

# A comparative girl jamaica kincaid analysis of two short stories

[Society](#), [Gender Socialization](#)



The short stories *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Gilman and *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid share the common theme of women who are portrayed as frail beings. In both literary selections, women are depicted as dependent on men and other family members, and who must deal with so many restrictions. Their limitations are deliberately foisted on them by their immediate kin or spouse. On the other hand, the women portrayed in the short stories also hurdle challenges they themselves have created or brought upon themselves.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, for example, the author presents the protagonist as weak or on the brink of a nervous breakdown. In the beginning of the story, when the protagonist is brought to a country home, she appears in control of her mental faculties.

She even opines, “ Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” (Gilman, 2008, p. 2). Her husband, however, confines her to the upper story of the house and prohibits, albeit in his loving and gentle manner, anything that may tax her mentally. The woman’s craving for social interaction and stimulus becomes more pronounced as the days pass, yet she allows her husband to direct all her actions.

The woman’s dismal future is reflected in the way she sees the wallpaper in the house where she is confined to recuperate: “ It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in other” (Gilman, 2008, p. 5).

The woman then begins to imagine things and becomes neurotic. This emphasizes how, when placed under repressive circumstances, the fairer gender may fall apart. In an ironic twist at the end of the story, though, the husband's fainting spell and the woman's movement of creeping over him denotes that women can have the upper hand over her male counterpart if she wills it.

The other literary selection, *Girl*, Jamaica Kincaid, likewise illustrates how women are expected to follow so many rules and conform to what tradition and society dictate. Just like in *The Yellow Wallpaper* where the main character indicates a feeling of tiredness at being manipulated and repressed, the protagonist in *Girl* who is a young girl receiving countless reminders answers back her mother for berating her every move, but ends up being castigated more.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the husband-wife relation is amiable. In fact, the husband has the best intention for his wife, but the worst harm results from it unknowingly sends her spiraling out of control by confining her. In contrast, *Girl* uses the mother-daughter tandem to illustrate the common practice adopted by most cultures of ingraining good manners, blind obedience, and prescribed roles to female members of the family.

In Kincaid's *Girl*, the daughter is admonished by her mother to move and behave in ladylike manner. Her movements – from the way she walks and carries herself, to the household chores she is expected to perform, to how to smile to certain people, to reacting to a man's bullying and even loving a man – are all dictated to her.

Offhand, it is a typical scene of a mother giving numerous pieces of advice to her daughter, but the story presents the parent treating the young girl with a condescending attitude. The mother keeps interjecting that the girl is bound to become the slut she is “so bent on becoming” (Kincaid, 2005, p. 257) if the proper rules of conduct and self-control are not followed.

In a sense, the mother portrayed in the story is depicted as the judgmental type who does not allow her daughter free creative expression. Kincaid dwells on the singular theme of just how powerless women were centuries ago.

Women back then had no voice of their own and were confined to doing traditional tasks like keeping the home neat and orderly and being prim and proper or acting in a refined manner. In both *Girl* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the suppressive societal attitude towards women of a bygone era – who are seen as meek and subservient individuals unable to chart their own destinies – is clearly presented.

Upon closer analysis of two different selections, readers find authors employing a variety of creative techniques that help them dissect different perspectives and gain much clearer understanding of the theme and other key messages.

## References

Gilman, C. (2008). *The yellow wallpaper*. Forgotten Books. Retrieved May 3, 2010, from <http://www.amazon.com/Yellow-Wallpaper-Forgotten-Books/dp/1606802380>.

Kincaid, J. (2005). Girl. In X. J. Kennedy & D. Gioia (Eds.), *Backpack literature: an introduction to fiction, poetry& drama* (p. 257). Pennsylvania: Pearson/Longman.