke the cage, or her husband had done it, but this act symbolizes Minnie's freedom from her husband's oppression. Her new freedom was manifested through strangling of her husband mirroring his cruelty toward the canary.

The inability of the men to investigate and successfully interpret the women's domain, the kitchen is ironic, on the one side. On the other side, it testifies to the functioning of men and women in different worlds. In the first scene, both the men and women see the same unkempt kitchen with unfinished household chores but the men blame a disorderly housekeeper while the women read in it the signs of a sudden interruption of some urgent matter. The men quickly walked through the kitchen not finding there "a motive; something to show anger, or – sudden feeling" (Glaspell 1898). Meanwhile, everything in there screamed about the anger and despair. Piece by piece, the neighbor, and the sheriff's wife unravel a mystery of Mrs. Wright's farm life.

Annette Kolodny points out, "Glaspell's narrative not only invites a semiotic

analysis but, indeed, performs that analysis for us” (462). Mrs. Wright is a transmitter or sender, and the women are receivers or readers of her message (462). Therefore, asking for the things seeming irrelevant for a jailed person, Mrs. Wright prodded the women to help her. Inasmuch as they live a similar life, they recognized the decoded signs and reconstructed what happened. Of this fact, Kolodny says, “To those outside the shared system of quilting and knotting, roller towels and bad stoves, with all their symbolic significations, these may appear trivial, even irrelevant to meaning; but to those within the system, they comprise the totality of the message: in this case, a reordering of who in fact has been murdered and, with that, what has constituted the real crime in the story” (462). By reading Mrs. Wright’s symbolical language correctly, the women come to the understanding that over the years, Minnie Foster had been slowly asphyxiated, figuratively speaking. It comes with regret as Mrs. Hale realizes she could have dropped by occasionally to support her neighbour. Mrs. Peters echoes acknowledgment that she can relate to Mrs. Wright’s solitude, “[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” (Glaspell 1902).

To that end, Glaspell’s point is “lacking familiarity with the women’s imaginative universe, that universe within which their acts are signs, the men in these stories can never read nor comprehend the meaning of the women closest to them” (Kolodny 463). Despite speaking the same language, the men and women can fail to understand each other as soon as they step outside the borders of the figurative language. While communicating in the everyday life, people can lose the ability to understand the language of specialized literature unless they are aware of the context, within which it was produced. In the similar vein, Susan S. Lanser claims that women used to write in a double construction with the upper layer reserved for the male readers such as the prying husband or brother and the lower layer for the intimate friend (616). These two voices are similar in the structure as both belong to the first-person

but they are codified in a different way, and narrate different stories (617). Susan S. Lanser reminisces of Mikhail Bakhtin's statement that "in narrative there is no single voice" (617). Claiming that polyphony is inherent to people, Bakhtin explained that the discourse of self is constructed of voice upon voice (617). For women living in the patriarchal society, the double voice was essential. Thanks to it, Glaspell demonstrated how those who could speak the women's language could save a person that was driven to a crime.

Glaspell's play is concluded with the same women's trifles, with which it began. The county attorney casually stirred the quilt pieces, which cover the box remarking that the ladies would hardly ever be able to carry very dangerous things (Glaspell 1903). Laughingly, the lawyer looks through the simple things for Mr. Wright. There is an apron, shawl, and the quilt. "No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law," concludes the county attorney (Glaspell 1903). His last joke about Mrs. Wright knotting was on him, and he did not get it because of his arrogance and patronizing attitude. The female power in the times of female powerlessness is the important issue Glaspell raises. Being constantly oppressed, the women have learned how to turn their weakness into their power. Therefore, they were able to subvert the principles of law followed by their men secretly.

If the marriage does not give pleasure and solace, women are forced to find other ways of how to protect self. Stepping into shoes of the other, these women join their forces in resisting the male dominance. It results in female bonding and, consequently, in a moral dilemma when the two moralities clash. Male morality considers it lawful to follow theoretical principle and adhere to rules while the female morality puts relationship ahead of the law.

Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" is one of the earliest feminist dramas that illustrates a number of the feminist problems. The feminist theory is concerned with the

questions of how women are treated in the society. Among them, there are issues of how women are oppressed in the patriarchal society, not heard, dismissed, and limited exclusively to the domestic domain. On the example of three couples, Glaspell demonstrates it. She also draws attention to the angel/demon opposition prescribed to women and explicitly shows that these extremities are artificial and not inherent to females in general. Through symbolic imagery and laconic means, Glaspell reveals the role that the women of the period were expected to perform.

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