

## Play - Susan Glaspell

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Primary Text: "Trifles"

### Supplementary Text(s):

- TBD or n/a

### Supplementary/Secondary Sources for Educators:

- <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uneedu/reader.action?docID=4844190&c=UERG&ppg=109>

### Topics:

- Gender Hierarchy & Social biases of gender roles
- Genre of play → murder mystery = inherently conservative (not experimental: realistic)
  - Maintains the arc of "social order" (comedic)
    - How does Glaspell thwart that standard? How does she alter the form of a murder mystery?
      - Women gain no protection (from the law) from the emotional and physical abuse of their husbands → Women take the matter into their own hands
      - The "justice" does not get served in the way the reader typically expects

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### Commentary on the Original Journal

#### Masculine Ignorance and Symbolism: Susan Glaspell

Susan Glaspell's work captivated me in plot and delivery. I found the **structure of a play to serve as a great medium** as this thoroughly entertaining mystery developed and ensnared me. I always appreciate when an author *utilizes form and structure to better convey their message*, as standard prose may not land as the writer intends. I agree when Gilbert and Gubar write, "confining environments that frustrate the full development of human potential" as well as the impact of gender on the complex process by which we read and interpret not only literary but also social texts" (177). This quote regards Glaspell's writing, and I believe in its sentiment. It is never beneficial to look at a situation from only one side. In Glaspell's play, this means only the men's perspective. I believe Gilbert and Gubar mean that – even beyond the topic of gender – we, as readers, should approach the literary field with an open and flexible mind. In Glaspell's

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piece, we find that **the truth would not be revealed without those who worry over trivial things**. As Mr. Hale puts it, “Well, women are used to worrying over trifles” (Glaspell 180). Mr. Hale’s dismissal of the women highlights the ignorance of those who **hold bias**. As the reader knows, Hale was wrong to disregard the women’s words and negligible concerns. Had he (and the other men) considered the women’s concerns even remotely important, the mystery of Mr. Wright’s death may have been solved sooner. Instead, the **men mock the women** by saying things like, “They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just know it! [*The men laugh: the women look abashed*]” (Glaspell 183). However, this mockery makes a joke out of the men since they missed out on vital evidence concerning the very thing they were attempting to solve. The constant belittling of the women reeks of toxic masculinity, **though they may never realize it.**

Commented [2]: what biases appear in Glaspell's work? What biases might we hold as readers?

I also wanted to touch on Glaspell’s utilization of symbolism. As readers, we may be familiar with the common connotation with birds – their representation of freedom. I believe Glaspell incorporated the bird as a portrayal of **Mrs. Wright’s freedom**. Glaspell writes, “She was kind of like a bird herself – real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and – fluttery” (185). Here, the women make a direct link from Mrs. Wright to the bird. The bird was evidently strangled to death, its neck snapped. This image is indicative of Mrs. Wright’s circumstances, as with the growing tension of isolation, she snaps. More than the bird, the rope used to kill her husband displays the suffocation she must have felt for so long in isolation. Mrs. Hale comments, “I’ve never liked this place. Maybe it’s because it’s down in a hollow and you don’t see the road. I don’t know what it is but it’s a lonesome place and always was” (Glaspell 184). I, too, would be driven mad by the **suppression and loneliness** felt in a house all alone with a **restrictive husband**. Mrs. Hale reasons that living in such a place **can lead someone to insanity**. The rope, and the

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Commented [4]: Women's minimal protection from the law - spousal abuse

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strangulation of the bird, indicates complexity to Mrs. Wright's situation, and what lifestyle some women endure with *such little support*.

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