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English 103

Outline

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1. Introduction- “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a complex piece of writing that holds many different symbols and meanings.
2. From a historical perspective, Gilman was incorporating her current situations into her short story.

A. Women were misunderstood in Gilman’s day.

1. “The Yellow Wallpaper” points out a typical situation where a woman suffering anxiety is diagnosed as “sick” and banned from doing activities that she desired to do. They were diagnosed as sick and forbidden from doing daily activities that they wanted to do.

2. Women wanted freedoms like the rest of society, mainly men, possessed.

a. Women wanted freedom to work.

b. Women desired freedom from household responsibilities.

c. They desired freedom from man’s domination.

B. Women had no rights.

1. During this era, women were not allowed to vote.

2. Also, many women were not allowed to get a divorce.

3. Women had trouble finding employment.

C. Men treated women with little respect.

1. Like John in the story, many men were doctors who could control female patients, including their wives.

2. In the story, John took away his wife’s pleasures, made her rest when she didn’t need it, forbade her from writing, and isolated her from the world.

3. Furthermore, Gilman stressed how men treated women as children and would not allow them to live freely.

D. Because of this treatment, the protagonist was driven to madness.

1. The wife in the story represents all the women in the world who were being driven mad by being treated similarly.

2. “Upon recognition of the wallpaper woman, who in this story clearly represents not only the narrator's own divided self but all women who are bound and inhibited by a society that insists that women are childlike and incapable of self-actualization, the narrator begins a descent into the vicarious experience of madness through a virtually self-conscious and planned inducement of hysteria” (Quawas, 42).

III. From a Marxist perspective, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” loosely based off of her own experiences in life.

A. Charlotte Gilman’s marriage had striking similarities with the couple in her story, “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

1. In short, Gilman had a rough and forced relationship with her husband. “In her own marriage, Gilman struggled with some of the same issues plaguing her fictional narrator. Walter Stetson, although kind and devoted, held conventional views about gender roles and dismissed Gilman's desire to work, particularly after the birth of their daughter”(Knight, 1229).

2. John and Gilman’s husband kept their wives from doing what they wanted to do.

B. Both Charlotte and the girl in her story suffered from what is now called postpartum depression.

1. They both suffered nervous breakdowns, depression, and anxiety.

2. Like Jane in the story, Gilman was subjected to a “rest treatment.” “This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as far as possible,’ to ‘have but two hours' intellectual life a day,’ and ‘never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived’” (Why I Wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper,” 45).

C. Gilman expressed her encouragement for women to not stay idle, but to get to work.

1. Gilman’s depression and nervousness left her once she returned to work.

2. Also, Gilman had grown up in a hard-working family and knew the benefits of being a wage- earner. “Charlotte’s belief in the necessity of preparing women to be wage-earners thus had its roots in her own family’s struggle to survive” (Lutes, 2).

1. By using a Feminist analysis, Charlotte Gilman was an advocate for woman’s standing in society.

A. Gilman was an important supporter of the feminist cause.

1. Although it was unusual in her day, Gilman was a bold author.

a. “Gilman was ahead of her own time. An innovator in her own right, she defied cultural stereotypes and patriarchal assumptions and planted her feminist ideas in her own writings to enlarge the woman's sense of what was possible” (Quawas, 37).

b. “In Gilman, however, we find a writer who dares to assert her right and ability to address public issues, to intervene in public discourse, and to reinforce her cultural authority. Infusing her fiction with socialist and feminist ideologies was a way for Gilman to show how progress and democracy in society could be advanced if only people would act on the need for change” (Quawas, 38).

2. “The Yellow Wallpaper” was published by The Feminist Press.

3. Her works speak about the reality of male superiority. “In the story, Gilman chronicles the groping and growth of its narrator and protagonist and depicts her arduous struggle against the hegemony of male power and many of society's patriarchal values and self-denying myths that have been incorporated within women's consciousness” (Quawas, 42).

B. Besides being an adamant feminist, Gilman incorporated feminist views into her work, “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

1. The relationship between John and his wife are an example of feminist dilemmas in their time.

2. The fact that the wife was imprisoned by her husband symbolizes how women were imprisoned by men during that time.

C. Feminists accepted her views and believed them to be accurately depicted.

1. Using a psychoanalysis, although Jane claims to want to obey her husband, she subconsciously wants to rebel.

A. Jane feels pressured and restricted by her life.

1. Jane felt pressured be becoming a new mother.

2. Jane felt restricted by her husband.

3. Jane felt restricted by the house she was staying in.

a. The confining bedroom represented a mental asylum. “Although this is all explained away for us—notably, by an unstable narrator—as the doings of the previous tenants' raucous children, there is a darker side to the ruin which recalls (not so) ancient cells and mental asylums” (Suess, 91).

b. Jane saw herself imprisoned by the yellow wallpaper. “The woman in the wallpaper is, according to Jane, restricted by the front pattern, which she first describes as “that silly and conspicuous front design” ( 8) and later likens to the more intensely negative image of “bars” ( 13)” (Suess, 93).

B. Jane claims to want to be submissive despite the pressures.

1. “I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 15). Jane blames her rebellious feelings on her condition.

2. “He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 15). Jane tries to see her husband in the best possible light.

C. Jane goes against her claims to desire to submit to her husband and restricting ways of life.

1. “And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way--it is such a relief!” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper 17). Although she knew her husband would not approve, Jane delighted in fantasizing with the wallpaper.

2. “He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 18). Even after John told his wife to stop daydreaming about the wallpaper, she continued to do it without his knowledge.

D. Jane associates herself with the woman in the wallpaper.

1. At first, Jane only sees a woman behind bars who is trapped behind the wallpaper.

2. As she begins to hallucinate and go mentally insane, she believes herself to be the woman behind the wallpaper.

3. When she tears the wallpaper off the wall, she believes that she is freeing herself.

4. Jane eventually believed that she was breaking free from her prison of life by tearing off the wallpaper from the wall.

E. Jane eventually goes against all claims to want to submit to her life by breaking free from the wallpaper.

V. Conclusion- She skillfully incorporated different perspectives and themes into her short story.