

ENC 1102
Instructor Cuda
Sample Reader Response

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ENC 1102-07C
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Reader Response Assignment

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Portable Literature: Reading Reacting Writing. Ed. Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell. 5th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Thompson, 2004. 234-241.

"Oppressive Husband or Neurotic Wife?"

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a beautiful and horrifying story of a woman's descent into insanity. At first, I thought that the husband was merely trying to control his wife by patronizing her and imprisoning her under the excuse that she was mentally unstable. The idea that any woman who wasn't compliant MUST be insane (or a witch) has been quite popular for centuries and even as late as the 1950s women were given drugs and electro-shock therapy or even a lobotomy at the insistence of her male relative or guardian. I hated the narrator's husband, John, who is a Doctor and is treating his own wife. He is a typical Physician of "high-standing" who thinks his wife merely needs some rest and tonic cures without any stimulus whatsoever. By shutting her away in the room with the yellow wallpaper, he is in essence trapping her in her own madness and denying her any worthwhile purpose or creative outlet. While he thinks she is getting better, the reader sees her insanity grow as she strips away at the wallpaper trying to help "the woman trapped behind the pattern" to escape; seeming to point to an oppressive patriarchal society. My first impression was that she was just a victim who was powerless to have any tools to resist her husband's deliberate control, but after reading the story a second and third time, I think she was truly suffering from what we would now call Post-partum depression and she did need treatment. It is unfortunate that the type of treatment she received worsened her illness into complete insanity. I think that is still a possibility today. We still don't understand mental disorders and often diagnosis and treatment are ineffective. I think the author must have had some real life experience with mental illness to write so credibly; it is almost a cautionary tale on what not to do in treating depression and anxiety.

Note: Your documents are to be double-spaced. This sample is single-spaced to conserve paper.