

# A jury of her peers by susan glaspell

Literature



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The short story 'A jury of her peers', written by Susan Glaspell, eminent playwright and reporter, is an extremely enlightening account of gender based investigative techniques of a murder case. The short story has highlighted the status of women at a time when their opinion was neither sought nor considered in areas that were dominated by men. Therefore, not surprisingly, the short story has stirred hornet's nest when the author has used women's perspectives and tried to interpret a supposedly clear cut murder case, in a manner that has clearly put the whole justice system into a question; whether the evidence of 'crime' is the sole criteria of declaring guilty of the prime suspect and whether the crime should be seen from a wider perspectives?

The story revolves around the place of crime where 'Minnie Foster or Mrs. Wright as she is now called' is accused of murdering her husband. Peter Hale, along with Sheriff and County Attorney visit the house to get the 'feel' of the murder and gather clue that might have led to it. Sheriff's wife and Mrs. Hale also accompany them as some personal items were needed by the Mrs. Wright, who was in custody. While the men folk wander around the scene of the crime, the women remain in the kitchen and try to interpret the events by observing small things that was out of sync with the general way, women work in the house and kitchen. When they notice a block of the quilt that was very different from the rest and looked 'as if the distracted thoughts of the woman who had perhaps turned to it to try and quiet herself were communicating themselves to her' (Glaspell, 1993). Both the women perceive the signs that would have been emotionally disturbing for Mrs. Wright, the accused. Finally, when they find the dead canary in the sewing

box, they hide the evidence that would have conclusively implicated Mrs. Wright and in their own way, try to give justice to the woman who might have been forced to commit the crime and knew that she would be denied justice if the men found the ‘evidence’!

In the literary analysis of the short story by Elaine Hedges that was published in a leading international journal of Women’s studies in 1986, Hedge’s interpretation of the story became highly relevant because they brought into focus the weakness of the legal system that relies heavily on the machinations of ‘evidences’. It also highlights a very pertinent observation in the investigative techniques that are adopted by the two genders. While men like to strictly depend on the legal strictures and evidences, discounting emotional inputs, the women show more understanding towards people’s emotional states and interpret the event in the wider context. ‘They react to an action and look for evidence to justify the retribution they wish to enact’ (Hedge, 1986) aptly shows the viewpoint of the men for whom the evidences prove the guilt of the person that they have chosen to be prime suspect. The same crime was viewed differently by women. The two women observed the signs that would have disturbed the prime suspect and they were forced to consider the wider perspective of the life of Mrs. Wright that had changed her from a lively, cheerful personality into a melancholy and lonely person. They questioned the very foundation of a justice system and had redefined ‘victims and perpetrators’. Whatever the failings of the investigation and subsequent ‘justice’ of the two women, the story has raised important questions about the prevailing techniques of investigation that may not always yield the correct interpretation of the event.

## Reference

Glaspell, Susan. (1993). ' A Jury of Her Peers'. Mankato, Minnesota. Creative education.

Hedge, Elaine. (12 January, 1986). Small things reconsidered: Susan Glaspell's ' Jury of Her Peers'. Women's Studies: An International journal. 89-110.