Feminism In Literature In The Late Nineteenth And Early Twentieth Centuries

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women were looked down upon by men. Women were considered weaker, mentally and physically, so they handled domestic chores while men took care of the heavy labor and made all decisions for the women. Many authors during this time include feminist ideas in their works. “A Rose for Emily,” “The Yellow Wallpaper,” and “A Jury of Her Peers” are examples of short stories with several feminist elements in them.

In “A Rose for Emily,” Emily Grierson’s father controls every aspect of her life. She is still single by the time she turns thirty because he drives off many suitors that he deems not good enough to marry her. Her community pities her for never getting married. After her father passes, the town’s mayor suspends Emily’s tax responsibilities, justifying the action by claiming that “Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town…” (William Faulkner 681). In the same year as Mr. Grierson’s death, a construction company headed by a Northerner named Homer Barron arrived in town to pave the sidewalks. Emily and Homer become romantically involved with one another despite the townspeople’s judgmental gossip. “Emily’s affair becomes complicated when the ladies of Jefferson, determined to end the scandal, encourage the Baptist minister to reason with Emily” (Scherting).

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator’s husband, John, also serves as her doctor. John is positive that he knows what is best for his wife, so he disregards her opinions and forces her to hide her true feelings. Her opinion about the room she stays in is of no value. She is forced to stay in a room she feels uneasy about. The windows are barred, the bed is bolted to the floor, and the walls are covered in faded paper that has been ripped off in places. “I never worse paper in my life.” (Charlotte Gilman) she says. John has good intentions, but his ignorance about what she really needs leads to her mental collapse. By treating her as a patient and not as a person with a will of their own, he helps destroy her, which is the last thing he wants.

In “A Jury of Her Peers,” Minnie Wright is accused of murdering her husband. While she awaits trial Minnie’s neighbors, the sheriff, his wife, and a county prosecutor come to her house. The men look for evidence to use against Minnie. Meanwhile, the women collect personal items to take to her. Both women find strange trifles like a strangled canary and an irregular quilt pattern that the men never notice. The men do not think much of the evidence they found and Mr. Hale says “..women are used to worrying over trifles” (Susan Glaspell). Based on the evidence the women found, they conclude that Minnie must have been driven to murder by her abusive husband.