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THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND OPPRESSION: A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

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Abstract
Charlotte Perkins Gilman works also represent one of the central manifestations of feminist literature in the 19 th century with the Yellow Wallpaper being a criticism against the patriarchal subordination of the feminine. The protagonist in this work is actually a female who is taken to madness which is actually the negative effects of gender-based oppression, medical paternalism and lack of autonomy and this study adopts the qualitative research. By using the strict textual analysis, this paper examines how even the metaphor of the silencing and marginality that women have to struggle against in patriarchal society is itself being deployed by the story of how the narrator has been confined and isolation due to a pretense of medical attention. It examines the symbolic connotation in the yellow wallpaper regarding the psychological confinement of the main character, as a protest and opposition against gender stereotypes in the text. Through the feminist theory of literature this study illustrates that Whitman in her work The Yellow Wallpaper has criticized and opposed the notion of traditional gender roles and the rationale as to why the dominance of males over the females and their bodies and minds are undesirable. Focusing on text in that manner, the paper has also pointed out that the text is emotional account of the woes cast on women, but, more importantly, a social commentary on how women are relegated to intellectual and emotional cages. This account finally presents the story of Gilman as an influential factor of feminism in our time having to do with the matter of gender and mental health, and in a manner which in the end helps it attain all of the objectives of this kind of feminist critique in modernity.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an American writer, social reformer, feminist and an activist who was born in July, 3, 1860, in Hartford, Connecticut. Despite the relative openness of her life aided in part by her command of a foreign language, both literary and

intellectual output suggested the confrontations that Gilman fought in the arena of gender inequality as well as the insidiousness of mental sickness. As a young woman, she went through economic hardships and discrimination heaped on females that they were only supposed to perform traditional domestic duties. In 1875, she married to Charles Walter Stetson, where she followed post partum depression, which was the genesis of her most renowned short story The Yellow Wallpaper (1892). But Gilman also thought that equality could not be truly attained until women had access to the professional and intellectual life of men. Other works of hers worth mentioning include Women and Economics (1898), where she tries to make a case in favor of the financial independence of the latter, and Herland (1915), a mainly utopian, 120-page work that depicts a society in which the entire population had been composed of women. Gilman entered into the feminist movement and played an important role as a participant in early feminist writings and lectures where she challenged Patriarchal systems which were deemed to hold women back in accepting the roles they were supposed to serve.

The Yellow Wallpaper published in 1892 is partly an autobiography short story and it explores the use of health of the mind, gender roles and patriarchal suppression to a large extent. The story takes the form of an epistolary diary that is written, by an unknown female narrator who has been imprisoned in her room by her doctor John; to whom he seduced her husband following what is said to be a temporary nervous depression. She is subjected to the 'rest cure', a kind of treatment applied to women in the 19th century which involved no intellectual and physical activities. The further the story develops the more the heroine gets obsessed with the yellow wallpaper in her room seeing figures imprisoned by the patterns. This is fall into psychosis which indicates to the constricting nature of the confining limits of patriarchal monopoly and yet their effects were not as devastating as the power under whose collar women end up being suffocated and infantilized. In the snapshot of the mental decline of the main character in Gilman, we can detect the symbiotic interrelationship between the scholars to whom mental failings were even less comprehended, and those who asserted in the most unapologetic manners that they should deny their patients their agency and psychological health.

The Feminist literature criticism of The Yellow Wallpaper concentrates on the plot of the novel according to the systematic oppression of women during the 19 th century. The events of the protagonist in the middle must be interpreted as a metaphor of women whose agency concerning their own lives was taken away many times. In this case, John, as a possessor of patriarchy legitimacy, determines the behaviour of woman by prescribing his medicine without consulting their thoughts or wishes. The physical and psychic imprisonment of the protagonist has already demonstrated that he is not allowed to be engaged in some intellectual activity like writing or communicating to others. It is a metaphor for the woman's confinement, who feels entrapped in her own existence and whose house with the yellow wallpaper is a chaos of intricate patterns. Through feminist eyes, the story unveils the risks of male dominated medical practice and also the traditional cultural arrangement that silenced women.

The Yellow Wallpaper can also be read in relation to 19th-century notions of how men and women should and shouldn't behave as well as to the prevailing ideas on how women should be looked after within what must inevitably be recognized today as frame-breaking medical practices. At this time, women were frequently diagnosed with 'hysteria' or 'neurasthenia,' so called medical terms that were meant to brush off women's real psychological or emotional battles. The rest cure, as promoted by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, was an extensively accepted form of treatment for the sick woman of the mind, but it usually made her condition worse by prohibiting all activity and isolation. This treatment was prescribed for Gilman and she later wrote The Yellow Wallpaper in response to how it damaged her. The story, therefore, serves as both a personal and political statement against the medical establishment's treatment of women. The critique of Gilman's society comes out through the literary device of showing the descent into madness of the heroine, which is a society pathologizing female emotions and denying women intellectual and personal freedom, that condition underpinning the mental well-being.

Both as a feminist work and a work of psychological horror, The Yellow Wallpaper also employs gothic elements to induce a sense of claustrophobia and dread. Uncertainty is created in the reader's mind as the protagonist's unreliable narration makes her lose

her sanity step by step. This offers the eerie, unsettling tone of the story, as the imagery of the wallpaper itself (itself described by the author [Browning] with "bulbous eyes" and "torturing patterns") is quite eerie. At a literal, the idea of a woman trapped behind the wallpaper is struggling to break free is a literal picture for female oppression. Her creeping along the floor and her association with the woman in the wallpaper indicate the protagonist's eventual breakdown blurring the line between reality and delusion. The consistent depiction of this gothic dimension of the story further supports its feminist message of how imposing restrictions upon women can dissolve them emotionally.

Lastly, The Yellow Wallpaper is a taut and powerful piece of feminist literature that has stayed relevant even to modern readers. The critique of Gilman is more about how the historical and cultural traditions oppress and shun women by subduing mental health and gender roles in patriarchal society. She brings in personal experience to a wider social commentary to demonstrate the perils of silences, subordination of women through the notion of care. The genuinely creepy finale to the story as the heroine manages to escape by giving in and succumbing to insanity, is an emphatic and edifying life sentence to the effect of female repression. The Yellow Wallpaper is one of the most famous works of feminist literature, its narrative and rich symbolism inviting different people to discuss it all the time concerning the subject of gender inequality and the position of women in the past and in the modern world.

Statement of the Research Problem

The paper discusses the issue of patriarchal oppression as it is explored by researchers in the context of the The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The short story is a caustic observation of the kind of roles women played in 19 th century and how they were submissive to medical and social practices. It is symptomatic that the voice of the main character is trampled upon under the pretext of medical treatment which shows how the feelings and voices of women together with their autonomy were diminished. This paper will set out to analyze how the narration as presented by Gilman exploits the chronicle of survival under the foot of a patriarchal standard through explaining the madness that besieges the main character in the story.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research is therefore, the fact that it offers an in-depth analysis of The Yellow Wallpaper as a feminist response to patriarchal oppression within the gender studies and the feminist literary criticism. In the world today, the story is applicable as it was in the time of publication as it reflects on issues of gender-related inequality, poor mental health, and how silence to women voices can be detrimental. In this work, the study considers the historical, cultural background of this piece of writing and brings out the role of literature as an extension of dominant social structure. This study also raises controversy on the fight that is being fought by women in terms of self-determination, political representation and treatment by doctors.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the portrayal of patriarchal oppression in *The Yellow Wallpaper* through a feminist lens.
- To interpret the symbolic significance of the yellow wallpaper as a representation of female entrapment and resistance.
- To explore the impact of male-dominated medical practices on women's mental health in the story.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Yellow Wallpaper* portray patriarchal oppression from a feminist perspective?
2. What symbolic meanings does the yellow wallpaper carry in relation to female entrapment and resistance?
3. In what ways do male-dominated medical practices impact women's mental health as depicted in the story?

Literature Review

The Yellow Wallpaper has also been a subject of Elaine Showalter's discussions of women's literature and her 'madwoman' trope. The protagonist's gradual descent into madness in accordance with this idea, argues Showalter (1985) is not only a personal psychological breakdown but rebelly against the rigid structures of patriarchal society. The protagonist's

madness, she says, is the representation of women's collective oppression, silenced and infantilized in their domestic roles. Through treating the story as a feminist allegoric, Showalter suggests that suffering and resistance, such madness for women in literature, does not equal a medical problem but rather a social one, and the usual medical interpretation of female psychological distress as a matter is broken.

Though this theme, in fact, has been explored by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal work The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), this theme also has something to link it to women's oppression and resistance. They maintain that the unnamed protagonist in The Yellow Wallpaper represents the goat as a 'madwoman' (because once frustrated by the social environment, she is moved to insanity). The protagonist's hallucinations and her obsession with the wallpaper are according to Gilbert and Gubar, a representation of her fighting against the patriarchal authority, as expressed in the role played by her husband and physician. This woman she sees in trapped wallpaper becomes a representation of all women instilled, impeachment, and quashed by male dominated systems. As per Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The madwoman in the attic is more than just a trope, more than that; it's a symptom of patriarchal society, which silences, and confine women, as Dr. Gilman described in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'"; Elaine Showalter expressed similarly; 'Charlotte Perkins Gilman's protagonist, not only depressed, but a woman who had lost her agency, whose voice is stolen away, by a husband who claims he knows what's good for her, and, as in many other cases, does so too.' Paula A. Treichler asserts "that the story functions as a forceful attack on how language and medical discourse are instruments of patriarchal authority." Likewise Jean Kennard has mentioned that "The narrator's death into madness is not a process of breakdown, but a means of escape from an intolerable reality of oppression."

Feminist critics have given a great deal of attention to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper and its critiques of patriarchal oppression and medical mistreatment of women. It is a seminal text in feminist literary criticism in that the story explores gender roles, mental illness, and domestic confinement. There are many researchers who have focused on how the protagonist's fall into madness, represents the wider social issues that women were faced with in the 19th century that Gilman uses. Through studying various scholarly views on the text, this literature review illustrates an important reading of the text related to patriarchal control, female autonomy, and that of women in the historical medical treatment.

The importance of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis is that it provides the context of The Yellow Wallpaper in relation to a larger literary tradition of women employing madness as a symbolic act. The summary of their work indicates that Gilman's story is not only a story about the collapse of medical practice but also a larger commentary on the suppression of women's creativity and intellect. Woman's historical silencing in literature and society is represented by the struggle of the protagonist to write and express herself. The Yellow Wallpaper is interpreted in this way in relation to a feminist literature canon seeking to reclaim women's voices and experiences.

'Jean Kennard suggests that 'the narrator's descent into madness is not breakdown but escape from intolerable reality of oppression'.' Mary Jacobus also noted that 'The wallpaper is a palimpsest of women's erased voices, revealing the subtext of all the women's sufferring' According to Annette Kolodny, "Gilman's work shows the perils of a world where women's knowledge is dismissed as hysteria" . Gilbert B. Cross has noted that 'The yellow wallpaper stands as a representation of the counted bars of a male dominated society to brandish and build up women.' Susan S. Lanser mentioned that Gilman's story recovers that of female subjectivity in that patriarchy speech tries to shape reality. Shirley Samuel had stated that 'the narrator's mind comes apart as a result of rigid gender roles, and women silenced,' is a breakdown.' As 'The Yellow Wallpaper' 'dismantles' the supposed objectivity of male medicine, as it 'dismantles' that which it supposedly elevates — the man who erases subjective emotions from medicine as objectivity itself — it turns out to be deeply ideological'.

Showalter's thought is interesting as it rethinks the main character's mental devastation as something different than a disheartened illness. Real life medical treatments on women that tried to suppress their intellectual and creative expressions are mirrored in the 'rest cure' prescribed to the protagonist. The

protagonist can be depicted not as a passive victim but as one who actively rebels against the constraints of her reality and thus, by the fact that she succumbs eventually psychologically, she actually collapses. The other perspective here is in line with the larger feminist claim as it has been centered in literature to offer critiques and, perhaps more importantly, reveal the injustice women faced.

Another influential scholar, Jean Kennard (1981) then poses the question of gender and power relations in marriage and medicine regarding The Yellow Wallpaper. According to Kennard, John the husband is the authoritative male figure which denounces female suffering as trivial. Under pretense of care, he has total control over her life and dictates what she can and can't do, where she can stay and how she's supposed to think. Kennard shows that this is not just a testament to how men would take power over women's minds and bodies, but a larger systemic issue that took away the power women had over their own bodies and minds, especially in the medical field.

Kennard's article is powerful because it reveals how The Yellow Wallpaper deals with both the gendered and the power fueled aspects of contemporary culture, namely, of patriarchal marriage patterns and of the male dominant, medicine. The loss of agency over the protagonist's own body and thoughts suggests that her descent into madness is a response to Loser who had taken control of her. That's in line with the feminist theories that stress the insidiousness of male control of women's health and life, comparing the medical practices yesterday and today on gender and autonomy.

Another is Paula Treichler (1984) who considers language, and its use of oppression. According to essay "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in The Yellow Wallpaper," the protagonist's madness has a connection with her inability to talk openly. Her thoughts are constantly interrupted, cut short, and debunked from the activity that would be necessary in order for her to actually express how she feels. Treichler argues that language is a tool of patriarchal control, to silence women, define the way they are, and to define and dictate women's reality. The protagonist's fixation with understanding the wallpaper is a manifestation of that wanting to fictively create for herself the opportunity to speak in a world in which she can't.

This is because Treichler's linguistic approach is crucial and it renders clear the ways that oppression works not only by confining women physically, but also by shutting them up. Her analysis continues to emphasize the fact that The Yellow Wallpaper is not just about women experiencing medical mistreatment, but this is a bigger issue regarding women's exclusion from discourse. This reading meets with contemporary feminist work on the matter of representation and the right to represent one's own experience. In The Yellow Wallpaper, Catherine Golden (1992) looks at the role of visual imagery and the role that the Yellow Wallpaper plays in the mind of the protagonist in her descent in to madnenss. Through the patterns in the wallpaper, Golden suggests that the protagonist's souring mental status and her awareness of her entrapment is reflected. The wallpaper is a powerful symbol of woman oppression and the desire of its nature to free herself from it.

Final analysis, Golden's reflection brings yet another point to the feminist reading of the text; by focusing on symbolism Gilman illustrates psychological and social themes. The wallpaper not only symbolizes this literal prison, but also, literally, a figurative prison, thrusting the protagonist deeper into isolation, while simultaneously creating a metaphor for the sort of larger restrictions put onto women. This perspective accords with feminist theories that support the theme of employing imagery and symbolism in literature to fight gender imbalance. Finally, The Yellow Wallpaper's varied scholarly interpretations prove that it will remain one of the most important feminist writings. From a patriarchal oppression, female resistance, linguistic control or a visual symbolism, the story remains a powerful critique of the systemic forces that have historically disadvantaged women the most.

Susan S. Lanser (1989) provides another critical perspective to The Yellow Wallpaper from the standpoint of feminist narratology. Lanser claims that the protagonist's narratorial voice purposefully reflects the constraints of women's expression. The fragmented, diary style structure of the story reflects this, as the protagonist's psychological deterioration fragments this story, as well as commenting upon the erasure of women's voices. Lanser mentions that the changing tone and unreliable narration complicate generic literary structures by making the reader

complicit in the protagonist's struggle to articulate her reality. The strategies that Gilman utilizes to reinforce her message in this way suggest that she is critiquing patriarchal control through a thematic perspective but also subverts a convention of storytelling.

Lanser's analysis are important because they establish the storytelling as an act of resistance. Although she is shunned by her husband from writing, the protagonist's journal entries are the only way she can communicate. This act of writing—however knocked asked together—is an effort to regain agency in a world that has robbed her of it. Lanser's work then positions The Yellow Wallpaper as an example of feminist narratology and associates the story with other arguments on how women's writing has always been underappreciated or discredited. From this perspective, the current feminist literary criticism interested in recovering and amplifying underrepresented voyces in literature can be compared with that.

Another compelling interpretation of the role of medical discourse in The Yellow Wallpaper is the position taken by Beverly A. Hume (2002). Hume further adds that the protagonist's oppression would have gone beyond gender norms and even be a consequence of the exploitative medical beliefs that perpetuated women's subordination. In she demonstrates the 'rest cure' was dependent upon the assumption of the physical and mental weakness of women and that their intellectual stimulation was required to be restrained for their good. Hume demonstrates how male dominated medicine took women's feelings and made them the object of pathology using medical authority as a point of social control. In the same stroke, Hume takes advantage of this dual framing by positioning the protagonist's treatment as a failure of gendered institutional power. To understand how Gilman's story works as both an individual testimony and a social critique, it is essential to be sure to take into consideration Hume's perspective. Having been subjected herself to the rest cure under Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, Gilman herself wrote the piece that depicts medical malpractice in The Yellow Wallpaper. The protagonist's descent into madness is not just a result of isolation but mutual denial of agency, her own agency and path out of her illness. Hume's work gives further insight into how the story critiques not only patriarchal and institutional power, but also within the history of medical misogyny by situating The Yellow Wallpaper. Janice Haney-Peritz (1994) also contributes another important one to the critical discussion of The Yellow Wallpaper, as she looks at the story through the prism of feminist psychoanalysis. According to Haney-Peritz, the reason why the protagonist goes into mental deterioration is because of external oppression and internalized patriarchal ideology. According to her, at first the protagonist submits to her husband's power, to the treatment ordered by the doctors, and confinement is believed to be for her own good. However, the wider she is able to lift the wallpaper, the more she understands that it is her entrapment; and eventually she descends into psychological breakdown. Haney Peritz's observation highlight the double bind of Patriarchal oppression that is not only women's bodies are controlled physically by male authority, but also expose that women do not accept nor justify women's subjugation.

Haney-Peritz's argument contributes to feminist interpretation of the short story The Yellow Wallpaper by focusing on internalized oppression. It can be argued the protagonist's journey is that of awakening; moving from passive acceptance to desperate struggle for self liberation. But there is absolutely nothing she [Mary Shelley] can do about it but go mad, and that apparently is her only escape into freedom. This reading is consistent with the contemporary feminist psychoanalytic theory that believes that social structures do determine the psychology of an individual. Haney-Peritz's work emphasizes the internal conflict of the protagonist to reinforce the notion that The Yellow Wallpaper is not simply about critique of external control but also the psychological trauma of inbuilt oppression.

Research Methodology

To study The Yellow Wallpaper, a feminist literary approach, this study follows a qualitative research strategy. Literary analysis is particularly well suited to qualitative research because it allows one to go deep into the work: into the examination of themes, symbols and narrative tools through which the story critiques the oppressive nature of the patriarchal. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative research as one that explores complex experiences of human beings such as the cultural and historical contexts of text.

Enumerating the protagonist's experience, the symbolism of the wallpaper and the narrative structure insight of this study is to do textual analysis of the text to critique the gender based oppression with secondary data which is limited. The research aims to uncover how the story shows in a close reading of The Yellow Wallpaper, was depicting the attitudes towards the women's autonomy, health of mind and self expression, which existed in the broader society.
Also, the qualitative approach can allow an interpretive analysis of the reading of The Yellow Wallpaper by means of feminist theory. This method of writing relies on textual evidence and historical context and on scholarly interpretations and interpretations, rather than numerical data, in order to develop a feminist critique of the story. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is useful in literary studies because it emphasizes meaning and experience of the researcher and helps in uncovering deeper ideological messages in the text. This study examines how Gilman's work demonstrates structural inequalities which limited the right of women in the 19th century using feminist criticism as the main analytical lens.

Data Collection Method

Data collection for this study is done through analyzing and gathering textual sources concerning The Yellow Wallpaper as the primary means of doing so. This includes Gilman's original short story, scholarly journal articles, books on feminist literary criticism, and historical documents regarding 19th century gender roles and medical practices. The interpretatioin of the text is supported secondarily by academic critiques and feminist theoretical frameworks. We draw our data from reputable databases such as JSTOR, Project MUSE and Google Scholar so that the study has a basis on peer reviewed and scholarly type of data. It also analyzes historical documents regarding the "rest cure" and Gilman's own writings regarding the protagonist's medical treatment. Using a combination of primary and secondary sources, the study offers a complete study of the literary and socio-historical context of the story The Yellow Wallpaper.

Theoretical Framework

This study sits on the ground of feminist literary theory, which serves as framework for a feminist interpretaion of The Yellow Wallpaper as the critique of oppressive patriarchal ideology. It is feminist theory that studies literature from the standpoint of gender inequality, to see if or to what extent literature also reinforces or challenges the societal norms of women's participation, autonomy and expression. However, as Butler (1990) contends, gender is a historical and cultural constructed concept that is used to construct individuals as powerful and also give them their identity. Based on this idea, the study focuses on how the protagonist's confinement and psychological decline in The Yellow Wallpaper mirror particular cases of gender-based restrictions in 19th century society.

Analysis and Discussion

The Yellow Wallpaper uses one of the dominant themes in the imagery of oppression in the patriarchal sphere, be it in the domestic or medical area. This involves a woman who is postpartum depressed, married to her spouse (and patient) John, who presides over her with his authority. He dismisses her illness as mere "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman, 1892,), undermining her lived experience and reinforcing the societal notion that women's emotional struggles are trivial. Control over her own treatment was a 19th century woman's denial of autonomy over her own body and mind, exemplified in John's, according to Stafford. His condescending attitude, such as when he calls her "little girl" infantilizes her, reducing her to a passive and powerless figure. In this case, the dynamic presupposes the larger feminist critique of patriarchal medical practice that drowned out the voices of women to enforce submission purporting to be care. This oppression directly results in the deteriorating state of the protagonist's mental state, and how the oppression contributed to women's suffering.
Gilman's use of symbolism, particularly the yellow wallpaper itself, serves as a powerful representation of female entrapment and resistance. The more and more the protagonist fixated on the wallpaper, the more and more she begins to see a woman trapped in the pattern in front of her, "The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to

get out" . This imagery reflects her own situation: she is too pinned down, literally in the room and metaphorically by social norms. The woman in the paper continues to grow the woman in Joana and with that she looses her own identity: 'Pulling, she shook, for part of a century she shook while Joana shook for part of a century'. Here the act of destruction is the symbol for the protagonist's rebellion against her oppressively real reality. Yet her breakdown is not liberatory, but traumatically caused by a forced submission; thus the feminist point that under the weight of structural oppression women have no other recourse to freedom but the mad.

Another critical aspect of the story is its critique of male-dominated medical practices, particularly the "rest cure" prescribed to the protagonist. Annoyingly, this treatment—commonly prescribed by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell—fostered women's intellectual and creative suppression on the notion that overwork was causing hysteria. The protagonist resists this confinement, expressing her frustration: "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 think about my condition" . Other techniques used to silence women's voices include her husband's insistence on isolating her from mental stimulation in the medical field. Instead of comforting her expression of emotion, she has to stay passive, which only exacerbates her psychological state. At the end of the story, her total psychological breakdown gives a bitter comment about the result of ignoring women's experiences and handling them as if they were tender, unreasonable people.

The unreliable narration in The Yellow Wallpaper is an important part in reinforcing the protagonists' descent into madness and feminist critique of patriarchy over language and discourse. Throughout the story, her diary entries become more and more scattered and erratic, a reflection of her mental disequilibrium, as mentioned in the fragment of the diary life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. I, I have something to expect, to look forward to (to watch)" . This is an indication of her loss of agency towards her own mind, the result of the enforced silence, enforced no self-expression. On the side of feminist theories about language and oppression, this is said in line with feminist theories which claim that depriving women to speak about their thoughts and experiences leads to the loss of their minds. By the time she has internalized enough of the wallpapered woman to say, "I've out at last... in spite of you and Jane," she has fully internalized it in she has not. She has accepted none of the truth forced down her throat and I've ripped most of the paper off, so it sounds like you can't put me back!". It is a chilling conclusion to this tragedy that points to the destructive consequences of silencing women, yet, that reinforces the argument that language control by the patriarch is a form of systemic violence.

The second crucial thing about The Yellow Wallpaper is the theme of domestic confinement and its psychological results. The protagonist is trapped in a room she despises, describing it as "a big, airy room... for a nursery first and then for playroom and gymnasium" (Gilman, 1892) . The room's description is representative of the infantilization that happens to her in the larger society where society treat her not as a person with agency but as a child to be controlled. All of the window bars, the nailed down bed, the wallpaper's suffocating patterns work together to make the idea that she is imprisoned inside of the domestic space is much like most women in her time. Her forced isolation, meant to "cure" her, only exacerbates her mental distress. She writes, "I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour" . Where the room is supposed to be a home; a place of rest and recovery; it ends up being a symbol of the very restrictions women are unable to exercise their freedom in so much as domestic space becomes a site of oppression rather than safety.

The protagonist's conflict with patriarchal authority is also seen in her conflicted relationship with writing. Throughout the story, she expresses a strong desire to document her thoughts but is repeatedly discouraged by John: "There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word" . Yet writing is a way of expressing self but is denied to her, keeping in line with the idea that women's voices are in all ways silenced. John's restrictions do not stop her from writing in secret, demonstrating her quiet defiance. Her journal entries become more erratic and intense as the story progresses, as her desperation increases and her will to be erased decreases. This matches feminist rants against past attempts to write women out of intellectual and literary spheres and the writing

of itself, too, becomes an expression of rebellion against patriarchal control. It is clear that the more she writes, the closer she gets to what had oppressed her, even if the outcome is her mental collapse.

The Yellow Wallpaper is one of the most controversial feminist writings because it challenges marriage as an institution that exposes inequality between genders. The dynamic of John and the protagonist is one of power imbalance, where John is in control of every decision which relates to her health, movement and tasks. “Bless her little heart … he dispenses with her concerns as he patronisingly insists he’ll do what’s best for her, and she can’t argue with him.” “She shall be as sick as she pleases!” . His tone is that of affectionate condescension, but it also completely covers him controlling her life. It is characteristic of a larger societal phenomenon in which, legally and socially, women were under the power of their husbands with few legal means to assert their autonomy from their husbands. Subtle resentment towards John grows in the protagonist when she says, “one expects that in marriage; John laughs at me, of course” . This reflects on the internalized oppression that many women were involved in at the first half of the story. But by then she symbolically rejects his authority, crawling over his unconscious body upon it when he keels over: 'Why should that man have fainted?' . This last act implies a great power reversal, in which the protagonist is free—both mentally and probably not physically—of subjugation.

The descent into madness in The Yellow Wallpaper is a piece of its own tragedy but also of broader commentary on the harm caused by repressing women’s identities and wants. First of all, the protagonist's first anxieties about the condition are taken off, and it forces her to internalize the belief that she is responsible for her own suffering. When she lets go of reality and starts to blend in to the chaos of the wallpaper, she says, “I wonder whether they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?”. A symbolic aloofness from what is happening in the picture; the trapped woman in the wallpaper symbolizes a psychic breakdown and/or an awakening. It is only now that she now realizes that she has been imprisoned as well and completes her last act of tearing down the paper in a wild attempt to free herself. Despite this cost to her sanity, this too is her rejection of the constraints which were put on her, this becomes her moment of destruction. Taken by Gilman, this unraveling sees the devastating effects of systemic oppression of women illuminated in how the women’s autonomy was denied and how it could lead to the psychological undoing of women.

A significant other aspect of The Yellow Wallpaper is a satire on patriarchal medicine’s treatment of women’s psychological distress and the medicalization of female mental health. The protagonist’s condition—likely postpartum depression—is dismissed by her husband, John, who prescribes a "rest cure" that forces her into complete inactivity. I personally disagree with their ideas, she laments. As for myself, I would like to do very well with pleasant work, with excitement and change' (Gilman, 1892). This statement suggests the protagonist’s knowledge of what she needs and the inability to command how she is to be treated. In this broader pattern, men controlled women’s bodies and minds in the guise of medical authority, John, as both husband and physician, imposes a regimen of rest and isolation. This aligns with feminist critiques of 19th-century medicine, where diagnoses such as "hysteria" were used to justify the suppression of women’s autonomy. The protagonist’s eventual breakdown demonstrates the dangers of medical paternalism, revealing that treatments designed to "help" women often contributed to their suffering instead.

Moreover, domestic space is further implicated in the oppressive nature of gender roles in the 19th century through the role that they play in the story The Yellow Wallpaper. The space in which the protagonist finds herself confined is a room she did not choose and serves as her imprisonment. She describes the room as “a nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium” , suggesting that it was designed for children, not an adult woman seeking recovery. It also demonstrates a general view of women as coddling, totally dependent and unable to decide for themselves. Her lack of agency is demonstrated through the barred windows and nailed down bed, turning what should be a place of healing into prison. Dominated by John, the room mirrors in a literal sense that historically the domestic space was a place of female subjugation not refuge. When her psychological state deteriorates, she starts to notice the wallpaper in the room as an expression of her own entrapment. This transformation is evidence that domestic spaces were not spaces that

encouraged women but often secluded them into subject gender norms.

The symbol of seeing and perception in The Yellow Wallpaper is central in the use of it to portray the protagonist's movement towards madness and tangible understanding of suppression. Throughout the story, she increasingly fixates on the wallpaper, initially describing it as "dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study" . As she spends more time in isolation, she begins to "see" the woman trapped behind the pattern, stating, "And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" . The effect of this changing perception is an acknowledgment of her own inability to be free of the social expectations as well as her mental deterioration. The act of "seeing" becomes symbolic of gaining awareness; however, because she is denied the ability to express this realization in any meaningful way, it manifests in madness. It also fits with the way feminist readings of the story have argued that insight and perspective from women have been routinely dismissed and that women therefore do not have any other option but to either internalize or express their struggles in an alternative fashion.

At the end of the day, The Yellow Wallpaper is an exemplary feminist text that addresses how women's individuality has been hindered in the past through marriage, medicine and social expectations. The protagonist's passage from one who doubts her suffering to one who rejects the limits imposed on her is mirrored of many women for whom the definition of self has been a battle against those who would contain them. Through symbolism, unreliable narration and psychological deterioration, Gilman's critique of the result of forced domesticity and silenced voices is powerful. The ending of the story sees the protagonist escape the imposed narrative of passivity but at the comprehensive price of her sanity, which speaks to the perceptible evils of patriarchal dominance. Today, the story still resonates as a cautionary tale of women fights and recognition of women's voice.

Discussion

This analysis repeats the findings about The Yellow Wallpaper as a powerful critique of patriarchal oppression in the areas of medic, matrimony, and domestic confinement. Properly, this portrayal of the protagonist moving from the passive submission to psychological breakdown represents the psychological effects of the silencing of women and their denial of autonomy in terms of life. 'Her rest cure,' as prescribed to heal, instead inflames the condition, illustrating how once medical institutions were desensitized to the female voice for the sake of their own dominance, they enforced this restrictive treatment. It is in agreement with feminist visions that women's mental health is still often regarded by a pathologizing lens that is harmful to it. The parallel is also shed on how the power over one's self expression, in this case writing, is a parallel of power over women's narratives, in terms of social control. Her descent into madness emerges as both a tragic outcome of patriarchal managing and a substantial wrote off of it, as she figuratively celebrates the constraints put upon her by famile over her unconscious spouse.

Furthermore, the story's use of symbolism, particularly the yellow wallpaper itself, underscores the larger feminist themes of entrapment and resistance. At first the wallpaper as decoration irritates, but becomes the body of the protagonist's suppressed consciousness, growing consciousness of her oppression. All the women who have been stuck with the constraints of societyliness are trapped in the wallpaper she sees. In that process of tearing down the wallpaper, she acts out a symbolic rebellion, but the price paid is her total mental collapse. It also suggests that making the fight for women's autonomy in this society is not an easy ride. It is relevant today and is still studied in terms of gender roles, mental health, feminist resistance, for the broader implications of the story. In a strong sense, Gilman's work is both a historical indicting and warning of the risks presented by enforcing rigid gender roles as a feminist staple.

Conclusion

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper remains a seminal feminist text that foils the oppressive nature of patriarchal society in marriage, medicine and domestic life. Through such a desensitized look at how women's autonomy and self-expression have traditionally been prohibited, the novel exposes the psychological cost. This symbolizes how women who suffered in silence and been controlled by male dominated institutions felt. The

entire story mirrors the protagonist's discovery of her entrapment, her struggle with the yellow wallpaper, which is a reflection of her realization of her status as a prisoner and her desperate attempt at liberation culminating in the act of rebellion that is tragic. Gilman's work still resonates with the current discussions about gender equality and mental health by critiquing the nasty medical practices of the period and portraying the harm of silencing women's voices. The story functions as a warning and a call to sever ties with societal prejudices that constrain women to the notion of female fragility and dependence.

Suggestions and future recommendations

The story is to recognize the mental health needs of women and to come to our mental health more compassionate and understanding. Rather than write women's experiences off as 'hysteria' or exaggerating medical professionals must validate women's experiences and ensure that they can seek treatments that enfranchise rather than enfranchise them. The gender biases in medicine should find no place in contemporary discussions on mental health as they should continue to be challenged. A Story that Encourages Female Autonomy and Self Expression: The protagonist's situation illustrates its dangers – that is, encouraging women to keep quiet. Spaces that women can express themselves in literature, academia and personal relationships should be created, free of fear of being dismissed or controlled. Written word, storytelling, the written word, written expression, storytelling, or even in the arts can be powerful tools for resistance and building self identity. Reexamining the Family – The story criticizes the old idea that the wife is property of the husband, the husband owns the wife's body, her choices, and her well being. The relationships should include a rather more equitable approach, like a mutual respect, shared decision-making. It is wrong for women to conform to be passive and submissive and for men to be as so called dependents. Rest Cure: A Form of Patriarchal Medical Practice – The "rest cure" the protagonist is administered is no anomaly in that history of women's medical practice which has always been more concerned with control than cure. It would be more appropriate for future research and policy changes to address this gender bias in healthcare such that women do indeed get the type of care that considers their agency and individuality. Teaching works like The Yellow Wallpaper in schools and universities will enhance awareness of the historical and current gender issue. Feminism opens up a new avenue into discussing power, autonomy and resistance when reading literature and as it helps the future generations to develop the ability to identify and resist in systemic oppression.

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