Jury of Her Peers Annotated Bibliography

"Glaspell's "Jury of Her Peers" develops a case of spousal abuse and the psychological oppression that Minnie experiences at the hands of her husband John." - Class thesis

1. Mildred’s husband isolates her on the farm and walls her up in a tiny kitchen, separating her from the social life she lead when she was a "town girl." This is the beginning of the psychological effects of his cyclical oppression. We get a feel from this when Mildred’s peers, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, rummage through the house looking for things that may be a probable motive in the murder case. However, in this process they come to realization that Mrs. Wright had undergone more suffering than they expected.

   Quote:
   >>"Wright was close!" she exclaimed, holding up a shabby black skirt that bore the marks of much making over. "I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. I s'pose she felt she couldn't do her part; and then, you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively—when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was twenty years ago."
   >>"No, Wright wouldn't like the bird," she said after that—"a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too." Her voice tightened.
   >>"I've never liked this place. Maybe 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. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—" She did not put it into words.

Here we can see how Mrs. Hale’s epiphany connects the pieces to Mrs. Wright’s psychological oppression. Hale recalls how Minnie has changed from past to present, and how Minnie’s seclusion has made interacting with her something unpleasant to Hale, and we can assume to many other women. Based on these three quotes from the passage. There are many ways we can infer that Minnie was psychologically oppressed by her husband. Mrs. Hale, in a conversation with Mrs. Peter recalls how Minnie has changed over time. Recalling Minnie as someone who was more so lively and social, and now keeping to herself; psychologically something shifted in the personality of Minnie Wright. For one to completely
change their outlook and approach to life, something must change. Emotion and mood are strong factors into how many view life, and how they interact with things around them. If one is constantly isolated, and shut out from things that made them happy, like singing was for Minnie, their brain can suffer tremendously from it and completely change their personality and outlook on life. With the place being “down a hollow” and “lonesome”, it is very likely these circumstances could affect Minnie’s moods and emotions, suppressing her true desire to be free.

We can also see how her husband secludes her, by refusing to buy a phone. In these quotes, Mr. Hale is explaining previous interactions with Mr. Wright in regards to buying a telephone for their home. The responses from Mr. Wright are very cohesive to the superior and abusive mindset he had in regards to his wife.

'I'm goin' to see if I can't get John Wright to take a telephone....I'd spoke to Wright about it once before; but he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet....But I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, and said all the women-folks liked the telephones, and that in this lonesome stretch of road it would be a good thing—"

"I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone; and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me--scared."

Again, this is just another form of Mr. Wright closing Minnie off from the rest of the world. Restricting someone’s ability to communicate with people outside her little home is a major way her husband isolated and depressed her. Taking away someone’s humane right to interact with the people around them can significantly cause loneliness, and cause the person to even become antisocial. As stated in previous quotes, Mrs. Hale had stated Minnie “kept to herself”. She had no other choice. She was forced into being antisocial, which made Minnie not able to speak and interact with her peers.


In this article, the author explains how Isolation and loneliness lead to various forms of health related issues. It labels isolation as a severe health risk physically and mentally. To understand how the isolation could have affected Minnie mentally, which could have lead to the murder of her husband, we must look at the psychological aspect of it.

First the author describes what it means to be “Lonely”

“**To be lonely, one is not simply alone. It is, rather, the feeling of being isolated and disconnected from the world.”**
With Minnie being isolated, she may as well have been feeling extremely lonely. This Loneliness, in turn, became an overwhelming burden to her. Something she had to deal with everyday because of the control of her husband.

"Loneliness increases inflammation and alters immune system function, leaving people vulnerable to a host of health concerns, including ...depression."

With the location of her home, and her inability to interact with the outside world, Minnie may as well have fallen into a depression, which caused her to live the life she lived in the home. Women like Minnie at this time, and in present time experiencing this kind of coverture experience similar feelings if not, worse. This is why Hale and Peters were able to resonate so much with Minnie when they finally discovered the motive(s) for Minnie murdering her husband. One can also argue that this isolation can serve as abuse.


"Indeed, some battered women described psychological degradation, fear, and humiliation as constituting the most painful abuse they experienced (Walker, 1984). This type of emotional abuse is seen as having long-term debilitating effects on a woman’s self-esteem (Ferraro, 1979), which in turn diminishes her ability to cope with the abuse. The effects of psychological abuse therefore are seen as contributing to the cycle of violence in which the battered woman is trapped.”

Here the author explains how psychological and emotional degradation can also serve as abuse. So while Minnie’s husband is psychologically oppressing her, he is simultaneously abusing her emotionally. Many women like Minnie went through these tribulations with coverture culture, The effects are long-lasting, and can even drive one to make irrational decisions like Minnie did in the play.

Quote: She turned back to the county attorney and explained: "She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. She said the fire would go out and her jars might burst."

Mrs. Peters’ husband broke into a laugh.

"Well can you beat the women! Held for murder and, worrying about her preserves!"

"If I was you I wouldn’t tell her her fruit was gone! Tell her it ain’t. Tell her it’s all right—all of it. Here—take this in to prove it to her! She—she may never know whether it was broke or not."

It seems although preserves are something so miniscule in a case like this, but for Minnie it was otherwise. It’s concerning when someone is faced with a Murder case, and all they can think
about is the fruit in their cabinet. Unfortunately, that's all Minnie could care about. Minnie was isolated in this hallow, all her dreams and interests were taken from her. All she could do was focus on things around her. Which is what was her preserves. The preserves are significant to Minnie, and Mrs. Hale is beginning to understand why. This is why she suggested not to tell Minnie that the fruit were gone. Psychologically, this may upset Minnie. The only things left for her to care for after everything was taken from her were deteriorating. This again, can show how Minnie was oppressed psychologically because these fruit were of so much significance. For someone to only be worried about fruit while being held for murder, we can easily see how lonely and bored Minnie could have been while being a wife to Mr. Wright.

"The Oppression of Women in the 19th Century as seen in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman." 06 Mar 2019

This article goes on to further explain the where mindset of women subordination stemmed from. Because of this justification, Minnie’s husband was free to treat her as he pleased because he was justified by this mindset.

"From the beginning of time woman were looked at as inferior and treacherous. Inferior, because women were thought to have had smaller brains therefore incapable of making decisions. Most decisions were made for her and women found themselves where “the world of public affairs was nowhere open to woman.” (Friedman 9); leaving women’s duties to fall solely under the household. The treachery (8) of course was because of her actions in the Garden of Eden. The decision Eve made in the garden was proof for the male that “Some basic taint of corruption was thought to be inherent in the feminine constitution” (Friedmen 10) therefore women cannot make qualified decisions.”

So, because Minnie in her husband’s eyes was seen as “unqualified to make decisions”, he isolates her to keep her under his control because in his eyes he is the man, which means he is the logical one. Again, this can contribute to the psychological oppression Minnie faced because someone forcibly taking ownership over your very own will power and decision making can have detrimental effects on one’s perspective of life and self esteem. We can conclude based on these circumstances that Mrs. Wright could be severely depressed, which is a psychological disorder stemmed from her environment.

2. During the investigation of clues for a motive, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are left alone in the downstairs area to rummage through the kitchen items. In doing this, they noticed a damaged cage that belongs to a bird. After noticing the damaged cage, she find a silk cloth with something strange wrapped in it. To their surprise, they see the dead bird with its neck snapped.

"Look at this door," she said slowly. "It's broke. One hinge has been pulled apart."
"No, Wright wouldn't like the bird," she said after that—"a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too." Her voice tightened. Mrs. Hale came nearer. "Looks as if some one must have been—rough with it."

"There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk," faltered Mrs. Hale. "This isn't her scissors," said Mrs. Peters, in a shrinking voice. Her hand not steady, Mrs. Hale raised the piece of silk. "Oh, Mrs. Peters!" she cried. "It's—" Mrs. Peters bent closer. "It's the bird," she whispered. "But, Mrs. Peters!" cried Mrs. Hale. "Look at it! Its neck—look at its neck! It's all—other side to."

Again their eyes met—startled, questioning, apprehensive. For a moment neither spoke nor stirred.

With Minnie’s dreadful loneliness, it makes sense for her to try to find something that’ll comfort her when she’s alone. Her husband isn’t nurturing, he controls everything, and he doesn’t let her interact with the outside world. He keeps her caged in. So with all this, Minnie somehow manages to find herself a bird. But her husband kills it. Just like he killed her spirit. The one thing that gave her comfort and companionship was murdered by her controlling husband. It used to sing like she did, but he stopped that. He opressed her by killing the bird because it was one of the things she found happiness in. She was caged in just like that bird. By taking it away from her forcefully, we can see how this may have drove Minnie to make the decision she made.


In the article, the author brings to light the struggles not only of Minnie, but of other women during this time period. Psychological oppression and spousal abuse was so common amongst women that Mrs Hale and Peters automatically knew what was going on once they saw the bird. The article focuses on Hale and Peters’ thoughts and actions, and how they connect the dots to Minnie’s hidden abuse.

“The women's perspective and understanding of Minnie Wright raised questions about the responsibility of her case. Both women also notice that a birdcage door has been broken and with few words spoken between them, they infer that John Wright might have strangled Minnie's canary, her only source of joy, much the way he killed his wife's spirit with his violent manner. The two women piece together the clues; strangled canary and the birdcage and speculate that Minnie has strangled her husband just as he had strangled her canary. Empathizing with Minnie, the women decide not to tell their husbands about the results of their own investigation “
“Glaspell's A Jury of Her Peers employs essentially a feminist stylistics standpoint in presenting a genderlect investigation of a murder on the surface but in depth a story of revenge, women's victimization, oppression, justice and women's shared experience.”

Again, the author explains that there is this “shared experience” that these women possess and that is the oppression. Although John Wright’s act of strangling the songbird was a single cruel act, it symbolizes the way he has treated Minnie throughout their marriage. It was in this moment, the women were able to fully grasp the intensity of abuse happening in the household. The Bird somehow parallels Minnie’s character. The strangling of the bird can symbolize the abuse Minnie sustained throughout their marriage.


In this article the author further explores the idea of Minnie’s connection to the bird. With the connection of Minnie’s character to the bird, it helps further the argument of physical abuse in the home of Minnie Wright.

“The symbolism is again clear. Minnie Foster "was kind of like a bird herself."219 She sang in the church choir as a young girl 20 years before, 220 but Mr. Wright had been rough with her, at least emotionally if not physically.....”

“A value system based on concern, fear, intervention, and care drives the women. Their fear includes fear of psychological and physical harm... but also fear they will fail to act to protect themselves or others. Martha Hale fears she let Minnie Foster ‘die for lack of life.’(227) She should have taken the initiative and intervened earlier; she should not have passively allowed abuse to occur and continue...”

This symbol of the bird is developed over the course of the story as Martha Hale, repeatedly equates Minnie with the bird, emphasizing her love of singing and her lively and bright personality. As the songbird was literally strangled by John Wright, Minnie Foster was may have also been strangled by a man who was cold, unkind, poor company, and kept her isolated. Trapped in her marriage, like a bird in a cage, Minnie desperately needed a companion, which she found in the bird. With her husband ability to even kill the bird in a rage, it is no question what he may have done to Minnie in other fits of rage.