Comparison Of The Haunting Of Hill House And Yellow Wallpaper

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson and ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman are both popular pieces of gothic literature. Both pieces of literature use gothic elements such as but both are similar in the expression of emotions, origins and actions. Both Gilman and Jackson illustrate that destructive impacts of oppression of women in society.

Both ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and The Haunting of Hill House uses female sub-genre to depict the theme of repression which result in a decline in women’s mental health and hinders their potential growth. Women were brought up’ in the predominance aim of being a good mother and housewives. In the Yellow Wallpaper, the protagonist is forced to hide her declining mental health to portray an image of perfect marriage. She is dominated by John’s assumption that his intelligence level is more superior and misjudge her condition. This evokes the protagonist to be forced to behave like a petulant child, unable to stand up for herself. The protagonist seems to be a prisoner in her own home. John confines her in a room that has no getaway with bars on the window and fixed bed which is “nailed down”(Gilman 1892, p.17). This suggests that women is limited by society and dictated by men around them. Her dictatorial husband suppresses her emotional and creative inclination by disallowing her to write. The protagonist ‘s repression is evident in“I think sometimes that if i were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me” (p.5). The protagonist displays flashes of rebellion against John by secretly continuing to write. Her notebook is a symbol for her retaining her sanity. She is caught between her desires and the limited expectations of societal norms, She repress her feelings and constantly carrying this fear of John with her. And, over time, the protagonist's sentences in her diary becomes shorter and more curt and this convey her distraught mental state and inability to think clearly. A house normally symbolises security and comfort but in The Yellow Wallpaper, it is a form of suffocation to the protagonist. The room is a haunted space because its been haunted by the protagonist. The use of word “smouldering” depicts suppression, suggesting about her incapability to stand up for herself in her marriage with John. The house is “quite alone, standing well back from the road” produces a sense of isolation, creating a dreaded tone. Gilman uses irony to depict her relationship with John. “John laughs at me, but one expects that in marriage” (p.1) In a healthy relationship, one should not expect their partner to laugh at them. This depicts female in passive position. The protagonist is nameless and therefore, powerless to her predicament.

Similarly, in the Haunting Of Hill House, taking care of her mother for most of her childhood prohibited Eleanor from developing as a person. It builds her to be a very child-liked, immature and insecure person. This can be seen in the novel where she hears crying and her first instinct is to call out for her mother just like a child after they experience a nightmare. Eleanor could never form social relationships outside of her house and has to obediently stay and take care of her mother. Eleanor could no longer face the sun without blinking, implying that she was always kept in a dull environment, as if she had been locked away and closed off from society for a period of time. Eleanor lacks center of identity as seen in “I’ve never been wanted anywhere” (Jackson 1959, p.209), she missed out on life experiences that help to form a coherent view of herself. Thus, Eleanor went to the Hill House with the stolen car with an intention to find belongings. The car utilized as a means of freedom for Eleanor steal the car from her sister to

be freed of her sister’s control. Secondly, Eleanor also repress her mother’s death. Eleanor is guilty and blames herself for her mother’s death, she has been carrying it for 11 years. Although she feels happy and free now that her mother is dead, she also feels guilty because she felt that she could have saved her mother but she choose not to do so. She repress her feelings of guilt but the supernatural events that happened in the hill house reveals her true emotions that she has been trying to hide. She questioned herself “am I making more guilt for myself” (p.160).

Both ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and The Haunting Of Hill House use gothic conventions to express the displacement of their repression that the protagonists are holding within. They lost their identity and become conflated with the architecture that entrap them, specifically the hill house and the wallpaper. The gothic conventions which refers to the supernatural events that happened personify and exaggerate these stereotypes, allowing it to be contravened. It allows for repressed desires to be made eminent and characters transgress and cross their contemporary gender boundaries.

In the Yellow Wallpaper, the protagonist is mentally imprisoned, she was absolutely involved in her own imagination. The image of the woman she sees in wallpaper is a projection of her inner self, someone that parallel with her own life, a displacement of her anxiety and fear. Since she’s unable to openly express herself to anyone, she begins to see herself through the wallpaper and vent her anger onto it. She imagines a woman trapped behind the wallpaper, just like how she is trapped in her room. She imagines the woman crawling, implying that she is hallucinating and that she is aware of a larger scheme of oppression around her. The woman is a symbol for her powerless state. The protagonist fascination with the wallpaper is the first step of her degenerating sanity. The wallpaper is described as a yellow and a torn wallpaper. Gilman describe it as “a smouldering unclean yellow” that is “strangely faded by slow turning sunlight”. The yellow colour carries gothic element, portraying something old and decayed. The wallpaper creates haunting and gothic images “there are things in that paper that nobody knows, or ever will.”The ugliness for which the wallpaper is described parallel with the ugliness of the protagonist ‘s situation.

In the Haunting Of Hill House, the haunting events is a result of her repression. She project the hillhouse to be a motherly figure and a projection of her inner self. Hill House is a personification of her mother. Eleanor is the one who has always been contained, who lives in her fantasy world and has no home. Eleanor‘s entire life revolved around her mother. The events happened in the hill house lead to she being haunted by the belief that her mother is in the house. Eleanor constantly hears her mother's voice and feel her presence: thought her mother was knocking on the door; not entering the library because it smells like death of her mother (p.); attempting to commit sucide by jumping from its tallest turret because she is lulled onwards by a voice believed to be her mother (p.) ; running up the old iron staircase to reunite with her mother because she heard her voice (p.). Apart from that, the message “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (p.) is also an attempt to take advantage of Eleanor’s guilt over the stolen car. The closed doors, confusing hallways and shifting perspectives (p.228) represent Eleanor’s hidden feelings and contradictions within Eleanor. Eleanor’s affection and anger is also depicted by splattering Theodora’s room with blood (p.). Jackson uses Hill House to create an intimate relationship with Eleanor. Hill House is depicted as an emotional attachment for Eleanor. It is described as “diseased”, “born bad” and the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice (p.34). This illustrates gothic elements of gloomy and darkness. Both stories share a common

symbol-the nursery. The nursery is a symbol of how women are perceived as being treated like children in society.

Both ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and The Haunting Of Hill House depicts how the displacement drive the protagonists to madness and are similar in the protagonists’ desire to break free from the gender roles. However Eleanor desires acceptance and belonging, while the protagonist in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ desires independence and freedom.

In the yellow wallpaper, the protagonist fights to set the woman in the wallpaper denotes her battle for freedom. The room and the wallpaper that she hated so much become the center of her world-her voice. The act of tearing down the wallpaper is an allegory for the need of women to breakfree of the constraints imposed on them by a male-dominated culture. It is a symbol that represents her struggle to retain her sainity. Marriage can never be happy for women in a male dominance world and the pattern will be broken. Her developing insanity is a form of rebellion and a way to gain her own independence from marriage. As seen in “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!”(p.), the protagonist asserted her independence and break free. “She repeatedly pass over her husband as she crept along the smooch around the perimeter of the room”. (p.) illustrate she is free from John's control.

There is an inversion of gender roles when John collapse where the protagonist feel empowered and breaks out of the figurative cage that is degrading treatment of women. Her only opportunity for freedom in society is to escape into the wallpaper, into insanity.

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is used as a method to convey how gender structures need to be changed. effect of inhibiting creativity and self-expression

Eleanor’s forced freedom and independence from hill house as staying at Hill House makes her feel the belonging she has been yearned for. She becomes trapped in the embrace of home and remains just as dependent. Eleanor’s midnight haunting such as dancing through the Hill House, knocking on doors and singing emphasizes the severity of her mental condition, parallel to the protagonist’s creeping over wallpaper. She tries desperately to stay but it is too much for her to handle . Eleanor’s insanity is a way to protest the medical, professional and social oppression against women at that time.

Eleanor just wants to be loved and someone to truly care for her.

The ending of the story is ambiguous whether Eleanor really finds freedom or failure. Eleanor’s death may symbolises failure but Eleanor leaving Hill House in her sister‘s stolen car would illustrate that Eleanor will live in an even further restricted and controlled life.

The car is being represented as an object of control over Eleanor. Her suicde is an extreme act of desperation. Both stories reject the patriarchal presumption that they should be dominated and illustrate madness is a very viable end if one isn't given the freedom to grow, think and act as individuals. Both supported feminism and women's rights, women need to have the opportunities to work, grow and make connections outside of home.

In conclusion, both stories depicts a society where women blindly follow the way of culture that they are living in. Both stories share how societies follow the unfair subordination of women. It

portrays how women who lived in the past had no voice and has no freedom.