

A sorrowful woman gail godwin course work examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



In many ways this story is an inverted fairy tale - beginning with "once upon a time." In what ways does the fairy tale motif inform the tale?

The fairy tale motif that informs this story does so in two main ways: firstly, it affects the way Godwin writes and the choices of language and descriptive detail that she uses; secondly, because of the mythic qualities that we associate with fairy tales - the notion that they embody some sort of moral message - the woman becomes an archetypal figure, not an individual, but a type or Everywoman. Finally, because the story ends with the woman's suicide it becomes almost a fable of the fate of some women trapped in the stereotypical roles of wife and mother.

The story opens with a deliberately ambivalent sentence: "Once upon a time there was a wife and mother one too many times." This could mean that the woman has been married too many times or has given birth to too many children, but this is not the case: as we read on, we realize that she only has one child and is still in her first marriage. What emerges is a portrait of a woman who rebels against the pressures of being a "wife and mother" - note that Godwin does not use the word "woman" in that sentence.

The elements of fairy tale are apparent throughout the tale. None of the characters have names, thus emphasising their archetypal significance. Apart from the three central characters and the girl they hire to help with the child, there are no other characters - this limited range of characters is also typical of fairy tales. Although the story takes place in the modern world - there are telephones and the husband works in an office, the woman smokes cigarettes and they have a garbage can - Godwin deliberately uses some

very slightly archaic vocabulary and largely avoids any details which fix the story in a particular year or even decade: this adds to the eternal, universal element that fairy tales have. For example, there are scenes which take place in the kitchen but no modern gadgets are mentioned; the husband prepares a “ sleeping draught” for his wife - she doesn’t take sleeping tablets.

The vocabulary Godwin uses is very simple and there are hardly any complex sentences - just like a fairy tale. We do not know the name of the town where they live or even the country: we might assume it is the USA because Godwin is American and uses U. S. English, but no detail in the story gives that information away. In a restaurant one night the husband describes his wife as, “ a cloistered queen,” and the way she stays in her room and gradually withdraws from family life is reminiscent, in a general way, of the isolation of characters from fairy tales such as Rapunzel, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. The wife’s frenzy of activity on the final afternoon of her life is not credible - she performs so many tasks in such a short time that there is an unrealistic, fairy tale feel to

The overall impact that this archetypal, universal tone that the story has because of its fairy tale elements, is to emphasise that this woman’s fate is the fate of many women - all over the world and during all periods of human history. Not all women react with the extremity of the woman in the story by withdrawing from family life and by committing suicide. However, by using the traditional elements of a fairy tale Godwin turns her story into a parable of what it is to be a woman trapped within marriage and motherhood. The

fact that her husband is so patient, understanding and compassionate about his wife might also be seen as an unrealistic fairy tale-like element, but it also increases the poignancy of the woman's suicide.