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PERCEPTIONS OF WOMAN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE SHORT STORY THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the mental health of the main character in a short story, who is often found to be suffering from postpartum depression. The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. This data was taken from the HCC Learning website. The data collection is carried out using the documentation method. The theory used in this research is Dobie's literary critical theory in the third edition of the book and Beauvoir's (1949) feminist theory. In the story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the woman's perceived mental health is depicted as drastically declining due to confinement and lack of freedom, leading to isolation and delusions. The main character, who initially suffers from mild depression, becomes increasingly obsessed with the wallpaper pattern in her room, the ending in a complete mental collapse due to ineffective therapy and a stressful environment.

Keyword: Wallpaper, Room, Collapse

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesehatan mental tokoh utama dalam cerita pendek, yang sering ditemukan menderita depresi pascapersalinan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Data ini diambil dari situs web HCC Learning. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode dokumentasi. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah teori kritik sastra Dobie dalam buku edisi ketiga dan teori feminis Beauvoir (1949). Dalam cerita *The Yellow Wallpaper*, kesehatan mental perempuan digambarkan menurun drastis karena kurungan dan kurangnya kebebasan, yang menyebabkan isolasi dan delusi. Tokoh utama, yang awalnya menderita depresi ringan, menjadi semakin terobsesi dengan pola wallpaper di kamarnya, yang berakhir dengan keruntuhan mental total karena terapi yang tidak efektif dan lingkungan yang penuh tekanan.

Keyword: Wallpaper, Kamar, Runtuh

INTRODUCTION

The Yellow Wallpaper is a classic feminist work that raised awareness about the importance of better understanding women's mental health in the late 19th century. This short story describes the struggle of a woman suffering from mental disorders and how inadequate treatment and understanding from society and medical personnel at that time made her condition worse. The main character in this short story, whose name is never mentioned, experiences what might now be known as postnatal depression. However, in her day, her condition was misunderstood and she was forced to undergo a "rest cure", a treatment method involving complete rest and isolation from all forms of intellectual and social activity. John, her husband who is also a doctor, believes that this method is the best for his wife's mental health. Unfortunately, this method actually caused a decline in the wife's mental condition. Through the main character's narration, the reader is taken into her inner struggle when she observes a

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strange pattern on the yellow wallpaper in her room. As her isolation and inability to express herself intellectually continued, her mental health worsened, and she began experiencing hallucinations centered on the wallpaper. This short story, powerfully, criticizes the patriarchal approach to women's mental health and shows how a lack of understanding and excessive control can destroy a person. This highlights the importance of recognizing the perception of women's mental health in the main character in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* as a reflection of society's views at that time and the impact of conditions or actions that worsen a person's mental state, resulting in emotional, psychological, or physical damage that is more severe than the treatment methods did not used exactly. Gilman, through her work, invites readers to reconsider the treatment of women who experience mental disorders and the importance of emotional and intellectual support in the healing process. The aim of this study is to determine the mental health of the main character in a short story, who is often found to be suffering from postpartum depression.

METHOD AND THEORY

The Yellow Wallpaper is a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman which was first published in 1892. The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative research is a research approach that aims to provide an in-depth and descriptive understanding of a particular phenomenon or context. This approach is suitable for exploring and explaining the narrative complexity and psychological aspects of short stories from a feminist perspective. This data was taken from the HCC Learning website

(<https://learning.hccs.edu/faculty/emily.klotz/engl1302-7/course-readings/the-yellow-wallpaper/view>). In this research, data collection is carried out using the documentation method. The documentation method can provide advantages in investigating feminist elements in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* with a focus on text analysis and feminist theory. Text analysis is an approach used to understand and decipher the meaning of written text. Text analysis will help reveal and understand important elements in the story, such as theme, characters, plot and symbolism. The way to collect data in this research is, find the story you want to use as data, download the short story *Yellow Wallpaper*, read the story carefully to understand the plot, characters, setting and theme, note important details such as character names, important events, dialogue and descriptions. environment, underline the sentences used as data to determine the desired information. The analysis technique is carried out by analyzing the *Yellow Wallpaper* story text itself, such as identifying themes, symbols, narrative and other story elements. The theory used in this research is Dobie's literary critical theory in the third edition of the book and Beauvoir's (1949) feminist theory. On Dobie's theory provides a comprehensive guide to various approaches and theories in literary criticism. This book explains various critical theories, including feminist theory, and how these theories can be applied in the analysis of literary texts. Dobie discusses the basic principles, history of development, and methods of applying each theory. Meanwhile, Beauvoir outlines important concepts regarding the role and representation of women in society.

Literature Review

In this literature review there are five studies related to this research. There are three undergraduate theses and two international journals.

Anggawasita's undergraduate thesis (2019) with the title *An Analysis of the Main Character through Feminism Approach in the Novel Lucia, Lucia* by Adriana Trigianis. This research uses a descriptive method based on a feminist approach. The theory of feminism was put forward by Djajanegara et al to obtain feminist values. This research describes women's struggle for equality. The purpose of this research is to introduce feminism and identify the characteristics of Lucia as the main character. This research reveals that the main character in

the story represents feminist values, while this research explores the impact of oppression, limitations, and lack of understanding on women's mental suffering.

Risna's undergraduate thesis (2021) is entitled *A Portrayal of Woman Liberal Feminism as Reflected in Kate Elizabeth Russell's "My Dark Vanessa"*. This research uses qualitative descriptive methods and Jaggar's liberal feminist theory. This research aims to explore the experiences of liberal feminist women and the protagonist's efforts to guarantee her rights as a woman. Researchers collected 27 data from a novel about Vanessa, a protagonist who overcomes gender oppression in a husband-wife relationship, where her husband controls her life, belittles her views, and lacks autonomy.

Sudarni's undergraduate thesis (2017) was entitled *Struggle of Woman in the Novel Sing Me to Sleep by Angela Morrison (The Analysis of Feminism)*. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, mainly based on Woolf's theory. This research explores the struggles of women in *Sing Me to Sleep*, revealing three main challenges: reality, goal achievement, and love. This study also highlights the importance of this novel in promoting gender equality and mental health rights.

Meanwhile, the International Journal article ASPIKO Girsang (2020) entitled *Women as Opinion Leaders within Community* uses qualitative methods by Cooper and White (2012). This research explores the role of 'voice' in inequality and oppression, revealing that feminine transformative leadership encourages sources to communicate, persuade and influence communities. This research also explores stories about changes in a woman's identity.

The International Journal of Language Teaching and Research article by Fitriana et al (2019) is entitled *The Characteristics of Women's Image in A Novel of Entrok by Okky Madasari: A Study of Literary Criticism in Ideological Feminism*. This research explores the image of transitional and feminist women in *Entrok*, using qualitative description techniques and interactive analysis. The report criticizes social and cultural norms that force women to conform to societal expectations.

Theory of Literary Criticism

The theory of literary criticism explained by Dobie in the third edition can be applied to the analysis of the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, especially in terms of the perception of women's mental health in the main character. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, feminist and psychoanalytic approaches are very relevant to analyze the perception of women's mental health in the main character. The story depicts a woman experiencing postpartum depression and being confined by her husband as part of her doctor's recommended "rest." This approach will highlight how gender roles and inequality affect the main character's mental health. Her husband, also a doctor, did not recognize his wife's authority or views on her own health, reflecting the patriarchal views of the era. The main character is treated as a child incapable of making her own decisions, which contributes to the deterioration of her mental state. This approach will focus on symbolism and psychodynamics in the story. The yellow walls in the room where the main character is confined become a symbol of restraint and lost freedom. When she begins to see figures of women trapped behind the wallpaper, it reflects a projection of her own mental state and feelings of being trapped in restrictive gender roles. This story shows how women's mental health was often misunderstood and misrepresented at that time. The treatment of the main character shows a lack of knowledge and empathy for the experiences of women with mental conditions.

Theory of Feminist

Beauvoir (1949) is a famous feminist who has made major contributions to feminist theory. In her book, Beauvoir puts forward the idea that women are often seen as the Other in male-dominated societies, where women are seen as something inferior and different from men who are considered the norm. Beauvoir also highlights how social and cultural constructions of gender influence women's identities and experiences. *The Yellow Wallpaper* tells the story of a

woman who experiences mental disorders that are made worse by the treatment she receives. Her husband, a doctor, implemented a "complete rest" method that forbade her from writing or interacting with the outside world, isolating her physically and mentally. As a result, the woman's mental health worsened, as symbolized by a growing obsession with the yellow wallpaper in her room. The main character is treated like a child by her husband and is not given the opportunity to make decisions about her own care. The main character's husband, John, uses his patriarchal authority to control his wife's life, which reflects the identified patriarchal structure. She ignored her wishes and opinions, and imposed treatment methods that were detrimental to her mental health. This shows how patriarchal systems can negatively impact women's mental health by ignoring their voices and experiences. This story also shows how rigid gender roles can be detrimental to women's mental health. The main character is not allowed to write or express herself, which is essential for her health. Enforced gender roles limit women's potential and undermine their well-being. The method of "complete rest" used by the main character's husband reflects the demeaning medical views of women at that time. Medical science and practice often do not consider women's needs and perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussion section is going to discuss the perception of women's mental health as depicted through the main character in this story.

(Data 1)

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?

This sentence refers to a situation where the main character in the story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is faced with the view of a prominent doctor who is also her own husband who states that her condition is only experiencing a temporary nervous breakdown or mild hysterical tendencies. In the context of perceptions of women's mental health, this sentence describes how women are often ignored or underestimated when it comes to their mental health problems.

(Data 2)

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour.

The phrase "I lie here on this great immovable bed" highlights the main character's physical state, where she is trapped in a large, immovable bed. This reflects his physical isolation, where she is confined to a limited space and cannot escape from situations that cause stress and anxiety. The phrase "follow that pattern about by the hour" shows how the main character becomes obsessed with the wallpaper pattern in her bedroom. She spent hours watching and following the patterns, which reflected her mental turmoil. Her obsession with this pattern reflects symptoms of a mental disorder that has worsened due to the isolation and restraint she has experienced. The explanation that the bed is "nailed down" shows that the main character feels trapped and cannot escape a situation that is hampering her mental health. This reflects her feelings of helplessness and restraint, where she felt she had no control over her own life. The sentence above shows how the main character in this story experiences a decline in mental health due to the isolation, restraint and mental chaos she experiences. This illustrates the deep perception of feelings of being trapped and helpless that are often experienced by individuals with mental disorders.

(Data 3)

I don't like to look out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all came out of that wallpaper as I did?

This sentence shows the main character's disturbed perception of his mental health. She experiences hallucinations and false beliefs that cause her to see "creeping women" on the

wallpaper, indicating symptoms of psychosis. The main character feels threatened by their presence, reflecting the feelings of anxiety and fear she experiences due to her increasingly deteriorating mental condition. This also shows how mental illness can affect a person's perception of their surroundings, even making them doubt their own reality.

In the results and discussions obtained, the main character experienced a significant decline in mental health due to the isolation and restraint imposed by her husband. A ban on writing, reading, or social interaction made her increasingly obsessed with the pattern of the wallpaper in her room, which indicated a worsening mental disorder. Symptoms of psychosis such as hallucinations and delusions begin to appear in the main character. She begins to believe that there are women trapped behind the wallpaper and feels trapped herself too. This shows the negative impact of isolation on her mental health. This story criticizes the "rest cure" method that was popular at the time. This method, which prohibits intellectual and social activities, actually worsens the main character's mental condition. This suggests that these treatment methods are ineffective and may be detrimental to mental health. Patriarchy plays a large role in the treatment of the main character's mental health. Her husband, John, controlled every aspect of her life and ignored her wishes for activities. This reflects how patriarchal systems can oppress women and harm their mental health. The prohibition on writing and expression deprives the main character of important ways to manage stress and emotions. Self-expression is a crucial element in maintaining mental health, and its absence makes the main character's mental condition worse. This emphasizes the importance of freedom and autonomy for women. Analysis of *The Yellow Wallpaper* shows that perceptions and treatment of women's mental health are strongly influenced by patriarchal social and cultural structures. Freedom, self-expression and respect for women's autonomy are key to good mental health. The criticism of medical practices and patriarchal control in this story inspires us to continue fighting for women's rights and welfare in the context of mental health.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions drawn from exploring how misperceptions about women's mental health and patriarchal control negatively impact emotional and psychological well-being. This story is a call for improvements in the understanding and treatment of mental health, as well as recognition of women's rights and need for intellectual and emotional freedom.

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