

Feminist connotations in susan glaspell's "trifles" essay

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Susan Glaspell was an active feminist in her time, so one may read her work through this lens. The play -Trifles - has numerous feminist connotations. It is a call to reexamine the value of women in a patriarchal society; through their central role in the drama, the female characters challenge traditional notions about women's perspective and value.

The men in the play enter the Mr. Wright's house with a fixed mind. They take pride in their role as professionals, and use this background to analyze the murder scene (Glaspell 1043). Their rigidity explains why they did not identify Mr. Wright's murderers. Conversely, the women entered the Wrights' house with an open mind. They had no professional titles or legal obligations. In fact, they had come to the premises in order to collect Mrs. Wright's personal effects.

However, these women's way of knowing was not just different from the men's; they had a practical way of applying it to discover something useful. While the men analyzed most of the conventional areas of crime-scene investigation, the women used their knowledge to consider Mrs. Wright's entire marriage. They had a holistic view of the crime, yet the men only focused on one point in time.

When they stumbled upon a canary that had been strangled in the same way as Mr. Wright, they connected the dots and realized that Minnie was the murderer. Their lowly status gives them an upper hand in the investigation because they have no expectations to meet. The women's perspective allows them to redefine themselves in readers' perspectives. They eventually emerge as winners at the end of the play.

The society in which *Trifles* is set devalues women's opinions. It is a patriarchal one that only holds men's contributions in high regard. Such attitudes demean the way society operates.

Professionals do not function effectively because they push away matters that involve women. In the end, these biased individuals end up hurting themselves. The author wanted to challenge these thoughts by illustrating that the female perspective could solve problems or enrich lives. In essence, Susan Glaspell was using her play to engage in feminist criticism of her society.

One should note that feminist inclinations were not alien to the playwright. She was an active feminist who supported several organizations. Heterodoxy was one such entity; it consisted of 25 women. Their intention was to promote the freedom of women in all spheres of life. The author grew up in a conservative community but her exposure as a journalist awakened her to the plight of women in her society.

Not only were they landless, but they had no right to vote or participate in public discourse. The author was dissatisfied with the unequal power relations between men and women in marriage. Glaspell decided that she would use her writings to advance this cause. In fact, the disempowering relationship between men and women is evident in the deceased marriage. Mr. Wright, like a number of other men in that society, silenced his wife during their marriage.

She was a highly talented individual that could have experienced personal fulfillment if she had exploited this talent (Glaspell 1047). Her husband exerted negative control over her because he devalued her. The power relationship at the time was inclined towards men. Mr. Wright's patriarchal attitudes could not allow his wife to have a life of her own. The writer wanted to highlight how this attitude could backfire in the form of extreme events like murder.

Perhaps one of the ways in which Susan Glaspell challenged society's view of women was through her subject matter. 'Trifles' is a play about a woman who kills another human being. This subject has always been a source of fascination even for real-life investigators. When the killer is female and she kills a man, then this elicits fear in male audiences. Men react so strongly to such occurrences because they defy society's expectations of femininity.

Society assumes that women epitomize the values of passivity and moderation. Therefore, when they vent out their frustrations on other people, through murder, then these expectations are crushed. In the play, Glaspell wanted to challenge cultural stereotypes of women. Susan wanted to erase the myth that women would always take the injustices that came their way by illustrating that women could also kill. She focused on a controversial subject so as to elicit strong reactions from her audiences.

The key characters in the play were women. They did not just participate in the play, but they drove the events in the narration. Conversely, the men in the play appear to exist merely for the purpose of proving that patriarchy

has its limitations. The male characters are oblivious to women's ability to commit crimes because they presume that passivity is feminine and action, even in the form of crime, is masculine.

This closed-mindedness impairs their ability to solve the case. The author had feminist intentions because the female characters manage to do what the men could not. Glaspell has taken on a controversial subject and shown that the patriarchal order is not the best solution.

Glaspell, Susan. "Trifles." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Vol D. Ed. Paul Lauter. Houghton: Mifflin, 2006. 1041-1050. Print.