



DIFFERENT MARRIAGE PERSPECTIVES IN THE SHORT STORIES *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER* AND *THE STORY OF AN HOUR*

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In this paper I'll talk about my perspective about the theme of marriage in the short stories "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin. I will mainly focus on the role the theme has alongside the main plot and why it gives readers different views about both short stories.

At the very beginning of "The Yellow Wallpaper" we notice the protagonist being brought to live in a new house due to a certain condition she has. This happens because her husband John wants her to concentrate on relaxing and getting better without any kind of external interactions with relatives and so on. The woman is then put to stay in a room with a terrible wallpaper on it. She instantly despises it, but John continues to say that it will be better for her to stay there and try not to think about her illness.

During the whole short story we may see various scenes in which John convinces the protagonist that all of this is happening in favor of her recovery. She agrees with him and lets her stay in that so-called nursery.

As the story continues it is visible that John does not believe in her illness being a huge problem, that she will recover in no time and that she is "exaggerating" in behaving like that. She then starts to dislike some of John's actions and thoughts, but still follows what the husband says to her for now.

We can clearly see in some of John's lines that he is belittling her condition and many of the things he says are seen as a kind of "gaslighting" from the reader's point of view, as he laughs and mocks the protagonist when she tries and talk to him about her condition and her welfare.

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 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." "I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!" "Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug, "she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!" (GILMAN, 1892, p. 9)

It is evident the difference between the protagonist's opinion (a woman) and the husbands and the protagonist's brother (both male characters), in which the men have a final say in how the protagonist should act in relation to her illness. They both detain the place of speech, for both are physicians, in relation to the protagonist that is "just a hysteric and mentally ill woman".

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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? My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing. (GILMAN, 1892, p. 2)

On the other hand we have the short story “The story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, in which we accompany the last hour of life of Louise Mallard, a woman with a heart illness that makes it impossible to her sister and her husband's friend to break her the news that her husband Brently was killed in an accident this very day.

Both Josephine (the sister) and Richards (the husband's friend) have trouble telling Louise the news of her deceased husband, with fear that she would collapse due to her heart condition. Not long after, when they tell her what was going on, Louise bolts to her room and locks herself in.

At first glance we expect Louise to grieve for her husband's death, but we are contemplated with the very opposite as we see her sparkling with joy repeating several times “I'm free, free, free”. It is easy to see that Louise was unhappy with the marriage, or even displeased with it and never had the opportunity to “live for herself”.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” [...] There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. (CHOPIN, 1894, p. 2)

We start to develop sympathy for Louise as we see her growing happier with her finally being free to do her will, but as she goes downstairs with her sister we face the news together with Louise. Her husband is alive and seems to be far from the accident as he enters through the door nice and clean. The shock of the bad news we expected in the beginning falls over now, as Louise collapses, dead of joy.

Finally, we notice different aspects between Louise in “The Story of an hour” and the protagonist in “The

Yellow Wallpaper”. Louise definitely had a bad relationship with her husband and despised the marriage. As for The Protagonist* (The Yellow Wallpaper), she seemed to have a good relationship with her husband, but it was clear to the reader that their marriage was not the best due that he does not believe in her illness not even once during the whole periode they stayed in that house.

It is interesting to see how marriage was treated in the past, with a clear superiority of men in relation to women, but is also intriguing to see how these two short stories present us these relationships, as both women were unhappy and showed it through the story, so that other women could see and relate with it at the time.

Another perspective, aside from the short stories, about the concept of women's marriage and inferiority is in the movie and book “Little Women” by Louisa May Alcott, with a scene of the head director of the local journal giving his opinion about the story Jo March wrote. Paraphrasing him: “This book can't end with the woman by herself in the end, she either gets married or ends up dead in the end”. The second statement really happened in the short story “The Story of an Hour” but in “The Yellow Wallpaper” we don't see any of these endings. All we see is a mentally ill woman slowly getting insane as her condition affects her, being able to even theorize that she may be sent to an asylum after all that happened.

But it is sure that both books are ahead of the common thought of that time, showing clear and strong opinions from both protagonists, being literature one of the only ways a woman could express opinion and be heard by others. We fortunately ended up having more places of speech nowadays, at least more than in the past centuries, as so women must have self-opinion and decision barely equal to the men, showing us the results of past writers as Kate Chopin and Charlotte Gilman in these types of matters.

Finally, as an important mention of speeches given by women in the last centuries, I would like to finish off this paper by quoting Sojourner Truth's speech delivered at the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. So that we may continue to grow our voices.

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And

ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

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