



Insanity as a form of escape: Freedom, Isolation & Becoming in “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

Vidhi Jain,

Content Developer, University of Delhi.

Abstract

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" depicts the harrowing descent into madness of a woman who is confined to a room by her physician husband in the 19th century. Through the protagonist's experiences, the story explores themes of freedom, isolation, and becoming, as insanity becomes a form of escape from a repressive patriarchal society. The protagonist's isolation from the outside world, including her husband's control over her actions, forces her to turn inward and confront the conflicting desires of societal expectations and her own sense of self. In the process, she becomes aware of the limitations of her own agency and the power dynamics that govern her life. As she descends into madness, her perception of reality becomes distorted, and she is able to liberate herself from the constraints of her social and gendered roles. Ultimately, her insanity becomes a form of freedom, a means of rejecting the oppressive norms of her society and becoming her own person. Through "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman offers a powerful critique of the patriarchal society of her time and shows how mental illness can be both a symptom of oppression and a means of resistance.

Keywords:

Freedom, Insanity, Feminism, Patriarchy, Isolation, Becoming, Escape, Womanhood, Madness, Confinement, Oppression, Limitations.

Introduction

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1892. The story is told from the first-person perspective of a woman, referred to as the narrator, who is struggling with postpartum depression.

"I sometimes fancy that in my condition, if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad."

Her husband, a physician, prescribes a "rest cure" for her condition, confining her to a room with yellow wallpaper and forbidding her from engaging in any stimulating activities.

"I don't like to look out of the windows even - there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast."

As the narrator becomes increasingly fixated on the wallpaper, she begins to see a woman trapped behind it. The story is seen as a feminist critique of the medical treatment of women during the 19th century and the societal expectation that women should be confined to domestic roles. Additionally, it's also seen as a commentary on the treatment of mental illness, as the narrator's condition is not taken seriously by her husband and is treated only as a minor ailment.

"I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin"

The story concludes with the narrator losing her mind and tearing down the wallpaper, which can be interpreted as a symbol of her rebellion against the confinement and oppression imposed upon her by society.

Body

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is highly regarded as a significant work of feminist literature and is still studied and discussed in literature and women's studies courses today. It serves as a powerful illustration of how societal and cultural expectations can harm the mental health of individuals.

The narrator's journey into madness is portrayed as a means of escape from the oppressive societal expectations and confinement imposed upon her as a woman. The narrator is suffering from postpartum depression, and her husband, a physician, prescribes a "rest cure" that involves confinement to a room with yellow wallpaper and a prohibition on engaging in any stimulating activities.

As the narrator becomes increasingly preoccupied with the wallpaper, she begins to see a woman trapped behind it, representing her own feelings of confinement and oppression. Her descent into madness is portrayed as a way for her to break free from these societal expectations and confinement. As she loses her grip on reality, she tears down the wallpaper, symbolizing her rebellion against the confinement and oppression she has experienced.

Still, another critic, Susan S. Lanser notes that the story is "a powerful critique of the 'rest cure' and of the patriarchal society that prescribed it." She also suggests that the protagonist's growing identification with the trapped woman in the wallpaper represents her growing awareness of her own trapped and oppressed state.

The story is seen as a criticism of the medical treatment of women during the 19th century and the societal expectation that women should be confined to domestic roles. Additionally, it serves as a commentary on the treatment of mental illness, as the narrator's condition is not taken seriously by her husband and is treated only as a minor ailment.

"I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try."

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator's journey into madness is depicted as a form of escape from the oppressive societal expectations and treatment imposed upon her.

The theme of becoming is prominent throughout the story. The story begins with the narrator being confined to a room with yellow wallpaper and being instructed to rest by her husband, a physician, as a cure for her postpartum depression.

As the story progresses, the narrator becomes increasingly fixated on the yellow wallpaper, which symbolizes her confinement and oppression. As she becomes more obsessed with the wallpaper, she begins to see a woman trapped behind it, representing her own feelings of confinement and oppression.

Throughout the story, the narrator transforms from a passive and submissive woman to a strong and independent one. She begins to actively rebel against her husband's treatment and societal expectations, and this rebellion is symbolized by her tearing down the wallpaper in the end, representing her breaking free from her confinement and oppression, and becoming her own person.

The theme of becoming is also evident in the narrator's journey of self-discovery and self-empowerment. As she becomes more aware of her own situation, she actively fights against it, and this process is represented by the motif of becoming.

Overall, the theme of personal transformation in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a powerful representation of the narrator's journey towards self-discovery, self-empowerment, and breaking free from societal expectations and oppression.

The theme of insanity is portrayed through the narrator's growing fixation with the wallpaper in her room. The wallpaper, which is described as having a "repellent" pattern, becomes a symbol of her confinement and oppression. As she becomes more absorbed by it, she begins to see a woman trapped behind the pattern, representing her own feelings of confinement and oppression.

The narrator's descent into madness is also portrayed through her diary writing, which becomes increasingly disjointed and delusional as the story progresses, reflecting her growing obsession with the wallpaper and her descent into madness.

The narrator's physical actions also reflect her growing insanity. She starts to creep around the room at night, peeking behind the furniture and tearing off strips of the wallpaper, these actions reflect her increasing delusion and loss of reality.

The narrator's descent into insanity is also portrayed as a form of escape from the oppressive societal expectations and confinement imposed upon her as a woman. Her madness is depicted as a means of breaking free from these societal expectations and confinement.

Sandra Gilbert writes that the story is "a powerful and at times almost unbearably intense study of one woman's descent into madness under the oppression of patriarchal authority and societal norms." She notes that the protagonist's "obsession with the wallpaper" serves as a metaphor for the "constraints and ennui of her 'proper' feminine role."

Overall, the theme of insanity in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is portrayed through the narrator's growing fixation with the wallpaper, her diary writing, her physical actions, and her descent into insanity being portrayed as a form of escape.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," freedom is a central theme that is portrayed through the narrator's journey toward self-discovery, self-empowerment, and breaking free from confinement and oppression. The narrator is confined to a room with yellow wallpaper and is not allowed to leave or engage in any stimulating activities by her husband, a physician, as a treatment for her postpartum depression.

Throughout the story, the narrator becomes increasingly fixated on the yellow wallpaper, which symbolizes her confinement and oppression. As she becomes more aware of her own situation, she also becomes more determined to break free from the confinement and oppression imposed on her. This is symbolized by her tearing down the wallpaper in the end, which represents her breaking free from her confinement and oppression, and becoming her own person.

The narrator's journey toward freedom is also portrayed through her transformation from a passive and submissive woman to a strong and independent one. She begins to actively resist her husband's treatment and societal expectations.

The narrator's journey toward freedom is also portrayed through her descent into madness. Her descent into madness is portrayed as a form of escape from the oppressive societal expectations and confinement imposed upon her as a woman. Her insanity is depicted as a means of breaking free from these societal expectations and confinement.

Conclusion

Overall, "The Yellow Wallpaper" portrays freedom as a central theme through the narrator's journey towards self-discovery, self-empowerment, breaking free from confinement and oppression, her transformation from a passive to a strong and independent woman, and her descent into madness as a form of escape from societal expectations and confinement.

Through this paper, it is clear that Gilman's story is a powerful critique of the societal constraints placed upon women in the late 19th century and the ways in which they can resist and overcome them.

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