



**THE OPPRESSION TOWARDS WOMAN AS
REFLECTED IN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S
*THE YELLOW WALLPAPER***

A THESIS

**In Partial Fulfillment and Requirements
for S-1 Degree Majoring in American Studies in the English
Department, Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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PRONOUNCEMENT

I truthfully state that this thesis is written by myself without taking any results from other researchers in any university, in diploma degree, S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree. I also ascertain that the materials in this thesis are not taken from other publications or someone's works except for the references mentioned.

Semarang, 26 April 2021

Ardela Nabila

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear.

– QS Al-Baqarah: 286

Man will not get anything unless he works hard.

– QS Al-Najm: 39

*This thesis is dedicated to
myself, my beloved parents
and those who have helped me to complete this thesis.*

APPROVAL

**THE OPPRESSION TOWARDS WOMAN AS REFLECTED IN
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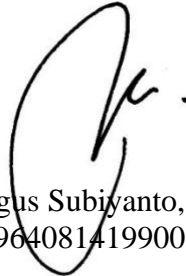
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Semarang, 26 April 2021

Ardela Nabila

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the issue of women's oppression in the nineteenth-century America that is experienced by the main female character in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The aims of this study are to examine the forms of oppression presented in the story, as well as the effects of oppression on the main female character. In order to analyze the short story, the writer uses sociology of literature approach and library research to collect the data needed in this study. The result of the study shows that the main female character experiences three forms of oppression, namely psychological oppression, material oppression, and powerlessness, which are caused by patriarchal system. The writer concludes that the short story portrays how oppression can happen even in the smallest unit of the society, which is family.

Keywords: Oppression, Women, Patriarchy, Patriarchal System, Powerlessness

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As stated by Simone de Beauvoir in her book entitled *The Second Sex*, women have always been considered as “the other” that are being separated from men in the society (2011: 26). In a patriarchal society, women are considered to be inferior and weak, whereas men are assumed to be strong and superior. Thus, men tend to dominate the roles in political and social system, while women tend to be the target of oppression because of those reasons. According to de Beauvoir, women are haunted by their own femininity (2011: 24). Women’s life among men are bound by household works as well as social and economic conditions (de Beauvoir, 2011: 28).

Various forms of oppression have existed since a long time ago and have deeply rooted in the society. The system built by patriarchal society is likely to advantage men and cause prejudice against women; thus, it causes women to suffer. Women are considered to be in a subordinated position, in which as the result, women have limitations in a lot of aspects.

In the nineteenth-century America, women were very dependent to their husband. Although there were several phases of women’s movements that emerged in that era, the wall that separated both men and women remained exist even until the end of the century. Since the early 20th century, the rights of women and discrimination against women have been addressed by United Nations as issues relating to human rights. They

believe human beings are equal despite the gender (Feminisms, Women's Rights, and the UN: Would Achieving Gender Equality Empower Women?; 2015: 674). However, in spite of various feminist movements regarding the issue, women from around the world still experience challenges and oppression even in the present day.

Common issues in the society are often discussed and portrayed in a work of literature. One of the common issues in the society that can be reflected through literary work is women's oppression. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a short story written by an American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It was first published in January 1892. The story brings the topic of oppression against women in the 19th century and is considered as an important early American feminist's work of literature in that era. The story revolves around the life of a couple who spend their summer to be isolated in a house in order to cure the wife's depression. In this study, the writer explores and investigates the oppression of women in a patriarchal society as reflected in the short story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman by analyzing the intrinsic as well as extrinsic elements of the story.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is women's oppression presented in the story?
2. What are the forms of oppression experienced by the main female character?
3. How does the oppression influence the main female character?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how the story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper* portrays oppression of women.
2. To analyze the types of women's oppression in the short story.
3. To identify the effects of oppression toward women as depicted in the story.

1.4 Previous Studies

Many studies regarding oppression of women have been done previously. In this study, the writer finds nine previous studies related to the discussion as the references of the study. The first study is an undergraduate thesis entitled *Women's Oppression Reflected in Paulo Coelho's "The Spy" Novel (2016): A Feminist Perspective* conducted by Dyan Nur Ayni (Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, 2018). According to Dyan, women do not have the equal opportunity in expressing their idea as well as desire in the society, and women are considered to be powerless in which they have to struggle and not have the power against unfair treatment.

Another previous study is *The Struggles of The Female Protagonist Against The Oppression in Room A Novel By Emma Donoghue*, done by Ikhtiarina Putri S. (Diponegoro University, 2018) for her undergraduate thesis. She discovered that women experience many forms of oppression such as psychological oppression that caused by denial and forces women get from the people around her and objective oppression that caused by society's judgement towards women.

The third study was conducted by Bayu Satrya Yudha, an undergraduate thesis entitled *Women's Oppression As Reflected in Jordan Belfort's The Wolf of Wall Street* (Diponegoro University, 2016). According to his conclusion, he found the forms of oppression towards women that include of exploitation in patriarchal society in which women become the subject of injustice, and powerlessness in which women do not have the same power as men who dominated the structure of society.

The next study is an undergraduate thesis entitled *Oppression to Women In Shirley Conran's "Crimson" Novel (1992): A Feminist Literary Criticism* by Silvi Oktaviana Ika Handayani (Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, 2018). In her analysis about the oppression to women in *Crimson*, she discovered that women have to struggle to overcome the oppression done by their husbands.

Elisabeth Rustaviani Nugraheni in her undergraduate thesis entitled *Women's Struggle Against the Oppression of Men in Toni Morrison's "Paradise"* (Sanata Dharma Universita Yogyakarta, 2016) also examines how women must struggle because of unequal treatments in the society. One of the reasons why inequality occurs, according to Elisabeth, is because of the patriarchal culture.

Another study about women's oppression was also conducted by Affroni and Dr. I.M. Hendrarti, M.A in their article entitled *Analysis on the Issue of Women Oppression in F.Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"* (Diponegoro University, 2013). From their analysis, it can be seen that women in the story manage to free themselves from the oppression in a patriarchal domination.

Analysis about the oppression of women is also conducted by Nurliana Fitri and Erni Suparti. In their article entitled *Analyzing the Potrayal of Patriarchal Oppression Towards the Female Characters in J.K. Rowling's "The Casual Vacancy": A Reflective Post-Feminist Critics*(Mulawarman University, 2016), oppression and subordination of woman exist because of the patriarchal system. They also found that female is considered as an object in a patriarchal system, while men are the villain.

Study about the oppression of women is also discussed by Gavin Anditya Putra for his undergraduate thesis entitled *Women's Struggle Under the Practice of Patriarchy in Alice Nannup's "When The Pelican Laughed"* (Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, 2016). According to his finding, the practice of patriarchy has caused the female characters in the story to struggle for their rights.

The last study that the writer uses as the reference of this thesis is entitled *Patriarchy, Women Suffering, and the Ideas of Feminism Reflected through the Characters in Maria Irene Fornes' "The Conduct of Life"* by Amanda Rindu Dyah Perdana (Sanata Dharma University, 2008). Amanda stated in her thesis that women in the society are considered to be weak and dependent, whereas men are strong and independent. From her study, she discovered that women are suffering because of patriarchy.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In this study, the author focuses on discussing about how the story reflects oppression of women, forms of oppression experienced by the female character, as well as how oppression affects the female character.

1.6 Organization of the Study

This writing is arranged into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter consists of background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, previous studies, scope of the study, and organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Theory and Method

This chapter elaborated the theory and method used by the writer to support the analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the literary work.

Chapter 3: Result and Discussion

This chapter contains of the analysis, including intrinsic and extrinsic analysis, of the literary work based on the theory and method.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the analysis examined in the previous chapter.

References

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this sub chapter, in order to help the investigation of the study, the writer elaborates the theories used to analyzed the intrinsic aspects as well as the extrinsic aspects that are related to the discussion.

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements are the most important aspects that cannot be separated from the structure of a literary work. In this study, the author uses exponential approach that focuses on four intrinsic elements, namely characters, setting, conflict, and theme.

2.1.1.1 Characters

Characters are one of the most important and major parts of a literary work especially in short story. Without characters, the story will be incomplete as it is considered to be the life of literature. According to Kennedy, character is an imagined individual who occupies a story (Kennedy, 1995: 67). Kennedy divided character into two types based on the development in a story, which are flat character and round character.

Flat character is an outstanding character that have specific trait to distinguish them from other character (Kennedy, 1995: 68). Many literary work consists of only one flat character which tend to be considered as a minor character. On the contrary, round character is described as a character with a greater and more generous detail in a story and is considered as major character (Kennedy, 1995: 68). Round character will only

appear when there is other character in the story. Other differences between the two characters are flat characters will usually remain the same throughout a story, but a round characters will show a frequent change(Kennedy, 1995: 68).

2.1.1.2 Setting

Other important element in literary works is setting. Setting provides and help creates mood to the reader with explanation of where the story happen. Setting of a story includes of time and place in which the story appear that encourage characters to do something, lead them to realization, and cause them to express something (Kennedy, 1995: 110). Several writers use setting to arose the atmosphere and make the reader feel whatever the storyteller wants them to feel (Kennedy, 1995: 112). As stated in his book, Kennedy categorized setting into three types, which are setting of place,time, and social.

Setting of place can be described as the location of a story wherein the story occurs, “...the idea of setting includes the physical environment of a story: a house, a street, a city, a landscape, a region” (Kennedy, 1995: 110). Setting of time focuses on the time in which the action of characters in the story takes place. It essentially involves the time of the story that helps the readers understand what happen in the story as it explains the hour, year, or century where the story occurs. Setting of social includes of the whole society, beliefs, as well as assumptions relating to the characters. Setting of social defined the social condition in the story that can completely affects the characters.

2.1.1.3 Conflict

Other element contains in a literary work, particularly short story, is plot. The definition of plot according to Pugh is a “sequence of events, which are arranged in a purposeful and deliberate way to demonstrate their casual relationships” (Pugh, 2014: 129). It is a series of events occur on the story that is interrelated with other elements and is presented chronologically.

Conflict, on the other hand, is part of plot. Most literary works will rely on particular event happen in the story that creates narrative conflict which can yield from external as well as internal causes (Pugh, 2014: 131). Through the book entitled *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide*, Pugh suggested that conflict is categorized into two types, specifically external and internal conflict. External conflict occurs when the main character of the story struggles with the other character, an event, or other matter, whereas internal conflict occurs when the character deals with his or her own desires and principles (Pugh, 2014: 131).

In a story, conflict creates suspense to the reader which can leads the story keep on moving forward while developing tension along the way. This will then make the reader anticipate on what will happen next.

2.1.1.4 Theme

In fiction, theme is the fundamental idea of the story that the writer wants to present and convey. Kennedy stated that in short story, “theme is the center, the moving force, the principle of unity” (Kennedy, 1995: 190). Generally, theme is what the entire story

is about. When analyzing the theme of a story, Kennedy suggested that we can conclude the story's main idea into a general or shorter words by looking deeper into the story and think about what the writer tries to reveal (Kennedy, 1995: 190). Thus, in order to identify a theme of the story, the readers can try to understand the story by looking deeper into other elements of the story.

2.1.2 Extrinsic Elements

The extrinsic elements as the main focus of this study will revolve around oppression, specifically towards women. The author uses sociology of literature approach that focuses on the issues of patriarchy and women's oppression to support the analysis and will be elaborated in this sub-chapter.

2.1.2.1 Women in the Nineteenth-Century America

In the nineteenth-century America, women were struggling to fight for their right as they were "victims of social and economic discrimination. Upper and middle-class women's choice were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood" (Cruea, 2005: 187). American women in that era were required to rely on their husbands. Their rights were limited which "resulted in domestic dependency" (Cruea, 2005: 187). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in Cruea (2005: 187) stated that women were discourage to earn money by herself; thus, marriage became one of the strategies to survive in the society. In the same era, women began to raise awareness in order to emerge from patriarchal society of the 1800s.

The nineteenth-century also signifies a change in the position of women in the society with the established of several women's movements in a series of phases, which are True Womanhood, Real Womanhood, Public Womanhood, and New Womanhood. Ironically, as women started to fight for their rights and tried to escape the patriarchal system, women were still depicted as weak and delicate. In fact, the wall that separated women and men still existed in the era of True Womanhood movement. Women were considered to be emotionally and physically fragile that they must be protected by a family member who is a man (Cruea, 2005: 189). They were even discouraged to do too much physical activities because they are assumed to be more fragile than men.

Frances B. Cogan in Cruea described that Real Womanhood "emerged as an alternative to True Womanhood" (2005: 191). Women began to participated in the physical activities and received the opportunity to obtain education. Education was considered to be essential in this era because women who are educated were not dependent to their husband and able to support themselves. Furthermore, the Public Womanhood appeared because women who worked in a public space were faced with social marginality and being treated unfairly. As women continued to fight for their right, women's existence in the public began to be seen. Nevertheless, "women were still prohibited from participating as "revivalists" or taking leadership roles" (Cruea, 2005: 196).

The increasing of women's freedom did not stop in Public Womanhood movement. The New Womanhood focuses on "gaining greater access to education, employment, and economic and civic rights, and in changing expectation concerning social

behaviour” (Cruea, 2005: 199). For the first time in America, women were allowed to attend male universities to pursue an education. However, another problem occurred, women were insulted and harrassed by men who remain to dominate the environment.

Not only did the New Womanhood demanded right in education, but also in economic and political power. Finally, women in the era of New Womanhood “believed that sexual identity and behaviour should not be linked with public public respectability. Sexual activity should not destroy a woman’s reputation” (Cruea, 2005: 201). The nineteenth century then marks how women began to obtain power in a larger aspects.

2.1.2.1.1 Patriarchy

The term patriarchy cannot be separated from oppression as it is a system of social structures that “oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990: 20). Patriarchy indicates a system in which men dominate and rule the society through their position with primary power. In a structure that holds patriarchal system, women are considered to be powerless and have limitations in almost everything. Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* explained patriarchy as “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby, 1990: 20). The term social structures imply how man is in dominant position, while woman is in subordinate one. Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy* explained that patriarchy can be expressed in values, social roles, customs, as well as law (1986: 212).

The most basic unit that patriarchal system is expressed is a patriarchal family in which the values and rules are controlled by men as the head of family. According to Murdock (1949) in Steel, family is a social group that is defined by regular home, reproduction, as well as economic cooperation that incorporates grown-ups of both genders who are socially supported by sexual relationship, with one or more children, own or adopted, who are living together (2012: 2).

In a family that holds the system of patriarchy, Lerner described how men “had rights in women which women-as-a-group did not have in men” (Lerner, 1986: 212). No matter how exploited or abused, women should have the ability to retain their power to choose and act without limitations. However, Lerner emphasized that what happens in the reality is the contrary wherein women have relatively greater state of un-freedom unlike men (Lerner, 1986: 214).

This patriarchal system leads to oppression of women as women are being psychologically restrained which caused them to struggle against various forms of oppression by men. If women have relatively more power, women might be able to “counteract the dictates of their particular patriarchal system” (Lerner, 1986: 217). However, Lerner also added that “reforms and legal changes, while ameliorating the condition of women and an essential part of the process of emancipating them, will not basically change patriarchy” (Lerner, 1986: 217). In conclusion, patriarchal system within the society causes more harm and disadvantages women and benefits men.

2.1.2.2 Oppression

Oppression is a social phenomenon that has deeply rooted in the society that affects both men and women. However, in this study the writer will only concentrates in analyzing the oppression happens to women. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* stated that women in the society are considered to be “the other” in which their life are tied with the oppressor, who are men (2011: 28). Furthermore, de Beauvoir in Cudd also argued that women’s oppression comes as a result of comprehensive political, psychological, economic, and sexual domination of men (2006: 19).

Marilyn Frye defined oppression as the element of “press”. According to Cudd, oppression is a term which defined a feeling of person who feels stifled or overtaxed by rules. She defined oppression as “an injustice caused by (at least in part) social institutions” (Cudd, 2006: 21). Cudd concluded that the term oppression is used when a group of people are experiencing social injustice such as unfairly constrained, burdened, or reduced by force (Cudd, 2006: 23).

A person is considered to be oppressed by considering one aspect in which one ought to experience burdens that could benefit the other person. In addition to that, Marilyn Frye emphasized that an individual is assumed to be oppressed and experienced harm, suffer, or limitation by determining the context whether it is included in the elements of an oppressive structures (Frye, 2008: 13). She also added that oppression is everything which restricts a person; however, “not every harm or damage is due to or contributes to oppression” (Frye, 2008: 14). Hence, it is clear that

oppression is an act which causes harm and suffer to the victim and benefit the other person.

2.1.2.2.1 Forms of Oppression

There are various forms of oppression that happen in the society. It is characterized and divided into several types according to the harms consequent it causes. According to Cudd, in *Analyzing Oppression* (2006), there are four types of oppression, namely subjective, objective, psychological, and material oppression. However, in this study the writer analyzes psychological as well as material oppression.

Cudd stated that psychological oppression happens when one is being emotionally oppressed through one's mental states by manipulating one's beliefs; thus, one will be psychologically stressed, lack of self-esteem, or even psychologically damaged (Cudd, 2006: 24). As for material oppression, Cudd suggested that it "occurs when one's physical being is harmed by oppression, or one's material resources, including wealth, income, access to health care, or rights to inhabit physical space, are reduced by oppression" (Cudd, 2006: 24). From Cudd explanation, it can be concluded that material oppression can harms the victim physically and can be seen clearly unlike psychological oppression that harms the victim emotionally.

In addition, Iris Young in *Five Faces of Oppression* divided oppression into five forms including exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. In this writing, the writer will only explains the type of oppression relevant to the discussion, namely powerlessness. Young defined powerlessness as

“those who lack authority or power...the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them” (Young, 2004: 52). People who are powerless are inferior and have little opportunity to develop themselves because they lack of status and sense of self. Nevertheless, Cudd argued that by an act of will, oppression can be overcome (Cudd, 2006: 21). It is also obvious that oppression might happen in many different forms in which each form might also affects the victim differently.

2.1.2.2.2 Effects of Oppression

Oppression affects differently in every person who experienced it as it affects both mentally and physically. However, Frye stated that oppression can causes frustration and suffering. Meanwhile, Cudd explained that oppression could affects the victim psychologically and leads to trauma as well as the inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She also added that the effect of oppression is seriously damaging because “persons who are subjected to violence suffer shame and loss of self-esteem” (Cudd, 2006: 92). Thus, oppression can mainly harm the victim psychologically and creates various types of mental suffer.

Other than that, oppression can also causes “inequality through the intentional actions of members of a dominant group on members of a subordinate one...as they try to live in the face of other inequalities and injustices” (Cudd, 2006: 156-157). Not only can oppression affects the victim’s psychological condition, but it will also affects the condition of the society by creating inequality between dominant group of people and

subordinate group of people which then lead to the victim's inability to cope effectively in the society. Moreover, material oppression can damaged and disadvantaged a person for a long period of time (Cudd, 2006: 92).

2.2 Research Method

This sub chapter explains the method used to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

2.2.1 Data and Data Source

The data in this study are categorized into two types, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected from the work of literature itself, that is short story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper* written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whereas the secondary data is obtained from other books, articles, and research journals.

2.2.2 Method of Research

In conducting the research, the author of this study uses library research to analyze the oppression of women in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Mary W. George suggested that library research includes of recognizing and finding sources that give authentic data or individual/well-qualified assessment on an exploration question that is considered as an essential component (George, 2008: 6).

2.2.3 Method of Approach

In examining the short story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the author uses exponential approach and sociology of literature approach. Exponential approach is used to analyze the intrinsic elements of the literary work. According to Guerin, the word exponent

derives from a Latin word *exponere*, meaning “to put forth” or explaining (Guerin, 2005: 143). Guerin stated that exponential approach examines “signs or symbols of patterns of meaning” (Guerin, 2005: 143). Essentially, this approach focuses on the intrinsic aspects of a literary work that makes the readers aware of the implicit meanings in it.

As for the extrinsic elements, the author uses sociology of literature approach proposed by Alan Swingewood that focuses on how literature portrays values of the society, such as norms, behaviour, as well as attitudes to sex (Swingewood, 1972: 15). As an extrinsic approach, Swingewood argues that literature is used as a medium to reflect various aspects of the society that includes of social structure, conflict between class, as well as family relationship (Swingewood, 1972: 13).

CHAPTER 3

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Intrinsic Elements

In this chapter, the intrinsic aspects that will be discussed to support the analysis of the extrinsic aspects include of characters, setting, conflict, and theme.

3.1.1 Characters in *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Based on the explanation in the previous chapter, the characters in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* are divided into two categories, namely round character and flat character. The round character in the story includes of only one character, that is the narrator of the story. On the other hand, flat character includes of four characters, who are John, Jennie, the narrator's brother, and Mary.

3.1.1.1 Round Character

3.1.1.1.1 The Narrator

The main character in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is the narrator, an unnamed woman, who does not mention her name throughout the story. The narrator is classified as the major character as she shows changes of character during the story. In the story, the narrator suffers from depression after the birth of her baby. However, the people around her, including her husband, do not believe that she actually feels depressed, "You see he does not believe I am sick!" (Gilman, 2006: 1).

The narrator loves and trusts her husband very much that she always listens to whatever he says. She believes that everything her husband does to her is an act of

love in order for her to get well as soon as possible. However, her depression makes her often feel nervous and sensitive all the time, although she never really expresses it to anyone around her, “I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I’m sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition” (Gilman, 2006: 2). Despite her condition, the narrator is actually a very strong woman who does not let anyone in her family know about what she really feels. Although she feels like she is suffering inside, she still listens to her husband and endures everything she feels to herself.

Her mental state has caused her to experience several internal conflicts. Sometimes, she will be angry to her husband without any reason and cry when she is alone. She always shows her strong side when there are people around, especially in front of her husband. However, when she is alone, she is only a weak woman who actually in need of help. There are also times when the narrator tries to talk to John about what she really feels, but he will always end up saying not to talk about it.

As the plot of the story progresses, the narrator slowly shows change of character, especially when her mind begins to only think about the yellow wallpaper in her room. She tries to talk to John a few more times to get her out of the house because she is bothered by her own hallucination in which she sees many women inside the wallpaper. Her feeling towards John also gradually change as she is getting afraid of him, “The fact is that I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look” (Gilman, 2006: 12). She starts to distrust him and think that John does not actually love her and is only pretending.

Throughout the story, it can also be seen how the narrator's name is not mentioned. Perhaps, the narrator in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* who is the main female character of the story, does not mention her name because she does not want to be known that she is the victim of oppression. From how she keeps herself anonymous, it can be seen that she does not want to be considered as the oppressed who is rather powerless.

3.1.1.2 Flat Characters

3.1.1.2.1 John

John is the narrator's husband who works as a physician. He is the one who tells his wife that she needs to stay in a house for a season. He plays a major role in the story as he is the main cause of why the narrator suffers throughout the story, but he is not considered as a round character because his character stays the same until the end of the story. John is very loved by his wife, it can be seen from the beginning of the story where she continuously portrays him as a good and responsible husband.

Even though his wife thinks that he really loves her, John forbids the narrator to do everything that she pleases, he does not even allow her to write. In addition, John is someone who thinks that he is always right and will not listen to what the other person wants to say. For example, when his wife tries to tell him about her condition, he will immediately cut her off and makes her silent. In spite of his behavior towards his wife, the narrator depicts John as someone who is "very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction. I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the

day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more” (Gilman, 2006: 3).

3.1.1.2.2 Jennie

Jennie is John’s sister and the narrator’s sister in law who is working as the housekeeper during their stay in the mansion. She is responsible to take care of her sister’s in law who experiences depression. Throughout the story, it can be seen how Jennie is a good sister who always obeys her brother. Her responsibility as the housekeeper is to keep an eye to the narrator when her husband is away for work.

Jennie is an enthusiast person who is good at her work as she carefully takes a good care of the narrator and regularly gives report to her brother about her sister in law’s condition, “Such a dear girl she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing. She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession” (Gilman, 2006: 6). Even though Jennie has to do everything for the narrator, on behalf of her brother, Jennie still loves her job. She will not let the narrator do something that is forbidden by her husband. Jennie also thinks that writing has worsen the narrator’s condition, “I verily believe she thinks it is the writing that made me sick! But I can write when she is out” (Gilman, 2006: 6).

Not only is Jennie a perfect person for her job, but she is also an understanding person. Every time the narrator is having an inner conflict with herself and wants to be alone due to her depression, Jennie will always lets her alone, “Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want to” (Gilman, 2006: 7). In spite of her caring attitude towards her

sister in law, Jennie does not believe that the narrator is suffering. Hence, she stays silent even though she sees how the narrator is being oppressed. She also does not try to defend her everytime the narrator argues with John. However, it can be concluded that Jennie does not try to defend the narrator because she does not suffering from the same pain as the narrator does. Thus, she does not understand what the narrator really feels to be oppressed by the closest person in her life.

3.1.1.2.3 The Narrator's Brother

The narrator's brother is one of the character in the story whose name is also not mentioned. He does not make any appearance in the story, but he is described as someone who also works as a physician, like John. Based on the narrator explanation, her brother also does not believe that she is suffering from depression, he believes that she is only experiencing a temporary condition that makes her feel nervous all the time. Similar to John, the narrator's brother thinks that his sister will eventually feel better once she gets enough rest.

3.1.1.2.4 Mary

Mary is someone who works for the narrator and John. She is a responsible woman who does her job well, "It is fortunate that Mary is so good with the baby" (Gilman, 2006: 4). She takes care of the baby who is left in the house with her while the baby's parents are away during the summer, "There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy" (Gilman, 2006: 9), from the quotation it can be seen that Mary is a caring and a reliable baby sitter whom John and his wife can trust as she is the perfect person for the job.

3.1.2 Setting

As explained in the previous chapter, the discussion of setting is classified into three categories, namely setting of place, setting of time, and setting of social.

3.1.2.1 Setting of Place

In the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the story takes place in an old house that the narrator describes as ancestral and queer. In the beginning of the story, the narrator depicts the mansion she will be living for the next three months as “a colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house” (Gilman, 2006: 1). According to the narrator, the house that she and her husband rent is an empty house that has been left for quite a long time, which is one of the reasons why the narrator thinks that the house is haunted and strange. It is located three miles from the village and standing back from the road with a beautiful garden.

As the narrator explores the house, she finds a garden that she portrays as “large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them” (Gilman, 2006: 2). The beautiful garden that she mentions also has a greenhouse that has been abandoned by its owner who left the house untenanted. Inside the house, there are empty rooms that the narrator, John, and Jennie use to sleep. In the first floor, there is a room with an “opened piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings” (Gilman, 2006: 3). However, John does not allow his wife to use that room as he says that there is not enough room for two beds. Thus, she has to stay in a room upstairs where she spends most of her time there.

The major setting wherein most parts of the story take place is the room upstairs with a yellow wallpaper which the narrator portrays as “a big airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore” (Gilman, 2006: 3). In here, the narrator spends her time analyzing the wallpaper. The room with the dull yellow wallpaper that the narrator assumes as a former playground and gymnasium is also considered to be the most important place in the story because that is the place where the narrator struggles against the oppression she is experiencing. It is also the room that the narrator mentions the most throughout the short story as it reflects how the narrator is trapped in a situation that she cannot escape.

3.1.2.2 Setting of Time

The setting of time in the story is not specifically mentioned in the story. However, the story takes place in the season of summer. There are also several parts of the story that portrays the setting of time in which the events occur. The first part where the narrator portrays the setting of time in the story is when she explains that she has been staying in the house for two weeks, “We have been here for two weeks, and I haven’t felt like writing before, since that first day” (Gilman, 2006: 4).

The next part that shows the setting of time is when the narrator asks John that she wants him to remove the wallpaper because it has been very bothering to her. He mentions that they will only stay and rent the house in the period of three months, “and really, dear, I don’t care to renovate the house just for a three months’ rental” (Gilman, 2006: 4). Furthermore, the following quotation is also an evidence of the time in which

an event occurs, namely after the narrator seems to celebrate the independence day of the United States together with her family that come to see her in the mansion, “Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out” (Gilman, 2006: 7).

Another evidence of the time is when the narrator tries to talk to her husband before they sleep. She also describes the situation that night, “But I tried it last night. It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does” (Gilman, 2006: 10). There is also an event that happens in the daylight, when the narrator begins to think and analyze the wallpaper in the room under the sun light that comes from the window inside the room.

3.1.2.3 Setting of Social

The setting of social that is portrayed in *The Yellow Wallpaper* can be seen from the narrator description about her family. The narrator and her husband come from a middle-class family as stated in the following quotation, “It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer” (Gilman, 2006: 1). It can also be seen that they come from a well educated family as John and the narrator’s brother work as a physician that, of course, the job requires a high education. They are also portrayed to have a lot of money that is proven from their capability to rent a big house to stay for several months along with the servants to take care of the narrator who is experiencing depression, “So now she is gone, and the

servants are gone” (Gilman, 2006: 16). They can also employ a baby sitter for their baby who is being left at home.

3.1.3 Conflict

In the short story, the main character experiences two classifications of conflict, namely internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict appears within the narrator’s self, whereas external conflict appears between the narrator and the other characters.

3.1.3.1 Internal Conflict

The internal conflict appears throughout the story as the narrator struggles against the oppression. She expresses the conflict inside her head through a journal book that she secretly writes when John and Jennie are not around. The inner conflict within herself mainly appears as a result of the oppression that she is experiencing throughout the story. Although she is externally surrounded by many people around her, such as the servants, Jennie, and John, the narrator feels alone internally because she has no one she could rely on.

In the beginning of the story, it is told that the narrator is being isolated in a house where she ought to rest and listens to her husband. Her husband will always tells her to stop thinking about her condition and focus on her recovery. This mindset then creates tension inside the narrator’s head as she is forced to act like she does not suffer from depression, because according to her husband, she is only physically ill; thus, it makes her feel bad about herself. However, there is nothing she can do about it because nobody will listens to her. It makes her feel worse and feel as if she is a burden to her

husband, “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!” (Gilman, 2006: 4).

The inner conflict also happens because the narrator is not allowed to write. In fact, she thinks that her condition will be much better if she is able to convey her thought through writing, “I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me. But I find I get pretty tired when I try. It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work” (Gilman, 2006: 5). Hence, because she cannot do anything during the day, she spends most of her time looking and analyzing the yellow wallpaper in her room which eventually dominates her mind. She does not even want the people around her know that she is actually examining the patterns in the wallpaper.

She starts hallucinating and seeing some strange figures inside the wallpaper that often makes her feel angry. As she becomes more and more attached to the wallpaper and her depression gets worsen, the narrator often cries when she is alone. She also starts to think that she cannot think straight because of her condition. Aside from that, she begins to distrust John and Jennie.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. (Gilman, 2006: 15).

The quotation above when the narrator expresses “It does not trust people too much” shows how the narrator starts doubting the people around her as she continues to think

about the patterns inside the wallpaper that she assumes as a woman. At the end of story, the conflict within herself ends with the narrator tearing down the wallpaper while crawling around the room, trying to get the woman inside the wallpaper out.

3.1.3.2 External Conflict

As for the external conflict, it happens between the narrator and her husband, John. She tries to talk to him about her condition from the beginning of the story, but John always doubting it. He does not believe that his wife is suffering and will not listen to her. John also does not allow his wife to do anything, the main cause of the conflict in which the narrator disagree with it.

Whenever the narrator tries to talk to John about the yellow wallpaper that bothers her, John will not hears about it too. He believes that it has nothing to do with the narrator condition. Besides, they will only rent the house for only three months. Aside from that, John also tells his wife to recover fast, because if she is not, he threatens that he will send her to another physician named Weir Mitchell. Sometimes, the narrator will tries to talk to her husband about her condition, yet he still stays the same and will not listen to anything she says.

Although John always says and tries to show how much he loves his wife, it can be seen that the narrator tries her best in order for her voice to be heard by her husband. The other day, the narrator tries again and tells him that she wants to get out of the house because she does not feel comfortable there. Hearing about it, John gives her the

same answer about her condition that is becoming better. He also tells her not to talk about it ever again while giving her a look that keeps the narrator silent.

“The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and I would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you.” (Gilman, 2006: 10).

It is clear how the conflict between the narrator and her husband reaches its climax as the narrator continues trying to tell him what she really feels, but her effort does not give her any better result as she remains staying in the house until the end of the story where the narrator locks herself up in the room with the yellow wallpaper and John ends up fainted the moment he enters the room because he sees his wife has gone insane.

3.1.4 Theme

The Yellow Wallpaper is a short story that brings the topic of women's oppression as the main idea of the story. The author of the story, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, tries to reveal how women struggle against the limitation and injustice because of patriarchal system. Not only does the author focus on the struggle, but she also tries to show how the female character's husband is superior, whereas the narrator is inferior and weak. It also presents how oppression affects her life that leads to psychological as well as material harms to the victim, which in this case is the narrator as a woman.

Digging deeper into the story, the main character's attempt to fight for her right is always fail as her husband tends to say something that will keep the narrator silent.

Throughout the story, her struggle to achieve freedom eventually makes her go insane because no one around her listens to her. From the story, the readers can see how this phenomenon where one does harm and causes suffer to the other person might occur even in the smallest unit of the society, that is a family.

3.2 Extrinsic Elements

In this sub-chapter, the author of this study examines the extrinsic aspects of the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* that are related to women's oppression in the story, namely patriarchal system, forms of oppression, and effects of oppression.

3.2.1 Women in the Nineteenth-Century America

As explained in the previous chapter, patriarchy was one of the main aspects that causes women's movements in the nineteenth-century America. Accordingly, this sub chapter will analyze how the female character in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is being oppressed by her husband because of the patriarchal system.

3.2.1.1 Patriarchy

Patriarchal system that is reflected in *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a system that occurs in the smallest group of the society, namely family. The narrator, as a woman is inferior, whereas her husband is superior. As the head of the family, John has a primary power to control everything in the house. He does not listen to his wife and treats her as someone who is powerless. He only cares about himself and does not care about his wife's feelings.

Unlike John who has the freedom to do anything, the narrator as a woman in the family does not have any freedom. She has to obey all the rules that her husband creates with an excuse of her condition. Regardless of his responsibility as a husband, to take a good care of his wife, the narrator is still being harmed by the limitations that exist in the house. John thinks that as a man, he can make all the decisions himself without discussing it with her wife and without thinking about that she will be disadvantaged by it.

The female character does not even have the freedom to express what she feels about her current condition because her husband will always tell her to stop talking and not think about it. He does not believe that she is suffering, though the narrator has tried telling him about what she really feels. As a physician, John comes from a well-educated background, yet it does not make him aware of his wrongdoings toward his wife. This system that exists in the female character's family, is the main cause of the oppression she faces.

3.2.2 Oppression

After analyzing the main cause of oppression, namely patriarchy, in this sub chapter the writer will explore and discuss the forms of oppression that the woman in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* experiences as well as how oppression affects her.

3.2.2.1 Forms of Oppression

Based on the writer's findings, there are three types of oppression that the narrator experiencing in the short story, namely psychological oppression, material oppression, and powerlessness.

3.2.2.1.1 Psychological Oppression

The first form of oppression that the female character experiencing is psychological oppression. The narrator is being oppressed through her mental states. Her husband, John, who is a physician should have been aware of his wife condition. However, he chooses not to believe it because he thinks that the narrator does not have any reason to suffer "John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him" (Gilman, 2006: 4).

As a physician, John always manipulates his wife by telling her that she is alright and nothing will happen if she takes enough rest. He makes her think that she does not have any mental issue. Thus, when she feels mentally unstable, she tends to think that she is being a burden to feel what she feels; hence, it always makes her feel bad about herself. The pressure she gets from her husband who tells her that she must not think about her condition has caused her depression to get worse.

There are also several moments where the narrator tries to tell John about how she wishes to get away from the house. However, John will eventually looks her in the eyes and says something that manipulate her into thinking that she is wrong and foolish for feeling so.

“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?” (Gilman, 2006: 11)

The quotation above happens when the narrator and her husband argue in the middle of the night. The narrator tries to talk to him about her wanting to get out of the house because she does not feel any better there. Nevertheless, John makes her think that it is very silly of her to think that her condition is not getting better.

3.2.2.1.2 Material Oppression

Beside psychological oppression, the narrator also faces material oppression in the story. As stated in the previous chapter, material oppression is when one does not have the rights to have their own physical space. In this case, the narrator as a woman is also facing material oppression. She is being isolated in a house for several months because of her depression. Her husband believes that she is not actually suffering from depression, but rather physically ill. Consequently, he thinks that locking her up will do her good as she will be fully rested. Unfortunately, he does not realize that what he does is only making her condition worse.

In addition, during the isolation, the narrator does not have any access to the outside world. Inside the house, the female character is also restricted from doing things that she likes “So I take phosphates or phosphites – whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again” (Gilman, 2006: 2). She is only allowed to rest, take tonics, and exercise in order to recover.

On the first day upon their arrival in the mansion, the narrator chooses her own room to sleep during their stay, but John says she cannot use the room. Instead, he tells her to use the nursery room upstairs “I don’t like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it” (Gilman, 2006: 3). The narrator tries to tell him, yet he does not want to listen. Aside from that, John also forbids his wife not to write because he thinks that it is writing that causes her depression. Thus, she will only writes when no one is around, including the servants and housekeeper as they are going to report it to John. Although John provides the narrator with her daily needs along with the servants and the housekeeper, it is the freedom that the female character desires the most.

I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin and Julia. But he said I wasn’t able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished (Gilman, 2006: 9).

The quotation above proves how the female character does not have the freedom because her husband restricted her to meet her own family. He uses her condition as an excuse to oppress her.

3.2.2.1.3 Powerlessness

Powerlessness is the form of oppression that most of the oppressed encounter. The female character in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is one among many women in the patriarchal system who are powerless. As a woman who faces an oppression in a patriarchal family, the narrator does not have any power to fight against it because

she is in the subordinate position. She is trapped in a situation where she is unable to defend herself. As the oppressed who does not have the access to the outside world, the narrator does not have ability against her husband; thus, she must obey the rules that her husband made. Besides, no one, even her family, gives her the support she actually needed.

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!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do? (Gilman, 2006: 1).

The narrator who is inferior does not have the power to fight against her husband. The quotation “And what can one do?” above shows her powerlessness, there is nothing she can do to defend herself. In several parts of the story, the narrator tries to talk to her husband about how she wants him to let her escape. Nonetheless, he will not let her go. Instead, he threatens her by saying that if she is not becoming better and getting enough rest, he will send her away to Weir Mitchell, a physician. As the subordinate one, of course the narrator does not have the ability to disobey John, who has the power to control his wife.

3.2.2.2 Effects of Oppression

The effects of oppression might vary from one person to another. It can affect the oppressed physically as well as mentally. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator is faced with three types of oppression, namely psychological oppression, material oppression,

and powerlessness in which the three types has affected her mentally which leads to instability of emotion. It causes the female character to suffer and struggle against it. She tries her best to be heard by the oppressor, who is her own husband, but her powerlessness makes her stay to be oppressed until the end of the story.

The narrator, who is becoming emotionally unstable, often shows changes of mood throughout the story. Sometimes, she feels unreasonably sensitive and feels angry to her husband, John. However, she only thinks that it is the effect of her condition that causes her to feel so. In fact, she actually feels angry because she cannot stand for herself and escape from the oppression. The other time, the narrator feels like she has no strength to do anything, even when she does not do anything exhausting during the day.

Everytime she is alone, the female character admits that she cries most of the time without understanding what makes her cry, “I don’t feel as if it was worth while to turn my hand over for anything, and I’m getting dreadfully fretful and querulous. I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time” (Gilman, 2006: 7). The result of her unpredictable change of mood also leads to the trouble to think straight. She confesses how she often experiences difficulty to think straight.

Aside from unstable emotion, oppression also causes loss of self-esteem of the victim. The oppressed, in this case the narrator, is experiencing lack of confidence due to her loss of self-esteem. She also feels bad about herself when John says something to her. Even though John always expresses how much he loves his wife, the narrator seems like she does not trust him. Instead, it makes her feel like she is a burden and a

troublesome to her husband. In addition, her lack of confidence also occurs because she is not allowed to write. Whenever she writes, she feels discouraged as there is no one who can give her any advice about her writing.

As she is experiencing the effects of oppression, she starts to feel attached to the wallpaper inside her room. She begins to hallucinate and seeing a woman that seems to be trapped inside the wallpaper. She becomes extremely eager to help her escape the wallpaper. In reality, it is actually herself that she sees on the wallpaper as she starts to imagine what will happen if she breaks free from the oppression. Since she is unable to free herself from the oppression, she is becoming obsessed to help the woman in the wallpaper to leave the trap.

Her obsession towards the woman in the wallpaper eventually makes her become insane. At the end of the story, she succeeded getting the woman out from the wallpaper by tearing off the wallpaper, ““I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane? And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”” (Gilman, 2006: 18). The quotation proves how the woman that she sees is actually the reflection of herself in her mind. Thus, when she finally manages to encourage the woman inside the wallpaper to escape, she feels like she is also getting her freedom, although in reality she is still there in the house with her husband.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The Yellow Wallpaper is a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman that brings the theme of women's oppression happening in the family. The main female character in the story is being isolated by her husband due to her condition. To examine the short story, the author of this study analyzes the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic aspects. The intrinsic aspects include of character, setting, conflict, and theme. Meanwhile, the extrinsic aspects consist of the analysis of patriarchal system, the forms of oppression, as well as the effects of oppression.

Accordingly, the writer of this study concludes that John is one of the men who feels superior, whereas the narrator is inferior. Thus, he thinks that he can control everything in the households. Throughout the story, the narrator experiences three types of oppression, specifically psychological oppression, material oppression, and powerlessness. Psychological oppression, the main type of oppression that the narrator experiences, occurs as the narrator is being manipulated and psychologically harmed by her husband; thus, it causes her condition to get worse. On the other hand, she also faces material oppression as she is being isolated and restricted from the outside world. Her right to have the freedom is also being taken away as she does not have the access to meet her family and do something that she likes. The last type of oppression that the narrator experiences is powerlessness. As a woman who lives within the limitations

of the patriarchal system, she does not have any power to defend herself. As the oppressed, she is in the subordinate position; therefore, she must obey the oppressor.

The three forms of oppression that she is experiencing has caused her to struggle and fight against it. Unfortunately, from the beginning until the end of the story she could not escape from the oppression. Hence, she is forced to accept her own condition as the victim of oppression. As the result, she experiences several effects of oppression, namely instability of emotion as well as loss of self-esteem. Her unstable emotion causes her to experience change of mood, for example she will be crying and getting angry for no reason. Her loss of self-esteem also causes her to feel lack of confidence that often makes her feel discouraged and think that she is a burden and troublesome to her husband.

Another effects of oppression also occurs when the narrator tries to overcome the oppression. She starts to feel attached to the yellow wallpaper inside her room and begins to hallucinating. She sees a woman trapped inside the wallpaper. As the wallpaper starts to haunt her slowly, it dominates her mind, when in fact, the woman that she sees inside the wallpaper is the portrayal of her own self in her mind who is being oppressed. Hence, it can be concluded that the reason why she tries so hard to help her escape is because the narrator herself wants to escape from oppression, yet she does not have the power to.

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