Dillan Jaras

Wesley Ward

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The Yellow Wall-paper Contextualization

The short story "The Yellow Wall-paper," is about a woman with depression getting medical treatment for her illness. In the story, she is brought to a mansion with her husband John, who is a physician. The room she stays in has boarded windows, and yellow wallpaper which she despises. The perspective of the story is told from the view of the woman. She writes in a diary she hides from her husband and sister when they visit her. Throughout the story she begins to question the wallpaper, saying it has an odor and she slowly becomes obsessed. Eventually she believes there are woman hiding behind the wallpaper purposely bothering her. Shortly after this, she is convinced she is one of those women, and she locks herself in the room to be safe, where the story ends.

This story was written and published in 1982, a time where medicine for depression was not even created yet (Prozac/Fluoxetine HCl was made in 1986) (What). From reading the story you can deduce that the story is set in a time where modern medicine is not present. This was a common treatment for depression in these times, as there was no medicine yet, and there were misconceptions about what caused depression, thus leading to putting the patients in a room and checking up on them every now and then. The reasoning behind putting a patient into a room was simply that they did not know what to do with them. This is because science isn't what it is currently so they didn't know what caused it (they had ideas, but weren't concrete). This was done with most mentally ill persons during this time.

Back in Roman and Greek civilizations, the Greek physician Hippocrates thought of causes for depression, he suggested imbalance of bodily fluids called humours. There were four of these: black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. Hippocrates said that depression was caused by too much black bile in the spleen. (Nemade) During the Renaissance era, common views on mental illness were split. Many people believed those affected were witches, and should be burned, killed, or locked away. On the other side, doctors referred back to Hippocrates' theories of the imbalance of bodily fluids (Nemade).

If this story's setting was in modern times, it would be much different. We now have progressed farther in medicine and biology than when this was written. Typically, if someone believes they have depression, they will be diagnosed based on if they've had a major depressive episode lasting longer than two weeks (Depression). After a diagnosis, what follows after is usually some sort of psychotherapy. These therapies are: Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which helps reverse the negative thinking. • Interpersonal therapy helps its social relationships and how to problem solve. • Psychoeducation therapy educates the patient on depression and their symptoms. Focus group can be with other strangers in the same situation or the patients family. People share their frustrations and successes, recommend specialists or therapists, and community resources.

Throughout the duration of these therapies, the patient is prescribed medicine called antidepressants. The most often prescribed antidepressants are selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These work by increasing the amount of the brain chemical serotonin, which results in an improved mood. Common SSRIs are: Fluoxetine/ Prozac HCl, Sertraline/Zoloft, Paroxetine/Paxil, Citalopram/Celexa, and Escitalopram/Lexpro (Depression). Patient will have check-ups to analyze if the medicine is working as desired.

"The Yellow Wall-paper" is a good example of how mental illnesses were treated in the past. The reasons the story unfolded the way it did is due to the fact that the doctors, or anyone, did not know what to do or how to make the ill better. If the story had been written in modern times it would be very different because we now have a greater understanding of depression and how to treat it. Not only is there treatment, but a variety of treatments for very specific situations.

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