

# Jane in the wallpaper



In reading Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," I found the perspective of the woman's mind-set towards the wallpaper to be out of the ordinary.

At first the room and wallpaper were viewed to be "repellent, almost revolting" by the woman but later she grows "fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper" (Gilman 222). The woman goes back and forth from hating the paper to then becoming intrigued with it when she sees another woman within it. Her relationship with the wallpaper itself during the story grows, as does a bond between her and the woman inside the wallpaper. The article, "The Writing's on the Wall: Symbolic Orders in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'", written by Barbara A. Suess, details the matter of the relationship between the wallpaper and the woman even more. Suess argues that "The Yellow Wallpaper" is about a mental breakdown of Jane, whose ever-expanding relationship with the wallpaper is her attempt to represent herself. Suess contends that the woman is in fact Jane all along and is present both in the wallpaper and in the room the wallpaper contains.

Suess believes Jane to be psychotic and through Lacanian's Psychosis and examples in "The Yellow Wallpaper," she is able to support her theory. Like Suess, I believe the woman in the story had a mental disorder and becomes the woman she grew fond of in the wallpaper. When analyzing Suess's article I found that I agreed with several of her points. To better understand Suess's argument, one must first have an understanding of law/order and imagination or Lacanian Psychosis, known as Symbolic Order and Imaginary Order because Suess uses it as evidence in her article. Symbolic Order is "the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations,

knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of law. " Once you recognize and accept the " laws and restrictions that control both your desire and rules of communication," the Symbolic Order is made probable. When the woman in the wallpaper appeared she was just a figment of imagination.

But once the woman spoke to the woman in the wallpaper recognition occurred, which gave the woman in the wallpaper an identity that put the Symbolic Order in motion. With this recognition, the person is " able to enter into a community of others. " This happens as the woman starts to see more of the woman in the wallpaper outside of the windows. The woman in the wallpaper now has a relationship with the woman, and the woman is letting the woman in the wallpaper communicate with her. This opens up a world of others through the Imaginary Order—that is " the fundamental narcissism by which the human subject creates fantasy images of both [themselves] and [their] ideal object of desire" (Felluga). In Barbara A. Suess's article she states that the woman narrator in " The Yellow Wallpaper" is in fact Jane, who is revealed to have escaped from the wallpaper at the end of the story.

The woman/Jane had just given birth to a baby at the beginning of the story, which became an emotional point in her life. Jane is then sent to a place where she is to live in a room with yellow wallpaper covering the walls. In this place, thought to be a nursery but is more of a prison/mental institution based on the description, Suess says that Jane feels influenced by external forces, which causes Jane's own " detached" ego. The wallpaper slowly, over a period of time, gains authority over Jane and it becomes the alternative where Jane turns. Even though Jane mocks the wallpaper at first, she steadily not only grows to like it, but also becomes attached to it and, in her mind,

literally one with it. At this Suess goes into detail how Jane's relationship with the yellow wallpaper and the woman within fit into the Symbolic Order. Jane creates a new identification through her relationship with the wallpaper and transforms herself into the imaginary woman she sees in the wallpaper.

Through the identification with the woman in the wallpaper, Suess notes that Jane's first comprehension of an order is seen. Jane undergoes a battle with the woman in the wallpaper, who is Jane's own alter ego. In the end the woman in the wallpaper wins. Suess declares that at the end of the story, the woman does not belong to the same world or have the same identity as she once had previously. After reading Barbara A. Suess's article, my perspective of the woman's mind-set towards the wallpaper to be out of the ordinary was influenced even more. In her article, Suess quotes "The Yellow Wallpaper" when describing the room, or prison, that the woman is staying in.

Not only does she mention the "bed is bolted to the floor, the windows are barred, and there are rings and things on the wall," but also that "the wallpaper on the wall above the bed is torn off as far as she [the woman] can reach" (Suess 91). When the woman describes this torn-off paper, she tells it as if someone else has torn it off the walls, when in fact she is the one who has torn it off. The woman does not recall this because she was not mentally herself. Suess uses this information to serve as an example of an "influence by external forces" said to be part of the Symbolic Order. In Suess's article she quotes scholarly work from Michael Walsh, "when a person enters the Symbolic Order, he or she does all of the following: enters the realm of language, gains a connection with the Name-of-the-Father, finds a place in the world of others, and is provided with 'the foundation of the

objectification and unity of the self,' ” to help the reader better understand the process Jane goes through (Suess 83). These “ external forces” represent the Name-of-the-Father—those that are not named—because they have not yet been named. Although Jane sees and feels their presence, the woman in the wallpaper for instance, they are in fact only in her head and not of the real world.

Suess uses the line, this paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had, to exemplify the woman’s realization of those presences. The wallpaper can have no influence on the woman because it cannot talk to persuade her to do something. Suess is stating that the only influence on Jane is what she hears in her head from her alter ego in the wallpaper. The woman says, “ there are things in the wallpaper that nobody knows about but me, or ever will . . . it is like a woman” (Gilman 225).

When Jane identifies the woman in the wallpaper, who is her own ego, the “ realm of language” is opened. Jane has acknowledged her presence and by letting her in she opens a way of communication. Jane “ not only grows to like [the wallpaper], but goes so far as to become, in her mind, literally one with it” (Suess 92). This is where Suess believes the woman has found a “ place in the world of others” like Walsh states. The woman’s relationship with the wallpaper and the woman in it is beginning to make her leave the real world and go to become part of that of the imaginary. The woman’s reality and imaginary life start to become vaguely joined together. When writing about the woman in the wallpaper Jane records, “ I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I’ll tell you why—privately—I’ve seen her! I can see her out of every one of my windows” (Gilman 227).

Jane was not seeing a different woman out of her window but seeing herself and her actions at a previous time when she was not herself. Her sense of reality is beginning to fade, for her imagination and alter ego are taking over. Suess states that the woman is transforming into the person she sees in the wallpaper who wants to escape the containment of that prison. On some days the woman is herself, than on other days the woman in the wallpaper takes over. It is a constant struggle of who will have control over the earthly body. At the end of the story, while escaping the room the woman is caught by her husband and remarks, " I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back" (Gilman 228).

This ending completes the logic with the result of the Symbolic Order that Suess defines in her article by Walsh, which is proven with " the foundation of the objectification and unity of the self" (Suess 83). The woman in the wallpaper had finally taken over Jane. The foundation of the objectification, the woman in the wallpaper, became unified with the self, the woman/Jane. Jane does not belong to the same world or have the same identity as earlier," she is now the woman who escaped from behind the wallpaper (Suess 95). Through all her details and evidence, I found Suess's arguments to be very supported. Along with other documentation from other scholarly articles, there was enough evidence to not only back her study but to also reassure mine. The woman's relationship with the woman in the wallpaper was such a strong bond that in the end, they become one with each other until the woman in the wallpaper took over.

The woman, Jane, was no longer herself but a different person. Today a person of that nature would be classified as what Susse called the woman to be, " psychotic. " Bibliography Felluga, Dino. " Introductory Guide to Critical Theory. " Cla. Purdue. edu.

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