

Makayla Harvey

101073012

Kevin Gildea

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Escape of Madness in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Within the late Victorian Era, being a woman living in a male dominant society was difficult as woman had no control over their life, or decisions. In Gilman's, "The Yellow Wallpaper", Jane finds herself isolated in a nursery, playing a patronizing role, unable to connect with anything that may stimulate her intellection. Within the time Jane is held in isolation, her diagnosis of hysteria creates conflict within her mind between her growing understanding of her own powerlessness plus her desire to repress this awareness, which results in her destruction to escape madness.

Within the timeframe of the nineteenth century, nervous diseases in women transformed, categorized as a new disease, called “hysteria.” Stemming from the Greek word for “uterus,” this disease was perceived as a condition only the female gender could obtain. When diagnosed with hysteria, Jane is prescribed S. Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure” from her husband, in an effort to calm herself from her nervous depression; allowing her to resume her proper position in the household. Jane is more subjective to her husband because of his ideas towards her cure of hysteria. Although Jane's relationship with her husband is confiding, she doesn't agree with his idea that just having a long rest time is the best thing for her.

Jane is guilty for her contradiction of her own opinion because it differs from her husband, " i have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so i feel basely ungrateful not to value it more". (...) Keeping her inner thoughts and ideas to herself becomes harder. Jane's effort of keeping her notebook a secret from her husband becomes larger than her relief from expressing herself in it. Dominated by the masculinity society and ideals, Jane is unable to obtain a sense of self because men decide it for woman. What Jane thinks of her own identity, is actually imaginary, Lacan called the development of this identity "the mirror stage". The first time an infant sees itself in the mirror, literally or figuratively is what Lacan believes is the moment that the child develops a sense of self. Jane being isolated, she is unable to see herself and uses her imagination, creating an image on the wallpaper in attempts to gain a sense of identity for herself. Bars on Jane's windows only allow her to gaze on the outside society, imagining what her life could be without being isolated in the nursery. Her notebook acted as a tool, the only way allowing her to express what she thinks and feels without the approval of her husband.

Jane's attitude towards her husband changes; no longer trusting him as she confides in her notebook, "the fact is i am getting a little afraid of john" (...). Jane is very wary of being criticized and her thought of this develops deeper into paranoia. Jane suspects her spouse is being affected by the yellow wallpaper because she no longer views him or his ideas to cure her hysteria as logical. The uncertainty of the yellow wallpaper agitates jane, as she doesn't want anyone else to find out what is behind the wallpaper.

Jane develops a deep relation with the wallpaper, using it as her companion of imagination since she is isolated from the world. With a strengthened relationship with the

wallpaper and the figure that appears upon it, Jane's madness becomes larger. The mirror gives Jane an illusion that her identity and character are whole when in reality the desires and inconsistencies of life experienced by her before the mirror stage are real. Jane projects her personality onto the wallpaper. Jane blames the wallpaper for slowing down her healing process time and says the wallpaper "... looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!" Jane studies the pattern on the wallpaper more closely discovering, "a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to sulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design."

Within Jane's mind the object projected on the wallpaper no longer revolts her, instead it becomes an object in which she is fascinated by. Jane's madness grows, as she becomes obsessed with the pattern of the wallpaper, tracing the object with her eyes, becoming frustrated each time she loses track of the figure's complex lines. In Jane's mind she believes that "There are things in that wallpaper that nobody knows about but me, or ever will". Jane's imaginary figure in the wallpaper becomes her secret in which she can keep from her husband. Without her husband's knowledge of the figure, it provides Jane with a small sort of escape within the wallpaper. With a growing relationship with the wallpaper, Jane's imaginary figure in which she sees upon the wallpaper metaphorically becomes her madness.

Jane is kept from things which suppress her in society leaving her stuck in the mirror stage, lacking a sense of self and instead uses her imagination for her senses of herself. Jane is assertive that there is a woman trapped behind the wallpaper's pattern. Her assertion is her mind's inverted expression of her own desire towards her freedom. Both Jane and the figure that she sees on the wallpaper are constrained by lines. The figure behind the wallpaper and Jane herself

are both being dominated by the rules of society that are not to be crossed. Neither of the woman have any control over their isolation, as they cannot remove or break patterns to escape male domination. Although the figure in the wallpaper begins as a formless lurking pattern, the image solidifies as Jane feels more trapped under her husbands controlling demeanor. Janes internal desire for freedom increases, helping the woman in the wallpaper escape by tearing wallpaper off the walls. QUOTE . Suffering from a major dissociative break, Jane escapes from isolation and imprisonment, becoming the woman in the wallpaper. By escaping her isolation, she prevents herself from returning to her previous lifestyle; where she would be forever dominated and under control by her husband. Jane descends into madness to escape dominance of her male society.

Jane's descent of madness is presented through her decrease of trust in her husband and her increasing obsession with the pattern behind the wallpaper. Jane is confined by the rules of her husband who doesn't permit her to express her voice or feelings, so she becomes the woman confined only by walls. In Janes madness, she is able to escape what is confining her, achieving a level of control over her own life and behaviour that she could never obtain when she was bound by the rules of sanity within her society.

Works Cited

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