

## Applying Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to *The Yellow Wallpaper*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study applies Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, examining how individual readers understand and connect with the literary text through personal experiences and knowledge. Using a qualitative methodology involving questionnaire and interviews, the research gathers responses from 15 students of English Literature to explore interpretations of the story's theme, particularly mental health, gender roles, and autonomy. The findings shows that students are able to express their Affective responses, Associative responses, Reflective responses, Interpretive responses and Inferential responses. The study further demonstrates that the Reader- Response Approach has helped the students to understand the literary text by showing empathy, critical thinking, and active literary engagement.*

**Keywords:** *Reader-Response Theory, literary interpretation, critical thinking*

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini menerapkan Teori Respon Pembaca Rosenblatt pada The Yellow Wallpaper karya Charlotte Perkins Gilman, dengan meneliti bagaimana masing-masing pembaca memahami dan terhubung dengan teks sastra melalui pengalaman dan pengetahuan pribadi. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif yang melibatkan kuesioner dan wawancara, penelitian ini mengumpulkan tanggapan dari 15 mahasiswa Sastra Inggris untuk mengeksplorasi interpretasi tema cerita, khususnya kesehatan mental, peran gender, dan otonomi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mampu mengekspresikan tanggapan Afektif, tanggapan Asosiatif, tanggapan Reflektif, tanggapan Interpretatif, dan tanggapan Inferensial. Studi ini selanjutnya menunjukkan bahwa Pendekatan Respon Pembaca telah membantu mahasiswa untuk memahami teks sastra dengan menunjukkan empati, pemikiran kritis, dan keterlibatan membaca karya sastra dengan aktif.*

**Kata kunci:** *Teori Respon Pembaca Rosenblatt, interpretasi sastra, berpikir kritis*

### A. Introduction

Reader-Response Theory remains a key framework since it stresses the active role readers play as they construct meaning. The

reader response approach operates on the belief that literature exists within a reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text, as the reader interprets the work and relates it to their personal experiences

(Mart, 2019). This theory perceives reading as an interactive activity influenced by the reader's cultural context, emotions, and experiences, rather than interpreting texts as having fixed meanings intended by the author. Furthermore, Woodruff & Griffin, (2017) stated that the reader response theory encourages the activities in making readers critical, thoughtful and engaged.

Transactional theory remains Louise Rosenblatt's foundational idea. Rosenblatt (1994) claimed reading involves a two-way exchange involving text and reader. The reader both engages and thus produces some meaning. Reading experiences are shaped via identity as well as emotion and even sociocultural factors, according to recent research building upon Rosenblatt's ideas (Kukkonen, 2017). According to Kunjanman & Aziz (2021) the Reader-response theory is advantageous in teaching literature as it can foster students' ability to give personal responses to a text, encourage reflective thinking and creativity, as well as assist self-learning, higher-level reasoning, self-interpretation and predicting. It can be inferred that reader-response theory sees the interaction between the text and the reader as interdependent. The reader's comprehension and interpretations have an impact on the text.

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman ideally can apply to Reader-Response Theory for the reason that it is open symbolically and complex psychologically. Historically, Feminist critics historically, have interpreted the story as a critique of medical treatment of women and patriarchal control.

This study argues that the fluidity of meaning created through interactions with the text is revealed by applying Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to The Yellow Wallpaper. This research is guided by identifying the types of responses generated by the students involved in The Yellow Wallpaper reading process based on Reader-Response Theory and how the reader-response reading helps them understand the text.

## B. Research Method

This study is conducted by using a qualitative research methodology. As stated by Creswell, (2009), qualitative research involves the examination and exploration of social events that occur among individuals. In qualitative research, the data gathered primarily consists of words or textual information, and the analysis of these words is done in a subjective manner. The research seeks to explore how different readers interpret *The Yellow Wallpaper*, emphasizing the transactional nature of reading in which meaning arises through the interaction between reader and text.

15 students, aged 20 to 21 who were enrolled in the sixth semester of English Literature taking Literary Criticism in STBA-PIA Medan participated in the study. The students were assigned to read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) which serves as the primary text for analysis. After completing reading the short story, participants were asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire designed to bring out emotional and cognitive responses to the story. The questionnaire consists of eleven questions. They were:

1. What can you infer about the relationship between the narrator and her husband based on their interactions?
2. By the final section of the story, what is the narrator's relationship to her husband? to Jennie? to the wallpaper? How has the narrator's perspective changed from the start of the story? What change to do we see in her actions?
3. What emotions did you feel while reading the narrator's descriptions of the wallpaper and her surroundings?
4. Were there moments in the story that made you feel disturbed, angry, or frustrated? Why do you think you had such strong reactions to those moments?
5. Did the narrator's isolation remind you of a time when you felt alone, ignored, or powerless?

6. What does the yellow wallpaper symbolize for you personally?
7. After reading the story, what insights did you gain about how gender roles can affect psychological well-being? Relate your response to your own experiences or observations in life.

By employing Garzon & Castaneda-Pena, (2015) the participants' responses are categorised into :

- Affective responses (emotional reaction)
- Associative responses (personal Memories and connections)
- Reflective responses (self awareness and beliefs)
- Interpretive responses (meaning creating)
- Inferential responses (reading between the lines)

Following the reading and reader response theory questionnaire completion, all participants were interviewed to see how reader-response approach help them to understand the literature texts.

### C. Result and Discussion

The students' responses collected responding to The Yellow Wallpaper through a set of open-ended questions grounded in Louise Rosenblatt's Reader-Response. They are categorised into Affective responses, Associative responses, Reflective responses, Interpretive responses and Inferential responses.

- Affective responses (emotional reaction)  
Affective response express students' feelings towards the literature text.

Question : What emotions did you feel while reading the narrator's descriptions of the wallpaper and her surroundings?

Response :

*uneasy, sad, and at times trapped with her. Her words start off slightly playful but slowly become more disturbing, and that shift created a growing sense of tension. I felt sympathy for her because it was clear she was trying so hard to hold on while no one around her truly listened. Her obsession with the wallpaper felt like a desperate way to make sense of her isolation. Those emotions made me see her not as "crazy," but as someone suffering in silence, slowly breaking down because she was never given the care or freedom she needed.*

Question : Were there moments in the story that made you feel disturbed, angry, or frustrated?

Response :

*Yes, I felt frustrated when she tried to speak up but wasn't listened to. It's upsetting to see someone being silenced over and over. It made me feel like her suffering could have been prevented if she had been truly heard.*

- Associative responses (personal Memories and connections)

Question : Did the narrator's isolation remind you of a time when you felt alone, ignored, or powerless?

Response :

*Yes, the narrator's isolation reminded me of a time when I felt ignored and powerless during a group project where my ideas were constantly dismissed. Even though I tried to contribute, my voice wasn't heard, and I felt invisible and frustrated. This experience, though small compared to the narrator's, helped me connect with her feelings of being silenced and trapped. It made her descent into obsession and madness feel more real and heartbreaking, showing how damaging it can be when someone's thoughts and emotions are constantly invalidated.*

- Reflective responses (self awareness and beliefs)

Question : After reading the story, what insights did you gain about how gender

roles can affect psychological well-being? Relate your response to your own experiences or observations in life.

*Response :*

*After reading the story, I realized that strict gender roles can really harm someone's mental health. The narrator was expected to be quiet, obedient, and dependent on her husband, which made her feel powerless and ignored. I've seen in real life how some women are still expected to stay silent or put others first, even when they're struggling. This can lead to stress, anxiety, or even depression. The story helped me see how important it is to listen to people and treat them as equals, no matter their gender*

- Interpretive responses (meaning creating)

Question : What does the yellow wallpaper symbolize for you personally?

*Response:*

*The yellow wallpaper, for me, is a symbol of pressure. It looks normal, but it's not. The longer you look, the more trapped you feel. Just like the narrator's mind. She stared at it too long and it pulled her in. It reminds me how mental stress can grow slowly until it explodes.*

- Inferential responses (reading between the lines)

Question : What can you infer about the relationship between the narrator and her husband based on their interactions?

*Response:*

*Based on their interactions, the narrator and her husband have an unequal relationship where he holds all the control. He treats her more like a child than a partner, calling her "little girl" and ignoring her thoughts about her own health. For example, when she says she wants to leave the house or write, he tells her no and says he knows what's best. This shows he doesn't take her seriously, which*

*adds to her feeling powerless and leads to her mental decline*

Question : By the final section of the story, what is the narrator's relationship to her husband? to Jennie? to the wallpaper? How has the narrator's perspective changed from the start of the story? What change do we see in her actions?

*Response :*

*By the end of the story, the narrator no longer trusts her husband, John, or his treatment. She sees Jennie as someone who supports the control over her. Her obsession with the wallpaper grows until she believes she is the woman trapped inside it. Unlike at the beginning, when she tried to follow the rules, she now rejects them completely. Her final act of tearing down the wallpaper shows her break from reality but also her attempt to free herself.*

After conducting the interview, it is found that all participants find it easier to understand the The Yellow Wallpaper short story with the Reader-Response approach. The questions helped them to be more critical in finding the meaning of the text and creating connection.

## D. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study explores how readers read and understand Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper through the lens of Louise Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory.

Reader-response theory enables the students to express their effective responses, Associative responses, Reflective responses, Interpretive responses and Inferential responses with reference to the elements of the story- especially the symbolism of the yellow wallpaper, the narrator's mental state, and the ambiguous ending.

This study suggests further depth analysis for future work. In the classroom, using Reader-Response approach can help students think

critically, connect emotionally with texts, especially with stories or other literature texts that are open to many interpretations. Future research could include readers from different cultures and backgrounds to see how their responses vary, and compare how academic and non-academic readers understand the story.

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