



## The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman*

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## **The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories** Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Best known for the 1892 title story of this collection, a harrowing tale of a woman's descent into madness, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote more than 200 other short stories. Seven of her finest are reprinted here.

Written from a feminist perspective, often focusing on the inferior status accorded to women by society, the tales include "turned," an ironic story with a startling twist, in which a husband seduces and impregnates a naïve servant; "Cottagette," concerning the romance of a young artist and a man who's apparently too good to be true; "Mr. Peebles' Heart," a liberating tale of a fiftyish shopkeeper whose sister-in-law, a doctor, persuades him to take a solo trip to Europe, with revivifying results; "The Yellow Wallpaper"; and three other outstanding stories.

These charming tales are not only highly readable and full of humor and invention, but also offer ample food for thought about the social, economic, and personal relationship of men and women — and how they might be improved.

The yellow wallpaper

Three Thanksgivings

The cottagette

Turned

Making a change

If I were a man

Mr. Peebles' heart.

## **The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories Details**

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## From Reader Review The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories for online ebook

### Gloria Mundi says

This is a short story about a woman's descent into madness and I have just the t-shirt slogan for the protagonist:

#### **EXCUSE ME. I HAVE TO GO AND MAKE A SCENE.**

Because that's what I wanted her to do throughout, but we cannot really expect that from a genteel 19th century lady and that is when the story was written. So does that mean that it is now outdated and irrelevant to us emancipated 21st century women?

Personally, I have gone through a period in my life when I took some pretty heavy drugs, stayed up all night staring at the walls (fortunately, not covered in hideous yellow paper) and writing random quotes and poetry on them and indulged in a spot of self-mutilation. I also went through a mild form of "baby blues" after my daughter was born, mainly just bursting into tears whenever anyone said boo to me. I don't know whether I was *technically* depressed (is there such a thing? I feel there must be, as opposed to just a naturally sad and gloomy person with a tendency for weirdness who is feeling down, which may, I feel, be my particular diagnosis or, maybe, the term I am looking for is medically?) but, in any case, I was expecting to *relate*.

And do you know what, I actually did. What I think worked brilliantly in this story, frighteningly so, is the description of *how* the protagonist loses her mind by concentrating on the wallpaper, following its patterns, imbuing them with meaning and projecting and externalising her own problems through it. As I said, I used to have a bit of a thing for walls myself (though, clearly, nowhere near to the extent of the heroine, as I am still a sane and functioning member of society, trust me) and I found this aspect of the story, extremely creepy, recognisable and accurate.

I could even relate to the submissiveness and the apathy, because I can clearly remember feeling exactly that in my lower moments. That feeling of being completely separate from the whole world and honestly not caring one way or the other, of wanting to just sit there and being too tired to really do or feel anything. The heroine here seems to recognise what is happening, that what her physician husband prescribes as the cure is really not good for her but doesn't really have the energy or the strength of will to stage any sort of opposition other than her little rebellion in writing the journal entries. And, as much as I wanted her to scream and rant and rave, what Gilman writes is actually a much more accurate description of my own experience of the apathy of depression.

I also admired the disjointed haunted way in which the story is constructed leaving the reader with multiple questions to ponder. Is she really going mad? Would she still be going mad if she were not confined to a room and lacking any physical and intellectual stimulation? Is her husband a sinister jailer or a loving spouse earnestly trying to help her? Is he even really her husband? And what happens at the end is anyone's guess.  
(view spoiler)

P.S. While I thoroughly enjoyed this particular story and generally enjoy books and movies about descents into madness, I also find the proliferation of mad women in film and literature somewhat disquieting. I have not done any sort of comprehensive analysis but I have personally come across many more insane female characters than male. And the women never seem to go mad in quite the same way men do either because

they are so clever (as in *A Beautiful Mind*) or so brave (as in the case of shell shock (which is, I think, a form of male hysteria, but hysteria was, clearly, a term that was too female to be applied to soldiers) in e.g. *Catch-22*) or because they actually think that they are turning into a woman (as in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*). The *Yellow Paper* made me want to read something academic on the subject of women and madness. If anyone is able to recommend anything good on this topic, I am open to suggestions.

P.P.S. I only read the title story, so this review and rating only relate to that.

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## **Apatt says**

*“I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin. It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide-- plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.”*

Oh my gawd! This story creeped me out! I have never heard of *The Yellow Wallpaper* until I saw this post Reddit's “r/books”, the books discussion forum. After reading a few comments I decided to save it for reading in October when I tend to be in the mood for spooky reads.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* is about a poor lady with a nervous disposition moving into a creepy (but not haunted) mansion with her husband and sister in law. She is left to her own devices much of the time with little to do and she while away the time in her room with its “disturbing” yellow wallpaper. Her husband, a doctor, instructs her to get a lot of rest and refrain from doing any work. In the absence of anything to occupy her mind, she contemplates the colour and pattern of the wallpaper and begins to “see things”.

This is a very effective and disturbing 1892 short story. The author, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, wanted to do more than give you the willies, however. The story is her exploration of how women with mental health issues are condescended to and not taken seriously by the medical profession and even men in general, including those who love them.

If you are looking for a quick, creepy read in a more psychological horror vein, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is just what the doctor ordered. F\*ck the “rest cure”, man.

Art by fit51391

### **Notes:**

- Sorry I can't review the entire “*The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*” collection, only have access to this story.
- This story is in the public domain, grab a copy from Project Gutenberg. An audiobook version is also available at Librivox .

### **Quotes:**

“John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and

*habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try."*

*"But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it KNEW what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down."*

*"Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with delirium tremens—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity."*

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

\*PREFACE TO REVIEW: I have a soft spot for literature about descents into madness. I blame it on my mother taking me to see *Lost Highway* in the theater at a young and tender age. I also blame this film, to a larger extent, on my fashion sense from then to now. Which is to say, I blame my mom. Who is, in fact, more sane than most.\*

Ah, suicide authors! You do know madness so!!! There have been a few times where I have personally thought that I was going off my rocker, but considering that I've yet to seal my (nonexistent) children into a room so I can gas myself into the ever-receptive arms of Death...or shot myself when I found out I had cancer...or poisoned myself with CHLOROFORM when I found out I had cancer like Gilman did (I don't have cancer), then I guess I'm doing fine, and far from at risk of being a mad genius whose descriptive abilities concerning my slow backward crawl away from the really real realities of for real realness are the first step in accepting my problem, which would be (and is not) insanity. Well, you can't win 'em all, I guess. For example, my rational mind begs me to wonder why "in the hell" Gilman opted for chloroform. I mean if I were crazy (WHICH I'M NOT, YOU WILL RECALL), I could think of much more fashionable, delightful, actually-seeing-angels-and-heaven-on-your-way-out-of-this-mortal-coil-and-into-the-worm-farm ways to go. Just saying, you should always explore all of your options before making a firm decision on any matter...particularly those of notable importance.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* is a well-written and I'm sure at the time quite shocking and groundbreaking feminist rebel-yell. The title story is the bestestest one...it concerns a crazy bitch who goes all crazy like women tend to do (KIDDING, GOODREADS TROLLS! KEEP YOUR CORSETS ON AND CHILL, BABY GIRLS!) The description of the narrator's break with reality is beautifully constructed, exploring the process of "reasoning" that leads a crazy person to firmly believe that they are not crazy, because they've been so gall-darn "rational" the whole time (as you will recall, I myself am not crazy. Trust me, I've thought it through). The rest of the stories present powerful critiques of male/female power dynamics, as well as female/female dynamics from the most sincere to the most socially fabricated, destructive and (sadly) often digested. It says to the readers (consider the audience...1890's folks) "How about NOT THAT. Have you ever considered NOT THAT? Maybe that is a poisonous thought-pattern worthy of, perhaps, a consideration of exploring whatever is NOT THAT." A message worth hearing, and which left its mark on perceptions of gender and identity from 1892 forward. You can't really criticize something like that, can you?

A CRITICISM: There is one story in the book called "Turned" which tells of a married couple and their adopted-from-the-streets-mega-hot-girl-daughter-figure. \*SPOILER ALERT\* Daddy-figure knocks her up. Mommy Dearest finds out, and is a wee bit upset. Here is this girl that she had saved from a life of poverty, personally educated, fed, clothed, the WORKS...all of this only to find out that the ungrateful little brat doll has been fucking your husband? WTF!!?!?!, you say! Yeah, that's right. It's called righteous vindication, and she deserved to experience and work through every bit of her initial feelings of anger. THEY WERE WELL DESERVED. However, Gilman's perspective is that the only person who has done anything wrong is the father-figure. I know, you may be thinking "I smell a Humbert Humbert," but let me fill you in on a little detail. The character being presented as a victim of the savageries of \*the male sex\* so to speak is 18 years old. Not 12. Not 14. Not 5. She is EIGHTEEN. They say that thirty is the new twenty, which would lead me to believe that in 1892, this poor, innocent "victim" was approaching her 30's as far as everyone else was concerned. Despite this fact, the mother changes her mind, puts on her man-hater suit, and takes the young WOMAN away and raises the child with her, abandoning the man to dwell in his regret without giving him a single opportunity to be involved in the life of his child. This rubbed me the wrong way, and it is my one truly deep gripe with this book. It just seemed so, forgive me but...femi-nazi. Pardon the cliche, but they say "it takes two to tango" for a reason, people.

In short, read it. It only takes an hour or two. And never assume you can get away with cheating (especially if you're living it up in the pre-birth control days, thankyouverymuch Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the ensuing feminists you directly inspired). This ramble is over.

**Shovelmonkey1 says**

Ok all jokes aside, mental health is a serious issue and something which is more fragile than we realise - do not take it for granted people. We are lucky enough to live in a time when people recognise and understand depression and constructive, helpful treatments can be offered. Unfortunately for Charlotte Perkins Gilman, she inhabited the tail end of the Victorian Period when depression, post-natal or otherwise was a totally mysterious and misunderstood thing. A perfect Victorian solution to outward displays of "unusualness" was to put you in an assylum/prison/attic/foreign country (delete as viable depending on income and social status) and then just tell the neighbours that you were either indisposed for a reaaaaaaalllly long time, or that you were having a "little holiday". Similar to the little holiday you got sent on if you managed to get knocked up without having bagged yourself a husband first. Basically, you were disappeared for a while thus making everyone feel that society had been saved the awful sight of you making a show of yourself. Phew, well we wouldn't want to upset society now, heaven forbid!

The Yellow Wallpaper is Perkins Gilmans attempt to express the hopelessness of mental illness; effectively an invisible, inescapable cage around your mind (reflected by the imagery of the caged in woman locked behind the patterns in the wallpaper), which no one in the 1890s was capable of diagnosing correctly. Gilmans suffered from depression and so knew what she was writing about. I do always struggle with the idea of the self restraint which was exhibited by many of these women, the character in the Yellow Wallpaper included. If someone had repeatedly patronised me and told me that really there was nothing wrong with me apart from a mild case of nerves and the tendency to be a bit hysterical, I'd have probably

reacted by shouting

"HOW'S THIS FOR HYSTERICAL MOTHER F\*CKER", before destroying all the furniture in the room. This snippet of text is short, sharp and truly sad with a suitably ambiguous ending, after all where does the madness end?

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### Ron says

5 stars for **The Yellow Wallpaper** - Excellent short story. After looking into Gilman's traumatic inspiration for writing it, I was wowed.

4 stars for the other stories included in this small book - all were good.

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### David Schaafsma says

The Yellow Wallpaper, first published in 1992, is now a staple of middle and high school English classes and college (Gender and )Women's Studies programs, linked to Kate Chopin's The Awakening, Ibsen's The Doll House and similar texts reflecting on the damage patriarchy does to society, especially to women. Gilman wrote a lot of fiction, and also Women and Economics, was a friend of feminist and social reformer Jane Addams, and was increasingly a feminist critic of society.

Gilman also experienced a series of "nervous breakdowns," and was treated for her condition in one of the "best practices" known at the time for women with "melancholia" with a "rest cure," denied access to reading and writing (or basically any kind of stimulation), a practice she features in this autobiographical fictional story.

There are a lot of theories about what is going on in the story: it could be seen as an example of the gothic, worth of Lovecraft, a woman driven slowly by the patterns in the wallpaper in the room where she is kept isolated by her doctor husband. (She thinks it is a former nursery because there are bars on the windows, and one idea is the large room was a gymnasium, because there are iron rings on the walls; hey, is this really a sanitarium her husband has put her in?) She, who just recently gave birth to a baby, may have Post Partum Depression, which would not have been a diagnosis 100 years ago.

She may be driven crazy by her infantilizing, hyper-rational husband, who might be seen as an emblem of the patriarchy, which has become the conventional reading, and mine. It is convincingly chilling, regardless of your interpretation.

I've read it several times over the years, most recently for a class I am teaching on madness in literature.

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### Diane says

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a powerful short story about a woman going mad, in part because she's not

allowed to do anything. Gilman did a beautiful job showing how frustrating it was when the woman's concerns weren't taken seriously, both by her husband and by others. The story is written as an argument against restricting women from activities — commanding them to "rest" isn't always restful; it's maddening.

I first read this story in high school, but I'm quite certain I didn't really understand it or fully appreciate it back then. Rereading it as an adult, after having suffered through plenty of mansplaining from coworkers and bosses, made me admire what Gilman accomplished even more. Highly recommended.

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### **Celia says**

The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a prominent American feminist, sociologist, novelist, writer of short stories, poetry, and nonfiction, and a lecturer for social reform.

In her lifetime, she wrote over 200 short stories. 7 of them are included here.

The Yellow Wallpaper. I could have never imagined that a story describing wallpaper could be so engrossing. The descriptions, however, depict a woman going deeper and deeper into madness. And how the misdiagnosis of her husband aided in that descent.

Three Thanksgivings. How a woman triumphs and gets her own way.

The Cottagette. What IS the fastest way to a man's heart?

Turned. A woman betrayed finds an answer.

Making a Change. Two women collaborate to bring happiness to their lives.

If I Were a Man. A woman morphed into a man, hears the men's thoughts.

Mr. Peebles' Heart. A strong, unselfish woman helps an unselfish man and changes her selfish sister, to boot!!

These stories are the workings of a strong, feminist author describing strong women who show their strength through charm and grace. Reminds me of a steel magnolia. The stories read so well and all ended so satisfactorily. Strongly recommend.

5 stars.

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### **Catriona (LittleBookOwl) says**

Woo, intense!

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## ?Eryn says

### 5 STARS

I only had to read *The Yellow Wallpaper* for class, however, as soon as I read that short-story, I knew I would have to read her other stories. Gilman's writing is just *flawless*. I honestly think Charlotte Perkins Gilman is my new favorite short-story author, ever. Her unique ideas and effortless writing, is really something. I mean, she literally has me feeling sorry for the characters in under 10 pages -- that's talent.

**Overall**, this is brilliant! I'll come back to this later and write a proper review when I have more time. For now, I highly recommend YOU (whoever might be reading this) read *The Yellow Wallpaper*, because that's honestly the best short-story I've read all year!

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## Mary says

I read this short story a few months ago on someone's recommendation when I said that the tile design at a hotel was driving me insane.

In retrospect, the tile was fine.

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## Olivier Delaeye says

This well-written story about a depressed and possibly deranged woman who is convinced that the wallpaper of her bedroom is haunted/possessed/inhabited reminded me of China Mieville's Details, which appears in his short story collection Looking for Jake. In both, the devil is indeed in the details...

OLIVIER DELAYE  
Author of the SEBASTEN OF ATLANTIS series

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## BrokenTune says

*"This wallpaper has a kind of subpattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then. But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design."*

Classic horror in small doses provided by an author I had not heard about but who is now someone I will seek out for other stories.

The Yellow Wallpaper tells the story of a woman who is incarcerated in her own house and basically confined to rest in a room without being allowed to do anything. No work, no mental diversion. All because her keepers - mainly her husband - believe this is what is best for her, even though he does not understand the reason for the woman's illness:

*"John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him."*

Over the three months (!) of her confinement, the woman has nothing to occupy her mind except for the room she is in and the wallpaper hanging in pieces:

*"It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls. The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin."*

In fact, the description of the room strongly reminded me of Stefan Zweig's Chess Story, where a prisoner is held and where isolation, inactivity, and a bare room is used as a form of torture. In order to keep sane, the prisoner starts an imaginary chess game against himself, which he cannot win.

So, when reading The Yellow Wallpaper's first few chapters, I suspected that the story might reveal similar motives. As the paragraphs went on, however, I became less interested in the motives of the "carers" (or captors) and instead increasingly interested in the woman's identity. She is not named. Was she a person or was she a ghost?

For a story written in 1890, The Yellow Wallpaper packs a lot of punch. I had not expected that the story was not really written as a horror story, but was written as social commentary based on the author's own experience, which in fact just adds to its poignancy.

When Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote the The Yellow Wallpaper, she knew about suffering from post-natal depression and had first-hand experience of the then newly developed prescription on rest cures - a treatment consisted primarily in isolation, confinement to bed, dieting, electrotherapy and massage - because she had been a patient of the developer of said cure, Silas Weir Mitchell, who even gets a mention in The Yellow Wallpaper.

I guess, this is another instance where fiction and fact are inseparable, and where circumstances that once described the fate of real people will now pass as classic horror.

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### **J.G. Keely says**

Roland Barthes talked about 'writerly' and 'readerly' books. I've struggled for a long time, myself, in trying to come up for terms to talk about the differences between deliberate works and those which are too bumbling, too one-sided, or too ill-informed to make the reader think.

While The Yellow Wallpaper brings up interesting points, it does not really deal with them. The text has become part of the canon not for the ability of the author, which is on the more stimulating end of middling, but because it works as a representational piece of a historical movement.

As early feminism, this work is an undeniable influence. It points out one of the most apparent symptoms of the double-standard implied by the term 'weaker sex'. However, Gilman tends to suggest more than she asks, thus tending toward propaganda.

It may be easy to say this in retrospect when the question "is isolating women and preventing them from taking action really healthy?" was less obvious back then. However, I have always been reticent to rate a work more highly merely because it comes from a different age. Austen, the Brontes, Christina Rossetti, and Woolf all stand on their own merits, after all.

This symbolism by which this story operates is simplistic and repetitive. The opinions expressed are one-sided, leaving little room for interpretation. This is really the author's crime, as she has not tried to open the debate so much as close it, and in imagining her opinion to mark the final word on the matter, has doomed her work to become less and less relevant.

This is the perfect sort of story to teach those who are beginning literary critique, because it does not suggest questions to the reader, but answers. Instead of fostering thought, the work becomes a puzzle with a solution to be worked out, not unlike a math problem. This is useful for the reader trying to understand how texts can create meaning, but under more rigorous critique, it is not deep or varied enough to support more complex readings.

Unfortunately, this means it is also the sort of story that will be loved by people who would rather be answered than questioned. It may have provided something new and intriguing when it was first written, but as a narrow work based on a simplistic sociological concept, can no longer make that claim.

The story is also marked by early signs of the Gothic movement, and lying on the crux of that and Feminism, is not liable to be forgotten. The symbolism it uses is a combination of classical representations of sickness and metaphors of imprisonment. Sickness, imprisonment, and madness are the quintessential concepts explored by the Gothic writers, but this work is again quite narrow in its view. While the later movement was interested in this in the sense of existential alienation, this story is interested in those things not as a deeper psychological question, but as the allegorical state of woman.

Horror is partially defined by the insanity and utter loneliness lurking in everyone's heart, and is not quite so scary when the person is actually alone and mad. Though it does come from the imposition of another person's will, which is horrific, the husband has no desire to be cruel or to harm the woman, nor is such even hinted subconsciously. Of course, many modern feminists would cling to the notion that independent of a man's desire to aid, he can do only harm, making this work an excellent support to their politicized chauvinism.

I won't question the historical importance or influence of this work, but it is literarily very simple. A single page of paper accurately dating the writing of Shakespeare's Hamlet would also be historically important, but just because it is related to the threads of literary history does not mean it is fine literature.

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### **Zaki says**

A very sad tale about a woman who stares at her yellow wallpaper and gets so irritated and frustrated, that after a while she rips it off the wall.

