“The Yellow Wallpaper” Pseudo-Satirical Literary Criticism

Alright, we both know you do it behind my back, but it’s time for you to make fun of all of the silly things that bring meaning to my life to my face. Today you’re writing analyses of “The Yellow Wallpaper” from each of the various literary perspectives that we’ve studied so far (this is also my way of forcing you to start reviewing for your test). These analyses will be satirical in nature. What’s satire you say?

Satire—a composition intended to make some (person, thing, group, etc.) look ridiculous; generally humorous and hyperbolic in nature.

Your mission (in groups of 1-3) will be to analyze “The Yellow Wallpaper” from your chosen critical perspective (Feminist, Sociological, etc.) and write about it in as an absurd a manner as possible. Over-analyze. Read far too-far into the text. Make wild accusations. Say the story shows how society is actually all part of a satanic cult (as long as a literary critic from your perspective could conceivable believe so). As you are writing satire, your goal should be to poke fun at the flaws of the literary theory you’re using. I will be counting this as a quiz grade.

Make sure you:

-Perform a close-reading of the text (QUOTE AND ANALYZE SPECIFIC WORDS)

-Have a clear voice/p.o.v. for your literary critic

-Apply your literary theory clearly and accurately (i.e. there’s no reason a Biographical critic would start talking about satanic cults unless it was a known fact that the author was in one)

-Have a thesis of some kind (generally your analysis should be cohesive and be arguable)

-Are creative and have fun (\*sarcastic tone sold separately).

Literary theories we’ve covered so far:

-Reader Response

-Formalism

-Feminism

-Sociological

-Marxism

-Psychological

-Biographical

**Reader Response Sample:**

There’s nothing more distressing than finding yourself relating to a crazy lady. Unfortunately, that was my exact reaction to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Everybody’s had that moment where he or she says “That X (misspelled word, crooked line, unevenly iced cake, slightly asymmetrical eyebrow, insert your personal pet peeve here) just bothers me so much.” Well, I do, at least. And so does the lady in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Maybe we’re the only ones. Every time I stay in the hospital, I end up counting the number of ceiling tiles. Timing the number of seconds before each drip from the leaky faucet. Trying to sniff out what the person in the next room ordered for lunch.

These little experiments often lead me to ask my brother/mother/father/reticent friend “Have you ever noticed…\*insert random and seemingly unimportant while simultaneously insightful observation\*?” Usually my companion will just look at me like I’m crazy. The lady in “The Yellow Wallpaper” gets that. Her good-for-nothing husband merely “laughs at me so.” RUDE. My troll brother he is same—he says I’m just “letting it get the better of me” and eats the rest of my gummy bears (lest I worry about how many of them I beheaded v. draw and quartered during consumption) because “nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.” “Fancies” indeed! I see his attempt to demean and diminish me, calling me “Pretty Princess” just because he knows I hate it. The narrator also “caught [her husband] several times LOOKING AT THE PAPER! And Jennie too.” And yet she and I are the ones made to feel “caught” like common criminals.”

“As if I couldn’t see through him!” It is this ridicule and rejection that leads her to “see through” the wallpaper as well as her husband. The real power of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is how we, as readers, also start to “see.” Not a woman behind the wallpaper, but the logical and rationality of a nameless narrator who could just as easily be you.