**Lethal Housewives**

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How could this be a better hook? Dictionary and quotes and questions are not that strong.

Notice in paragraph 3 how well (highlighted in light blue) the author weaves the quotes into a sentence but in paragraph 4 not as well (highlighted in red).

In the dictionary, a housewife is defined as “A married woman who manages her own household and domestic affairs, especially as her principle occupation” (Webster 705). But not all housewives are content to be the ‘good’ housewife and this could lead to unhappy situations if something goes wrong, such as their beloved pet being maliciously killed or maybe their husband’s plan to leave them for another. With that in mind, the short and concise works of “Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl and “A Jury of Her Peers” by Susan Glaspell find two housewives under the suspicion of murdering their husbands. While both are guilty, there is more to understanding their situations and circumstances then simple guilt of a crime. The two ladies attempt to appear as innocent as possible by putting on the expected “scared and vulnerable wife” façade in front of the police. Thus, examining the protagonists, Mrs. Mary Maloney and Minnie Foster/Mrs. Wright, the development of characterization makes the reader sympathetic to these homicidal maniacs through the author’s use of description, understanding motives, and development of relatable personalities.

In Dahl’s “Lamb to the Slaughter”, an anxious, gleeful, and pregnant housewife awaits her husband’s return home from work. She finds him in an unusually speechless temperament. Much to her dismay, her husband tells her that he does not wish to be married to her any longer, and that she need not argue with him. In a quiet rage, Mrs. Maloney strikes him solidly on the back of the head with a frozen leg of lamb and sends him crashing to the floor. After deranging the living room to appear as a robbery scene, she then puts the lamb meat in the oven, rushes to the grocery store, and then promptly calls the police to inform them of the “tragic accident”. When all of the questioning is complete she offers the investigators the lamb of leg for supper, and thus they eat the murder weapon while she giggles silently in the opposite room. We are lead to believe she gets away with murder. Moreover, in a similar story “A Jury of Her Peers” by Susan Glaspell, an elderly lady, Mrs. Minnie Foster, is held in jail on suspicion of killing her cantankerous husband. However, before they can convict her, the town sheriff needs to find a motive. Sheriff Wright, his wife and another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hale, examine Mrs. Wright’s old farm in search of clues. While the men examine the upstairs rooms, the women ramble through the kitchen and living room downstairs. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale come across a wooden box with a dead bird inside. They come to the conclusion that Mrs. Wright’s bird was killed by her livid husband and this angered her so much that she in return killed him. Although they have the evidence, the ladies silently withhold it from their husbands and the secret is kept between them.

Although both stories are somewhat similar in plot, the author’s style and description could not be more different with approaching characterization directly verses indirectly. Dahl uses the direct approach as he describes Mrs. Maloney. This means that the author defines the character almost as if he was a narrator talking directly to the reader; for example, “Her skin –for this was her sixth month with the child- had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their placid new look seemed larger darker than ever before” (Dahl 1). In stark contrast, Mrs. Wright from “A Jury of Her Peers” is illustrated by in an indirect manner which means the author uses characters from within the story to describe her. This is evident in the passage seen through another character’s eyes: “She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively--when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir” (Glaspell 10), as delivered by Mrs. Hale. Both characters are three dimensional as they under a change from their timid shell to a stronger, more defiant stand-up persona. Even though both of these murderous women are described differently, we relate and sympathize with their plight through the details. Perhaps, we even secretly hope they get away with the terrible deed.

Another way in which these stories differ is in each woman’s vicious motives behind their attacks on their husbands. In the beginning of “Lamb to the Slaughter”, once her husband tells her that he is leaving her, Mary Maloney at first thinks he is joking. She then becomes exceedingly furious, making her instantly decide to kill him. In one of her essays, Sara Piecha writes that, “The directly shown suddenness of the events creates an experience of shock for the reader. He is confronted with the decision whether Mary Maloney is culprit or victim” (Piecha 6). Mrs. Maloney has nothing to lose by killing her husband since she is already losing him to another woman. Here, we must think how a pregnant woman in the early 50s might get along in a society without a husband. Thus, it is this concept and perhaps the hormones that may have lead her to snap and kill her husband, and while not right or justifiable, we as readers certainly relate and sympathize with her plight.

On the other hand, Mrs. Wright’s motive is quite different. Glaspell describes Mr. Wright as an unpleasant person to say the least; for example, another character states that, “I don’t think a place would be any the cheerfuller for John Wright’s bein’ in it” (Glaspell 8). It seems that Mr. and Mrs. Wright had not been getting along for quite some time, and when he killed her pet bird it incited her enough to kill him. We must remember the setting of the harsh prairie and remoteness set in a bygone era which contributed to her snapping and killing her husband. Once her beloved companion and pet was murdered, she felt completely alone, even abandoned. Thus, her reason is not really different from Mrs. Maloney in “Lamb to the Slaughter” where she, too, became crazy at the prospect of being abandoned.

The last thing to consider is the dispositions of these distraught housewives, and how their marriages were before they lost their status as sane. The Maloney’s seemed to be the perfect couple who had not been married long with a strong, growing relationship. This can be seen at the opening of the story, “Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but with anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come” (Dahl 1). Her sweet and placid disposition gives the idea that she would have responded calmly to her husband’s shocking news, but instead her real personality comes out and her temper flares showing that perhaps her gleeful marriage was quite different than the author initially depicted it. Again in contrast, the Wright’s marriage had not been a happy one for many years. Even Mrs. Lillian Schanfield wrote in her book about Minnie Foster that, “Although she has been often referred to as disturbed and abused, there has been little speculation about the nature of her mental condition or the types of abusive behaviors that she experienced in her marriage” (Schanfield 69). Although she too appeared to have a calm and optimistic demeanor, her breaking point comes when Mr. Wright appears to have thrown a tantrum and purposely breaks the neck of her pet bird. She deals with the harsh actions of her husband for many years before she loses her composure and kills the husband amidst his slumber.

While these stories express the creativity of both writers, Roald Dahl and Susan Glaspell, they paint an eloquent and colorful picture of two characters that are in a sense wrongdoers and someone we would not want to associate with. It is to these writers credit through the development of their style and setting that we hope they get through these situations successfully, despite the fact that both characters are smiling killers.