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"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a semi-autobiographical short story written in 1891 by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It takes the perspective of a young woman who has been ordered to continuous bedrest as a treatment for hysteria. Trapped in a small room in her husband's country house, with nothing to do all day but sleep and write in her journal, she starts to dwell upon the dingy yellow wallpaper that decorates the place. In her boredom, she begins to see a woman crouching, cowering, trapped in the walls...A landmark feminist work, its depiction of postpartum psychosis was also an inspiration for early cosmic horror, in particular The King in Yellow. Note that H. P. Lovecraft may have named the Gilman family after her when writing The Shadow over Innsmouth (and as a pun on "gill").Adaptations of the story can be found here.This work provides examples of: Abandoned Hospital: Although it is never stated outright, it is heavily implied that the narrator is not the first person to suffer a mental breakdown in the room with yellow wallpaper. The windows are barred and there are bite marks on the (heavy, bolted-down) bed—which the narrator assumes to be signs that previous occupants were particularly rowdy children. Alien Geometries: The narrator attempts several times to describe what's so troubling about the wallpaper, but it seems to change every time she looks at it. All she can convey is that the pattern is wrong, somehow. Ambiguously Evil: It's not entirely clear if John, the narrator's husband, genuinely thinks isolation is the best possible cure, or if he's merely controlling and possessive. The narrator starts out often saying that he loves her and wants what's best for her, but later entries have him becoming cold and angry as she expresses her belief that she's not getting better or wants things he thinks she shouldn't. Apocalyptic Log: On a small scale. The narrator seems much more put together and sane in the first entries and deteriorates as time passes. Author Avatar: The narrator is implied to be a fictionalized version of Gilman herself. Babies Make Everything Better: Subverted. It's implied that the narrator's hysteria is at least partly due to post-partum depression. Her baby hardly enters into the story. However, it is also implied that if the narrator could have just taken care of her child (and see a reason to live in said child) she could have gotten better faster. Being denied even being a mother was another part of going insane. Bad Bedroom, Bad Life: The narrator's Sanity Slippage is focused on the sickening yellow wallpaper in her bedroom, where she's forced to spend a majority of her time, isolated and without entertainment. In addition to the wallpaper, though, the room has scratches on the walls, bars on the window, and bite marks on the bed. The very fact that she's trapped in this room at all reflects badly on her husband, who put her in there, thinking her Postpartum Depression is Hysteria, much as was common for the time period. Cassandra Truth: Victorian-era wallpapers often contained toxic arsenic-based dyes. Although everyone knew that arsenic was toxic, it was generally believed to be safe as long as you didn't actually eat it. However, there was a then-new theory (now considered correct) that wallpaper and other objects containing arsenic give off microscopic dust particles that can make people sick if they inhale or accidentally ingest them. So when the narrator complained that the wallpaper was making her sick, this was likely the literal truth. Forgotten Framing Device: To start with there are several references to the fact that the protagonist is keeping a journal, such as one section ending with her saying that she has to stop writing now because she has a visitor. These fade out about halfway through, and by the end she's narrating events as they happen. (Events which clearly do not involve her stopping to write anything down.) Arguably, this shift helps cement that the protagonist has absolutely lost it. Freak Out: The narrator freaks out by the end of the story. Justified due to how she was locked into a room with nothing to do. Go Mad from the Isolation: Being locked in a room with nothing to do for months on end has an adverse effect on the narrator's mental health. While she's not entirely confined to the room and mentions sitting in the garden and going on carriage rides a few times, she's not allowed to visit friends or family or even to take her rest in a room she likes better. History Repeats: The narrator describes odd iron loops attached to the ceiling and scars in the windowsill that indicate the windows were once barred. Then there's the strange worn spot in the wallpaper, exactly at the height of a woman's shoulder, that goes all the way around the room and which the narrator winds up endlessly following once she loses her mind, and may or may not have been created by her. All signs indicate that she's not the only person who was ever kept prisoner in that room, and that the previous resident might have suffered the same fate. Hysterical Woman: Deconstructed. Everyone around the narrator treats her as if she is on the verge of a mental breakdown, and will snap if she so much as thinks too hard. She starts out sane and complains that if she had something to do she thinks she'd recover better; in the end, it's her imprisonment in the house and room, and everyone treating her like a ticking time bomb, that drives her around the bend. Lovecraft Country: Definitely the seclusion part, if nothing else. Madwoman in the Attic: The narrator is slowly driven insane by being cooped up in the room with the yellow wallpaper with nothing to do except stare at it and see patterns in it. Maybe Magic, Maybe Mundane: An interesting use that reverses the normal comfort of "maybe it wasn't real". The writer Alan Ryan put it well with the description "It may be a ghost story. Worse yet, it may not." That is, the less horrifying possibility is that the woman in the wallpaper was real and possessed the protagonist, rather than the protagonist is driven insane by her loved one's insistence that she was insane. Mind Screw: The latter half of the story gets increasingly incoherent as a symptom of the narrator's decaying mental state. No Name Given: The narrator. Some conclude from a line near the end that the narrator is named Jane, as there was no mention of a character named Jane previously in the story. note It could also be argued that she was writing so frantically, and had gone so insane at that point that she had gotten Jennie's name wrong. The names are close and it makes sense for Jennie to have been in the room. The Ophelia: Deconstructed—there's nothing at all romantic or pretty about the narrator's illness. Primal Stance: The women in the walls as well as the narrator. The movements are described with the word "creep". Purple Prose: It's deliberately written this way to show her boredom. She has nothing to do but overly describe the room she's in. Sanity Slippage: The entire story details the narrator's downward spiral while she's sequestered in an ugly room with nothing to do. Stay in the Kitchen: The rationale behind the narrator's husband forbidding her from writing. Gilman herself was told by a prominent neurologist to "Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time... And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live," as a cure for her depression. Creative endeavors were considered too exciting and disruptive for women in a fragile condition. Straw Vulcan: In the first paragraphs, John is described to be practical to the extreme, has no interest in things that aren't able to felt or seen or put down in figures. He's a physician who thinks it's just a temporary nervous depression (or hysterical tendency), and disregards her initial complaint about something being wrong with the room where he puts her. Later, he's condescending at best and angry at worst when she tries to tell him about wanting to leave or have company and says that since she has no reason to be suffering, she's not actually suffering. Because of this, he contributed to the breakdown described in the story. Stringy-Haired Ghost Girl: The woman in the wallpaper, according to the narrator. Take That!: The entire story was spurred by how ineffective the "rest cure" was in treating the depression of the author, Charlotte Gilman, and how the lack of any form of stimulation nearly drove her crazy. Through the Eyes of Madness: The story becomes more incoherent as the narrator slips further into madness. Unreliable Narrator: The narrator is having a nervous breakdown, and is utterly convinced there's a woman behind the wallpaper, crawling around and looking for a way out. Wallpaper Camouflage: The narrator believes there's a woman trapped behind the wallpaper, trying desperately to get out. When the narrator finally snaps completely, she tries to assist, and it's up to the reader to decide if that means she's tearing off the wallpaper, or tearing off her own skin. Wandering Walk of Madness: As the narrator goes mad from prolonged confinement in her bedroom, she starts circling the room over and over, obsessively following the pattern in her wallpaper in the belief that something is hiding within it. Wham Line: "I always lock the door when I creep by daylight." This is where the reader realizes how deep into madness the narrator's slipping.The 2011 film adaptation adds examples of: Adaptation Expansion: The film adaptation gives the narrator a name, expands a bit on her (meager, tiny) social life, and expands on the character of her husband, John. Hypocrite: John gives a lecture on the importance of mental stimulation, exercise, and fresh air—while his isolated, cloistered wife is having her psychotic break in the attic. Named by the Adaptation: The narrator is named "Charlotte" in the film adaptation. In 1913, more than twenty years after the first publication of"The Yellow Wallpaper," Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote that she devised the story, "to save people from being driven crazy." Gilman had suffered a near mental breakdown herself, and had been prescribed a rest treatment very similar to that prescribed to the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper." For Gilman, the act of resuming her normal life, which certainly included writing, was what restored her health. Though we don't know what became of Gilman's narrator, we can chronicle Gilman's own life after her near mental breakdown. If Gilman's narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" regressed into her insanity, Gilman certainly did not; unlike the narrator she created, she made her voice heard. She pursued her career as a writer and lecturer, and she wrote works of theory and social commentary that brought her international fame. Though she concentrated on feminist issues, her influence reached beyond the woman's sphere. She has been compared by some critics to the author George Bernard Shaw and the art critic John Ruskin, and the London Chronicle compared her book, Women and Economics, to the writings of John Stuart Mill. "The Yellow Wallpaper" commands attention not only for the harrowing journey into madness it portrays, but also for its realism. It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that the "The Yellow Wallpaper" is autobiographical. In 1887, Charlotte Perkins Gilman placed herself under the care of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, a well-known nerve specialist. She was suffering from depression,"nervous prostration" as diagnosed by the doctor, after the birth of her daughter. At that time, the medical profession had not yet distinguished between diseases of the mind and diseases of the brain; problems that would now be treated by psychiatrists, such as depression, were treated by neurologists such as Mitchell. The symptoms of depression—fatigue, hysteria, crying fits—were thought to stem from the body, and thus were treated through care of the body. Mitchell's treatment for breakdowns of the nervous system, and the treatment he prescribed for Gilman, included total bed rest and isolating the patient from family and familiar surroundings. In ' "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman demonstrates the horror that such a treatment could induce in its subject. When the narrator is threatened by her husband with being sent to Weir Mitchell if she does not get better quickly, she says: "But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" Gilman was sent home from Mitchell's sanitarium after one month, having been pronounced "cured," with the following instructions: "Live as domestic a life as possible.... Have but two hours' intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live." When Gilman heeded this advice she came, in her own words,"perilously close to losing my mind." Mitchell's "rest cure" had been used on other literary figures—Walt Whitman, Edith Wharton, and Virginia Woolf— and other noted persons—Jane Addams and Winifred Howells, whose father, the editor William Dean Howells, was instrumental in the publication of "The Yellow Wallpaper." Woolf, Addams, and Howells, like Gilman, protested against the treatment (Woolf also attacked it in her novel Mrs. Dalloway). In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman chronicles what happens to a woman forced to succumb to the "rest cure" and thus, to her inflexible position in society as a prisoner of the domestic sphere. Gilman claimed a purpose for everything she wrote. "The Yellow Wallpaper" pointed out the dangers of the medical treatment imposed by Mitchell and other doctors like him. Years later, Gilman learned that Mitchell had changed his treatment of nervous prostration after reading the story, so she won her victory. Yet, the story is far more than just a crying out for improvement in one facet of a woman's life; it touches on many issues relevant to women of the nineteenth century, particularly that of the limited roles available to them. Despite Gilman's avowal that her story was not literature, it has been appreciated as such since its rediscovery in the 1960s (Gilman's works had been out of print since the 1930s). And just as "The Yellow Wallpaper" espoused Gilman's feminist views when she wrote it, critics have analyzed it as a feminist work—or a work that has feminist issues as its main concerns—for the past two decades. As is often the case, the critics disagree. The story has been seen as a realistic tale in its portrayal of the narrator's descent into madness, as a feminist Gothic tale in its use of abnormal behavior and occurrences, and as one of the earliest modernist texts for its unaware narrator and its intense focus on what she is thinking and feeling. Readers and critics alike have even disagreed over the meaning of the story's ending. Some critics see the narrator's defeat: she has retreated into the world of childishness. Others, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, see in it the narrator's triumph: by fainting, John shows he is defeated, and the narrator has become the woman behind the wallpaper, who can creep down the road, away from the house and her husband's authority. Even attempts to understand why the story was ignored for so long have led to dissent. Some critics argue that Gilman's contemporaries could not understand this story of a woman's mental breakdown because they were accustomed to "traditional" literature. Still others believe that women could accurately read the story, but they chose not to because they were afraid of what they would find. What then are we to make of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"? Essentially, it is a story of female confinement and escape. Gilman's narrator is trapped in the home, in her maternal body, and in the text she has created for herself, which is the only escape she can find. That Gilman's narrator is physically and spiritually trapped by her husband is apparent from the beginning of the story. Though she "wanted [a room] downstairs that opened on the piazza ... John would not hear of it." The narrator strives for some space of her own; the room she would have chosen would not fit two beds and had no other bedroom for John nearby. Instead, John has put his wife on the top floor, away from the rest of the household (their baby, the nurse, and John's sister) in a room she believes to have been a "nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium." Though she recognizes her captivity—John "hardly lets me stir without special direction"—she overlooks other more ominous signs of her confinement: the bars at the window, the gate at the top of the stairs, steel rings on the wall, and the nailed-down bedstead. This habit of the narrator of deliberately misreading her surroundings is apparent throughout the story. For instance, when John refuses to give in to her fancies about changing the wallpaper because, after that"it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on," is he reminding her of her confinement? Does she recognize this subtle way of controlling her? Rather than confronting such a possibility she instead, outwardly, relies on John's advice. "I think sometimes if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me," she muses, which she then follows with a reiteration of what John wants her to think—"But I find I get pretty tired when I try." Such is her effort to believe in him and thus preserve her sanity (sanity as defined by John), because she knows she has not the will to resist him: "But what is one to do?" she says. In fact, she does something John doesn't approve of—she writes in a journal, thereby creating her own text. Unfortunately, because the text is her only place of true self-expression, it becomes as oppressive as the room, as oppressive as her husband. Gilman's narrator is so cruelly trapped both by the conventions of nineteenth-century American society, which says that a woman's function is to bear and raise children, and by her husband's inflexible belief in this code. John has attempted to take away one of the few things that bring her consistent pleasure, her writing, "He hates to have me write a word," she says, and notes his determination to correct her "imaginative power and habit of storymaking." Unfortunately, for Gilman's narrator, these sentiments are shared by others in society. John's sister, a woman who occupies her proper place in the domestic sphere by being "so good with the baby" and a "perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper," seems to believe "it is the writing which made [the narrator] sick!" Because the narrator has no physical or spiritual escape from her husband, she must seek relief elsewhere: in the yellow wallpaper, and thus, in the text she creates as she describes her relationship with the wallpaper. Though at first she says of it, "I never saw a worse paper in my life," as she loses her slim hold on sanity, she gets"really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps because of the wallpaper." Her initial discomfort decreases as she sees mirrored in the wallpaper her own existence. She realizes that the wallpaper has two patterns; the front pattern is made of bars, and in the back pattern is a woman "stooping down and creeping about," and later shaking the bars. And the woman in the wallpaper continues to reflect the narrator: "she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through the pattern—it strangles so." By the end of the story, the narrator finds escape when she becomes the wallpaper woman as she "creep[s] smoothly on the floor." With this final action she escapes those places of her confinement. Her husband, the force that keeps her in the home, has become an inanimate object, one that only gets in the way of her "path by the wall, so that [she] had to creep over him." She releases herself from her maternal role as she occupies the role of a "madwoman." And, by refusing to write it anymore, she has freed herself from the text that chronicles her mental breakdown. Virginia Woolf, in her important essay A Room of One's Own, says that in order to write a woman must have money and her own private room. Perhaps implicit in Woolf's words is that women also need to be accepted for what they are: creative, independent, thinking creatures. For Gilman's narrator, having money, a private room, and the necessary leisure time certainly was not enough to sustain her as a writer and as a person; she was lacking that other essential element: a family who believed in a woman's right to creativity and self-expression. Source Credits: Kathleen Wilson (Editor), Short Stories for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context & Criticism on Commonly Studied Short Stories, Volume 1, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Published by Gale, 1997. Rena Korb, for Short Stories for Students, Gale Research, 1997. Hi, I'm John Green, and this is CrashCourse Literature. So, for the last few weeks we've been talking a lot about dystopias, imaginary societies gone wrong. Like, George Orwell's 1984 is a world of war, surveillance, and mind control. The Handmaid's Tale portrays a toxic landscape in which healthy women are forced to produce offspring for the ruling class. Candide showed us the best of all possible worlds, which was terrible. And, Parable of the Sower takes place in an alternate universe where a sloganeering, strongman president presides over a country experiencing intense social disorder thanks to climate change. Fortunately none of that stuff has happened, yet. But, today we're going to talk about our final dystopia of the series, The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and it's about a dystopia that already happened. First published in 1892 in the New England magazine, this story is less of a "what if" dystopia than a "this is happening to me" call to action. So, at first glance the life that Gilman describes in this story might not seem that bad; a young woman is married to a doctor, and spends all of her time in a country mansion, and I mean all of her time. But, make no mistake about it, the social order in this story is in some ways as oppressive as the others that we've examined. Gilman's narrator is imprisoned within her marriage and her social order, and, also, her house. And, she eventually goes insane trying to preserve her perspective. Today, I want to talk about Gilman, who was a feminist, humanist, sociologist, novelist, poet, and essayist. I also want to talk about perspectives on mental health, and how they've changed between Gilman's era and ours. And, of course, I'm going to talk about yellow wallpaper. Soon enough, you're going to see it everywhere. [Intro Music]So, Charlotte Perkins Gilman had a fascinating life. She was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1860, and she lived with her mother and brother, after her father abandoned the family. And, although she moved from school to school, her childhood was really intellectually rich, largely because of her three brilliant and famous aunts: Isabella Beech Hooker, suffragist and abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe, best-selling author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Katharine Beecher, education reformer an advocated for Native American rights. With some financial help for her ne'er-do-well father, Charlotte enrolled in design school. Later, she supported herself by illustrating advertising cards and tutoring; so, you know, she did know something about wallpaper patterns. In 1884 she married Charles Walter Stetson and gave birth to a daughter, Katherine, and in the years after her daughter's birth, Charlotte experienced a series of what were called at the time nervous disorders. In 1887, she visited a specialist, who encouraged her to try a "rest cure," and this involved living as domestic a life as far as possible, having but two hours intellectual life a day and never touching pen, brush, or pencil again. After three months of this so-called treatment, she quote, "came so near to the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over." Gilman wanted to warn others of the dangers of this rest cure, and her story, she explains, was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy; and, it worked. We'll get to that working bit in a second, but back to her life. So in 1888, Charlotte left her husband and took Katherine with her to Pasadena, California. Her professional life flourished; she organized social reform movements, she represented California at the suffrage convention in Washington DC, she became a lecturer and edited a series of magazines. She also wrote essays, poems, a novella, and, by far her most famous story, The Yellow Wallpaper. Much of her work focused on women's unequal status in marriage and their need for financial independence. And, she achieved financial independence and also equal marriage in her second marriage. Eventually, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and as she had lived on her own terms, she also died on her own terms. She was an advocate of euthanasia, and she chose chloroform over cancer, committing suicide in 1935. I wanted to focus a little on Gilman's life story to emphasize that this was a person who experienced severe, disabling mental illness, and whose treatment ended up making it much worse; and yet, who still went on to live a long, fulfilling, and productive life. I think it's really helpful to read The Yellow Wallpaper with that background. As for the story itself, well, let's go to the thought bubble. The Yellow Wallpaper is the first-person narrative of a 19th century woman suffering from a mental breakdown after giving birth. In a secret diary this narrator describes her setting as "a colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity-- but that would be asking too much of fate!" This narrator is confined to a room with barred windows. It's possible that she's in an asylum, but the physical setting is less important than another landscape, the shifting consciousness of her mind. The narrator knows that she perceives reality differently from her husband, who is also her doctor. At first, she chalks this up to the expected difficulties of male-female relations. "John," she writes, "laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage." This expectation of marriage is, of course, troubling in its own right, but there's an even darker side to their dynamic; John has almost complete control over his wife's body. The narrator's descriptions may be at times unreliable, but there are a few things we do know: she recently had a baby, she recognizes that she is sick, John belittles her, saying that she suffers from a temporary nervous depression-- a slight hysterical tendency. Meanwhile, he prescribes her a scheduled prescription for each hour in the day of phosphates or phosphites, the narrator doesn't know which, and a regimen of tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise. Also, John forbids his wife from writing, working, or socializing, and it quickly becomes clear that these so-called cures are exacerbating the narrator's condition, as she is left with very little to do except stare at the yellow wallpaper. Thanks thought bubble.So today, we would probably say that the narrator is experiencing postpartum depression and/or postpartum psychosis. These are conditions that can result from a drop in hormones, like estrogen and progesterone, and are intensified by the two central experiences of new parenthood, sleep deprivation, and anxiety. Postpartum psychosis can include the depressive symptoms of postpartum depression, along with confusion, disorientation, hallucinations, and paranoia. Today these conditions would be treated with medication and therapy and other medical interventions, but whatever treatment John gives to his wife in The Yellow Wallpaper definitely does not work. If Gilman's story were an argument, this line from it would be its thesis: "John is a physician, perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster."Admittedly the 19th century wasn't a golden age for psychiatry, but even so, John is exceptionally bad at treating mental illness. At the start of the story, Gilman's narrator craves more society and stimulus. She writes that she "must say what I feel and think in some way." Forbidden from communicating with a living soul, she secretly confesses her thoughts to dead paper in a journal. And in her writing, she projects her mental disintegration onto the patterns that she sees on the walls. "I never saw worse paper in my life," she writes, explaining that it contains "one of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin." Still, she finds this pattern compelling: "it is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study... And, when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance, they suddenly commit suicide-- plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions." Of course, this also describes the narrator's interior landscape, but it also describes the story, right? Like initially, her narrative seems dull. I mean plot summary: woman stares at wall. But, then it becomes confusing. The wallpaper seems to be moving, we aren't sure where this narrator is or if we can trust her, and then something becomes pronounced enough to provoke our further study. Are these romantic descriptions of a house, a delicious garden, or it's tattered decor? Are they intimate descriptions of a failing marriage, the desire for connections? Or are they veiled suicidal musings? Or, maybe, they're attempts to find a meaning in an extremely limited experience, like Offred opening her hand in the sunlight in The Handmaid's Tale.I've always been fascinated by how the narrator tries to understand her situation in terms of principles of design. Like, after she studies one breath, or strip, of wallpaper, she concludes that its pattern is "not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of." I think anybody who's experienced mental illness can relate to that. For her, each of these breaths exists as an isolated column of fatuity; in other words, it's meaningless. A pattern only emerges when she considers the strips next to one another. Dim shapes appear to resemble a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. The wallpaper also changes as the light changes. At night, the woman in the wallpapers captivity behind bars becomes as plain as can be. So, of course, does the narrator's own captivity. And, also, wait, hold on, full disclosure, I'm about to go full Freudian, which I know is like a frustration and annoyance to many of you who are not, like, hardcore lit-crit people. but just walk with me on this one. So, the paper has this peculiar odor that creeps all over the house, and is stronger after a week of fog and rain. Her husband might explain it as a combination of glue and mold intensified bu humidity, but smells travel through the olfactory bulb closely connected to the regions of the brain that handle memory and emotion. That's why smells always remind us of moments from our past, and it seems to me the narrator's fixation on this smell could be what Freud called the return of the repressed, or unconscious material rising to the surface. And, maybe that's part of why the narrator becomes determined that nobody discovered the wallpapers meaning except herself. Although she had initially craved conversation, she decided that it does not do to trust people too much, especially with her most frightening thoughts. I mean, after all, having previously trusted people with her frightening thoughts has landed her in this situation where she has to stare at yellow wallpaper all day. And then, eventually, the narrator begins to suspect that many women are trapped inside this paper; "I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over." The narrator longs to free this woman or women. On her last day in the house, she locks her door, throws the key into the garden, and tethers herself to the bed which she also bites. She rips at the wallpaper and thinks that it would be an admirable exercise to throw herself out the window. Then, she wedges her should into a smudge that runs along the lower part of the wall, and walks hunched over along the periphery of the room, a kind of reenactment of the woman stuck behind the wallpaper. John enters the room at last, and then faints at the sight of his wife; yet, she continues her laps, crawling over the body of the man who had oppressed her. "I've got out at last," she announces, "in spite of you and Jane?" Getting out at last involves rejecting societal norms and defying John, and breaking free of Jane, a character not mentioned until this point who may be herself? But, then comes this question mark, which complicated everything and makes it ambiguous. Charlotte Perkins Gilman transformed her experience of enduring this rest cure into a story that invites us to reconsider gender dynamics and the treatment of mental health disorders. At the times of its publication, the story may have inspired concrete change, too. In an article published in 1913, Gilman claims that her story, quote, "has to my knowledge, save one woman from a similar fate - so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered. But, the best result is this. Many years later I was told that [my own doctor] had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading The Yellow Wallpaper." Stories affect the world in mysterious ways and it The Yellow Wallpaper helped end the practice of separating the sick from the world, then I am grateful. But, I think the story has served another far more personal function. It has given form and expression to many people's experiences with mental illness, including, I have to say, mine. It's a story that explores the ways that physiological brain disorders can be hurt or helped by treatments, and by the way the social order imagines and talks about mental illness. And, although we are no longer embrace rest cures, we still have a long way to go when it comes to talking about mental illness without the stigmatization that can worsen suffering. But, then also mental illness and the way it's discussed isn't the only yellow wallpaper out there. I wonder, what is the wallpaper that constrains you and who else do you feel might be imprisoned by its pattern? How might you escape? How might you tell your story to influence others? Those questions haunted me when I first read Gilman's story in high school, and they shaped a lot of the ways that I think about writing today. More than 20 years later, I'm still asking them. Thanks for watching. I'll see you next time.[Outro Music]CrashCourse is filmed here in the Chad and Stacy Emigolz studio in Indianapolis, and it's made possible by your support at Patreon. Patreon is a voluntary subscription service, where you can support CrashCourse directly though and monthly donation to help us keep it free for everyone forever. We make CrashCourse wih Adobe Creative Cloud, you can get a free trial at a link in the description. Thanks to everyone who supports us on Patreon, and to all of you for watching, and, as we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome. First published: 1892The WorkThe Yellow Wallpaper is an autobiographical novel by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in which she describes the treatment of women during a rest cure prescribed for nervous disorders by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, who was a famous physician. The story describes the submissive, childlike obedience of women to men authority figures that was considered typical at the beginning of the twentieth century.Charlotte, the protagonist of the story, is helpless to express her own needs. She is taken by her husband, John, to a country house so that she can recuperate from a nervous condition. The reader is immediately aware of the condescending attitude of the physician husband toward his wife. She is relegated against her will to a third floor room of the house, a room that the owners previously used as a nursery. Symbolically, the room with the yellow wallpaper serves as a prison where the wife is restricted, like a child, from the intellectual activities of reading and writing. At first, Charlotte rebels against the constraints by keeping a secret diary. When John discovers her disobedience, Charlotte is chastised and her diary is cruelly destroyed.Social interactions are also held to a minimum. The husband lectures in other cities, so Charlotte is often left without emotional support for days at a time. When John is at home, his conversations are patronizing, and he dismisses Charlotte's concern about her condition. Clearly, her role is to comfort him and trust blindly that her own condition is improving. John's self-absorption does not permit him to see that Charlotte's condition is deteriorating.Jennie, who manages the household, is another example of the restricted role of women. She busies herself with decorating and supervising the kitchen. She unquestioningly carries out John's orders to monitor Charlotte's activities, even when her own contacts with Charlotte make it clear that what the doctor orders is not what the patient needs. She nevertheless obeys blindly until it is too late to reverse the effects of Charlotte's descent into madness.The powerful pattern in the yellow wallpaper resembles bars that confine the protagonist in her world of loneliness, helplessness, and infantilism. Deprived of intellectual stimulation, Charlotte's imagination conjures up a world behind the paper where captive women wait helplessly to be freed. Ironically, she is one of the women seeking to be liberated. Destroying the paper seems to be the only way she can destroy the hold of stifling mores that demand female subservience to men and free women from male dominance.BibliographyGilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979. One of the premier critical works on nineteenth century women writers. Includes a discussion of The Yellow Wallpaper linking the pattern in the wallpaper to patriarchal text patterns that women writers had to escape.Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper." Forerunner 4 (1913): 271. A one-page article in which Gilman explains that her main reason for writing The Yellow Wallpaper was to save other women from fates similar to her own under the rest cure.Golden, Catherine. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper." New York: Feminist Press, 1992. This indispensable compilation includes the text of The Yellow Wallpaper with the original illustrations, useful biographical and background information, well-selected critical essays, and a solid introduction.Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." New Literary History 11, no. 3 (1980): 451-467. In this article, Kolodny argues that Gilman's contemporaries did not understand the implications of The Yellow Wallpaper because they did not have the context to understand her point.Meyering, Sheryl L., ed. Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989. An important collection of critical essays on Gilman and her works, including one by Linda Wagner-Martin focusing on The Yellow Wallpaper. Assignment: „The Yellow Wallpaper": Autobiography or fiction? Regarding the first supporting evidence where this short story is regarded as an important work of feminist literature that illustrates the attitudes of the 19th century towards women, more specifically their mental and physical health which the author tried to show according to her personal experience. The short story is actually a first personal journal entry that was written by a woman whose husband was a physician that had confined her to a bedroom that he had rented for the summer. The women is forbidden to work and therefore she has to hide when she is writing in her journal because the husband believes that in this way she could recover from what he calls a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency;" which was also a common diagnosis to women in the 19th century. Furthermore, this story depicts the effect of confinement on the storyteller's mental health, which is the woman and her fall into obsession because she has nothing to stimulate her so she becomes obsessed by the pattern and the color of the wallpaper. In the end, the woman imagines that there are other women creeping around behind the patters of the wallpaper, and comes to believe that she is one of them. The woman locks herself in the room with the torn yellow wallpaper and feels that now that it is the only place where she feels safe and refuses to leave. Order custom essay The Yellow Wallpaper: Autobiography or Fiction with free plagiarism report 450+ experts on 30 subjects Starting from 3 hours delivery Get Essay Help There are supporting elements within the story that makes the story an autobiography and not a fictional story. In my opinion, the way that the author writes in such detail and in such craze about the wallpaper only gives me proof that the author herself experienced this craze of obsession over petty things for the simple reason of being confined and not having anything better to do since she was on "rest cure" and was not allowed to be with her child, work or even write. Basically, the details that the author writes about how something simple, like wallpaper can cause an obsession can only be written by a person that actually experienced such a feeling in such a situation as written in the story. Considering the second supporting evidence that Gilman herself gives a statement on why she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper". The author explained that the idea for the story originated from her own personal experience as a patient and also stating that "the real purpose of the story was to reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell (who was mentioned in the story itself) in order to convince him of the error in of his ways. " Gilman had suffered from years of being depressed, and talked to a physician specializing in the "rest cure. " He put her on a rest cure, advising her to live as domestic as possible and was forbidden to touch and doing anything that would stimulate her brain. After three months and almost completely giving up, Gilman decided to go against her diagnosis and continue to work and stimulate her mind again. And after she had realized how close she had come to the worst mental illness, she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" with additions and exaggerations to illustrate her point of misdiagnosis. In conclusion, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an exaggerated account of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's personal experiences where after being diagnosed and put on the "rest cure" she eventually felt herself beginning to go slowly insane from the inactivity. However, unlike the protagonist in her story, Gilman did not reach the point of total madness, but she knew that her deteriorating mental condition was due to the oppressive medical regime that was meant to "cure" her. In addition, Dr. Mitchell and his treatment play a key role in the story in the third section of the text where the protagonist's husband even threatens to send her to Weir Mitchell in the fall if she does not recover soon. According to the above arguments and the supporting facts, it can only be stated that it can be nothing more than an autobiography consisting of exaggerated accounts of what the author was going through personally and thus giving the short story fictional elements. However, the short story is an autobiography for the simple reason of it being based on actual events and perceptions of the author, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, even if it consists of exaggerated and thus fictional elements. The Yellow Wallpaper: Autobiography or Fiction. (2018, May 09). Retrieved from Gilman's short story called The Yellow Wallpaper is partially autobiographical; otherwise, I cannot imagine a healthy person with any physical and mental concerns writing such a stunning literary piece. The novel, as if criticizes the medical approaches to curing women of the depressive disorder by the so-called "rest cure." Written an epistolary style, Gilman' narration provides a better picture of how women in the nineteenth century were neglected by medical professionals. It seems to me the author's idea that recuperation is impossible without practicing normal social skills and without communication with other people. Being isolated, therefore, can worsen the conditions leading to madness. We will write a custom essay on your topic tailored to your instructions! Because the story interprets the way female health issues were treated in the eighteenth century, I could recollect my personal experience of coming up with stress after different negative events. Nowadays, depression is considered a much more serious thing and, therefore, no one ignores that disorder as it was previously neglected. Hence, I always try to talk to a close person who would understand my concerns and who can help me find the right decision. In contrast, the book reveals that men did not consider women being able to experience psychological and moral pressure on the part of society. Hence, Gilman writes, "…if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus – but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (2). By reviewing concrete emotions and feelings and capturing the heroine's experience, it was possible to understand that isolation destroyed her as an individuality. Further analysis and reflection on the text make me wonder why men were so ignorant of women's concerns and needs. While looking through other historical evidence, I have realized that these problems occurred due to inadequate evaluation of women's attitude to work, as well as the role of professional occupation in their lives. In this respect, the author provides monologues of a woman who becomes crazy with colors in the room she was locked in: "…that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things. But there is something else about that paper – the smell…A yellow smell" (10). Skimming through these lines, I was terror-stricken by the consequences of the medical treatment leading to psychosis. I agree with the author, particularly about her attitude to the role of socialization in the life of humans. Her criticism of isolated treatment is justified because some of the autobiographic facts prove that working is not the main reason for depression among women. Because of accepted social norms, the position of women in society did not allow them to fulfill themselves professionally. Female professionals were not largely welcomed and, as a result, many physicians considered it the main cause of mental disorders. In conclusion, I should note that most of the misconceptions among the causes and underpinnings of depression are partially premised on the false stereotypes existing at the end of the nineteenth century. The short story, therefore, precisely renders the social problems and challenges of that time, particularly about women. Moreover, the author underscores the negligence on the part of the psychotherapists of the original reason for depressions among females because of firmly accepted stereotypes. Works Cited Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. The Yellow Wallpaper. US: Diginovus, 1981. Print. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. We're getting everything ready for you. The page is loading, and you'll be on your way in just a few moments. Thanks for your patience! First published: 1892The WorkThe Yellow Wallpaper is an autobiographical novel by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in which she describes the treatment of women during a rest cure prescribed for nervous disorders by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, who was a famous physician. The story describes the submissive, childlike obedience of women to men authority figures that was considered typical at the beginning of the twentieth century.Charlotte, the protagonist of the story, is helpless to express her own needs. She is taken by her husband, John, to a country house so that she can recuperate from a nervous condition. The reader is immediately aware of the condescending attitude of the physician husband toward his wife. She is relegated against her will to a third floor room of the house, a room that the owners previously used as a nursery. Symbolically, the room with the yellow wallpaper serves as a prison where the wife is restricted, like a child, from the intellectual activities of reading and writing. At first, Charlotte rebels against the constraints by keeping a secret diary. When John discovers her disobedience,