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Symbolism in the Yellow Wall-Paper by Charlotte Gilman

The society was not what it is today in the 19th century. Women were controlled and repressed by their husbands and the male-dominated society (Beer 99). In Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" main character is a representation of how women were restricted in the society. This effect has been made through the use of symbols such as the wallpaper, the window and the house which enhance her self-expression and oppression. In the Yellow Wallpaper, Charlotte Gilman uses symbols to represent different concepts and themes such as restrictions on women, inequality between the genders and minimal public interaction.

According to Beer (98), the most open symbol in the story is the yellow wallpaper. Essentially, it represents the mindset of the woman in that time. Besides, it is a representation of the way in which women were treated in the 19th century. The wall paper cannot be categorized in any particular part. It contains curves which contradict each other, angles, and patterns. The same could be said of the emotions of the narrator. Furthermore, the nursery is a representation of how women were treated or seen as children. Moreover, the yellow wallpaper acts as a trap to the main character (Golden 97). She is blocked into the small room by the paper.

A house should be a place where a woman feels secure and can transform and express herself freely. However, the woman in the story is in a house that is not hers, and she is not willing to be there. She says that "there is something queer about it" (Gilman 496) and that the house is "haunted." Although she knows and recognizes that the house is beautiful

especially its surroundings, she is still convinced that "there is something strange about the house" (Gilman 498). The impression that she gives is like a premonition for the changes that take place within her while at the house. In this manner, the house still acts like a cocoon for the changes that she undergoes. Instead of being a traditional place where the woman is free to perform her domestic duties, it enhances her metamorphosis. Besides, the house facilitates her thoughts, her writing, accommodates and releases her.

The wallpaper is a representation of the restrictions that women experienced in the 19th century (Ruth 186). In that period, women were restricted from intellectual work and required to depend on males while maintaining decent behavior towards men. This is oppression and helplessness. Besides, the title wallpaper may represent the complicated and the confusing way in which the narrator appears. It is a symbol of women feeling lost in a society where that has a definite hierarchy and oppression.

The symbolism in the book could also be viewed in terms of actions of the characters. For instance, the narrator tears down the wallpaper to find the woman inside the wallpaper (Ruth 188). This represents the narrator trying to regain her lost self. The wallpaper was a part of the confinement that blocked her, and by tearing it down, she was loosening herself from it. The writing on the book and the book itself are also symbols (Gale 127). They represent the narrator's attempt to have a normal life during the time that she was locked in the room. Although the husband stressed that she should not write the entire time, she continues to secretly write to maintain her sanity.

Finally, the interpretation of the wallpaper according to what Susan Lanser describes can be considered. She created the story in an ideological and political context of nativism and racial anxiety. Her thesis made the paper appear like the Yellow peril, and it triggered questions about its common perception. The color used in the story represents uncleanness, inferiority, and dirt and this signifies the concept of racial inferiority. In the 19th century,

several immigrants were moving to the West. This was a threat as it was thought the immigrants would take up jobs belonging to the citizens and create a change of lifestyle (Tischleder 116). Consequently, the Americans were hostile and unfriendly to those who represented the yellow race. In this case, the tearing down of the wallpaper may symbol removing the immigrants from the country. It may also express their hostility against the yellow race. There is a symbol of racial uniformity "She belonged for a time to eugenics and nationalist organizations; opposed open immigration; and inscribed racism, nationalism, and classism into her proposal for social change" (Gale 127). In conclusion, that the narrator wanted to escape into the world where there were not dirty yellow wallpaper implying the yellow race.

The complex symbols used by Gilman informs on how women were oppressed in the 19th century. It may be the representation of the state of mind of the narrator, the oppression by the society against women or a racial discrimination metaphor. In conclusion, through the use of different symbols to convey different meanings, Gilman successfully explained the oppression of women in the society.

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