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Instructor Name

Course Number

13 June 2019

Title: The Yellow Wallpaper

In the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper,* author Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes the story of a woman who narrates the story of her three-month confinement at a house in a series of journal entries. The narrator had recently given birth to a child and exhibits signs of depression. Her husband, John, was a doctor who described her symptoms as a type of hysteria for which she requires complete rest to recover. John is insistent that she does not need any treatment apart from a ‘rest cure’ to treat what looks to be post-partum depression. The narrator does not question her husband's diagnosis and agrees to spend her time sitting in a bed, avoiding any mental stimulation while adhering to a strictly prescribed schedule.

As the narrator is prescribed a ‘rest cure' for her condition, she remains confined to a bedroom in the estate. She was prohibited to write, as any intellectual or mental activity could interfere with the rest cure. Consequently, she is left confined to her bed in a room where there is nothing to see except a yellow wallpaper. Even though the woman insists that she is need of ‘excitement and change’ to help herself out of her condition, her husband disagrees and suggests her to avoid any ‘stimulating’ company of other people. The husband apparently decides these treatments out of concern for his wife, terming her a “little girl” who needs an adult to care for her. She trusts her husband’s judgment and is appreciative of his concern for her, as she begins writing her condition down secretly in a journal.

As the narrator gets confined to the bedroom with the yellow wallpaper, she describes feeling disturbed by the solitary nature of the bedroom. Whenever she is visited by her husband, she tries to convey her state of affairs to him, in particular, the yellow wallpaper that she says has started to distress her. Yet, her husband deems any such emotion to be irrationality and refuses to remove the wallpaper. To the husband, the woman is just allowing the wallpaper to ‘get the better of her’ and dismisses any disconcerting reaction from her as ‘fancy’. At times, the narrator breaks down into tears when she meets her husband, but he only interprets her crying as evidence of her hysteria and tries to engage her in a reasonable talk. It further convinces him that his wife cannot be left to make her own decisions in such a state.

In the subsequent entry, she describes her longing for people's company and starts to complain against her husband's controlling and patronizing ways. At the same time, she feels guilty for not being able to follow her prescribed treatment plan. She continues to see the yellow wallpaper as an ugly and menacing item in the room alongside her husband's inability to see it from her perspective. Yet despite repeated requests, John does not remove the wallpaper. Eventually, the wallpaper starts to become the focus of the narrator's imagination and fantasies. She narrates how she began to enjoy imagining people moving about the house's walkways in the watchful and malicious presence of the wallpaper. Despite reporting feelings of distress and anxiety, John continues to dismiss her fears as irrational even denying her request to shift to a better room. He manages to convince her that she needs to stay within the same room and obtain even more rest. Gradually as her mental condition begins deteriorating, she begins to feel weak and hopeless and begins to spend more time lying in her bedroom staring at the wretched wallpaper.

The wallpaper has an ugly yellow tint to it and is partially stripped off around the bottom of the wall that faces her. Yet slowly, the disgusting wallpaper starts to become a subject of her fascination. At times, the pattern and color reek of violent imagery while at other times, the narrator imagines that there is an actual woman who is trapped within the wallpaper. Her boredom in the room combined with her obsession with the wallpaper to dedicate many subsequent journal entries to describing that wallpaper in vivid detail. She mentions it as having a breakneck pattern and a ‘yellow smell’ which could smear the clothing or skin of any person who would touch it. The patterns and the design intrigue her every night which lead her to believe that the paper would mutate for anyone who stays for a longer time in the bedroom with it. The woman who is living in the wallpaper appears to be moving about its four corners in trying to escape. Eventually, the narrator is convinced that she has to free that woman by stripping the wall of its paper.

In her last entry, the narrator describes her attempt to tear down the wallpaper so that she could free the helpless woman who has been trapped for ages inside the wallpaper. However, she is frequently hit by conflicting thoughts before she could attempt to do so. At times, she starts to think of herself as the woman who’s trapped inside that wallpaper while sometimes she feels that it is another person that she must rescue. Sometimes she starts to imagine different creeping women lurking in the garden and thinks that she is safe here in the room with the wallpaper. The trapped woman would violently shake the patterns which she imagined as bars trying to break free of them. She feared that the woman’s head would strangle as did of past women who tried to break free of the wallpaper’s shackles. At times, the hallucinations would cause her to see the trapped woman walking outside in the sun who would then be imprisoned each night and call out for help. At this point, she is convinced that she has to rescue the woman, and thus she slowly begins to tear the wallpaper down. She describes the bed in front of it being too heavy to move, and frustrated, the narrator describes biting the wallpaper to peel its pieces off before they come to take her away. Eventually, her descent into madness becomes complete as she develops a frequent habit of walking on four legs and crawling around the room, thinking of herself as the trapped woman, while tearing bits and pieces of the wallpaper off before anyone could notice.

In her last few days of treatment, the woman overhears John and his sister, Jane, arguing before they come to take her away. Frantic, she locks herself in the room determined to rescue the woman by tearing down her prison. By now she believes herself to be the woman inside the yellow wallpaper who she has to rescue by tearing it down before someone comes to take her way. Eventually, when John returns with the key and unlocks the door, he witnesses a horrifying scene. His wife is creeping along the room's walls, continuously stooping around the place, unaware of what she is doing. She tears down the wallpaper while circling the room’s walls and finally claims “I've got out at last... in spite of you and Jane", believing that she has rescued the trapped woman in the wallpaper before they could take her away, excitedly claiming to her husband that she was now free. The disturbing and maddening situation that John just witnessed causes him to faint.

# Works Cited

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wall-Paper 1892." *The Literature of Prescription*. Bethesda, MD: National Library of Medicine, 2013. 648-656. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>.