

Jane Doe

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English 1302

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Feminism as an Advantage

Mrs. Hale, the sheriff's wife, is an independent and defensive woman throughout Susan Glaspell's play, *Trifles*. Throughout the nineteenth century a superior woman was absolutely unheard of; women were required to be submissive by standing behind their husband's decisions and claims, regardless of how they truly felt. The action in this play begins immediately after the murder of John Wright. Mr. Hale, a long time neighbor, relates the details of when the murder was discovered to the county attorney and sheriff, describing the sight of John Wright's lifeless body and Mrs. Wright's explanation for the murder. Upon entering the Wright's farmhouse, the men trivialize Mrs. Wright's duties, while the sympathetic women crucially defend them. Through ethos, logos, and pathos, Mrs. Hale attempts, and succeeds, at defending and protecting Mrs. Wright.

By utilizing a woman's role and identity as a farmer's wife, Mrs. Hale clarifies just how difficult it is being a caretaker. The men deliberately condemn Mrs. Wright's filthy kitchen without taking into consideration the reasons behind such clutter. The men feel that the in-completed tasks are "[s]igns of an incompetent housekeeper" (Reynolds). Therefore, the husbands feel that Mrs. Wright is a useless and unskilled housewife, whereas the women and audience feel that the clutter was a result of someone upsetting and disturbing her not pure laziness. Mrs. Hale analyzes the reasoning behind Mrs. Wright's in completed house work by stating, "Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come

away in such a hurry” (Glaspell). Mrs. Hale’s defensiveness, as well as her consideration for Mrs. Wright’s emotions, displays a loyalty amongst sexes. Mrs. Hale’s predominant role as a house wife helps her better understand just how difficult it must have been for Minnie Wright, trying to keep up with a spotless home, while caring for such a negative husband.

Furthermore, in the process of carefully picking up the kitchen, Mrs. Hale notices the fruit spoiling and bursting from the glass containers within; she disposes of the bad and places the remaining fresh inside of a cupboard. Without Mrs. Hale’s knowledge and experience as a homemaker she would have failed to notice the spoiling fruits, which play a key role in solving the murder. Similar to the rotting fruits, “Minnie herself stayed on the shelf, alone and without any company, until the coldness of her marriage; her life in general, broke her apart. Her secrets kept under pressure burst from their fragile containers” (“Trifles Summary”). Consequently, Minnie’s entire life remained isolated until the point that she could no longer remain remote and she merely exploded. As Mrs. Hale is unconsciously comparing Minnie Wright to the rotting fruit she notices that Mrs. Wright was in the process of either cooking, or just getting finished, but somehow was interrupted. In returning the bread to the box and removing the fruit from the table these particular clues were no longer visible to the men’s eyes. Because the men do look for such evidence, without this inviting evidence, the men are not able to conclude that Mrs. Wright was under any amount of stress prior to the night of the murder.

In the process of Mrs. Hale removing key evidence she emphasizes the fact that John was a hard, passive, and unhelpful man just to be around, much less live with. Due to neglect, Mrs. Wright seemingly rebelled by refusing to do her feminist chores; her revolt could easily explain why the kitchen was in such turmoil. It is clear that, Mrs. Hale’s ethos as a woman helps her

when determining the level of difficulty it must have been for a woman to constantly live in such a negative atmosphere.

In addition to Mrs. Hale's ethos as a housewife her logic and knowledge play key roles in solving the murder of Mr. Wright. Mrs. Hale is able to piece together the details of the murder while covering any evidence. As the wives search for any signs of rage, because they too are curious if Mrs. Wright was a murderer, they come across a quilt that has been left unfinished. As Mrs. Hale observes the quilt, she comes across an interesting piece and states, "Look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!" (Glaspell).

Immediately following this remark, Mrs. Hale rips the sewing from the knot and rethreads it correctly, preventing the men from noticing any nervous behavior. She did not even think twice about tampering with such evidence, almost as if she was Mrs. Wright's own blood relative.

Ironically, Mrs. Hale's unlawful reaction to the evidence is a strange but important aspect because Mrs. Wright is the sheriff's wife; she does not even consider the law once. In the mix of Mrs. Hale using her knowledge as a housewife to determine the things Minnie would need most while in jail, she comes upon an empty birdcage and, immediately, she concludes that a cat must have eaten the bird that once lived inside. Upon examining the cage, Mrs. Hale notices the bent bars, as if someone had been extremely rough with it. She goes into an entire conversation about Jack Wright's intolerable personality, blaming him almost instantaneously for the bird's death, which eventually leads to Mrs. Wright's emotional as well as physical breakdown.

With the logic used by Mrs. Hale she comes to the decision that time would pass more rapidly for Mrs. Wright if she had her sewing materials, the only thing left to locate were the actual patches. Mrs. Peters briefly looks into a fancy red box and, astonishingly, finds the dead bird. Mrs. Hale realizes the burden that this must have been for Mrs. Wright, especially since she

was such a lovely singer in her younger years and had become lonesome, with no one to speak with. “The bird was a child-substitute for the solitary Minnie; the canary's voice was to displace the silence of a coldly authoritarian husband and replace the sounds of the unborn children” (Hedges 54). The bird brought alive the happy and younger side of Mrs. Wright; the death of the bird destroyed Mrs. Wright’s reason for living, which sent her into a rage of hostility. As the men’s steps are heard approaching, Mrs. Hale hides the bird and speaks as if absolutely nothing was happening.

Mrs. Hale begins to think about all of Mrs. Wright’s distress and literally feels her emotions within. “Mrs. Wright becomes the primary focus, and her feelings, her motives, and her fate are the subject, she has no voice or character, an acknowledgment of the nature of her life with John Wright” (Wohlpart). The loneliness within Mrs. Wright causes a great deal of depression that eventually catches up to her until finally she explodes. Therefore, Mrs. Hale no longer questions whether Mrs. Wright is a murderer; she only views her as a helpless victim. Mrs. Hale shifts into a stage of responsibility, wishing she would have assisted Mrs. Wright through her lonesome days. A feeling of blame for this horrible murder captivates Mrs. Hale’s mind as she says to Mrs. Peters, “I would’ve come. I stayed away because it weren’t cheerful-- and that’s why I ought to have come” (Glaspell). Pathos is greatly demonstrated as Mrs. Hale continues to defend Mrs. Wright’s remaining life. Mrs. Hale stresses the fact that Mrs. Wright was married for thirty years without ever having children. From a woman’s standpoint, Mrs. Hale could not bear to imagine having such a hard husband with out any children to speak with.

Comment: This quotation, as should others, should be integrated . . . a part of the student writer’s sentence.

Ironically, this play ends with Mrs. Peters and the sheriff’s wife discarding the dead bird, thus tampering with the only remaining evidence. Due to Mrs. Hale’s experience as a housewife, she was able to solve the murder and cover any evidence that was attained while doing so. Mrs.

Hale's submissive role within the society motivates her to defend Mrs. Wright's last chance to be in control of her own life. As the men search for evidence, amidst the crime scene, the women uncover the trifles, referring to all the small symbols and clues that, result in Mrs. Hale's and Mrs. Peter's solving of the crime. "The men who claimed that women always worried about trifles would never realize that these 'trifles' would connect Mrs. Wright to the murder. To keep quiet was the revenge of these women. This may be the only time they can claim victory over men. Ultimately, because of their searching and their identities, the women are able to outsmart the men" (Ferguson). Mrs. Hale's actions throughout this play are very important as they allow for the possibility of Mrs. Wright to live her life.

Works Cited

Comment: MLA requirements were changed since this essay written.

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