

The metaphor of the caged bird in trifles



Back in history, women in America, just as their colleagues around the world, were commonly seen as inferior beings. Their children, together with everything they owned, were under the property of their men. Many social and legal barriers made it impossible for them to seek divorce. In essence, American women were treated in the same manner as slaves and criminals. Glaspell, in her play referred to as “ Trifles”, tries to tackle these issues and raise alarm regarding the issues faced by women at the time. Things have changed a lot these days because women now enjoy a variety of rights and freedom. Nonetheless, there are still those who undergo humiliation and abuse during this age. There are men out there who still degrade and enslave women. “ Trifles” is a murder mystery that dives into issues related to gender relationships, the nature of truth, and power play between the sexes.

The Metaphor of the caged bird in Trifles

“ Trifles” depicts a true murder story as reported by Susan Glaspell herself. The story happens in a quiet and cold scene of the Wright’s kitchen (Glaspell, 2010). The whole place is in disarray with dirty dishes, unwashed dishtowel, and a crusty loaf of bread exposed out. Such a scene evokes the impression of a cold and lonely home with minimal attention having been directed to hygiene recently. Three men, Mr. Henderson the court attorney, Sheriff Peters, and Mr. Hale the neighbor go into the house. As shown in Glaspell (2010), two women also follow the men as they enter the house; Mrs. Peter’s, the wife to the Sheriff, and Mrs. Hale, the wife to the neighbor. Since it was cold, the men decided to go over the stove and get some warmth while the women remained standing at the door. The view that women were

standing behind the men signifies that women at the time were inferior when compared to the men. As it appears, women were supposed to be behind their men. The sheriff then kick starts the conversation by asking Mr. Hale to describe what he witnessed in the morning when he came across Mr. Wright's dead body. In response, Mr. Hale narrates the events that unfolded as he entered the house. He also talks about his conversation with Mrs. Wright that morning.

All this time, the women stand at the door and do not contribute to the discussion, which shows the demeaning aspect of the men during those days. Nonetheless, the men then proceed to inspect up stairs and leave the women by the kitchen. According to Smith (1982), this is the turning point of the play where the women take the center role. As they converse in low and small talk, they employ several tactics characteristic of what trained police men would use to solve a murder. They talk about the state of the kitchen after the killing had happened. They refer to the pieces of preserve bottles, which depicts how Mrs. Wright was under such a state; she was broken. She lived a lonely life, in the farm and in the kitchen until her life and marriage breaks her into pieces. Mrs. Wright then points out the quilt that Mrs. Wright had been knitting. They wonder whether her next step was knotting or quilting it. Just then, the men enter the kitchen but fail to notice the discovery made by the ladies in the room.

One other crucial clue stumbled upon by the ladies is the dead caged bird. While the women were collecting a few of Mrs. Wright's belonging, they find out that the cage's door is broken and the bird is missing. Later on, they find the bird hidden in Mrs. Wright's tapestry box. Nonetheless, someone has

broken its neck and placed it nicely in silk. Mrs. Hale relates Mrs. Wright to the bird at some point when they discover the dead bird. She states that Mrs. Wright was like the bird. She was pretty and sweet but fluttery and timid. The canary was very helpful to Mrs. Wright because it was a representative of the children. Somehow, it displaced the silence that was screaming in the entire house. As Alkay-Gut stated, Mrs. Wright recognized the action of her husband to symbolize the strangling of her, his wife. Mrs Wright was like a caged bird herself, which sparked a connection to her husband's action of killing the bird. In finding the caged bird, the women concluded that Mrs Wright murdered her husband because he was the barrier to the outside world. He prevented her from interacting with the rest of the outside world. In view, the husband thought he had strangled his wife when he strangled the bird. The women connected the caged bird to Mrs. Wright; therefore, they understood that Mrs Wright murdered her husband because he killed the caged bird. The bird was her only joy in the house. Therefore, the murder served as retribution to her husband's action as well as the years of neglect and abuse she had endured. The caged bird actually symbolizes the miserable and solitary life that Mrs Wright was going through. The women note that Mrs. Wright used to sing before she became wife to John Wright. They then theorize that Mr. Wright prevented Minnie (Mrs. Wright) from doing anything, not even singing, which would have lightened up her heart. Martha presents Minnie's plight as a form of spiritual death, which is clearly seen in the death of the caged bird, which was her songbird mate.

Inference and Conclusion

The use of metaphor and symbols was a crucial part in "Trifles". Glaspell employed these facets to depict the bonding between the two women in the play. She used terms that only specific women could comprehend and relate to to demonstrate female bondage. In essence, the men present in the play could not grasp any of the symbols that would solve the murder. They did not notice the missing bird or the jar of cherries. Several instances involve the use of metaphors in "Trifles". Glaspell has used several symbols to shine light on her theme: the repression of women in the society. Some of the symbols used include a kitchen, a jar of cherries, a quilt, and a bird. Glaspell uses these instances of symbolism to justify murder that happens in the play. One of the symbols that stand out of the rest is the caged bird. Apparently, the two women sympathize with Mrs. Wright and, therefore, understand what her motives would be, which then leads them to gather evidence against her.

The three men, on the other hand, are blinded by their emotionless and cold investigation tactics. It is the women who discover the canary's body, whose neck had been wrung. The death of the caged bird was the same as John Wright's death. This similarity leads the women to conclude that Minnie (Mrs. Wright) was the killer. Nonetheless, they seem to empathize with what she had been going through and what she might be going through at the moment. It is straightforward that the caged bird depicts the wife, which appears to be the common symbol of the role played by the women in many societies. The play ends with the women concealing their discoveries and evidence from the men. It might be because they downplayed the women. The men believed that no evidence could be found around the kitchen area,

where a woman stays. Consequently, they ignore concrete evidence that might have led them to solve the mystery. The silence of the women raise queries about justice and the role played by women in the society, especially in regards to justice.