

# Yellow wall paper, beast in the jungle, and my contraband

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



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Most of the literary works we have discussed in class are so distinctive from each other, yet so similar. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Beast in the Jungle" we see how symbols are used to portray and dramatize the theme of the story. We also learned how women were treated, or "expected" to act, in works such as "The Yellow Wallpaper", "The Beast in the Jungle", and "My Contraband", which then leads to the subject of miscegenation. We also see miscegenation used in most of Chesnutt's works and in "Desiree's baby" by Chopin. The wallpaper in "The Yellow Wallpaper" was a symbol of imprisonment, restraint, and control. As described by the narrator, the wallpaper "became bars" imprisoning the "woman" in the wallpaper. The narrator herself (Jane?) was constrained by her husband, John, whom did not allow her to pursue a career as a writer and persuaded her to instead rest. The wallpaper symbolizes social restrictions women, especially the narrator, encountered at the time period the story was written. The wallpaper not only is representative of those restrictions the narrator faced, but also the restrictions the author, Gilman, faced herself as a woman also wanting to be a writer. The narrator "peeled off all the paper [she] could reach standing on the floor", believing that this would free her and the women whose life was trapped by the wallpaper. The ripping of the wallpaper by the narrator symbolizes her freeing herself of those social limits imposed on her, making her feel as though she had also freed many other women whose life were also being controlled, just as Gilman did herself. While Jane's life was being controlled by her husband, John Marcher's life, from "The Beast in the Jungle", was being restrained by something not human. John Marcher's life was being troubled by "the thing", something that was to occur to him, an

event. I believe that John himself was the "beast", and the "jungle" was the condition in which he lived (without a definite direction). Although it was discussed in class that the "beast" was John's mind and the "jungle" was his life, I don't completely agree with that interpretation. I interpreted it as John being the "beast" himself, not only his mind; the "jungle" was the social environment in which he resided. When I think of a beast, I think of a lonely animal, which is self-centered and preys on others. I felt that what made him more of a "beast" was the way he "preyed" on May Bartram, by having her stay by his side to witness "the thing", although she was not reluctant. It is this subject, May's kindness, which brings us to the next theme, women's treatment. Women were regarded as comforting, caring, and were sometimes restricted socially, making them socially inferior to men. The women were seen as homemakers whereas men were seen as "bread winners". Women had rights, but their choices were limited. A working woman was not seen as appropriate, like in "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Gilman, in which Jane (?), whom wanted to be a writer (she was actually in fact a writer), upon her husband's orders did not pursue a career. Women are also seen as more caring and compassionate like Miss Dane in "My Contraband" by Alcott, in which she pleads Robert not to kill his own brother, after he had taken his wife and sold Robert away. May Bartram from "The Jungle in the Beast" is also a caring, patient woman, who really dedicates the rest of her life accompanying John Marcher, waiting for "the thing", which ironically had already occurred. I also noticed a sense of dependence men had on women. As pointed out before, women relied on men to bring home the "bread", but what we sometimes fail to notice is that men relied on

women mentally and emotionally. John relied emotionally on May, I felt as though he needed a sense of reassurance from May. Miscegenation is another important topic we discussed in class. Miscegenation is seen throughout the various stories, such as "Desiree's Baby" by Chopin and in "The Wife of My Youth" by Chesnutt. In "Desiree's Baby" Desiree's husband, Armand, is ashamed of part of him that he believed to be inferior to the White in him, ashamed of his African roots. Once Desiree's baby is born, and the quadroon in the baby begins to show, Armand seeks to veil his secret by accusing Desiree of having African ancestry herself, which at the time was seen as a "fault". Driven by shame and hopelessness, Desiree takes her life and her child's. In "the Wife of My Youth" light skinned African American believed they were superior to those that were darker than them. Mr. Ryder, a former slave, found himself thinking like the other "Blue Veins" members; the lighter they were the more superior they were. When Mr. Ryder finds himself in the presence of "the wife of [his] youth" he reflects on what he is and where he came from, and takes again his former spouse for a wife again. Miscegenation today is still criticized, although we see more interracial marriages than previous years. Like Mr. Ryder, I feel that accepting where you come from makes you a more legitimate person. I prefer Chesnutt's method on portraying miscegenation, although Chopin's is very realistic. A lot of these literary works were very interesting. I felt that they raised awareness in the different topics. Although society today is much different than what it was one hundred years ago, which was when most of these works were written, I feel that reflecting on the bitter past encourage us to appreciate a lot of the liberties we possess today. I enjoyed reading "the

Yellow Wallpaper", I felt that Gilman gave a voice to all women who felt trapped under the stereotypes of society. I thought that "Desiree's Baby" was such a tragedy that I can't think of how Armand dealt with his guilt, if he had any. I thought that every story was interesting in its own way. The class discussions were very helpful because everyone had their own interpretation to a particular text.