



E-ISSN: 2706-8927

P-ISSN: 2706-8919

[www.allstudyjournal.com](http://www.allstudyjournal.com)

IJAAS 2025; 7(7): 171-177

Received: 24-06-2025

Accepted: 15-07-2025

**Kochetova Larisa Anatolyevna**  
Doctor of Philological  
Sciences, Professor, The  
Department of Translation  
theory and practice and  
linguistics, Volgograd State  
University, Volgograd, Russia

**Mohammed Mustafa M Al-Misfer**

Post Graduate Student  
The Department of  
Translation Theory and  
Practice and Linguistics,  
Volgograd State University,  
Volgograd, Russia

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Kochetova Larisa Anatolyevna**  
Doctor of Philological  
Sciences, Professor, The  
Department of Translation  
theory and practice and  
linguistics, Volgograd State  
University, Volgograd, Russia

## The concept of fidelity in Susan Glaspell's: Ethics and gendered perspective

**Kochetova Larisa Anatolyevna and Mohammed Mustafa M Al-Misfer**

**DOI:** <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2025.v7.i7c.1588>

### Abstract

This study examines how fidelity functions as a feminist ethic and act of resistance in Susan Glaspell's. Moving beyond traditional notions of loyalty to law, marriage, or domesticity, Glaspell redefines fidelity as a morally charged commitment to empathy, shared female experience, and personal integrity. Drawing on feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, Carol Gilligan, and Simone de Beauvoir, the research highlights how Glaspell's female characters resist patriarchal structures through symbolic action, emotional solidarity, and psychological self-assertion. Through narrative strategies including symbolism, domestic space, and dialogic contrast, Glaspell constructs fidelity as an ethical alternative to institutional justice. Whether through the quiet solidarity of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters or the radical individualism of Claire Archer, Glaspell positions fidelity as a feminist virtue rooted in moral agency. The study thus offers a new interpretive lens on fidelity as a site of gendered resistance and ethical transformation. This research argues that Glaspell's fidelity is not passive allegiance but an active, justice-oriented practice, embodying a feminist ethic of care and moral courage. Ultimately, fidelity in Glaspell's fiction and drama becomes both a narrative theme and a feminist methodology, reclaiming loyalty as a transformative force in the struggle for female autonomy and ethical recognition.

**Keywords:** Trifles (1916), A Jury of Her Peers (1917), and The Verge (1921)

### 1. Introductions

Susan Glaspell (1876-1948), a pioneering voice in early American feminist literature, occupies a significant position in the development of socially engaged theatre and short fiction. As a playwright, novelist, and journalist, Glaspell challenged traditional representations of gender and power, particularly within the domestic sphere. Her contribution to American letters is closely tied to her role in co-founding the Provincetown Players, a radical theater group that launched the careers of numerous modernist writers, including Eugene O'Neill. Through her dramatic and fictional works, Glaspell interrogated the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal ideologies, legal institutions, and cultural expectations. Among the central motifs in her writing is the struggle of women to assert their autonomy, moral agency, and social worth in male-dominated settings (Makowsky, 1990) [10].

While Glaspell's feminist legacy is well acknowledged, one underexplored thematic avenue in her body of work is the notion of fidelity. Traditionally conceived as a woman's loyal devotion to husband, family, or moral codes, fidelity in Glaspell's fiction and drama undergoes a profound redefinition. Rather than upholding fidelity as an instrument of patriarchal discipline, Glaspell reimagines it as an ethical and political act of resistance. Her female characters remain faithful not to oppressive social structures but to a higher sense of justice, shared womanhood, and inner moral truth. In this context, fidelity becomes not a passive virtue but an active stance against inequality a feminist reclamation of moral responsibility that privileges personal conscience over legal or societal expectation (Ben-Zvi, 2005) [2]. This study proposes that fidelity in Glaspell's works particularly *Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921) serves as a symbolic site of conflict and resistance. In *Trifles*, for example, the two women protagonists ultimately conceal evidence of a murder in solidarity with the abused female suspect, enacting a form of fidelity to gendered experience and ethical sisterhood rather than to the patriarchal legal system. This scene subverts normative ideals of duty and justice, illustrating how fidelity, when aligned with feminist consciousness, becomes a revolutionary act.

Likewise, in *A Jury of Her Peers*, the women's quiet refusal to betray another woman foregrounds loyalty not to institutional law but to experiential justice. These literary portrayals suggest that fidelity, when uncoupled from patriarchal norms, can become a site for feminist critique and social transformation.

To understand Glaspell's nuanced treatment of fidelity, this research will employ an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates feminist literary theory, moral philosophy, and cultural studies. By contextualizing her characters' choices within early 20<sup>th</sup> century gender politics and ethical philosophy, the study reveals how fidelity operates as a contested value that either sustains or subverts the patriarchal status quo. Drawing on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity and Carol Gilligan's (1982) <sup>[6]</sup> ethics of care, the analysis will show how Glaspell's women characters navigate moral dilemmas not by conforming to abstract rules, but through relational ethics rooted in empathy and justice.

Furthermore, this research situates Glaspell's redefinition of fidelity within the broader historical discourse of feminist resistance. At a time when women were denied legal personhood and political voice, Glaspell's heroines quietly enacted fidelity to each other as a form of defiance. These acts challenge the boundaries between private and public morality, between obedience and subversion. In doing so, Glaspell not only dramatized the ethical complexity of her characters' choices but also offered a subtle critique of the gendered structures of authority and power in American society.

Ultimately, this research seeks to highlight how Susan Glaspell transformed a traditionally conservative ideal into a radical feminist tool. By dramatizing fidelity as a commitment to justice, mutual understanding, and moral courage, Glaspell expanded the meaning of loyalty beyond its conventional boundaries. Her works prompt a rethinking of what it means to be faithful not to institutions that suppress, but to principles that liberate. As such, fidelity in Glaspell's fiction and drama becomes both a theme and a strategy of feminist resistance, deserving of deeper scholarly attention and contemporary relevance.

## 2. Research Objectives

- To analyze how fidelity operates as a theme of resistance in Glaspell's drama and fiction.
- To explore the intersection of fidelity with feminist ideology, justice, and moral agency.
- To examine the narrative techniques and character developments Glaspell employs to subvert traditional gender roles.
- To contribute to feminist literary criticism by providing a nuanced understanding of Glaspell's portrayal of loyalty and rebellion.

## 3. Research Questions

- How is the concept of fidelity reimagined in Glaspell's work as a tool of feminist resistance?
- In what ways do her female characters challenge traditional definitions of loyalty to family, law, and society?
- How does Glaspell use plot, symbolism, and dialogue to highlight conflicts between personal fidelity and institutional authority?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Textual Analysis

- *Trifles* (1916)
- *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917)
- *The Verge* (1921)

### 4.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This research is grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates feminist literary theory, ethical criticism, and symbolic narrative analysis to examine the redefinition of fidelity as feminist resistance in Susan Glaspell's works. Through the lenses of theorists such as Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Martha Nussbaum, and Wayne Booth, this study aims to reveal the ideological and ethical dimensions of Glaspell's writing. This holistic framework enables a layered understanding of how fidelity is employed not only as a moral concept but also as a political and narrative strategy to critique patriarchal power.

#### • Feminist Literary Theory

Feminist theory forms the backbone of this study, particularly in its application to gendered subjectivity and the socio-political construction of identity. Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is instrumental in interpreting Glaspell's characters, especially in *Trifles* and *The Verge*, where women's actions challenge and reconstitute traditional gender roles. Butler posits that gender is not an innate identity but a repeated performance shaped by societal norms. In Glaspell's works, women perform fidelity not as a static virtue, but as a series of ethical choices that resist male-defined structures of loyalty and obedience. These performances expose the constructed nature of gender and the performative potential of fidelity as a feminist act.

Simone de Beauvoir's seminal assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2010) offers further theoretical grounding for understanding how Glaspell's female characters evolve within their socio-political contexts. Characters such as Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in *Trifles* become women not through biological determinism, but by actively redefining their identities in opposition to legal and patriarchal norms. Elaine Showalter's (1985) <sup>[13]</sup> model of "gynocriticism" also supports this framework by advocating for the analysis of women's literature based on female experience, language, and culture. Glaspell's narratives exemplify how women's experiences and loyalties shape alternative moral codes, often hidden from the male gaze.

#### • Narrative and Symbolic Analysis

Narrative technique and symbolic structure are essential to understanding how Glaspell embeds fidelity into her literary form. Her minimalist yet charged dialogues, as seen in *Trifles*, convey deep moral and social conflict with subtlety and economy. The use of domestic objects—a broken birdcage, unfinished quilting, and a dead canary—serves as symbolic vehicles through which the theme of fidelity is both expressed and contested. These symbols articulate a form of silent resistance that parallels the suppressed voices of Glaspell's female characters.

Moreover, Glaspell's use of spatial dynamics—such as kitchens, parlours and other domestic enclosures—reconfigures the traditional theatrical stage into a site of

feminist interrogation. The domestic space, often seen as a site of female containment, becomes in her work a terrain for political agency and ethical decision-making. Fidelity is performed in these liminal spaces, allowing Glaspell's characters to enact moral courage outside the patriarchal gaze.

In conclusion, the integration of feminist theory, ethical criticism, and symbolic narrative analysis provides a robust framework for examining how Susan Glaspell reimagines fidelity as a form of feminist resistance. This theoretical approach allows for a nuanced interpretation of her characters' moral dilemmas, narrative strategies, and subversive gestures. Through this framework, fidelity emerges not only as a thematic concern but as a method of ethical and political critique that continues to resonate in contemporary feminist discourse.

## 5. Literature review

Susan Glaspell's literary contributions have long been recognized within feminist scholarship as instrumental in the development of American feminist theater and fiction. Scholars such as Linda Ben-Zvi (2005)<sup>[2]</sup>, Barbara Ozieblo (2008)<sup>[12]</sup>, and Martha C Carpentier (2000)<sup>[5]</sup> have explored Glaspell's dramatization of gender roles, female solidarity, and resistance against patriarchal norms. Much of the existing feminist criticism emphasizes Glaspell's critique of legal and domestic institutions that marginalize women. However, the thematic lens of fidelity as a form of feminist resistance remains relatively underexplored, despite its pervasive presence in her dramatic and narrative oeuvre.

### 5.1 Feminist Interpretations of Glaspell

Glaspell's works have often been analyzed through the lens of feminist theory, particularly in relation to gendered subjectivity, the critique of legal institutions, and the symbolic role of domestic space. Linda Ben-Zvi's seminal study, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (2005)<sup>[2]</sup>, situates Glaspell's writing within the socio-political landscape of early 20th-century America, emphasizing her commitment to representing women's ethical and emotional experiences. Ben-Zvi argues that Glaspell's heroines often defy legal and patriarchal constraints through intuitive moral reasoning, forming a community of care distinct from masculine codes of justice.

Elaine Showalter (1985)<sup>[13]</sup> and other scholars of "gynocriticism" have focused on how Glaspell centers female experience, not only in plot and character but also through narrative form. In *A Jury of Her Peers*, for instance, the women's shared knowledge of domestic life becomes the foundation for an alternative epistemology that challenges the patriarchal legal system. This kind of gendered knowledge, drawn from daily life and emotional insight, highlights a unique form of fidelity to lived experience and ethical solidarity among women.

### 5.2 Fidelity and Feminist Resistance

While much has been written about Glaspell's feminism, the specific theme of fidelity as a vehicle for resistance deserves more scholarly attention. Traditionally framed as a woman's loyalty to family or societal norms, fidelity in Glaspell's work undergoes a radical transformation. It becomes a moral stance that aligns with justice rather than subservience. Carpentier (2000)<sup>[5]</sup> notes that in plays like *Trifles* and *the verge*, women characters prioritize a higher

moral truth over institutional loyalty. Their fidelity is not to law or convention, but to each other and to a shared recognition of injustice.

Martha Nussbaum's (1990)<sup>[11]</sup> concept of the "narrative imagination" lends theoretical weight to this reinterpretation of fidelity. In Glaspell's narratives, women's empathetic identification with other women's suffering enables them to act in morally complex ways. This capacity for moral imagination allows female characters to transcend traditional definitions of duty, reinforcing fidelity as an active, rather than passive, virtue. Similarly, Carol Gilligan's (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> ethics of care offers a framework for understanding how Glaspell's heroines navigate ethical dilemmas not through abstract principles, but through relational and context-sensitive decision-making.

### 5.3 Thematic Analyses and Symbolism

Symbolism and spatial dynamics also play crucial roles in articulating fidelity in Glaspell's drama. Scholars like Ozieblo (2008)<sup>[12]</sup> have explored how domestic objects such as the broken birdcage and unfinished quilting in *Trifles* serve as symbols of female interiority and resistance. These symbols are not only indicative of women's lives but also of their loyalty to an experiential truth that lies outside male recognition. Such symbolic elements redefine fidelity as a commitment to hidden or silenced truths, often located within the domestic sphere.

In sum, prior feminist readings of Glaspell have laid a critical foundation for interpreting her work through the lenses of gender, justice, and resistance. However, the thematic focus on fidelity as reimagined by Glaspell as an ethical and feminist imperative requires further exploration. By foregrounding fidelity not as obedience to oppressive systems, but as a commitment to empathy, justice, and solidarity, this study contributes a vital new dimension to the understanding of Glaspell's feminist legacy.

### 5.4 Comparing fidelity themes in domestic and public spaces

Susan Glaspell's works demonstrate a profound awareness of the ethical and political tensions surrounding the concept of fidelity, especially when navigated across domestic and public domains. In *"Trifles"* (1916) and *"A Jury of Her Peers"* (1917), Glaspell reorients the domestic sphere from a space of patriarchal control to a site of feminist resistance, where fidelity to gendered experience outweighs adherence to state or legal norms. Traditionally, the home is constructed as a private realm where women are expected to enact loyalty to husbands and maintain familial cohesion. Glaspell subverts this expectation by portraying domestic fidelity not as submission, but as allegiance to female solidarity and moral justice.

In *"Trifles,"* the kitchen becomes the site where Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters uncover the psychological torment endured by Mrs. Wright. Their decision to conceal evidence becomes an act of fidelity to shared womanhood, privileging experiential knowledge over public law. As Ben-Zvi (2005)<sup>[2]</sup> notes, the domestic space, laden with symbols such as the broken birdcage and unfinished quilt, embodies a "counter-public" where suppressed narratives of abuse and oppression gain ethical legitimacy.

Conversely, the public space in Glaspell's works typically represented by the court, law enforcement, and masculine discourse demands fidelity to abstract principles of justice,



often divorced from empathy. The sheriff and county attorney in "*Trifles*" overlook the domestic space as trivial, failing to comprehend the deeper emotional truths encoded within it. This juxtaposition reveals Glaspell's critique of public institutions' inability to grasp the moral weight of lived experience, suggesting that true fidelity often arises within the private sphere.

### 5.5 Contrasting male and female constructions of loyalty and justice

Glaspell's narratives also reveal significant divergences in how male and female characters conceptualize loyalty and justice. Male characters often exhibit a rigid, institutionalized understanding of fidelity as obedience to law, duty, or authority. In "A Jury of Her Peers," the male characters frame justice through the lens of objective legal reasoning, expecting unwavering loyalty to the justice system. Their approach reflects a Kantian moral structure that values universal principles over situational ethics.

In contrast, Glaspell's female characters adopt a relational and affective approach to fidelity. Influenced by Carol Gilligan's (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> ethics of care, they prioritize empathy, shared experience, and moral responsibility over legal codes. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, in choosing not to report the evidence they find, display a fidelity rooted in emotional understanding and gendered moral solidarity. As Makowsky (1990)<sup>[10]</sup> argues, their loyalty is not to the state but to "a deeper justice that honors the truth of lived experience."

This contrast is further elaborated in "*The Verge*" (1921), where Claire Archer's internal struggle epitomizes the female quest for authenticity in a male-dominated society. Her refusal to conform to her husband's expectations and her ultimate breakdown dramatize the cost of resisting patriarchal constructions of fidelity. Whereas her husband defines loyalty in terms of marital stability and social decorum, Claire envisions it as faithfulness to one's evolving identity and artistic freedom.

Ultimately, Glaspell dismantles traditional binaries of public/private, male/female, and legal/ethical by illustrating how women reconfigure fidelity as a dynamic interplay between conscience, compassion, and resistance. Her works challenge readers to reconsider the moral frameworks that govern notions of justice and loyalty, revealing that fidelity, when shaped by feminist consciousness, can serve as a radical act of reclamation and resistance.

## 6. Feminist implications, cultural impact, narrative techniques in Susan Glaspell's Drama and Fiction

Susan Glaspell's works such as *Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921) are foundational texts in feminist literary criticism. One of the most underexplored yet potent themes in her writing is fidelity not merely in the sense of marital loyalty but as a broader moral and political commitment. This analysis investigates how fidelity operates as a theme of feminist resistance across Glaspell's oeuvre, with specific emphasis on the intersection of fidelity with justice, moral agency, and the subversion of traditional gender roles.

### 6.1 Fidelity as Resistance in Glaspell's Major Works

In Susan Glaspell's major works *Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921) fidelity emerges not as obedience to patriarchal norms but as a subversive and morally charged commitment to female solidarity,

autonomy, and inner truth. This redefinition of fidelity becomes central to Glaspell's feminist critique of the social and legal constraints imposed upon women.

In *Trifles*, fidelity is embodied in the silent complicity between Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, who withhold a critical piece of evidence the dead bird from the male authorities investigating Mr. Wright's murder. The bird, with its "neck wrung," becomes an emotionally potent symbol of Mrs. Wright's (formerly Minnie Foster) psychological abuse and suppressed identity. As Mrs. Hale observes, "*If there's been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful still, after the bird was still*" (Glaspell, 1916, p. 103). This image reflects the long-term emotional starvation and entrapment Mrs. Wright experienced, culminating in her violent, though silent, rebellion. Fidelity here is not directed toward the legal apparatus but toward a shared understanding of gendered suffering. As Mrs. Peters, initially hesitant, begins to empathize with Mrs. Wright, she recalls her own losses and sorrows, leading her to a silent alliance with Mrs. Hale. Their final action concealing the bird represents a moral fidelity to experiential justice and shared female pain, rather than institutional definitions of legality.

*A Jury of Her Peers*, Glaspell's narrative adaptation of *Trifles*, deepens this exploration by providing access to the characters' internal reflections, which reveals the full ethical transformation of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters. The story offers a broader social context, connecting Mrs. Wright's plight to systemic gender injustice. As Mrs. Hale reflects, "*We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things it's all just a different kind of the same thing*" (Glaspell, 1917, p. 9). This recognition of shared female experience shifts the axis of moral responsibility: the women's choice to protect Mrs. Wright becomes a collective act of fidelity to gendered experience. Glaspell thus moves fidelity beyond personal loyalty to a broader ethical realm what Gilligan (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> calls a "morality of care," rooted in relational understanding and emotional attentiveness. The story frames fidelity as an intuitive, justice-oriented response that resists the cold rationality and gender-blindness of the legal system.

By contrast, *The Verge* presents fidelity through a more individualistic and psychological lens. The protagonist Claire Archer does not enact fidelity to other women, but rather to her own internal vision of freedom, self-invention, and creation. Her scientific experimentation and emotional extremity embody a break from traditional domestic and maternal roles. In a climactic assertion of identity, Claire declares, "*I am going on... I'm going on into the unknown*" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 73). Her words resonate with existentialist overtones aligning with Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2010) notion that women must "become" through self-assertion rather than compliance. Claire's fidelity is to her evolving subjectivity, an "Otherness" that cannot be absorbed by social conformity or patriarchal expectations. However, the psychological toll of such fidelity is profound; Claire's eventual breakdown signals the isolating and destabilizing effects of resisting gender norms in a society unequipped to accommodate radical female autonomy.

The contrast between *Trifles*/*A Jury of Her Peers* and *The Verge* lies in the axis of fidelity: in the former, fidelity is communal and rooted in shared suffering and ethical solidarity, while in the latter, fidelity is internal and abstract a commitment to personal becoming at the expense of

societal belonging. Yet in both cases, Glaspell constructs fidelity as a challenge to male-dominated moral codes and legal definitions. In *Trifles*, the women's decision to suppress evidence is an act of radical empathy that critiques the gendered limitations of the law. In *The Verge*, fidelity becomes a metaphysical pursuit, as Claire refuses to "perform" womanhood according to societal expectations. Glaspell's reimagining of fidelity thus not only subverts traditional gender roles but also contributes to a broader feminist ethic in literature. Her characters do not merely resist—they redefine what it means to be loyal, just, and moral. As Nussbaum (1990) <sup>[11]</sup> suggests, literature can teach us to see through the eyes of others and respond with moral imagination. Glaspell's female protagonists exemplify this capacity, creating ethical alternatives that privilege empathy, interiority, and justice over institutional authority.

In conclusion, Glaspell's *Trifles*, *A Jury of Her Peers*, and *The Verge* collectively demonstrate how fidelity can function as feminist resistance—whether through collective moral solidarity or personal defiance. This fidelity is transformative; it disrupts gendered expectations, redefines justice, and affirms the ethical power of women's lived experience.

## 6.2 Fidelity, feminism, and moral agency in Susan Glaspell's *trifles* and *the verge*

Susan Glaspell's redefinition of fidelity disrupts traditional moral paradigms rooted in patriarchal ideologies, such as loyalty to legal authority, religious duty, or domestic obedience. Instead, fidelity in her work becomes an ethical and feminist practice—what Carol Gilligan (1982) <sup>[6]</sup> terms a "morality of care"—that values relational understanding, empathy, and lived experience over rigid codes of conduct. Through characters like Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in *Trifles* and Claire in *The Verge*, Glaspell crafts a nuanced vision of moral agency that privileges female subjectivity and resists patriarchal oppression.

In *Trifles*, the women's fidelity is not to the law but to shared gendered experience. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters reconstruct the emotional life of the absent Mrs. Wright, whose voice is silenced in the legal investigation led by men. As they observe the disordered kitchen and the broken birdcage, they begin to empathize with the emotional toll of Mrs. Wright's isolation and psychological abuse. The pivotal discovery of the dead bird with its neck wrung leads to a moral turning point. Mrs. Hale reflects: "*If there's been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful-still, after the bird was still*" (Glaspell, 1916, p. 104). This metaphor of silence—both literal and symbolic—captures the erasure of female expression in patriarchal spaces.

Rather than upholding the male investigators' pursuit of legal truth, the women align themselves with what Nussbaum (1990) <sup>[11]</sup> might describe as "narrative imagination"—the capacity to enter another's experience empathetically. Their choice to conceal the bird and remain silent before the law represents a radical moral agency. They reject the impersonal, detached form of justice represented by the men and embrace an ethical solidarity that foregrounds relational knowledge. As Mrs. Peters quietly notes, "*If there's anything we ought to get angry about, it's that*" (Glaspell, 1916, p. 105). Here, Glaspell signals fidelity not as passive obedience, but as an act of

quiet rebellion—a commitment to justice rooted in female lived realities rather than institutional decree.

In contrast, *The Verge* presents fidelity not as solidarity with another woman, but as self-loyalty—an existential defiance against societal scripts of femininity. Claire, the protagonist, is portrayed as an avant-garde botanist and intellectual who rejects domesticity, motherhood, and romantic attachment. She is "going on," as she insists repeatedly, suggesting a commitment to becoming—a concept that resonates strongly with Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2010) idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Claire's fidelity is to her own creative vision, her individuality, and her freedom from repressive gender expectations.

This fidelity, however, is not without its costs. Claire's radical break from the roles assigned to her—as mother, wife, and female companion—isolates her. Her experiments with plant cross-breeding metaphorically reflect her effort to cultivate a new self beyond the constraints of patriarchal biology and society. Yet society remains unprepared for such autonomy. As Claire cries out at the end, "*I wanted to give you all of me... but I wanted it to be the new me... the one that was coming to be!*" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 73). Her breakdown becomes the dramatic embodiment of fidelity stretched to its existential limit: fidelity not to what is, but to what could be.

In comparing the two plays, we see that both groups of women confront oppressive structures—*Trifles* within the domestic and legal spheres, *The Verge* within the psychological and existential realm. In *Trifles*, moral agency arises through identification with another woman; fidelity is communal, empathetic, and rooted in shared gendered suffering. In *The Verge*, fidelity is solitary, intellectual, and visionary—an allegiance to one's own becoming rather than to social roles or communal belonging.

Both, however, challenge the dominant, male-authored definitions of morality and justice. As Booth (1988) argues, ethical narratives in literature reveal the "implied moral universe" of their creators. Glaspell's universe centers women's ethical subjectivity and reveals how fidelity—when untethered from patriarchal constraints—becomes a means of feminist resistance and identity reclamation.

## 6.3 Narrative Techniques and Character Development in Glaspell's Feminist Vision

Susan Glaspell's literary technique plays a crucial role in constructing fidelity not as blind allegiance to patriarchal institutions but as an evolving ethical and feminist stance. Her use of symbolism, spatial dynamics, and contrasting dialogue articulates a nuanced gendered epistemology—one that privileges domestic knowledge, emotional intuition, and psychological complexity over institutional rationality. In *Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921), Glaspell crafts character arcs and narrative forms that recast women's domestic lives as sites of moral resistance and interpretive agency.

In both *Trifles* and *A Jury of Her Peers*, Glaspell masterfully elevates domestic objects from mere props to active symbols of oppression and resistance. The birdcage, broken canary, and unfinished quilt are not merely evidence—they become interpretive tools through which Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters come to understand Mrs. Wright's suffering. The dead bird with a wrung neck functions as a central metaphor. "*Somebody wrung its neck,*" Mrs. Hale observes with quiet horror (Glaspell, 1916, p. 104). This detail leads

to the realization that Mrs. Wright, once cheerful and musical, had been emotionally suffocated by years of domestic isolation and psychological abuse.

The significance of these symbols lies in their feminist reappropriation. While the male investigators dismiss these items as insignificant, the women reconstruct the invisible narrative of trauma encoded within them. "*Look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at the way it's done here-this is the thing,*" Mrs. Hale insists, using feminine craft as both literal and symbolic evidence (Glaspell, 1916, p. 102). In *A Jury of Her Peers*, the same quilting metaphor is expanded upon, showing how what appears as disruption or "unfinished work" is in fact a symbol of internal rupture—a break from the imposed silence of gender roles. These symbolic fragments reflect a larger cultural critique, one in which women must interpret signs overlooked by the masculine logic of law.

Dialogue in *Trifles* functions as a powerful narrative mechanism to contrast gendered worldviews. Early in the play, the County Attorney mocks the women's concerns: "*Well, women are used to worrying over trifles*" (Glaspell, 1916, p. 97). This remark, which ironically gives the play its title, exemplifies the epistemic injustice embedded within patriarchal discourse—where women's observations are trivialized and their voices systematically excluded from legal and moral authority.

Yet within this silence, Glaspell embeds a counter-dialogue. The women's conversations, initially hesitant and fragmented, evolve into a subtle form of resistance. Their shared empathy becomes a space of co-interpretation and ethical awakening. In *A Jury of Her Peers*, this dialogue is even more interiorized, allowing readers deeper access to the characters' thoughts. As Mrs. Hale reflects on Mrs. Wright's loneliness—"*She come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery*" (Glaspell, 1917, p. 9)—Glaspell constructs fidelity as relational understanding, drawing moral conclusions from emotion rather than law.

In *The Verge*, Glaspell departs from realism and adopts expressionist techniques to dramatize fidelity as self-loyalty. Claire, the protagonist, inhabits a surreal, fragmented world where language often breaks down under the weight of psychological tension. Her identity crisis is rendered through abstract dialogue, metaphoric imagery, and spatial symbolism. The greenhouse, where Claire conducts her radical botanical experiments, becomes a metaphor for creative rebellion—a womb of transformation—and simultaneously, a site of isolation and implosion.

"*I'm not interested in making other things like what we already have,*" Claire asserts. "*I want to make something—grow something—that's never been seen before*" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 67). Her fidelity is not to domestic or social expectations, but to her vision of becoming. This aligns with de Beauvoir's (1949/2010) existential idea that woman must define herself through action and transcendence. The spatial tensions in *The Verge*—between the domestic interior and the experimental greenhouse—serve as visual manifestations of Claire's desire to "*go on,*" to resist containment.

Unlike Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, whose fidelity emerges through empathy and shared experience, Claire's fidelity is solitary and existential. It is a refusal to conform, even at the cost of psychological coherence. Her ultimate breakdown can be seen as both a tragedy and a radical feminist statement in a society that pathologizes female autonomy,

fidelity to self becomes unsustainable. Yet, Glaspell does not condemn Claire; instead, she elevates her struggle as emblematic of the broader tensions between feminine identity, creative freedom, and social conformity.

Comparing these three works, Glaspell's narrative techniques underscore the multifaceted nature of fidelity. In *Trifles* and *A Jury of Her Peers*, it is enacted through domestic solidarity and moral intuition—what Gilligan (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> calls "an ethic of care." In *The Verge*, fidelity takes on an existential, even destructive form—echoing modernist themes of alienation and self-fracture. The former dramatize fidelity as intersubjective and redemptive; the latter presents it as intensely personal, perilous, and radical.

Through symbolism, spatial design, and layered dialogue, Glaspell reshapes the domestic and psychological landscape as terrains of resistance. Her female characters do not passively obey or rebel—they interpret, imagine, and act. Their fidelity lies not in submission, but in their ability to see and feel what male authority refuses to recognize: that justice and moral truth are not always found in law books, but often hidden in the quiet, fragmented details of a woman's life.

Finally we can say that In *Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921), Susan Glaspell reconfigures fidelity not as submission to patriarchal authority, but as a morally charged, feminist practice of resistance. Across her major works, fidelity becomes a deeply ethical commitment—to empathy, shared female experience, and the pursuit of personal or collective autonomy. Whether it manifests through the quiet solidarity of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters or the radical self-assertion of Claire Archer, Glaspell's portrayal of fidelity challenges dominant moral frameworks that prioritize legal, religious, or domestic obligations. Instead, her women protagonists embody what Gilligan (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> calls an "ethic of care", responding to moral dilemmas through relational insight rather than detached rationality.

The narrative strategies Glaspell employs—rich symbolism, gendered dialogue, and spatial dynamics—create interpretive spaces where the overlooked "trifles" of women's lives gain profound ethical weight. In *Trifles* and *A Jury of Her Peers*, domestic objects like the dead bird and unfinished quilt serve as emblems of suppressed lives and catalyze acts of female fidelity that subvert institutional justice. In *The Verge*, fidelity becomes a metaphysical pursuit, expressed through Claire's psychological unraveling as she seeks to "go on" beyond the confines of femininity and societal roles.

Ultimately, Glaspell's works not only critique patriarchal structures but offer alternative moral visions rooted in feminist consciousness and agency. By dramatizing fidelity as a transformative, justice-oriented force, Glaspell asserts that loyalty to truth, shared suffering, and selfhood can be more righteous—and more human—than adherence to rigid legal codes. In doing so, she expands the boundaries of both literature and feminist ethics, reminding us that true justice often begins in empathy, imagination, and resistance.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has explored how Susan Glaspell redefines fidelity as a morally charged, feminist mode of resistance that challenges patriarchal constructions of loyalty, justice, and identity. Through her seminal works—*Trifles* (1916), *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), and *The Verge* (1921)—Glaspell



dismantles the traditional associations of fidelity with obedience to law, marriage, or domestic duty, and reconfigures it as a deeply ethical and gendered practice rooted in empathy, moral imagination, and existential autonomy.

In *Trifles* and *A Jury of Her Peers*, fidelity is enacted through the silent alliance of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, who shift their loyalties from patriarchal authority to shared female experience. Their decision to conceal the evidence of Mrs. Wright's emotional abuse and implied motive for murder is not an act of legal subversion alone but an assertion of relational justice—what Carol Gilligan (1982)<sup>[6]</sup> calls an “ethic of care.” By interpreting domestic objects as encoded symbols of trauma and resistance, Glaspell constructs a feminine epistemology that privileges emotional insight over abstract legalism. These women become moral agents not in spite of, but because of their gendered position, subverting the very definitions of justice imposed upon them.

Conversely, in *The Verge*, Glaspell expands the scope of fidelity from communal solidarity to radical self-loyalty. Claire Archer's psychological and philosophical rebellion against social conformity reflects Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2010) existentialist notion of becoming. Claire's fidelity is not to others, but to her evolving identity, to her refusal to be defined by patriarchal scripts of femininity, motherhood, or reason. While her descent into breakdown might suggest a tragic failure, it more accurately symbolizes the costs of fidelity to radical selfhood in a world unprepared to accommodate female autonomy and creative divergence.

Together, these works position fidelity as a dynamic feminist virtue: sometimes communal, sometimes solitary, always transformative. Whether through the ethical solidarity of women who refuse to betray a fellow woman's suffering or through the avant-garde pursuit of personal becoming, fidelity in Glaspell's work disrupts traditional binaries between law and justice, duty and freedom, silence and speech. Her characters do not merely defy authority; they embody an alternative moral order—one that demands recognition of lived experience, emotional truth, and ethical complexity.

Ultimately, Glaspell's revisioning of fidelity offers a powerful challenge to institutionalized ethics and a compelling framework for feminist literary criticism. She dramatizes how women's moral choices—often rendered invisible or irrational within patriarchal discourse—can serve as revolutionary acts of resistance. In doing so, Glaspell not only reclaims fidelity from its patriarchal origins but elevates it as a feminist methodology: a conscious, justice-oriented practice that continues to resonate with contemporary debates on gender, ethics, and literary representation. Her work calls for continued scholarly attention to the nuanced intersections between emotional solidarity, ethical agency, and gendered resistance in literature.

Through feminist narrative strategies and symbolic detail, Glaspell presents fidelity not as submission but as moral courage. Her works affirm that true justice often arises from compassion, imagination, and resistance rooted in women's lived experience.

For further study, future research could explore fidelity in Glaspell's lesser-known plays and fiction, examine comparative treatments of fidelity in contemporaneous

feminist literature, or investigate its relevance in modern gender discourse and ethical theory.

## 8. References

1. Beauvoir SD. The second sex. Borde C, Malovany-Chevallier S, translators. New York: Vintage; 2010.
2. Ben-Zvi L. Susan Glaspell: her life and times. New York: Oxford University Press; 2005.
3. Booth WC. The company we keep: an ethics of fiction. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1988.
4. Butler J. Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge; 1990.
5. Carpentier MC. The major plays of Susan Glaspell: in context. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 2000.
6. Gilligan C. In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 1982.
7. Glaspell S. Trifles. In: Gainor J, editor. Susan Glaspell in context: American theater, culture, and politics, 1915-48. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; 1916, p. 100-5.
8. Glaspell S. A jury of her peers. In: American short stories. New York: Dover Publications; 1917, p. 240-55.
9. Glaspell S. The verge. In: Plays by Susan Glaspell. New York: Brentano's; 1921, p. 60-85.
10. Makowsky V. Susan Glaspell's century of American women: a critical interpretation of her work. New York: Oxford University Press; 1990.
11. Nussbaum MC. Love's knowledge: essays on philosophy and literature. New York: Oxford University Press; 1990.
12. Ozieblo B. Susan Glaspell and the American theatre. Bern: Peter Lang; 2008.
13. Showalter E. The new feminist criticism: essays on women, literature and theory. New York: Pantheon Books; 1985.