
GENDER OPPRESSION: THE YELLOW WALLPAPER BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

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Abstract:

This literary study uses Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalytic Criticism, specifically it looks into the characters, themes, and symbolisms to reveal the issues of gender oppression that are reflected in the story. The method of literary research used is qualitative method of discourse analysis. In addition, the related literature and studies are utilized to support the textual investigation. Through the lens of the literary theories used, the issues that are found in the characters, are done through by looking into its portrayal and implication. Hence, the portrayal and implication of all the characters in the story are highly showing the presence of gender oppression. For the analysis of themes, it explores the significant issue about gender oppression that is happening inside the marriage wherein the husband turns to be dominant while the wife becomes inferior. On the other hand, the symbolisms reflect the essential representation of gender oppression experienced by the women in the story. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman contains gender oppression. This study recommends that the literary researchers should make a character analysis, may create a study of the story that studies the theme of the literary work and should make a symbolism analysis essay on the story The Yellow Wallpaper.

Keywords: oppression, women, patriarchy, feminism, Charlotte Perkins Gilman

INTRODUCTION

A famous nineteenth-century masterwork is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," which was first published in New England Magazine in May 1892 and later published in book form in 1899. It was viewed as a Gothic horror story by Gilman, who regarded it as his least distinctive work of fiction (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). People are still subjected to gender oppression, as there remains a persistent disparity in access to opportunities for men and women. This is a never ending problem around the globe, even though its origin is very unclear (Burrey, 2021).

Furthermore, reading works about women, especially when it deals with gender oppression is an interesting topic because many women can relate its impact in different aspects of their lives. Prior to deep observation, many works of literature from old up until now talk about this issue as their main subject. They are using literature as their voice of expressing discrimination and inequality in the society.

Oppression because of gender is not new to everybody. History can really tell that a long time ago there was gender oppression, like women were not allowed to work and they just stayed at home to take good care of their children. Nevertheless, it is very significant to know until now that men and women are the same, that there are no gender roles to weigh between who's dominant or not. The purpose of this research is to examine gender oppression in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". This study takes into account: characters, themes, and symbols to scrutinize the gender oppression of the story. On the other hand, in terms of women's portrayal, Master Class Staff points out that the characteristics of strong female characters are; a woman who has her own opinions, being her own person, who has flaws but still be able to manage it, and tough in her own right (The Master Class staff, 2020).

In the study of Kadhim, *Negative treatment of women in selected short stories by Katherine Mansfield and Ernest Hemingway*, how both authors depicted women in an unfavorable light in their short tales, but there are grounds for such negative portrayal (2018). In Mansfield's selected short stories, it does not only try to display the supremacy of the male in society but also the effect of supremacy and the destruction it gives in woman's privacy, and these conditions of her women characters remained static. While the females in Hemingway's selected short stories are inactive in a way that they are not named or named at the end of the story and aside from that they are used as a sex object. Kadhim emphasizes that women are never recognized and some of them are accused as one of the reasons for the man's devastation; women's devotion, participation in man's life and sincerity are not appreciated (2018).

This study is supported by Feminist theory of Charles Fourier, and Psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud.

Feminist criticism answers the gender oppression present in the study in the means of looking into, how the theory will touch the characters and theme of the short story while Psychoanalytic criticism corresponds to the unconscious meanings behind the symbols that are being used in the story. From this theory, it could be found that symbolisms convey special senses of the unconscious or some desires.

This study examines the gender oppression of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Specifically, it looks into: characters; themes; and symbolism.

METHODOLOGY

This study assumes that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* contains gender oppression.

Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism is concerned with how literature (and other forms of cultural interaction) sustains or destroys women's economic, political, social, and psychological oppression. Patriarchy may oppress women economically, politically, socially, and emotionally, with patriarchal ideology serving as the primary means of oppression. In other words, women are undervalued, distinguished solely by their differences from male ideals and attributes. Feminism is the concept that women should not be considered as second-class citizens or treated unequally just because they are female (Purdue Online Writing Lab College of Liberal Arts).

Finally, feminist criticism, like the larger cause, urges us to consider the connections between men and women, as well as their respective responsibilities in society. Many feminist critics remind us that men and women's positions in society are frequently unequal and reflect a specific patriarchal worldview, and these facts are frequently reflected in both the assembly of literature and literary writings themselves (Yang).

Psychoanalytic Criticism

Psychoanalytic critique is based on Sigmund Freud's psychological theories, which he is known for as the "Father of Psychoanalysis." He was an outstanding thinker of the twentieth century who was born in Austria and became a psychologist, medical doctor, and physiologist (Brewton).

The psychoanalytic method contends that the author's unconscious desires and concerns can be found in creative texts such as poems, dramas, novels, and short stories, which serve as expressions of the author's innermost wishes and thoughts. Freud's research methods, which concentrated on the human mind, were later dubbed "psychoanalysis." Human behavior is founded on repression, internal wants, memories, and unconscious thoughts (The Psychoanalytic Lens).

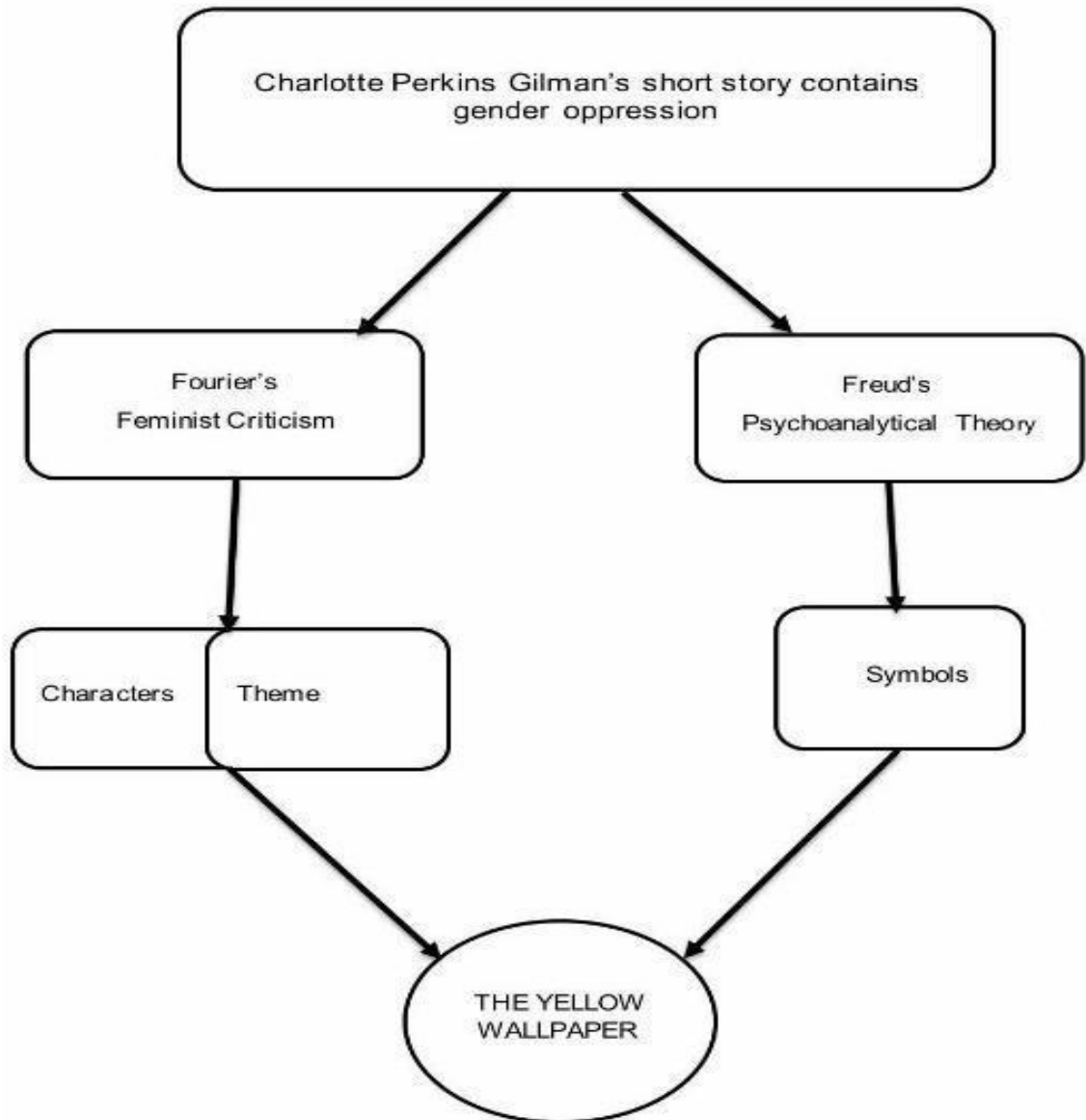


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Literary Study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characters

Below is Table 1 that contains the characters and their portrayal as well as their implication that looks for the instances of gender oppression in the story.

Table 1: Character Analysis

Character	Portrayal	Implication	Instances of gender oppression
The Narrator	Trapped by the authority of the husband	No freedom	Unjust treatment of the husband.
John	Controls almost every aspect of his wife's life	Manipulative husband	Inappropriate treatment towards his wife inside their marriage
Jennie	Does all the household chores without complaint	Perfect housekeeper	Only woman can take all care of the household chores

In the story, the main character is The Narrator who is known to be the wife who has been trapped by the authority of the husband as the portrayal of her character. The narrator's portrayal of being trapped by the authority of her husband implies that she has no freedom inside the marriage. The instances of gender oppression are the unjust treatment of the narrator's husband. From its portrayal and implication, the narrator is obviously experiencing oppression because the husband holds absolute control in making decisions that make her feel inferior.

On the other hand, John is the husband of the narrator who controls almost every aspect of his wife's life. He becomes inconsiderate when his wife expresses suggestions about her preferences. As the narrator suffers about her mental health, John is confident that what he is doing makes his wife good. Mishra concludes that one of the signs of having a dominant partner (relationship) is neglecting the opinion of the other and assuming they know better (Mishra).

The portrayal of John's character implies that he is a manipulative husband. The instances of gender oppression on John's character is his inappropriate treatment toward his wife inside their marriage.

Lastly, the character of Jennie, who is John's sister and works as a housekeeper for John and the narrator. The narrator reveals that Jennie has taken over the household chores and does all the work without complaint. The portrayal of Jennie implies that she is indeed a perfect housekeeper. The instances of gender oppression on Jennie's character are that only women can take over all care of the household. As the substitute of the narrator, it is emphasized that doing household chores are exclusively for women like cleaning the house. There is a stereotype about who fits to work the household responsibilities.

Themes

Below is Table 2 that presents the themes of the story that looks for instances of gender oppression.

The first theme, the oppressive nature of gender roles. Here the narrator's being robbed of all her duties as a wife and a mother signifies that she has no power of voicing her own right. John, the husband at the same time a physician, takes a hold for everything and that includes the life of the narrator.

Table 2. Theme Analysis

Themes	Instances of Gender Oppression
The Oppressive Nature of Gender Roles	Unequal right in decision making
Importance of Self- Expression	The wife is inhibited to express herself
Wife in Patriarchal Society	The husband predominates his wife
Appearance vs. Reality	Unable to synthesize outward appearances and internal truths

It is said that the narrator is having a temporary nervous depression that might have a slight hysterical tendency, and due to this the narrator is restricted by her gender roles. Being a woman with illness, the narrator was forbidden to do a lot of things, including taking care of her own child, making decisions regarding their household, which clearly portrays the unequal rights especially in the manner of decision making. At this point, it can obviously identify the instances of oppressive nature of gender roles in the story.

The second theme of the story focuses on the lack of self-expression, the urge to express herself but inability to do so. John believes that the main cause of her illness is due to her creativity. On the other hand, writing is a form of escape for her situation, it seems like through writing she found a place that can be the sanctuary of her secluded thoughts. This is a form of how the wife is unable to express herself.

Another theme is the wife in patriarchal society. The instances of gender oppression are when the husband predominates over his wife. There is a great indication that the wife has no voice when it comes to her preferences. The wife is dependent on his husband and never tries to fight for what she really wants. Both main characters have trouble distinguishing between outer appearances and inside truths.

The last subject deals with the appearance vs. reality debate. One of the first things the narrator's husbands mentions regarding her illness is that he "does not think she is unwell." For John, when the narrator's physical state is improving, he assumes she is recovering as he hoped, but he overlooks the narrator's sentiment about not feeling any better in her thoughts, demonstrating how complex the contradiction between appearance and reality is.

In addition, the narrator misinterprets an appearance. The pattern's unpleasantness initially draws her in, its visual intricacy progressively draws her in, causing her to invest increasingly time scrutinizing it. It finally becomes the center of her emotional world and the cause of her delusions. The narrator's assessment of the wallpaper, on the other hand, is based on the tragic illusion, as any attentive reader can observe. The strange, moving images on the wallpaper are, rather than being a true representation of the wallpaper, a mirror of the narrator's thoughts.

The themes in the Yellow Wallpaper explore the significant issue about gender oppression that is happening inside the marriage wherein the husband turns to be dominant while the wife becomes inferior.

Symbolism

Below is Table 3 which contains the interpretation of symbols that represent gender oppression.

Table 3. Symbols Analysis

Symbols	Instances of Gender Oppression
House	Isolation and restriction
Window	Trapped feelings
Wallpaper	The ugly situation of the narrator
Nursery room	Treated like a small child
Creeping Women	Struggling against the unfair treatment

The short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” has a symbolic paradigm regarding isolation and restriction. The narrator directly shows and tells that the house was haunted, and she did not feel secure at all. It is common to interpret the symbol of the house as a haven for a woman’s transformation and self- expression. Therefore, the house remains the cocoon for her transformation in this way, it does not adopt the shape of the conventional sign of safety for a woman’s domestic choices, but it does not allow for her transformation.

The second symbol that can be found in the story is the window as the narrator’s trapped feeling. She is implying that she realizes that women are not equal to men and that they must crawl into society’s shadows. The bars and gate indicate the woman’s metaphoric imprisonment.

The Wallpaper symbolizes the ugly situation of the narrator. The wallpaper is the most evident element in the story; it takes center stage and could perhaps be considered as a character in and of itself. The wallpaper represents several things, one of which being men’s limits on women. The narrator is imagining herself locked behind

bars, powerless over her life and health, yet this image is larger than the narrator. Aside from that, the nursery room is one of the symbols used in the story. Nursery means a place for the use of young children where they are taken care of (Cambridge Dictionary). It shows that the nursery room is exclusively for young children where they can be happy and comfortable. But, for the narrator it is the other way around, instead the nursery room represents a dark message regarding her situation. The way her husband treats her is not like a wife, but it seems like he is talking to his young daughter which is not appropriate. It shows that the husband is dominant, and oppression is visible between their relationships. Lastly, the creeping woman is another symbol that helps to fully understand what the narrator is experiencing under her husband's authority. Creep means slowly or carefully moving in order not to be noticed (Cambridge Dictionary). The narrator becomes obsessed with the image of creeping women behind the yellow wallpaper that it seems so real to her.

The symbolisms in the Yellow Wallpaper reflect the essential representation of gender oppression experienced by the woman.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman Perkins Gilman contains gender oppression extracting them on The Yellow Wallpaper's characters, theme, and symbolism.

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