

Yellow wallpaper assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Instructor: Camilla Pciakrd English 11271 - 011 06 August 2011 Topic 3

Research Paper Assignment "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story by American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It is regarded as an important early work of American feminist literature, illustrating attitudes in the nineteenth century toward women's physical and mental health. The story also has been classified as Gothic fiction and horror fiction. Gilman's macabre fantasy, "The Yellow Wallpaper", exploits the nightmarish feel, violence and uncanny terror found in Gothic writings.

In this story there are plenty of "Gothic" elements used by the author and she uses it to express her dark protests, fantasies and fear. In the beginning, the "setting", a "colonial mansion" (99) which is a "hereditary state" (99) is taken as a haunted house by the narrator. From the narrator's point of view, the nursery, and the yellow wallpaper in particular, become a prison which reflects her (narrator) inner thought and tortures her mind. It is in this room that the narrator with slight postpartum depression is obsessed with the yellow wallpaper, and it is here that she'll go mad in the end.

In addition, we also can find gothic elements in psychological status of the heroine. At first, the yellow wallpaper represents her view of herself: sinful and ugly, for she bogs down on the ridiculous contradictions in her role as a wife and a mother. Nonetheless, with time passing, the narrator connects herself with the woman, who the narrator imagines creeping and being trapping behind the yellow wallpaper. According to a well known scholar named Greg Johnson, he suggests that "The Yellow Wallpaper" contains Gothic themes such as "confinement and rebellion, forbidden desire and 'irrational' fear . . . Gosal 2 the distraught heroine, the forbidding mansion,

and the powerfully repressive male antagonist” (522). Gilman uses these Gothic elements to unleash the nineteenth century woman writer from the domestic, social and psychological confinements of patriarchal society. The focus of the story moves continuously inward, describing the narrator’s absorption into the Gothic world of chaos and “ imaginative freedom,” however Gilman controls the heroine by the use of repetition, humor, irony and “ allegorical patterns of imagery” (523).

Despite all the “ demonic forces” that are set against her she decides to rebel by choosing to suffer. Rather than surrendering, Johnson explains the narrator has a rebirth into a new stage of being, as she crawls on the floor of the nursery on all fours, exploring her new world as does a child. “ Simply put, this fate is her psychological confinement and torture as a woman desiring creative autonomy in nineteenth century America” (527). Gothic fiction, sometimes referred to as Gothic horror, is a genre of literature that combines elements of both horror and romance.

As a genre, it is generally believed to have been invented by the English author Horace Walpole with his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* (wikipeda). Now that we have a good understanding of Gothic genre and it’s history, we can inquire about the characteristics that make “ *The Yellow Wallpaper*” a Gothic tale. Gothic fiction generally features the kinds of things you find in good horror movies. Fear, the supernatural, secret rooms and isolated houses, suspense and dread are some of the ingredients gothic writers use to make their stories effective. Gilman makes us of several of these ingredients.

The story takes place in an isolated estate which is in a state of disrepair. The narrator is kept in a room all by herself with strange, yellow wallpaper. At first, she has a feeling of dread which turns to hallucination and progresses to full blown insanity. She keeps thinking there is a ghostly woman trapped inside the wallpaper. The woman's isolation is reinforced by the fact that no one will take her seriously. These are classic characteristics of the gothic genre. Typical Gothic literature involves major characteristics such as the following.

The setting is in a castle, the story holds elements of mystery and suspense, an ancient prophecy appears and a character has visions and omens. There are actually four more such as supernatural elements exist, emotion is elevated- for character and, typically, the reader, a woman is in distress. Last but not least a tyrannical, oppressive, and impulsive man tries to control a woman. Based upon these characteristics the story "The Yellow Wallpaper" does not contain a castle, a prophecy or anything related to the supernatural. This diverges the Gothic mold in the story.

To conclude this essay, the Gothic tale was formed because of Gilman's historical experience through her devastating fears/issues. Gilman had suffered years of depression, and consulted a physician specializing in the "rest cure." He put her on a rest cure, urging her to "live as domestic a life as possible." She was forbidden to touch a pen, pencil or brush ever again, and only allowed two hours of stimulation a day. After three months and almost completely giving up, Gilman decided to go against her diagnosis and continue to work again.

After realizing how close she had come to worse mental illness, she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” with additions and exaggerations to illustrate her point of misdiagnosis. She sent a copy to Mitchell, but never received a response. She further added that her purpose in writing “The Yellow Wallpaper” was “not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.” Gilman claimed that many years later she learned that Mitchell had changed his treatment methods, but book historian Julie Bates Dock has discredited this claim.

Mitchell actually continued his treatment methods and was interested in creating entire hospitals devoted to the “rest cure” so that his treatments would be more widely accessible. This was as late as 1908, sixteen years after her short story was published. Gosal 4 Work Cited Gilman, Charlotte. “The Yellow Wallpaper.” ENGL 1127- 011 Custom Courseware. Comp. Camilla Pickard. Vancouver: Langara College, 2011. 99. Print Bomarito, Jessica. Gothic Literature. Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2006. 37-87. Print. Smith, Andrew. Gothic Literature. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. 55-57. Print.