

Social Minds Theory: How the Heroine in *Trifles* Get Away With Crime

Bingrui Lu¹

¹ School of Foreign Studies, China University of Geosciences (Beijing), Beijing, China

Correspondence: Bingrui Lu, School of Foreign Studies, China University of Geosciences (Beijing), Beijing, China. Tel: 86-131-6131-3211.

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Abstract

Trifles is one of the outstanding representative works of feminist playwright Susan Glasper. Most of the previous studies on this play were limited to the field of dramatic performance or its feminist theme, but few scholars paid attention to the social minds in this play from the perspective of narrative. Starting from the point of social group thinking, this paper attempts to discuss how the author managed to help the criminal heroine get away with her crime of murder and eventually reveals the theme of rebellion against male hegemony and patriarchal exploitation, which utilizes social ideology of male supremacy among the society, the intermental thought between the two female characters in the drama and the collective thought between the inside characters and the outside audience.

Keywords: Susan Glaspell, social theory, collective thought, *Trifles*

1. Introduction

Trifles (1961) is one of the greatest dramas in the early twentieth century, and its author Susan Glaspell is also regarded as "the mother of modern American drama" for her bold and avant-garde feminist plays. *Trifles* tells a story of a crime investigation on a mystery murder of a strangled farmer. After the protagonist John Wright is strangled in the sleeping, Henderson, the county attorney, comes with farmer Hale and sheriff Peter to the dead's home for evidence, who are accompanied by wives, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peter. The women secretly find the key evidence which could prove the guilt of Mrs. Wright, Minnie Foster, but they conspire to hide the proof and eventually help Mrs. Wright escape the justice.

In the previous academic studies on this drama, scholars and critics mostly analyzed it from the perspective of dramatic performance, or discussed the feminist thoughts in the play in light of Foucault's spatial power theory, but rarely focused on the characters in the way of narrative. The play was created in a background of huge gap between male's and female's status in American during the early 20th century. With such social cognition, it is tricky to publish a play with such strong feminist thought. Glaspell, however, could overturn the conviction of the heroine with a criminal's identity, who kills her husband, and encourage readers to reflect on the rebellious spirit of women in the story. The reason why she could make it lies in the use of group thinking in narrative.

Social minds theory, first proposed by Alan Palmer, emphasizes the social attributes of cognition and belongs to the category of cognitive narratology (2010). Social minds mainly focus on the relationship and mutual influence among characters in the narrative from the perspective of group thinking (Phelan, 2011), including "collective thought" and "intermental thought". In addition, social ideology is a deeper manifestation of social minds, which is a solidified thinking mode under long-term collective cognition. This paper intends to use social minds theory to analyze how the author ingeniously designs the heroine to escape from punishment and finally reveal the latent feminist theme in depth.

2. Social Ideology: The Unintentional Help of Social Subconscious

The smooth development of a story requires a corresponding social background. Without the foundation of a common social ideology, the whole story would lack rationality and authenticity, resulting in the disconnection between the story and reality. Therefore, the common social ideology in this drama plays a fundamental role in realizing the protagonist's escape from guilt. Furthermore, it trumps all other concrete means of help.

Social subconsciousness is a form of social ideology, which is at the lowest level of social consciousness and is

the early original material of mature social ideology. Fromm, on the basis of Freud's theory, first proposed the concept of the social unconsciousness, which refers to those repressed areas which are the same to the greatest number of members of a society (1986), and the social unconscious features latency because it could not be directly perceived. It is because of the undiscoverable nature of the social subconscious that the author adopts this perfect form to convey the latent information, and this unconscious ideology shared by each character in the play impacts a crucial effect on the whole investigation process.

2.1 *The Unconsciousness of Unequal Task*

In the narrative society, characters hold a common belief that women are born to deal with trifles, and thus they are not allowed to step in important fields, which leads people to assume that such a major murder will not involve women. When Mr. Hale asks Mr. Wright to set up a telephone, Mr. Wright refuses because "folks talked too much anyway" (p. 247), and then Mr. Hale decides to persuade Mrs. Wright, implying that he thinks trifles like chatter should be more attractive to women than men. Besides this kind of indirect way of narrating, Glaspell also depicts this common idea in the community in a more direct way:

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

Sheriff (rises): Well, can you beat the woman! 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. (The two women move a little closer together.)

Seeing fruit is frozen, the female character's first reaction is that Mrs. Wright, the hostess, must be worried. On the contrary, male characters mock those women who are so simple and just care about such trifles as they think. This scene shows that males are complacent that they have confirmed their idea, which is a direct description of the common idea that women are only associated with chores.

This social unconsciousness is not only reflected in male characters, but also in women living in the same social background. The author portrays Mrs. Hale that she "arranges the pans under sink which the lawyer had shoved out of place", "goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside" and other cleaning actions in Mrs. Wright's house. Female characters subconsciously do sundry cleaning potentially embodies that women themselves have internalized that they are tied with trivial matters. As a result, cleaning has become their subconscious action. Similar to the narrative way of depicting male's social mind, Glaspell also describes female's same idea in some direct way:

Mrs. Hale (resentfully): I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. (She sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision.) I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

Mrs. Peters (apologetically): Of course, they've got awful important things on their minds. (Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table.)

In this part, female characters directly express the idea that males are connected with important things. The juxtaposes of "housework" and "important things" in their dialogue borrow the idea of dualism in order to create a conflict between trifles and important matters, which indeed represent the conflict between women and men. Thus, both male and female characters are greatly influenced by the idea of patriarchal society, which has a subconscious view that women can only be associated with trifles while men with important matters.

2.2 *The Unconsciousness of Unbalanced Space*

Michel Foucault once proposed that space is the basis of any public form, and space is the basic operation form of any power (as cited in Khin Myo Chit, 1988). Foucault takes prison as an example and points out that "one of the ways to implement discipline is to start from the spatial distribution of people" (as cited in Zhang and Li, 2013). Therefore, by means of the uneven spatial distribution, Glaspell presents the unbalanced distribution of rights and interests of different genders, which reflects the social subconsciousness that women should make concessions for the interests of men. The play begins with the unbalanced geographical distribution of space, which is also a form of declaration of male's sovereignty:

[1] County Attorney (rubbing his hands): This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

Mrs. Peters (after taking a step forward): I'm not — cold.

[2] Mrs. Peters: My, it's cold in there. (She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.)

Excerpt [2] confirms that Mrs. Peters lies in front of men in excerpt [1]. The inconsistency of her words and deeds derives from the unconscious that women cannot step into the space occupied by men. When Mrs. Peters intends to fetch something from the front room after the men has gone upstairs, she looks hesitantly around the room and begs Mrs. Hale to come with her, even closing the door quickly afterwards so that the men would not notice her intrusion into the room. All these actions reveal the female characters' inner fear of stepping into the field of male activities, which is the proof of repressed subconscious of women with low social status.

The author not only expresses the social default to unbalanced space through the cognition of characters, but also through the overall space allocation. On the one hand, as the investigation progressed, the male characters including the sheriff, the lawyer and the neighbor moved from the living room to the upstairs, to the shed outside and around the house, taking up more and more space. On the other hand, the activities of the two wives are confined in a narrow space from the door to the kitchen, which directly reflects the common social ideology that women should make concessions to men's interests in patriarchal society.

2.3 *The Unconsciousness of Unfair Law*

Law is a key word that is hard to ignore in this play. Literally, law stands for justice and the equal status of different forces. It is precisely on account of Glaspell's highlight on such a positive word that it creates a great ironic effect that the law is not equal. Acting as social functions, the law is part of the state apparatus, whose purpose is to stabilize society through formulated rules. Briefly, law is in the service of regime, so it could be concluded that in the patriarchal culture, the law is proposed, passed and promulgated by men and takes their interests as the establishing standard. Such a law is bound to be unequal. Before the 1970s, American courts regarded domestic violence against women as an individual matter and did not intervene (Zhu, 2018). It was a tacit social consensus that domestic violence should be dealt with within the family. In such a social context, requiring women to obey such unequal laws is actually the portrayal of social consciousness that women should obey men's interests. The word "law" is emphasized several times in the play:

Mrs. Hale (who is standing by the table): Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. (She puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one-half of which is clean, the other half messy.) It's wiped to here. (Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.) Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

Mrs. Peters: But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

Although Mrs. Hale has doubts about the way of searching, Mrs. Peters persuades her to comply with the law. Even though there is no explicit written term, Mrs. Peters still acquiesces to the principle that the demands of the men are equal to the demands of the law without questioning. She represents a large number of females who could not even perceive that the unequal laws are merely reinforcing the male's dominance rather than standing for justice. This social common sense is not only reflected in women, but also in men who are the direct beneficiaries of the law:

Sheriff: Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in? (The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.)

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 that way, Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters: Not — just that way.

"Married to the law" points out that wife is an appendage of their husband. The tone of rhetorical question to Mrs. Peters is a man's declaration of sovereignty over women and a provocative act of men's blatant denial of women's rights. The characters in the play are unaware of the inequality of the law, but emphasize the importance of the law many times. This ironic contrast proves the collective internalization of the social unconsciousness that women should obey men.

On the surface, the above three social subconsciousness reveals the sadness of women in patriarchal society, but in Glaspell's writing, such stereotyped ideas inadvertently transform into the key to Mrs. Wright's successful escape from the crime. Under the the unconsciousness of unbalanced space, the men leave the small kitchen to two wives, giving a chance for them to implement the conspiracy without supervision, and the kitchen that is seemingly a place of trivial matters turns to hide the vital evidence. Under the unconsciousness of unequal task, all trivial things are ignored by males, while the two ladies pay attention to trivial details subconsciously, from

which they discover the very truth of the murder; Under the unconsciousness of unfair law, the men group assumes that women would not dare to challenge the authority of the law, so they do not bother to examine what wives are going to take to the prison, resulting in crucial evidence not being found.

3. Intermental Thought: The Silent Help of Female Characters

It is not difficult to tell from the social ideology that women lack their inherent rights including the power of discourse. Foucault believes that there is a direct or indirect interaction among knowledge, discourse and power. To some extent, the lack or discontinuity of discourse reflects the deprived power. In the presence of men, the ladies are always the responders to a conversation and never talk as initiators. We can figure out from the speeches of female characters that a large number of dashes make their discourse features incoherency. On the one hand, it is a form of timid expression of female characters; on the other hand, it implies that women suffer from aphasia under long-term oppression. In addition, the murderer Mrs. Wright's absence in the play from the beginning to the end carries a metaphorical meaning that she is deprived of the right to defend herself or seek help from the outside world. The author deliberately designs the absence of the heroine, which is also a manifestation of the loss of women's discourse power.

Compared with social ideology as an invisible social helper, intermental thought is the direct concrete means to help the heroine. The two ladies cannot directly, through language, figure out whether each other is willing to participate in this conspiracy, let alone discuss the detailed plan. Moreover, the absence of the key figure, the heroine, also hinders the communication within the female group, adding great difficulty to the conspiracy. In the case of being unable to speak, Glaspell takes advantage of it and designs the conspiracy in a "silent" way. Therefore, the intermental thought without direct communication is chosen as a perfect communication channel within female group.

3.1 Verbal Communication: The Ambiguous Implications

"Silent" help does not mean that there is no dialogue during the conspiracy, but that the verbal communication between the two ladies does not point out any detailed plan of their cooperation. When women are excluded by the ruling class in the patriarchal society and are banned from any resistance, they have no choice but to establish a same-sex union spontaneously to protect the group. At the beginning, the two ladies are not sure if the other is in the same alliance, so the first step is to sound out each other to verify the identity:

[1] Mrs. Hale (abruptly moving toward her): Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters: Yes, Mrs. Hale?

Mrs. Hale: Do you think she did it?

Mrs. Peters (in a frightened voice): Oh, I don't know.

Mrs. Hale: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

[2] Mrs. Hale: His neck. Choked the life out of him. (Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.)

Mrs. Peters (with rising voice): We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

[3] 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?

Mrs. Peters (looking upstairs): We mustn't — take on.

In excerpt [1], the tacit question-and-answer dialogue between the two wives, which takes place when they are alone for the first time, is actually to feel each other out, and then each of them receives the implicit message that the other one is willing to join in the conspiracy. Excerpt [2] takes place after the discovery of the dead bird, key evidence, so both of them have already deduced the truth that Mrs. Wright is the murderer. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hale still dares to point out that Mr. Wright dies in a similar manner to the bird, because her real intention is to finally confirm whether Mrs. Peters has determined to cooperate with her to cover up for Mrs. Wright. Once the vital evidence is exposed, they will immediately face the problem of hiding. From the point of linguistics, what Mrs. Peters says seems to be an unsupportive verbal feedback, but the real implication of her words is that she agrees with Mrs. Hale and is willing to keep the truth to herself, even though she freaks out at the moment. Excerpt [3] is her final positive response, stating that Mrs. Wright, who has been tortured by her husband for her whole life, cannot be punished by the unequal law again because the one who really commits the crime is the perpetrator Mr. Wright. It is the final statement of her decision to participate in the conspiracy.

The process of testing each other is not smooth and constant. As the wife of a sheriff, Mrs. Peters has absorbed

the male's value system unconsciously, which means she is alienated from the female camp (Zhao, 2007). In this case, Mrs. Hale has to constantly persuade Mrs. Peters to come back to the female alliance:

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. I heard 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 want to take in?

Mrs. Hale stated that because of Mr. Wright's stinginess, Mrs. Wright, a young girl who loves singing, becomes a lonely housewife who could not even pay the dues to the lady's aid. Economic foundation is the root of superstructure, is the primary; the superstructure is the political and ideological expression of the economic base, which is secondary and derived (Marx, Engels, 1932). When women do not have economic independence, they cannot get rid of the ideological control of society. Mrs. Wright is an example of a woman moving from the group to alienation without financial means. It is through the description of the contrast between Mrs. Wright's life before and after marriage that Mrs. Hale arouses Mrs. Peters' sympathy, targeting at the male host who represents the patriarchal culture. Mrs. Hale, after the persuasion, immediately deflects the subject with a question in order to pass discourse to Mrs. Peters, partly to gauge his reaction and partly to pretend that she has not meant anything. After Mrs. Hale's first guidance, Mrs. Peters apparently sways her identity as alienator, responding to Mrs. Hale that the men have suspected Mrs. Wright profoundly. But Mrs. Peters persuades that "the law is the law", implying that she is still inclined to conform to the male group from the nature. So, Mrs. Hale initiates a second round of guidance and imposes compassion to a higher level through the image of a canary:

Mrs. Hale: She — come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself — real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and — fluttery. How — she — did — change. (Silence: then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things.) Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

Mrs. Hale's words point out that the heroine has been snuffed out like a poor canary. The multiple dashes in the sentence are the manifestation of female aphasia under the oppression of male power, and it is inability to speak here that makes this conspiracy succeed without notice from men group, which is ironic. These words greatly touch Mrs. Peters and she starts to give positive feedback with her painful life experience, from the cat killed by boys to her child who dies because her husband is not at home. The miserable memories begin to crush her step by step until she finally cries out "we mustn't allow", which is a symbol that she rebels against patriarchal control and back from the state of alienation to the female unions.

Under the situation of female aphasia, Glaspell specifically makes female characters occupy most of the play, as for the two ladies to create enough space for conspiracy. At the same time taking advantage of aphasia, the ladies do not need to communicate in the form of words but still successfully deliver information within the group of women.

3.2 Behavioral Communication: The Interactive Actions

Interactive thinking is not only reflected in the verbal communication, but also through the interaction of actions. The most representative interactivity in the play is six silent eyes cooperation between the two ladies.

The first eye contact happens after they find the bad sewing. "After she has said this, they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door." It indicates that they suspect the sewing is related to the murder, so they glance at the door at once in case the officials would find it.

The second eye contact occurs when they spot the crucial piece of evidence, a dead bird. This time, eye contact is added with the expression of realization and panic. It can be seen that they have confirmed the real murderer through the similar cause of death. The eye interaction expresses their fear and the common idea that they decide to continue to keep silent.

The third eye contact contains more information than the first two:

County Attorney: Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. (Seeing the bird-cage.) Has the bird flown?

Mrs. Hale (putting more quilt pieces over the box): We think the — cat got it.

County Attorney (preoccupied): Is there a cat? (Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters.)

Mrs. Peters: Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

Mrs. Hale answers the lawyer's questions through words, while covering up the evidence with her movements. At the same time, she gives a quick glance at Mrs. Peters asking her to tell a lie. After receiving the eye hint, Mrs. Peters immediately understands the information and completes the lie as instructed.

For the fourth time, the form of eye cooperation has changed. Instead, firstly, they deliberately do not look at each other in case causing men's suspicion. Secondly, both of them try to resist the temptation to peek at each other, and this action shows how antsy they are after learning the truth. Of these two actions, the former is to carry out the plan, the latter is to communicate emotions tacitly.

The fifth time they make eye contact is when they hear the attorney says Mrs. Wright couldn't be convicted unless they find the motive for murder. This time, they make eye contact to warn each other that the men are coming back and they must not let them find the evidence they want.

The final one is abundant in information, taking place at a crucial stage when the ladies are hiding the key evidence:

Sheriff: We'll be right out, Mr. Hale. (Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff.)

In her eye contact and eye extension, Mrs. Hale conveys a message for Mrs. Peters to quickly hide the box. The hesitation in Mrs. Peters' eyes at the beginning shows that she is afraid to carry out the instruction which is an extreme violation of the rules of men, but in the end, the eye meeting brings out her courage to fight for the female alliance, and then she tries to hide the box is a feedback action that she receives information.

Eye contact is the majority of the six cooperations, as the abundant expressions in it make it the most common form of silent communication. During the collaboration, ladies take various other actions, such as pulling out a stitch and hiding the box. These actions are behavioral feedback to the received information, and also a way of confirmation.

4. Collective Thought: Invisible Help From Off-Screen Readers

From the above, social ideology and interactive thinking are analyzed from the perspective of the narrative society. In fact, however, the supporter of the heroine is far from limited to the drama. Collective thought is normally interpreted as the consensus held by the public in the social group. Usually, this kind of thinking is explicit, namely, the people inside the group have the ability to be aware of the consensus' existence, which is also a prominent feature of collective thought different from the social subconscious. The analysis of collective thinking in the field of literature is usually limited to the narrative world. Most scholars define the social group within the literary works, and accordingly, collective thought is also limited to the characters in the text. Roland Barthes once proposed that the myth of writing should be reversed, and the birth of the reader should be at the expense of the author's death (1968), implying that the death of the author is also accompanied by the birth of the reader. As soon as the author completes the work, the right to understand and interpret it has been transposed to the reader. "The death of author" theory initiated that the perspective of literary analysis is no longer confined to the works, but can jump out of the text. A distinguishing feature of drama from novel is that the playwrights need to take the audience's psychology into consideration in order to achieve the desired dramatic effect. In the analysis of drama, the reaction of readers is an indispensable part, which is quite consistent with the content of reader response theory.

Besides the aid of characters in the plot, the heroine can escape also thanks to the invisible help from the outside readers. Both characters on the screen and audiences off the scenes resonate with the protagonist, which bridges the narrative world and the real world into an invisible society. In this society, the characters and the audience also consciously produce collective thoughts on account of the same ideas. Ultimately, the heroine not only manages to escape the crime in the narrative world, but also wins the sympathy of readers in the real world and gets acquitted.

4.1 The Reader's Preconception

The story is unfolded from the perspective of the two wives, so the readers are easily inclined to the female group. While more attention is paid to the communication between the two wives, the reader unconsciously neglects the male perspective during the reading process, because the author intentionally hides the male voice

behind the story and puts the female voice on the stage. Automatically, readers feel the unknown miserable life experience behind the protagonist, regarding the female group as the vulnerable one. In addition, there are very few male participants in the whole play, while the description of female characters occupies most of the length. This is also the author's intention to amplify the voice of women and to challenge the male's discourse power. In this way of layout, readers prefer to stand in the same camp with the main voice, forming a collective alliance, and the balance of judgment in their hearts would be tilted to the "plaintiffs".

4.2 The Reader's Compassion

Giving emotional feedback to external stimulus is an innate perceptual ability of human beings. Reader obtains the character's tragic life background through the ladies, resulting in empathizing on the protagonist's inner despair and anger in her perennial depressive life. Even after knowing that Mrs. Wright is the murderer, readers still tend to explain the rationality of her extreme behavior. Thereby, the audience subjectively shelter the killer and help her escape the condemnation of morality. Readers mainly sympathize with the heroine in the following ways:

[1] Mrs. Hale: I could've come. I stayed away because it wasn't cheerful — and that's why I ought to have come. I — I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in 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.)

[2] Mrs. Hale: Not having children makes less work — but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

[3] Mrs. Hale: Yes — good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him — (Shivers.) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. (Pauses, her eye falling on the cage.) I should think she would 'a' wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

In excerpt [1], Mrs. Hale points out that Mrs. Wright lived in a remote place, far from densely populated area. From the beginning, the readers would feel sorry for the heroine's lonely life all the year round. Later, Mrs. Hale reveals a common impression that Mr. Wright lacks company for his wife in the excerpt [2]. In the piece [3], Mrs. Hale directly states the assertion that anyone living with Mr. Wright will feel the exceeding pain of his aloof attitude. It is the character's own judgment, but the reader has no chance to associate with Wright in person, so a negative first impression of the dead is imposed on the readers involuntarily. In such circumstances, they are less likely to doubt the truth of the information, and more likely to interpret the impression as an objective fact.

At the moment, readers are just exposed to the lonely life of Mrs. Wright's, and their emotion is heightened to a higher level later when they know how Mr. Wright persecutes her entire life:

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.

Mrs. Hale (with a slow look around her): I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. (Pause.) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird — a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

Mrs. Peters empathizes with Millie through her personal experience of her dead cat brutally killed by a boy, leading the reader into a world dominated by males where bullying is already commonplace. The reader is guided to a peak of resentment. The last sentence is a straightforward collective indictment on Mr. Wright's crimes, together with the reader's final verdict on the real "murderer".

Through the above two ways of guidance, the readers become more and more sympathetic to the murderer, more and more angry at the dead, and finally accept the appeal from the female camp, stand with the murderer, and ethically acquiesce the guilty person to regain innocence.

5. Conclusion

The publication of *Trifles* was a blow to the patriarchal era. The author spoke for the female group to challenge and resist male hegemony, breaking the stereotype of women and men in the past. With the title of "trifles", she narrates a shocking murder case, creating an extreme irony about the male's pride and arrogance. Under the social common cognition that male masters power, Glaspell takes the opposite approach. Under the entire framework of social minds, Glaspell utilizes the social subconscious prejudice to help the murderer get rid of the suspicion and gain an opportunity to find the key evidence for the female camp. Later, through the intermental thought of the two characters, a conspire is implemented to assist the heroine to get innocence. Overall, the

whole text depicts women's low social status and male's supremacy, and it finally manages to create a reasonable motive for killing, jumping out of the text and resonating with readers in the real world. In the end, it is the readers who ultimately turn the table on the homicides and absolve the heroine in the psychological war.

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