

A role of details in trifles novel

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How often are the small details overlooked? When will it be realized that these, supposed, insignificant things always build up to a climactic explosion? A weed in the garden, overlooked, grows to choke out the flowers, and a drop of poison kills. Perhaps, Susan Glaspell, could see a repetition of this, “big picture” mentality, and perhaps she recognized that many people only pay attention to the result of situations but fail to see what contributes to the madness. It could have been such a realization as this that drove Glaspell to write her play, “Trifles”. In the play “Trifles”, Glaspell depicts a short segment concerning a quest to find evidence against a woman who has murdered her husband. In this play, members of a small Nebraskan community gather together to examine the crime scene. Immediately, the men within the group are drawn to the place of the murder, the bedroom, but the women look around the dilapidated kitchen and find all the evidence needed to convict the murderous housewife. The twist of the tale, however, is that all the evidence is hidden within the simplistic details that the men over-look and the women decide to conceal. In the play, “Trifles”, readers began to see the importance of the small details and how they relate to the murderer, Mrs. Wright.

The very title of the play encourages the reader to observe small details which would otherwise be overlooked and equally, Glaspell intentionally places lines within the text to grab the reader’s attention and make them as aware of the trifles as the women become. Glaspell begins to do this when speaking through the characters, Mr. Henderson, the county attorney, and the sheriff, Mr. Peters. As the group of witnesses and law enforcers stand around the kitchen, Mr. Henderson says, “...You’re convinced that there was

nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive” (1860). Mr. Peters replies, “ Nothing here but kitchen things” (1860). Though their words might appear to be of no consequence, the repetition of the word “ nothing” becomes increasingly suspicious to the reader, especially as the tale progresses. The men are solely consumed in the place of the murder and are blinded to the details that would help them to solidify a motive which, in turn, would help them to put Mrs. Wright behind bars for good. Unlike the men, the women notice every detail around them; in fact, Mrs. Peter’s first lines in the play convey her concern for Mrs. Wrights preserves, the response to this is the Sheriff saying, “ Well, you can beat the women! Held for murder and worrying about her preserves” (1860). Mr. Henderson chimes in, “ I guess before we’re through she may have something more serious than her preserves to worry about” (1860). After this, Mr. Hale adds, “ Well, women are used to worrying over trifles” (1860). What they all fail to see is that this attention to detail helps the women to solve the case. It almost appears as if the men are too oblivious to their surroundings, and perhaps Glaspell was intentional in this; perhaps their obliviousness is needed so that the reader might begin to take notice of each line and the tone behind it. The way that the men behave and speak about their surrounding versus how the women view the scene and speak of it, forces the reader to, at least, raise an eyebrow in response to the conversation of the characters. The way the men behave so nonchalantly about the kitchen and how attentive the women are to everything around them makes the audience question if there is indeed something important laying there in plain sight. Glaspell intentionally blinds the men so that the readers can see and become attentive to every detail in

the script. With the viewpoint of the women, every movement, every word, and every thing becomes potentially important to the reader.

Every “trifle” integrated into the play is important because each trifle is a representation of Mrs. Wright. The songbird is a representation of Mrs. Wright, even Mrs. Hale believed so and said, “She—come to think of it, she was kind of like the bird herself (1865) ...” Not only was the bird, itself, a representation of her, but everything else surrounding the bird; the cage, it’s death, all reflected in Mrs. Wright. Just as that bird, Mrs. Wright, was trapped in a cage, yet her prison was formed from despair and abuse (whether physical, emotional or verbal). And just as the lovely little canary, her life’s song had been choked out at the hands of her husband and she ceased to sing it any longer. As Mrs. Hale stated, “No, Wright wouldn’t like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too” (1867). Perhaps that was why Mrs. Wright connected so much with the bird because it was everything that she was and when the song bird was taken away, that was her breaking point. But it must’ve been a slow fade to insanity, things must have been better at one time for Mrs. Wright, her quilt spoke of this. Mrs. Hale, who often appears to notice each detail in a distinctive manner, even more so than Mrs. Peters, looked at the quilt and said, “...Here this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It’s all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn’t know what she was about!” (1864) The quilt reflects the change in Mrs. Wright in response to her surroundings; as a young woman she was happy, pretty, and full of joyful songs, but over time, she transformed in a dysfunctional wreck just like her quilt. Every small detail, from the bird to its

cage, to its death; from the dirty dishes and dreary house to the quilt, every trifle in the story represents Mrs. Wright and helps the reader to understand her past life, her suffering, and the reasoning behind why she murdered her husband.

Each line of the play makes readers more aware of the importance of trifles. Whether the line exposes a detail or jests at it, readers begin to pay attention and in turn, they see how critical each trifle is to understanding Mrs. Wright. Though the play leaves readers to ponder whether Mrs. Wright should be punished or find freedom, every twist and turn helps the audience to, at least, understand the logic behind Mrs. Wright's decision and to connect with this character that is never seen or heard. Perhaps the intent of the play is not to make an argument as to what the outcome should be, but to look at every detail from every angle and simply try to understand. Understand, the "why" behind the action, to understand the process that builds to the result, and to understand that the smallest things, the trifles, often hold the most value.