

# "the yellow wallpaper" a novel by charlotte perkins gilman essay

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



A combination of a thriller and a social drama, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, is mesmerizingly frightening. The novel analyzes the complicated issue of feminism in the conservative society in a very unusual manner. Because of the clever use of literary devices, a simple story was turned into a cautionary tale and a masterpiece of the thriller genre.

To start with, the novel contains a brief allusion to the Holy Virgin, which Gilman makes me mentioning the narrator's sister, Mary (Gilman 649). In addition, Gilman sets a very dark tone by creating a contrast between the lighthearted atmosphere of the hotel and the depressing state that the narrator is in. The pathetic fallacy also adds to the unsettling contrast, such as the room being "strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" (Gilman 650).

By far the creepiest element of the stylistic choices made by the author, the use of personification deserves a specific mentioning: "The front pattern does move - and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!" (Gilman 634). On a surface, the image of a woman trying to break through her paper-thin prison is solely the product of the narrator's deformed imagination. However, such details as the narrator's insane sympathy for the "vision" indicate that the woman behind the wallpaper is the personification of the lead character's fears and the representation of the demons that the narrator has inside, particularly her desire to come out of her shell and become an active member of the society: "[...] she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight. [...] It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!" (Gilman 654).

As insane as this statement is, it points to the social restrictions imposed on women, the process of "creeping," possibly signifying the intent to enter the domain traditionally defined as the "male" one (Bailey 28). Thus, the imagery, particularly the woman behind the wallpaper, is a metonymic representation of social boundaries that most women had to face at the time, and a very powerful one at that - Gilman clearly knew the power of people's superstition and fear of the supernatural.

Another major part of what can be read between the lines of Gilman's story, the metaphor has also played a great role in the creation of the surreal atmosphere and the development of key ideas. The final and by far the most memorable scene of the lead character crawling over her husband's presumably unconscious (or, arguably, dead) body can be interpreted as a metaphor for the deplorable outcomes that the unwillingness to recognize women's rights may lead to. It would be a mistake to consider the ending of the story a direct threat; instead, it should be viewed as a cautionary tale about the peril of intolerance.

The rest of the literary devices used throughout the novel, though less noticeable than the ones listed above, also add to the disturbing impression that the novel leaves. For instance, the use of epithets is, at the very least, thought-provoking. The way in which the narrator describes the setting and the careful choice of epithets used to depict the room and especially the color of the wallpaper, such as "repellant" (Gilman 649) and "smoldering unclean" (Gilman 649) contributes to building the suspense that will finally resolve in tragedy. The epithets used to depict the environment of the hotel

in general also leave a very depressing impression: the trees are " gnarly" (Gilman 649), the arbors are " deep-shaded" and " mysterious" (Gilman 649), etc.

The last, but definitely not the least, the simile is also used a lot throughout the novel. This stylistic choice must have been made in order to make the reader enter the world of descending madness that the protagonist lives in: " The pattern lolls like a broken neck" (Gilman 649). In addition to similes, Gilman also uses a variety of analogies, such as the parallels between the life that the narrator leads and the role of women in the society of the time: " Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able, - to dress and entertain, and order things" (Gilman 649).

One of the most memorable novels mixing the genres of a tragedy and a thriller, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, clearly leaves a very disturbing feeling. However, these are not the supernatural elements that scare the audience, but the depth of insanity caused by injustice. The novel shows what may happen once prejudice takes its toll over society, and it does so in a disturbingly graphic manner.

Bailey, Dale. *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*. Madison, WI; University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Print.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. 1982. Web.