American Literature

Charlotte Gilman Perkins – “The Yellow Wallpaper”

**PART A: With your partner/s:** discuss the following questions. Individually you should take notes and write down the group’s answers in your notes.

1. To what extent is the narrator reliable? How & why?
2. How is the story broken down into different sections? Do you think there are other effective divisions within the story? If so, what are they?
3. **DISCUSS ONLY-no notes necessary**: Is the narrator’s name "Jane"? If so, how do you know? If not, who is the narrator?
4. What are some themes in “The Yellow Wallpaper”? Symbols? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
5. Does “The Yellow Wallpaper” end the way you expected? Did you expect a longer (or more involved narrative)? How? Why?
6. **DISCUSS ONLY-no notes necessary**: What would "The Yellow Wallpaper" look like as a full-length novel? Why do you think it’s presented in the short story form instead?
7. What is the central/primary purpose of “The Yellow Wallpaper”? Is the purpose important or meaningful?
8. What are some of the problems with reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a feminist text? For instance, does the narrator speak for all women? Could the men in the story also be understood as repressed individuals?
9. Does the story belong more to the Gothic horror genre or the feminist literary fiction genre? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.
10. Does the ending of the story suggest progress (a woman tears down the shackles that are binding her) or pessimism (this woman has become completely unstable)? Or is it delivering a different type of message? How should we read this story?
11. **DISCUSS ONLY-no notes necessary**: What did you enjoy (or hate) most about “The Yellow Wallpaper?” Why?
12. Why do you think Gilman briefly changes the point of view from first person singular to the second person as the narrator describes the pattern of the wallpaper? What effect does the narrator say light has on the wallpaper?
13. Choose someone to read the following biography “snippet”; does knowing this information change your perception of the story? In what way? Would you change your answer to any of the previous questions? Why and how?

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)*

*Gilman was born in New England, a descendent of the prominent and influential Beecher family. Despite the affluence of her most famous ancestors, she was born into poverty.  Her father abandoned the family when she was a child, and she received just four years of formal education.  At an early age she vowed never to marry, hoping instead to devote her life to public service.*

*In 1882, however, at the age of twenty-one, she was introduced to Charles Walter Stetson (1858-1911), a Providence, Rhode Island artist, and the two were married in 1884. Charlotte Stetson became pregnant almost immediately after their marriage, gave birth to a daughter, and sunk into a deep depression that lasted for several years.*

*She eventually entered a sanitarium in Philadelphia to undergo the "rest cure," a controversial treatment for nervous prostration, which forbade any type of physical activity or intellectual stimulation.  After a month, she returned to her husband and child and subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown.  In 1888, she left Stetson and moved with her daughter to California, where her recovery was swift.*

*In the early 1890s, she began writing and lecturing, and in 1892, she published the now-famous story, "The Yellow Wall-Paper."  A volume of poems followed a year later.  In 1898, she published her most famous book, Women and Economics.  With its publication, and its subsequent translation into seven languages, Gilman earned international acclaim.*

*In 1900, she married her first cousin, Houghton Gilman.  Over the next twenty-five years, she wrote and published more than a dozen books.*

*In 1932, Gilman learned that she had breast cancer.  Three years later, at the age of seventy-five, she committed suicide.*

*Although her reputation declined in the years before her death, in 1993, Gilman was named the sixth most influential woman of the twentieth century in a poll commissioned by the Siena Research Institute.  In 1994, she was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**PART B: With your partner/s** create a thesis statement to the following prompt and give 3 pieces of evidence from the text as support along with analysis of the given text.

**To what extent is the setting in Gilman’s short story necessary for the main themes of the story?**

1. <http://sites.google.com/site/gilmansociety/about-charlotte-perkins-gilman> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)