

Brian Ruehr

Professor Antonio Garcia

ENGL 1312

29 July 2022

Different Lenses

Is Susan Glaspell's play "Trifles", the author takes a look at how men and women of the early 1900s would see things differently. According to Suzy Holstein, "the play reveals a fundamental difference between the women's actions and the men's, a difference grounded in varying understandings of the home space" (Holstein). While the men, in the play, are there to investigate the murder the women were brought only to gather a few things for the female suspect. While the men take a more textbook approach to the investigation, they discount the things that the women might see as important and Mr. Hale even says, "Well, women are used to worrying over trifles" (Glaspell, 732). Glaspell uses the play "Trifles" as a commentary about gender roles of the time and how these could cause the male and female characters to come up with different ideas about what life was like on the Wright's ranch and the murder of Mr. Wright.

The gender roles of the early 1900s were pretty clearly defined with the men doing the work and making the money and women concerning themselves things around the home space. This is seen from the very beginning of the play as the sheriff and county attorney along with Mr. Hale showing them around search the home for clues as to what exactly happened.

While the search is going on the women are left in the kitchen to gather a few things that Mrs. Wright, who had been detained as the prime murder suspect in her husband's murder, that she had requested. For most of the play the women and men are in different parts of the house as Janet Grose points out "The interactions between the male and female characters in 'Trifles' is somewhat limited" (Grose). This could be on purpose to show that the men of the time didn't appreciate a women's input as much in such an important thing as a murder investigation. If they had taken into account what the women saw though they potentially could have come up with motive for the murder of Mr. Wright.

The women in this play show that they have a much better eye for disturbances of the household than men do. Holstein wrote "Although neither they nor the men realize it, they too are conducting an investigation" (Holstein). At first Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Hale don't believe Minnie could have killed her husband. She was worried about her fruit preserves freezing and the women don't think a murderer would be concerned about such things. They even defend her against the county attorney when he points out some dirty dish towels, "Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands are always as clean as they might be" (Glaspell, 733). The women offer excuses for why the kitchen might be such a disarray. You can see very early on in the play the divide in thinking between the groups of men in the play and the women. The more the women look around the more clues they find, seemingly overlooked by the male investigators.

As the men continue their investigation into the death of Mr. Wright the women continue to piece together what life was like on the Wright's ranch. The next thing the women find while gathering things for Minnie in a quilt that she had been working on. As Mrs. Hale

examines the quilt she notes, “look at the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It’s all over the place!” (Glaspell, 737). This might have been there first clue that Minnie was stressed out or unhappy. There is no way that the men of the time period could have looked at an unfinished quilt and come to the same conclusions. Glaspell writes, “They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!” and then they laugh (Glaspell, 736).

The next clue found by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale is a bird cage but no bird in it. While wondering what happened to the bird Mrs. Hale says, “I s’pose the cat got it” but Mrs. Peters explains that she was afraid of cats (Glaspell, 738). Mrs. Peter examines the cage further and notices that the hinges on the cage door are busted and she wonders if someone had been rough with it. As the women continue to reconstruct life the Wright’s ranch the women begin to sympathize with Mrs. Wright, this sympathize and regret not visiting Mrs. Wright. This understanding from a women’s point of view shows them where a motive could have been forming all these years that would lead to the murder of Mr. Wright.

The last piece of evidence that our female investigators come across is that of the dead bird found in a decorative box. Holstein describes this last piece of evidence as, “In her sewing box, they discover Minnie’s dead pet bird, and this discovery would be the missing piece of the men’s ‘puzzle.’ As they recognize that the bird had been violently strangled and then lovingly set inside a piece of rich material” (Holstein). This was the last piece of the puzzle for the ladies to see what life had been like for Mrs. Wright. While they had not been brought as part of the investigative team, they had turned out be better suited at solving the case of Mr. Wrights death or at least could provide a motive for the murder because of the details that had been

important to them but not the med. While the men had focused on things where and when the murder took place and whether or not the windows had been secure the women were able to deduce how Mrs. Wright could want to kill her husband. The men of this time period were incapable of seeing things through the eyes of women.

There ended up being two different sets of investigators in the death of Mr. Wright, one set male and one set female. The men were your stereotypical male investigators who were only concerned about the facts and couldn't see part of the male sphere of influence. The second set were the wives, who were only brought along to gather a few things for the female murder suspect. While the men are unable to figure out a motive for the murder because they aren't able to find anything of note the women are able to find several details overlooked by the men. Glaspell uses the gender roles of this time period to point out the way men and women see things differently.

Works Cited

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