

Analysis of the yellow wallpaper

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



Gilman wrote this story as a symbol of the oppression women face in a society full of paternalism over women. The narrator, a woman, feels powerless against her husband (John), who determines what she does, who she sees, and where she goes while she is recovering from her illness. She is misdiagnosed with hysteria, a term meant to belittle women for being overly emotional. Her only path to freedom is insanity.

The major function of John's control over her, is him restraining her from writing. She feels writing would help her recover, but John believes it only saps her strength. He suppresses her creativity and intellect and forces her into the position of a powerless wife. The act of hiding her writing whenever John is around is similar to the way literary women in the 18th-century, and the late 19th-century had to hide their work from their families.

The narrator feels like she is imprisoned, not being able to control her mind or her thoughts, " It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people...I never saw such a garden - large and shady, full of box-bordered paths..." Everything to the narrator seems like a prison; she feels like she is just a prisoner being held captive in her cell (which is her room). The wallpaper is also beginning to take a key position in her mind and reality. She is beginning to feel as if the wallpaper was watching her. Not only do John and Jennie watch her, but now the wallpaper. That really gives her that sense of imprisonment.

The narrator finds something strange on a moonlight evening that prove to be of importance later. Night, in literature, is typically viewed as an escape from the conscious order of the day; at night the subconscious runs wild with dreams. The moon tends to symbolize female intuition and sensitivity.

Sunshine dominates the nursery during the day, much as John dominates the narrator during the day as he gives her “ a schedule prescription for each hour in the day.” Thus, sunshine is associated with ordered, masculine oppression, while the night seems to liberate the narrator. Sunshine is also equated with the yellow wallpaper, which is “ faded by the slow-turning sunlight.” The “ sickly sulphur tint” of the wallpaper is also associated with illness. When the narrator attempts to convince John to repaper the nursery, John rejects her request demonstrating his continued his superiority over her.

The narrator also discovers that there is a woman in the wallpaper.

Overtime, it becomes clear that the woman in the wallpaper represents feminine imprisonment. As her narrative grows more chaotic, the narrator starts to identify with the woman in the wallpaper. The narrator’s sense of reality has become warped by the wallpaper. No longer recognizing herself as ill, she decides that John and Jennie are the ones being affected by the wallpaper.

The narrator’s insanity reaches its high as she identifies completely with the woman in the wallpaper. She believes that not only has the woman come out of the wallpaper, but she has as well. When she states that she has escaped from the wallpaper despite John and Jennie, she suggests that they and the

representation of ideal domesticity has contributed to her imprisonment. She allowed John and social expectations to dominate her but now she and the other woman that were “creeping” have now broken free. This indicates that feminism needed to “creep” about secretly before it could be acknowledged and respected.

After seeing the narrator literally crawl and creep on the floor at the end, caused John to faint. This is a stereotypical show of weakness of woman. The narrator had finally shown dominance in her marriage and with John unconscious on the floor, her imaginative restraints were finally loose; and her continual “creeping” over John's body represented her liberation and to show his inferiority.