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## Women Mental Breakdown In The Yellow Wallpaper And The Bell Jar

The mental breakdown and insanity of women in both “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and “The Bell Jar” by Sylvia Plath are portrayed in numerous different ways. The Yellow Wallpaper introduces the reader of a nameless woman’s progressive mental breakdown from postpartum depression after giving birth and this provides the reader an opening into the perception and treatment of mental illness in the late 19th century.

The novel is set in a Gothic horror-style story and follows the slow deterioration of its nameless narrator’s mental state, but it also looks into the ways her husband’s attempted treatment contributes to this decrease. Gilman suffered from postpartum depression and this situation is very alike to the story’s narrator and was prescribed the same ‘rest cure’ provided by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, whose name is referred to in the story. She underwent a mental breakdown as a result of this isolated treatment, which excluded her from any form of writing or work outside of her proposed domestic field. The forced confinement of the story’s narrator, and her husband’s authoritative instructions against writing or any other activity mirrors the same type of ‘rest cure’ that was given to Gilman in her life. In the novel, the nameless wife, her very caring husband, and the unpleasant room, which is plastered in an old fashioned wallpaper all seem to play important roles in driving the wife mad. The husband's suffocating attention, played along with the isolated environment provokes the nature of the wife’s nervousness, which causes her to fall into the roots of insanity to the point where she views herself in the wallpaper. The author's skilful use of the setting and also of the point of view, which is in first person, allows the reader to participate in the woman's growing insanity.

Similarly, this theme is shown throughout Sylvia Plath’s “The Bell Jar”, where we follow the story of Esther Greenwood, the breakdown she experiences and the start of her recovery. We learn that Esther, the protagonist in the novel, begins life at college and fantasises of becoming a famous writer, while women, at her age were looking for a husband, in the 1950s. The novel is set in the early 1950s and was written before the feminist movement of the 1960s. Esther, in The Bell Jar is treated for a nervous breakdown by doctors. It seems as the story mirrors the events in Plath’s life, an intelligent and academically successful child, whose father had died when she was just a young child.

Both authors cleverly put to use their real life situations in their work, showing how being a woman in a patriarchal society (in their time) eventually caused their mental breakdowns. In both novels, the authors manage to touch upon the role and expectations of women, feminism, the treatment of madness, confinement, insanity and mental illness. The Bell Jar has had many people having criticising comments and it seems as if a great amount of people agree with the fact that the male dominated society in which the protagonist of the novel, Esther lives in seems to contribute to her mental breakdown.