

# Feminist criticism: the yellow wallpaper

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The Feminist Movement of the early 20th century brought about ideas that were not easily accepted, difficult to comprehend, and subject to misinterpretation. One such story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* was written in 1899 by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and pertains to the latter. The prose was written in a journal-style format to convey private and honest ideas of what some people were really thinking and life like details made the narrator (Jane) very visible mentally. But blame on the events that actually occurred in the story made the message seem psychotic; the piece was brushed aside.

Not until late into the First Wave of the feminist movement did contextualized references begin to carry weight for readers and specifically, women. Actual quotes, personal feelings, dialogue, symbols, and ideas in setting were used in the composition to describe life in a man's world; at least for the era. In the context of dialogue, the story quietly addresses society's ideas but immediately giving an alternative. Jane: " Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good." The author is rebelling against the decisions of two notable physicians, both male.

" There comes John, and I must but this away, -he hates for me to have a word." John does not like for her to have her own ideas. Nonviolent oppression for women was what was expected. John: " I don't know why I should write this. I don't want to. I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd.” John does not support her ideas. She’s afraid to even bring it up in front of him. “...but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know.

You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you.” He talks down to her, calling her affectionate names and trying to calm her by the authority of a physician. The last phrase is about how HE feels about her, ignoring what she feels about herself. Jennie: “ And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

” Jennie you can imagine is a mild-mannered woman who understands it is a man’s world and will not say anything to displease. Odd how John doesn’t help out around the house at all but Jennie takes care of all the homely matters. As stated, this old fable had several nuances of dialogue that must be perceived with reference to understand what the author was really trying to say. In the story, the use of the word “ Physician” is thrown around a lot, and possibly to symbolize the authority granted to them through a license, but not over autonomy, yet over women. This is due to the correlation that doctors require several years of schooling, and the profession carries a noble understanding of human physiology. And even in the use of the word “ One”, the narrator tries to separate herself from ideals formed in her own mind to feel less guilty about forming such ideas.

This separation of accountable thoughts makes it easier for Jane to express how she really feels, because anyone who has already converted into the mindset of the era would find offense in her views. This includes John and

Jennie, who both have closed their minds on the subject. Lastly, key points are to be noted in *The Yellow Wallpaper* to prove the story was not written about craziness but to present an idea with a safe cover. At the point where Jane begins to refer to herself as “ I” in her writings, she starts to take ownership in her ideas. This is symbolic to that she has finally lost it, and the stages of insanity will soon follow. The metaphor behind her becoming insane is relatable that losing your private thought was the equivalent to going crazy.

A mental slave, so to speak. The wallpaper itself-herself-whatever it likes to be referred as is actually a mirror of her inhibitions in life and the inability to be socially conformed. As she tries to shake the wallpaper, Jane is ideologically trying to ‘ help’ her break free. Eventually, the woman trapped in the paper becomes her, [the author] stating more obviously that she feels trapped, aching to be free to a world of equality. To conclude, the idea of general negativity towards woman’s individual thought has been cast over them due to the natural primal instinct all men have of male dominance.

Women are in a spectrum that is exempt from these values, but because we are not aware of the underlying reason they fall victim. Luckily women have kept their morale up in this argument and have made many triumphs. *The Yellow Wallpaper* makes an excellent example of one’s suffering in a struggle for humane and reasonable rights granted to people. Through symbolic gestures, suggestive wordplay, evocative dialogue and figurative ideals Gilman illustrates a vivid picture no longer live today, but the standard over 100 years ago.