

# The yellow wallpaper as an attack on radical feminism

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“ What is it, little girl? Don’t go walking about like that—you’ll get cold”  
(Perkins-Gilman).

Gilman’s first book was *Art Gems for the Home and Fireside* (1888); however, it was her first volume of poetry, *In This World* (1893), a collection of satirical poems that first brought her recognition. During the next two decades she gained much of her fame with lectures on women’s issues, ethics, labor, human rights, and social reform. She often referred to these themes in her fiction. The story is about a woman who suffers from mental illness after three months of being closeted in a room by her husband for the sake of her health. She becomes obsessed with the room’s revolting yellow wallpaper.

Gilman wrote this story to change people’s minds about the role of women in society. Using feminist criticism, the reader can analyze Charlotte Perkins-Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* through symbols, Jane, and setting. To begin with, in the story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, symbolism is shown throughout many parts of the story. The wallpaper represented a prison that women were trapped in, some tried to break from the control like Jane. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* it states, “ The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smoldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight” (Perkins-Gilman). This symbolizes the color of the wallpaper.

She is describing the way the color looks to her of the wallpaper and how the color of it is disgusting and how it almost sickens her. It also states in *The Yellow Wallpaper* it states, “ The front patter does have—and no wonder! The woman behind it shakes! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind; and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her

crawling shakes it all over” (Perkins-Gilman). Jane saw the woman behind the wallpaper many times and she even tried to show her husband and Mary the woman but they didn’t see it. Jane was only looking for freedom and this soon became her way of getting it. Jane made it her mission to help this woman get out from behind the wallpaper.

Furthermore, the element setting was used in the story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Jane’s surroundings often influenced her behavior. Jane hated being in the room because of the wallpaper, all she wanted to do was get out. In the story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* it states, “ The most beautiful place! It is quite alone standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people” (Perkins-Gilman).

This quote describes the way Jane sees the house. She sees it as an old English house and how she likes the garden. In the story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* it states, “ The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here” (Perkins-Gilman). This quote describes the setting of the room Jane had to stay in. She describes the room very cruelly.

She does not like the room at all especially the wallpaper. The room had negative effects to it and Jane didn’t like that. In addition, in the story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Jane loved to write and this can be seen in this quote, “ I

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did write for a while for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” (Perkins-Gilman). Jane wasn’t allowed to write. She had to sneak and write. The act of hiding the writing from Mary and John made her sick but writing is what helped Jane.

Mary and John never knew that. Jane wrote every chance she could and she did her best at not getting caught. In this time women were not allowed to write because there were more important things to do. In the story, The Yellow Wallpaper it states, “ John does not really know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him” (Perkins-Gilman).

John only seems to think of himself and when he does think to care about Jane he treats her like a child. She’s in pain and he doesn’t even see what Jane is going through. John doesn’t care to see what Jane is going through instead he tries to treat her like a child and comes off as controlling. Jane doesn’t protest to John’s controlling ways instead she tries not to upset John. All in all, using feminist criticism, the reader can analyze Charlotte Perkins-Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper through symbols, Jane, and setting. What can be learned from this is that woman often rely on men too much and that can be a bad thing because the man would do nothing but control you.

A woman’s lack of independence can be harmful to their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The narrator in this story must do as her husband demands although the prescription contrasts with what she truly needed which was just to escape the room.

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