

Voices of Confinement and Rebirth: The Yellow Wallpaper, Daddy and Lady Lazarus

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Abstract

Female authors in contemporary literature play a crucial role in reshaping the portrayal of mental illness, offering nuanced narratives deeply rooted in women's experiences. They address the complex intersection of mental health and societal expectations, exploring themes such as gender roles, body image, and trauma with sensitivity. These authors highlight women's unique challenges in treatment systems and advocate for gender-sensitive approaches in mental healthcare. Through diverse and complex characters, female writers challenge stereotypes and offer a broad spectrum of mental health conditions with empathy and sincerity. They employ literary techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, internal monologues, and symbolism to provide intimate insights into their characters' inner worlds, effectively externalizing their struggles and dilemmas. Female authors also confront the stigma surrounding mental illness, challenging discriminatory attitudes and societal pressures that deter individuals from seeking help. Their narratives foster empathy and understanding, promoting a more inclusive dialogue on mental health and encouraging help-seeking behaviors. Additionally, many female authors incorporate social commentary into their works, shedding light on systemic inequities exacerbating mental health disparities and advocating for structural reforms. In summary, the contributions of female authors to the representation of mental health in contemporary novels are profound and wide-reaching, enriching our understanding of mental illness and advocating for a more empathetic and supportive societal framework.

Keywords: Feminist movements, mental illness, societal pressure, misconceptions, women suffrage

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a central theme in contemporary literature, especially in novels written by women. This research paper delves into the intricate portrayals of mental illness in these works, highlighting the significant contributions female authors make to the discourse on this critical issue. Focusing on women authors is essential due to the higher prevalence of mental health conditions among women and the unique perspectives female writers bring, which often intersect with societal expectations, gender dynamics, and the female experience. This study aims to analyze how modern novels by women address mental health, exploring the broader societal implications and distinctive narrative strategies they employ.

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Received Date: August 12, 2024
Accepted Date: August 14, 2024
Published Date: September 06, 2024

Citation: Aashna Arora. Voices of Confinement and Rebirth: The Yellow Wallpaper, Daddy and Lady Lazarus. *Emerging Trends in Languages*. 2024; 1(2): 21–30p.

The primary objective of this research is to examine how contemporary women writers depict mental health conditions in their novels. By analyzing these representations, the study seeks to reveal how these authors challenge stigma, promote empathy, and foster more nuanced discussions on mental well-being. Through a detailed examination of selected literary works, this paper will highlight the significant contributions of female authors to mental health literature and assess the broader societal impact of their work.

Key variables in this research include the depiction of mental health conditions, the exploration of gender dynamics, approaches to diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, and the narrative techniques used by female authors. Each variable is crucial for understanding the holistic representation of mental health in contemporary literature:

1. *Depiction of Mental Health Conditions*: This examines the types of mental illnesses portrayed and the narrative strategies used to convey them. For instance, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a woman's descent into madness is depicted through her fragmented journal entries, driven by the oppressive "rest cure" prescribed by her physician husband.
2. *Gender Dynamics*: This investigates how gender norms and societal pressures shape characters' experiences of mental illness. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the protagonist's struggles are exacerbated by oppressive gender norms and her husband's dismissive attitude, reflecting broader societal tendencies to invalidate women's experiences.
3. *Approaches to Diagnosis, Treatment, and Recovery*: This assesses critiques of conventional mental health systems and presents alternative paths toward healing. Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* critiques the medical treatments of the late 19th century, showing how the "rest cure" leads to the protagonist's complete mental breakdown.
4. *Narrative Techniques*: This explores the methods female authors use to create immersive portrayals of characters' internal struggles. For example, Sylvia Plath's confessional poetry in "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy" uses vivid imagery and intense language to convey the raw emotions associated with mental illness, allowing readers to connect deeply with her psychological pain and turmoil.

This research adopts a qualitative paradigm, utilizing literary analysis to explore the nuanced representations of mental health in contemporary women's literature. By focusing on the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sylvia Plath, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how female authors articulate and critique mental health issues. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of the texts, revealing the complex interplay between mental health, gender dynamics, and societal expectations.

Through this analysis, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how contemporary women writers use their craft to illuminate mental health issues. By examining the depictions of mental health conditions, gender dynamics, approaches to diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, and narrative techniques, we gain valuable insights into how these authors challenge stigma, promote empathy, and foster more nuanced discussions on mental well-being. Such literary explorations not only enrich our understanding of mental health but also advocate for more compassionate and informed approaches to addressing mental health issues in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The sexuo-economic relationship explores the intricate interplay between sexual dynamics and economic structures [1]. It delves into how economic status and resources influence sexual behaviors, relationships, and gender roles within societies. Economic reliance has historically influenced sexual relationships, frequently enhancing power disparities and gender inequalities. Modern analyses examine how contemporary economic conditions, such as employment patterns and income distribution, continue to affect sexual relationships and family dynamics. The topic also considers the implications of economic policies and social norms on sexual health and rights, highlighting the need for integrated approaches to address the socio-economic determinants of sexual wellbeing. By understanding these connections, we can better inform policies and interventions that promote equitable and healthy sexual relationships.

Literature from the 19th and early 20th centuries often reflects the principles of domestic feminism, portraying female characters who navigate and negotiate their roles within the family to effect broader social change [2]. Works by authors such as Louisa May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe illustrate how domestic spaces can become arenas of resistance and reform. For instance, in Alcott's "Little

Women,” the protagonist Jo March embodies the domestic feminist ethos by balancing her domestic duties with her aspirations for literary success and social impact. Similarly, Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” underscores the moral authority of women in the household, depicting female characters who leverage their domestic roles to challenge and dismantle the institution of slavery. Through these narratives, literature not only mirrored the ideological currents of domestic feminism but also contributed to the ongoing discourse about women’s roles and rights in society.

In 1915, Charlotte Perkins Gilman released “Herland,” a novel that offers a radical reworking of gender roles and societal systems by depicting an entirely female-only utopia [3]. In this fictional land, women have created a self-sufficient, harmonious community devoid of war, poverty, and gender-based oppression. The narrative explores themes of motherhood, education, and communal living, suggesting that these elements, when free from patriarchal constraints, can lead to a more equitable and peaceful society. Gilman’s work critiques contemporary gender norms and advocates for a society where women’s potential is fully realized. By depicting a world where women thrive independently, “Herland” challenges the reader to reconsider the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles.

Confessional poetry emerged in the mid-20th century as a distinct literary movement, characterized by its focus on personal subject matter and the poet’s introspective exploration of their own experiences and emotions. This genre is marked by its raw, unfiltered expression of themes such as mental illness, family dynamics, sexuality, and personal trauma. Pioneered by poets like Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman, confessional poetry breaks away from traditional poetic conventions by delving into deeply private and often taboo topics. The movement is distinguished by its use of a first-person narrative voice, creating an intimate connection between the poet and the reader. Lowell’s “Life Studies” is often cited as a seminal work that exemplifies the confessional style, laying the groundwork for subsequent poets to explore their inner worlds with honesty and vulnerability.

“The Divided Self,” a seminal work by Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, published in 1960, explores the nature of mental illness through the lens of existential philosophy and phenomenology [4]. Laing challenges traditional psychiatric approaches by arguing that conditions such as schizophrenia result from a fundamental split within the individual’s self, rather than merely being a result of biochemical abnormalities. He posits that this divided self arises from existential conflicts and the pressures of conforming to societal expectations, leading to a disintegration of the individual’s sense of identity. By examining the subjective experiences of those diagnosed with mental illnesses, Laing provides a compassionate and humanizing perspective, emphasizing the importance of understanding patients’ internal worlds and the existential anguish they endure. Laing’s “The Divided Self” has had a profound impact on both psychiatry and the broader field of mental health. It sparked a shift towards more empathetic and patient-centered approaches in therapy, highlighting the need to address the personal and existential dimensions of mental illness. Laing’s work also contributed to the anti-psychiatry movement, which criticized conventional psychiatric practices and advocated for more humane treatment of patients. His ideas influenced subsequent generations of therapists, scholars, and activists who continue to challenge reductionist views of mental health. Despite some criticisms and controversies, Laing’s exploration of the divided self remains a foundational text in understanding the complex interplay between individual psychology and societal influences, encouraging a deeper consideration of the human experience in the context of mental health.

Feminist critique in literature involves analyzing texts through the lens of gender, focusing on how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges the patriarchal structures and gender norms of its time. This approach emerged from the broader feminist movement, gaining momentum in the late 20th century with scholars like Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. Feminist critics examine the representation of women in literature, exploring themes of female oppression, identity, and agency [5]. They critique the marginalization and stereotyping of female characters, advocating for the recognition of women’s experiences and voices in literary history. Key concepts in feminist critique include the

exploration of the “male gaze,” the construction of gender, and the ways in which literary texts can either perpetuate or subvert traditional gender roles.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Literary analysis employs several theoretical concepts, such as feminist critique, psychoanalytic theory, modernism, gender and madness, narrative voice, and interdisciplinary approaches. These frameworks emphasize how literature challenges patriarchal oppression and society norms by examining power relations, identity development, and the representation of mental illness.

Feminist Critique

- Theoretical frameworks of feminist criticism are applied to analyze how patriarchal structures influence the lives of women in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” “Daddy,” and “Lady Lazarus.”
- Pay attention to power relationships, gender roles, and how cultural conventions suppress female autonomy.

Psychoanalytic Theory

- Exploration of psychoanalytic concepts such as repression, identity formation, and the unconscious mind in interpreting the psychological struggles of the protagonists.
- Analysis of how the protagonists’ internal conflicts manifest in their external environments and relationships.

Literary Modernism

- Examination of modernist literary techniques and themes in Plath’s poetry, including fragmented narrative structures, intertextuality, and the use of persona.
- Contextualization of Gilman’s work within the modernist movement, considering its experimental narrative style and critique of societal norms.

Gender and Madness

- Critical perspectives on how gender influences the portrayal of madness and mental illness in literature, with a focus on how societal expectations contribute to the protagonists’ psychological distress.
- Exploration of how madness is used as a narrative device to critique patriarchal oppression and the medicalization of women’s experiences.

Narrative Voice and Identity

- Analysis of narrative voice and identity formation in the texts, considering how the protagonists’ self-perception evolves through their experiences and societal constraints.
- Examination of the relationship between language, voice, and power in shaping individual agency and resistance.

Interdisciplinary Approaches

- Integration of interdisciplinary perspectives such as psychology, gender studies, and literary theory to enrich the analysis of mental health, gender roles, and artistic expression in the texts.
- Exploration of how these texts engage with broader cultural, historical, and social contexts to provoke critical reflections on gender, power, and identity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why do only female protagonists face discrimination and are ill-treated?
- What changes can be observed in the portrayal of women’s mental health from the past to contemporary literature?
- What intrigues the women writers to portray their life stories or struggles in the form of confessional poetry?
- What role do traumas play in the narratives about women’s health?

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER: CRITIQUING PATRIARCHAL MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a key figure in American feminism, advocated for women's rights and challenged societal norms. Known for her pioneering ideas on gender equality, Gilman's work extended beyond feminism to encompass a broader vision of societal transformation. This paper explores how Gilman's personal experiences, especially her first marriage, influenced her commitment to social reform and feminist thought.

Early in infancy, Gilman had a predisposition for artistic endeavors like writing and drawing. However, the rigid expectations of 19th-century domesticity imposed significant constraints on her aspirations. Her dissatisfaction with these societal norms became a source of her feminist ideas. She preferred the term "humanist" over "feminist," reflecting her broader aspiration for universal equality.

A critical turning point in Gilman's life was her first marriage, marked by unhappiness and depression. During this period, she wrote "In Duty Bound," critiquing the oppressive conditions of marriage. Seeking help from Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell's "rest cure" only worsened her condition, highlighting the limitations on women's autonomy and the failure of the medical establishment to address their needs. These experiences intensified her resolve to challenge societal constraints.

Gilman's personal experiences informed her feminist theories, particularly in her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." Published in 1892, the story is presented through the journal entries of an unnamed woman confined by her physician husband. This narrative serves as a potent critique of the oppressive constraints on women's mental and physical health in 19th-century America. The protagonist's isolation and forced inactivity symbolize the broader societal and medical frameworks that marginalized women. Her obsession with the wallpaper reflects the entrapment felt by many women relegated to the domestic sphere [6].

"The Yellow Wallpaper" sparked debate within the medical community. Some condemned it as harmful, while others praised its accurate depiction of insanity. These divergent reactions highlight the story's provocative nature and its impact on contemporary understandings of mental health. Gilman's work not only challenged societal norms but also provoked critical discourse among medical professionals, reflecting the broader struggle to comprehend and address mental health issues. The oppressive environment in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is established early. The narrator's forced isolation and lack of agency transform her surroundings into a source of torment. The yellow wallpaper becomes the focal point of her obsession, symbolizing her mental state and growing entrapment. Gilman uses the wallpaper to represent the protagonist's struggle to assert her identity within societal constraints. The enforced inactivity and denial of personal autonomy devastate her mental health, illustrating the profound impact of these practices [7].

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman masterfully depicts the narrator's mental unraveling, critiquing the societal and medical practices of her time. The story highlights the devastating effects of confinement and the suppression of women's intellectual and creative lives. By illustrating the protagonist's descent into madness, Gilman calls for a reevaluation of how women's mental health is treated, advocating for empathy, understanding, and recognition of women's intellectual and creative needs. This narrative remains a seminal work in the discourse on mental health, gender, and autonomy, resonating for its timeless exploration of these critical issues.

LADY LAZARUS AND DADDY: CONFESSIONAL POETRY AS A PATH TO HEALING

Sylvia Plath, a 20th-century literary figure renowned for her deeply personal and confessional poetic style, explored the complexities of the human psyche. Born on October 27, 1932, in Boston, Massachusetts, Plath's work is characterized by complexity, emotional depth, and themes such as mental illness, identity, and the female experience. Although her life and career were tragically short,

she left an indelible mark on American literature, making her one of the most studied and admired poets of her time [8]. Sylvia was born into the family of biologist Otto Plath, a German immigrant, and second-generation Austrian American Aurelia Schober Plath. Her early life was marked by intellectual stimulation and personal tragedy. The death of her father when she was just eight years old had a profound effect on her, an event that would reverberate throughout her career. Plath's mother raised Sylvia and her younger brother Warren in Wellesley, Massachusetts, where Sylvia showed early promise as a writer [9].

After graduating from Smith College, Plath was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Cambridge University in England. She finally got to know and marry poet Ted Hughes there. Their relationship affected a lot of her later work and served as a source of both personal struggle and creative inspiration.

Her collected poems, including "The Colossus" (1960) and "Ariel" (1965), published posthumously, reflect her evolving voice and the themes that would define her legacy [10].

Plath's work often explores struggles with identity, the dangerous expectations placed on women, and the pervasive darkness of mental illness. Her confessional style, characterized by its unflinching honesty and lyrical precision, made a profound impression on readers and critics alike. "The Colossus," Plath's first collection, reveals her developing talent and her sense of subjectivity. However, it was "Ariel" that cemented her reputation as a literary hero. Composed during the final months of her life, the poetry in "Ariel" is charged with a sense of urgency and raw emotional power. Works such as "Lady Lazarus," "Daddy," and "Tulips" exemplify her ability to transform personal grief into profound art.

Plath's life was a constant battle with mental illness, made worse by demands from her personal and professional life. Her marriage to Ted Hughes, while initially a source of support and solidarity, became increasingly difficult due to Hughes' infidelity and Plath's own emotional volatility. After the couple's 1962 split, Plath and her two kids relocated to London. Although this period was creatively fruitful, it severely deteriorated her mental health. On February 11, 1963, Sylvia Plath committed suicide in her London home. Her death marked the loss of a brilliant and troubled artist whose work continues to influence generations of writers and readers.

EXPLORING THE DEPTHS OF LADY LAZARUS

Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," a poem from her posthumously published collection "Ariel," is one of her most celebrated and enigmatic works. Written during the turbulent final months of her life, the poem explores themes such as resurrection, identity, and self-destruction through powerful imagery and strong language. "Lady Lazarus" is imbued with images of death and resurrection, themes both personal and universal. The title itself makes reference to the biblical account of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. However, Plath's resurrection is cyclical and deliberate, a repeated defiance of death that echoes her own life marked by periods of severe depression and recovery. The poem's opening lines,

"I've done it again. One year in every ten I manage it—," establish this cycle of death and rebirth. The speaker's tone is one of exhaustion and triumph, suggesting an intimate relationship with her own salvation. Resurrection is not miraculous but a painful, powerful statement of will. The harsh and confrontational language serves as a vehicle for expressing anger and reclaiming power.

"Out of the ash I rise with my red hair, And I eat men like air" encapsulate a defiant resurgence. The image of rising from the ashes is reminiscent of the mythical Phoenix, symbolizing renewal and strength. This act of defiance in the poem can be interpreted as Plath's rejection of forces that sought to diminish her—be it personal relationships, societal expectations, or internal demons.

During Plath's formative years, societal norms imposed restrictive roles on women, primarily revolving around domesticity and modesty. Plath's pursuit of higher education and literary ambition

was both a personal triumph and a defiance of these norms. Despite her achievements, Plath's journey was fraught with internal and external pressures. Her turbulent marriage to Ted Hughes and her personal battles with mental illness made her feel even more alone and demoralized.

Plath's use of enjambment and repetition creates a dynamic, intense reading experience. Her language is visceral and haunting, filled with images that confront the reader with the brutal realities of the speaker's experiences. The free verse form of the poem enables a flowing, emotive examination of the speaker's internal conflict.

"Lady Lazarus" blends theatrical imagery with personal narrative, presenting the speaker's resurrection as both a personal triumph and a public spectacle. The opening lines, "Dying Is an art, like everything else. I do it exceptionally well."

Introduce the idea of death as performance. By framing her self-destruction as art, the speaker asserts control over it, transforming suffering into a deliberate, skilled act. This theatricality underscores the public nature of her suffering and resurrection, turning private pain into a form of expression that demands recognition.

The poem can be read as a critique of patriarchal forces that seek to suppress and control women's voices and freedoms. The speaker's confrontations with male figures, symbolized by terms like "Herr Doktor" and "Herr Enemy," evoke the inhumanity and oppression of patriarchal authority. By framing her resurrection as a deliberate, skillful act, the speaker subverts traditional power dynamics, reclaiming autonomy over her life and identity.

"Lady Lazarus" stands as a powerful exploration of self-destruction, rebirth, and empowerment. Plath's vivid imagery, compelling language, and underlying feminist critique continue to captivate and inspire readers and critics alike. The poem's cyclical structure and intense emotional depth make it a profound commentary on the complexities of the human condition. Sylvia Plath's ability to transform personal grief into lasting art ensures that her work remains relevant and impactful, speaking to the struggles and triumphs that define the human experience.

DADDY: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

Written in October 1962 and later published posthumously in "Ariel," Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" remains a powerful testament to her emotional intensity and artistic skill. The poem delves into themes of power, oppression, and personal trauma, drawing heavily on vivid imagery and historical references.

Plath begins with a striking metaphor, likening her father to a "black shoe" that has oppressed her for years. This image symbolizes both his authority and the suffocating influence he had over her life, reflecting her feelings of entrapment and helplessness.

Throughout the poem, Plath shifts from fear and reverence towards her father to anger and rebellion. She emphasizes the intensity of his domination by drawing comparisons between her father and a Nazi and herself and a Jew using powerful Holocaust imagery. These references evoke a sense of historical oppression while intensifying her personal struggle [11].

"Daddy" is crafted in free verse with a rhythmic, almost hypnotic quality that amplifies its emotional impact. The repetition of sounds and words, like "Ich, ich, ich, ich" and "You don't, you don't," creates a chant-like effect that draws the reader deeper into Plath's turmoil.

The poem's resolute proclamation of independence from her father's memories at the end signifies a dramatic departure from his repressive legacy. This moment of catharsis is both personal and symbolic, representing her rejection of patriarchal authority and reclaiming of her own identity.

Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" stands as a powerful exploration of personal trauma intertwined with broader themes of power dynamics and oppression. Through vivid imagery and a distinctive poetic style, Plath delves into the complexities of her relationship with her father, using it as a metaphor to critique patriarchal structures that constrain women's identities.

In "Daddy," Plath portrays her father as a domineering figure, symbolizing oppressive forces that restrict individual autonomy. The poem opens with stark declaration: "You do not do, you do not do/Anymore, black shoe," immediately setting a tone of defiance and separation. This establishes the speaker's struggle against paternal authority, reflecting a broader feminist critique of societal power dynamics.

Central to Plath's exploration is the use of symbolism and striking imagery. The father figure is likened to a Nazi, with references to the "Luftwaffe" and "Aryan eye," evoking historical atrocities and suggesting the father's oppressive nature. This metaphorical alignment highlights the speaker's emotional turmoil and the suffocating presence of paternal influence.

Plath employs a unique poetic structure characterized by irregular stanzas and a rhythmic, almost musical quality. Staccato, short lines convey a sense of intensity and urgency while expressing the speaker's inner struggle. The repetition of phrases like "I could never talk to you" and "Ich, ich, ich" emphasizes the speaker's struggle to articulate her identity under paternal control.

"Daddy" is a powerful feminist film that questions patriarchal expectations and promotes female independence. The speaker's ultimate declaration, "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through," signifies a rejection not only of her father but also of societal constraints that seek to silence women's voices. Plath situates her personal narrative within a broader feminist critique, asserting the importance of reclaiming power and agency.

In conclusion, Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" remains a seminal work that merges personal trauma with universal themes of power and resistance. The poem challenges readers to consider the nuances of identity, oppression, and autonomy through its striking imagery, poetic form, and feminist undertones. Plath's ability to weave together personal experience with broader societal critique ensures that "Daddy" continues to resonate as a poignant exploration of the human condition and a testament to the enduring struggle for self-definition.

EXPLORING MENTAL ILLNESS, SOCIETAL CONTROL, AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN THE YELLOW WALLPAPER AND SYLVIA PLATH'S POEMS

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy," two poems by Sylvia Plath, delve into topics related to mental health, social control, and feminist resistance. In The Yellow Wallpaper, the protagonist's imprisonment and psychological decline are depicted as emblems of the 19th-century social subjugation of women. While Plath's "Daddy" uses Nazi imagery to criticize patriarchal dominance and the speaker's complex connection with her father, "Lady Lazarus" reflects her issues with mental health. In both pieces, strong female leads defy patriarchal oppression and take back their autonomy by rebelling against social norms and turning to literature as a cathartic outlet.

Narrative of Mental Health

- "The Yellow Wallpaper" explores the deterioration of mental health, reflecting societal attitudes towards women's mental illness in the 19th century.
- "Lady Lazarus" portrays the speaker's repeated attempts at suicide and resurrection, reflecting Plath's personal struggles with mental health.

Subjugation and Control

- In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the protagonist's confinement to a room symbolizes societal control over women's bodies and minds.

- “Daddy” critiques patriarchal domination through the speaker’s complex relationship with her father, using Nazi imagery to highlight oppressive forces.

Feminist Resistance

- Both “The Yellow Wallpaper” and “Lady Lazarus” depict female protagonists resisting societal norms and patriarchal oppression.
- Plath’s defiance in “Daddy,” culminating in the rejection of her father’s influence, aligns with feminist themes of autonomy and empowerment.

Psychological Realism

- Gilman employs psychological realism in “The Yellow Wallpaper” to depict the protagonist’s descent into madness and the repression of her creative and intellectual capacities.
- Plath’s confessional style in “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus” explores deeply personal and psychological states, blurring the lines between the poet’s life and art.

Symbolism and Imagery

- Symbolism of the wallpaper in Gilman’s story represents the protagonist’s confinement and growing insanity.
- Plath’s use of Nazi imagery in “Daddy” underscores the speaker’s emotional turmoil and the suffocating presence of paternal authority.

Artistic Expression as Catharsis

- Writing becomes a form of catharsis and defiance for the female protagonists in “The Yellow Wallpaper” and “Lady Lazarus,” allowing them to assert their voices in oppressive contexts.
- Plath’s poetic expression in “Daddy” serves as a means of confronting personal trauma and societal injustices, offering a platform for resistance.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of mental health in modern literature by women authors profoundly explores psychological struggles, societal constraints, and personal empowerment. Examining Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Sylvia Plath’s poems “Lady Lazarus” and “Daddy,” these works highlight the complexities of mental health from a female perspective.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman portrays postpartum depression and the oppressive treatment of women’s mental health in the late 19th century. The protagonist’s forced isolation by her physician husband exacerbates her condition, critiquing patriarchal medical practices and societal constraints that dismiss women’s autonomy. Her fixation on the wallpaper symbolizes a desperate escape from domestic and societal restrictions.

“Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath provide a thorough examination of mental health concerns. “Lady Lazarus” uses resurrection imagery to depict recurring battles with mental illness, highlighting defiance and vulnerability. The poem emphasizes the cyclical nature of mental health struggles and resilience. “Daddy” addresses Plath’s personal trauma and complex relationship with her father, using stark imagery to convey entrapment and rebellion. The poem’s confrontational tone provides a cathartic release and defiant assertion against oppressive memories.

These works underscore the intersection of mental health and gender, revealing how societal pressures and personal experiences shape women’s psychological landscapes. They critique historical and cultural tendencies to dismiss or pathologize women’s mental health, advocating for recognition and understanding. Gilman and Plath’s narratives emphasize the importance of autonomy, self-expression, and resistance against oppression.

As personal and artistic expressions and social critiques, these literary works challenge readers to reconsider historical and current perceptions of mental health, particularly for women.

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