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The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The Yellow Wallpaper is an example of feminist literature highlighting the patriarchal ideologies that women faced in the 19th century. The short story, narrated in the first person, takes the reader through the numerous discomforts experienced by the narrator as she undergoes a "rest cure" for her nervous condition. During this period, women were perceived as incapable of thinking for themselves. This perception is evident from the disregard for the narrator's needs and wants for what John and her brother perceive to be the best thing for her (ŞENTÜRK). After a long show of dislike for the yellow wallpaper in their room, she eventually begins to see women crawling behind it and tries to rescue them by ripping it open. While this act symbolizes her breaking free from patriarchal control over her life, John's overbearing control over his wife's writing and treatment methods, disguised as what is best for her, is the reason for her depression and eventual mental breakdown.

Throughout the short story, the narrator is portrayed as 'imprisoned' by her husband mentally and physically. The woman suffering from nervous depression after giving birth to their child is mainly confined to their upstairs nursery. Even after expressing her dislike for the room and its wallpaper, the husband declines the request for the changes stating that he is not willing to invest in any changes for a house they are renting for only three months. She describes the barred windows, scratched floors, torn wallpaper, and its 'murderous' print with dis-taste but cannot change it since John prefers the room as is. He claims that the room is airy and suitable

for her condition. Left with no other stimulus but the wallpaper, the narrator, becomes fixated on it and eventually begins to see a figure in the design. She sets the women free by ripping the wallpaper. When her husband returns home, he sees her creeping on all fours, exclaiming that she finally broke free despite him. This claim illustrates her insanity, which was primarily driven by her exclusion and limitations implemented by John.

Given that the recommended treatment for her nervous condition is rest care, John disregards most of his wife's suggestions on treatment methods. He forbids her writing or interaction with other people and strictly enforces bed rest with no mental or intellectual stimulation. Such disregard for her stated needs that could improve her condition pushes her into further depression and insanity. She results in taking walks, sitting on the porch under the roses, and writing in secret only when John or other house guests are not around. Moreover, by not believing that she is sick, John automatically brushes off any of her concerns and suggestions, recommending that she rest without any thought of her condition, as seen in his claim that the worst thing she could do is to think about it (Gilman). Just like her brother, a decorated physician, he does not believe she is sick or needs additional support, limiting her chances of getting the help she needs from him, her family, and suitable healthcare providers.

The yellow wallpaper demonstrates the belittling of women as persons incapable of making decisions about their life. Throughout the short story, John constantly disregards his wife during conversation as if she is merely a child without the capacity to comprehend anything. This tendency can be demonstrated from his statement "What is it little girl? Don't go about walking like that, you'll get cold," yet she had gotten up to have a closer look at the wallpaper within their room (Gilman). John often spoke to his wife as if she was a child even when she was determined to have meaningful conversations with him on important matters. For instance upon

suggesting that they move as her health was not improving within their home, he aptly stated that she was definitely improving, she was just not aware of it herself. He expressed his disinterest in moving and became reproachful when she persisted. Speaking to his wife like she was a child coupled with his demand for her to suck up to her mental problems, as if they were merely her own doing and within her head, ultimately led to her insanity.

The narrator's work in writing faces opposition, for it is thought to strain her mind contributing to further illness. Throughout the short story, she mentions how she enjoys writing, even stating that it would help her offload the many thoughts that make her nervous. However, John does not support this, forcing her to write secretly. She constantly has to hide her writing from her housekeeper since she thinks that it is why she became ill in the first place. The narrator further notes that the housekeeper is the ideal housekeeper focused on house matters without any regard for personal and intellectual achievement beyond what is expected of her by the male figures and society at the time (Ghandelharion and Mazari). Limitations in the narrator's writing, despite her deep want for it, may have chipped at her identity, contributing to depression.

Surely, some individuals may argue that John was not responsible for his wife's depression since she had herself to blame. Throughout the *Yellow Wallpaper*, she is portrayed as sick but with the mental fortitude to determine what she wants and even practice it secretly. Her husband and brother may have viewed her as mentally fragile, but she was also strong-willed seen, as she knew to defy her bed rest prescription at times. She engages in negative self-talk about how she feels useless to her child and husband, which can contribute to depression regardless of her husband's actions. John's words of encouragement and advice on how to recover majored on; adequate rest and careful management of her thoughts. The couple has many loving moments where John comforts her through nervous breakdowns, which shows that he has

her best interests at heart. However, John was a physician who should have taken his wife's condition much more seriously instead of leaving her to manage it alone. He stood by downplaying her needs and controlling her life as her depression worsened into insanity.

John can be blamed for letting his wife's illness get out of hand, but he is not the ultimate cause of her depression and mental breakdown. Throughout the story, he refuses to give in to his wife's requests to change the yellow wallpaper, move to a different room downstairs, and write and interact with other people. Instead, he limits her movement to bed rest within the nursery, contributing to her mental breakdown. She expresses dissatisfaction with the wallpaper numerous times, often drifting from other thoughts back to it to show how unhinged it makes her feel. Towards the end, she begins to see figures within the wallpaper, which she frees by tearing the remaining wallpaper off. Having locked herself in the room to prevent her husband's entry as she frees the trapped woman, he finds her on all fours exclaiming that she is finally free from him and collapses. This act symbolizes her breaking free from John's depressing limitations in her life. Ultimately, patriarchal beliefs that women are mentally fragile and incapable of deciding what is best for themselves are evident throughout the story. John's ignorance of his wife's needs is why her condition progressed to insanity.

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