

# Character analysis from a drama -

Literature



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The Character of Mrs. White in “ Trifles” Susan Gaspell’s short play, “ Trifles”, is debatable from various angles, but it mainly highlights how women are looked at in the society, particularly a century ago. It is written in the style of a detective story. In spite of the sincere investigation going on by an attorney, a sheriff, and Mr. Hale to discover the death of Mr. White, the team fails to arrive at any conclusion. The irony in the play is that the women who accompany them and who are generally treated as belonging to the inferior sex ultimately discover the circumstances leading to the death of Mr. White. Though Mrs. White is the central character in the play, her character slowly emerges only through the conversation going on among the women. The focus is finally on the miserable and lonely life lived by her. This paper is an analysis of the character of Mrs. White by examining the dialogues in the play, mainly that of the female characters.

The play opens with the investigating team arriving at the house of Mr. White to discover the causes of his death. Extreme care is taken by the playwright to conceal the actual circumstances leading to White’s death. Mrs. White’s indifference to the sad event is given in her casual but ironic answer, “ his home” (Susan). As the title shows, the attention of the readers at the beginning is taken to trifle things, the things in the kitchen, as Gaspell intends to show that, during her days, women were only identified with kitchen and silly things. As Mrs. Hale points out, the “ Farmers wives have their hands full” (Susan). The female characters in the play try to discover the actual relationship between Mr. White and Mrs. White. They try to find out what kind of man Mr. White was, as they know how men in those days generally treated women: “ he didnt drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters”

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(Susan). It shows his snobbishness.

As already noted, the action of the play is in the dialogue that goes on among the ladies. Men mostly talk separately as they do not feel that women are intelligent enough to join them. Moreover, it is a dialogue meant to unearth the murder of a man. However, the irony is that it is the discussion among the women which lead to the discovery of the objects which help them to know the real psychic situation of Mrs. White: " She--come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself--real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and--fluttery" {Susan). Similarly the changes found in Mrs. White's knitting help them to realize that she was slowly reaching at the end of her power to tolerate, to tolerate her husband. Like a caged bird she has been living a miserable life: " If thered been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful--still, after the bird was still" (Susan). The greatest revelation is when they suspect that the innocent bird was perhaps killed by Mr. White, and that prompts Mrs. White to undertake the most monstrous activity in her life. The play becomes totally feministic when Mrs. Hale understands the plight of the women as a whole: " We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things--its all just a different kind of the same thing" (Susan). No one could so far suspect any kind of strain in the life of the couple.

Through the character of Mrs. White Susan Gaspell thus reveals the gender differences in the patriarchal society in which she lived. The play shows how serious are the male characters, but how hollow are they when it comes to apply mind. It also gives the true nature of women. They are sensitive, affectionate, tolerant, but beyond a point they are capable of acting. It is one of the first outbursts coming from a feminist writer.

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. Work Cited

Gaspell, Susan. " Trifles", <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng384/trifles.htm>