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The Yellow Wall-Paper

It’s clear that in the beginning of the story the author is not insane. She just has post mortem depression which in that time was diagnosed as hysteria. Due to this she is stuck in a room with an ugly yellow wall paper with nothing to do except rest because that is what her husband John, who is a physician, wants her to do. As the story goes on how ever you can start seeing changes in the authors mental state as the isolation is beginning to worse her condition. “But in the places where it isn’t faded and where the sun is just so – I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.” (650) demonstrates the beginning of her mental state starting to go insane as she is beginning to see things skulking around this is most like caused by her isolation. As the story goes on she begins to go completely insane. The ending of the story proves it; “I’ve got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane? And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (656) shows how in the final part of the story she clearly isn’t the same person as she was in the start of the story. She has developed a paranoia and distrust of her husband, which she didn’t have at the beginning of the story. The protagonist began sane but the isolation in the old nursery caused her to go insane.

Stories are often reflections of an author’s personal beliefs or opinions. The short story “The Yellow Wall-Paper” is no exception to that. Written in 1892 by Charlotte Perkins Stetson, the short story is set in the first-person point of view of a woman in the Victorian era suffering from a nervous disorder. The author was a utopian **feminist** and believed in social reform. Stetson uses “The Yellow Wall-Paper” to convey her beliefs about the resting cure and some of her feminist beliefs.

“The Yellow Wall-Paper” is a story about a woman with a nervous disorder who is ordered by her husband, who is also her physician, to do nothing but rest for majority of the day. This was known as the resting cure, which was used by physicians in the Victorian era to help woman suffering from hysteria. Stetson bases this short story on personal experiences and beliefs to show the damages that how unhelpful the resting cure really is. The protagonist starts out relatively sane, only suffering from a “temporary nervous depression,” (Stetson 648) for which her husband forbids her to work until she was well again. As a result, she is contained to an old nursery in a summer mansion. The nursery has a **conspicuous** yellow wallpaper that the protagonist hates. As the story goes on the isolation caused by the resting cure begins damage the protagonist’s mental states. She starts seeing a “strange, provoking, formless sort of figure,” (650) in the wallpaper. As she spends more time in isolation the figure’s significance grows and she starts to grow fond of the **grotesque** yellow wallpaper. The protagonist becomes completely insane in the final part of the story as she locks herself in the nursery and **skulks** along her floor. “I’ve got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane? And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (656) demonstrates the insanity of the protagonist, as she is mentioning a character who hasn’t been mentioned before and says, “you can’t put me back,” illustrating that an insanity has been caused as she is not the same person she was in the start of the story. The author shows her beliefs of the resting cure quite clearly in the story. She uses the short story to warn others of it by portraying the negative outcomes it can cause.

Stetson also uses the story to show some of the many issues with **patriarchy** in the Victorian era. The protagonist’s husband was a physician and didn’t believe there was anything wrong with her because he was a man and during that era the man always knew best: “John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage,” (647). Portraying how at the time in a marriage the man had every say and it was expected of them to laugh anytime the wife had a difference in opinion or any slight fear. This is also Stetson demonstrating her own personal experience as she had been in a marriage like that before getting a divorce. The protagonist’s husband, John, was also quite condescending when talking to her calling her a “blessed little goose,” (649) and wouldn’t let her write or do any work as he felt she needed to rest. This relates to Stetson’s personal experience with having post mortem depression and having to deal with the rest cure and a male physician who knew best. Throughout the story the protagonist is constantly stopping her writing because someone is about to enter the room and John hates when she writes. John hating when the protagonist writes shows the power the man had over the woman in that era, the protagonist had to write in secrecy because her husband doesn’t want her to do any work or write. Throughout “The Yellow Wall-Paper” it is a common reoccurrence for John to know best or have control over the protagonist, which ultimately results in the protagonist going insane. This is Stetson portraying that man doesn’t always know best and shouldn’t have total control over his wife.

Ultimately, Stetson shows her views on the resting cure by exposing the result of the resting cure causing the protagonist to go insane due to the isolation it causes. Her feminist views and experiences are shown throughout as the protagonist’s husband John is always in a position of power and has constant control over his wife’s action. Stetson wrote her beliefs and experiences throughout the entirety of “The Yellow Wall-Paper” and put them through the perspective of the protagonist.

Works Cited

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. “The Yellow Wall Paper.” *Inside Stories for Senior Students*, by Glen Kirkland and Richard Davies, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993, pp. 102–118.