
The Theme of Misogyny in The Yellow Wallpaper and a Jury of Her Peers

The term 'misogyny suggests contempt, dislike, and discrimination against women. It stems from the fact that the two sexes have not actually been equal in their rights for a very lengthy period of time, though it was somewhat resolved in the twentieth century. Unjust treatment of women and their confinement to gender roles previously assigned by the society have naturally sowed the seeds of discontent among them and many a woman actually tried to combat that in various ways, writing being one of them. This essay will deal with two short stories in particular, written by two female writers and the overarching themes of not only misogyny, but discrimination in itself, as well as means with which women countered them, (or rather, dealt with them) and the impact it had on them. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the writer of the short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' to this day remains a renowned feminist writer, her work ranging from short stories and novels to poetry.

The basis of her writing and worldview likely lies in her rough childhood – her father left when she was a small child, and her mother's increasingly bad financial status led to them largely depending on relatives, which was how Perkins Gilman got to know her father's aunts - educated women who were also known to write. Her interest in literature was what eventually inspired her to become a writer herself. Perkins Gilman was also in no small influenced by Kate Chopin, writer of the highly acclaimed 'Desiree's Baby'. Later on, Perkins Gilman got married and gave birth, though it led to a severe case of depression – this was what actually drove her to write the short story entitled 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Sensibly considered an autobiographical story (or semi-autobiographical, rather), 'The Yellow Paper' still remains a relevant and largely important piece of feminist literature, and Perkins experience allowed her to truthfully convey the ordeal she went through. It should be noted that the story being narrated in first person also strongly alludes to the autobiographical elements present within it. The narrator of the story remains unnamed through it, meaning that she possibly represents all women, therefore sending a message. Also suffering from post-partum depression, just like Perkins herself did, the female narrator of the story is made by her husband to undergo a rest cure – a known treatment for mental illnesses that was actually commonly practiced. The procedure involves confining the 'afflicted' to a room, and the narrator is unable to see her newborn, further fueling her negative thoughts. The theme of misogyny or mistreatment in general is present in her husband John who doesn't validate her opinions regarding the situation, constantly trying to reassure her.

Though he is intent on helping to cure his wife, John stubbornly dismisses her concerns, but she places her full trust in him, his capabilities and knowledge as a physician. Despite the not-so-evident discrimination against his wife, she still admires and almost idolizes John, appearing all but brainwashed. The quotes „He is so careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction 'and' John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition." Essentially imply the husband taking away (or controlling, rather) the narrator's free will. The room the narrator is placed in, albeit spacious, could well stand for a jail cell, and it being a former nursery alludes to her having a child's treatment. The symbolism of the yellow color of its wallpaper has more than one possible interpretation: yellow stands for hope, hope for recovery, creativity (the author's creativity), but on the other end it represents madness

which the main character is slowly but steadily descending into. Other than that, the wallpaper itself contains the imaginary woman that keeps appearing to her: she is shackled and oppressed, wanting badly to break free. One immediately starts drawing parallels between the mysterious woman and the narrator, and later it is actually established that they are one and the same – the former subconsciously struggling to break away from the way of life she didn't choose (even though she accepts it), from the way her husband contains her self-growth. That being said, the wallpaper itself might actually stand for all the ties that bind her, the same ties that inevitably lead to her insanity.

The release of the woman behind the wallpaper actually symbolizes the narrator's release from the restraints her life (and her husband) had put on her. Continuously leading such a life where one has very little to no influence on the choices they make inevitably leads to them losing their sanity. The quote 'I've got out at last in spite of you and I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!' further suggests that the imaginary woman behind the wallpaper in fact was her consciousness, or what had become of it due to the toll isolation have inflicted on her mind, not to mention keeping her creativity down. Susan Glaspell, another iconic feminist writer in American literature and a known playwright, author of the short story 'A Jury of Her Peers' wrote about themes akin to those that Perkins Gilman's work is known for. Said short story, however, is actually completely based on 'Trifles', a play that she wrote; it is, in a way, an adaptation of the play to fit the form of a short story. Just like Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'A Jury of Her Peers' deals with the issues of mistreatment of women, discrimination, assigned gender roles and the effect isolation (both physical and emotional) has on one's mind.