
Social Expectations From The Behavior Of Women In The Peer Jury And Yellow Wallpaper

“A Jury of Her Peers” by Susan Glaspell and “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Gilman both have plots of very different natures. In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, a mentally disturbed woman is taken into an isolated house to recover. In “A Jury of Her Peers”, a woman is blamed for killing her husband. However, one common message that the stories share is the idea of how women are treated and expected to behave by other people during this time period. “The Yellow Wallpaper” describes the life of an unknown woman who is lonely and lacks contact with anyone other than her husband and this causes her to have an obsession with the type of wallpaper that’s in her bedroom. In addition, in “A Jury of Her Peers” Minnie Foster, also known as Mrs. Wright, is a woman accused of killing her husband (Mr. Wright). The story follows two other characters as well who are housewives, named Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters. These two housewives find out about Mrs. Wright’s obsession with her pet that had died. Both of these stories describe the lonely and obsessive habits of the women who are isolated and the guilt they feel when they cannot live up to their expectations for their society. It describes them even though it may seem like the main characters are treated differently than those around them. This is because one woman was babied by her husband and Mrs. Wright was ignored by her husband.

Even though the husband of Mrs. Wright in “A Jury of Her Peers” and the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” had different ways of motivation for the way their wives were treated, both women still ended up feeling lonely and depressed. The narrator's husband (John) in “The Yellow Wallpaper” brings his wife to the faraway house. He does this so she could be cured from her “nervous depression” and “hysterical tendency” that he talked her into because he was a physician (Gilman, 992). In addition to that, he also says to her that she is “not allowed to work” until she is feeling ok again (Gilman, 992). Even though John demonstrates the certain types of biased tendencies by men during this time, he really thinks that these certain methods will be able to cure his wife. Unlike the narrator in “A Jury of Her Peers”, Mrs. Wright, who was suspected of murder, spends most of her time in her house. This is not because of her husband helping her all the time, it’s because she doesn’t have a good relationship with anyone else besides him.

The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” describes Mrs. Wright’s house as a “lonesome looking place” (Glaspell, 568), even though Mrs. Wright does spend a lot of time farming or doing other housework when her husband is at work. The fact that Mrs. Wright home is described as “lonesome” shows Mrs. Wright’s isolation. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” John, the narrator, makes sure that his wife does not have any human contact with anybody and this includes their own child. When the narrator asked John if his cousin could visit, his wife remembers that “he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow case as to have those simulating people about me now” (Gilman, 994). By saying this, he is comparing his wife’s cousins to the fireworks and this helps illustrate how dangerous he thinks they will be on her. In “A Jury of Her Peers”, the woman at Mrs. Wright’s house to talk about her husband and how he was “a hard man” and describing how he was working all day and there was “no company when he did come in” (Gilman, 577). Even though John’s treatment may have been over the top, he really thought that he was curing up his wife. The narrator’s confinement made her feel very upset and lonely,

she admits to “cry at nothing, and cry most of the time” (Gilman, 995). In “A Jury of Her Peers”, the women’s kindness and description of Mr. Wright to his wife recommends Mrs. Wright’s feelings of being lonely is a result of her husband being very disregarding.

Both women were feeling sad and lonely, but they are still expected to have the attitude of feeling bad when they cannot live up to the expectations. Women during this time period were expected to follow all the aspects of family life. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” makes these expectations clear when she says “John says the worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad” (Gilman, 992). When the narrator describes the guilt for not listening to her husband’s orders, this illustrates that she feels that she needs to be obedient and not have an opinion, even when it comes to her own health. On the other hand, Mrs. Wright feels that she needs to work hard to complete her responsibilities like farming, cleaning up the house, and knitting, even though she may feel unhappy and lonely all the time. During the search through Mrs. Wright’s kitchen, Mrs. Peters opens up the cupboard and sees ruined fruit and says to Mrs. Hale that Mrs. Wright was “worried” that it would get spoiled “when it got so cold last night” (Glaspell, 571). Right after they found this out, the whole group started walking around Mrs. Wright’s kitchen and saw that she had some washcloths that were really dirty. This caused Mrs. Peter’s husband, who was the sheriff, to say that Mrs. Wright was “not much of a housekeeper” (Glaspell, 572). Mrs. Wright worrying about her fruit shows that she feels bad that she couldn’t complete the responsibilities she was supposed to get done. In addition, it shows that women during this time period were taught to always be informed of their duties so they wouldn’t be looked at like they are not acting like a female by people such as Mr. Peters.

The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” focuses on her responsibilities, which shows up later in the story. She starts to notice that the wallpaper in her room becomes haunted and she tries to tell John how she feels about the situation but John ends up silencing her with his “stern, reproachful look” (Gilman, 997). After that, he goes on to tell her that she needs to be better. Specifically, he says “for my sake, and for our child’s sake, as well as your own” and then his wife “said no more” on the subject because she didn’t know what to say (Gilman, 997). The narrator then makes the scene silent due to John mentioning their child and the look that he gives to her. This illustrates the importance of her role as a housewife and mother and how her guilt makes her feel like she cannot fulfill those duties due to her being sick. Even though Mrs. Wright and the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” are sad and lonely, they are expected to be normal and obedient housewives.

Mrs Wright is an example of social isolation while the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is an example of physical isolation, both of these women start developing obsessions that are unhealthy during this time period because they don’t have any contact with the world outside of them. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is only allowed to see her husband, making her develop a weird relationship with the bedroom wallpaper. In the story, she says that she will “watch it always” (Gilman, 998). She was afraid of the room at first but then grows to like the room “because of the wallpaper” (Gilman, 998). The narrator then changes the feelings of the wallpaper to represent the relationship between humans and objects. On the other hand, Mrs. Wright is not physically isolated from other people because she has a husband and neighbors around her, but she does feel like she is removed from them socially. Mrs. Wright develops a friendship with her pet bird because she never talked to anyone else. This shows the narrator’s relationship that she had with the wallpaper because it serves as a replacement for having relationships with other people.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator is in a desperate need for togetherness makes her really believe that there is a woman that is "creeping about behind that pattern" because she sees her out of all her windows (Gilman, 996). Her and John were supposed to leave the house the night before and before that, she gets very desperate to find the woman that was outside and she was willing to tear apart the entire room. In her journal, she says that "I pulled and she shook", which she did in order to try and free her (Gilman, 1000). This describes the two of them working together and this shows that the narrator can see this woman as a person who can keep her company, resulting in a lack of contact with real people. Mrs. Wright has a crazy reaction when she found out her husband killed the bird and she said she "choked the life out of him" by killing him the same way the bird was killed (Glaspell, 579). Mrs. Wright's relationship with her bird and the friendship the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" has both illustrate how women can cope with the different types of isolation and how far they can end up the relationships are always threatened.

Comparing the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Mrs. Wright in "A Jury of Her Peers" makes it easier to understand their acts they were brought to at the end of the stories. The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" was a loved wife and mother and Mrs. Wright was very lonely and felt ignored. Even though both women had different types of backgrounds, they both ended up losing their common sense at the end of the stories. Their acts of despair show that it may have not been their fault that they were forced to have friends in weird places or commit acts of madness, but also the guilt of living up the expectations that society had for them.