

Property by valerie martin essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In literature, foreshadowing is hinting at possible developments that will occur later in the story. The purpose of foreshadowing is to create suspense and curiosity about the story so that the reader keeps wondering what lead to the events mentioned. It can also mean introducing characters who seem to predict the future. In the novel, *Property* by Valerie Martin, Manon notes that Sarah's baby burses with " lip-smacking sounds. Like a man savoring his meat" (72). This simile foreshadows Manon's previous suspicion of her husband's desire to drink Sarah's breast milk.

In the novel, *Property* by Valerie Martin, Sarah and Manon are both property to the same man, Gaudet. Sarah is a slave brought to Manon's house but she bore children for Manon's husband after Manon failed to conceive. Both women hate each other dearly and the reason for their hatred to each other is the fact that they each remind the other of the life they are subjected to daily and the fact that they have to put up with the property tag. They have the same problem of suffering mistreatment in the hands of the same man but again they both do not want to admit it to each other and perhaps seek solace or work together to solve their problems. Both do not view the other as rival to get attention from Gaudet since none of them longs for his attention or time. The theme that shows from their treatment is feminism. Women in the society at that time did not have the right to decide whom to marry or take charge of their marriages. Manon was stuck in a marriage where she hated her husband, who mistreated her but could do nothing about it while Sarah is a mistress to the same man and she was forced to bear children for him despite being unwilling to do it.

Walter is a son that Sarah bore to Gaudet two years after the marriage between Manon and Gaudet. The first few pages describe Walter as a “beautiful and vicious little wildcat” and he is indeed a wild, redheaded, and deaf boy. He is a source of some major and minor conflicts in the story since whenever he appears he causes havoc. Manon’s hatred towards Sarah and her husband was partly because of the birth of Walter. (pg. 55) His inability to hear is symbolic of the inability of the slaves’ to hear muffled sounds of discord around them.

Sarah does not talk much in the novel and it seems the author’s intentions are to leave her as an enigmatic character so that the reader can only imagine what she needs or craves but cannot really understand her. The author also does not describe Sarah’s feelings and only gives accounts of her experiences. Her silence may be a reaction to her bitter experiences in the Gaudet household combined with the status she holds as a slave in the house. She gets pregnant by a black butler but Gaudet denies them permission to marry, instead sells the butler, and canes Sarah. Gaudet sells the resulting child elsewhere where owners will be raised and sell it off, while Sarah becomes Gaudet’s mistress against her will and begets a child by him. Manon is too hard on Sarah when compared to other slaves. She is brisk and courteous but she becomes hateful and expects total compliance when dealing with Sarah. In the end, this extremity leads to silent hatred, brooding submission and in the end a cunning insolence.

Manon’s mother advises Manon to submit in her last words during her wedding night where she tells her to do better when managing her house by taking charge of her duties and take control of her household. This advice

makes Manon put up with whatever mistreatment her husband subjects her to such as her painful sexual encounter with Gaudet. The effect of this is the mistreatment she receives from her husband and the dissatisfaction she has to deal with in her marriage, both sexually and emotionally. Her mother expected Manon to sacrifice her feelings, take up her position as the dutiful woman in the household, and remain as dutiful and submissive to her husband.

One of the two literary elements in the literary elements that describe Manon's wedding night is oxymoron. An oxymoron is a literary element that combines contradicting terms and expresses paradox. The oxymoron used to describe Manon's wedding night is that it was full of "brute passion." The obvious contradiction is between how Manon feels and how the night turned out to be. Though she enjoyed the passion, the brutal force Gaudet demonstrated took her aback. The other literary element used is monologue where the writer displays the character talking to him or herself aloud or silently. During the wedding night, Manon has a monologue during her moment of individualized abjection after her husband falls asleep. She touches the sheet below to feel her blood. The monologue serves to portray the feelings that Manon held during the wedding night. She had felt too much pain that she had secluded herself from her body to bear the circumstances. These elements show that a woman was no more than an object for men to satisfy themselves sexually. In an institution of slavery, Manon is no more than a piece of property that should not respond to any sexual desire since it was simply a means of procreation (pg. 151).

Property as used in the novel means slaves and women. When dealing with Manon, she is married to a man she does not love and the man views her as an object of procreation. He does not have relations with her since he knows she cannot bear him a child and therefore he looks for a mistress. The next context is the manner which Manon uses Sarah. Manon attempt to take Sarah from Daudet's grip, not because of the threat she (Sarah) poses to her marriage but because she wants to retrieve a property that was given to her by her (Manon) aunt. Manon also objectifies Sarah's body as she becomes involved with her without her consent. This shows that Manon and Sarah are the respective properties to some identified people.