

Vertigo gender critique



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Vertigo and The Yellow Wallpaper The 1958 film Vertigo is surrounded by themes of control, dominance, and illusion surrounding a male and female power struggle. One of Vertigo's main themes is to create the perfect woman. This is also seen in the story The Yellow Wallpaper. The parallels with Vertigo's protagonist's quest for the ideal woman are evident with John and the treatment of his wife. John takes the authority over his wife like how Scottie took authority over Judy when he tries to recreate Madeline's image. Although John and Scottie are similar in character, their motives are different.

John wants to keep his wife quite as she slips slowly into madness. She is left helpless and bedridden but he just ignores her pleas for help. After Scottie witnesses Madeline's death, he becomes completely lost in his world of fantasy and is motivated to transform Judy. While Scottie loses his sanity, John does not. It is John's wife who loses her sanity in The Yellow Wallpaper while Judy is the sane one in Vertigo. While both characters are different in their means of control, their dominance and desire for control over women is apparent.

In Vertigo, Scottie is driven to transform Judy into Madeline even though he does not know why. " He made you over just like I made you over—only better. Not only the clothes and the hair, but the looks and the manners and the words . . . And then what did he do? Did he train you? Did he rehearse you? Did he tell you exactly what to do and what to say? ". Scottie says this as he drags Judy up the tower to throw her off. For the first time there is a similarity between him and the antagonist Gavin Elster.

Although John is obviously the villain in “ The Yellow Wallpaper” the context of the story would like us to believe this is not true. While John’s treatment of his wife’s depression is wrong, he does not necessarily do anything to make it worse. Just by ignoring her he is mistreating her. The problem with John in the story is that he holds all of the authority. He is her doctor as well as her caretaker. He is also stubborn and so sure he knows what is best for his wife that he disregards her opinion as just a symptom of her illness.

His overly rational disposition and ignorance towards her proves him to be dangerous. John treats his wife more as a medical case than a person. He wants her to get better but ends up just making her situation a lot worse. It is this counterproductively that makes John’s character ironic. Creating illusions is a common theme in both stories. Scottie creates the illusion of Madeline upon Judy to the point where he believes it to actually be her. Scottie loses his sanity accordingly because of his loss with reality.

He becomes consumed in his fantasy and whatever else happens to be going on does not matter. This loss of touch with reality causes him to be unaware he is actually doing anything wrong. Argumentatively he is not responsible for his actions at the point where he leads Judy to her death. He is overcome with his mental illness and the relapse of his Vertigo, that he is not himself anymore. It is the theme of mental illness which is also very apparent in “ The Yellow Wallpaper”. Because of the narrator’s seclusion, you could say she has a case of autophobia; fear of being alone or fear of one’s self.

Her loneliness creates a whole other world in her head which excludes her from the world she once lived in. John is unaware of her altered mental state

and thinks such a thing is not really a medical situation. It is clear that John has no knowledge of Psychology because he would be aware of the effects isolation can have on the brain. His strictly rational approach to medicine is his ultimate downfall. This tears their relationship apart as they can no longer see or speak on the same level. He will never be able to understand why she is losing her sanity or even comprehend that she has lost it.

By the end of the story she is beyond the point of communicating with or even recognizing John and it is too late for her to be saved. It is the lack of communication and common ground with the couples in these two stories that destroys their relationships as well as each other. It is the scheming and the faking of Madeline's death that perpetuates Scottie's mental disorder. While he already had Vertigo to begin with, it is elevated when he is unable to climb the tower to save Madeline. This causes both a confidence drop and an increased case of anxiety.

He thinks Judy is his second chance to save Madeline and thus recreates the scenario precisely. Unaware of this, Judy just accepts it as she is intimidated by Scottie and is afraid of him. The themes of illusion, lack of communication, and mental illness are the source of conflict in both these stories therefore they can be compared and contrasted quite well. Ignorance and deception as well as fantasy also seem to come up often. The idea of recreating reality or just an altered state of reality is seen within both stories. It is the power struggle between male and female roles that creates conflict as well.