

Womens movment as seen in shiloh and the astronome



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rs Wife The days of the barefoot woman forced to stay in the kitchen and bedroom are over. Womens liberation has gained voice in the last century and has emancipated many women, bringing them into the realization that they are not subservient to men. As this thought process becomes more widely spread, more and more women are seeing the truth of it. In the short stories Shiloh and The Astronomers Wife this theme of realization and liberation is dominant.

In the story Shiloh by Bobbie Ann Mason we are introduced to Norma Jean. She is a wife to an injured trucker named Leroy. Our first glimpse at Norma Jean is of her working out. Leroy Moffitts wife, Norma Jean, is working on her pectorals. She lifts three-pound dumbbells to warm up, then progresses to a twenty-pound barbell. Standing with legs apart, she reminds Leroy of Wonder Woman. (Pg. 68) This shows a bit about her strong, self-improving personality. Another look at this trait are seen in her attempts at learning. Norma Jean is going to night school. She has graduated from her six-week body-building course and now she is taking an adult-education course in composition at Paducah Community College. She spends her evenings outlining paragraphs. (Pg. 74) Not only is Norma Jean improving her body but her intellect as well. I believe this self-improving aspect points to an independence in her.

In The Astronomers Wife independent woman is the farthest description of Mrs. Ames. She was a youngish woman, but this was forgotten. The mystery and silence of her husbands mind lay like a chiding finger on her lips. Her eyes were gray, for the light had been extinguished from them. (Pg. 63) She had at one time been a bright beautiful woman but now she is stifled and has forgotten her beauty. She is very soft spoken. Every time she talks it

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mentions the soft tone or the hushed voice. This shows that she is a gentle and rather timid woman.

Norma Jean starts having problems in her marriage with Leroy when he gets disabled in a truck accident and is anything but gentle and timid about it.. He has been on the road for fifteen years as a trucker. Now he is home for good and adaptation is necessary. He is all for settling down in the marriage but he senses her discomfort. Since he has been home, he has felt unusually tender about his wife and guilty over his long absences. But he cant tell what she feels about him. Norma Jean has never complained about his traveling; she has never made hurtful remarks, like calling his truck a widow-maker. He is reasonably certain she has been faithful to him, but he wishes she would celebrate his permanent homecoming more happily. Norma Jean is often startled to find Leroy at home, and he thinks she seems a little disappointed about it. He reminds her too much of the early days of their marriage, before he went on the road. They had a child who died as an infant, years ago. They never speak about their memories of Randy, which have almost faded but now that Leroy is home all the time, they sometimes feel awkward around each other, and Leroy wonders if one of them should mention the child. He feels that they are waking out of a dream together- that they must create a new marriage, start afresh. Leroy is pretty observant of how his wife is feeling. He knows that this is a new way of living for both of them and he wants to start afresh to save their marriage.

Throughout the story there are numerous symbols that point to the problems in their marriage and the eventual break up. First the truck is seen, He will probably not be able to drive this rig again. It sits in the backyard, like some gigantic bird of prey that has flown home to roost. This truck has been the <https://assignbuster.com/womens-movment-as-seen-in-shiloh-and-the-astronome/>

thing that has kept Leroy away from home for fifteen years. It is said to look like some huge bird at roost. Now it is home and it is a menacing thing to Norma Jean. She is used to her solitude and independence now this truck has returned with her husband and she is uncomfortable with this. When a bird roosts it does so for long periods of time, it is stationary and it is not leaving. Then the names are apparent symbols of the characters role. Your name means the king Norma Jean says to Leroy that evening. (pg. 75) Norma comes from the Normans. They were invaders (pg. 75) Leroy means the king, this being the traditional role of males in the household. The king is in charge and makes the decisions. Norma Jeans name comes from the Norman invaders who came to England and overthrew the government there. This is an interesting point, for in this situation, Norma Jean (the Norman invaders) is overthrowing Leroy (the king), causing a historical juxtaposition of the two times. Next Leroy is talking consistently of building a nice new log cabin for his wife. Im going to build you this house, says Leroy. I want to make you a real home. I dont want to live in any log cabin. Its not a cabin. Its a house. I dont care. It looks like a cabin. (Pg. 71) Leroy wants to build his wife a log cabin, which is important. Log cabins dominated early America when there was absolutely no feminine voice. The women of this time were basically homemakers and mothers. Norma Jean does not want this log cabin because of what it stands for.

The problems in Mrs. Ames marriage are first seen in her basic differences with her husband. She would be absent from him all the day in being clean, busy, kind. He was a man of others things, a dreamer. At times he lay still for hours, at others he sat on the roof behind his telescope. (Pg. 63) Mrs. Ames is an earthly woman, she keeps herself busy by cleaning and being kind.

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These things are solid and everyday actions. Her husband is quite different however. He is an astronomer. He spends all day in bed or on the roof with his head in the clouds. He is more concerned with his thoughts than earthly things.

Among the earthly things that the astronomer is not concerned about is the problem with the pipes in his house. The astronomer was still asleep or feigning it. (Pg. 63) He just stays in bed while his wife calls the plumber in an attempt to fix the problem. The problem with the pipes is also a juxtaposition of the problem within their marriage. The problem with the pipes was deep and it required getting down into the ground to fix them as the problem in the marriage was deep and would have required some serious digging. However just as the astronomer was content to lay in bed while the pipes were in trouble, so is he content to let the problems with his wife continue without any attempt to mend them. So the problems continue with no closure.

Closure is needed but first these women need to realize this. In the case of Norma Jean its her mother who unintentionally shows her this need.

Everything was fine till Mama caught me smoking, says Norma Jean, standing up. That set something off. (Pg. 76) Norma Jean had lived her life pretty much how she wanted to while Leroy was gone. She had been independent free to make her own choices. Now her mother was a frequent visitor with Leroy home. She began to try and make her daughter more of a housewife. When she visits, she inspects the closets and then the plants, informing Norma Jean when a plant is droopy or yellow. She always notices if Norma Jeans laundry is piling up. Today she has brought Norma Jean an off-white dust ruffle she made for the bed. (Pg. 70) Her mother comes over and <https://assignbuster.com/womens-movment-as-seen-in-shiloh-and-the-astronome/>

points out all the things that Norma Jean is failing at as a housekeeper. She brings her daughter a mantle for the bed, an unnecessary frilly thing that is only good for decoration. She wont leave her daughter alone She wont leave me alone- you wont leave me alone. (Pg. 76) She feels pressured to live the life of every other woman and she does not want this. She feels trapped and she needs out.

She finally decides to get out and end her relationship with her husband while they were having a picnic at the old civil war battleground of Shiloh. This is a very symbolic place for this situation. Here was fought a great battle was fought between the Northern Union and the Southern Confederates. The more liberal north was finally able to beat back the traditional south in the end just as the liberal Norma Jean is able to fight off her more traditional husband Leroy. She leaves him in healthy, fresh renewal while he tries to hobble after her in his clinging to the old ways.

Mrs. Ames realizes her problems with the arrival of the plumber. She sees a man that is a complete foil to her husband. What on earth are we going to do? said the astronomers wife softly. There was a young and strange delight in putting questions to which true answers would be given. Everything the astronomer had ever said to her was a continuous query to which there was no response. (Pg. 65) She has found a man that will answer her questions in a direct manner. She finds this very neat for her husband is very philosophical and never talks straight out. She also sees the difference in their jobs and thoughts. Whereas her husband had always gone up, as the dead go, she knew now that there were others who went down, like the corporeal being of the dead. That men were then divided into two bodies now seemed clear to Mrs. Ames. This knowledge stunned her with its

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simplicity and took the uneasy motion from her limbs. Her husband was the mind, this other man the meat, of all mankind. (Pg. 65) The plumber is a grounded man whose job is based in the earth. He has an answer to things and he does them. This is a direct difference to her husband who spends time thinking in the sky. Realizing this Mrs. Ames sees that not all men are the same.

With the realization that not all men are the same Mrs. Ames decides to break from her husband. She is through with his lofty heights and she is ready for real earthly solid things. The trouble is very serious, very serious, she said across the garden. When Mr. Ames gets up, please tell him Ive gone down. (Pg. 66) Here she isnt just speaking of the pipes, she is saying that their troubles are very serious. She is leaving him and going back down to earth with the plumber leaving him with his deep thoughts.

The coming of age to see that women can gain their independence is very prevalent. In these two stories the women were able to realize the troubles that they were having and they were able to cut them off. Liberation and freedom are their prize.