

Free research paper on a psychoanalysis of minnie wright from a jury of her peers...

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Glaspell's character Minnie Wright from "A Jury of her Peers" is fundamentally a character created to instigate discussion about the complex relationship between the genders as it exists in Western society. Minnie Wright is a woman that is suspected of killing her husband via strangulation; the murder is discovered by a man named Mr. Hale. Mr. Hale tells the story of the discovery of the murder, claiming that Minnie Wright, at the time of the discovery, was acting in an extraordinarily odd manner. The story goes on to discuss the search for evidence, and the ways that the searchers split down gender lines; the women slowly come to view the wife as a victim, while the men view her as a potential murderer. The dichotomy between male and female perception of the crime is one of the fundamental thematic ideas present in the story, and essential to the understanding of Minnie as a character.

The reader is not introduced to Minnie Wright's character throughout the story, although the plotline centers around her character. The characters of the story are separated early by gender, with the men of the group quickly dismissing many of the things their wives and the women of the group think about the situation. At one point, Mrs. Hale's husband has an exchange with the neighbor's wife:

"I don't think anyone would call it cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the home-making instinct."

"Well, I don't know as Wright had, either," she muttered.

"You mean they didn't get on very well?" he was quick to ask.

"No; I don't mean anything," she answered, with decision. As she turned a little away from him, she added: "But I don't think a place would be any the

cheerfuller for John Wright's bein' in it."

" I'd like to talk to you about that a little later, Mrs. Hale," he said. " I'm anxious to get the lay of things upstairs now." (Glaspell)

Rather than listening to what the women had to say about the relationship between the couple-- insight into the home that could have been very helpful in discovering evidence as to the motive for the murder-- the men move about the house rapidly, insistent that they alone have the knowledge and ability to discern the truth regarding the murder.

The men of the story are convinced that Minnie Wright is the murderer, and that her guilt can be proven through some piece of evidence found in the home. However, the men are unwilling to listen to the women who are present at the scene, belittling their discussions of Minnie's home life. When the women find the dead bird-- the only proof that Minnie committed the murder-- they hide the evidence, becoming convinced that Minnie's murder of her husband was warranted (Glaspell). Their interpretation of the evidence is heavily based on their view of Minnie Wright as a victim pushed too far, rather than as the perpetrator of a violent act against an innocent individual.

Minnie is described, by the women, as " timid" and " fluttery," a shy little thing that liked to sing all the time (Glaspell). She is hardly described as a woman who could be construed to be a cold-blooded killer, although all of the women concede that they had not been close with her for some time. However, when the women discover the dead bird with its neck wrung, they know the truth: that John Wright had killed the last good thing in Minnie Wright's life, and Minnie's reaction was to lash out at John Wright, killing him

in the same way he killed her bird (Angel). It was Minnie's only recourse; her husband had stopped her from singing, and then killed the last little bit of her soul still symbolically living in the cage (Angel). With that death, Minnie could no longer bear her husband's violence towards her, and reacted in the same way a wounded, cornered animal would: violently, while he was at his weakest.

The men in the story are not Minnie Wright's peers. The peers that truly decided Minnie Wright's fate were the wives of the men involved in the story, and those women decided that Minnie's reaction to the violence in her life warranted a pass on the punishment for murder (Forell). Forell notes that animal abuse is often associated with domestic violence, as it indicates that the abuser is incapable or unwilling to feel empathy for the pain he or she causes another living being. The death of the canary may even have been a warning to Minnie herself that she was next: either she killed her husband, or he would kill her (Glaspell).

Even Minnie Wright's name indicates that she is a victim in the story, rather than a cold-blooded killer. Her married name-- Wright-- is a homophone for "right," which is a synonym for just or correct. Her maiden name-- Foster-- is a name that indicates hope for the future. To foster something is to bring it up and nurture it into maturity; Minnie originally had hopes and dreams of happiness that were taken away by her husband when he married her and forbade her to sing. According to the women of the story, Minnie could sing like a little bird; it was something she truly loved to do, and something that her husband took from her with little thought or care for her unhappiness (Angel).

The men of the story continuously trivialize the women of the story. The women repeatedly remind the men that being a farmer's wife is hard work, but the men fail to recognize the labors of love that the women in their lives foster upon them, instead choosing to trivialize their work and their intuition about the woman suspected of killing her husband. The men of the story fail to notice any of the clues that could tie Minnie to a motive for killing her husband; this is symbolic of society's general blindness towards the violence that women face from men every day. Men generally fail to understand the ways that society forces women into subservience, and this blindness to their male privilege is not always a positive thing. In the story, had the men been more willing to put aside their preconceived notions about justice, guilt, and innocence, they could have seen the nuance of the crime. Instead, they were left with a case they knew they could not win in front of a jury.

There is nothing in the story to indicate that Minnie is a cold-blooded killer, although this eventuality should not be disregarded without consideration. If Minnie were a cold-blooded killer who planned to kill her husband, it seems that she would have done so to gain something, as many women who are considered to be "black widows" do (Angel). However, there is no indication that Minnie would gain anything by her husband's death except a freedom from his violence; freedom from violence that has seeped into her everyday life, with no promise of stopping. Assuming that Minnie was not the victim of domestic abuse, and that the dead canary was merely an accident or that the canary died at her hands makes no sense from the point of view of the narrative. All the women-- the characters who actually knew and understood Minnie-- knew her to be a timid and flighty woman, not a fierce, violent one

(Glaspell). It should be assumed, then, that the reader understands that Minnie is designed to be a sympathetic character, rather than a character to be seen as a cold-blooded murderer.

Some may claim that the women subverted justice by hiding the evidence of the murder that Minnie committed. However, the subtext of the story indicates that if the murder had gone to trial, Minnie's side of the story would have been lost, and no one would have ever known about the pain and suffering she faced at the hands of her husband. Instead, the women acted as the jury of her peers in the unofficial court of law; they decided she was innocent of the murder based on the extenuating circumstances and acted accordingly, hiding the evidence from the men and protecting Minnie from a life-- or death-- sentence.

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