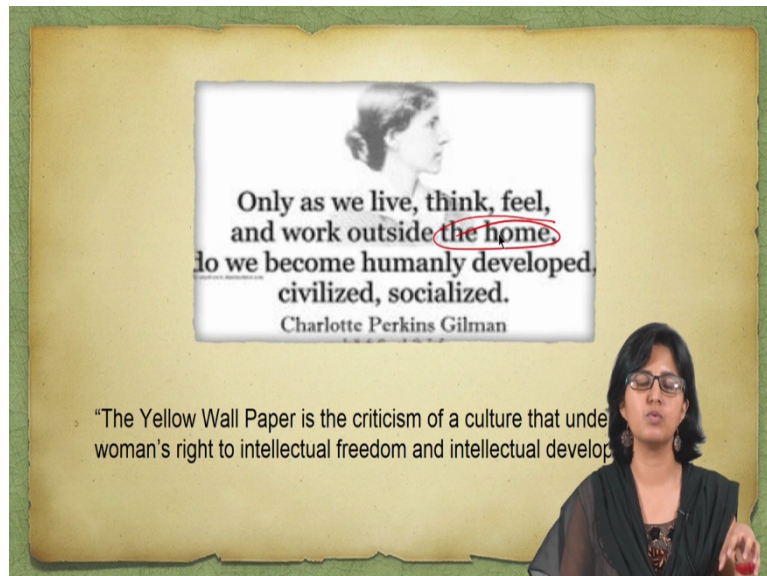


Introduction to World Literature
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“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Good morning everyone, I'm happy to welcome you to today's session where we read this short story the yellow wallpaper written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This is a brief description of this short story. We have this lead female character who is depressed at the beginning of the story. We find her being all the more repressed through the various systems within which she is caught and towards the end we find her sinking deeper into an obsessive status where depression becomes almost like an insanity for her.

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Reading the story one can find close parallels with the author Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In her own words only as we live, think, feel, and work outside the home, do we become humanly developed, civilized and socialized? This in that sense as Gilman points out rightfully can be seen as one such story which is advocating the need to bring women outside of the home space.

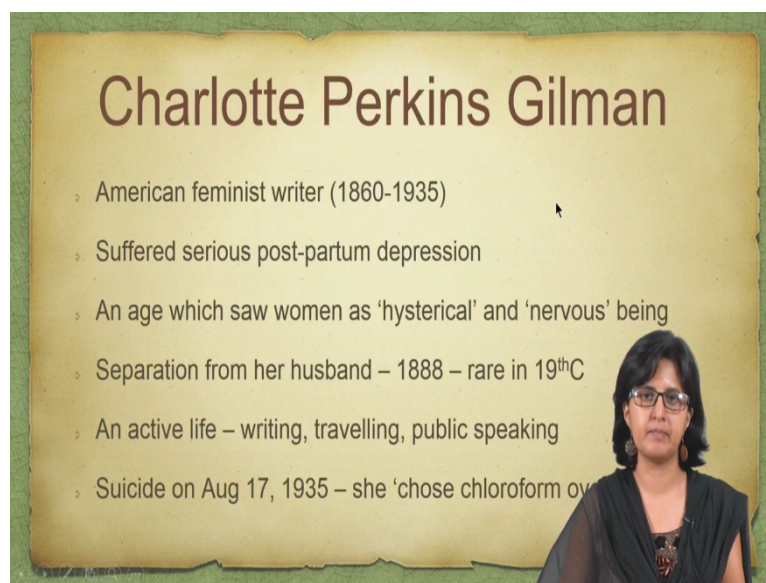
About the need to bring women out of the home space to make them more developed, civilized and socialized and the repercussions of not doing so. The yellow wallpaper has been seen increasingly as a criticism of our culture that undermines right to intellectual freedom and intellectual development as we would begin to see the unnamed narrator in this story. The

woman who is caught within the domestic space for various reasons. Her intellectual freedom and her intellectual development are curbed the well-meaning members of the family.

The yellow wallpaper as a short story it was first published in January 1892 and this was written just before her 2nd marriage to Houghton Gilman. The first marriage had failed and she was separated from her husband and this story however was revived only in the early 1970s where rediscovery of lost works such as Gilman's yellow wallpaper Kate Chopins the awakening.

Susan Glasspell's A jury of her peers, yes those words were revived only in the 1970s and yellow wallpaper also in that sense (2:36) much to the feminist awakening and the feminist rediscovery of lost works and orders. This story is written in the form of a collection of journal entries written by a woman. It can be read as a critique of (2:51) to which the author Gilman herself was subjected to during her life after her pregnancy and childbirth. It can also be seen as semiautobiographical in that sense.

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived from 1860 to 1935. She was a well-known American feminist writer. She had suffered serious postpartum depression and this was during an age in the 19th century which saw women as hysterical and nervous beings. So even when women complained about any difficulties, any pressures or anything just that they felt in their mind or in their body it was not taken seriously.

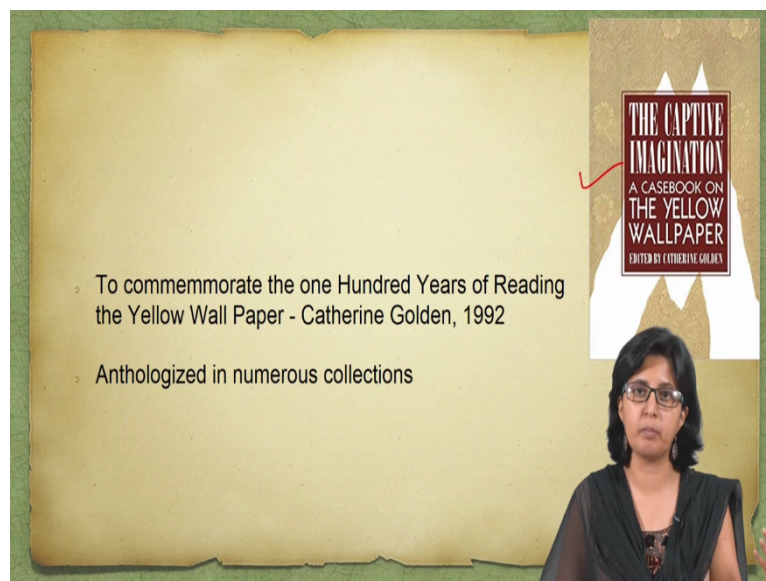
Because they were seen as beings who are inherently hysterical and nervous and this was bound to happen. Gilman had a very radical life due to the personal choices that she made.

She separated from her husband in 1888 that was also rare occurrence in the 19th century. Divorce was not unknown thing then. Divorce was not an accepted thing then and nevertheless she lived a very life writing, travelling and delivering public speeches and making people aware of the need for various social gender related, racial issues and economic issues.

She was someone who spoke prolifically and wrote extensively about a range of things which concerned in the society during that time. The fact that she was a woman did come across as a challenge but we do find her breaking out of those many shackles and living a mark of her home. By the editing of her life comes across is being a little disappointing as she committed suicide in the year 1935 on being diagnostic with a form of incurable cancer.

As she mentioned in the death note that she left, he chose chloroform over cancer but the sudden strong willingness of her certain stubbornness of herself comes through even through even in her death.

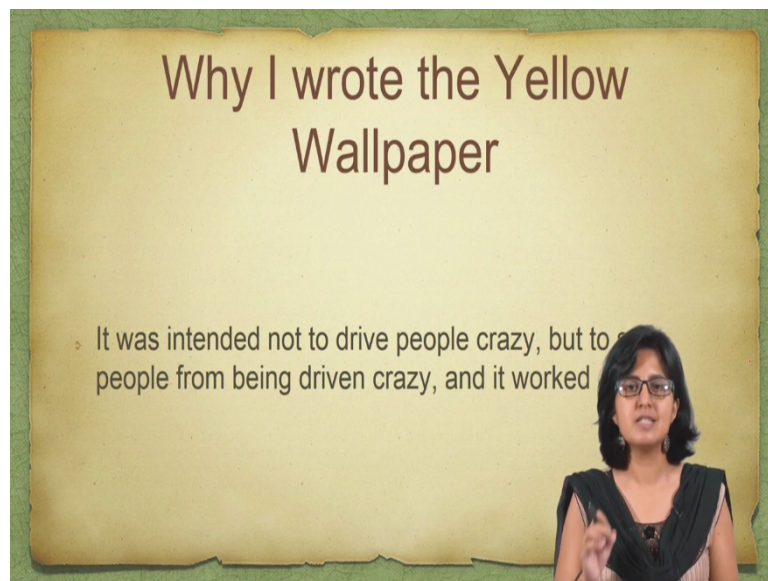
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This is a story the yellow wallpaper is a story which has attracted a lot of critical interest and discussion ever since it was published by the feminist press. In 1992 campaign Katherine Golden published his work “The Captive Imagination A casebook on The Yellow Wallpaper” to commemorate the 100 years of reading the yellow wallpaper. This is a story which has been anthologized in numerous collections and different kinds of readings are available about it.

Even recent paper published by Susan Lanza in the year 1989 where she talks about the politics of color in America and critiques the presentation of the yellow wallpaper as a typical white story and as a representative action for feminist writing. So in these 100 years it has received a lot of critical attention and has also began to receive some kind of resistance in the canonical status that the yellow wallpaper has now come to assume.

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Gilman herself has written about “why she wrote the yellow wallpaper”. In her own words it was intended not to drive people crazy but to save people from being driven crazy and it worked. In an extensive note that she left which was also published in this commemorative anthology of the readings of yellow wallpaper. She tells us the story of, the story the yellow wallpaper.

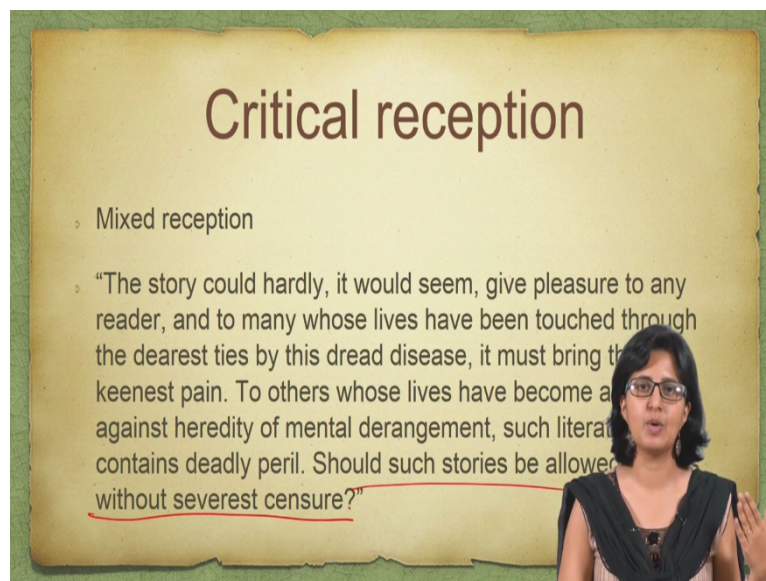
I read to you a brief excerpt from Gilman’s short piece “why I wrote the yellow wallpaper”. For many years I suffer from a serious continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia beyond. During about the 3rd year of this trouble I went devout faith and some faint star of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best-known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which my good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me.

And sent me home with solemn advice to live as domestic life as far as possible to have but 2 hours intellectual life a day and never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I live. This was in 1887. I went home and obeyed those directions and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over. Then using the remnants of intelligence

that remained and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist advice to the winds and went to work again. Work, the normal life of every human being, work in which is joy and growth in service without which one is a pauper and a parasite ultimately recovering is a measure of power.

So this is a context in which Gilman had to ride the yellow wallpaper. It is semiautobiographical, it is also critique of this rest cure which almost drove her crazy.

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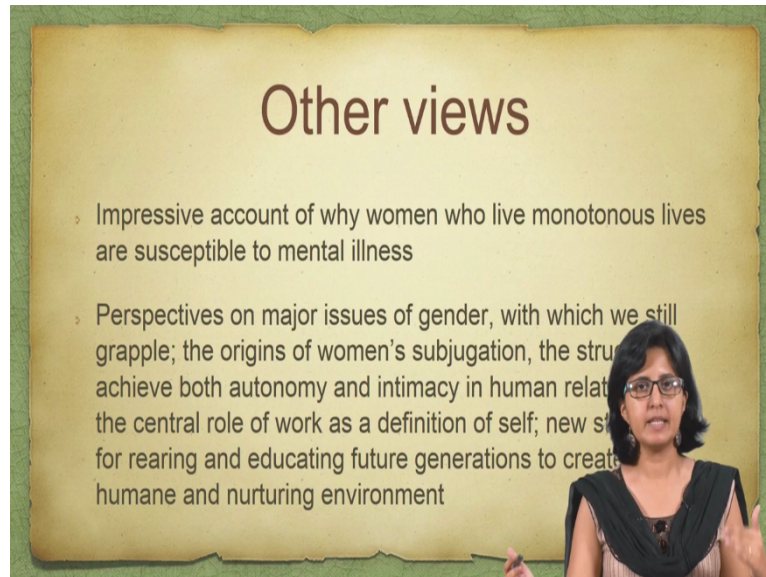
This story had received mixed critical reception and initially when this story was looking for a publisher. It is said that the editor of the Atlantic monthly had rejected it because the editor read it and said "I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself. It was not seen as a story which would encourage on the contrary it was seen as a story that the graphic details and almost grass ending it was it was expected that it will make people very very miserable.

And another editor William Deane Howells when he reprinted Gilman's story in the 1920, he also had written about it "being terrible and too holy dire and too terribly good to be printed". So the responses are are varying from 2 different ends of the spectrum and one of the readers when it was first published, an anonymous reader he is also said to have some kind of a censure over this work.

This is what it read "the story could hardly, it would seem, give pleasure to any reader, and too many whose lives have been touched through the dearest ties by this dread disease. It must bring the keenest pain. 2 others whose lives have become a struggle against heredity of

mental derangement, such literature contains deadly peril. Should share stories be allowed to pass without severest censure? So this is a work which had to outlive and also have to fight with such difficult reviews and challenges.

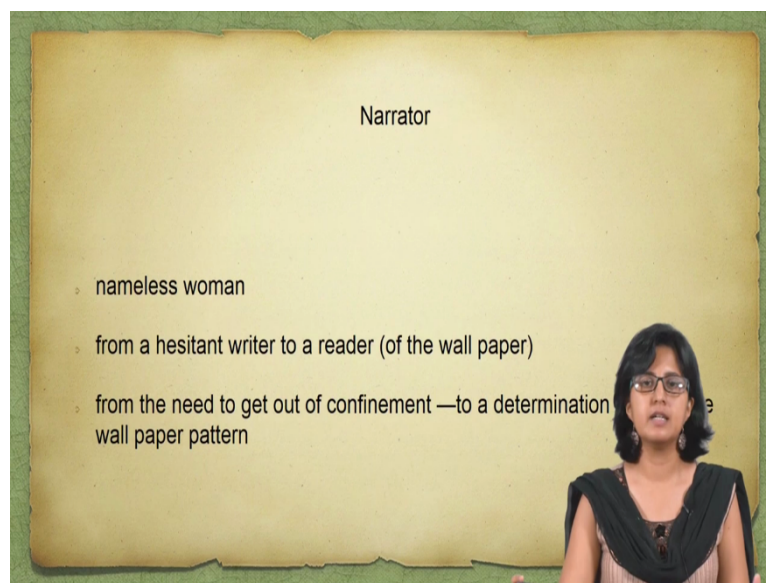
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But there have been other views more recent ones which an impressive account of why women who live a monotonous lives are susceptible to mental illness and now reading the story along with the notes shared by the author herself it makes a lot of sense. And it also said that this gives a perspective on major issues of gender with which we still grapple and it is a story which enables us to look at the origin of women's subjugation.

About the Central rule of a work as a definition of self that gives us new strategies for rearing and educating future generations, yes. Especially women to create a humanium nurturing environment. So these are many the many enabling and promising factors as far as this story is concerned.

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The narrator of the story is a nameless woman and we find her translation from being a hesitant writer to a reader of the wallpaper and the inability to write the lack of permission to pursue what she likes the most to write her journal, to articulate her feelings that almost drives her to the point of being mad. And the story celebrates this need to get out of confinement.

And we find the narrator this nameless woman being determined to solve the wallpaper pattern as confusing as it sounds the story is about, if you try to break it down to certain plot elements the story is about this woman trying to make sense of wallpaper which is there in this room where she is confined when she is not allowed to do anything else constructive and how that also accentuates her journey into complete madness and complete absurdity.

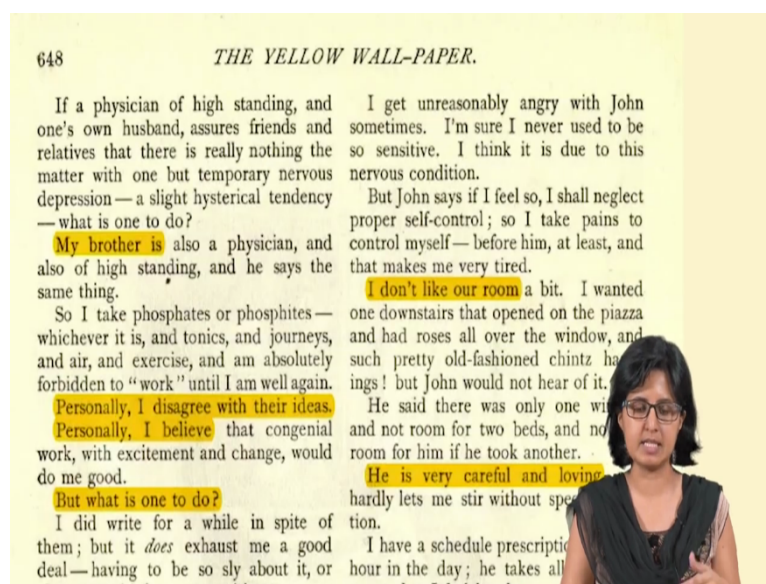
Let's try and go through this story very quickly focusing on some of the important elements which will be helpful for your understanding and reading. And the outset of the story we get to know that the narrator along with the correct John who is we get to know her husband they have rented out an ancestral hall for the summer. It's a colonial mansion, it's the everyday tree estate.

We also get to know about the kind social class to which this family belongs to which this nameless narrator belongs that they can afford such a summer residence. And in the beginning as if in the first page of the story itself we get a sense of how this woman is never taken seriously. How her complaints and her opinions are never taken seriously that is the statement which comes on the first page.

John laughs at me of course but one expects that in a marriage. It also tells us about the state of marriage where she is now where she is certainly married to a good man who is kind enough to take her to a summer residence to allow her to spend the summer recovering there but we also get to know that there are certain inconveniences in this marriage which will begin to unsettle her father.

And in the beginning we also get to know about the kind of profession that this husband has John as the physician that makes him all the more qualified to pronounce judgment's on the mental or physical state that this woman is.

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And we get to know that her brother is also a physician and that she disagrees with their ideas and personal beliefs are entirely different but there is helplessness but what is one to do? Because she's not allowed to do anything on her own. She cannot make any decisions on her own. She is under confinement and a room which has been allotted to her where she is in confinement.

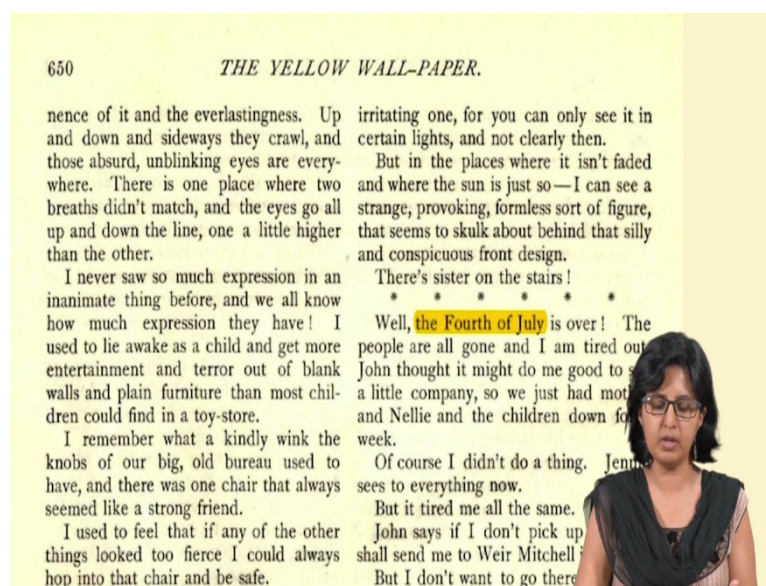
Where her family is taking care of her does not like that room a bit but she also finds it difficult to articulate. This dislike because she is (())(13:54) family where they all love her and we find love and care being presented as things which are not is easier for this woman. Love and care comes across this being an extension of patriarchal device which is used to further suppress her and further depress her desires.

And when you read through the story we get to know that she is also not allowed to write. At the end of the first section she says “there comes John I must put this away-he hates to have

me write a word” and we also get to know that this channel through which she is communicating to us the diary or the journal that she is maintaining that is not acceptable to her family because they think that is also one of the causes for her depression and for the state of being that she is in now.

We have given brief insights into the timeframe. We get to know in the beginning of the 2nd section that they have been there for about 2 weeks. And she talks about her increasing displeasure being confined and there are many thoughts that she continues to share with us. I encourage you to read that on your own.

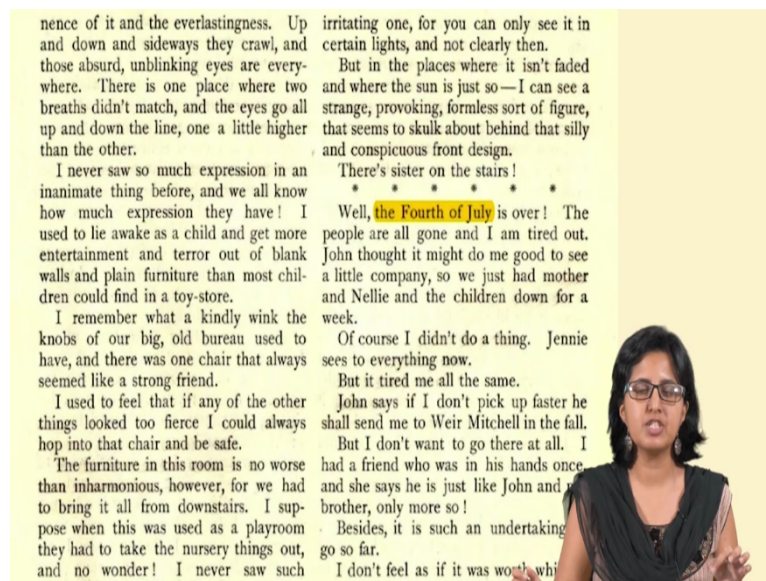
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And there is also another figure here which you can see in Page 650 which is John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is and so careful of me, she also must not find this woman writing and writing is something which is clearly a taboo thing for our narrator. And the section and is ready sister on the stairs.

Yes, so we are almost (15:42) to the thoughts and the emotions that a narrator is feeling as when she is writing she can hear the system coming up the stairs and see suddenly stops writing we can get to know and the next session begins after the 4 July which is which is the celebration of the American Independence Day.

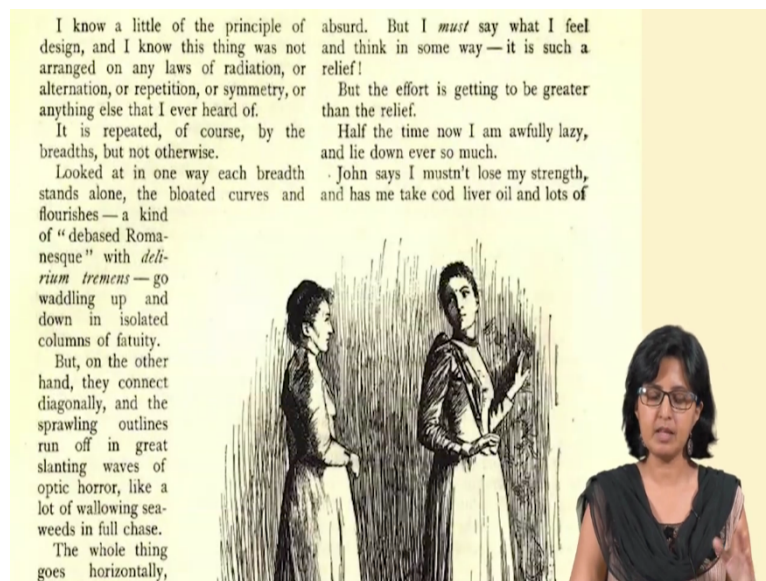
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And we get to know that that they have visitors but the narrator is not allowed to do anything. Yes, in the first section John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nelly and the children down for a week. Of course I didn't do a thing. Jenny sees to everything now. So here is a woman who is not allowed to write, who is not allowed to participate in any other activity at home, she has been asked to take a rest and it is rest cure that she is being subject it to in the form of treatment and she's not allowed to anything constructive or creative or even not allowed help others in the family and this becomes all the more difficult and depressing for this woman.

And as the story progresses we get to know that left with nothing else to do she gets obsessively interested in the wallpaper which is there in this room where she is confined, she gets interested, she initially does not like the room because of the wallpaper because it looks very very but now she gets although more interested in it and she feels that she likes the room because of the wallpaper.

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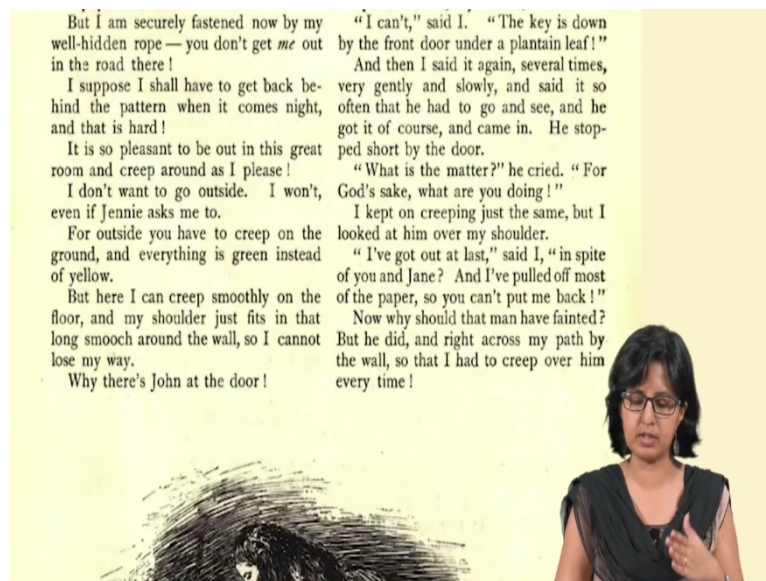


And we find fairly long segment in Page 651 where she continues to talk about the wallpaper almost to the point of an obsession and from this time onwards we find this story taking a different and a different twist altogether. We find the character getting increasingly obsessed where the idea of the wallpaper and she begins to imagine that there are women initially she thinks there is just one woman who is caught within that wallpaper.

Then she imagines that there are multiple women who are caught within the wallpaper and they need to be rescued she begins to tear the wallpaper down in this attempt to help them out and she we also get to know the time period towards the end that we have by now spent almost 3 months which is quite similar to the time that the author Gilman also had spent a confinement as part of the rest cure treatment and on the last day things completely go out of control the last day when they were supposed to leave this summerhouse.

We find that this nameless narrator her fall into the realms of insanity is almost complete. And when the husband comes back home, when John comes back home to take her she had locked herself within this room which she never liked initially where she is imagining that women are caught within the wallpaper and she imagines them coming out and creeping on the floor and she also begins to creep on the floor.

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When the husband manages to get in and witness this scene it totally freaks him out, this is how the final segment reads. I kept on creeping Just the Same, but I Looked at Him over My Shoulder. I have got out at last, said I, in spite of you and Jane? And I have pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back. Now why should that man have fainted? But he did and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time.

We find John fainting at the site of his wife creeping all over the floor which certainly would be and act which would freak perhaps any of us out of our heads and this ending is symbolic because we find that just like the woman that the narrator imagines being caught within the wallpaper, she also thinks she needs to find her way to freedom where she's not allowed to walk out, she chooses to creep out stealthily and this is an act which can be replicated to the act of writing as well.

She's not allowed to write in front of other people, we find the narrator from the beginning itself she had to do that and then in a very creepy we in stealthily way that she had taught herself to creep out and do certain things which she is not allowed to do otherwise normally in public.

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It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said.

"Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling!" said he, "our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before."

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I.

"Nor as much; and my appetite is much better in the evening when I am alone."

There are some interesting insights that we get about the relation between and the narrator. If we come to page 652 in the 2nd section and the 2nd part there is an instance where the narrator this woman is trying to talk about her fears and concerns to John her husband but we find that he almost dismisses them but not in a rude way, in a very caring and loving way which comes across as being all the more nauseous to this woman.

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There is a segment where John tells his wife "bless her little heart" said he with a big hug she shall be as sick as she pleases but now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep and talk about it in the morning. The husband is trying to baby talk the wife not giving her the self

for the agency. We find the husband referring to the wife in the 3rd person and not just in the second person.

We have noticed here that he's not saying bless your little heart, bless her little heart she shall be as sick as she pleases this is how one talks to a little children. We refer to them in the 3rd person and do not address them as you because an idea of self and idea of an agency is not implied there. So there are many instances in the story which tells us that John is not necessarily a vicious man.

He's not a bad sort of a person, he's not a wife beater, he's not someone who is not taking care of his wife. On the contrary he is someone who comes across as being too caring and 2 loving to the point that the care and the love and shown there becomes only extensions of the many rules and regulations that the wife is expected to follow. He is willing to spend money over her but at the same time not willing to allow her to do the one thing that she loves the most writing.

And what he expects in return as a favour is that she completely denies herself, her existence, her likes and ignore her dislikes and also not to give her the privilege of the company that she designs, not to give her the privilege of working. Here we realize that the woman not being allowed to work becomes, it has a very drastic effect on the self of this woman on her health and on her mental capacity.

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This story in that sense can be seen as a narration which places the contestation between freedom and confinement. And there are series of such dichotomous things that we can find

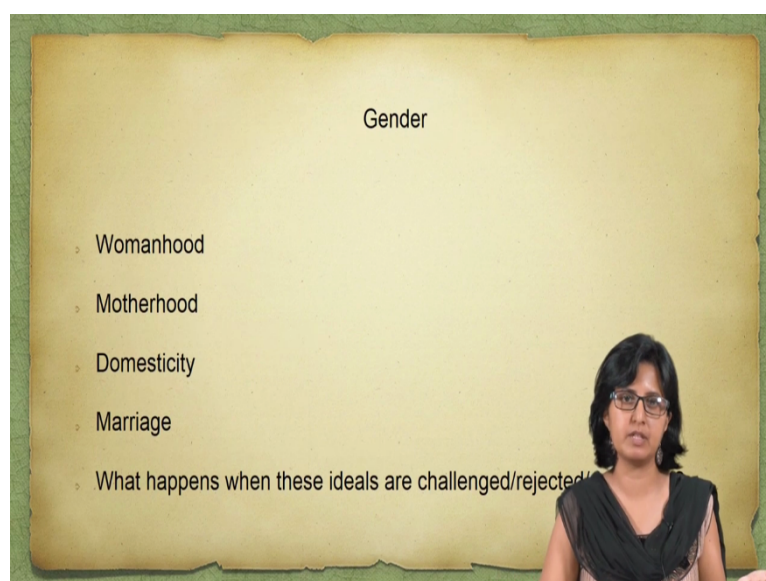
male versus female. It would be impossible to imagine, a male character being confined like this because for a man confinement is not seen as a good thing, it was not seen as a good thing in the 19th century it is still not.

But on the contrary preventing a woman from doing certain things, preventing a woman from socializing, preventing a woman from accessing the freedom that she deserve or she desired that was seen as the best cure for any kinds of mental depression or even for any kind of bodily weakness. We also find this very ambivalent relation between protection and suppression to such an extent that protection becomes another way of suppressing and having control over the women who is also happens to be his wife.

And it also becomes difficult to differentiate between the show of affection and the show of dominance because they are presented as 2 sides of the coin in this patriarchal system where the show of affection is also with an expectation that the one who is at the receiving end will also listen to whatever is being told will also accept this dominance. So affection and dominance are not necessarily seen as 2 different things but we find them coexisting in a peculiar way.

And finally we also see the role of the power structures initiated by the family as well as the society. Here we find this woman being comfortably placed in an upper middle-class aristocratic set up where the family becomes the important power structure for her where the family is the one who is not loving her to do certain things were also enabling her recovery in a way that they think she would benefit.

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The story also enables us to look at the many ways in which gender gets laid out. There is a focus on aspects of womanhood, motherhood, domesticity and marriage. And we find that during this period of confinement there is a way in which these seemingly feminine notions are also not attributed to the woman, she is not allowed to write at the same time she's not allowed to participate in the household chores.

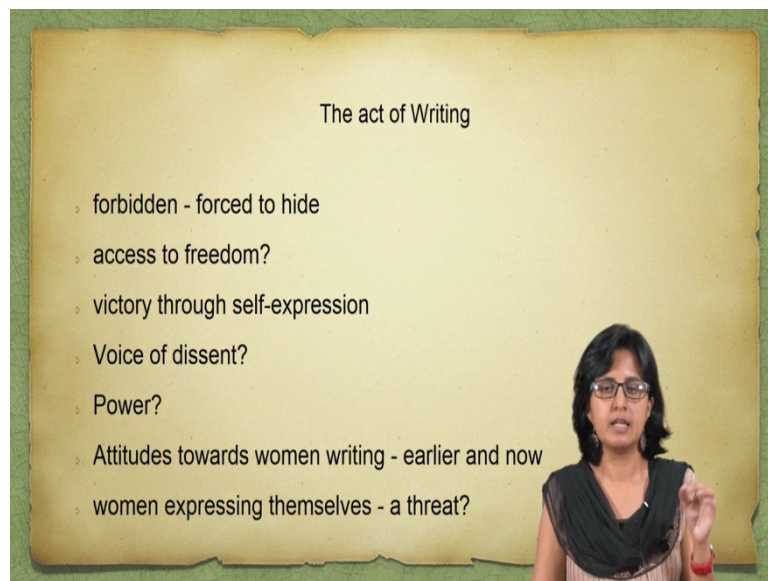
She is not allowed to be a good post, she is not allowed to take care of her baby. She is only ask take rest and stay alone and do not do anything, do nothing, do not write, do not walk just eat sleep and take good care of herself and this again on the contrary these expectations which do not allow her a sense of self or a sense of agency.

It is also gender expectation because she is forced to remain in confinement, she is forced to not express herself through writing or not to associate with there is a mention of 2 cousins whom she would love to engage with but they are seen as too stimulating by John. So these sort of confinements and these sort of restrictions and they are seen as an extension of these gendered expectations.

And what would happen when these ideal (())(27:01) rejected or destroyed. This story in some way shows us that the moment this gendered self is unable to perform the roles aspect of her as a woman, as a mother, as someone who is an enabler in the domestic space or someone who is expected to perform in the marriage relation we find that it becomes a difficult life for her altogether.

Once these gendered rules are not as important you will find that the woman is denied even the other things that she likes. Herself is rooted in these many performances and beyond that there is no freedom her to articulate herself or her desire or her ambitions in any other form.

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The act of writing it plays an important role it is like a (())(27:55) we get to know the story through this journal entries which is by there is a staccato kind of narration it is not a continuous flow of thoughts for reasons that the story also discloses she has to stop writing as in when someone comes in. She also in her mental state which is not really stable. The act of writing here comes across the as a forbidden act which is why she is forced to hide.

And this is also a way in which she tries to access the freedom, the only thing that she manages to do without anyone noticing as one to write and 2nd thing her mental obsession with the wallpaper. She gives a free rein to her mind when she's not allowed to do any other thing. And this rig read through self-expression is what she celebrates at the and when she manages to tear down the wallpaper and creeps on the floor.

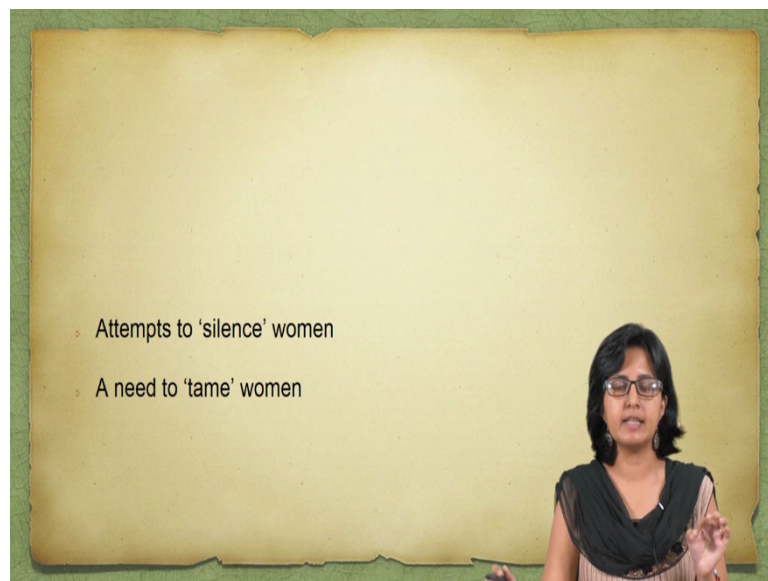
And at that point we find that John seems to be under control throughout the story who comes across as the one who knows what is best for his wife, we find him as a helpless being to such an extent that he even faints. At the act of writing whether it is the writing the Journal or trying to write a whole story on the wallpaper that comes across a voice of dissent, as a sense of power that she begins to assume.

And this story can be read as a critique of the various attitudes historically towards women riding earlier and even now and women expressing themselves where always seen as a threat. We know about the history of women riding in various parts of the world in different cultures where historical historicals involved in allowing the men to articulate themselves in allowing

them into expressing themselves in article error honors in based which were acceptable initially only for men.

We do find that this is an ongoing struggle because there are also expectations of women who are writing. There are certain kinds of things which are still considered as not very acceptable when it comes to women who are writing and this is a story which challenges these many ways in which women have been historically incorporate them to the act of writing or women have been historically excluded from many different honors different kinds of things.

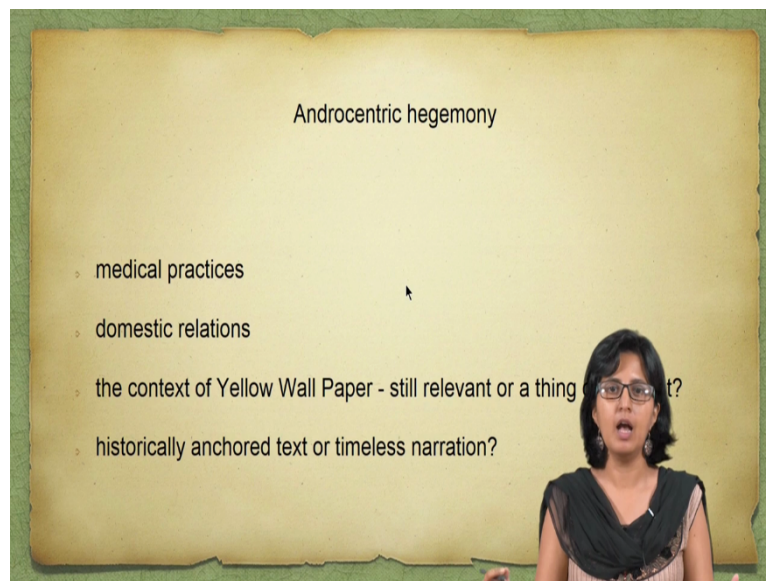
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And the story also highlights 2 important things in the context of women who would like to express themselves who would like to work and leave a mark for themselves. There have always been attempts to silence women from these different patriarchal structures further from within the family or from the society or from the larger institutions and structures and there is a need to tame women as John the seemingly good character in the story feels.

Or even the many representatives from these different social structures they continue to feel. This story is some kind of a challenge response to these many attempts to these many historical instances which feminist history has been witnessing.

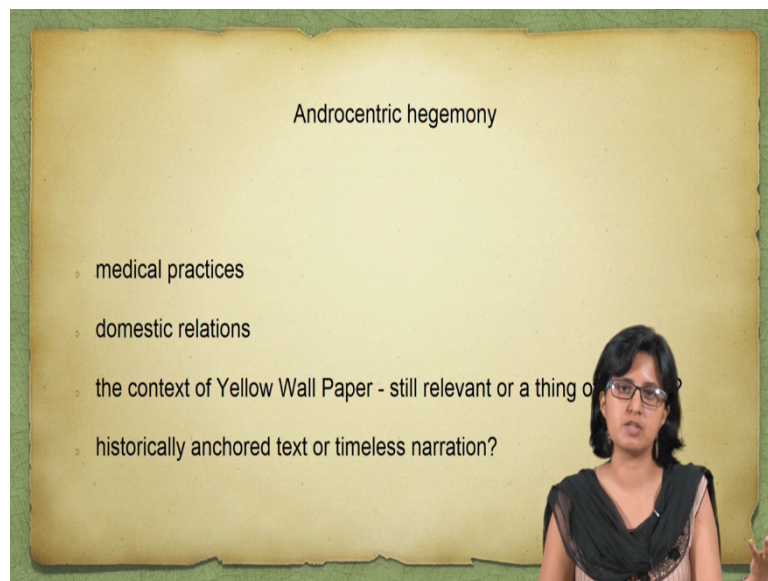
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And the other way in which we can categorize this story is by looking at this as a response to the Androcentric hegemony especially in medical practices in the 19th century. in the context of the yellow wallpaper it is important to ask certain questions whether this kind of reading whether these kinds of articulations where a woman is not allowed to express herself in the name of the ultimate good for our whole self are these discussions are still relevant or is it a thing of the past and looking at the theme of this text where it is a direct response to the androcentric hegemony of medical practices and domestic relations in the 19th century.

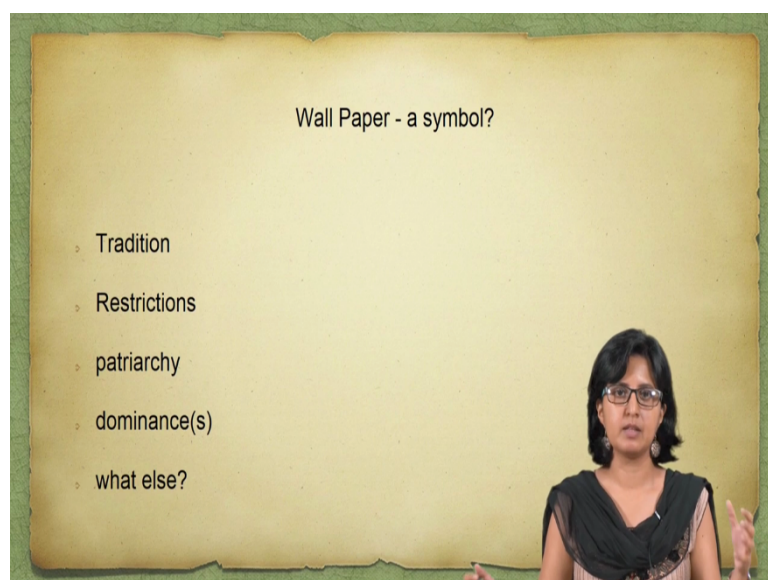
Do we not tend to see this as a historical anchor text or a dated text or does it have a timeless narration? This is something that I encourage you to read on your own and frame your responses to see how things have changed in the contemporary for women who would love to write or would love to articulate themselves in ways which are not considered entirely acceptable by the society, the family or by these extended institutions of power.

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The final imagery that we see in the story of creeping woman, about the way they move stealthily which is also due to these subservience which they are facing and creeping woman also indicate that they are not standing and it is not a ladylike act when you find them and creeping the final imagery is in that sense very very compelling because it is showcasing the need to come out of these images in which women are expected to perform in which women are expected to showcase themselves.

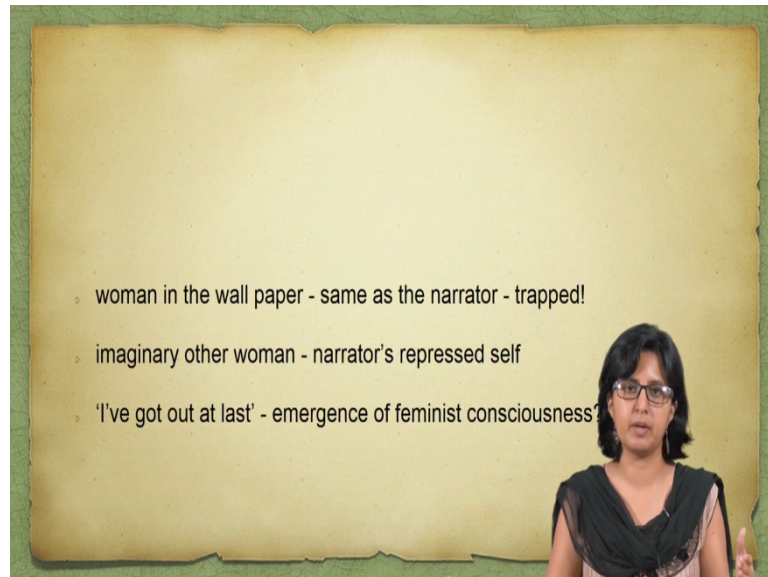
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The wallpaper is also a symbol of many things that the story directly and indirectly invokes it could be tradition, the restrictions by the family and the society, the overarching patriarchal, the different forms of dominance is and what else do you think the wallpaper is a symbol of?

In your reading if you could come up with new kinds of things that the wallpaper begins to symbolize. In the contemporary you could perhaps think about how well it can be articulated within the structure of the story.

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- woman in the wall paper - same as the narrator - trapped!
- imaginary other woman - narrator's repressed self
- 'I've got out at last' - emergence of feminist consciousness?

As we wrap up this discussion, the importance of the story lies in the celebration of these emergence of a feminist consciousness. The story towards the end we have the nameless narrator in a very exhilarating tone telling us that I have got out at last and this is very important.

The woman in the wallpaper as the narrator begins to see, the woman and the women in the wallpaper they succeed in getting out at same as a narrator who was trapped before, who was confined before, she also succeeds in getting out of the image, getting out of the physical confinement and the imaginary other women and the narrator's repressed self we find are being liberated at the same time.

And this emergence of the feminist consciousness is what makes this text extremely important for all times and for all cultures because this is an expression, this is an articulation of women trying to get out and express themselves in spite of the confinements and inspired for the situations that they are forced to be in regardless of the context, regardless of the time and regardless of the cultures.

I hope you enjoyed reading the story and this needs to be looked at in the context of world literature is one of the important feminist text which defined the ways in which feminist text and Articulations have been critiqued and look that especially in the context of the Western

academics. There have been different readings which also talk about the need to bring in more non-white text as representative text but nevertheless the 100 years of celebrating this text and the way in which it has lifted into the present century.

The way in which it is lived into the Canon, into the feminist canon and into the alternate Canon of the contemporary period makes it all the more reason to read this work as part of a course on world literature. I thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.