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The Significance of Form in Charlotte Perkin Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

In Charlotte Perkin Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" a story of a woman obsessing over yellow wallpaper is told. Looking closer at the story, it is evident that the use of form has been very cleverly used to show the process of the main character losing her mind. Form is defined as "A term designating the organization of the elementary parts of a work of art in a relation to its total effect...The form of the ideas refers to the organization or structure of thought in the work." (Harmon and Holman 221). Gilman uses extremely short paragraphs and forms breaks in the text to show how the main character is losing touch with reality.

The reason short paragraphs are significant in this story is because they represent how the main character's mind is unstable and jumps from thought to thought without logic. Time elapses as well in strange sequences showing that the main character cannot keep her ideas in chronological order. By showing these segmented expressions of thought the author achieves to portray the main character as a paranoid, psychotic person. "I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps because of the wallpaper. [New paragraph starts] It dwells in my mind so!" (Gilman 329). The main character is not only observing the wallpaper, but she is letting the wallpaper take over her mind. These short paragraphs show how the main character separates her ideas in awkward pauses. This shows us evidence that the main character does not think in normal ways. "'I've got out at last,' said I, 'in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'" (Gilman 336). This is another short paragraph. There are many ideas jumping around in this line. There is a great revelation in this line, perhaps the main character's name is Jane. The main character is screaming hysterically that she has escaped not only from her husband, but also from herself, the proper Jane that had to face

society. If these short paragraphs were all grouped together into larger paragraphs then there would not be as great of an effect on the readers. Seeing these dramatic sentences all separated into their own paragraphs draws the attention of the reader to the specific emotion of each sentence. In this story's case the small paragraphs shows how the character feels disconnected from society and also shows her rambling mind going insane.

Gilman also uses em dashes to pause the story to create emphasis on the main character's odd thoughts. The use of em dashes is a part of the author's use of form in the story. The pauses help the readers realize that the mind of the main character is fragmented and damaged. "I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about the hour." (Gilman 329). The main character's thoughts here are not very coherent. At first, it seems that she feels immobilized and stuck on the bed, but then changes the subject and starts to talk about the *moving* patterns on the wallpaper. She shows two opposite states in one sentence, her body is paralyzed, but it is apparent that her mind is wandering freely among the confusion of the wallpaper. The em dashes help point out to the reader that the main character has paused thinking about one thing, and has moved onto thinking about something else.

Gilman uses form to tell a story of a woman suffering from severe mental illness. Short paragraphs help convey the message of hysteria and paranoia because the statements made by the main character are easier to understand. Also, em dashes are a part of the form that help the reader pause and adjust to the main character's abrupt and random change in subject. Since the main character is losing touch with reality, Gilman successfully uses form to aid her readers and to prepare them for the main character's insanity.