

Conflict in the yellow wallpaper

Literature, American Literature



In Charlotte Perkins Stetson's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, conflict plays a significant role in the narrator's worsening physical and mental condition. The author has used a diary format to give readers incredible insight into Jane's state of mind. Stetson inserts John's voice into his wife's confidential thoughts, emphasising the control he has over her. Stetson's use of symbolism, as well as several other literary devices, successfully portrays the protagonists' internal conflict.

Stetson has effectively used a diary format in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, to demonstrate the effect of conflict on the protagonist's physical and emotional wellbeing. A diary is a book in which one records their significant experiences and emotions. The author did this to offer reader's a personal and intimate look into Jane's thoughts and feelings. This is particularly emphasised through the author's use of tone, and how it changes as Jane's psychological condition worsens. This is clear when the narrator expresses herself like " Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees," (p. 649) at the beginning of the story. The term ' riotous' refers to something that is wild and uncontrollable; like how the garden is characterised. This contrasts with the nature of the nurse; from which the narrator observes the flowers and trees constantly growing. The language that Stetson has used is effective in highlighting the dichotomy between Jane's desire for freedom and her life of confinement. However, towards the end of the story, the tone becomes hastened and desperate, through the author's use of short and disconnected sentences. This is evident in " I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again. How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed! But I must get to work.” (p. 655) These four sentences; while they are loosely connected, are all separate thoughts and nothing like the aforementioned coherent expression. From this, it is clear that she is not as lucid as she was previously, Stetson has effectively used these literary devices to represent the obvious effect that conflict has on one’s wellbeing.

Following on from above, the diary entry is written from Jane’s perspective, however, Stetson has successfully used this to inject John’s voice even into his wife’s most intimate thoughts, emphasising the conflict between them. The author overshadowed the narrator’s voice as it illustrates the gender roles present at the time this story was published, in 1892. The control that John has over his wife is evident when Stetson juxtaposes, “ He is very careful and loving,” (p. 648) which implies that John is a great husband and they have an amazing relationship, with “ hardly lets me stir without special direction,” in which the hyperbole presents readers with an image of John’s controlling nature. This emphasises Jane’s submissive role within their marriage, further exaggerated through “ Personally, I disagree with their ideas.” (p. 648) The uncertainty over “ I take phosphates or phosphites – whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “ work” until I am well again,” (p. 648) is Stetson’s way of showing readers that Jane has no say in how she is treated; she does not even know what she is taking, she is just doing what her husband says. Throughout the story, the author used one-line paragraphs and sentences with choppy rhythm, evident in “ It is not bad – at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met,” (p. 654) to bring forth

Jane's agitated state of mind and the hurried nature of the writing in her secret journal. This helps to reiterate the conflict between Jane and John.

Jane's internal conflict is most effectively represented by the yellow wallpaper discussed throughout the narrative. The wallpaper represents the structure of family, medicine, and society, in which the narrator finds herself trapped. Stetson has skilfully used this hideous and terrifying wallpaper as a symbol of the domestic life that traps so many women. This is evident in "There are things in that paper," (p. 652) where the 'things' are a clear example of the author's use of irony, as they represent both the mysterious woman that Jane sees and the disturbing ideas that she is beginning to understand. The quote "nobody knows but me" (p. 652) shows readers that the narrator is frightened of what her secret might imply, and through "the dim shapes get clearer every day," (p. 652) she is again trying to deny her growing insight. From this we can see that Jane is being pulled further and further into her own fantasy, and like the woman in her imagination, is stuck in a situation where escape is inconceivable. In the quote "It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you," (p. 653) the author's use of second-person narration provides readers with a firsthand look at Jane's descent into madness. Through the author's use of personification, words like 'slaps,' 'knocks,' and 'tramples,' help readers grasp the metaphorical pain the wallpaper causes the narrator. Using simile, Stetson compares the wallpaper to a nightmare, this demonstrates the amount of discomfort it causes Jane, evident in "It is like a bad dream." (p. 653) So, in addition to symbolism, Stetson has used a combination of personification, second-

person narration and simile to emphasise how the wallpaper tortures Jane, thereby, presenting the narrator's internal conflict.

Despite being published over a century ago, many of the issues addressed in Charlotte Perkins Stetson's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, are still prevalent today, the main one being the major role that conflict plays in the deterioration of both a person's physical and mental health. This is emphasised through the diary format in which the story is written, this gives readers an in-depth look into the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Jane and John's strained relationship is effectively depicted through the author's ability to integrate John's voice into his wife's most private thoughts, this is also her way of critiquing late 19th century gender roles. And by using literary devices such as symbolism and personification, Stetson was able to clearly represent the narrator's internal conflict.