

# The criminal psychology of mrs. wright

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The Criminal Psychology of Mrs. Wright Murder in human history dates back to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, the first descendants of Adam and Eve. Cain killed Abel out of jealousy, and since then countless amounts of feuds have lead to the extreme action of murder as a resolve to the dispute. Killings have become so common that some can now be viewed as justified, which appears to be the popular perception of Mrs. Wright's murder of her husband in Susan Glaspell's play Trifles. Aside from self-defence and military soldiers serving to protect the innocent, there is never a case in which murder can be justified, especially in the situation on Mrs. Wright. Although Glaspell gives clues of a psychologically abusive marital relationship, this does not give Mrs. Wright justification for murder. In fact, the way she goes about the act very much calculated and sociopathic. Uncovering clues throughout Susan Glaspell's Trifles will reveal a calculated murder which gives Mrs. Wright the title of a sociopath.

One of the great rights provided to Americans is the ability to always stand a trial, regardless of the crime, this way even the defendant has a chance to plead their case of innocence. However, many times loopholes in the law are exploited by lawyers to get their client out of trouble, or at least minimize the penalty. The same can be said for playing to the jury's emotion, which would most likely be Mrs. Wright's defense tactic if Susan Glaspell were to have continued Trifles to her trial. However, this would not have been necessary due to the clues Glaspell presents, which makes it seem obvious to the reader that it was Mrs. Wright who killed her husband. Yet even with these clues, many feel as if Mrs. Wright acted in a justified way because of the psychological abuse she received from Mr. Wright. According to Mrs.

Hale's description of Mrs. Wright before her marriage, "[Mrs. Wright] Used to wear pretty clothes and be lively when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir." (Glaspell, 605). This prior characterization of Mrs. Wright reveals how she has changed as a result of the marriage. Mrs. Hale also goes on to describe the home as not a very cheerful place with Mr. Wright living in it.

In Darlene Oakley's article entitled " Emotional Abuse: The Invisible Marriage Killer" men are typically the abuser due to the need to be in control. Oakley blames this on the possibility of lack of a father figure, or seeing this same abuse first hand. These abusers " self-referenced" which means the only perspective they have is their own and anything contrary is what fuels the abuse, which is why the woman feels the need to always be obedient. Oakley also provides the profile of the emotionally abused woman who has low self-esteem even if she appears to be in control of her situation and loss of trust in the relationship. Without any trust she is left to emotionally detach herself from the situation just to survive which comes at the cost of her soul and spirit. (Oakley). Therefore, the reader can feel sympathy for Mrs. Wright since her husband is presented as the one who ruined her life, but this does not give Mrs. Wright the excuse to murder Mr. Wright, it only gives her a motive. It is rare in history to find a woman killer, however there have been enough in history for trends to be formed.

In Sophie Davison's book Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health she discusses the rare female serial killers and where their motives lie. According to Davison, Mrs. Wright would be classified as a " Black Widow", one who

kills her family members. Mrs. Wright can also fit the description of a “Revenge Killer” since it was Mr. Wright who metaphorically took away her life, therefore she literally took his out of revenge. (Davison). Now with a motive, Mrs. Wright began her planning to get rid of her husband for the 30 years of psychological abuse she had to endure. A sociopath is defined as a person with a personality disorder manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behavior and a lack of conscience. What is discovered by Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters uncovering what the men of the play consider to be “trifle” details, is actually Glaspell’s presenting evidence of the progression of Mrs. Wright becoming a sociopathic killer. Glaspell begins by giving us Mr. Hale’s description of his conversation with Mrs. Wright. “Well, she looked as if she didn’t know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.” (Glaspell, 602). Mr. Hale goes on to describe Mrs. Wright’s actions as strange, as if she had no intention to care that her husband was just killed. This can be excused as a strange reaction to distress, yet it also gives the feeling of Mrs. Wright showing no remorse and as apathetic to the situation. Glaspell then continues by having the women find strange sewing patterns in Mrs. Wright’s apron. As the women conclude, the method Mrs. Wright used in the sewing is called “knotting”. This is not only ironic, but presents a clue and the second part of the killer progression that Mrs. Wright was actually practicing the knot she would tie to use to kill her husband.

Another hint of irony used in this situation is that when a couple gets married it is called “tying the knot” which Mrs. Wright is also doing to end this marriage. The third clue that Glaspell gives is a bit of a mystery to the women of the play, yet would make sense in order to continue the

progression of Mrs. Wright evolving into a killer. As the women continue to search through Mrs. Wright's things they discover an empty bird cage. Mrs. Hale goes on to give more insight of Mrs. Wright's life before her marriage, "She was like a bird herself- real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and fluttery" (Glaspell, 608). The two women eventually find the dead bird in Mrs. Wright's sewing kit with a knot tied around its neck, similar to how Mr. Wright was strangled.

Now there are two theories as to who is responsible for the death of the bird, the first being that it was Mr. Wright. There is some credibility to this theory when Mrs. Hale's description of Mrs. Wright as a bird is considered.

Obviously, Mr. Wright was not fond of a lively lifestyle which would be why he killed the bird the same way he took away Mrs. Wright's free spirit.

However, this would mean that killing the bird was a trigger to Mrs. Wright's emotion, making her murder of her husband a violent reaction which does not fit her profile of the obedient abused wife. This theory would also give no significance to the knots in the apron. Rather it is the theory that provides Mrs. Wright as the bird killer that has more correlation to the other clues.

There is much more evidence to support the Mrs. Wright theory, which leads one to believe that this is how Susan Glaspell intended for *Trifles* to progress.

The first piece of evidence is that this is the third part of Mrs. Wright's progression to a sociopath. This step is the first time she actually causes any kind of physical harm, in this case to an animal. According to The Humane Society of America, "65% of those arrested for animal abuse have also been arrested for assault and battery of others and of 36 questioned convicted murderers, about half admitted to harming animals." This data shows a

direct correlation between animal abuse and actual harm to others. With this information and by how the bird was strangled with the same knots used in the sewing of the apron there is certainly enough evidence to support the Mrs. Wright theory.

Yet another piece of evidence to support this theory will prove Mrs. Wright to be a sociopathic killer, and even have serial killer tendencies. Authors Ross Bartles and Ceri Parsons write about the social constructions of a serial killer in their book *Feminism and Psychology*. Their work analyzes the nature of these serial crimes and find that many serial killers are motivated by an emotion similar to that of a sexual fantasy. Once the ideal image appears in their mind they cannot stop killing until that fantasy becomes a reality, and therefore they can relive this image. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to recreate a fantasy perfectly, which is why these killers need to keep killing. (Bartles, Parsons). Therefore, it is possible that Mrs. Wright's fantasy was put in her head while she was sewing and killing the bird was simply practice carrying out that fantasy. Killing the bird serves as the connection from fantasy to reality of killing her husband, which is why the Mrs. Wright theory makes the most sense and proves her to be sociopathic killer.

Murder has always been a part of human history and has been used as the end result of countless feuds. Some people are of the opinion that killings can be justified, which appears to be the popular perception of Mrs. Wright's murder of her husband in Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles*. However, the evidence provided by Glaspell proves that there murder in the case between Mr. and Mrs. Wright cannot be justified. Although Glaspell gives clues of a

psychologically abusive marital relationship, this does not give Mrs. Wright the right to resort to murder as a resolution to the situation. The way Mrs. Wright goes about killing her husband is actually calculated and can be seen as sociopathic. The sociopath profile fits Mrs. Wright through hints given by Glaspell. Uncovering clues throughout Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* will reveal a calculated murder which gives Mrs. Wright the title of a sociopath.

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