

Character of the story yellow wallpaper

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Charlotte Perkins Stetson is recognized as one of the important figures in the social reform movement of the late 1800s to early 1920s. Pieces of her life experiences are woven into the plot of her most recognized fictional short story, “ The Yellow Wallpaper”. Stetson’s short story, “ The Yellow Wallpaper” demonstrates her distrust in the patriarchal dominance hierarchy that was common in her time, and deals with the theme of dealing with a mental illness.

Stetson created a character that is also the main narrator and they cope with daily stress by writing down their thoughts in a journal, hidden from the prying eyes of John, their husband and husband’s sister Jennie. As a reader we do not know if the narrator is aware we are able to see the contents of the journal. In the plot exposition Stetson’s main character poses the question of what to do when two of the people that she holds close to her heart downplay the seriousness of her condition. Her husband and her brother are both physicians of high standing and they told not only her, but also her friends and family that she has temporary nervous depression. They both claim that her condition is a “ slight hysterical tendency” meaning it’s a trivial matter and not one of importance. Our main character feels this is a serious understatement and disagrees with them. The plot of the story revolves around the narrator’s interactions with her husband and the sister that is absolutely loyal to him. This is an example of the classic patriarchy structure that dominated the 1800s and 1900s and is what Stetson fought against as a women’s rights activist before writing this story. The husband is at the top of the hierarchy which is why his sister, the only other female character in the story, follows his direction to the letter. Her husband

dictates which room in the mansion she sleeps in, when and what medication to take, and how often the narrator sleeps. The narrator's refusal to accept the patriarchal structure set in place is similar to Stetson's real views on men and the fact that Stetson attributed the ills of the world to the dominance of men (Britannica). It is easy to see the correlation between the traits assigned to the male characters and specific plot elements in Stetson's fictional story, and her real world views of men.

At the rising action point of the plot, the narrator gets into an argument with her husband and starts crying. It is after this moment that the narrator starts writing about seeing a figure in the Yellow Wallpaper that adorns their room. It is safe to assume that the argument affected the narrator deeply, deep enough that they started hallucinating. The diction of the narrator also changes after the argument. It takes on a more serious and dark tone. The narrator gives off the impression that they are scribbling down their thoughts into the journal while looking over their shoulder. The scribbles are frantic and the narrator admits to cultivating deceitful habits in the aftermath of the argument such as pretending to be sleeping when her husband or husband's sister is near her. The climax of the plot comes when the narrator doesn't finish writing out her thoughts in the journal because "it does not do to trust people too much." The narrator is no longer trusting her own journal entries, she is no longer trusting herself. This is a troubling indicator of the decline of their mental health. There is reasonable evidence that points to the narrator's descent into madness starting with the hallucinations and no longer trusting the journal.

Stetson's narrator descends further into madness when she stops talking about the figure in the yellow wallpaper in the third person, "I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down." The narrator replaces the pronoun "her" with "I" and essentially becomes the woman in the yellow wallpaper. The narrator is unable to separate the actions of the woman stuck in the yellow wallpaper from her own and instead molds them together. At one point the narrator notices that the bedstead has teeth marks and blames it non-existent children, a few lines later the narrator writes "I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner – but it hurt my teeth." Furthermore, another instance of the narrator confusing reality and descending further into madness is when she writes about successfully hiding a rope from her husband's sister somewhere in the room and how they intend to tie up the woman hiding in the yellow wallpaper if it tries to escape. A few lines later the narrator writes "I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope...I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night...It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!" The narrator has completely stopped observing the woman in the yellow wallpaper and now exclusively writes from the perspective of the woman they have hallucinated into existence.

The final act of insanity done by the narrator is when they lock out the husband from the room. The husband eventually makes his way into the room to find the narrator creeping around the room, stuck to the wall. The narrator tells the husband, "I've got out at last...and I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" The husband promptly faints as he at last realizes the extent of the narrator's mental illness. The deterioration of

the narrator's mental state could have been stopped before it reached this point if it wasn't for the arrogance of her husband. The husband was distracted by their ego and high position in the hierarchy and ignored every single call for help by the narrator. If the husband hadn't held themselves up on a pedestal and instead had placed themselves on the same level as a woman, it is possible that they would have been able to keep the narrator's mind intact.

Taking a step back from the atrocities wrecked upon the mind of the narrator, one could laugh at the situation. It is very ironic that Stetson portrayed man as the tyrant and villain in her short story. It is ironic because Stetson is one of the first public feminists in U. S history(Britannica). Stetson started the first wave of feminism in America. Every single one of her non fiction works, save her autobiography, heavily criticized man, especially her book Does a man support his wife? To conclude, the short story titled The Yellow Wall Paper is a fictional story that highlights the faults hidden in a patriarchy and exaggerates the effects they can have on women by utterly destroying the mind of the main character who is a woman.