

The yellow wallpaper argumentative essay



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Triumph of Insanity In her semi-autobiographical story “ The Yellow Wallpaper”, Charlotte Perkins Gillian depicts the frightening and tragic realities that many women faced in the late sass’s. There are prominent themes of male domination in the medicine, ageism, gender roles, marriage, duality, and mental illness such as, depression, postpartum depression and suicidal wishes. Jane describes the yellow wallpaper itself as what drove her to insanity, but I believe that it is what also gave her freedom. It was only through her relationship with the wallpaper that she was able to realize her untenable situation.

She came to see herself in the paper’s warped pattern and how she was trapped under the reigns of her husband. “ The Yellow Wallpaper” is a perfect microcosm of the world that Gillian perceived around her. Male dominance and patriarchy surrounded her from all corners and trapped her into the standard role of a wife and mother. Gillian herself suffered from postpartum depression and was treated with “ rest” as her character, Jane, was. Gillian was forced to fit the traditional domestic role very drastically, but eventually she divorced her husband and became a known feminist and political activist (Merrimac).

What better way to combat the feelings of male domination, loss of rights, and personal control than becoming a suffrage activist (Greene)? She lived her life in a way that constantly challenged the traditional female role and the patriarchal model, which is evident in the story of “ The Yellow Wallpaper”. The setting of this story is pertinent to the oppressive reality of patriarchy that Charlotte Perkins Gillian highlights in “ The Yellow

Wallpaper”. The story takes place in a huge estate about three miles from village life. The house is surrounded by beauty, gardens and flowers.

She infers that the house itself is surrounded by a gate which locks, similar to large estate in England. The house was full of rooms which lead to a main piazza and whose windows were lined with fresh roses, yet Jane was confined to the nursery at the top of the house, as if John, her husband, had imprisoned her. “ The windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (3). Charlotte Perkins Gillian famously exclaimed, “ a concept is stronger than a fact” ([http://thinkers. Com/quotes/Charlotte_Perkins_Gillian/3. HTML](http://thinkers.Com/quotes/Charlotte_Perkins_Gillian/3.HTML)). Jane began her story by explaining the insist of her husband John, “ he scoffs at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures. ” She explains that John laughs at her for anything that he cannot comprehend as a reality, anything intangible, “ but one expects that in a marriage” (1). Women were clearly not taken seriously for anything they said, felt or believed. Because mental illness is generally an emotional pattern, it was something that her husband did not have the capacity to truly understand and sympathize with.

That is why he confined her, suppressed her, did not allow her any form of self- expression or creativity, precisely the things that may have helped her. It was because of John’s treatment that Jane went into such an intense state of depression that she completely lost her wits. He did not allow her to converse with the people she wanted, or to go on outings. He forced her to consume tonics and rest after meals. He does not allow her to write or do anything which is intellectually and emotionally stimulating. Interestingly, that is the only thing that seems to help Jane is to, “ say what I feel and think
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in some way- it is such a relief! (7). John treated Jane as if she were a child. In the late sass's women and children were treated as if they were on similar mental and emotional levels. This the significance behind the room having been a nursery, a nursery that was just as much hated by Jane as it was by the children who occupied it before her. In the story John refers to Jane as, "little girl" (8), which may seem endearing, but was really a sign his low regard for her and for women in general. "To swallow and follow, whether old doctrine or new propaganda, is a weakness still dominating the human mind" (Gillian, [http:// thinkers. Mom/quotes/Charlotte_Perkins_Gillian/3. HTML](http://thinkers.Mom/quotes/Charlotte_Perkins_Gillian/3.HTML)). In the beginning of the story Jane trusted and followed whatever her husband demented. She felt it was important to conceal her true emotions. The only thing she claimed for herself was her writing, which she hid from him with great effort. What is most interesting about this story is that only after Jane truly studied the wallpaper did she begin to take life into her own hands. It was the paper that allowed her to see herself in her horribly repressive relationship with John. It drove her to hate him, and eventually it enabled her to claim independence.

The wallpaper served as a mirror for Jane, it allowed her to stare at herself and study her personal situation. From beginning there was something she utterly detested about the paper. The pattern was horrible, "committing every artistic sin" (3). Jane became increasingly obsessed with the pattern in the paper. She fixated on it all day and tried to figure out the meaning within it. As the story progressed Jane began to obsess about the wallpaper, she started seeing it everywhere; the yellow stench followed her, attached to her clothing and became a sort of toxic substance that overcame her.

This is an analogy of her realization that the paper and patriarchy surrounded her. It always was a part of her everyday life and a depiction of her incomprehensibly rotten relationship with John. Slowly and almost unconsciously she connected the paper with John and realized that they are one and the same. At one point in the story John exclaimed that Jane was getting better “ despite” the wallpaper, and although Jane agrees she writes, “ I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper... He might even want to take me away’ (11).

She was getting better because she was starting to make sense of the paper and in turn her life with John, and the reasons for her depression. The turning point of the story is when Jane finally began to see woman barred behind the pattern. Jane explains that the woman shook the paper to get out, but Jane also says, “ she is always creeping” (12). I believe that the woman behind the paper represents how Jane felt “ strangled”, but it also represents her desire to break the rules and challenge her position.

Jane wanted to “ creep” as the woman behind the paper did, but she only allowed herself to do so where no one could see her. Slowly Jane began to break out of the traditional role. She lied to her husband and concealed things from him more frequently, and she does not feel as guilty doing so, as she had in the beginning of the story. I believe that John was aware of what he was doing to Jane. He wanted her to be subservient and docile, because he felt a woman should be that way, even if it caused her illness. At one point in the story Jane exclaims, “ This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had! (5) Once she started to see herself in the paper and that her husband was the pattern that caged that her inside, she took a turn

in her way of describing John. “ He asks me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be loving and kind. As if I couldn’t see through him! ” (13).

Charlotte Perkins Gillian said, “ To attain happiness in another world we need only to believe something, while to secure it in this world we must do something. ” (Gillian, http://thinkers.com/quotes/Charlotte_Perkins_Gillian/3.html). Toward the end of the story Jane started to play an active role in her struggle against John.

She began tearing at the paper, striping it from the walls, and she did not quit spite her tremendous effort and exertion, “ it sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! ” (14). This signifies Cane’s desperate attempt to try and free herself from societal norms and from patriarchy heavy hand. Once Jane had most of the paper ripped off the walls she explained that she enjoyed the room much more with its bare walls. At that point she began referring to herself as the woman behind the paper who had been freed from the horrible pattern. This informs the reader of Cane’s triumph in her battle against John.

She explained, “ I want to astonish him ” (14), tit the sheer bliss of her freedom from his reign and from patriarchy. She explains, “ it is so pleasant to be out in the great room and creep around as I please! ” (14), a clear indication of her victory. Sadly, Cane’s triumph was at the expense of her sanity. Although she gained freedom, “ Vie pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back ” (15), she loses her mind completely. She succeeded in shocking John, because at the end of the story he fainted, and Jane had “ to creep over him every time ” (15) she walked on her path in the room.

Her “creeping” in front, or rather over John time ND time again, whereas before she had to hide it from him, is the ultimate sign of her refusal to conform to societal norms. I argue that her insanity itself questioned societal norms. She no longer had to act, feel, do, or say anything that society required because she would be deemed insane and unconformable. “The Yellow Wallpaper” is not only a sad depiction of reality for women in the late sass’s, but it questions authority and repression in society, which still exists today. Struggles against deemed societal role should not have to literally drive one to insanity.