

---

## Marxist Theory Of Alienation In Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'

Marx argued that Europe lived under the darkness of the hegemonic authority led by oppressive aristocratic power. The economy was built on the labor of young, poor, exploited children whilst the aristocracies manipulate and exploit the machines of human power to increase their wealth and fulfill their egoistic desire: 'Human begins cease to recognize in each other their common human nature; instead they see others as instruments for furthering their own egoistic interests'. Karl Marx, a philosophy graduate from the University of Berlin abhorred the pain and suffering of the poor people who lived under the shadow of the capitalist authorities. His hatred towards the current capitalistic society echoed that of his friend Friedrich Engels and together they developed the Communist Manifesto. The goal of Marxist theory is to emancipate human from slavery and abolish class differences. The dilemma of Marxist philosophy revolved around economic power, which greatly shapes all aspects of society. Marx's main purpose behind this theory was to find freedom for the alienated. Alienation, he believed, was a universal problem not only related to a class conflict but to all of humanity. Singer argues of alienation that it 'has this universal character in virtue of its total deprivation. It represents not a particular class of society, but all humanity'. Marx acknowledged that during the 19th Century, all over Europe, workers were becoming enslaved to the labor itself. Marx himself used the introduced the term 'commodity' in relation to the alienated labor of the workforce. Moreover, the more the worker externalizes himself in his work, the more powerful the alien, objective world outside of himself becomes. This world he has created lies in opposition to himself and his own. It is at this point which capitalism gains its strength and suppresses the individual values. The suffering and alienation of women's labor was seen as worse than men's, particularly in the 19th Century context. Unfair and unequal treatment of women both in the workforce and within society in general, both meant that women could be exploited to a worse degree. This is something that was not focused on in Marx's Communist manifesto, but will be discussed here in relation to a particular novel. The concept of alienated labor is explicitly expressed through the writing of Charlotte Gilman. Gilman's story of 'The Yellow wallpaper' introduces a female figure who suffers from alienation of labor and it can be argued that this leads her to lose her sanity and spiral into an endless struggle for liberty. This essay will discuss the Marxist theory of alienation of labor as portrayed in the narrator's character and her relationship with her husband as she heavily suffers the destructive consequences of not having work until she battles for liberty.

The narrator in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' represents the suffering of women in the nineteenth century in a sense that women were interpolated to hold to an identity they did not choose for themselves and denied the right to reason and break it free. Her husband imposes a kind of

---

**Need help with the assignment?**

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

alienation on her by preventing her from working. This leads her to question her role in society, her sense of value and satisfaction, and ultimately her sanity as a consequence. She makes her sense of accepted inferiority to her husband known to the reader when she says 'John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage A crucial way in which she is exploited and suppressed by her husband is through his failure to acknowledge her mental illness. This ultimately reduces her own sense of control and power, as she is refused the ability to own her feelings. The link to Marxism here is fairly apparent- the character's internal self is owned or at the very least, manipulated, by external forces. This is exaggerated through another character, her brother, who also does not believe that she is sick and needs assistance rather than isolation. In this way, the character universalizes the suffering of female victims, from a society induced and male-imposed alienation she says 'I am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again'. The alienation from work is the driving force of her mental deprivation and subsequent tragic struggle.

The narrator indicates her eagerness to work to pursue her identity, value, and authenticity. She indicates this when she says 'I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good'. Instead, her writing becomes her only symbol of control and her means of identity and expression. She writes in the absence of John, the eye of the society 'I did write for a while in spite of them'. By asking these questions more than once in the story 'But what is one to do?', she refers to the general incapability and futility of women to work or another solution to stop this alienation. Ultimately she lacks power. John also wants to silence her and maintain his control over her through her illness- specifically, he asks her not to think about her condition. He asks her to do so because he knows that will lead her to an understanding and the reality about herself. Once an individual understands and owns their sense of identity, they are able to resist the alienation imposed on them. The protagonist does not have this ability- she is stripped of any sense of self. She says 'John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad'. This is what Marx calls for the working class when he talks about the alienation of labor He claims that they are not simply animals because they have consciousness and they can think. Humans are more than tools to be used for the benefit of others. Her husband does not want her to think about herself and her position the society but to accept his means of alienation. We see that the narrator opposes the alienation of labor in her head but she cannot speak up for her rights and needs 'I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition'.

The sense of the alienation of labor intensifies as the story progresses. She loses the reality of herself internally as much as externally. She is confined in a room where she is alienated from any domestic labor or social needs. She cannot take care of her child as her husband assigns someone else to do the job. Her husband also isolates her from having a proper social life and preventing her from visiting her cousins. This kind of alienation leads her to talk negatively about herself because her husband and society more generally, crushes her values. She says 'I

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

meant to be such a help to John such a real rest and comfort and here I am a comparative burden already'. This feeling of self-disgrace leads to her regaining back her identity through writing: 'I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me'. However, writing does not help her too much because she writes for a purpose (that of finding a reader who can appreciate, negotiate, and respect her mental capabilities). She admits that this is futile: 'It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work'. This leads her to stop writing because she does not find the satisfaction she so needs. Thus, she looks somewhere else to occupy her thoughts. She starts to examine the room she is confined in as she describes herself 'I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store'.

The alienation of labor leads her to into alienation of herself and to the loss of her identity. She begins to focus on the wall in front of her, the ultimate sign of her entrapment and confinement. She deals with the wall as a regular job with specific times and examines it with a precise look and touch. This wall becomes her outlet and escapement from the prison of a society that excludes her. Moreover, she is able to gain a sense of control by carrying out a type of 'work' that has a purpose unknown to anyone in the external world as she says 'I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!'. She does the examination in the absence of her husband and Jane, the eyes of the society. As a result of her gradual realization of her sense of self, her health improves and she starts to eat better than before. By saying 'Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was', she explicitly proves that importance of labor and its impact on self-fulfillment and contentment. She feels she has something that inspires her behind the wallpaper.

Eventually, day by day however, the alienation of labor still negatively affects her. She loses herself in the midst of the wall. She becomes alienated from her reality as she develops intimacy with the wallpaper present in that room in a way she does not want to leave the room. She enjoys that isolation which later develops into an obsession with the woman displayed on it. She sympathizes with the woman on the wallpaper and feels she is constrained and needs to be liberated, and hence she peels off the paper to set her free. The woman on the wallpaper resembles herself who is imprisoned in this room.

In conclusion, in The Yellow Wallpaper the alienation from work leads that narrator into different phases of suffering until she reaches the level of detaching herself and loses her mind completely. The sense of alienation, both externally and internally lead to conflicts within herself. She practices writing against the will of her husband and she rebels within herself by rebelling against his demands of doing nothing but resting 'I get unreasonable angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be sensitive'. She tries to be among people so she can find

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

---

an outlet in writing by having readers, but he prevents her. He is the embodiment of the society in late nineteenth century when women of a certain class are suppressed from having work. The struggle of the alienation of work grows within herself until she denies her reality. The resistance reaches its climax when she peels off the wallpaper and lets the woman free, as if she is letting herself free, in crawling upon the body of her husband.

## Works Cited

1. Singer, Peter. Marx: Avery Short Introduction. Oxford, 2018.
2. Stetson, Charlotte Perkins. 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'.

gradesfixer.com

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)