

# The yellow wallpaper by charlotte perkins gilman essay

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman In every well-written piece of literature, all the literary elements contribute to effective storytelling. An example of such literature is the short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman entitled The Yellow Wallpaper. The story is about the repression of women during the 19th century. In this text, the setting serves a significant purpose in telling the story. In The Yellow Wallpaper, the setting of the story helps convey to the readers the plight of women in the 19th century.

The setting of The Yellow Wallpaper was not indicated in the text. However, Gilman provided her readers with enough context clues to determine the location of her unnamed narrator. In the beginning of the story, the protagonist stated that she was temporarily staying in a “ colonial mansion” for the summer; she moved into the residence to recover from her condition called “ temporary nervous depression” (Gilman, 1997, p. 1).

The exact location of the mansion was not disclosed, but it was suggested that the property was situated somewhere in rural America. The residence was apparently isolated, as the narrator described the place as located “ three miles from the village” (Gilman, 1997, p. 2).

According to the narrator, the residence was similar to an English townhouse (Gilman, 1997). The environment of the mansion is rather opulent. Based on the descriptions given by the narrator, the reader would get the impression that the heroine was rich enough to live in such place. The narrator spoke of the impressive spacious garden with its arbors and paths (Gilman, 1997). There were also greenhouses in the estate. One of the rooms of the house was situated near the piazza, with roses placed

throughout the window. Meanwhile, the narrator's room was spacious; it was well-lit and well-ventilated due to the windows (Gilman, 1997).

With its well-maintained gardens and homely ambience, the property clearly creates a domestic atmosphere. The setting of the story and the marriage between the nameless narrator and her husband are similar. From the surface, everything about the mansion is pleasant. It seems like a fascinating and peaceful place to be. However, upon closer inspection, one would find that such residence is not as pleasant as it appeared to be. The marriage is just as deceiving as the estate. At first glance, the reader may consider that the narrator's marriage was perfect. John may initially seem like the perfect husband.

Through careful analysis, one would discover that the marriage was flawed, because the narrator was clearly oppressed by her husband. John was portrayed in the story as a good husband. According to the narrator, he was "very careful and loving" (Gilman, 1997, p. 2). The narrator added that it was her husband's decision to stay at the mansion so she could "have perfect rest and all the air I could get" (Gilman, 1997, p.

2). Nonetheless, John was not as good as he was seemed to be. He did not treat his wife as an equal; he considered the narrator as a helpless human being who is not capable of making decisions for herself. For instance, he called his wife inappropriate names. In the text, he called her "blessed little goose" and "little girl" (Gilman, 1997, p.

4, 8). These names indicate that John never considered her wife to be a capable adult; to him, she was but a child to be cared for. The oppression of the narrator was most evident in the instances wherein she was manipulated by her husband John. John proved to be the dictator in her life. She was not allowed to make decisions; it was only he who could make the decisions. In the story, the narrator once implied that John “hardly lets me stir without special direction” (Gilman, 1997, p. 2).

She once expressed her disapproval of the bedroom. She told her husband that she preferred the other room, “but John would not hear of it” (Gilman, 1997, p. 2). John also forbade the narrator from doing any creative endeavors; according to the narrator, “he hates to have me write a word” (Gilman, 1997, p. 3). The situation of the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* was a reflection of the condition of women during the 19th century.

During that era, men and women occupied different realms in society. Men occupied the public realm; only they could get involved in public affairs. Women occupied the private realm; they were limited to the affairs of the household. Their sole role in society was domestic in nature. They were expected to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers properly. Because the public realm granted men to have more power than women, men had come to dominate the women. Just as John had power over his wife, men in the 1800s had control over women. As a result, women were repressed.

Despite its beauty, the mansion served as the domestic prison of the narrator. She was a prisoner in her own home. Her actions were controlled

within the confines of the house. She was restrained by the orders of her husband. The setting of the story echoed the narrator's situation and reasserted the problem of women in the 19th century. Through subtle descriptions, Gilman successfully conveyed the domestic repression of women through the story's setting.

For instance, the narrator mentioned that the mansion resembled an English townhouse. According to her description, "there are hedges and walls and gates that lock" (Gilman, 1997, p. 2). These specific features of the estate insinuate how the house in question was indeed a prison for the narrator.

The hedges, walls and gates all define a closed space. For the narrator, the home was surely a closed space. The house was something she cannot escape from, just as she cannot escape the domestic responsibilities attached to being a woman. In addition, the windows of the room also suggested how the narrator was trapped in the domestic sphere. When the narrator was describing her room, this was what she said: "for the windows are barred for little children" (Gilman, 1997, p. 3).

The barred windows were another feature of the house which implied the domestic imprisonment of the narrator. She had no means of escape. It was mentioned that the window was made as such for the purpose of little children. Since her husband treated her like a child anyway, the barred windows seemed appropriate for the narrator. Hence, the surroundings of the narrator also contributed to the meaning of the story.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the setting helped the readers determine the message of the story. When the details of the picturesque estate were analyzed, one can see that the mansion was actually a domestic prison. Through the setting, Gilman successfully conveyed the repression of 19th century women with her description of the estate in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Reference Gilman, C. P. (1997). *The yellow wallpaper*. In *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories* (pp. 1-16). New York: Courier Dover Publications.