

Undergraduate Dissertation

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Power of the Silenced: Examining Madness and the Invisibility of Female Voices in "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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ABSTRACT

Women have been historically oppressed, particularly in the field of literature, due to societal expectations. However, waves of feminism have challenged this oppression by providing them a medium to express their ideas. The different waves of feminism have broadened the voice of women in literature and encouraged gender equality. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the protagonist and narrator's madness can be considered a metaphor for the restriction of female voices and societal constraints on women. This short story explores not only gender stereotypes but also the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's work explores the changes women suffered during post-partum and the difficulties that isolation brought women who were prescribed the "rest cure". Overall, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a critique of women's oppression that emphasises the importance of giving voice to their personal experiences.

Key words: Women, Fiction, Oppression, Feminism

RESUMEN

Las mujeres han sido oprimidas durante la historia, particularmente en el campo de la literatura, debido a las expectativas sociales. Sin embargo, las olas de feminismo han desafiado esta opresión proporcionándoles un medio para expresar sus ideas. Las diferentes olas de feminismo han ampliado la voz de las mujeres en la literatura y han fomentado la igualdad de género. En "The Yellow Wallpaper", la locura de la protagonista y narradora puede considerarse una metáfora de la restricción de las voces femeninas y de las limitaciones sociales impuestas a las mujeres. Este cuento explora no sólo los estereotipos de género sino también el confinamiento de las mujeres en el ámbito doméstico. El trabajo de Charlotte Perkins Gilman explora los cambios que sufrieron las mujeres durante el

postparto y las dificultades del aislamiento en mujeres a las que se les prescribió la "cura del descanso". En general, "El papel pintado amarillo" es una crítica a la opresión de las mujeres que enfatiza la importancia de dar voz a sus experiencias personales.

Palabras clave: Mujeres, Narrativa, Oposición, Feminismo

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1. Introduction

The oppression suffered by women throughout history has left a deep mark in literature. For a long time, the feminine voice has been silenced in different literary genres, such as poetry or fiction. Nevertheless, as the waves of feminism have gained more prominence, they have defied the previous patriarchal domination and have achieved giving voice to women. An accurate example of this fight is the short story titled "The Yellow Wallpaper"(1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In particular, women who tried to write and rebel against conventions were considered mad or improper, primarily by men. Therefore, this work is going to consist of a detailed analysis of the role of madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in connection with the invisibility of the female voice in literature. Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper" depicts her personal encounter with neurasthenia, a disease at the time, and her rejection of the "rest cure" recommended by Dr.S.Weir Mitchell. The narrative explores the negative impact of societal expectations on women's ability to express themselves creatively (Freedman, 2007:128).

In the following part of this work, I am going to provide an introductory section that outlines the structure of my analysis. I am going to describe the situation of women in the nineteenth century by highlighting the works of women writers who fought for women's equality throughout the history of literature. Following the introduction, the analysis is divided into different sections. First, a description of the author's life is made in order to give content and meaning to the story, as it is based on her experiences and mirrors the situation of many women at the time. Following the author's biography, I am going to focus on the short story. In particular, my main concern is going to be the narrator and how the house, the room and the wallpaper itself make her collapse into madness. All of these

aspects are related to the last topic I will consider, postpartum depression, which the author suffered and which often causes women to become delusional.

2. Women and Literature in the 19th century

2.1 The 19th Century

Stereotypes of the nineteenth century created a clear distinction between how the different genders were expected to behave. Men were assumed to be brave and rational, while women were considered weak and emotional. The Victorian idea that women should be relegated to the private sphere and submissive resulted in generations of oppressed women (Shoemaker, 2023). There was a belief that if a woman showed too much interest in learning, she would become mad. Moreover, it is due to the socio-economic conditions that might have driven the narrator of the story that is going to be analysed, and possibly many women, to madness (Treichler, 1984).

Women were expected to stay at home and take care of the children at the time. Hence, there are certain sexist comments in the story, for example when John laughs at his wife: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (Gilman, 1892: 647). She has accepted it as she is a woman of the 19th century, but it can also be taken as an ironic comment if the reader relies on the feminist ideas of the writer. She says that it is what one expects when married; therefore, it was typical of the period to encounter masochist behaviours in couples. On the contrary, when she says "I did write for a while in spite of them" (Gilman, 1892: 628) she is rebelling and stepping out of the traditional role of obedient wife who behaves according to her husband's expectations. She is writing, despite her husband forbidding her to do so in order to cure.

2.2 Women during the Victorian period

The fight for gender equality, and therefore women advocating for their rights, first started in the evolving societies of the Western world. Together with the emergence of different social classes in the nineteenth century, driven by capitalism and the accelerated process of industrialization, Western societies replaced the previous hierarchical structures that were based on rank. This resulted in significant changes for both men and women. In particular, I am going to explain the impact those changes had on women.

There were two different spheres according to their responsibilities and tasks. While men were in charge of the financial matters and public duties, women were responsible for ensuring the well-being of the family and household. This division had been the standard for many centuries, but women's complete financial reliance on men limited their opportunities. Though relatively a small number, some married women were beginning to work to bring an extra income for their families. This raised concerns among men over who had control over their salary and the property of married women, as the law typically granted full ownership to husbands. The right to vote became highly significant as women sought to achieve full citizenship and have the possibility to defend themselves in Parliament to address their needs (Vaid, 1985).

2.3 Waves of Feminism

Feminism comprises a range of important historical moments in which women have fought to increase equality in areas such as politics, economics, and culture. The struggle for these rights continues to this day. It is due to the wide scope of history that feminism

covers, from the nineteenth century up to the present day, that many historians have classified the movement into four separate stages or 'waves'.

The first wave of feminism emerged during the period between 1848 and 1920, known as the era of the suffragettes. Women fiercely campaigned for the right to vote, participating in daring demonstrations to assert their political presence in a time when their rights were limited. Finally, in 1920, the 19th amendment was passed by the American Congress, granting women the right to vote. However, the movement primarily focused on the rights of white women, and it took several more decades for women of colour to achieve similar rights. The second wave of feminism, covering the period from 1963 to the 1980s, saw women advocating for a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles. Betty Friedan's influential book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, inspired women to challenge societal expectations of both marriage and motherhood. Through protests and marches, women demanded greater gender equality, rejecting the standards of appearance and behaviour at the time. Despite progress, racial disparities were still present. However, in the 1990s, a new wave of feminism, the third one, emerged and took into consideration factors such as race, class, and gender. This movement emphasised empowerment and autonomy for women, specifically addressing issues such as workplace discrimination, unequal pay, or the marginalisation they suffered in certain areas by society. The fourth wave of feminism is seen as an extension of the third one, with women insisting on their battle against persistent sexism (Lesso, 2023).

2.4 Women Writers

A literary history of women's writing has become essential in order to challenge the male-dominated canon and give voice to women's experiences. Women writers offer a

unique perspective and alternative narratives, reshaping the history of literature to reflect their priorities (Warner, 2004). Feminism asserts that women are just as capable as men, a notion which has been debated for centuries. Along different historical periods, society believed that women were physically, morally, and intellectually inferior to men, which led to the creation of laws that enforced female submissiveness to fathers and husbands. Despite these norms, women found ways to challenge patriarchal authority, especially those who belonged to the elite classes. Some even rose to positions of power, such as happened to some queens (Freedman, 2007: 13). One of the most relevant female authors in the history of literature could be Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, which is one of the earliest feminist works. The work argues that women should be empowered in different aspects of life, including education, politics, and marriage (Sottosanti, 2023). Feminist writers understood the female body as being both a source of oppression and empowerment. With the rise of medical science in the nineteenth century, female authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman began to voice their discontent with their treatment by the male-dominated elite (Freedman, 2007: 17). Charlotte Perkins Gilman released some of the most notable feminist writings in the United States during the early 1900s (Freedman: 2007: 128). Another influential writer worth mentioning is Virginia Woolf, celebrated for her modernist literature. Works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and her feminist essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929), defended women's ability to write (Freedman, 2007: 220).

3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "The Yellow Wallpaper"

3.1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, born on July 3, in Hartford, Connecticut, was a remarkable writer, activist and leader of the feminist movement in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She grew up in poverty, and as a result, her education was limited. However, she attended the Rhode Island School of Design. In May 1884, she married Charles Walter Stetson, but they divorced in 1884 (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024). Gilman was a woman known by various names and was praised as a poet and lecturer, but she differentiated herself by focusing on women's obstacles in her writings (Davis, 2010: 11). She did not receive much attention throughout her life in comparison to some of her contemporaries. In fact, she was rediscovered during the second wave of feminism, to a certain extent, thanks to "The Yellow Wallpaper". Her writings were considered key in the fight for women's rights and empowerment. She was a prolific and innovative author, as she published many poems and fictional works, in addition to her dramas, essays and cultural critiques (Davis, 2010: 12).

She worked to regenerate fiction and to attack the status quo, particularly male dominance. Indeed, even though she refused to consider herself a feminist, the purpose of her writings was quite radical and not necessarily commercially successful. She did not conform to censorship or impositions, as the main issues she dealt with were directly opposed to the established conventions, and would consider her work senseless (Lynn, 2011: 134). For example, one of her most famous works is her essay "Women and Economics" (1898), in which she argues that the oppression women suffered was largely caused by their economic dependence on men (fathers, husbands...), and she explores topics such as motherhood or marriage. In 1909, she launched her own feminist monthly magazine, *Forerunner*, where she published her writings and those of other feminist

authors. It was a space created to discuss issues related to women's rights and their sexuality without any restriction. Her aim, as she stated, was to spark optimism and offer practical solutions. Since she did not earn much income from her works of fiction, she dedicated herself mainly to giving lectures. That is, her purpose was educational, as she intended to share that new morality with her audience. By the end of her life, she wrote her own autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1935), in order to clarify misunderstandings about her life. The autobiography offers an extended explanation of her childhood, her marriage, and divorce, her career, and her planned suicide.

3.2 "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

3.2.1 Introduction

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a powerful example of how women have attempted to get rid of oppression when they have been silenced or driven to the margins. The story is narrated in the form of a diary, with the main character and narrator, Jane, being controlled by her husband, John, a doctor who attempts to reduce her nerves caused by postpartum depression by providing her with a medical treatment. The short-story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman was first published in January 1892 in *The New England Magazine*, after its rejection by Horace Scudder, the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* (Beer, 1997: 3). Through this work, Gilman presents different ways of feminine oppression, including the control exerted over the main character, who is confined to a room because of her mental health condition. This mirrors the oppression experienced by some women in patriarchal societies, where they could be controlled by men, particularly those who were in the same circumstances as the protagonist of the story. Jane is underestimated and considered mentally weak. Her opinion is not a valid one because of her gender, leading to her silence

and her mental instability. She does not have a voice or control over her own life. She is unable to make decisions about her treatment and has to conform to submissiveness and obedience to her husband's will, which was frequent in the society at the time.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is an autobiographical account fictionalised in the first person, initially interpreted as a Gothic horror tale, which goes hand in hand with the question of madness (Kuiper, 2011). Traditional gothic horror tales regularly used this topic since they explored the portrayal of mentally unstable characters, who were often haunted by traumatic experiences or supernatural forces that ultimately led to madness. This issue reflects the fears in relation to women's mental health in patriarchal societies, raising questions about gender roles and allowing analysis regarding the treatment of women by men.

3.2.2 The Narrator

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is an account of its author, the American writer and sociologist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, that has been adapted for the stage and screen on many occasions. It is written as a series of journal entries, detailing the experiences of the narrator who is suffering from postpartum depression because the story is set shortly after the birth of the narrator's daughter, much like Gilman herself. The narrator's husband, John, who is a physician, prescribes her wife the "rest cure" in order to recover. However, Gilman believed that this treatment only worsened the symptoms and accelerated mental instability in patients (Mukhtar, 2011). The narrator is forced to retire to a mansion where she is confined, not having access to the rest of the rooms in the house. What initially was described by Gilman as a "temporary nervous depression" (648) soon escalates into madness, with the wallpaper playing a crucial role in the short story. At the end of the story,

John finds Jane moving around the room, interacting with the wallpaper, and eventually stepping over his inert body. Both stories are similar as Gilman only found mental relief when she separated from her husband and child (Freedman, 2007: 128). That is, the narrator and the author of the short story found relief by isolating themselves from their family members and by re-discovering their identity after having a baby. In order to do so, they need to have some time alone to think about it or express their condition through writing.

3.3 The Wallpaper

Appearing as a socially acceptable female subject, the fascination with home decoration, the yellow wallpaper becomes an obsession that seems to occupy the narrator's entire reality. The wallpaper serves as a symbol of women's discourse that may initially seem confusing but it actually reflects the hidden message of gender inequality and the narrator's position within a male-dominated society (Treichler, 1984). Another aspect that must be taken into account is the use of personification when the narrator gives life to the wallpaper, which is an indicator of her state of mind. In fact, she projects herself and her fears into the wallpaper. When the wallpaper is looking at her, she gives the wallpaper the ability to understand the influence it has over her. She gives the wallpaper the capacity to have knowledge as a person would have. She describes "a spot where there is a broken neck and two bulbous eyes staring upside down" (Gilman, 1892: 649), noting that those unblinking eyes are present everywhere. "I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before" (Gilman, 1892: 650), she reflects, again embracing the inert status of the wallpaper to which she somehow brings to life. Another example where there is personification of the paper pattern would be when she says that the dreadful pattern

laughed at her. The yellow wallpaper could symbolise the narrator's mind, her subconscious, or the societal and financial factors that reduced women to the domestic sphere (Treichler, 1984).

She recalls that even in her childhood, she found entertainment in blank walls. "There was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend" (Gilman, 1892: 650), suggesting that madness may have been a constant companion throughout her life. Furthermore, she also mentions the fact that "The wallpaper has a sub-pattern in a different shade" (Gilman, 1892: 650), which is only visible in certain lights. Perhaps referring that not everyone has the capacity to see it in the way she does. She also sees a figure. That is, the wallpaper is literally personified in the form of a figure, as she says, she sees "a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to sulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design" (Gilman, 1892: 650). Yet, the shades get clearer day by day for the narrator, which might symbolise that the narrator is becoming aware of her mental illness and the oppression she is suffering because of her marriage, and consequently the medical treatment given by her husband. Alternatively, it may suggest that she is actually losing contact with reality and gradually losing her mind. Therefore, one could argue that the narrator's incapacity to escape oppression results in madness.

Indeed, the narrator's loss of control of her life, of her thoughts, and of her mental health culminate in a gradual growth of madness. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an accurate reflection of the societal restrictions placed on women during the time the story takes place. The confinement in the room motivated by her husband symbolises the control men had over women at the time in marriage. As her obsession with the wallpaper grows, she begins to see a woman trapped in the pattern, echoing her own feeling of helplessness over the

situation and aggravating her mental state. As the narrator remarks, "As soon as it was moonlight," (Gilman, 1892: 655) the woman began to crawl and shake the pattern of the wallpaper. She got up and ran to help her. Before morning, the paper was peeled off. But when the sun appeared again, the dreadful pattern laughed at her. No person could touch the paper but her. Nobody could touch the paper but her. She did not want to go out or have anybody come in. When she is angry, she contemplates her jumping out of the window but there are bars. Indeed, she does not like to look out as there are so many of those creeping women. The change in Jane's mental wellbeing is clear in this part of the narration. The story changes when she finally says: "I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?" (Gilman, 1892: 656)... "I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night" (Gilman, 1892: 656), therefore, she was the woman inside the wallpaper. So when her husband entered the room and said, "For God's sake, what are you doing!" (Gilman, 1892: 656), she replied, "I've got out at last...And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can not put me back!" (Gilman, 1892: 656). At this point, she has not only rebelled against restrictions, but she has liberated herself from the wallpaper, her husband and her constraints.

3.4 The House

The narrator's treatment requires solitude in order to recover. The house is described as a beautiful and quite isolated place, she is marginalised. Yet, there is something strange about it, as the narrator reflects. She is trapped not only in the house, but most specifically in the room because, according to her husband, people are too stimulating for her. At first, she does not like their room; she would rather be downstairs than at the top of the house. It is a big and airy room with windows from which she can see the garden, obtaining fresh air

and natural light. She does not like the wallpaper either, which is stripped off. She finds its pattern irritating, even describing its unclean yellow colour as "repellant" (Gilman, 1892: 649), with hints of orange in some places. She describes the room as an atrocious nursery. The fragments she writes are divided by symbols shaped like stars, as she has to stop when someone goes into the room, such as her husband, who has forbidden her to write because she gets tired when doing it. The fact that the narrator keeps a journal that challenges her prescription evokes a sense of danger in which we, the readers, are thus implicated from the beginning in a forbidden discourse (Treichler, 1984). At some point, she even mentions that she does not feel able or want to write since the effort is greater than the relief, and she feels extremely tired. She has to make an effort to think straight. She is secretive, hiding not only the fact that she is writing but also that, "There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will" (Gilman, 1892: 652). Therefore, one can say that the diary serves to capture her thoughts, just as the house is a confinement that helps her to restore her mental stability.

"The wall-paper is torn off in spots" (Gilman, 1892: 650) and "the floor is scratched" (Gilman, 1892: 650). She does not mind, she is only worried about the wallpaper. Later on, she seems relieved that the baby is happy and is not in that nursery, which has such unpleasant wallpaper. In the end, she is fond of the room, as her mental instability grows, "in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps because of the wallpaper" (Gilman, 1892: 650), as it dwells in her mind. While lying in her bed, she stares at the pattern, which lacks repetition or symmetry. It is as if there was a woman behind the pattern. Therefore, she wishes that her husband would take her out from there. "The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out," (Gilman, 1892: 652) making her

confirm if the paper moved. She was wondering "whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately" (Gilman, 1892: 653). Finally, she realises that the front pattern does move as the woman behind shakes the wall and the bars. She is constantly trying to climb through the pattern but is incapable because, as the narrator mentions, the pattern suffocates her. Those strangled heads mirror the different parts of her personality, which are restricted by both society and domesticity. In other words, the wallpaper pattern is a metaphor of the narrator's oppression.

By contrast, she has seen the woman creeping in the daytime all around the garden. The house has a "delicious garden" (Gilman, 1892: 648), "large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them" (Gilman, 1892: 648). Therefore, the garden could be considered an antithesis of the house, or the room itself and its consequent entrapment. The two elements are representatives of different functions: whereas rooms are enclosed indoor spaces, which have been typically related to secrets and personal space where thoughts are kept, the garden is an outdoor space related to nature and freedom. One is related to limitations and boundaries, and the other to growth and limitlessness. Jennie allows Jane to walk in the garden but she is determined to study the paper to such an extent that she does not want to leave until she finds out more about the wallpaper. On the Fourth of July, she is visited by Nellie and the children because her husband changed his mind and thought that it might be good for her to have some company. She requests him to let her visit her cousin Henry and Julia, but at that time he does not accept her proposal.

3.5 Madness

In the following section, I am going to focus on a detailed analysis of the role of madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper" in connection with the invisibility of the female voice in literature. I will explain the connection and impact that the waves of feminism had in eradicating the oppression suffered by the women who fought for their rights. Feminism at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century exerted considerable influence not only in the field of literature but in society itself, as it helped to deconstruct the different socio-cultural obstacles that impeded women to express their experiences. Therefore, Gilman and her short story contributed to expanding the voice of women in literature by defying the previously established literary, social and cultural conventions. She dealt with issues that were censored at the time, and has been considered one of the authors who paved the way for women to express themselves freely and be listened to. Hysteria was the way in which society of the nineteenth century dealt with the changes brought by industrialization, which affected not only women's lives but also men's, as it supposed the access to education for women among many other great improvements in their lives. However, they brought with them many "nervous weaknesses", largely among women, causing feminist historians to consider it as a strategy to maintain women at home (Briggs, 2000). During the Victorian era, mental illness became more recognized and integrated into institutions, coinciding with the rise in the number of women who were categorised as insane (Showalter, 1980).

It is important to examine this short story taking into account Gilman's vindication and ironic tone due to her feminist ideology. Precisely, the story starts with the woman disagreeing with her husband's ideas: "John is a physician, and perhaps—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind—) perhaps

that is one reason I do not get well faster." (Gilman, 1892: 647). Furthermore, her brother is also a physician, also a man. They agree and she does not agree, as she expresses "Personally, I disagree with their ideas" (Gilman, 1892: 648). She admits that she only gets unreasonably angry with John sometimes, thus acknowledging that she should not be upset with him, that she has no reason to be mad at him. She is suppressing her emotions and personal opinion in order to please the men around her.

3.5.1 The Rest Cure

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists were totally against using psychological treatments and theories. In fact, they ignored the potential impact of emotions, beliefs, and ideas on mental well-being. However, by the 1890s, physicians began to reconsider this issue because the demands of the new industrial society triggered mental health disorders. S. Weir Mitchell, an influential Philadelphia neurologist, created the "rest cure", which consisted of a controlled diet, forced isolation and prolonged bed rest without contact with friends or family, as well as massages or electrical muscle stimulation (Harris and Stevens, 2010). Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a means to convey to S. Weir Mitchell (and potentially to her husband), the extent of her descent into madness caused by the restriction to work, as is the case of the narrator of her short story (Martin, 2007).

Almost immediately, the narrator reveals that she is sick. In her journal, she documents her resistance and doubts towards the diagnosis and treatment given by her husband, which she is supposed to trust blindly as the standards of an ideal marriage seemed to be. However, the story portrays her rebellion against those Victorian standards. She was diagnosed with either hysteria or depression, common diseases among many

women in the nineteenth century, which resulted in her confinement in a room (Treichler, 1984). When the narrator says "This is a dead paper, and a great relief to my mind" (Gilman, 1892: 647) it conveys the idea that writing has a therapeutic effect on her, rather than the medical treatment prescribed by her husband. During this period, it appears that men believed that education, specifically in the form of writing, could pose a threat to women. The narrator is isolated in order to prevent her from being mentally stimulated by intellectual discussions. Moreover, she is recommended not to share negative thoughts, and is not allowed to engage in any type of work or to write (Treichler, 1984). The idea that education could empower women to be full citizens even surprised female authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft. Overtime, feminist began advocating for education for women's personal growth (Freedman, 2007: 15). However, it is a sexist assumption, related to the idea that if women were allowed to have a proper education and express themselves without restrictions, they might achieve some kind of freedom that men were trying to prevent in order to maintain power. Some men used madness to exert authority over women and take control of the situation. Some of Georgiana Weldon's works, like *The History of My Orphanage*; or *The Outpourings of an Alleged Lunatic* published 1878, highlighted the injustices within the system, particularly the control that husbands could exert over their wives. These works suggested that women who had an independent will were seen as deviant and possibly mentally ill (Showalter, 1980). This is why they try to convince the narrator that she is sick, confine her in her room and lead her to become delusional.

Historically, women often demonstrated respect to men, particularly to their husbands, without questioning their authority or seeking equality. While this was a common trend, it was not universally practised by all women, nor was it exhibited by all men.

Nevertheless, in this short story there is a relationship of superiority of the husband over the wife, as can be seen when he insists that she suffers from temporary nervous depression and hysterical tendencies. The narrator has to take "phosphates or phosphites whichever it is" (Gilman, 1892: 648). She did not even know what medication she was taking; she unquestioningly obeyed his orders because he was the one in power. Furthermore, when she says, "But what is one to do?" (Gilman, 1892: 648), she refers to her social context, or even to other periods when women could do little but agree with men's ideas or be regarded as out of the canon.

Additionally, the narrator states that it is difficult for her to talk to her husband because he is wise and he loves her. She idealises him regardless of his treatment towards her because it was the natural behaviour at the time, and she felt she had no choice but to accept it. "I am a doctor, dear, and I know." (Gilman, 1892: 652), he says. She is threatened by John, he wants to send her to Weir Mitchell. She wants to avoid going there because he is just like her husband and brother, or even worse. In the end, she is afraid of him, as well as of his sister, Jennie, who seems to act as a caretaker for the narrator (Lorenz, 2015). Jennie mentioned that everything the wallpaper touched got stained, which translates in a change in her perception about her. At the beginning, the narrator was pleased with Jennie's presence, but as she became obsessed with the wallpaper, her presence became disturbing because she tried to control her, just as societal restrictions prevent her health from improving. Moreover, when she finds Jennie studying the pattern, she declares "I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!" (Gilman, 1892: 653), reflecting the narrator's growing paranoia and her desire for freedom.

3.5.2 Postpartum Depression

Gilman focused on women's domestic, maternal and wifely duties whenever she believed they unfairly limited women to the home. It was due to their responsibilities as mothers that they were unable to have their own lives (Desford, 2021: 439). The narrator is a mother suffering from postpartum depression (Lorenz, 2015), consequently she has to accept the treatment her husband believes is best for her, even though she does not agree with his ideas. Women diagnosed with hysteria were often forced to rest, including famous writers such as Edith Wharton or Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself. After surviving puberty, women continued to experience hormonal imbalances during pregnancy and childbirth, sometimes experiencing mental instability as a result. Postpartum depression resulted in psychosis and suicide for ten percent of female patients admitted to asylums. One standard in medical textbooks was to present cases of female insanity as patients who were disobedient, rebellious, or opposed to the traditional female role (Showalter, 1980).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that a large number of women have experienced oppression throughout history, especially in the field of literature, as it was a means for them to express their emotions, which may have posed a threat to some men. A perfect example of resistance against patriarchal rule is seen in works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", along with the writings of authors like Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf. Gilman's story explores themes such as madness and postpartum depression, drawn from her personal experience. The society of the nineteenth century had specific expectations based on gender, with women confined to the roles of homemakers and caretakers. This led feminists to advocate for women's rights across various waves of the feminist movement in pursuit of freedom. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a notable figure in

these protests, used her literature to challenge male dominance, particularly focusing on themes related to motherhood and marriage. The story "The Yellow Wallpaper" unfolds as a diary, in which the narrator's husband, who is a doctor, recommends the protagonist to be isolated and forbids her writing or working as part of a treatment known as the "rest cure", developed by neurologist S. Weir Mitchell. Gilman believed this intervention only aggravated the situation. As the narrator's mental state deteriorates, she becomes fixated on the wallpaper in her room, a symbolic representation of women's societal subjugation. The house and the room serve as symbols of her lack of control and decline into insanity, echoing the transformations women underwent during the process of industrialization in the nineteenth century.

In my opinion, it is beneficial that women who may have felt confined or restricted at some point were able to express their emotions and thoughts through writing. Allowing them to liberate themselves from not only what could be regarded as a patriarchal society by some people, but also from traditional gender roles and their own mental struggles. Writing serves as a means of not just articulating their feelings, but also as a way to release oneself from them, leading to a state of relaxation and peace of mind. When the mind is calm, behaviour is influenced in a more positive manner compared to when one is overwhelmed with thoughts and stress. This connection can be seen in the issue of mental illness, which afflicted some women in the 19th century when they were deprived of the opportunity to write.

I can particularly relate to the author and the narrator's situation as I recently became a mother. I am now more aware of the hormonal changes, and the transformation of women's bodies through pregnancy and postpartum, as well as the risk of suffering

depression. Although I have luckily not experienced postpartum depression myself, I can understand how women who were prescribed the “rest cure” could descend into madness, therefore, agreeing with Gilman’s perspective. The short story intrigued me when I first studied it, but it has taken on a deeper meaning now that I am a mother. To me, the author serves as an example of female empowerment and the importance of self-expression. However, I do not agree with the statement that all men restrict women, it is a generalisation. I believe that both men and women should treat each other with kindness and respect in order to work together effectively, especially in regards to parenthood, and to be happy in marriage.

5. Works Cited

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