

## Dreams vs. Reality in Hawthorne's *Wives of the Dead*

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**Thesis:** In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wives of the Dead," Hawthorne illustrates the importance of distinguishing between reality and dreams through the viewpoint of two widows who have just lost their husbands.

**Supporting Point One:** Author's Stylistic Choices: Hawthorne writes "The Wives of the Dead" in the third person omniscient viewpoint, which sets the setting and tone of the entire piece. This allows him to tell the story from a godlike perspective. Elements that the main characters might not or can not be noticed are pointed out to the reader. Because of the circumstances in the story, Hawthorne uses this style so the reader has an idea of what is going on while the main character has stepped out of the room or turned away. In third person omniscience, the reader can get the story from Margaret and Mary's point of view. This style makes the story more interesting because both characters are blind to something the other one knows.

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**Supporting Point Two:** Structural Parallels pertaining to the Dreams vs. Reality concept: Each wife is awakened by a visitor who has news about the survival of their husbands. They are both sleeping restlessly at one point of the story but the story does not say for sure if they are dreaming. The main deception of the story is that what happens is exactly what both characters could dream. The story presents blanketed realities; however, they are not necessarily less real only because some events are not likely. The dramatic background of the story with the "rainy twilight of autumn day" suggests and is ideal for a dreamlike world. It is not clear if one, both, or neither of the characters are dreaming. Discussing the interpretation of the events or dreams is overlooking the purpose of the story. The point is simply a caution against ignorance of the distinction between dreams and reality.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, Nathaniel Hawthorne's message of distinguishing between dreams and reality allows the reader to understand that the tale is not a darkly ironic critique on the hopelessness of the wives' dreams, but simply a caution against ignorance of the distinction between dreams and reality.

**Abstract:** This poster presentation combines personal interpretation, textual evidence, analysis of the author's stylistic choices, and the theme of loss and grieving to demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between dreams and reality within Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wives of the Dead*.

**Supporting Point Three:** The Theme of Loss and Grieving: Hawthorne presents the theme of loss, detailing how a person's response to death reveals their true character and motives, which in turn creates a symbolic and almost supernatural background. Both wives are heartbroken and stricken by grief, and through their desperation, dream of seeing their husbands again and are told that they are both alive. The slightly ironic tone of the piece is reminiscent of the narrator's earlier subtle criticism of the superficially sympathetic mourners who had left. Margaret, obviously still very upset by her loss, is "given" back her husband, perhaps through the actual facts of the incident, but perhaps only through the narrator's story. Mary, on the other hand, seems much more accepting of her loss, so she may remain without her husband at the end of her dreamlike state.