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*The Yellow Wallpaper* Outline

1. Introduction- *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a tale about a woman, possibly named Jane, that slowly loses her mind when she is put on the “rest cure”.
   1. The story takes place in the late nineteenth century when doctors used to treat women suffering from “nervous hysteria” by putting them on the rest cure. These women were not allowed to go anywhere or do anything other than rest.
   2. Gilman uses thematic elements such as irony, symbolism, and conflict to demonstrate what the rest cure did to women.
2. The story outlines the struggle that the narrator has with the man who is supposed to be helping her.
   1. There is a man versus man conflict between the main character, Jane, and her husband, John.
   2. Jane doesn’t agree with her husband’s rest cure
      1. Jane’s husband, who is also her doctor, diagnoses Jane with nervous depression.
         1. “If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - what is one to do?” (Gilman 173).
         2. Jane seems uneasy about being diagnosed with hysteria, but she reveals that she is powerless against her husband’s finding.
      2. The conflict between John and Jane symbolizes the man versus society conflict that women at the time had in a patriarchal society. Just like Jane is being oppressed by her husband, so were many women who were also not allowed to do as they please like the men.
         1. “In the nineteenth century, women, as agents of moral influence, were expected to maintain the domestic sphere as a cheerful, pure haven for their husbands to return to each evening.” (Quawas).
         2. Women at the time had only one main duty which was to be submissive to their husbands and tend to their needs.
      3. Women in the nineteenth century were not allowed to express their opinion in any way.
         1. “‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is the story all ‘literary women would tell if they had the voice’” (Kasmer).
         2. Kasmer refers to the story as being the voice of women at the time, if women were permitted to have a voice.
      4. John patronizes Jane, treating her as if she were a child and her feelings weren’t valid.
         1. “‘Bless her little heart!’ said he with a big hug, ‘she shall be as sick as she pleases!’” (Gilman 181).
         2. Jane is not allowed to express herself in any way; when she does, her husband simply blows her off and tells her to stick to her rest cure.
         3. John thinks he is helping Jane by having her locked up in her room and not letting her write or interact with others. This shows dramatic irony because John thinks his treatment will make his wife better when it is actually making her condition worse.
      5. The main conflict in the story symbolizes the main conflict between men and women at the time, which is the oppression of women by men.
3. Another strategy that Gilman used to show the conflict between men and women in the late nineteenth century was the symbolism of the names of the characters.
   1. The author skillfully chose the names of all the characters to convey the message behind each character.
      1. The name John is used to refer to an anonymous male body. This symbolizes John as the embodiment of all the men in society who oppress women.
      2. Jane’s name refers to Jane Doe which is symbolic of all the women in society since this is the name given to identify an anonymous female body.
      3. The name Jenny in real life is used to refer to a female donkey which is basically a big dumb animal, and that is what Jenny fundamentally symbolizes.
         1. The narrator states that Jenny “… is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession” (Gilman 178).
         2. She is content with performing the domestic duties assigned to her by men just like a donkey who is unaware of any better life he could be living.
      4. The character of Mary in the story is the woman who is now taking care of Jane’s son.
         1. “It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby” (Gilman 175).
         2. The name Mary is symbolic of a mother figure. In the story, Mary is basically the mother of Jane’s baby.
      5. The mention of S. Weir Mitchell in the story refers to the doctor who put the author on the rest cure.
         1. “Although Mitchell's Rest Cure was in accordance with the most advanced neurological thinking of his day, in modern eyes it can be read as an attempt to reorient women to the domestic sphere” (Golden).
         2. Mitchell is a symbol of all the doctors in the late nineteenth century who practiced this type of treatment. The treatment itself symbolizes the power that men had over women.
      6. By using symbolism in the names of the characters, the author enhances the importance of each individual in the story.
4. Jane hates the room that she resides in, which shows a man versus environment conflict.
   1. The various aspects of the room give it a very negative connotation.
      1. The narrator describes the room in a way that symbolizes that she is living in an asylum.
         1. “…windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (Gilman 174).
         2. The bars on the windows and rings on the walls were likely used for keeping crazy patients under control.
      2. Jane does one of the very few things she is allowed to do which is to lay down on her bed.
         1. “I lie here on this great immovable bed- it is nailed down…” (Gilman 179).
         2. There is a large bed in the room that is bolted down to the floor which symbolizes that Jane has no sexual freedom, aside from all the other freedoms that she does not have.
      3. The room itself and the fact that Jane is stuck in it is symbolic of Jane and other women’s captivity.
         1. “For example, the room, or in the story the narrator's confinement to her room, has become symbolic of the situation of women in patriarchal society” (Kasmer).
         2. The narrator and all other women in society were put in their place by men and were trapped by the confines that men set up for them.
         3. “I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery…” (Gilman 175).
         4. The window is Jane’s only way of seeing the outside world, everything she can’t partake in, and people she is not allowed to associate with.
      4. Jane thinks the room she is in is a nursery which shows dramatic irony since she is not being nursed back to health, which would be the practical use of a nursery. Instead her condition is worsening.
      5. The fact that Jane thinks her room is a nursery is symbolic of how John treats Jane like a child.
         1. “‘What is it, little girl?’ he said. ‘Don’t go walking about like that- you’ll get cold’” (Gilman 181).
         2. John belittles his wife instead of doing something practical to help her which definitely does not help her situation at all.
      6. Instead of the room being a sort of nursery used to help nurse Jane back to health, it is more of a prison.
5. The narrator is horrified by the wallpaper in the room which demonstrates a man versus environment conflict.
   1. The wallpaper symbolizes the imprisonment of Jane as well as other women at the time.
      1. Jane notices that the wallpaper is old, yellow, and ripped.
         1. “It is stripped off- the paper- in great patches… I never saw a worse paper in my life” (Gilman 174).
         2. The fact that the wallpaper has been stripped off symbolizes that others who have also been in the same “room”, or situation as the narrator have also tried to break out of the imprisonment of the wallpaper.
      2. Lisa Kasmer states that when Jane rips down the wallpaper, it symbolizes her own liberation.
         1. “…discovers her double and enables this double to escape from her textual/architectural confinement” (Kasmer).
         2. Jane seems to have had a breakthrough; she completely loses her mind and identifies herself with the “woman” in the wallpaper.
         3. The narrator states that the woman in the wallpaper has “‘got out at last’…‘in spite of [John] and Jane!...’” (Gilman 189).
         4. Jane finally becomes free from the imprisonment of her husband, basically by going mad.
      3. The yellow wallpaper in the room is symbolic of men’s opinion which is passed on as factual information.
         1. The yellow wallpaper is analogous to yellow journalism which were tabloid newspapers that contained the editor’s opinion but because it was published in the newspaper, it was regarded as fact.
         2. The opinion that men in the late nineteenth century had was that women needed to stay in their place. They were not allowed to have high ranking or stressful jobs for fear that they would not be adequate enough to fulfill their duties.
         3. Now we know this is not factual information, rather it was the attitudes that men had towards women. They believed women were inferior.
      4. Jane accomplished her mission to free the woman in the wallpaper, and in doing so she liberated herself.
6. Conclusion
   1. In writing the story, Gilman uses a variety of symbols, conflicts, and irony to demonstrate her point. At the time Gilman wrote the story, women writers were not able to write about their struggles. This is why the author uses literary elements to portray the idea she is trying to get across.
   2. By writing this story and sending it to S. Weir Mitchell, Gilman eventually succeeded in helping put a stop to the rest cure and make advancements in the feminist movement.