

The Yellow Wallpaper Study Guide

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

The Yellow Wallpaper Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
The Yellow Wallpaper.....	5
Three Thanksgivings.....	8
The Cottagette.....	11
Turned.....	13
Making a Change.....	16
If I Were A Man.....	19
Mr. Peeble's Heart.....	21
Characters.....	24
Symbols and Symbolism.....	29
Settings.....	31
Themes and Motifs.....	33
Styles.....	36
Quotes.....	38

Plot Summary

"The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a collection of seven stories which focus on the suppression against women's rights and women's struggle to obtain equality. Each story depicts a female protagonist who battles oppression, and most of these women ultimately triumph.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator and John, her husband, rent a colonial mansion for the summer. Confined to an upstairs room, the narrator's already fragile mental health worsens as she obsesses about the yellow wallpaper covering the room. Convinced that a woman is trapped behind it, the narrator removes the wallpaper to free the woman, yet her insistence that she has "got out at last" (page 15) indicates her lack of mental instability through her belief that she is the woman behind the wall.

In "Three Thanksgivings," Mrs. Delia Morrison receives invitations from both of her children, Andrew and Jean, to spend Thanksgiving with them and live with them, but she does not want to leave her home, despite the fact that Mr. Peter Butts has taken out a mortgage on her property and uses the debt as leverage to try to force her into marriage, another option she rejects. Determined to repay her debt, Delia opens the Haddleton Rest and Improvement Club for Ladies, earning enough money to repay Mr. Butts and even turn a profit.

While spending the summer at an artsy mountain resort with her friend Lois in "The Cottage," Malda falls in love with Mr. Ford Mathews. At Lois's suggestion, Malda tries to encourage Ford to propose by making a home of the cottage. She has a kitchen installed, and she takes up domestic responsibilities, though it limits her time to focus on her art. When Ford finally proposes on the condition that Malda give up cooking to focus on her art, she cannot believe that such a wonderful man exists.

In "Turned," Mrs. Marroner is distraught when a letter mix-up reveals that her husband has impregnated Gerta, their young servant. However, her initial anger at Gerta is soon transplanted by disdain for the man who knowingly subjected Gerta (and his unborn child!) to the world's disparagement. Returning home from business abroad, Mr. Marroner returns to an empty home. After a detective locates Mrs. Marroner's new address, he visits her and is surprised to find that Gerta and his child also live with his former wife.

In "Making a Change," Frank and Julia's baby cries constantly, driving their household crazy and nearly driving Julia to suicide. Luckily, Frank's mother proposes a change. She secretly opens a daycare where she cares for her grandson and fourteen other infants, while Julia resumes teaching music lessons secretly. Frank is furious when he first learns that his wife and mother are working, but he quickly learns to accept, and even appreciate, the change that makes his entire household happier.

In "If I Were a Man," Mollie often wishes she were a man. Then, one day after a fight with her husband Gerald, she is shocked to find herself in his body. Throughout the day,

Gerald is overcome with foreign, feminine thoughts, while Mollie receives quite an education into a man's mind.

Dr. Joan, while staying with her sister Emma and brother-in-law Arthur in "Mr. Peebles' Heart," is struck by her sister's selfishness and Arthur's inherent goodness. So, she convinces Arthur to travel to Europe for two years for his health because traveling is his lifelong dream. During his absence, Joan improves the profitability of his business and cultivates Emma's mind. When a revitalized Arthur returns home, he finds a less stressful job and a more independent, selfless wife. When Arthur and Emma inquire about the condition of his heart, Dr. Joan merely responds that his condition has responded to treatment.

The Yellow Wallpaper

Summary

The narrator finds it odd that ordinary people like her husband, John, and herself were able to secure a colonial mansion for the summer. She finds the long-empty house to be strange and believes it may be haunted. However, her physician husband is a practical man who laughs at her superstitions. He also does not believe that his wife is sick, insisting that she suffers from a temporary nervous depression and slight hysterical tendency. His prescribed remedy is to forbid his wife from working, but she believes that change and excitement would benefit her health, so she sneaks and writes in her journal, though she finds it exhausting. Since the narrator agrees with John's warning that thinking about her condition will make it worse, she focuses on describing the house which is beautiful but odd. The wife grows angry when John does not believe her, yet he advises her to exercise self-control. The narrator is particularly adverse to the upstairs room where she is frequently confined because the former nursery contains barred windows and a hideous yellow wallpaper.

Two weeks later, while John is gone, the narrator writes in her journal again, lamenting the fact that she does not get to spend much time with her son. She has grown used to her room, other than the sickly colored wallpaper and the scratches on the floor and furniture. She begins to grow concerned by the strange pattern in the wallpaper. John invites company to the mansion to celebrate the Fourth of July. Though Jennie, his sister, sees to all the planning, the narrator is still exhausted by the festivities. She spends a lot of time alone, examining the patterns in the wallpaper. She knows that John wants her to get better, but he refuses to let her visit her cousins and insists that only she can improve her health by controlling her mind. Returning to the wallpaper, the narrator begins to see a woman creeping on all fours behind the pattern, but John refuses to leave the mansion for three more weeks, encouraging his wife to control her imagination. She is convinced that John and Jennie both suspect the wallpaper, so she determines to learn the secret before they leave, beginning to peel the remaining paper away to free the woman inside after she sees the woman creeping about in the daytime. Determined to aid the woman in escaping at night, the narrator works hard to remove the wallpaper before she leaves the mansion. On their last day in the mansion, the narrator locks herself in her room, preparing a rope to tie the woman up if she tries to escape. Stripping the rest of the wallpaper away, the narrator refuses to go outside because it is pleasant to creep around the room. When John finally returns and questions his wife's actions, she informs him, "I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back" (page 15)! John faints across her path, forcing her to creep over him.



Analysis

Published in 1892, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a 15-page short story, told from the perspective of an unnamed, first-person narrator. Since John, the narrator's husband, confines her to an upstairs room in the mansion they rented for the summer, her story consists of a collection of secret journal entries which are forbidden because John insists that she needs rest. While the narrator is convinced that she suffers from a serious physical ailment, John, a licensed physician, insists that she must recuperate from her "temporary nervous depression- a slight hysterical tendency" (page 1). This prognosis significantly contributes to the theme of the oppression of women which predominates Gilman's collection of short stories since women's health issues were commonly diagnosed as being mental issues during the late 19th century. Despite John's professional opinion, the narrator's confinement obviously affects her mental health negatively as she descends into psychosis, obsessing about the color and pattern of the yellow wallpaper covering the walls of her prison. As her condition regresses, she imagines a woman creeping behind the pattern, so she removes the paper to free the woman, and soon, she reveals that she believes herself to be the woman trapped behind the wallpaper, providing solid evidence of her mental instability. At the end of the story, John faints upon his wife announcing that he cannot put her back behind the wallpaper. One possible interpretation of his fainting is the suggestion that his wife may have killed him. While feminists interpret this text as a condemnation of androcentric hegemony in the 19th century medical profession, this work can also be seen as Gilman's protest against the medical and professional oppression directed toward women during that time period.

Discussion Question 1

How does John react to the narrator's feelings about the house?

Discussion Question 2

What does the narrator suspect that the upstairs room she is confined to was once used for?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the narrator peel away the yellow wallpaper?

Vocabulary

Ancestral, colonial, hereditary, felicity, untenanted, superstition, hysterical, phosphates, congenial, opposition, stimulus, neglect, flamboyant, contradictions, atrocious,



comparative, stimulating, inanimate, inharmonious, interminable, reproachful,
arabesque, convolutions, misconstrued, admirable

Three Thanksgivings

Summary

Mrs. Delia Morrison smiles as she reads letters from her children, Andrew and Jean, in which they invite her to spend Thanksgiving with them. They both also ask her to live with them. Though only Delia and Sally are left now that the boarders are all gone, Delia loves the Welcome House where she was raised and has no desire to leave her home. Early in the evening, Mr. Peter Butts calls. He has always loved Delia, and since she was forced to let him take a mortgage on her house, he hopes she will default and be forced to accept him to avoid losing Welcome House. Again, Mr. Butts proposes to Delia, suggesting it would be better to keep house for him than for boarders and reminding her that the mortgage is due two years from Thanksgiving. Still, Delia refuses to marry him, insisting that she will manage to pay the mortgage. Delia spends Thanksgiving with Andrew and his family. Though she is received kindly, she eagerly returns home after a week. Back at Welcome House, Delia considers how to pay her mortgage and interest. Since she is not fond of taking boarders, she decides that she can grow enough in her garden to sustain Sally and herself; however, she still needs money. She considers opening a girls' boarding school, but she cannot fathom how she could obtain the capital needed for such a venture. Recalling how much she enjoyed entertaining the local ladies during her husband's lifetime, Delia is struck with an idea. She works at her desk late into the night.

The town of Haddleton buzzes with news that Delia is going to entertain when they are all invited to meet Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake, who is famous for her work with children. The ladies are even more excited at the rumor that a Countess will also join Mrs. Blake. The ladies are delighted to see how equal Delia is to the two great ladies. Though the Countess stays only one day, Mrs. Blake continues at Welcome House. When Mrs. Blake comes up with the idea that the ladies need a Rest and Improvement Club, she suggests that Delia may allow part of her house to be used for the venture, and Delia cordially consents. The ladies agree on refreshments and calculate the cost, jumping at the opportunity before Delia has a chance to change her mind. Before long, Haddleton has a large, eager women's club to which all of the ladies belong. Though membership costs little, Welcome House is quite busy, and the money quickly accumulates. For Thanksgiving, Delia spends a week with Jean, and again, she is thankful to return home. Though Mr. Butts has already received his interest, he calls on Delia to ask how she acquired the money, and she responds that it was easier than he can imagine. Leaving no nearer to his goal of marriage, Mr. Butts warns Delia that she will still have to give in next year. Taking up her task with renewed energy, Delia finds it easy to collect ten cents a week from even the poorest women, and because of her skillful management, the club's membership reaches 500 women in the second year. By the end of the year, Delia has made the full amount of her interest and mortgage, plus an extra \$1000 in clear profit. She invites her children home for Thanksgiving, even providing the money for their traveling expenses. After a delightful holiday with her children and grandchildren, Delia receives a visit from Mr. Butts. When she hands him

the interest and principal, he is convinced that some friends loaned her the money because he cannot believe she made so much from her club. Delia tells him not to quarrel over good money and asks to part as friends. So, they part.

Analysis

Published in 1909, "Three Thanksgivings" consists of 13 pages, narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator. The main theme of this work is women's struggle for economic independence, despite the social pressure to marry and the possibility of being forced into undesirable marriages. Mrs. Delia Morrison, the widowed protagonist, wants to stay in Welcome House, the home her father built and where she has lived most of her life. However, the story's antagonist, Mr. Peter Butts, has procured a mortgage on the property and tries to use it as leverage to force Mrs. Morrison to marry him if she is unable to repay her debt, including interest. This scheme shows Mr. Butts' devious nature as it seems inevitable that Mrs. Morrison will fail to repay her pecuniary obligations due to women being unable to work during this era in history. Mrs. Morrison's distaste at the idea of living with either of her grown children and their families is indicative of her uncharacteristic struggle for independence. The supposition that she will be required to choose between the necessary evils of marrying Mr. Butts or living with one of her children demonstrates the prevalent oppressive attitudes toward women in the early 20th century. By opening part of her home to house a ladies' club, Mrs. Morrison finds a means of gaining financial independence. Furthermore, the fact that she earns her money through women is telling as she refuses to allow men to support her, even indirectly. Eventually, Mrs. Morrison triumphs, earning enough to repay the principal and interest on her debt, much to Mr. Butts' irritation. In fact, Mrs. Morrison even manages to turn a profit on her enterprise, showing the ingenuity that women are capable of, in spite of common oppressive attitudes at the time.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mr. Peter Butts visit Delia Morrison on Thanksgiving?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mrs. Morrison decide to do to rectify her financial situation?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Mrs. Morrison's business enterprise.

Vocabulary

Anxious, splendid, respective, lingering, diplomatic, gratified, cordial, provision, prosperous, habitable, profusely, fusillade, pertinacious, obstinate, maliciously, conspicuous, reminiscence, emanated, cumbersome

The Cottagette

Summary

Though Mr. Ford Mathews and Lois agree that it is a cottagette, it is larger than it looks, and Malda is delighted with its distance from other houses. It does not contain a kitchen, but meals are served nearby at High Court, a mountain resort used for a summer school of music and higher thought. Malda likes the music, but she loves the cottagette without reserve. The views are beautiful, and though she also enjoys the company of the musicians at High Court, it would not matter if they were not present as long as Ford was there. Ford is a former newspaper man who writes for a magazine, and he is currently writing a book. He spends much time visiting Malda and Lois who make a safe, reasonable household. The more time they spend with Ford, the more Malda grows interested in this man with a purpose who takes interest in her embroidery and design work. Malda's work is inspired by the beauty of the resort.

When Lois asks if Malda loves Ford, Malda responds in the affirmative, but she cannot answer when her friend asks if he returns her feelings. Yet, she believes it would be a good marriage if he could love her. Lois asks if Malda would be willing to do something to win him. When Malda agrees, as long as it is something she approves of, Lois unfolds her plan. Lois was unhappily married in her youth, but having escaped that marriage, she is willing to share her experience with Malda in order to save her friend from the pain. Though men like music and sensible talk, Lois insists they like domesticity best of all, and all men want to marry a homemaker. While High Court is conducive to love, it does not encourage marriage, so Lois suggests that Malda make a home of the cottagette by installing a kitchen and cooking. Malda objects that the lack of housekeeping is part of the place's beauty. Lois informs her that Ford has not known a home since he was 18 years old, so they have a kitchen installed, and Malda begins cooking. Though the housework interferes with her artwork, she is pleased that Ford visits even more often. She loves this man and tries to please him. She realizes that she will always have to do this work if they marry. So, she should get used to it. One day, Ford invites her on a picnic lunch to Hugh's Peak. During this perfect day, he asks Malda to marry him, on one condition: that she will give up cooking! He insists that he knows how to cook. While Malda cooks well, it does not agree with her, and it has limited her time on her artwork. He insists that her artwork is too good to lose. He loved her before she started cooking. In fact, he withdraws his condition, confessing his undying love even if Malda insists on cooking, but she quickly confesses that she does not want to cook. She wants to draw and will eagerly relinquish cooking for Ford's sake. Malda cannot believe that such a man as Ford exists!

Analysis

Eight pages in length and published in 1910, "The Cottagette" is told from the first-person perspective of Malda, the main character and protagonist of the story. This



narrative serves to demonstrate Gilman's incisive, relevant analysis of women's economic issues. As the story begins, Malda praises the simplicity of life at the cottage she rents for the summer with her friend, Lois. She particularly enjoys the opportunity it provides for her to focus on her artwork. Things change, though, when Lois realizes that Malda has fallen in love with Mr. Ford Mathews. Lois's belief that men want to marry women who are "domestic" was a popular belief at the time, and it leads to the installation of a kitchen in the cottage so that Malda can keep house as a means of demonstrating her domesticity to her potential suitor. Though Malda is unhappy tending to household matters, especially as these duties infringe on her time spent focusing on her artwork, she is convinced that this is the best way to inspire Ford's love, plus she knows these will be her responsibilities after she is married, so she needs to get used to it. She is obviously discontent with her inability to focus on her art, but she is determined to be a "true woman." When Ford finally proposes under the condition that Malda relinquish her cooking duties, the author reveals his uncharacteristically open-mindedness as well as his desire for Malda to pursue her dreams, thus placing him in direct opposition to many of the husbands in other stories within this collection to whom he serves as a foil.

Discussion Question 1

What does Lois teach Malda about marriage?

Discussion Question 2

How does Malda feel about her household responsibilities?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ford propose on the condition that Malda quit cooking?

Vocabulary

Furtive, furnished, eccentric, immensity, rational, domesticity, idyllic, competence, elusive, exquisite

Turned

Summary

While Mrs. Marroner sobs uncontrollably on the soft bed in her lush chamber, Gerta Petersen sobs on her hard bed without trying to control herself. Though Mrs. Marroner suffers from the ruin of a longer love, Gerta meets with personal shame, a hopeless future, and a terrifying present. Gerta came to the Marroners' house at age 18. As a perfect servant, she was readily admired by Mr. Marroner and his wife, though Mrs. Marroner quickly became jealous of the beautiful girl. Seven months earlier, Mr. Marroner went abroad for work, but he frequently writes his wife and always asks about Gerta, a fact that Mrs. Marroner now thinks about.

In recent months, Mrs. Marroner notices that Gerta seems anxious, but after ruling out homesickness and illness, Mrs. Marroner suggests something that cannot be denied. Trying not to be too stern so she might win the girl's confidence, Mrs. Marroner tries to repress her irritation when Gerta throws herself at her mistress's feet and begs not to be thrown away. Still, Mrs. Marroner determines to see Gerta through safely and get her back to Sweden with her baby. Receiving a letter from her husband at the same time that an identical letter arrives for Gerta with no return address, Mrs. Marroner reads her unsigned letter which encourages the little girl to bravely bare her condition and promises to take care of her.

Though she tries to disregard her suspicions, Mrs. Marroner forces Gerta to read her letter aloud, and since it is addressed to "my dear wife," it is obvious that Mr. Marroner switched the letters by accident. After telling Gerta to pack and leave immediately, Mrs. Marroner goes to her room and weeps, but after a relaxing bath, she regrets her instant banishment of Gerta. Finding Gerta crying in her sleep, Mrs. Marroner thinks about the situation, recognizing how hard it must be to resist temptation when it comes disguised as friendship from a trusted source. Forcing herself to see the girl's misdeed and ruined future, she is quickly lead to condemn the man who elicited the misdeed since he was fully aware of the consequences of his actions. Mrs. Marroner feels pity and outrage for herself and Gerta at her husband's offense against womanhood, motherhood, and the unborn child that he has doomed to degradation!

When Mr. Marroner returns home a few weeks later, he finds his house empty. At his office the next day, he receives a visit from John Hill, Mrs. Marroner's lawyer, who delivers a letter: "I have gone. I will care for Gerta. Good-bye. Marion" (page 46). Furious at Gerta, whom he blames for alienating him from his wife, Mr. Marroner does nothing at first. Eventually, he hires a detective who informs him that his wife is teaching college and keeping boarders in a quiet town. He visits her address where he learns that she now goes by her maiden name, Miss Wheeling. After being ushered into her parlor, Mr. Marroner is certain that his wife will forgive him when she sees his honest remorse and his determination to be a better man. Two women enter, one holding a

baby. As Mr. Marroner looks dumbly from Marion to Gerta, his former wife asks what he has to say to them.

Analysis

Published in 1911, "Turned" consists of nine pages and is told from the perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator. This story serves as Gilman's statement on the privileged existence of upper-class couples in the early 20th century while contributing to the theme of mistreatment of women which recurs frequently throughout this collection. Mrs. Marion Marroner is placed in the role of protagonist, while Gerta serves as a victim of the antagonist, Marion's husband, Mr. Marroner. The story's conflict arises upon Mrs. Marroner learning her husband's secret, that he has impregnated their young servant, Gerta Petersen.

At first, Mrs. Marroner furiously blames Gerta for her husband's infidelity and even banishes the girl, but upon reflection, the protagonist begins to sympathize with the young girl who has been misled by an experienced man acting in the guise of friendship. At the thought of the unborn child he has doomed to infamy, Mrs. Marroner's anger begins to be directed at the proper source, leading her to see her husband's guilt since he was fully aware of the consequences of his actions yet still proceeded without regard to the crime he was committing against womanhood and motherhood.

Seeing her husband from a new perspective, Mrs. Marroner leaves him, taking Gerta with her with the intention of caring for both Gerta and her child. On her own, Mrs. Marroner resumes teaching, contributing to the theme of women following their dreams which appears repeatedly throughout Gilman's collection. Though confident of his wife's forgiveness, Mr. Marroner is struck dumb at the sight of his wife and Gerta, suggesting that he has possibly come to terms with the consequences of his infidelity.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Mrs. Marroner and Gerta Petersen in the first scene of the story.

Discussion Question 2

How does Mrs. Marroner react to her husband's infidelity?

Discussion Question 3

How does Mr. Marroner show himself to be a stereotypical husband during this time period?

Vocabulary

Convulsively, prostrated, docile, eliminated, mellifluous, ingratitude, repress, contemptuous, deluge, repudiated, administered, accumulated, evasively, impersonal

Making a Change

Summary

When Frank Gordins asks for a way to stop his child's crying, Julia, his wife, claims she does not know of any, but his mother insists she does and wishes she were in charge of the infant's care. Julia says that they can make a change if Frank is dissatisfied with the child's mother, and though the baby's crying hurts her ears, especially since she is a sensitive musician, her conscience and pride are also sensitive; Albert is her child, and she devotes her days and nights to tending to his needs! When Julia and her mother-in-law begin to argue, Frank objects to how his wife speaks to his mother, but Julia will not stand for interference in raising her child, and she is furious when her husband suggests they may all get a little peace if she lets his mother tend to the baby. Frank was raised well, and his mother approved when he fell in love with Julia, a young music teacher, so she welcomed the young woman into their household. A devoted wife, Julia gives up music, but she misses it more than she could imagine.

When Albert is born, she is filled with devotion and gratitude, but now, as she looks at Frank, thoughts of separation, flight, and suicide cross her mind before she agrees to make a change to allow her husband some peace. Relieved, Frank suggests Julia let his mother tend to Albert while Julia naps. Leaving for work, Frank thinks that marriage and children are not what he expected, but he focuses his energy on supporting his beloved family. At home, while her mother-in-law is deep in thought, Julia battles with her thoughts before allowing her mother-in-law to watch Albert while she tries to nap. Delighted with her grandson, the senior Mrs. Gordins thinks how easily she could care for 16 babies, but when the smell of smoke leads her to Julia's bedroom, she climbs the stepladder to enter the room and opens the doors and windows. Waking to loving arms around her, Julia is told that her mother-in-law understands, that she and Frank have not been half good enough to Julia, and that she has a lovely plan for change which Julia listens to eagerly.

Frank is happy and relieved that Albert outgrows his crying spells, and agreeing she has learned much, Julia says the baby has better care. Frank is also happy that his wife's health improves and she even begins playing music for him in the evenings, plus his mother is more cheerful and affectionate toward Julia, so he does not question it when Greta, their maid, is replaced with a more expensive French matron. However, when Frank brags to his friends about his happy domesticity, he is not pleased to learn that his wife is teaching music lessons. In fact, he is so disconcerted that he goes home early in the afternoon to find his home empty. Learning that his mother is upstairs, he finds her and the nursemaid with 15 happy babies. The senior Mrs. Gordins explains that she has the babies from 9am to 5pm, and Julia will be home by 5pm also. Because Frank is angry and hurt, his mother explains that they did not tell him at first because they knew he would be angry, but she is happy babysitting and Julia is happy giving music lessons, so she asks "you can't feel very badly about a thing that makes us all happy, can you?" (page 55). When Julia returns home, her expression becomes guilty



when she sees Frank, but she begs him to get used to it and to be proud of her and his mother since they are happy and earning money. That night, Frank and Julia have a long talk during which she explains how near danger came and how his mother showed her an escape; she points out that they are all happy, even him, and Frank agrees that he loves his home, work, mother and wife and even wishes he had six children! He can stand the arrangement since it makes his wife so happy, and years later, he frequently notes, "this being married and bringing up children is as easy as can be- when you learn how" (page 56)!

Analysis

Published in 1911 and consisting of eight pages, "Making a Change" is told from the perspective of an omniscient, third-person narrator, and the events that transpire in this story are indicative of Gilman's belief that a communal daycare for working women would broaden and stimulate the minds of children while simultaneously freeing the mother's time. As the story begins, the Gordins' household is tense and unhappy, causing all three adults, Julia, Frank and his mother, the senior Mrs. Gordins, to agree that they need a change. Pursuing her idea for a change, Julia attempts suicide, but fortunately, she is rescued by her mother-in-law who proposes a change, though her idea is not shared with the reader. As the story progresses, there is an obvious improvement in the atmosphere in the Gordins' household, and the change is finally revealed when Frank learns that Julia has resumed giving music lessons, an act that contributes to the collection's theme of women pursuing their dreams. The man who informs Frank of his wife's career disapproves of women working, a sign of the times which contributes to the theme of the oppression of women. In accordance with most men's beliefs, Frank is furious at the idea of his wife having a job, and his irritation grows when he goes home in the middle of the day to find that his mother has started a daycare. Mrs. Gordins Sr. shows uncharacteristic open-mindedness, especially given her status as a member of the older generation, when she points out that there is no reason for Frank to disapprove of her scheme since it has made their entire household so much happier. Eventually, Frank concedes and even approves of the change his wife and mother have made since it improves the quality of all their lives and happiness; this shows Frank's willingness to accept women working which reveals an open-mindedness that most of the husbands in other stories in this collection do not possess. Thus, Frank serves as a foil to these other husbands while exhibiting similarities to Ford from "The Cottagette" through his forward thinking.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Mrs. Gordins Sr. holding Julia when she wakes?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the change that Mrs. Gordins Sr. suggests and implements.



Discussion Question 3

Why is Frank so angry when he first finds out that Julia is giving music lessons?

Vocabulary

Ominously, ardent, unremitting, deprivation, idolatrously, inefficiency, appurtenances, exhibiting

If I Were A Man

Summary

On the rare occasion that her husband, Gerald, refuses to do what she wants, Mollie Mathewson always says "if I were a man..." (page 57), and this is what she says this morning when Gerald fusses about an overdue bill she forgot to give him when it was first due. Mollie is a "true woman," she is a small, pretty and loving wife and devoted mother with a gift for society, yet she often wishes she were a man, and suddenly she is! Mollie finds herself in Gerald's body as he hurries down the street to catch the morning train, and still in a temper, Mollie's own words ring through her ears as Gerald shuts his mouth to avoid saying something he will regret. Mollie can feel his pride, sympathy with weakness and the feeling that he must be gentle with her, but she only has enough subconscious memory of herself to recognize the differences in their thinking. Mollie notes her increased size and how everything fits now, and digging for change, she finds pockets to be a revelation as she has never even imagined how it would feel to have pockets. For the first time in her life, she feels power in possessing money, but as she thinks that she would have paid the bill without mentioning it if it had come to her, she awakens to the manly consciousness about money and Gerald's irritation at the inconvenient bill when he is saving his money for special plans. Mollie is shocked to find herself complaining that women have no business sense, and because women spend so much money on useless hats, she sees hats for all their stupidity, realizing how stupid they look to those who pay for them. Still, as Gerald, she relinquishes her seat to a young woman and feels pleasure at another woman's appearance in her hat.

Surprised in the train by other commuting men who are friends with her husband and begin talking to him, Mollie is struck with the startling subconscious knowledge of how men really view women, though they keep their thoughts and feelings about females in a separate mental compartment from other things. The world that opens up before her is dizzying, but while Mollie is still crying at home over their fight, Gerald has already forgotten about this morning's bill, turning his concern to business and politics as he sympathizes with his neighbor's troubles much like Mollie usually does with the neighbor's wife. Struggling with her new masculine consciousness, Mollie cannot believe how Mr. Miles talks since she always thought him to be courteous. As the men's conversation changes to women's small minds, their tendency to change their minds, how much they want, and the danger of women overstepping the limits of their God-appointed sphere, one tired man notes, "a good woman is about the best thing on earth" (page 61), to which the other men contribute that a bad one is the worst thing in the world. Unable to resist something stirring inside him, Gerald sits up and points out that men have limitations as well as women, so it is time to wake up and realize that women are people too; though women dress like fools, men disdain women who are commonly dressed, and men do not allow their wives to work because it hurts their masculine pride. Furthermore, perhaps Eve brought evil into the world, but men have done their



part to keep it going! All day long at work, Gerald is vaguely conscious of new views and strange feelings inside himself as the submerged Mollie learns and learns.

Analysis

Published in 1914 and consisting of six pages, "If I Were a Man" is told from the perspective of an omniscient, third-person narrator who focuses on the realization of Mollie's desire to be a man. When her husband disagrees with her, Mollie often considers how she would act if she were a man, so she is stunned when her wish comes true one day after she and Gerald fight over a bill. Thus, Mollie spends the day in her husband's body. Her desire to be a man stems from her envy of men since, during this time period, men possessed all the power and pride. As Gerald, Mollie gets to experience how it feels to possess her own money and to be her own person for the first time in her life. Through Gerald, Mollie witnesses men's thoughts about women's fashion and business sense, but ironically, many of men's complaints against women are encouraged by men. For example, men complain that women's fashion is nonsense, but they criticize women who dress sensibly. They object to giving their wives money, yet they refuse to allow their wives to work (another contribution to the theme of women working and pursuing their dreams which pervades this collection)! In this story, Mollie gets to experience a gender switch, allowing her to learn much about the masculine thought process. Throughout the day, Gerald is vaguely aware of the new ideas and feelings caused by Mollie's presence, indicating that maybe this experience will strengthen their relationship as they both obtain a bit of insight into their spouse's perspective.

Discussion Question 1

What experiences does Mollie have for the first time as Gerald?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the thoughts of Mollie and Gerald.

Discussion Question 3

How will Mollie's day in Gerald's body affect the future of their relationship?

Vocabulary

Rendered, capricious, esoteric, subconscious, affiliation, sanctuary, lamentable, physiology, preoccupation

Mr. Peeble's Heart

Summary

While Mr. Arthur Peebles sleeps uneasily on his sofa, Mrs. Emma Peebles invites her sister, Dr. Joan R. Bascom, to accompany her to the Ellsworth Ladies' Home Club, but Joan insists she would rather stay at home as she is currently staying with her sister and brother-in-law while trying to build a practice in their town. Once Emma leaves, Dr. Joan peruses a book while watching Arthur sleep. At the age of 50, Arthur is a slave of duty, his duty being carrying women. He supported his mother as soon as he was old enough until she died when he was 30 years old. Then, after marrying Emma, he also cared for his sister and two daughters until they married. Though he has grown tougher with age, he does not complain. Since he likes Joan, he would gladly add her to the list of women in his charge, but she is unlike any woman he has ever known. After running away at a young age, Joan had put herself through medical school before coming home to settle, and she is a welcome visitor who inspires pride in her sister and brother-in-law. As Joan thinks about what a good man Arthur is, he wakes suddenly, causing her to warn him that it is bad for his heart to sit up so quickly. Joan questions Arthur about his dreams, learning that he hates keeping his store, would love to travel, and wishes he could have pursued a musical career. Unfortunately, Emma will not even allow him to keep a Victrola in their house!

A few days later, Joan obtains Emma's permission to board with the Peebles. When she asks if Emma is content, Emma says it would be sinful if she were not, but she does not think of Arthur until Joan mentions him, then adding that he is always well but has had a kind of breakdown every now and then. While establishing her medical practice, Dr. Joan secretly begins a campaign to alienate Arthur's affection, not for herself but without re-entanglement. She buys a noble gramophone which she and Arthur listen to while Emma sulks on the other side of the house, and while the music stirs Arthur oddly, he does not argue when Emma criticizes the music, though he loses the interested sparkle in his eyes. One day, while Emma is at the ladies' club, Joan asks if Arthur has confidence in her as a physician and whether he would listen to her prescription, and upon receiving an affirmative answer, Dr. Joan prescribes two years in Europe because Arthur is in bad condition and needs to travel to improve his health. In response to his objections, Joan insists Emma owns the house and has enough money to support herself, while Joan herself will buy the store from Arthur. Dumbfounded, Arthur protests, but Joan points out that while Emma and his daughters do not need him now, they may need him later, so now is his time to be his own man and do what he wants since he has already done his duty better than any other man! Arthur worries that Emma will miss him, but Joan says that is the best thing that could happen for Emma and Arthur. When Arthur insists that Emma will never agree, Joan promises to take care of that, promising that Emma will be intrigued by all the foreign places from which he writes her. Joan helps Arthur arrange his affairs, and his trip is settled before Emma has time to protest. When Emma upbraids Joan, worrying about what people will think, Joan insists that people will think what Emma tells them, advising her sister to explain that Arthur is



travelling per the doctor's advice. Emma selfishly accepts her sister's proposition, for her own sake.

During Arthur's absence, Joan hires a manager to make the store more profitable, so when Arthur eventually buys it back, he finds it less burdensome; however, the principal change he finds is in Emma. Joan harrows the fallow fields of her sister's mind until it bares fruit so, though Arthur leaves a dull, selfish woman, he returns to a youthful wife with a stimulated mind which matches his own that has been revitalized and refreshed from his travels. Additionally, his wife has developed her own feet to stand on, and she even decides to join him the next time the thirst for travel seizes him, proving to be a pleasant companion. Neither Emma nor Arthur ever extract a definitive diagnosis of disease from Joan. When they question her, she simply insists it has responded to treatment and no longer poses any danger.

Analysis

As the final story in this collection, "Mr. Peebles' Heart" consists of eight pages. It was published in 1914 and is told from the perspective of an omniscient, third-person narrator. There are three characters in this story: Joan, the protagonist and hero; Arthur, the main character and victim; and Emma, the antagonist. Joan acts as a foil to Emma as Joan is a forward-thinking, well-educated female physician, while Emma is a "true woman", self-centered and focused on her domesticity without any real aspirations. While staying with her sister and brother-in-law, Joan sympathizes with Arthur because the tired, middle-aged man is a good man who goes beyond the call of duty to care for the women in his life, including his mother (until her death), sister, wife and daughters. Unlike the other stories which emphasize the oppression of women, this story features a man's oppression as Arthur relinquishes his dreams of music and travel in order to tend to his duty to the women in his life. Thus, Joan determines to improve the quality of his life, but in order to do so, she deceives Arthur and Emma into believing that Arthur's health is poor and can only be recovered by a two-year trip to Europe. True to form, Arthur objects because of his responsibilities, but Joan convinces him to pursue his dream of traveling by her assurances that she will take care of Emma and his store during his absence. Joan keeps her promise, improving both Arthur's business and Emma's mind, so the revitalized Arthur comes home to a more peaceful existence; therefore, Joan succeeds in her scheme to improve the quality of her brother-in-law's life. The fact that Joan never explicitly diagnoses Arthur's disease, simply insisting that it responded to treatment and is no longer a threat when questioned, demonstrates her true purpose in prescribing Arthur's trip to Europe as well as her success in her goal of improving his life.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Dr. Joan and Emma.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dr. Joan insist on Arthur traveling to Europe for two years?

Discussion Question 3

How does Arthur's life change as a result of Dr. Joan's intervention?

Vocabulary

Obscure, competent, tenacious, curriculum, incredulous, ensconced, alienate, quarreled, adamant

Characters

Mr. Arthur Peebles

In “Mr. Peebles’ Heart,” Arthur Peebles is Joan’s brother-in-law and a good man who has dedicated his entire life to tending to his mother, sister, daughters, and wife. Because of this, he has neglected his own desires, including traveling and music. So, Joan prescribes a two-year trip to Europe for Arthur. Arthur returns, revitalized, to a more profitable business and more informed, selfless wife.

Narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”

The unnamed narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is the main character of this story. The narrator finds it odd that ordinary people like her husband, John, and herself were able to secure a colonial mansion for the summer. She finds the long-empty house to be queer and believes it may be haunted. As a practical man and a physician, John laughs at her superstitions. He also does not believe that his wife is sick, insisting that she suffers from a temporary nervous depression and a slightly hysterical tendency. His prescribed remedy is to forbid his wife from working, but she believes that change and excitement would benefit her health, so she sneaks and writes in her journal, though she finds it exhausting. Since the narrator agrees with John’s warning that thinking about her condition will make it worse, she focuses on describing the house which is beautiful but strange. She grows angry when John does not believe her, yet he advises her to exercise self-control. The narrator is particularly adverse to the upstairs room where she is frequently confined because the former nursery contains barred windows and a hideous yellow wallpaper.

Two weeks later, while John is gone, the narrator writes in her journal again, lamenting the fact that she does not get to spend much time with her son. She has grown used to her room, other than the sickly colored wallpaper and the scratches on the floor and furniture, but she begins to grow concerned by the strange pattern in the wallpaper. John invites company to the mansion to celebrate the Fourth of July, and though Jennie, his sister, sees to everything, the narrator is still exhausted by the festivities. She spends a lot of time alone, examining the patterns in the wallpaper. Still, she knows that John wants her to get better, but he refuses to let her visit her cousins and insists that only she can improve her health by controlling her mind. Returning to the wallpaper, the narrator begins to see a woman creeping on all fours behind the pattern, but John refuses to leave the mansion for three more weeks, encouraging his wife to control her imagination. She is convinced that John and Jennie both suspect the wallpaper, so she determines to learn the secret before they leave, beginning to peel the remaining paper away to free the woman inside after she sees the woman creeping about in the daytime. Determined to aid the woman in escaping at night, the narrator works hard to remove the wallpaper before she leaves the mansion. On their last day in the mansion, the narrator locks herself in her room, preparing a rope to tie the woman up if she tries to



escape. Stripping the rest of the wallpaper away, the narrator refuses to go outside because it is pleasant to creep around the room. When John finally returns and questions his wife's actions, she informs him, "I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back" (page 15)! John faints across her path, forcing her to creep over him.

Mrs. Delia Morrison

Mrs. Delia Morrison is the main character of "Three Thanksgivings." She is an elderly widow who resides in Welcome House, where she has lived most of her life. It is located in Haddleton. Mrs. Delia Morrison smiles as she reads letters from her children, Andrew and Jean, in which they invite her to spend Thanksgiving with them. They both also ask her to live with them. Though only Delia and Sally are left now that the boarders are all gone, Delia loves the Welcome House where she was raised and has no desire to leave her home. Early in the evening, Mr. Peter Butts calls. He has always loved Delia, and since she was forced to let him take a mortgage on her house, he hopes she will default and be forced to accept him to avoid losing Welcome House. Again, Mr. Butts proposes to Delia, suggesting it would be better to keep house for him than for boarders and reminding her that the mortgage is due two years from Thanksgiving. Still, Delia refuses to marry him, insisting that she will manage to pay the mortgage. Delia spends Thanksgiving with Andrew and his family, and though she is received kindly, she eagerly returns home after a week. Back at Welcome House, Delia considers how to pay her mortgage and interest, and since she is not fond of taking boarders, she decides that she can grow enough in her garden to sustain Sally and herself; however, she still needs money. She considers opening a girls' boarding school, but she cannot fathom how she could obtain the capital needed for such a venture. Recalling how much she enjoyed entertaining the local ladies during her husband's lifetime, Delia is struck with an idea and works at her desk late into the night.

The town of Haddleton buzzes with news that Delia is going to entertain when they are all invited to meet Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake, who is famous for her work with children. The ladies are even more excited at the rumor that a Countess will also join Mrs. Blake. The ladies are delighted to see how equal Delia is to the two great ladies, and though the Countess stays only one day, Mrs. Blake continues at Welcome House. When Mrs. Blake comes up with the idea that the ladies need a Rest and Improvement Club, she suggests that Delia may allow part of her house to be used for the venture, and Delia cordially consents. The ladies agree on refreshments and calculate the cost, jumping at the opportunity before Delia has a chance to change her mind, and before long, Haddleton has a large, eager women's club to which all of the ladies belong. Though membership costs little, Welcome House is quite busy, and the money quickly accumulates. For Thanksgiving, Delia spends a week with Jean, and again, she is thankful to return home. Though Mr. Butts has already received his interest, he calls on Delia to ask how she acquired the money, and she responds that it was easier than he can imagine. Leaving no nearer to his goal of marriage, Mr. Butts warns Delia that she will still have to give in next year. Taking up her task with renewed energy, Delia finds it easy to collect ten cents a week from even the poorest women, and because of her



skillful management, the club's membership reaches 500 women in the second year. By the end of the year, Delia has made the full amount of her interest and mortgage, plus an extra \$1000 in clear profit. She invites her children home for Thanksgiving, even providing the money for their traveling expenses. After a delightful holiday with her children and grandchildren, Delia receives a visit from Mr. Butts. When she hands him the interest and principal, he is convinced that some friends loaned her the money because he cannot believe she made so much from her club. Delia tells him not to quarrel over good money and asks to part as friends, and so, they part.

John

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” John is the narrator’s husband. He is a physician who confines his wife to an upstairs room in the colonial mansion they rent for the summer because he is convinced that she suffers from a temporary nervous disposition, rather than an actual physical ailment. He laughs at her superstitions regarding the wallpaper and the mansion. When he learns that his wife believes she was trapped behind the yellow wallpaper, John faints.

Mr. Peter Butts

In “Three Thanksgivings,” Mr. Peter Butts is the man who holds the mortgage on Welcome House which he tries to use as a means of manipulating Mrs. Morrison into marriage if she is unable to repay the interest. His schemes are disappointed by Mrs. Morrison’s success with the ladies’ club.

Malda

Malda is the narrator of “The Cottagette.” During the summer she and her friend Lois spend at High Court, she falls in love with Mr. Ford Mathews. Following Lois’s advice, she attempts to foster his love and encourage marriage by cooking and keeping house. Unfortunately, this inhibits her from working on her art, so she is relieved when Ford proposes on the condition that she quit cooking.

Lois

Lois is Malda’s friend in “The Cottagette.” She advises Malda to encourage Ford to propose by creating a home of their cottage to demonstrate her domesticity.

Mr. Ford Mathews

Mr. Ford Mathews is Malda’s beloved in “The Cottagette.” He spends much time with her throughout the story, and when he finally proposes, he does so on the condition that she give up cooking because her art is too valuable to neglect.



Mrs. Marion Marroner

In “Turned,” Mrs. Marion Marroner is the main character and protagonist. She is distraught when she learns that her husband impregnated their young servant, Gerta. However, after deeper reflection, she despises her husband for subjecting the girl and his unborn child to the world’s derision. After leaving her husband, Marion begins teaching again under her maiden name, Miss Wheeling. She allows Gerta and her child to live with her.

Gerta Petersen

Gerta Petersen is the servant girl that Mr. Marroner impregnates in “Turned.”

Mr. Marroner

In “Turned,” Mr. Marroner is the husband who impregnates Gerta. He blames the girl for his alienation from his wife, but he is certain of his wife’s forgiveness when he visits her to apologize. He is stunned to find that Gerta and his child live with his former wife.

Julia Gordins

In “Making a Change,” Julia Gordins is the unhappy, stressed wife who cannot seem to get her infant son to stop crying. When this results in a domestic disagreement, Julia attempts to commit suicide, but her mother-in-law saves her and suggests a change, after which Julia is much happier since she resumes giving music lessons.

Mrs. Gordins Senior

In “Making a Change,” Mrs. Gordins Senior is Frank’s mother who lives with him and Julia. After saving Julia from suicide, Mrs. Gordins Sr. suggests a change which improves the happiness of their entire household. Julia gives music lessons while her mother-in-law cares for her son and several other infants.

Frank Gordins

In “Making a Change,” Frank Gordins is Julia’s husband and Mrs. Gordins Senior’s son. He is furious when he first learns that his wife and mother are working, but he accepts the change since it makes his entire household much happier.

Mollie Mathewson

Mollie Mathewson is the main character of “If I Were a Man.” After wishing to be a man, she finds herself in her husband’s head and spends the day learning how men think.

Gerald Mathewson

Gerald Mathewson is Mollie’s husband in “If I Were a Man,” and due to his wife’s wish to be a man, Gerald spends the day with Mollie in his head, causing him to experience foreign, womanly thoughts throughout the day.

Dr. Joan R. Bascom

In “Mr. Peebles’ Heart,” Dr. Joan is the protagonist of the story. She is Emma’s sister who stays with the Peebles while establishing her practice in their town. She sympathizes for Mr. Peebles because he is a good man who devotes his life to caring for the women he feels responsible for. As such, Joan prescribes that he travel in Europe for two years, claiming it will help his heart condition. After Arthur’s return, Joan simply insists that his condition responded to treatment.

Emma Peebles

In “Mr. Peebles’ Heart,” Emma is Joan’s sister and Arthur’s selfish wife who serves as the antagonist. She is selfish and does not worry much about Arthur. During Emma’s husband’s trip to Europe, Joan broadens her sister’s mind and teaches her to stand on her own two feet. Arthur returns home to an improved companion.



Symbols and Symbolism

Yellow Wallpaper

The yellow wallpaper in the first story of the collection inspires the title and serves as a symbol of the unnamed narrator's mental instability.

Woman Behind Wallpaper

The woman behind the wallpaper further symbolizes the narrator's insanity as it is eventually revealed that this woman is actually the narrator herself.

Welcome House

Mrs. Morrison's refusal to leave Welcome House symbolizes her independent spirit.

Haddleton Rest & Improvement Club

The Haddleton Rest & Improvement Club serves as a symbol of Mrs. Morrison's enterprise to establish financial independence without being forced to marry Mr. Peter Butts.

Cottagette

The cottagette that Malda and Lois rent for the summer symbolizes their pursuit of their artistic dreams instead of the typical womanly duties.

Letters

The confusion of Mr. Marroner placing his letters to his wife and Greta in the wrong envelopes symbolizes his infidelity as this act informs his wife of his sins.

Miss Wheeling

Mrs. Marroner's decision to resume her maiden name, Miss Wheeling, shows her decision to leave her husband and to regain her independence.

Music Lessons

Julia's decision to resume giving music lessons symbolizes the pursuit of her dreams and ultimately leads to the happiness of her entire household.

Bill

The bill that Mollie and Gerald argue over serves as a catalyst for Mollie entering Gerald's body, leading to both experiencing the opposite gender's viewpoints.

Arthur's Heart Condition

Arthur's heart condition is an invention that Joan creates to separate Arthur and Emma, using travel as a means of increasing Arthur's happiness while she focuses on broadening her sister's mind. Though fake, this illness serves as a catalyst and symbol of improving the Peebles' marriage.

Settings

Colonial Mansion

The colonial mansion that John and the narrator rent for the summer is the main setting of "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Haddleton

Haddleton is the town where Delia Morrison lives and where Welcome House is located in "Three Thanksgivings." It is also where Mrs. Morrison establishes a ladies' club as a means of acquiring financial independence.

High Court

High Court is the setting of "The Cottage." It is a summer school of music and higher thought located in the mountains, and Malda and Lois rent one of the neighboring cottages so they can work on their art throughout the season.

Marroners' Home

The setting of "Turned," the Marroners' home is where Mr. Marroner presumably seduces and impregnates Gerta. It is also where his wife learns of his infidelity due to a mix-up with letters he sends to both women. As a result, Mrs. Marroner leaves her husband and her home.

Gordins' Home

The Gordins' home is the setting of "Making a Change." This is where Julia lives with her husband and mother-in-law unhappily until Mrs. Gordins senior proposes a change that makes the entire household happier.

Train

In "If I Were a Man," Mollie finds herself in Gerald's body as he takes the train to work. While on the train, she learns much about his thoughts on women and how he interacts with other men.

Peebles' Home

In "Mr. Peebles' Heart," Joan is staying at the Peebles' home with her sister and brother-in-law when she has an idea to improve Arthur's happiness. While Arthur adheres to her prescription to spend two years in Europe, Joan stays at his house and focuses her efforts on improving her sister's mind.

Themes and Motifs

Pursuit of Dreams

The pursuit of dreams plays a large role in Gilman's short stories, rejecting the attempts to oppress her female characters by allowing them to pursue their interests. The unnamed narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" dreams of freedom, and in her mentally unstable state, she achieves this by removing the wallpaper from her room to free the woman behind it, herself. John's fainting at the end can also be construed as his wife murdering him, thus suggesting another way that she obtains her freedom and achieves her dream.

In "Three Thanksgivings," Mrs. Delia Morrison dreams of financial security without being forced to marry Mr. Peter Butts, and she is able to chase her dreams by opening the Haddleton Rest and Improvement Club for Ladies, earning enough money to repay her debt and make a profit without succumbing to an unwelcome marriage.

Malda, from "The Cottage," spends the summer focusing on her artwork, so she is upset when she turns her attentions to domestic activities in an attempt to encourage Ford to propose. Happily, when Ford proposes, he insists that Malda pursue her dreams of being an artist because her work is too valuable to lose.

In "Turned," Mrs. Marroner resumes her career as a teacher after leaving her unfaithful husband.

In "Making a Change," Julia is unhappy with her life until she begins teaching music lessons again. This demonstrates the lack of fulfillment that many women find when they are confined to the domestic sphere, thus reinforcing the importance of pursuing their dreams.

Mollie's dreams are fulfilled when she gets to spend a day as her husband in "If I Were a Man."

In "Mr. Peebles' Heart," Joan forces Arthur to pursue his dreams of music and travel by introducing a Vitrola into his household against Emma's wishes and by prescribing a two-year trip to Europe for his health. His improvement reinforces Gilman's belief that the pursuit of an individual's dreams is integral to their happiness.

Men's Viewpoints

Women's independence and women's oppression are the themes of men's viewpoints which play a large role in "The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories." In "The Yellow Wallpaper," John believes his wife's illness is of the mental variety, and he forces her to adhere to his advice to rest, despite her desire to visit her cousins. Thus, John's viewpoint is an example of one way that men oppress women in these stories.

In "Three Thanksgivings," Mr. Peter Butts' insistence that he can force Mrs. Morrison into marriage, combined with his disbelief when she acquires the funds to repay her debts, shows his lack of faith in a woman's ability to financially support herself, a belief that Delia vehemently disproves with her success.

Ford, from "The Cottagette," offers a different masculine viewpoint when he proposes to Malda on the condition that she relinquish cooking and focus on her artwork which is too valuable to lose. Thus, he serves as a foil to the other men in his lack of oppressive attitude.

In "Turned," Mr. Marroner's infidelity shows the attitude that man can do as they please, and this is reinforced when he is certain of forgiveness as he visits his former wife. He is struck dumb when she appears with his mistress and child.

In "Making a Change," Frank is furious when he learns that his wife has resumed giving music lessons, but after Julia explains how unhappy she was and how much her career has improved the quality of her life, Frank accepts and approves of the change, showing himself to be comparable to Ford from "The Cottagette" when he demonstrates a lack of oppressive tendencies.

"If I Were a Man" focuses the most on masculine viewpoints as Mollie spends the day in her husband's body, learning all about how men think.

Arthur Peebles, from "Mr. Peebles' Heart," shows a different variety of man than most of the other stories. Arthur neglects his own dreams and happiness in order to care for his mother, sister, wife, and daughters. Since he does not exhibit an oppressive attitude toward women, it is only fitting that he be rewarded by Joan's intervention. He is rewarded when she sends him to Europe for two years under the pretense of his heart condition.

Women's Oppression

The most prevalent theme in "The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories" is that of women's oppression, and this concept plays a role in every story in this collection as this was a major purpose behind Gilman's writing. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," female oppression is seen in several instances. First, the narrator's husband disregards her belief in her poor health, insisting that it is a mental weakness instead. Additionally, he confines her to an upstairs room and insists that she rest constantly.

A less explicit example is seen in the woman creeping behind the wallpaper who turns out to be the narrator, demonstrating her belief that she is trapped. In "Three Thanksgivings," Mr. Peter Butts tries to force Mrs. Morrison into marriage because of her debts. However, with her ingenuity, she is able to establish financial independence and prevent the forced marriage.

In "The Cottagette," women's oppression is seen in Lois's insistence that Malda must demonstrate her domesticity to secure a husband. Malda's agreement and adherence is reflective of women's household roles during that time period.

Though Mrs. Marroner is initially angry at Gerta for her husband's infidelity in "Turned," she eventually sees her husband's actions as a crime against womanhood and motherhood. As such, she leaves him and cares for Gerta and her child, refusing to succumb to her husband's oppression.

In "Making a Change," Julia feels oppressed in caring for her child after relinquishing her career as a musical instructor. After she makes a change at her mother-in-law's suggestion, another instance is seen in Frank's initial reaction to her career. Luckily, he has a change of heart and agrees that the changes made improves his household.

In "If I Were a Man," Mollie's experiences while in Gerald's body show the things that women of the era were unaccustomed to, such as possessing money. This is another example of how women were oppressed.

"Mr. Peebles' Heart" tells a different tale, one of a man being oppressed by his duties. As a result of Arthur's obedient observance of his duties, his wife is spoiled and self-absorbed. However, all of that changes thanks to Joan's intervention.

Women's oppression was, and continues to be, a major theme in literature and in life. Gilman's stories offer a solution to this oppression by suggesting that women obtain independence.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view in this collection of stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman varies a bit between stories. The majority of the stories are told from the perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator, but "The Yellow Wallpaper" is told from the first-person perspective of an unnamed narrator.

The main character Malda narrates "The Cottagette" from a first-person perspective. The two stories narrated in first-person are limited to the narrators' experiences, thoughts and what they witness. The fact that the third-person narrators in the remainder of the stories offer an omniscient perspective is proven by their ability to share the thoughts and feelings of each character in the story, allowing the reader to get a more thorough, accurate view of each scene. The narrators throughout the collections are reliable with the exception of the unnamed narrator in the title story. Her mental instability makes her an unreliable resource as exemplified by her obsession with the woman behind the wallpaper who is revealed to be the narrator herself.

The varying perspectives in this collection are important as they allow the author to advance her themes as well as the purposes of each individual story. The stories are mostly written using exposition with small portions of dialogue scattered throughout, serving as an effective means of sharing her message of women's equality.

Gilman frequently shares her personal viewpoints through her characters' experiences, allowing a focus on the themes rather than the individuals.

In this collection, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is told from the viewpoint of the unnamed narrator, and Malda's viewpoint narrates "The Cottagette." While each of the other stories utilizes a third-person narrator, they each utilize various viewpoints.

"Three Thanksgivings" focuses on Mrs. Delia Morrison's viewpoint, while "Turned" primarily uses Mrs. Marroner's with a brief exploration into her husband's viewpoint at the end.

"Making a Change" shares both Julia and Frank's viewpoints, as Mollie and Gerald share the viewpoint of "If I Were a Man," though Mollie predominates.

Joan's viewpoint guides the narrative of "Mr. Peebles' Heart".

Language and Meaning

The language used in this collection is casual and informal, though grammar is still used correctly and quite properly. This is because the language is fairly casual for the time period in which the stories are set, making it comprehensive to modern readers. This is

useful because it maintains the focus on the author's message and themes, allowing the reader to easily grasp the meaning behind the narratives. The language utilized characterizes the time period in which the stories are set, the personalities of the individual characters, and most importantly, the theme of feminine oppression and their struggle for equality.

The stories are mostly written using exposition with small portions of dialogue scattered throughout, serving as an effective means of sharing her message of women's equality. The writing style is enhanced by the verbiage chosen as it maintains the focus on the tone and theme of the collection. Overall, the language used is easy to understanding and very effective in emphasizing the author's purpose for creating her fiction.

Structure

Gilman's collection consists of 70 pages and contains seven stories, each of which range from six to fifteen pages in length. The stories are fairly short, and the narratives tend to be vague, reinforcing the author's focus on the issues she champions, opposed to focusing on the individual stories; the generalities are more important than the specifics as the topic of female oppression was so widespread and prevalent throughout society.

"The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a collection of seven stories which focus on the suppression against women's rights and women's struggle to obtain equality. Each story depicts a female protagonist who battles oppression, and most of these women ultimately triumph. The stories are all fairly quick-paced, easy to read and linear. Overall, "The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories" is an interesting, enjoyable collection of short stories geared toward promoting women's equality.

Quotes

John is a physician, and perhaps- (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind-) perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster. You see, he does not believe I am sick!

-- Unnamed Narrator (The Yellow Wallpaper paragraph 7-8)

Importance: This quote shows John's belief that his wife is not physically sick, thus suggesting that her affliction is of the mental variety.

My darling, I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?

-- John (The Yellow Wallpaper paragraph 142)

Importance: This quote reiterates John's belief that his wife's illness is mental, rather than physical, thus foreshadowing the confirmation of this prognosis.

I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!

-- Unnamed Narrator (The Yellow Wallpaper paragraph 266)

Importance: This quote confirms the earlier foreshadowing concerning the narrator's mental instability as she explicitly expresses her belief that she, herself, is the woman behind the wallpaper.

This has nothing to do with my wanting you, Delia Morrison. I've always wanted you- and I've always wanted this house, too. You won't sell, but you've got to mortgage. By and by you can't pay up, and I'll get it- see? Then maybe you'll take me- to keep the house. Don't be a fool, Delia. It's a perfectly good investment.

-- Mr. Peter Butts (Three Thanksgivings paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote shows Mr. Butts' determination to manipulate Mrs. Morrison into marrying him, strengthening her resolve to avoid the union without sacrificing her home.

I have been thinking this over. Mrs. Blake has been discussing it with me. My house is certainly big enough for all of you, and there am I, with nothing to do but entertain you. Suppose you formed such a club as you speak of- for Rest and Improvement. My parlors are big enough for all manner of meetings; there are bedrooms in plenty for resting. If you form such a club I shall be glad to help with my great, cumbersome house, shall be delighted to see so many friends there so often; and I think I could furnish accommodations more cheaply than you could manage in any other way.

-- Mrs. Delia Morrison (Three Thanksgivings paragraph 83)



Importance: This quote shows Mrs. Morrison's scheme to earn money by opening a ladies' club as a means of repaying her debt to Mr. Butts and avoiding being forced into marriage. This demonstrates Mrs. Morrison's ingenuity.

Never did I know the real joy and peace of living, before that blessed summer at 'High Court.' It was a mountain place, easy enough to get to, but strangely big and still and far away when you were there.

-- Malda (The Cottagette paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the serenity of the cottagette.

Malda, let us face this thing and be rational. You are beginning to love Ford Mathews- do you know it?

-- Lois (The Cottagette paragraph 27-28)

Importance: This quote indicates Malda's growing love for Ford while foreshadowing her attempt to secure his affections in return as she is advised by Lois.

I want to marry you, Malda,- because I love you- because you are young and strong and beautiful- because you are wild and sweet and- fragrant, and- elusive, like the wild flowers you love. Because you are so truly an artist in your special way, seeing beauty and giving it to others. I love you because of all this, because you are rational and highminded and capable of friendship,- and in spite of your cooking!

-- Mr. Ford Mathews (The Cottagette paragraph 38)

Importance: This quote not only shows that Malda's feelings are requited; it also demonstrates the fact that Ford is not a typical man since his proposal contains a condition that emphasizes the importance of Malda's dreams, a concept foreign to most men.

As the older, wiser woman forced herself to understand and extenuate the girl's misdeed and foresee her ruined future, a new feeling rose in her heart, strong, clear, and overmastering; a sense of measureless condemnation for the man who had done this thing. He knew. He understood. He could fully foresee and measure the consequences of his act. He appreciated to the full the innocence, the ignorance, the grateful affection, the habitual docility, of which he deliberately took advantage.

-- Narrator (Turned paragraph 59)

Importance: This quote shows Mrs. Marroner recognizing that Gerta's misstep arose from innocence and naiveté whereas Mr. Marroner was fully aware of the situation he was putting the young girl in. As a result, Mrs. Marroner shows her intelligence and reasonable thinking by blaming her husband for corrupting Gerta, instead of the other way around.

He's a perfectly lovely child! There's not a thing the matter with him! It's just her absurd ideas. She's so irregular with him! To think of letting that child cry for an hour! He is nervous because she is. And of course she couldn't feed him till after his bath- of course



not!

-- Mrs. Gordins Sr. (Making a Change paragraph 45)

Importance: This quote foreshadows the change she proposes as well as her decision to run a daycare.

You must have noticed how happy and well she is now- haven't you? And so am I. And so is Albert. You can't feel very badly about a thing that makes us all happy, can you?

-- Mrs. Gordins Sr. (Making a Change paragraph 85)

Importance: This quote emphasizes the fact that the entire Gordins household is happy with the changes made as Mrs. Gordins Sr. persuades her son to consider this fact and accept it, despite his initial disapproval at the idea of the two women in his life working.

It's time we woke up. Women are pretty much people, seems like to me. I know they dress like fools- but who's to blame for that? We invent all those idiotic hats of theirs, and design their crazy fashions, and, what's more, if a woman is courageous enough to wear common sense clothes and shoes which of us wants to dance with her? Yes, we blame them for grafting on us, but are we willing to let our wives work? We are not. It hurts our pride, that's all. We are always criticizing them for making mercenary marriages, but what do we call a girl who marries a chump with no money? Just a poor fool, that's all. And they know it. As for Mother Eve- I wasn't there and can't deny the story, but I will say this. If she brought evil into the world, we men have had the lion's share of keeping it going ever since- how about that?

-- Gerald with Mollie in his mind (If I Were a Man paragraph 55-57)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the influence of Mollie's womanly thoughts as she offers a defense of women while confined to a man's mind.

Nonsense! You can too. She doesn't need you at, at all- she may later. No- the girls don't need you- and they may later. Now is your time- now. They say the Japanese sow their wild oats after they're fifty- suppose you do! You can't be so very wild on that much money, but you can spend a year in Germany- learn the language- go to the opera- taking walking trips in the Tyrol- in Switzerland; see England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Denmark- you can do a lot in two years... Why not? Why not be your own man for once in your life- do what you want to- not what other people want you to do?... If ever a man on earth has done his duty, Arthur Peebles, you have.

-- Dr. Joan (Mr. Peebles' Heart paragraph 72, 74 & 76)

Importance: This quote shows Dr. Joan convincing Mr. Peebles to travel; though she claims that he needs to travel for his health, it is obvious that she simply wants him to enjoy some of his life.