



Women As ‘Other’ In The Drama *The Trifles* By Susan Glaspell

Nur Anisa Febriani

¹English Department Faculty of Letter, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

²Anisa@gmail.com

**Article
Info**

Abstract

This study discusses a matter of women discrimination faced by women character in the drama *The Trifles* by Susan Glaspell. As a feminist, Glaspell shows in her one-act drama that women are often depicted as individual who are less than men. Women is often being dismissed and have second place in society. This study is aimed to see how women is portrayed as the ‘other’ by the men in their life. This research is a descriptive qualitative study and using feminist approach. This study used a drama script *The Trifles* by Susan Glaspell as the main data. Gender theory by Simone de Beauvoir will be used as the main theory of this research. The main data collected after doing a throughout reading the drama script. The result shows that women are considered ‘other’ half by the men and that men decides that women nature is to nurture.

Keywords:

Gender, half,
men, other, women.

© 2024 Universitas Pamulang

✉ Corresponding author:

B3 Building, Kampus Viktor, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan Indonesia 50229

E-mail: andyndyna.vasdara@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

“We live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture”. The statement was made by Secretary-General António Guterres in his Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture 2020 speech. The statement is not far from the reality that only 5% of women working in the skilled trades in Canada (Menard, 2022). And only 6.5% of women working full-time in 2020 (Hegewisch & Mefferd, 2021). However, women now are different from women twenty or thirty years ago.

Women now have a chance to work. They have a chance to actualize themselves. Even though women still live inside the patriarchy system. Patriarchy is a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women (Nash, 2020). The system positioned men as the dominant while women as subordinate. Patriarchy refers to the greater power that men have over women. It makes women as part of men rather than their own.

Women being a part of women is in line to what de Beauvoir says in her book *The Second Sex*. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men –father or husbands –more firmly than they are to other women. (De Beauvoir, 1953, p. 18)

Women are not themselves. Women is always being a part of other sex which makes women the ‘other’. Pateman (1988) also states about fraternal patriarchy’ is that although father figure no longer primary power, figure women are still not the equal of men. He also argues that in the family context, women are subordinate first to their fathers and then to their husbands. It concludes that women does not have place to stand or define themselves on their own. There are always another figure, in this case is man, who give women a definition.

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” (De Beauvoir, 1953). The provocative statement is made by Simone de Beauvoir, one of the great feminist with her contribution through her book *The Second Sex* that can be applied until today. The statement means that woman becomes woman because of the society, women are made to be women. Woman is born equal to men but along the time, by the rule and system than man made, women is determined to be in a certain position in man’s life. “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth,” (De Beauvoir, 1953).

Women is the ‘other’ according to men who define them. Meanwhile men are the subject. “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.” (De Beauvoir, 1953). This means that woman cannot be herself without linking herself to a man, however man can be himself without woman. It goes

without saying that men think women are less and likely do not have choice as the choices are to be made by men.

A condition in which women are defined less can be seen through a work from Susan Glaspell in her drama play named *The Trifles*. Glaspell was an American playwright, novelist, journalist, and artist. Her work *The Trifles* named the most anthologized works in America theater history since its first play in 1916. *The Trifles* brought up a story of gender role, shows how there was injustice in patriarchal society.

There are some previous studies dealing with feminist issue. One of them is entitled *Oppression towards women as Depicted in Marge Piercy's Selected Poems* (2021) by Diksita Galuh Nirwinastu. The research conducted to examine how women are oppressed by the patriarchal community. Another study is *Rejection against the Patriarchal Society in Stephen Chbosky and Evan Spiliotopoulos Beauty and The Beast* (2022) by Marsy Diana Sampe. The study examines the liberal feminism that focuses on how women should have the same rights and opportunity as men in education, economy, politics, rights, and other gender inequality issues.

This study appoints gender theory by Simone de Beauvoir (1953). Women live in patriarchal society tend to accept their role as man's other. It does not because they want to, rather it is because they do not have the capability to say otherwise. Women has always been man's dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality (De Beauvoir, 1953).

The power women have would have eventually been subdued by the men in their life. Women have very little idea on how to manage things because they are not used to it. Men used to arrange everything for them, therefore at the end women would have gone back to accept what de Beauvoir (1953) called as masculine authority. The situation in which woman is made to be incapable of things are actually the result of patriarchy system. Women are called lazy because they do not accomplished things in which the whole reason is because of the society. de Beauvoir (1953) gives an analogy for it that her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.

This study adopts qualitative descriptive study, the data taken are from a drama script written by Susan Glaspell, *The Trifles*. The data are collected by reading the drama script in-depth to find narration and dialogues that shows woman as 'other'. Several books and journal articles related to the issue are also used. The quotations collected from the drama script to reveal the women's struggle as being 'other' faced by the character in the drama script. Next, analysis is given to

explain interpretation to the issues. Finally, a conclusion is set to solve any matters of women's struggle as being 'other' faced by women character in the drama.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part describes women's role as 'other' which faced by the women characters in Susan Glaspell's *The Trifles*. Glaspell reveals that men evaluate women according to their belief and women is subdued as less by the men in their life.

Men Evaluation over Women

Women is a free individual. However, as women is often being defined by the men in their life, it is hard to be one true self without man trying to correct women.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (looking around) I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there, (to the SHERIFF) You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF: Nothing here but kitchen things.

[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. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 4)

The quotation above shows that men always have their comment on how women do things. The county attorney said "*here's a nice mess.*" Shows that men always think that women is what de Beauvoir (1953) describes as *eternal feminine*. Women have jobs which are nurturing. Women takes care of men and not vice versa. House is where woman is placed. Woman prepares food, takes care of the house, and the children. Country attorney comments on the kitchen condition of Mrs. Wright's kitchen shows that as a man he keeps evaluating woman on what she must do. *County Attorney: Dirty towels!* (kicks his foot against the pans under the sink) *Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?* (Glaspell, 1916, p. 4).

de Beauvoir (1953) argues that men never have to explain themselves not like woman does. Man also thinks that women is always in the opposite of way, that if a man is right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong (De Beauvoir, 1953). It means that when men as a group has opinion on things it would be considered normal, meanwhile when woman wants to defend another woman, it means that woman is taking sides. Just like what happen in the drama play when Mrs. Hale is depending Mrs. Wright regarding the dirty towel.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal

to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 5)

Again, despite whether Mrs. Hale is depending Mrs. Wright because they are women, it does not mean that what Mrs. Hale said is any less true. She is right for saying that it is probably men that makes the towel dirty but for the County Attorney, whether what she says is true or not, he does not want to hear it. All he can get from it is that, Mrs. Hale is taking side and she is taking woman's side.

Another part in which men is giving their opinion on women in the play is when they are talking about the Wright's house. While they are talking, County Attorney, again, gives his opinion on Mrs. Wright about how she does not have the homemaking instinct.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 5)

County Attorney stands on the reality in which he agrees that homemaking is woman's job. For him, woman's job is taking care of the house and it must be done dutifully and precisely. If not, then she is not doing a good job. It goes in line to what de Beauvoir (1953) states that men defines woman and decides that her place is to nurtun, to take care of things.

County Attorney and possibly many other men think that women have only one job and that is taking care of her husband and children. Since woman belongs to her father and then when she gets married she belongs to her husband, woman never has a stand point in which they can proof their capability on doing things.

Women as 'Other' Part of Men

Biologically, women is different than men. There is not denying that. What de Beauvoir (1953) concerns about is that unqiues experiences, such as menstruation and pregnancy, that women have make men see them as foreign being. Men thinks of women as the 'Other'. Women also considered as a part of man. Woman cannot define themselves without their entanglement with a man in her life. A woman is daughter to her father and when she marries, she is wife of her husband. In theplay, woman being a part of men can been throught Mrs. Peters. She is the wife of the Sheriff. That makes her a part of her husband.

MRS. PETERS: Of course it's no more than their duty. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 5)

MRS. PETERS: But Mrs. Hale, the law is the law. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 7)

The quotation above shows the entanglement of Mrs. Peters to her husband. Her husband is a sherif and as a sheriff's wife she ought to stand beside the law. She takes her place as her husband's significant 'other'. In the play, there is not muct opinion given by Mrs. Peters. The only thing she utters are only explain where she stands in the case of Mrs. Wright.

She cannot be blamed for what she is thinking. Even though, it looks at seems like she does not the back bone to say what really wants to say. Mrs. Peters thinks just like what de Beauvoir (1953) mentions that women do not have the capability to think or act otherwise because she does not have the place to. Because ever since she was little, woman is already defined by the society. Mrs. Peters speaks on things that she believes is true. Because for her, in where her husband stand then that is where she stands. “He is for her the meaning, the justification of her existence.” (De Beauvoir, 1953). Below are another quotations regarding Mrs. Peters’s position.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Oh, I

guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. (*Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back*) No, Mrs Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it thatway, Mrs. Peters? (Glaspell, 1916, p. 13)

“a sherrif’s wife is married to the law.” (Glaspell, 1916) can also have an implication that her husband is her law. Which means that her husband decides what is right or wrong for Mrs. Peters. That after marrying her husband, hersole role is to follow her husband and obey him.

In the play, the story goes into questioning who is the murder of John Wright. In this part, Glaspell puts little explanation. The audience is the one who must decide who is the real culprit. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters accidently made discover the culprit behind the mystery of John Wright’s death. In their discovery, it can also be found how Mrs. Wright herself, who is actually not a part of the whole play but has a very important role, considers half of her husband.

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. (*a look around the room*) 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? (Glaspell, 1916, p. 12)

The quotation above explains about how Mrs. Wright was thirty years ago, assumingly before she got married. She was a pretty you woman named Minnie Foster who loved to sing. Minnie Foster was probably her maiden nama, as when woman got married she takes her husband’s name. It shows how marriage can change a woman as a whole. Minnie Foster loved to sing but Mrs. Wright’s home was gloomy, Minnie Foster wore pretty dress but Mrs. Wright wore shabby clothes.

MRS. HALE: (*examining the skirt*) Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. 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. (Glaspell, 1916, p. 6)

Again, there is nothing much to do about it because as de Beauvoir (1953) states that in marrying woman becomes his ‘half’, detached from her past and becoming attached to her husband’s

universe. Just like what happened to Mrs. Wright. She was not Minnie Foster anymore as soon as she got married. She becomes the other half of her husband.

CONCLUSION

The analysis results show that the drama script from the play *The Trifles* by Susan Glaspell contains patriarchy society in which women is defined as 'other'. Men think that women have certain role that women must do it well because men think it is already part of woman's nature to nurture. Also, Woman is defined as men 'other' half because as soon as woman marries a man, the man become woman's whole universe but it does not occur for men.

References

- De Beauvoir, S. (1953). *The Second Sex*. (H. Parshley, Ed., & H. Parshley, Trans.) London: Jonathan Cape.
- Glaspell, S. (1916). *The Trifles*. New York: Frank Shay.
- Gutteres, A. (2020, July 18). *Annual Lecture 2020: Secretary-General Gutteres's full speech*. Retrieved from Nelson Mandela Foundation: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/annual-lecture-2020-secretary-general-gutterres-full-speech>
- Hegewisch, A., & Mefferd, E. (2021). *Institute for Women's Policy Research*. Retrieved from Thegender wage gap by occupation, race, and ethnicity 2020.
- Menard, J. (2022, August 03). Building Tomorrow Supported. Retrieved from Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com>
- Nash, C. J. (2020). Patriarchy. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography: Second Edition*, 43-47. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10206-9>
- Nirwinatsu, D. G. (2021). Oppression toward Women as Depicted in Marge Piercy's Selected Poems. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 21(2), 456-463. DOI: 10.24071/joll.v21i2.3722
- Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sampe, M. D. (2022). Rejection against the patriarchal society in Stephen Chbosky and Evan Spiliotopoulos *Beauty and The Beast*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 22(1), 115-124. DOI: 10.24071/joll.v22i1.3582