

Research Article

Female predicament in the novel the yellow wallpaper

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(Received: September 29, 2021; Revised: April 01, 2022; Accepted: April 08, 2022; Published: May 19, 2022)

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ABSTRACT

The study deals with "Female Predicament in The Novel the Yellow Wallpaper". The Yellow Wallpaper is a semi-autobiographical short story by an American author Charlotte Perkins Gillman. The New England Magazine published the short story in 1892. After suffering a severe case of postpartum psychosis, she wrote this work. Through her work, Gillman reveals the way she was treated by her husband. According to some interpretations, the story is both a critique of patriarchal medicine and an opposition to the rest cure. Her idealistic feminist thinking served as a role model for future generation feminists. The major objective of feminist literature is to determine what kind of voice women have or do not have in a world dominated by men. The study aims to find the predicaments faced by the heroine in The Yellow Wallpaper. The fundamental motive of any work based on literature is to provoke unfathomable sensibilities and thoughts that the readers can associate with their own personal experience. The anonymity of the heroine helps the female reader to identify themselves with her. Charlotte Perkins Gilman reveals the oppression of women and the lack of freedom in The Yellow Wallpaper that highlights the patriarchal society's restriction on women's choices and desire. There are number of literary devices like simile, imagery, symbolism and dramatic irony used by Gilman to illustrate the idea of feminism and violated human rights. The heroine deals with discrimination and abandonment that leads to physical and mental collapse. As a result of inside and outside imprisonment, she became insane and herself identity was shattered.

Key words: Semi-autobiographical, Predicament, Postpartum Psychosis, Patriarchal Society, Anonymity, Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

"There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (Woolf 76). When men are oppressed it is a tragedy. When women are oppressed it is a tradition. Half of the world's population is made up of women but only man's struggle, accomplishment, and intellectual contribution have been recognized. Looking back through history, from ancient to modern times, it is apparent that the life of one-half of the human species has not been effectively portrayed. The term 'predicament' refers to an unpleasant and difficult situation that is hard to get out of. Female predicament means the unpleasant situation created by Men who have subjected women to enslavement to 'protect' them, but also to impose restrictions and exercise control over them. This research deals with the predicament faced by the narrator in the novella "The Yellow Wallpaper".

POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS

Charlotte Perkins Gillman suffers from postpartum psychosis after giving birth to her, Katherine Breecher in 1855. Postpartum psychosis is a group of twenty distinct mood disorders associated with childbirth, which can affect both sexes. Before the 19th-century, female depression was commonly diagnosed as hysteria and the 'rest cure' become one of the treatments. It is believed that it was based on the experiences of Gilman herself when she was going through the phase of postpartum psychosis. Gillman uses the form Journal

entry to narrate this semi-autobiographical of her real-life experience with psychosis and isolation.

The short story begins in the late 1800s and it is the journal entry of the unnamed narrator. She is a new mom and has been diagnosed with a nervous condition by the doctors. She has been prescribed a rest cure. So, she and her physician husband John moved to an isolated country estate for the summer. The treatment includes total elimination of all mind stimulating activities like reading, writing, and spending time with her baby. She has been assisted by two women for household duties and taking care of the baby. The narrator shares her confinement in the upper room through writing secretly. It was a former nursery with barred windows. The room has tattered yellow wallpaper with an intricate pattern that irritates the narrator. As time passes, her anxiety and depression increase and she is unable to do even the smallest tasks. She asks John whether they can leave the house, but he ignores it. The narrator is obsessed with the patterns of the wallpaper. She is more paranoid about the color and smell of the wallpaper. She thinks there's a woman trapped behind, trying to get out of the wallpaper. While hallucinating, the narrator feels better and energetic. She has an interest in the women behind the wallpaper. Sometimes she sees many women all creeping about behind the pattern. As summer approaches, the narrator feels that women should escape before leaving home. Initially, she peeled the paper a bit at a time. But at the climax of the story, she locks herself in the room and starts ripping off massive sections of the paper. She finishes this task and starts to identify herself with the woman

on the wallpaper. Her husband faints on seeing her condition. But she continued to creep along the floor around the room, following the streak on the wallpaper (Gilman, 1999)

TAINTED MATRIMONIAL RELATIONSHIP

The narrator begins the story suddenly by describing the colonial mansion which they have rented. She feels something odd about the house because the house has been untenanted for many years and is rented for a low price which created a haunting impression on it. When she shared her views with her husband John, he laughed at her. "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage". According to the narrator, marriage is not supposed to be the union of respect, but it is something that man always makes fun of woman's emotions. Then she describes her husband. John is extremely practical and is the epitome of reason, domination, and authority. He is a physician which makes him more authoritative especially over her condition. She thinks that if her husband was not a physician, he would have paid more attention to his wife's complaints and taken her seriously.

John is a physician, and perhaps - (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster.

Because of John's attitude of passing judgment on her, her relationship with him is corrupted. He considered her silly. So, she does not trust John as much as the dead paper. Writing a journal on this dead paper is the only comfort for her because it does not pass any judgment.

OPPRESSION OF PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

It is a kind of confessional story where the narrator pours her heart. This makes her relieved which her husband and the medical society cannot give her. Her brother is also a physician who also does not consider her emotion. She not only complains about her husband but her brother is also doing the same thing. She establishes binary by placing all practical men with their reason who denies all emotion which is feminine on one side and herself on the other side. The narrator is forbidden by her husband to reading, write, and all mind-stimulating activities. But she disagrees with his idea. She contrasts his practical rational manner with her imaginative sensitive ways. "I disagree with their ideas" but she can do nothing about it. She is even stopping to think about herself by her husband. She is denied to take control over her own life "I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad".

IRRITATING SURROUNDINGS

The mansion is a two-story building; her husband selected the upper story room for her bedroom. The room must have been a nursery since its wallpaper is torn off and has barred windows. The mansion is decorated in an orderly that is a traditional colonial mansion which gives an air of authority.

She is not happy about her husband's choice of bedroom for her. She prefers a downstairs that has nice decoration and windows facing the garden. However, her husband argues that the room is too small and not airy. The barred windows resemble a happy prison. Then she describes the wallpaper which makes the room ugly: "sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin...Lame uncertain curves... commits suicide". It is dull, irritating, irrational, whimsical and an object of surveillance. Her description of the wallpaper reflects the self-destructive mind of the narrator. She is constantly irritated by the wallpaper so she attempts to convince John to change the wallpaper but John advises her to adjust to the circumstance and not give away to emotional fancies. John will stay in hospitals when he has serious cases. On one hand, she is relieved that John is not at home on the other hand she has self-doubt that her concern is not serious. "And yet I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous". She is denied taking care of her child because she will get nervous.

REST CURE METHOD OF TREATMENT

In 1887, Charlotte Perkins Gilman suffers from depression and fatigue went to see noted physician Silas Weir Mitchell who prescribed the "rest cure" system. He is the father of medical neurology. His prescription for her disease is isolation, confinement, and the prohibition on mind stimulating activity. She sent him a copy of her short story but he did not respond. She learned later that he had changed his treatment of neurasthenia after reading the story.

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

She is deliberately taking the narrative away from herself and concentrating on the house. She is deliberately trying to be objective. "There is a recurrent spot... like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down". The wallpaper has certain cracks and the pattern looks as if it is looking at her. Women are subjected to surveillance and judgment from a patriarchal society. The wallpaper becomes the agent of the patriarchy. She is aware of being looked at.

UNHEIMLICH

Wallpaper that the narrator sees from childhood becomes uncanny and creepy. The unheimlich is the psychological experience of something as strangely familiar, rather than simply mysterious. It may describe incidents where a familiar thing or event is encountered in an unsettling, eerie, or taboo context. According to Sigmund Freud, the unheimlich locates the strangeness in the ordinary things. The wallpaper which is a familiar thing becomes more than a non-living thing. It becomes an active agent of horror for the narrator. Psychosis is the state where the brain tends to go to the inhabited part of childhood where it is not conditioned by society. The imagination is like a stream. In this state unheimlich is manifested. The wallpaper comes alive and starts to stare at her.

THE IDEA OF CONTROL

In this passage, John's sister Jennie is introduced to the journal. She focuses on household duties and believes that writing makes the narrator sick." She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession... she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!". The binary extension of John's sister is represented by her total submission to society's demands.

Realists, patriarchy, and authoritative figures don't always have to be male; they can even be female. As a woman, she can also foster patriarchy, conservative thinking, and limited thought. Jennie is adding more to the idea of control, which is controlling the narrator's life.

REASON V. EMOTION

The narrator feels like a prisoner of her marriage. She is confined and secured. The colonial mansion, the bed everything is an extension of her relationship with her husband. while lying down, she tries to understand the pattern on the wallpaper and understand the meaning of it as if understanding it would heal her." I don't know why I should write this. I don't want to. I don't feel able." She writes it in a sense of immediacy and urgency as if she were talking rather than writing it. Throughout the story, she writes in the present and past tense. Whenever she writes about what she is supposed to do, how things are supposed to be, and the general things society expects from a woman she writes in the past tense (Sit *et al.*, 2006). When she writes about what she is feeling she writes in the present tense. She overlaps past and presents tense with reason and emotion.

ELEMENTS OF FEMINISM

The narrator starts to imagine that a world is behind the wallpaper becomes visible with figures of women crawling on it. This creates a sense of uncanny and gothic ambiance. She saw a woman stooping and creeping behind the wallpaper. The woman behind the wallpaper is a kind of monstrous entity because she uses the word 'creeping' which is associated with animals and insects. The issues of feminism and agency are not voiced out by a single author but a group of consolidated women comes together to express their idea in whichever way they want. The movement of feminism gained shape by the authors like Mary shell, Christina Rossetti, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Virginia Woolf. By the narrator's description of the woman behind the wallpaper as a monster, she feels disgusted about anything that is outside normalcy. The normalcy is established by the agents of patriarchy which are not approved by her ego (Sharpe & Wessely, 1998).

THE PURPOSE FOR LIVING

She wants to escape from the room in the beginning. But as time goes by she becomes addicted to gazing back at the

woman behind the wallpaper. The wallpaper looks normal to her while John looks queer. By this mutual surveillance is established. Watching the woman makes her life exciting and gives purpose for her to live.

LAST MISSION

On the last day of staying in the house, the narrator has her plans. She wants to pull the wallpaper back because she feels that the woman behind the wallpaper wants to escape. So, she wants to help the woman. "before morning we had. peeled off yards of that paper". At first, the woman repulsed the narrator, but now she is her companion. They worked together against the wallpaper. She doubts that whether the room is used to confine women which John might have come to know about the house as a standard house for housing 'hysterical' patients. Our narrator is living the same experience which women before her might have had in this room. This is the first action the narrator is willing to take and she hopes to shock her husband.

MENTAL BREAKDOWN

Secretly the narrator got a rope to tie the woman as soon as she escapes. She wants to free the woman and bind the woman simultaneously. she is now able to see many women outside the window. "I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?" The narrator is unifying with the figure. She is assimilating herself with the imaginary woman. She is becoming the person she is about to set free and then to tie down. She is transforming into a monster she is scared of (Mostert, 2011). To resist reason and normalcy she becomes unheimlich herself. She locked herself and throw the key outside. When John returns home he lost control over the situation. The narrator is calm and poised and talking to her husband as a little child.

FREEDOM

John questions her about what she is doing. Women are always not allowed to do what she wants, like in the case of the right to vote, the normalcy society always questioned them what they were thinking and doing. John is behind her. She has gone past john. "I've got out at last," said I, "despite you and Jane... so you can't put me back! ". John is a jailor who confined her behind his patriarchal restrictions. She has broken free. John cannot put her back. Jane doe is the name given by the police to the unidentified, faceless dead body. The moment she mentions the names John and Jane, she talks about all the faceless agents of patriarchy that dominate women like her husband and his sister. The narrator is waging war against them all (Pfuhlmann *et al.*, 1999)

GENDER ROLE

John has fainted in shock. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Fainting is associated with women which makes them vulnerable and needs man's protection. The man of a high

standard is not supposed to faint. The gender role is subverted when John faints. The story started with a weak frail woman and a strong man making all statements but ends with the man had fainted. Every time she goes around the room creeping. She is confronting that man. She is not referring to the figure as her husband or John but as a man. As a kind of generalized statement. Every time a woman wants to break free and assert herself she has to confront a man.

CONCLUSION

The women's voice when suppressed eventually finds utterance which is not always in tune with the codes of normalcy established by the world of men. The narrator is unreliable because tense swings between past to present and characters are fusing into one another. She questions the ideas of madness and ideas of monstrosity. This is the text the subverted agent's voice out. Tragedy and isolation go hand in hand. Here the narrator was in isolation but she has no choice. Without choice, there is no error of judgment. So, when she can act, only she becomes a tragic figure. Gilman stated that she wrote the story not intended to drive people crazy but

save people from being driven crazy and it worked. The ideal situation is not where everything is in order. But it is where you have the freedom to question order.

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