

Analysis of the Awakening of the Heroine's Female Consciousness in the Yellow Wallpaper

Xiaoxian Tang

Nanjing Xiaozhuang University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 211171, China

Abstract: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* tells a story of the heroine who, due to postpartum depression, is sent by her husband to a remote country house to receive "rest cure", during which the heroine is forbidden to engage in all activities, but she constantly resists and eventually goes insane. This thesis first analyzes the process of the awakening of the heroine's female consciousness from three aspects: writing secretly, discovering the shadow and ripping the wallpaper. In addition, through the analysis of both internal factors and external factors this thesis aims to explore the causes of her awakening: the rebelliousness, curiousness and kindness in the heroine's character make her learn to fight against the patriarchy in the face of oppression and eventually discover the secret behind the wallpaper; restraints of the autocratic family, constraints of the patriarchal society and influences of the irritating surroundings prevent the heroine from doing the work she prefers, leaving the woman as a subordinate to her husband. All of these factors push the heroine to get rid of the oppression of patriarchy on women, so as to gain spiritual independence and freedom.

Keywords: The Yellow Wallpaper; Female Consciousness; Awakening; Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and The Yellow Wallpaper

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, born on July 3rd, 1860, was a prominent American writer, sociologist as well as one of the most influential feminists in the first wave of feminist movement. Gilman grew up in a troubled family. When she was very young, her father deserted his family. She was later brought up by her aunt Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Under the influence of Stowe, Gilman developed her early consciousness that she could enjoy equal rights with man. At the age of 23, she stepped into her first marriage, during which she gave birth to her first child and suffered severe postpartum depression. After she was suggested a "rest cure" by famous neurologist S. Weir Mitchell, she took the advice and even quit writing, but her health continued to deteriorate. The "rest cure" nearly made Gilman insane. In the depth of her heart, she wanted to write instead of fulfilling the responsibilities of motherhood. She also despised the male-oriented world in which women should be submissive to men. She hated the housework which left her no time and no energy for her writing. Consequently, she divorced her husband and left the child with him. After getting done with this she resumed her writing. She mentioned in her diary that she started to feel that her depression was vanishing. She not only wrote enthusiastically but also participated actively in the feminist movement. She urged women to be independent especially in financial matters (Parker, 2013). Although she was bisexual, she got married again in 1900 with her cousin George Houghton Gilman, who supported her social reform. George died in 1934 and the next year Charlotte was diagnosed with breast cancer. Instead of dying a painful death, she committed suicide in 1935.

The Yellow Wallpaper is a semi-autobiographical short story, which was written in the first person. It depicts the suppression of women in the Victorian era through the

situation of the narrator. After giving birth to a child, the narrator suffers from postpartum depression and has to accept the so-called "rest cure". To help the narrator recover from the illness, her family has rented a colonial mansion and moved in. John, her husband, is a doctor himself and asks her to quit her job and to take a rest. She is confined in a room, which is wrapped with the yellow wallpaper and located at the top of the mansion; she is not allowed to write, work or contact with the outside world. She rejects to live in such a room, but her husband says that the room is good for her illness. Due to a series of reasons, the narrator becomes interested in the yellow wallpaper, hence she keenly begins to observe the patterns of the wallpaper. Having been staring at the wallpaper, she finally discovers the secret of the wallpaper: a shadow is entrapped behind the pattern. In the end, the narrator pulls off most of the paper and helps the women climb out of the pattern. In this way, she has achieved the independence and liberation of her personality.

The novel exposes the extreme suppression of women by the patriarchal culture and reveals their strong desire for freedom. It became a masterpiece of feminist thought in American literature.

1.2. Introduction to Feminism

Feminism initially appeared in France in 1870, and since then it was introduced into other European countries and America. It had got through development and changes for more than a century in western countries. With the development of women's liberation movement, feminism underwent three times movements, including the first wave occurring towards the end of eighteenth century, the second wave in 1860s and the third wave in 1990s. In the first-wave feminism movement, it mainly focused on women's rights on marriage, property and later on suffrage. The second-wave was to help women fight on the social, political and cultural inequalities. It aimed to deconstruct the binary classification and to eliminate gender differences. Moreover, the third-wave feminism movement came out and had a newly interpretation in gender and sexuality. It challenged female heterosexuality,

speaking for both the white women and the colored women.

The foundation of feminism emerged when women started to demand independence and legal rights. Feminism could be defined as “a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to eradicate sexist domination and to transform society” (Humm, 1992: 1). It was a political and ideological movement that aimed to achieve gender parity and equity in all spheres, including the social, political, personal, and economic ones. “The issues of feminism and agency are not voiced out by a single author but a group of consolidated women come together to express their idea in whichever way they want” (S. Yogapriya, 2022: 19). The movement of feminism gained shape by the authors like Mary shell, Christina Rossetti, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Virginia Woolf.

In 1837, the first recorded usage of the term “feminist” was made by Charles Fourier, a French philosopher. The Netherlands had adopted the term by 1872, while the United Kingdom and the United States adopted it in the 1890s and 1910 respectively. The goal of feminism was to establish equal treatment and opportunity for women so that they could attain equal opportunities and respect across different domains of labor and culture.

2. Literature Review

The Yellow Wallpaper is one of Gilman’s most representative works. With its unique narrative style and profound feminist ideas, The Yellow Wallpaper have attracted the attention of the experts both at home and abroad.

The foreign scholar S. Yogapriya (2022) publishes *Female Predicament in the Novel The Yellow Wallpaper* and explores the dilemma of the heroine from various aspects, pointing out that the heroine has no choice but to protest against the patriarchal society in the form of madness and revealing that men in the patriarchal society enslave women, restrict women’s freedom, and imprison women’s thoughts in the name of “protection”. And also, it is hoped that women should have freedom to question the unequal social order. Based on the defense mechanism of Freudian psychoanalysis, M. Mohsin Manzoor (2022), in his paper *The Yellow Wallpaper: A Psychoanalytical Parallelism Between Character and Author*, unravels the inner connection between the author and the heroine, pointing out that the mental disorder of the heroine is also the author’s own mental disorder. In *The Yellow Wallpaper: A Woman’s Journey into an Evolved Identity*, Stine Hope Blom (2022) delves into the world of ideology from a feminist perspective, exploring that what the heroine seeks is not only the satisfaction of being recognized by men, but also the self-satisfaction of being able to create her own value. The heroine tries to search for a new female identity by breaking the unequal relationship between men and women in traditional society.

The domestic scholars have also done many studies on *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Zhang Hetong (2020) interprets the heroine’s gradual awakening of self-awareness through struggle and resistance, revealing the plight of women and encouraging them to break free from the shackles of patriarchy and fight for independence and freedom. Zhou Tingting (2021) analyzes the internalization of patriarchal discourse and medical truth in the novel from the perspective of “insanity”, pointing out that the “insanity” of intellectual women in the 19th century was not a mere insanity, but the mechanism of disciplinary power of patriarchal discourse, and the internalization of moral standards of patriarchal

discourse, which profoundly reveals that a “insanity” is closer to the truth than “rationality”. She also argues that it is through “insanity” that women build the authority of female discourse in the process of resistance. Analyzing from the perspective of Marxist feminism, Gu Zihua (2018) points out that under the background of capitalist patriarchy, women suffer from the double oppression of class and gender and are almost unable to realize their dream of pursuing freedom; at the same time, she reveals that the madness of the heroine in the novel is a continuation of her self-consciousness, a helpless choice under the social reality, and a silent challenge to the capitalist patriarchal society.

To sum up, different scholars have studied and interpreted *The Yellow Wallpaper* from various perspectives, but most of them focus on a single factor such as survival and experiences of the females in the novel’s time period. This thesis aims to elaborate the process of the heroine’s awakening of female consciousness and to analyze the causes of her awakening in terms of both internal and external factors.

3. Awakening of the Heroine’s Female Consciousness

The Yellow Wallpaper is written in the first-person narration. The image of the heroine, and also the narrator, in *The Yellow Wallpaper* keeps changing as the novel’s plot develops. This change reflects the continuous transformation of the heroine’s character — from submissiveness to rebelliousness. The process of her awakening is embodied in the following three aspects.

3.1. Writing Secretly

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator loves writing and longs for a space in which she can write freely and independently. However, with no financial income, she has to be completely dependent on her husband John. She even does not have freedom to choose her own room. For a husband, the role of a woman is to care for the household and family and to become a devoted wife and mother. She should not play the role of a “writer”, who has right and freedom to speak independently. In the male-centered Western culture and patriarchal society, writing is seen as the privilege of males. Men believe that discourse is the expression of power and that all power is realized through discourse. So, they think that mastering discourse means mastering the power to speak. If women engage in writing, they may obtain the power of speech, which inevitably poses a threat to male dominance. Therefore, women are strongly discouraged from writing. In the eyes of the husband in the novel, his wife’s “writing” is a violation of her identity and the main cause of her “sickness”.

Although the narrator’s husband and brother rely on “medical truths” to prescribe a “rest cure” for her — a ban on writing and thinking, the narrator still keeps writing secretly. She thinks that nothing can stop her from creating her works as long as she is happy, except for the fact that she is too weak to create. When John is at home, the narrator behaves submissively, ostensibly following his orders. But when she is unobserved, the narrator defies her husband’s rules and writes clandestinely. The narrator keeps writing about her confinement, recording her own journal from depression to true madness. “This rebellion against the patriarchal authority of her husband is the first step in the narrator’s escape. It is a model for women of her class to emulate as they seek to overthrow, or to escape, the yoke of repression in their male-

dominated society.” (Debbie, 2012: 22) Nonetheless, both the narrator’s husband and her brother are such firm practitioners and defenders of the central culture of patriarchy that they strongly forbid the narrator to do these things. Meanwhile, writing starts to exhaust her a lot so that she feels uncomfortable and becomes unable to keep herself sane. As a result, the narrator has no choice but to stop writing.

Even though the narrator does not write later, she has a sense of resistance in the process, which reveals her awakening of female consciousness and also paves the way for the narrator to rip the wallpaper eventually.

3.2. Discovering the Shadow

In the novel, the narrator is confined to the nursery all day long. She cannot contact the outside world and participate in social activities. What she does every day is staying in her room and watching the wallpaper. At first, the wallpaper’s color, smell and pattern repel her, “This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down” (Gilman, 1973: 4). The narrator is angry with the impertinence of the wallpaper, and hates the absurd and unblinking eyes in it. She also describes the color of the wallpaper like this: “... is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow- turning sunlight. It is dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly Sulphur tint in others” (Gilman, 1973: 4). The adjectives like “repellant”, “revolting” and “sick” are just the expressions of anger and hatred in her heart that drive her to rebel against her oppressed life. Later, she begins to explore the mystery in the yellow wallpaper, recording in detail how it appears. She begins to observe the wallpaper, noticing how the patterns form the “eye” that seem to be peering at her. She finds that there is an annoying wallpaper sub-pattern in a different shade that is only visible in specific lighting conditions. And more alarmingly, when the sun is shining, there seems to be a woman in the wallpaper, crouching down and crawling behind the pattern.

Since then, the narrator has become more and more interested in the wallpaper, “I’m getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper, perhaps because of the wallpaper” (Gilman, 1973: 5). The words “in spite of” and “because of” give a hint as to how the wallpaper progresses from being repulsive to becoming attractive and fascinating. The narrator becomes increasingly interested in the paper and extremely possessive of it. She says, “there are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.”

The narrator starts to enjoy lying on her bed, tracing the wallpaper patterns, and trying to come to a conclusion with one of the strands. She becomes frustrated because she can’t recognize the pattern right away. Despite this, she still thinks that the paper contains secrets. Gradually, the shadows in the wallpaper get cleaner and cleaner, which makes the narrator feel so anxious that she wants to leave this house, but her husband refuses. As a result, the narrator is still entranced by the wallpaper. One night, while John is sleeping, she tries to figure out which part of the wallpaper is moving. The narrator describes the wallpaper as follows:

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind. The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing. You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well

underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream (Gilman, 1973: 10).

The narrator’s act of quietly discovering the yellow wallpaper while her husband sleeps reveal her desire to penetrate the wallpaper and unveil its hidden meaning. To a certain extent, this act also reflects her rebellion against her husband John. The narrator gradually gains the courage to confront this patriarchal society. From writing secretly to discovering the wallpaper, the narrator’s awakening of female consciousness does not just stay at the embryonic stage, but goes further and makes a more substantial leap.

3.3. Ripping the Wallpaper

The narrator begins to pay more attention to the yellow wallpaper which continues to stimulate her imagination, and finally finds that there is a front pattern and a back pattern of the wallpaper. These patterns keep changing with the light: in the evening the front pattern forms bars; the woman in the yellow wallpaper is quieter in broad daylight and more animated at night. The change is described by the narrator: “at night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bar! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be” (Gilman, 1973: 10). The description of the yellow wallpaper expresses the narrator’s own predicament. The wallpaper actually symbolizes patriarchal society’s cultural and social norms which require women to be plain, obedient and passive. The woman behind the bars just symbolizes the condition of both the narrator and the women in the patriarchal society. The narrator comes to realize that the woman behind the bars seems to be eager to step out of the yellow wallpaper. By comparing her own life to the yellow wallpaper, the narrator expresses her anger at a life of control and oppression. This exactly indicates the awakening of narrator’s own subconsciousness that she herself wants to get free of the constraints.

“Like a woman... Now I am quite sure it is a woman!” (Gilman, 1973: 10) The narrator’s mood improves as she realizes she now has something to look forward to. She behaves very well in front of John, and does not tell him the secret behind the wallpaper. The narrator knows that if John knew about this, he would only laugh at her and send her away. This act reflects the fact that the narrator has largely achieved self-awareness and is eager to release herself from the repressive society. And she no longer sleeps at night because the movements of the wallpaper are so fascinating. The narrator gradually moves from timidity to defiance in the process of the awakening. Eventually, the narrator plunges deeper into a state of madness while observing the wallpaper. In fact, the heroine’s almost crazy observation of the yellow wallpaper is also the revelation of the awakening of female consciousness in her heart. The horrific implications of the wallpaper and the characters imprisoned behind it begin to permeate the ancestral mansion that she and her husband rent. The “yellow smell” of the paper “creeps throughout the house,” soaking every room in its subtle aroma of decay. She now fully understands the reason why the pattern keeps changing. The pattern is being shaken by a woman hiding behind it. She recounts:

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one and she crawls around fast. And her crawling shakes it all over. Then in the very bright spots she

keeps still, and in very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern — it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white. (Gilman, 1973: 11)

Shaking the bars represents the battles of oppressed women who oppose patriarchal society's cultural norms. Throughout the journey of the heart, the narrator continues to tap into her inner thoughts, to break free from her past, and to yearn for freedom and independence. The narrator's sense of self is deepening.

Despite the rooted basic norms of the society, the struggle has been started to break the norms. However, the narrator stays in the room, creeping with a rope around her waist. That is to say she has not destroyed the bars inherent in her own self which develop out of a sociocultural self-conditioning. She remains imprisoned in the room because she is psychologically crippled. For her, the invisible bars are too strong even to try to destroy them. (Alkan, 2021: 1233)

It is apparent that there is a change in the narrator's consciousness. Even though she only has two days, she insists on tearing up the wallpaper and rescuing the woman in trouble. Finally, as the narrator creeps around the room, she says aloud to her husband, who has fallen to the ground, "I've got out at last in spite you and Jane," "And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman, 1973: 20) These remarks show that the narrator becomes aware of her own desire for freedom and wants to break away from the bondage of the cultural norms. This final declaration is powerful because it not only represents the voice of the narrator, but also stands for the voice of the women trapped behind the wallpaper, and that of the millions of women, who hope to break free from the shackles in the patriarchal society.

The ending leaves much to readers' imagination. It can be regarded both as a triumph and as a tragedy for the protagonist. It is a triumph in that she has, in a sense, freed herself from the imprisoning feminine role in a patriarchal culture. And, it is also a tragedy in that her freedom has been gained at the expense of her sanity. The story ultimately suggests that it remains protest in that it is an indictment of a society that silences women, of a society in which the only path to freedom for women, it seems, is madness.

To sum up, such acts as writing secretly, discovering the shadow, and ripping the wallpaper can be seen as the process of the narrator's awakening of female consciousness. The narrator is initially oppressed by the patriarchy, and then gradually recovers her consciousness and makes great efforts to resist that society. "... the effort is getting to be greater than the relief" (Gilman, 1973: 6).

4. Causes of the Heroine's Awakening

The awakening of the narrator's female consciousness is facilitated by both internal and external factors. The internal factors deal with her own personalities --- her rebelliousness, her curiousness and her kindness. Such external factors as the autocratic family, the patriarchal society and irritating surroundings also have great influences on her awakening.

4.1 Internal Factors

4.1.1 Her Rebelliousness

Even though the narrator of the novel ultimately fails to preserve her spiritual integrity and individual independence,

she still tries every means to fight against her husband's male authority throughout the novel.

Firstly, the narrator's act of rebellion is manifested in the fact that she keeps writing secretly in spite of the strong opposition of her brother, her husband and her husband's sister Jennie. Regardless of their warning, the narrator seizes all possible opportunities to write down her inner feelings on paper. Although, due to the surveillance and disturbance of her husband and Jennie, she has to hide what she has written from time to time, readers can still find an element of rebelliousness in this action.

In addition, it is the rebelliousness in the narrator's character that motivates her to protest against the patriarchal society in the latter part of the book. When she finds that she cannot get sympathy or assistance from her family, the narrator grows increasingly dissatisfied with her living condition. She thinks, "The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look" (Gilman, 1973: 10). Therefore, she begins to turn her attention to the yellow wallpaper and tries to discover the secret behind the wallpaper. Although her husband asks her to rest in bed and not to trouble her mind with fancy ideas, she sneaks to observe the patterns on the yellow wallpaper. With enhanced awareness of her husband's attempt to control her voice and thought, the narrator gradually identifies herself with the woman shaking the bars, the figure she finally figures out according to the pattern of the yellow wallpaper. She decides to assist the woman escaping from the pattern, which foreshadows her eventual behavior of rescue.

"In a patriarchal world where women were imprisoned as physical and mental slaves of men with no one to depend upon except themselves, the only way to break the shackle was through insanity, or total subversion of socially-accepted norms" (He, 2016: 470). A series of actions of the narrator show that she is no longer submissive, but has a sense of rebellion. She starts to follow her inner guidance. In the latter part of the novel, the narrator starts telling lies and pretending to be so obedient that John misinterprets these actions as signs of her recovery. Later, when John asks her to open the door, the narrator refuses and locks herself in the room in order to rip the wallpaper. After John is stunned, the narrator even crawls over his body. In the end, the narrator goes crazy; however, she is freed from patriarchal notions of acceptable feminine behavior by this seeming craziness. It is the revolt against the patriarchal society. In this sense, it can be said that her rebelliousness contributes to her awakening of female consciousness.

4.1.2 Her Curiousness

The longer the narrator stays in the house, the more interest she shows in the wallpaper. At first, she feels irritated at the wallpaper, and later begins to show interest in it. She becomes very curious about the secret behind the wallpaper.

In the beginning, the narrator says she likes the house, except for this horrible wallpaper in the room. But little by little, she has changed her attitude towards the wallpaper, which has impressed her so much that she even thinks it is the wallpaper that makes her like the house better. The narrator is no longer full of fear about the wallpaper, but is interested in it. She is so desperate to know the secrets in the wallpaper that she even stays awake all night to observe it. She can even keep her eyes firmly fixed on the pattern on the wall for about an hour. The narrator says, "I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch

developments” (Gilman, 1973: 15). With curiousness, the narrator spends a lot of time and energy observing the wallpaper, despite the fact that the color of the wallpaper frightens her and the pattern on the wallpaper causes her pain. She is even unwilling to leave the house before discovering the mystery. Her curiousness drives her to investigate what is behind the wallpaper, and it also sets the stage for the narrator’s complete awakening eventually.

4.1.3 Her Kindness

The narrator has discovered the secret of the women “hiding” behind the wallpaper, and even knows that they often “run” out during the day. But now, she does not discriminate against them. When the narrator sees the woman behind the wallpaper creeping along in the garden during the day, she thinks like this, “I don’t blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight” (Gilman, 1973: 16). After the narrator sees the crawling woman so often, she even shows sympathy for the woman and thinks about helping her out — peeling the pattern off slowly. She is so kind that she decides to keep it a secret, telling nobody else what she has seen and noticed. Meanwhile, she pretends to behave very well in front of her husband in order to wait for the opportunity to rescue the woman in the wall.

One night, in the moonlit room, when the narrator sees figures in the wallpaper shaking and tugging at each other, she immediately rushes to help them. Before dawn, they unknowingly tear off many pieces of wallpaper.

But at this moment the narrator does not find that the woman inside the wallpaper is another her. If she wants to help the woman inside the wallpaper to completely break free from the shackles, she has to completely abandon everything she has obtained. In other words, the only way she can truly escape the shackles of a male-dominated society is by throwing away everything, such as her status and position. (Chen, 2019: 12) Even so, it can also be said that it is her kindness that pushes her to help the women behind the wallpaper to come out, which actually indicates that her kindness also helps herself break away from the bondage, thus leading to the awakening of her female consciousness.

4.2 External Factors

4.2.1 Restraints of the Autocratic Family

As has been argued by second-wave feminists, women are not born to be weak, illogical and subjective. The feminist, de Beauvoir, asserts that a woman’s sole anatomy does not suffice to determine whether she is male or female; rather, these entities are created by the conscious awareness of individuals through the roles they play at the very center of the society in which they exist (Beauvoir, 1953: 63).

In most cases, words like “family” or “home” conjure up images of joy and love. However, in a patriarchal society, the family has become a place where women are deprived of their rights and lose their independent individual nature. Because of many factors, women are forced to be confined to the home and eventually become subservient to men. Beauvoir (1953) once points out that the civilizations are patriarchal, with men treating women as their subordinates. She says:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (1953: 267).

In an authoritarian social environment, men believe that

women in the family are expected to be obedient. Women are regarded as accessories of men, so they cannot have their own independent thoughts, jobs and voices. Compared with the traditional “family prison”, the physical and mental restrictions on female in *The Yellow Wallpaper* are particularly horrific and inhumane. The narrator’s husband, John, is authoritative in everything. He places the narrator in such a room with barred windows, which seems more suitable for insane asylum, so that she cannot escape. Also, he regulates nearly every aspect of his wife’s day, treating his wife more as his child than as his wife. As Quawas points out, “he denies her an autonomous existence as he tries to reshape her accordance with all that being a wife or patient entails, including being submissive, childlike, and subservient” (2006: 43). He treats her as a child who has no idea what is good for her. “By keeping her unemployed and secluded, her husband ensures his wife’s reliance on him. She must remain the child he treats her as” (Quawas, 2006: 44). The narrator cannot share her feelings and state of mind with her husband since he always blames her. When her husband is not at home, she feels more relieved. In addition, the narrator’s brother, who is a physician, also does not care much about her feelings. “She not only complains about her husband but her brother is also doing the same thing. She establishes binary by placing all practical men with their reason who denies all emotion which is feminine on one side and herself on the other side” (Yogapriya, 2022: 19). Both her husband and brother always turn down the narrator’s requests with all kinds of excuses. The narrator is not allowed by them to read, write, and do all mind-stimulating activities, although she deems it beneficial to take appropriate amount of work. When the narrator wants to move to the room downstairs with blossoming roses at the window, her request is refused; when she wants to socialize with other people like her cousin Henry and Julia, her request is rejected; when she hopes to have the smelly yellow wallpaper replaced, her request is again rebuffed, without any room for further negotiation. John’s overbearing attitude, which is revealed in imposing his wishes and beliefs on his wife, reflects traditional power relations in a typical marriage around the 1890s. John, the representative of the husbands in the patriarchal society in those days, shows little or even no concern for what his wife feels or wants. He does not care about whether she has strong desire to work and socialize. Nor does he want to know why his wife is nervous. He has a firm belief that there is no need for anxiety. His conversation with the narrator implies that the so-called “illness” is the narrator’s own fault and that she is asking for trouble. It is clear that the narrator disapproves of his arrangements, but she can do nothing about it. She is denied to take control over her own life. “...but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad” (Gilman, 1973: 2). The term “my condition” not only indicates the unequal position of husband and wife and the surveillance from her husband and the family, but also reflects the situation in which the husband, with just a few words, can easily deprive his wife of her right to work and even her freedom, yet the narrator cannot resist. All these show that the authoritarian family members not only ignore women’s voices and wishes but also oppress women from body to mind. To some extent, the restraints of her autocratic family stimulate her to protest against the oppression, thus waking up her female consciousness.

4.2.2 Constraints of the Patriarchal Society

Patriarchal culture offers legal rights and economic power

only to men, which means men play the dominating role in society while women are subordinate to men and imprisoned in the domestic realm. When men experience oppression, it is a tragedy; when women experience oppression, it is a tradition. Despite the fact that women make up half of the world's population, it seems that, in this society, only men's struggle, success, and intellectual contribution have received recognition. The patriarchal system concerning politics, ideology and culture have been consolidated and reinforced through history, and women are placed under its control in every aspect.

In the novel, the narrator is unnamed which reflects her lack of an individual identity as a married woman living by the patriarchal and social codes of her time. Her diaries reflect the struggle of a middle-class Victorian female writer and artist, whose creativity is hindered and discouraged by patriarchal dominance and social norms, all of which seek to confine a female's existence to that of a perfect wife and devoted mother. In order to meet the expectation of patriarchal society, the narrator is forced to discard her real-self. The terrible yellow wallpaper she can't stop staring at functions as a mirror, through which the narrator learns to recognize herself. Little by little, the reflection of her imprisoned alter-ego becomes increasingly clear.

In such a society, the minds of many women are influenced deeply by patriarchy. In the story, John's sister, Jennie, is the one who has been so heavily influenced and assimilated by male authority that she has internalized the patriarchal norms and beliefs, and even makes efforts to defend the patriarchal system. When John goes to work, his sister Jennie comes here to look after the narrator. Jennie always stands on John's side, with firm belief that it is writing that has damaged the narrator's body. She keeps watch on the narrator and prevents the narrator from writing. Actually, too much of her "care" even worsens the narrator's situation. de Beauvoir (1953) points out that often women themselves adopt the status of 'other' and that they are complicit in their subordination.

Under the confines of patriarchy, most women are afraid to cross the patriarchal and cultural boundaries of the time because they will then suffer the punishment of the "hysteria" labels and enforced domestication. Only a small number of women, like the narrator of the novel, dare to resist when they are oppressed by the patriarchy. In this novel, the narrator chooses to rebel against the patriarchal society in her own way.

4.2.3 Influences of the Irritating Surroundings

The narrator's husband rents a lonely mansion, in which they are going to spend a summer. "It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. There are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people" (Gilman, 1973:1). That is a traditional colonial mansion, which gives an air of authority. Although the house is magnificent, the narrator feels uncomfortable on her first arrival, and suspects that the house is haunted. Not only that, her husband selects the room on the upper floor for her bedroom. The room is a nursery, with its wallpaper torn off and its windows barred. She is not happy about her husband's choice of bedroom for her. She prefers a downstairs room that has nice decoration and windows facing the garden. However, her husband argues that the room is too small and not airy. The narrator thinks she has been imprisoned in the room with the yellow wallpaper, which she describes as ugly, dull and irritating. The atmosphere of the room is so oppressed. The self-destructive mind of the narrator's thinking is reflected in her description

of the wallpaper. She tries to persuade John to change the irritating wallpaper, but John, showing no concern for her emotions, just asks her to accept the situation.

When the narrator moves into the room, she feels that the wallpaper on the wall keeps staring at her: "those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere... the eyes go all up and down... stare at your upside down" (Gilman, 1973: 4). This surrounding brings her so much repression that she has been thinking all day long for escape.

All in all, all these seemingly ordinary and normal furnishings are actually full of a sense of depression: the isolated mansion, the closed room and the odd wallpaper. In addition, the people around the house are watching her every second. Under such a suffocating environment, the rebellion suppressed in the narrator's heart is about to burst out. In other words, this irritating surrounding contributes to the awakening of the narrator's female consciousness.

5. Conclusion

The Yellow Wallpaper tells the story of a nameless narrator who is suffering from postpartum depression and has to accept "rest cure" in a queer house. The narrator's husband forbids her from doing any type of work. With very little to do, the narrator is left to observe the yellow wallpaper in the nursery, and later, she discovers the secret behind the wallpaper. Finally, she tears off the wallpaper and frees the women inside. From the perspective of feminism, the thesis analyzes the process of the narrator's gradual awakening of female consciousness and the factors leading to her awakening.

The narrator does not suddenly awaken, but gradually awakens through constant struggle and resistance, mentally escaping from this oppressive patriarchal society and gaining freedom. Through such acts as writing secretly, discovering the shadow and ripping the wallpaper, her female consciousness achieves its awakening. Ultimately, she runs to freedom.

There are many factors promoting the awakening of the narrator's female consciousness. On the one hand, the internal factors deal with her personal character --rebelliousness, curiousness and kindness. Her rebelliousness spirit gives her the courage to fight against the patriarchal society; her curiousness makes her discover the secret behind the wallpaper; her kindness causes her to help the woman to come out. On the other hand, the external factors deal with the autocratic family, the patriarchal society, and the irritating surroundings. At her home, the narrator's husband and brother do not care about her feelings and forbid her to do anything she enjoys, such as writing. They think all the narrator can do is act as a docile wife. Also, under a patriarchal society, women are merely the subordinate to men. Many women are so deeply influenced by its ideas that they themselves even have become the defenders of patriarchy. In addition, the surroundings around the narrator, such as the remote home, the depressing bedroom, and the odd wallpaper, all make her feel oppressed. With a combination of all factors, the narrator gradually achieves her awakening of female consciousness and starts to declare war against the patriarchy in the image of madness.

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