

Evaluation of the women's experience as described in susan glaspell's, a jury of ...

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Today, it is difficult for women to visualize a time when human rights were exclusive only to men. Written in 1917 before the feminist movement, the story "A Jury of Her Peers" by Susan Glaspell, paints the unsettling way of life for women in a male dominated society. Glaspell uses two main characters, Martha Hale and Mrs. Peters to tell the tale of the prime suspect in the murder of her husband, Minnie Wright. Glaspell uses symbolism and characterization to expose the discrimination and abuse women lived in that ultimately led to the demise of Minnie Wright's identity and individuality.

Glaspell represents a time when women were viewed as property. Carefully using surnames when referring to the female characters symbolizes women's subordination to their husbands, suggesting that women have no identities. Unlike Martha Hale and Minnie Wright, Mrs. Peters is only known by her husband's last name because she is the most oppressed since she is married to a sheriff. The county attorney reaffirms this saying "a sheriff's wife is married to the law" (378). She accepts that character until she understands the cruelty forced upon Minnie. She says "I know what stillness is. The law has got to punish crime" (377). However she is not speaking about the murder of John by Minnie, but the crime committed against Minnie. Another important symbol is the rocking chairs condition. This chair symbolizes the transformation from Minnie Foster to Minnie Wright.

"And it came into Mrs. Hale's mind that the rocker didn't look in the least like Minnie Foster- the Minnie Foster of twenty years before. It was a dingy red, with wooden rungs up the back, and the middle rung was gone, and the chair sagged to one side" (367-8).

The deteriorating chair represents Minnie's change as a result of marrying a harsh man, the change in her identity from a pretty girl involved in her community to an emotionally battered woman in rags. " I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang", Mrs. Hale mentions several times to Mrs. Peters how Minnie Foster was and " how she did change" (375). This furthering Mrs. Hale's point that Minnie Foster had no choice but to escape from the grasp of Mr. Wright.

The final straw was the strangulation of the bird. This is the most significant symbol in the story because Minnie was symbolically speaking, the bird. " Kind of like a bird herself-real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and fluttery" (375) was how she was described by Mrs. Hale, who once knew Minnie before her imprisonment. The bird's damaged cage represents Minnie's confinement in her marriage. When Mr. Wright kills the canary, he finally kills Minnie. The once fluttery and singing bird who had a voice was now gone. As the last piece of herself diminishes it is also how she becomes free. Minnie kills Mr. Wright by strangling him, just as he did to her over the long and dreadful years. The only way a women was free from the oppression and ownership by men was when a wife became a widow. As a widow, a women is in charge of her own property and money, she can work for herself and live her life for herself, something unimaginable of the time. Ironically, as the men searched for clues to tie Minnie to the murder, it was the women who solved the crime. The attorney could have never predicted a woman could do a man's job, questioning their sex, " but would the women

know a clue if they did come upon it?" (370). The only way Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peter found out the truth was because they themselves have suffered as Minnie, as women they sympathize with Minnie because they see themselves in her. The women hide the evidence that would generate a motive for Mr. Wright's death to protect one of their own. Glaspell successfully uses characterization and symbolism to capture the anti-women period by the deterioration of a woman, driven to madness from the tyranny of her husband. This story represents all the lives of all women who lived under the men.