
THE REFLECTION OF SOCIAL CONDITION IN SUSAN GLASPELL'S PLAY TRIFLES

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ABSTRACT

Literary works are usually uses as the tools to express an author's ideas and experiences, there are several literary works that show issues, conflicts and conditions to reflect the original community when the work was made. One of these literary works is through the Trifles tragedy which was written by Susan Glaspell through the inspiration of a case she had handled when she was a journalist in Iowa. This undergraduate thesis analyzes the social condition that reflected from Susan Glaspell's play script Trifles by using the literature as the reflection of society that show the condition of the discrimination treatment of men towards women in America .This study uses the sociological approach with the theory proposed by Ian Watt (1961) literature as the reflection of society.

KEYWORDS: *Literature, Trifles, Social Condition*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a social institution because the author/writer is also a part of society with express their experiences and conception about life and society in his works [1]. Literature as "art" is not just a pleasure, it brings the readers to the habitual frameworks of consciousness and affective life habitual effect [2].

Literature introduces reader to the new experiences from a literary works, the author represents their idea and imagination from literary works. Literary works consists of three main forms, they are; fiction, poems and play. Play has a different characteristics between fiction and poems, which in the fiction and

poems people can only see and read the text that made by the author for us as the reader to determine what we want to imagine without the visualization, but in a play people can enjoy the performance and also read the script that consists of a dialog with a good detail of expression and situation. Play is an imitation of life, it has a unique characteristics, it can be read and it composes to be performed and presented on the stage to the audience [3].

Author as a part of society creates a works that is called as their own creativity based on what they saw and experience, it also portrayed the social situations and condition. A literature can

gives reflection society at the time the author write their works to shows and give the valid conditions from the society at the time they were written. The social condition can be portrayed through the works that show the conflict, statement, situation and act in the works itself.

This research will show the social condition that reflect in Susan Glaspell's works Trifles by using the sociology of literature proposed by Ian Watt (1964) theory that give the classification of; literature as the reflection of society. Ian Watt (1964) identifying Literature as the reflection of society means that it considered with the conditions of society at that time the works written, it can be shown through out the characters and text that show the same condition and actual issue from the time they were written, the genre also can show the problem with the fact in social life at the time it was written. [4]

LITERATURE REVIEW

Play.

Play is the one of the genres of literature. Play focus on the action and conversation between the characters. A play must be always close with the performances in the stage. All of the characters must be do an act on the stage and give the best performance for the audience. As one of the literary works, play script have a special characteristics. A play has a purpose to entertain the audience with a visualization and by a script so the audience also can be enjoy the play by reading a script. There are 5 types of

Play; (a)Tragedy, is a play that the storyline end with the sorrow and sadness. (b) Comedy, is a play with having much of fun in the storyline. (c) Tragicomedy, is a play which having a tragic theme but will having a happy ending. (d) Melodrama, this is a sentimental play. (e) Slapstick, this play is called a joke.[5]

Sociology of Literature.

Sociology of literature is a study about human and society and the process of social interaction within the literary works. sociology of literature analyze how the society grow and develop by learning social institution, economic problem, politic issue and point of view of the certain social groups. Sociology of literature is the study of literary works in their relationship with social – culture's influence which follow to influence story in literary works. A literary text can have the big potential to be studied using the sociology of literature because literature is produced from members of society to be enjoyed and utilized by the society. Ian watt (1964) in his theory sociological literature stated that the object of sociology of literature are Literature as the reflection of society and the social function of literature itself. [6]

Literature as the Reflection of Society.

In writing a literary works, the author take their own experiences as a human in society to make it as the tool or material in write their works. Literature as a reflection of society examine about how far a literature can be reflected a condition on society. While making a literature, the author remake, build up,

embellish with their own idea and imagination. The author can use some of fact in society to put their own works but they need to choose if they can use as the inspiration and references to show social attitude in specific place or certain groups (not everybody) and its literary works tries to present the situation carefully. Other things that can say for literature as a reflection of society is that the issue from its works can't happen again in nowadays and it only can happen in the time of the author write their works, the way the author influence the selection and appearance of social fact in his work.

MEDHOD

This research used the descriptive qualitative methods, which the purpose of this research revealed, described and explained the social condition of American Society in Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles* using the theory proposed by Ian Watt (1964). Amminudin in (Arifuddin 2014) states that descriptive qualitative method is to analyze in the form of description not in number or event the coefficient of relationship between variables. [7]

DATA ANALYSIS

The Reflection of Social Condition of American Society in Susan Glaspell's Play *Trifles*.

Trifles is a one act play that took Susan Glaspell into the huge popularity, she took the of tragedy of muder that happen in the farmhouse about the husband who got killed in his bed and

the wife become the suspected. The five characters in *Trifles* act as a detective to find out the evidience in the place where the dead body of John Wright was found. Susan Glaspell as the author of *Trifles* stated that in writes the play it is comes from her inspiration when she was being the journalist of the murder case in Iowa 1900, where the case of a wife that put on trial about killed her husband in their own house, *Trifles* are made by Susan Glaspell because of her involve into the actual case of a murder in *Trifles* itself, it can be proved from the quotation bellow.

Trifles are based on the murder of sixty year old farmer named John Hossack on December 2, 1900, in Idianola, Iowa. Glaspell covered the case the subsequent trial when she was a reporter for the Des Moines Daily News (Ben-zvi) . Most of her works was taken from the background and setting in Iowa because she was raised in there and having a favorable impression to the people who lived and farmed in the region. In earlier her carrer into write a fiction and drama, she use Iowa characters and setting in many of the 14 plays, 9 novels and over 50 short stories, essays and articles that she wrote.

Scene. The kitchen is the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the Sheriff comes in followed by

the Country Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the Country attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the Sheriff's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.
(Trifles, page 1)

The opening scene of give the first focus on “Kitchen”, to show the setting of kitchen has the important role play place in the whole story of the play and as the first place for all the characters into start the investigation. The unnecessary place or where the place that usually use by women to do stuff there and somehow ignore by others especially men to give the short introduction of what the story of the play continue with the search of the proof. The picture of Kitchen in the house as the place where all the women do all stuff there draw as the unattended place and gloomy. The 5 characters with the explanation by their gender and age to shows that the play will focus on the different gender characters to give their own opinion and a short debate.

Trifles gives the story from investigation of murder in the one family house which a wife suspected for killed her husband because she act weird in their own house which when her husband fall asleep. “Trifles adheres to the creaky

convention of detective fiction; John Wright, an Iowa farmer, has been found strangled in his bed; Minnie, his oddly antisocial wife, is suspected of the murder” (Hilton, 2011)”. The potrayed of killed and murder in the farmhouse is made by Susan Glaspell that she took the inspiration from the story when she was being a journalist in Iowa, the murder in the house of John Wright has been found strangled in his bed and the wife become a suspect, the five characters in Trifles shows the investigation for a wife (Mrs. Wright) as the suspected of being a killer of her husband as what the conversation continues to give the explanation from the witness.

Hale : She moved from that chair to this one over here (pointing to a small chair in the corner) and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me – scared. (The country attorney, who has had his notebook out, makes a note) I dunno, maybe it wasn;t scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back and then Dr Llyod came, and you Mr Peters and so I guess that's all I now that you don't Country Attorney (looking around) I guess we'll go upstairs first – and then out to the barn and around there. (to the sherrif) You're convinced that there was nothing important here – nothing that would point to any motive.

Sherrif : Nothing here but kitchen things.

(The country 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. Pull his hands away, sticky.)

Country Attorney : Here's a nice mess (Trifles, page 4)

Susan Glaspell start to show the act of the three men characters in Trifles which commenting about the kitchen in the house by looking around looks like underestimate the place and they thing there is nothing they can find there, only a mess. After the explanation from Mr Hale, Country attorney and sherrif make the investigation continue to the upstairs, the bed room of Mr Wright where his dead body was found. Based on what Susan Glaspell do as the jounalist in Iowa when she handle the cases of murder trial in 1900, she gives the reflection of the place of farmhouse in the midwestern as same as in Trifles, Susan Glaspell tried to give scene of detective fiction into the whole story in Trifles, the introduction of her play by statement from the witness and retelling again about the case they are handle in but in this play Susan Glaspell did not show and give a dialogues to the character of Mrs Wright as the suspected.

(The women draw nearer)

Mrs Peters (to the other woman) Oh, her fruit; it did freeze (To the country attorney) She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

Sherrif : Well, can you beat the women! Held for the murder and worryin about her preserves.

Country 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.

(The two women move a litter closer together) (Trifles, page 4)

From di dialogues above, The statement that comes from Sherrif, Country Attorney and Hale as the character of men in this dialogue can show to the readers for understanding of Susan Glaspell means by used the word of Trifles as the title and also in the dialogue of the characters of man in this part, Susan tries to explain to the readers that Trifles in this play is pointed to the women. As the title echoes, "women are supposed to worry "over trifles" while men's breadwinning role is viewed as the weighty task. In objection to Country Attorney remark about Mrs. Wright's kitchen as "a nice mess". (Bazregarzadeh, 2016).

It is potrayed the situation and condition of the certain society in America in the 20th Century where women are still under the orders of men and must follow all the words said by men, therefore at that time there were still many views that said that women were gentle creatures and could not stand alone without men, so women should always do small activities and not heavy, because heavy work is only done by men, in Trifles it is shown how male

characters think that women only work in the kitchen. From the dialogue above also shows how men think about women who have become an understanding of them and make it a habit that they can be proud of to compare themselves with women. Susan Glaspell show the treatment of a men towards woman by saying the satirical words that purpose to making fun and think that women can't help them to do their job. "Women are used to worrying over trifles" has already become the mindset of men to the women that always commenting to the things that is not necessary, same with their activity and task. The statement effected to the other character of men and become the agreement from Country Attorney, Sherrif and Hale to shows their absolute opinion about women and the way women into solving a problem, the women who just supposed to do their own job for the kitchen and can't do any kind of job that same as men does. From the dialogue, argument and different point of view in the Trifles, each characters that label by different gender is having a different critics and point of view to each other, they use the critic to men and women based on their gender not for the name of the people or characters. So it can be seen that Susan Glaspell tried to give the equality of thought about the same gender to another gender.

Country Attorney : (With the gallantry of a young politician.) And Yet, for all their worries, what would we do without ladies? (The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and

pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller towel, turns it for a cleaner place.) Dirty towels! (Kick his foot against the pans under the sink.) 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.

Country Attorney : To be sure. And yet (with a little bow to her) I know there some Dickson country farmhouses which do not have such roller towels (He gives it all pull to expose its full lenght again)

Mrs Hale : Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as cleas as they might be. (Trifles, page 4)

The statement and the trival treatment of Country Attorney into satirize a women from the messy kitchen and towels in Mrs. Wright house shows that he claiming that women can't solve their own job desc and left to be solved, Country Attorney gives his ignorance to the women characters and tried to show the example Mrs Wright unsolved job in her own kitchen. Men just think about how the women that can't even finish their own job and tries to help the other people works. Seems like the reflection in 1900s, mostly the population in midwestern do the job as the farmers and most women after married do the job for controlling crops in garden and poultry. In the dialogue above, Susan Glaspell shows the thinking of men at that time that women should be able to complete their own work and do their jobs well such as cooking, cleaning the

house and taking care of children. The actions taken by the country attorney seemed to mock fellow women through the state of the Wright family's kitchen and compared them to other farmers families.

Mrs Hale (examining her skirt) Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to 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. This all you was take in?

Mrs Peters : She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door (open stair door and looks.) Yes, here it is. (Trifles, page 5)

From the dialogue above, can be seen how Mrs Hale tell the story of Mrs Wright which called as Minnie Foster at the time when she was young and not married yet, Susan Glaspell from the context tried to give the reflection of society in the time of 1900s that women who has married must use the last name of her husband, if there is no women use their name and combine with the last name of their husband, they will be dislike in the society. From the dialogue, how the

name of Minnie Foster change her name to be known as Mrs Wright or Minnie Wright and use the last name of her husband, and it also show the differences of Mrs Wright when she was single and after married.

(Mrs Peters takes of her fruit tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.)

Mrs Peters : She was piercing a quilt (She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the pieces.)

Mrs Hale : It's log cabin pattern. Pretty isn't it ? I wonder if she was goin to quilt it or just knot it?

(Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters followed by Hale and the Country Attorney.)

Sherrif : They wonder if she was going to quilt or just knot it!

(The men laugh; the women look abashed.)

Country Attorney (Rubbing his hands over the stove.) Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up. (The men go outside) (Trifles, page 7)

Through dialogue above, it can be seen how men laugh at women's opinions and activities, because they say that women's work and thoughts are not that important. What is important in this case is opinion and decision. Whenever the men and women who are in the kitchen talk to each other to give their opinions, the men in this text always underestimate women by laughing and

pretending to participate in answering what the character of women in this dialogues say and discuss about. They don't continue what they have done, the men just left the women and go outside looks like what they heard is about past wind. In America itself in the 1900s, although there had been a release about the emancipation of women to be free to express their opinions and carry out activities they wanted, it did not experience rapid development until the 1920s. The movement in America about women's opinions began to multiply, which was reflected that still not all women at that time were accepted by society and many people had their opinions.

Mrs Hale : I wish if they were going to find any evidience they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

Mrs Peters : But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

Mrs Hale : It would, wouldn't it? (Dropping her sewing.) But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I__ (looking around the room)__ wish I had.

Mrs Peters : But of course you were awful busy, Mrs Hale __ your house and your children.

Mrs Hale : I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful_ and maybe that's why I ought to have come. I__I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down a hollow and you don't see the road. 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__(shakes her head) (Trifles, page 8)

The conversation above shows how Mrs. Peters is grateful for Mrs. Hale's presence to accompany her in this investigation, because she knows that if she is alone in this place as a woman she will become useless without her opinion and argument that will not be heard by men. Mrs Peters also certainly will not give her every opinion because it is still under her husband's full control. The conversation given above is reflected in the situation felt by some women who are still not able to freely talk about their opinions and findings because they are still considered not being a priority. In the 1900s in America, there were still many men who were a priority in all fields and aspects, so there were still many people who trusted and listened to the opinions of their husband.

(The men are heard coming down stairs.)

Mrs Hale (Under her breath) Maybe they would _ maybe they wouldn't

Country Attorney : No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to the women. If there was some defenite thing. Something to show- something to make story about- a thing would connect up with this strange way of doing it__

(The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door.) (Trifles, page 9)

Through the dialogue above, it can be seen that Susan Glaspell reflects from what happened in America in the 1900s, where when it comes to dealing with the law, women cannot have a great right to defend themselves. It can be seen that in the 1900s in America the jury in trials could not be women, but had to be men. It can be seen in the text above that they are convinced that if there is no strong evidence they get, but if it is related to women then they can make something, tell a story or even connect other things that can make the decision on the sentence itself. It can be seen from this reflection that women are still not able to get their own rights, especially in law and trial.

Hale : Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

Country Attorney : I'm going to stay here a while by myself. (to the sheriff.) you can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

Sheriff : Do you want to see what Mrs Peters is going to take in?

(The Country Attorney goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.)

Country Attorney : Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies 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 that way, Mrs Peters?

Mrs Peters : Not just that way.

Sheriff (Chuckling) Married to the law. (Moves toward the other room.) I Just

want you to come here a minure. We ought to take a look at these windows. (Trifles, page 10)

Through the dialogue above, it can be seen how the characters of Country Attorney in this dialogue say that what Mrs. Peters took is not so dangerous and they don't really care about what evidence the woman in the kitchen gets or any kind of their opinions. This shows how in American most people still has the stereotype that men are expected to do physical violence and are more aggressive, so they are declared more threatening than women, but because women are considered more passive, they are considered less dangerous or can threaten the man himself.

Overall, it can be seen how this play, Trifles reflect the social conditions that occurred in American society in the 20th century, on which side there are still many understandings and views that women must continue to be under the control of their husbands after marriage, women who are not free to give opinions and thought and also women who are only seen as sexual objects by men. The opinions given by women in this drama are shown as opinions that are not heard and give the underestimated by men. So Susan Glaspell, through her literary work, Trifles provides an illustration through her understanding and experience when she became a journalist and handled the original case of the Trifles murder trial and combined the issues that existed in society at that time as her inspiration in wrote a literary works. As explained in the following

quote; Trifles are based on the murder of sixty year old farmer named John Hossack on December 2, 1900, in Indiana, Iowa. Glaspell covered the case the subsequent trial when she was a reporter for the Des Moines Daily News (Ben-zvi)

As can see Susan Glaspell provided the story that same as the descriptions which she handle during the time when a jury of a wife who killed her husband.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the results are obtained through reflection of the social condition of American Society in the play Trifles written by Susan Glaspell. The writer gets; one, That the problems that occur in the play script Trifles reveal the issue of discriminatory treatment of men against women in the play, because men think that women are a weak creatures and can only do small things or trivial things. Showing that men are the key to all decisions in the household and men in this play do not show excessive expectations of women, Men also in this text often put pressure on women, so sometimes women feel depressed and keep it in their hearts because they can't against her husband who has complete power over them and controlled what activities they want to do. The issue of women who must always submit to men is also in the trifles written in 1916 that reflect the 20th century in America, where at that time there were still many women who were under pressure and command by men, women were less free to give opinions and decisions so that

everything must go through the approval and will of men, it is also described that women should stay at home to cook, clean the house and take care of children.

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