



HawCC English 100 Cause-and-Effect Essay

# Sickly Yellow

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In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," the female narrator goes through a temporary nervous depression due to childbirth; in an attempt to help, her husband prescribes for her a treatment where she is confined to an old nursery room with yellow wallpaper for three months. There, she can only speak to her husband and sister-in-law. Instead of curing her, the treatment has various negative consequences on her mental health. The narrator goes through many psychological issues before entering into a state of insanity. "The Yellow Wallpaper" epitomizes the ways that forced change can lead to ruin and destroy a person's identity.

Throughout the story, the narrator becomes increasingly cautious of the outside world. In the beginning, she craves for company because she is alone. When she asks her husband John to "ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit," "he says he would as soon put the fireworks in [her] pillowcase as to let those stimulating people around" (142). John is convinced that by keeping his wife away from family and friends, her "condition" will improve. The result of this isolation is that the narrator becomes anti-social, and does not want to leave the room at all: "I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in till John comes" (153). She begins to lose trust in everyone and herself, as indicated by this passage: "I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much" (142). This is proof of her distrust, as she will not describe what she has found within her own diary.

As her isolation continues, the yellow color of the wallpaper consumes her thoughts. When she first enters the room, she immediately notices the "repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering, unclean yellow" wallpaper (140). She does not like the wallpaper one bit, but because she is in that room all day, she is forced to look at it. She states: "it dwells on my mind so!" (144). While in the room, the narrator notices patterns in the wallpaper that only she can see (146). In many other instances, she repeatedly mentions the yellow wallpaper in her journal entries, thus illustrating her obsession with the wallpaper. Her

fixation is clearly evident when she writes: "the only thing I can think about it is the *color* of the paper!" (150). She also believes that she can smell the color, which has a "yellow smell" (150). Due to her isolation in the yellow room, her brain is consumed with the color and her senses become entangled with the smell.

The narrator's confinement is what ultimately drives her insane. After staring at the print for such long hours, she comes to believe that there is a woman lurking within the wallpaper. By the end of the story, she peels the wallpaper off to let the captive woman out: "I got up and ran to help her, I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper... Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor" (152-153). The narrator is so focused and determined to help the woman in the paper that she "locked the door and [threw] the key into the front path[;]" when John finds the door locked, she does not open it for him, instead saying that the key is "down the front steps, under a plantain leaf" (154).

In the end, the narrator "becomes" the woman in the wallpaper. She creeps around the room and continues to do so even when her husband, at the sight of her, faints: "I've got out at last... Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I ha[ve] to creep over him everytime" (154). The fact that she continues to creep around the room, and over her husband's body, is further proof that she is out of her mind.

The narrator's mind becomes a mess due to her treatment, which, ironically, does not treat her for depression, but instead, has a very negative effect on her mental health. While she is in a crazed state, she states to her husband: "I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (154). It is possible to imply from this that she believes she is the woman in the wallpaper and that she feels as though her husband was keeping her as a sort of prisoner. She has to put up an act for her husband, as the woman he wants her to be. The narrator is finally able to tell her husband what she feels only when she finally enters psychosis.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" shows the importance of someone being able to express themselves to others. If the narrator's husband had simply listened to her, she would not have had to enter insanity to tell him how she feels. Her husband was trying to make her into a different woman. This worsened her condition because he was trying to change what defined her as

an individual. She was different, and her husband wanted her to be the stereotypical wife who watches the children, stays at home, and obeys his every whim. It is not possible to change someone for who

they are, because that is altering the essence of what makes that person who he or she is, and from it, the individual can become crazed from the pressure put upon him.

#### WORKS CITED

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Points of View: an Anthology of Short Stories. Eds. James Moffit and Kenneth R. McElheny. New York: New American Library, 1995. 138-154.