

## **Narrating Madness: The Ambiguous Narrative Voice of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"**

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* is considered by many to be a pioneering feminist text, although it was first read as a story about madness. Critics such as Paula A. Trenchler and Catherine Golden have argued for the importance of seeing the language of the text as destabilizing and challenging patriarchal language. They see the "contradictions" attributed to the wallpaper as being opposed to cold and rational patriarchal language. Feldstein and Wiesenthal argue from a poststructuralist perspective that it is important to focus on how the text destabilizes language. Both these critical stances work from the assumption that madness is antithetical to language and that the pattern in the wallpaper is representative of this madness, a madness that challenges rational (sometimes interpreted as medical) language. I argue that in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, madness is not antithetical to language, and that the language of the text itself carries structural contradictions that can be seen as "madness." In my reading, the wallpaper functions, not so much as the opposite of rationality, but as something that distracts the reader from the madness embedded in the seemingly rational narrative of this powerfully disturbing short story.

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