

Feminist literary theory of the yellow wallpaper by charlotte perkins gilman

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“ It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.” (Gilman, 1899) Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived from 1860 to 1935 and was an American author, lecturer, feminist, and also a social reformer. (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) One of her most famous stories was *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The story was about a woman who moved to a summer home with her husband. The husband is very controlling and thinks he knows what is best for the wife, Jane.

Throughout the story, Jane is obsessed with the wallpaper in her bedroom. She studies the patterns and eventually rips it apart and says she is free, as a symbol of her breaking free as a woman. Using feminist criticism, the reader can analyze Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* through character, Dialogue, and Symbols. Also, while reading *The Yellow Wallpaper*, one can find examples of character in terms of feminism. For example, when Jane says “ John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in a marriage,” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) it truly shows how she views herself.

This is an indication that Jane is used to being treated like a child. She is used to being treated like her opinions and thoughts are not important as those of a man’s. Not only does this explain her character, but it explains John’s as well. Her husband obviously doesn’t think much of laughing at her, because it is something that is normal. A lot of men are this way, and feel that they are superior to women, and that is portrayed vividly in this line.

Also, when Jane says “ You see he does not believe I am sick,” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) is primarily an example of John’s character. He causes Jane to accept the fact that he won’t believe her because she is simply a woman.

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He thinks he is much more intelligent than her; therefore he has no reason to believe what she thinks. Another aspect of reader-response criticism present in this story is dialogue. The way the characters interact verbally with each other really helps one see the feminist qualities of the story.

For example, John calls Jane a “Blessed little goose.” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) Clearly in this line, John is belittling her and treating her like a little girl. He is probably making her feel like she is no more intelligent than a child. Of course, this is not the case, but Jane accepts it. Also, John says “You know this place is doing you good, and really dear, I don’t care to renovate the house for just a three months’ rental.” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) This is a great example of the control John has over Jane.

John is assuming that he knows what’s best for his wife, despite what she says. Also, he is not taking how she feels seriously and instead cares about wasting time and money on renovation. This dialogue is especially important because it is a very informal conversation. This must be the way John speaks to his wife on a daily basis, and it is obviously not right. Symbolism is another way readers can analyze the story *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

There are many symbols present in this reading, most of which resemble aspects of feminism, whether they are negative or positive. One example includes when the author writes “This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had.” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) Jane speaks about the wallpaper as if it is something nagging at her, like she knows breaking out is something she needs to do but is afraid. It seems as if the wallpaper being there, covering the wall (and needing to be peeled off) resembles her. She

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knows she is being treated unfairly and she knows she can be so much more successful in life if only she could break free. Then Jane says “ I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow the pattern about an hour”.

(Charlotte Perkins Gilman) This is interesting because it seems when Jane speaks about the bed, she is really speaking about her life and marriage. She is chained down by her husband and immovable. She wants to move, but there is something holding her back. When reading *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one can use feminist criticism to analyze the story through Character, Dialogue, and Symbol. This story is very influential in terms of feminism. There are clear representations of both a misogynistic man and a weak woman.

In the end however, the woman breaks free and becomes independent from the man. It is a very hopeful story and people can learn a lot about individualism. It's important to understand the different characters involved in all types of feminist literature.