

Essay on the first person perspective in the yellow wallpaper

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



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Charlotte Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" tells the tale of a young married woman who suffers from what is presumed to be post-partum depression. Her physician husband decides to sequester her for a 'rest cure' in their summer home, which turns out to backfire when she starts to slowly go insane. The story takes the form of journal entries denoting her gradual slide into madness, as she hallucinates and forms paranoid thoughts about her husband and the outside world. The audience sees all of this through a first-person perspective that allows us to see inside the mind of the protagonist, sharing her slow mental collapse and allowing them to feel everything that she is going through. This creates a sympathy for the protagonist that would not otherwise have been as present if the story were told from any other perspective.

At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is excited, even chipper, about the prospect of going to this summer home with John, her husband - however, she is suspicious from the start about why they are going there. "I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it. Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?" (Gilman, p. 1). The first person perspective lends a wonderful bit of foreshadowing, as the protagonist senses that something is wrong, letting the audience know, but she cannot quite articulate it.

The protagonist's relationship with the color yellow is a big part of the story, especially as more and more time passes and she becomes increasingly paranoid. When she first enters the room, she has a violently negative reaction to the titular wallpaper - "The color is repellent, almost revolting: a

smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight” (Gilman, p. 4). Time goes on, and John’s promise to change the wallpaper has not been fulfilled, leaving the otherwise nice room with a nagging flaw that exacerbates her growing insanity – “ I’m really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper” (Gilman, p. 6).

The first person perspective allows the audience to go on the complete emotional journey with the protagonist – nothing is left out, no matter how gruesome or uncomfortable. Suspicion turns to anger and hatred, as the protagonist starts to wonder about the woman she sees behind the yellow wallpaper, even relating to it in her own isolation. “ I don’t blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!” (Gilman, p. 21).

She also has her lucid moments – the punctuation of her continuing insanity with moments of clarity makes the journey even more dangerous, as she recognizes what is happening to her, but seemingly cannot stop it. “ I wish I could get well faster,” says the protagonist at one point in a fit of pique (Gilman, p. 7). However, due to her own depression and madness, we see her slowly believe that there are women in the wallpaper, that

The protagonist feels extremely helpless, especially because her husband will not see to her needs or care about what is happening to her. However, she never blames him, which is the most dangerous thing of all, as it allows him to continue ignoring her. With the help of the first-person perspective, we see the conflict she has with her husband, subconsciously suspecting he

is neglecting her while still excusing his behavior. “ I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can” (Gilman, p. 17).

In the end, she is extremely excited by her situation regarding the wallpaper – the first-person perspective allows us to see inside her mind and learn her opinions on the situation. “ Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was” (Gilman, p. 18). If this story were told from a third-person perspective, we would simply see a woman going mad in a room, not knowing her innermost thoughts. In this way, however, Gilman allows the woman’s mind to become the journey itself; the arc of the plot is her own descent into madness, rather than merely becoming cooped up in a summer home.

Works Cited

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The yellow wallpaper* . [1st ed. New York: Feminist Press, 1973. Print.