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***Feminist Analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper”
by Charlotte Perkins Gilman***

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement Master Degree in
Language and Culture**

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Dedication

Praise & blessing be to Allah almighty, who gave us the ability to complete this work. I humbly dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents and siblings who have always been such a loving, caring and supporting family. I want to thank my parents for their endless love and encouragement and for always standing by me.

Boukhdena Roumayssa

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family especially my parents, who have contributed to raising my spirits and encouraging me to do the best. Finally, I would like to thank my sister Raniya who helped and guided me to finish writing.

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, women faced extreme marginalization and discrimination in male-dominated societies, where literature served as a crucial tool for expressing their thoughts and desires at the time. This study analyzes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fictional short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' from a feminist perspective, aiming to explore its significant themes and shed light on the social issues related to women during the late nineteenth century in America. The study follows feminism methodology in analyzing portions of the story's text by closely examining the portrayal of the characters, both male and female, the attitudes of the author, and the relationship between the characters. The story represents a woman's mental deterioration and imprisonment under the control and authority of her husband, and the psychological treatment given to her depending on his false assumptions. It highlights the social issues related to women, and enlightens the reader about women's mental conditions, and its treatment in America during the late nineteenth century. This dissertation examines the relationship between the sexes in male-dominated societies, and male's negative way of thinking towards the role and status of women. And it reflects the gender stereotyping and the subordination of woman, and their position in patriarchal societies. This paper raises awareness about the danger of oppressing and ignoring women and tries to deliver the fact that people are equal no matter what their gender.

Keywords: Feminism, The Yellow Wallpaper, Oppression, Patriarchal, discrimination

ملخص

لطالما عانت النساء في القرن التاسع عشر من التمييز و التهميش المطلق في المجتمعات الخاضعة لسيطرة الرجل حيث كان الأدب وسيلة هامة للتعبير عن أفكار و رغبات النساء آنذاك. تحاول هذه الدراسة تحليل القصة الخيالية القصيرة "ورق الحائط الأصفر" للكاتبة الأمريكية شارلوت بيركينز غيلمان من منظور نسوي. تمثل القصة التدهور العقلي لامرأة تعيش تحت سلطة وسيطرة زوجها بالإضافة إلى العلاج النفسي خلال القرن التاسع عشر. تسلط القصة الضوء على القضايا الاجتماعية المتعلقة بالمرأة وتوفر للقارئ نظرة حول الظروف الاجتماعية بالإضافة إلى الاضطرابات العقلية التي عاشتها الكاتبة والنساء عامة وكيفية علاجها في ذلك الزمن. تهدف الدراسة لاكتشاف المواضيع المهمة الموجودة في القصة من خلال إتباع منهجية نسوية في تحليل أجزاء من نص القصة. تسعى هذه المذكرة إلى فحص العلاقة بين الجنسين في المجتمعات التي تخضع إلى سيطرة الذكور والطريقة السلبية التي يفكر بها الرجال حول دور ومكانة النساء. وتعكس النمطية الجنسانية و خضوع المرأة وحالتها داخل المجتمع الأبوي. هذه الأطروحة تعمل على نشر التوعية حول خطر تجاهل واضطهاد المرأة و تحاول إيصال فكرة أن كل الناس سواسية مهما كان جنسهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية, التمييز, الأبوي, الاضطهاد, النمطية

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
General Introduction	2
Chapter One: Literature Review	
Introduction	10
1.1. Brief Biography of The Author	10
1.2. Definition of Feminism	10
1.3. Types of Feminism.....	11
1.3.1. Radical Feminism	12
1.3.2. Socialist Feminism.....	12
1.3.3. Liberal Feminism	13
1.4. Aspects and Values of Feminism	13
1.5. Definition of Relevant Terms.....	14
1.6. Previous studies.....	16
Conclusion.....	22
Chapter Two: The Analysis	
Introduction	24
2.1. Historical and Social Background of “The Yellow Wallpaper”	24
2.2. The Illustration of Key Concepts of Feminist Literary Theory in “The Yellow Wallpaper” 25	
2.2.1. Gender Roles.....	25
2.2.2. Mental Illness.....	31
2.2.3. Freedom and Identity	34
2.3. Symbolism.....	39
2.3.1. The Yellow Wallpaper	39
2.3.2. The Country Estate	41

2.3.3. The Diary44

2.3.4. Moonlight.....45

2.3.5. The Creeping Woman46

Conclusion.....50

General Conclusion52

Works cited **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

General Introduction

General Introduction

There is a close relationship between literature and life, because it is a written form of human expressions based on life experiences. Literary works have the power to influence and impact individuals through the ideas and thoughts they convey. And “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a great example of the influence of literature on people’s thoughts and feelings.

This dissertation presents a feminist analysis of the literary work “The Yellow Wallpaper” written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman that was first published in 1892 by *New England Magazine*, a feminist masterpiece and semi-autobiographical short story and work of fiction based on the author’s own experience, a short story that talks about an unnamed narrator who suffers from postpartum depression after giving birth to her first child, and the struggle between the main character and her husband, who prescribed her with a wrong treatment called the “rest cure” caused in the narrator’s mental deterioration. This story is a powerful indictment of the societal constraints placed on women during the late nineteenth century. It is a haunting and disturbing story that remains relevant today as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

The paper will first explore the term feminism and its different types, aspects and values, which show the women’s efforts and struggles in proving their existence and the ability to change from submissive women to independent individuals and leaders. As well as reviewing some other previous studies on the topic. Through the analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper” we explore the experiences of women in the late 1800s and how these experiences have affected them negatively, and investigate how female authors created their image in literature and how they expressed their thoughts and feelings.

Moreover, the research tries to explore and explain the different themes expressed in the story, and how this kind of stories communicate the women depression and oppression, and show how the surrounding circumstances affected their mental health, and in which way these mental issues were treated and diagnosed depending on wrong assumptions.

The story was written in 1890, by an American feminist writer, and social activist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in time when women held a very different place in society than they do today, and when women's rights and social roles were largely restricted and limited to the domestic sphere and their voices were often silenced or ignored. At the time, women's rights and gender roles were significant issues in the United States. Women were expected to fulfill the traditional roles of wife and mother, and expected to behave according to men's orders. Women have been regarded as inferior and living under the dominance of men, and their opportunities for education, employment, and political participation were very limited. Gilman's story sheds light on these issues through the depiction of a woman's descent into madness and the ways in which she is dismissed by her husband and the medical establishment. The story can be seen as a critique of the patriarchal structures of society that limit women's agency and prevent them from fully realizing their potential, and also critiques the ways in which mental illnesses were treated in the past. This short story was written based on a woman's life experiences and struggles in patriarchal society which is the author herself. The story portrays the women's status in men-oriented societies and the tough conditions that women were living during the nineteenth century, and reflects these societal expectations and the ways in which they negatively impact women's mental health.

The medical profession also played a major role in shaping women's lives during this time period, women were often diagnosed with "hysteria" and prescribed by inappropriate

treatments such as the “rest cure”, which often did more harm than good and led to mental deterioration or breakdown. Charlotte Perkins Gilman had personal experience with the “rest cure” treatment when she was suffering from postpartum depression after the birth of her daughter. Gilman found the treatment unhelpful and oppressive which was one of the reasons that inspired her to write “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a critique of the “rest cure” and the medical profession’s treatment of women.

During the nineteenth century man has always been the controller, the authority holder and the superior especially in patriarchal societies, and woman was viewed as inferior, weak, emotionally unstable, and restricted only to the domestic sphere, and have to take care of the house and her children. Women were marginalized, oppressed and exploited and entirely controlled by their husbands. Women could not vote, could not work outside the home and could not own property (Nicole et Christopher).

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed awakening of woman consciousness, and marked a time of change and reform of women, turning from a mother, wife and homemaker into a worker, respected individual and equally contributing in the society, when women started to call for their rights and show their voice through popular movements and multiple ways like writing and expressing their thoughts which reflects the way they live. Most of feminist literary works were written against women’s traditional secondary status in family and society, and the lack of freedom and oppression they were living in their controlling societies. And female writers fought for acceptance in the literary community, and have been trying to portray a realistic picture of women’s struggles and limited freedom in the world.

Woman has always been regarded as inferior to man, and faced a great unjust and unequal treatment for centuries. Women's life was so limited and restricted under the patriarchal system, they had no voice to speak and claim for the rights they deserve. But some of them at least tried to show their voice through different ways, such as Gilman's short story, which tries to convey a significant message in her own way to help women realize that they deserve equality and freedom, and to spread awareness about the danger of "rest cure" treatment.

Despite the significant feminist themes discovered in "The Yellow Wallpaper", there is a need for more in-depth analysis of the story. This study attempts to provide a feminist interpretation mainly of the story due to the lack of analysis of the illustration of the key themes of feminist literary theory in the story. The specific goal of the analysis is identifying key themes and patterns within the data to provide a kind of comprehensive understanding of the story's message and how it portrays and reflects the women's experiences and struggles in male-oriented societies. It may exist some different interpretation or analysis of the same themes identified before. For that, a deep and comprehensive feminist analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper" would be necessary to fully understand the complex themes and patterns of the text.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the main themes and issues presented in the "The Yellow Wallpaper", and how do they relate to the historical and social context of the time?

How does the text reflect and challenge patriarchal structures and gender roles of the time period in which it was written?

What are the different ways in which the protagonist's mental illness is portrayed and what does this say about the societal attitudes towards mental health in the late nineteenth century?

How are female and male characters presented in the story, and how the relationship between men and women portrayed?

How do feminist literary works contribute in changing the woman's role and situation in society?

What lessons can be learned about the life of women through this analysis?

By addressing these research questions, this dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which gender roles and mental health are portrayed in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the significance of these portrayals for women's experiences and perspectives.

This study aims to explore and show how feminist literature or the literary works written by women were one of the main tools or ways to show their voice and existence in the societies under patriarchy system through the analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous literary work "The Yellow Wallpaper".

The second aim of the study would be to provide a comprehensive analysis of the story's themes and messages, and explore the ways in which the story challenges and critiques patriarchal power structures, gender roles, and medical practices of the Victorian era.

This study aims to provide a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the themes and messages conveyed in the story, through conducting a feminist analysis of the story which helps to explore the key themes and issues presented in the text, as well as how they relate to the historical and social context of the time.

This study is a qualitative research that tries to analyze the literary work "The Yellow Wallpaper" from a feminist perspective. To prepare this study we have conducted a feminist analysis method and historical research, using primary data sources which include the short story

itself, as well as any personal correspondence, journals, or other writings by the author, and secondary data sources that are related to the story and feminism such as dissertations, articles, and websites. This approach is appropriate for exploring the complex themes and ideas in “The Yellow Wallpaper” and examining how they relate to the historical and social context of the time.

The methodology would likely involve close reading and analysis of the text, and reviewing other previous studies on the topic to show how the story reflects the different themes and issues related to women’s experiences. This would involve exploring the position of women in late nineteenth century society and how women’s position has changed nowadays.

The choice of feminist analysis as a research method for this study is appropriate as it allows for a systematic exploration of the themes and patterns in the data, and enables a more in-depth understanding of the social and historical context of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, and it is the most suitable way to show the relevance of the story with the social structures at the time. For a feminist analysis of a story, the sampling approach would involve selecting passages that relate to specific themes or motifs identified in the story text. In addition to the use of knowledge extracted from previous studies on the story and the topics included in it.

The study applies a thematic analysis which involves close reading, coding, and note-taking. In this study, the data will be gathered through a comprehensive literature review of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, including critical analysis and interpretation of the text. The themes and patterns that exist in the story’s text will be examined in the context of the historical and social background of the text to provide a deeper understanding of the story and its significance.

This research analyzes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” from a feminist perspective to show how women were mistreated and misunderstood by patriarchal social

principles, and enable readers to get an insight of the history of women and how they were living during the nineteenth century.

The significance of this study is that it attempts to provide some kind of contribution to feminist studies, by conducting a feminist analysis which involves analyzing the dominant themes and provide insights into the ways in which these themes are portrayed, and how they reflect the social structures and issues, and that would be a useful contribution to the further researches. Furthermore, this study applies a feminist approach specifically to show the depiction of woman in patriarchal societies and which may encourage further future studies of feminism.

The scope of this study is limited to the analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper" short story, as it focuses more on the representation of the main feminist themes and concepts existing in the story. The study may also consider the historical context of the novel and its social implications. However, the study does not focus on analyzing feminist theories or deep examination of the historical context of the novel. The study tries to analyze the messages and themes in the story from a rational feminist perspective, and examines the themes, characters, and the relationship between them in the story to understand the representation of feminist themes included.

This study can demonstrate the importance of feminist perspectives in literary criticism and provide a model for further feminist literary analyses. And deepen our understanding of gender representation in literature.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

The adversity women endured in a patriarchal society during the 19th century gave birth to female feminism. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was one of the leading feminist during that time. Gilman strived for the oppressed women during the “Victorian Age” she dedicated her life to social reform believing even women should have equality. The subjugation Gilman faced in the nineteenth century as well as her own experience with postpartum depression greatly influenced her short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

1.1. Brief Biography of The Author

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a feminist writer, social activist, public lecturer, editor, and publisher, who rode the wave of reform in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But Gilman had a very difficult childhood in a separated family, after her father abandoned the family shortly after her birth. Fortunately, financial hardship forced the family to live with relatives. Gilman was living with her strong, successful aunts who guided her and made her grow into a well adjusted, independent woman. In 1884 Gilman married Charles Walter Stetson and gave birth to their only child. After the birth of her first child, she experienced a severe post-partum depression and was prescribed unsuccessful treatment by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell. Gilman and her husband divorced after they were separated in 1888 and moved to California where she became an active voice in the feminist movement, publishing extensively on the role of women in the household. She was married again to her first cousin Houghton in 1900. In 1935, Gilman committed suicide by taking an overdose of chloroform, after years of sufferance with breast cancer. (Lorenz)

1.2. Definition of Feminism

When women begin to demand freedom and legal rights, the bases of feminism appears. Feminism refers to the women's liberation movement (Kayahan, 1999:9), as a main branch of feminism. Feminist criticism is concerned with the "ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 83). This school of theory looks at how aspects of our culture are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and aims to expose misogyny in writing about women, which can take explicit and Implicit forms. This misogyny, Tyson reminds us, can extend into diverse areas of our culture. Feminist criticism is also concerned with less obvious forms of marginalization such as the exclusion of women writers from the traditional literary canon.

Feminism is an ideology that demands an equal right of men and women in terms of politics, decision making, career, and having children. It consists of a number of social, cultural and political movements that take attempts for equal rights of men and women (Asmani, 2020). It is considered as a struggle to achieve same rights, opportunities and dignity as men have in the society (Ray & Davidson, 2014). It has raised much in the western upper class society and the women have fought for women's suffrage and reproductive rights (Agger, 1998).

Feminism explains and suggests directions for the change in social and environmental factors; tries to highlight the propose interventions for women's intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns, and provides a perspective for evaluating social and environmental experiences of groups and individual, regardless of sex or gender. It has changed the lives of millions of women (Anderson, 2016).

1.3. Types of Feminism

Patriarchal society gives legal rights and economic power to men so that women are subject to men and imprisoned in private sphere. When women who are given the role of wife and mother begin to demand freedom and legal rights, the basis of feminism appears (Alkan). Feminism has become an international school which sprang into many types among which radical, social and liberal.

1.3.1. Radical Feminism

Radical (mean root) feminism is a movement founded in the 1960s by the women who had participated in the civil rights and anti-war campaigns, primarily in New York and Boston, then spread to the rest of the United States of America and Europe; on the basis of the idea that patriarchy is the main cause of discrimination and oppression of women (Millett, 1970; Vukoicic, 2017). It views that patriarchy and sexism are the most fundamental factors in the discrimination and oppression of women and ignore all others forms, such as race, color, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, caste, and economic and social class; patriarchy is based in psychological and biological factors, which is rooted in the society (Nachescu, 2009).

1.3.2. Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is a vibrant intellectual and political current that has come and gone. It has arisen to produce a creative synthesis of debates in the late 1960s about the roots of the oppression of women. It is inspired by Marxism, and is developed for the reaction to liberal feminism, but it does not lead to the abolition of patriarchy in social relations. Marxism is stuck with the complexity of class analysis which socialist feminists consider as gender blind (Haradhan, 2022). Paradigm academic press feminism is gained popularity in the 1960s and

1970s. It has gradually faded from the 1980s and has abolished after the collapse of communism in the early 1990s (Holmes, 2007; Fraser, 2009).

1.3.3. Liberal Feminism

Liberalism is a political and economic principle that stresses individual independence, equality of opportunity, and the protection of individual rights. It supports rule of law, civil and human rights, secularism, democracy, freedom of speech, press, religion and property. It encourages the development of freedom, particularly in the political and economic spheres (Alterman, 2008).

1.4. Aspects and Values of Feminism

Inherently, feminist criticism concerns with few ideas and issues that help feminist critics examine gender politics within literary works. So, feminist literary approach focuses on female representation in literature, and we use and apply it.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" in next chapter of dissertation by classically examining the portrayal of the characters, both female and male this means that; how is the relationship between men and women portrayed?

And analyze and describe the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination by exploring the economic, social, political, and psychological forces embedded within literature, it means that we critique the language of literature. Then, the power relationships between men and women: are men doing men's work only or, men and women sharing the work. And the differences between men and women: the basic assumption is that gender determines values and language. We notice the differences in topics that men and women talk about and how they

discuss them. Too we notice the struggle and suffering of women and status and role of women in society. While also interpreting symbolism of women's writing, besides to what does the work say about women's creativity?

1.5. Definition of Relevant Terms

The following definitions help in understanding the subject's content and make the reader more familiar with the topic through giving an idea about the meaning of some related concepts.

a. Feminism

Is the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for women. Feminism generally arose in response to traditions that restricted the rights of women. It is manifested worldwide by many women from different cultures and backgrounds (Laura et Elinor).

Feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice.

b. Feminist Movement

Feminist movement (also known as the women's rights movement or the women's liberation movement) refers to a series of political campaigns for reform on a verity of issues that effects women's quality of life, such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, women's suffrage and many (Lumen Learning).

c. Feminist Theory it is a Critical Analysis

Feminist theory examines women's social roles, experiences, and interests, with the goal of analyzing gender roles and social relations, and understanding the nature of gender inequality.

This theory sheds light on social issues and problems experienced by women including discrimination based on gender, stereotypes, gender role, objectification, and inequality (Simply Sociology).

d. Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to any restrictions or limitations made based on gender or physical appearance. Gender discrimination means treating one gender differently from the other, or causing one gender to be privileged or prioritized over another. It happens when people are treated unequally depending on their gender or the physical appearance. Gender discrimination limits individual freedom of expression and construction of identity, and marginalizes particular members of community, who are regarded as inferior (Standford).

e. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is one of the key terms in feminist literary criticism. It is a social system in which men hold absolute power and authority, occupy leading roles, and control the women and children. Patriarchy is the kind of system that privileges men, and underestimates the mental and physical capacities of women. It structures gender inequality between genders, when masculine attributes are privileged but feminine attributes are undervalued. (Nash)

According to Eisenstein, Patriarchy ideology hammers at “destroy woman's consciousness about her potential power, which derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein, 1981:14)

Patriarchy refers to male-dominated or male-oriented societies. In the patriarchy society, men are the absolutely dominators in every social aspect. Since the emergence of the feminism, feminists have done their best to lead all women to fight against the male-dominators.

f. Feminist

Feminist is a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. The feminist aims to terminate all forms of male domination. Feminist research focuses on gender and tries to establish gender equality in the world (Kaur et Nagaich).

g. Women's empowerment

It is the act of enabling and encouraging women to stand strongly in the face of oppression and injustice, and giving them the power to control their own life and achieve their goals and desires. Empowerment refers to the process which attempts to prevent the forces that marginalize and disregard women. Women's empowerment does not aim to achieve a form of domination of women over men, but it aims to empower women to claim their legitimate rights, and to show their voices and be active members in society, and protect themselves from injustice. (Zahra, Akram et Muhanad).

h. Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotypes are assumptions about a person depending on the gender, and the beliefs about the behaviors of women and men, how they should be, act, and behave based on traditional expectations.

1.6. Previous studies

Many articles and books have been written about Charlotte Perkins Gilman's works and generally "The Yellow Wallpaper". A central concern for scholars of United States women's writing has been the recovery of lost and unread texts, a process well exemplified by recent work on Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In the twenty fifth anniversary issue of *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* (26.2 [2009]), critics participating in a roundtable discussion assess the success and failures of recovery during the past the three decades or so.

Recovering the writing of women, through scholarship and through modern editions, has been a central, even generative, component of many academic fields that have proliferated since the 1970s, not only literary criticism and women's history but also women's studies, cultural studies, and other cross-disciplinary areas of investigation. One occasion for sharing and showcasing new work was the fourth International conference on Charlotte Perkins Gilman, held in 2016 at the University of New England in Maine. Titled "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Then and Now", the conference's stated aim was to situate Gilman in her own time as well as to explore how she and her work are being recovered, assessed and reassessed in ours. This focus elicited consideration of texts and contexts that were new to the field. The essays in this volume were originally presented as conference papers at this gathering in 2016.

Since that time, the author have developed and amplified their arguments, which situate Gilman historically and assess her mixed legacy; recover and focus needed attention on a richer variety of Gilman's writings; and reflect upon the ways her work is still relevant today. Several of the scholars included here attend to Gilman's less-studied novels and short works. Others consider her use of drama and journalism, genres underrepresented in Gilman's studies. Some revisit one of Gilman's best-known works of fiction "The Yellow Wallpaper" bringing new contextual information and new ways of reading to bear on this familiar story. Still others read

her work written a longer trajectory of women's writing, charting her influence and her significance within broad literary, feminist, and rhetorical traditions. The essays cover the entire span of Gilman's career, from her very first published stories, through the productive forerunner period, to her last years of published private writing.

In "feminist humor and Charlotte Perkins Gilman", a later version of her keynote address at the fourth International Gilman conference (2016), Shelley Fisher Fishkin discusses an important aspect of Gilman's work very seldom acknowledged by critics: her use of humor as a rhetorical tool, humor often exemplified by her verse. Placing Gilman within an historical context of feminist humorists before, during, and after Gilman's time, Fishkin identifies three particular strategies apparent throughout Gilman's body of work as well as that of her contemporaries: illumination, impersonation, and inversion. Illumination "involves shining a light on women's lives, making the invisible more visible breaking through myths and lies that are accepted as truths, and giving voice to truths that are not usually articulated"(Fishkin, "Feminist Humor"224). Impersonation consists of Ventriloquizing "the voice of the person who holds attitudes that you want your reader to reject". And inversion is accomplished through imagining how men and women would feel if they found themselves in one another's "bodies and clothes and roles". Through her ability not only to inject humor into her discussion of serious social issues but also to laugh at herself, Gilman was often able to change minds and thereby effect social change.

Shelley Green's article "Women's Encounters with the Mental Health Establishment": Escaping the yellow wallpaper (2013) is an anthology of previously published and unpublished contributions.

On women who have less serious mental health illnesses. The article attempt to reach women who can obtain “support, affirmation, care, and strength that only another person who has experienced the same events can furnish” and the aim to address professionals, so they can increase their understanding of “the anguish of mental illness” are only partially reached. Apart from Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s portrayal of her psychosis in the prologue, few if any of the other contributions reflect Gilman’s acute disordered sense of reality. This anthology might better have been called “A subset of women’s Encounters with a part of the Mental Health Establishment”.

Equally important is the need to recover new contexts for Gilman: scholars doing archival and historical research have begun to answer the call for more nuanced and accurate understandings of her work and life. Drawing upon both biographical and textual evidence, for example, Barbara A. White has called critics attention to the largely overlooked “lesbian sensibility” in Gilman’s work (205). Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her contemporaries: literary and intellectual contexts (Cynthia J. Davis and Denise D. knight) have undertaken this project specifically in terms of juxtaposing Gilman with other intellectuals of her time. Other recent research has considered Gilman’s well-known work in new ways. For instance Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the “Woman Question” (2005), in her article Cynthia J. Davis delves into the difficulties that Gilman experienced in her own personal life over her constant efforts to reconcile the demands of a woman’s situation on both marriage and work.

“Feminist criticism, “The Yellow Wallpaper” and the politics of color in America”:
according to Susan S. Lanser (2001), criticism “The Yellow Wallpaper”, and “the politics of color in America” examines the impacts “the yellow wallpaper” had on feminist writing styles and critiques. Lanser writes that the story helps to analyze the reading through “the lens of a

female consciousness” and apply the knowledge gained from a female perspective onto other literature the transition that the narrator displays from being dependent on John to becoming independent reflects the feminist movement and challenges the “male dominance” that currently takes precedence in society. “The patriarchal prison house” that is society controls the narrator and oppresses women not only in “the yellow wallpaper” but in real life as well. In conclusion, this article shows that Hedges’ main objective was to demonstrate the multitude of interpretations to Gilman’s feminist classic and how these interpretations can be seen as products of a dynamic shifting of social changes.

In “Doing It ‘man-fashion’: Gender performance in Gilman’s unpunished”, Jill Bergman examines Gilman’s little discussed detective novel, which was complete in 1929 but not published until 1997. Through the lens of Judith Butler’s poststructuralist model of gender performance, Bergman argue that a substantial change occurred in Gilman’s perspective by 1929: the novel figures as a departure from Gilman’s oeuvre in that she resolves conflict not through social reform at the hands of an “iiberwoman”, as seen in her previous novels, but through the violent death of a patriarch. In what could be seen as either a disappointing or a strategic compromise with her woman centered life’s work, Bergman argues, Gilman invokes a performative definition of gender, creating a character whose ability to inhabit both femininity and masculinity allows her to defeat the novel’s antagonist. Even in her last novel, Gilman was constructing new ways to be human as she imagined potential efficacy in moving beyond stereotypical gender roles.

In other ways, however unpunished is classic Gilman in its attention to the damaging effects of patriarchy on women and, by extension, while in 1909 Gilman founded the forerunner as a direct response to the salaciousness of the yellow press, this essay argues that “The Yellow

Wallpaper” is her first, and most complex, indictment of the journalism the vexed and misrepresented her throughout her career, while Linden and Edelstein historicize Gilman in new ways, Caroline Brown reads “The Yellow Wallpaper” within a longer historical trajectory in “The mad woman’s other sisters : Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gloria Naylor’s 1985 novel, Linden Hills, as revising “The Yellow Wallpaper” while separated by time and the racial identities of their authors (identities that inform each woman’s larger agenda) as well as by almost a century of elapsed time, both works examine middle class heroines driven to madness by social systems and husbands unprepared to acknowledge either their emotional and intellectual complexity or their need for greater autonomy.

However, rather than simply presenting passive victims, both Gilman and Naylor create vivid portraits of women complicit in their own marginalization, yet who nonetheless manage figuratively to some extent to blank out patriarchal texts with their own. Brown illustrates how Naylor reverses Gilman’s paradigm of the “mad woman in the attic”, a white, nineteenth century, Anglo American model, by shifting her position to the basement, the figurative space assigned to African Americans in the larger American landscape and the literal space in which the novel’s antagonist, Luther needed, imprisons his wife. Brown then shows that these Anglo and African American husbands hold similar attitudes toward their wives, in performing originally feminine rituals maintaining private journals, cookbooks, and family albums generations of women in the privileged black needed family attempt to assert their individuality. Instead, these texts become, like that of the protagonist of “The Yellow Wallpaper” a feminist record of growing disillusionment, madness, and eventual self-annihilation. Through these portrayals, Gilman and Naylor identify and theorize the traditional erasure that women have faced in history and

literature as a result of their socioeconomic and emotional dependence, and thereby create powerful oppositional discourses that emerge from women's lived experience.

Conclusion

The first chapter we discuss literary feminism theory and types of feminism, previous studies and researches done by other researchers and through analyzing the story of "The Yellow Wallpaper" by applying a theory of feminism which we will discuss it in the next chapter, because our total goal is to explore and show how literary works were the main ways to show the existence of women in the society by criticism.

Chapter Two: The Analysis

Introduction

All states and nations have their own invention, creative, artistry, literature, and ways of thinking. Literature is the art of writing. It is a meaningful representation of what authors have experienced, thought, and conveyed in their lives. Analyzing a piece of literature in many ways requires the application of relevant critical theories, one of these theories is feminist criticism. This chapter deals with the illustration of key concepts or aspects and values of feminism literary theory in “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

In this chapter we will apply feminist theory to “The Yellow Wallpaper” short story by closely examining the portrayal of the characters, both female and male, and the relationship between them. It seeks to understand the presentation of both genders (Appleman).

2.1. Historical and Social Background of “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Although “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a fictional literary work, it was based on Gilman’s own experience after she was diagnosed with a nervous condition and prescribed a “rest cure” (Gilman). The story was written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1890, and highlights the status of many women during the nineteenth century, in a time when women faced much oppression and little freedom and all women were seen especially by doctors as prone to ills and mental disorders because of their biological and emotional weakness.

The story examines the role of women in nineteenth-century American society, including gender roles, and the relationship between men and women. It portrays the subjugation and subordination of women to men and the authority of men over women, particularly in marriage.

If a woman had depression or anxiety in 1892, her condition was often diagnosed as a trivial 'nervous condition' and prescribed full rest and isolation. Doctors of the time, and many saw women as weak and emotionally unstable, and thus prone to illness and mental breakdown (Women).

Although women had many duties in the home, they had few political and legal rights. Women did not have the right to work, own property, or vote. Women were seen merely as servants to their husbands. So they were forced, for a variety of reasons, to be dependent upon their husbands for financial support (Cruea).

The story's events start in a country estate, an isolated big house or nursery far away from people and society, where the narrator and her physician husband John are staying for the summer vacation. The story is told in a form of a diary through the journals of an unnamed narrator.

2.2. The Illustration of Key Concepts of Feminist Literary Theory in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

The story contains many different themes and concepts that make it unique and appealing to readers, especially women, because it portrays the image of women in nineteenth-century society. The key concepts or the main themes embedded in the story are gender roles, mental illness, freedom and identity. Moreover, Gilman has used some elements in the story as symbols that reflect different meanings and feelings in reality.

2.2.1. Gender Roles

Much feminist literary theory tells us that the relationship between men and women in society is often unequal and reflects a particular patriarchal ideology (Appleman), which can be

seen obviously in the description of the relationship between the narrator and her husband. Gender Roles is one of the main themes in the story which was also one of the great issues in the time period.

The story is narrated by an unnamed narrator through her dairies that were written in secret. The narrator is new mother who recently gave birth and prescribed a “rest cure” treatment because she was diagnosed with a nervous condition. And through her writing there are passages that show the personality traits or roles of each character in the story.

Quotes on gender roles extracted from the story text would be the following concerning male and female characters.

a. Female Characters

Gilman’s portrayal of the three female characters in the story reflects the roles of women in the nineteenth century. And this is shown through the analyzing the three female characters which are the narrator, Jennie and Mary.

The first and main character is the unnamed narrator. She is a young woman, a wife, and a mother, who just gave birth, and who is undergoing care for depression which was prescribed by her husband. The narrator’s description of the treatment means that she should take a full rest in an isolated place far from people and society, and forbidden to do any type of physical or intellectual work, also she cannot even see or hold her newborn baby. But she disagrees with this treatment and feels that it will make her condition even worst and instead an active work and stimulation will make her feel better. But although she does not feel good, she trusts her husband’s decisions and follows his directions because she thinks that he knows better about her illness and his opinion weight more than hers. Also her opinions mean nothing to her husband

and she has no power to change this situation. And that reflects the powerlessness and submissiveness of women in the male-oriented society.

“So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.” (Gilman 648)

The second female character is John's sister Jennie or the narrator's sister-in-law. She is the housekeeper and the one who takes care of the narrator and the house, and doing domestic tasks. The narrator describes her as a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and also suggests that she is complicit with John and obeys her brother's orders as she is taking care of the house and the narrator. Through this character's role the writer tries to show that women at the time are limited or restricted only to the domestic sphere and they are convinced that this is the only right and suitable role for them, and that they are under the control of men whoever was, a father, brother or husband.

“There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing. She is perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!” (650)

The third female character is named Mary. Mary is the caretaker of the narrator's baby. She is mentioned once in the story, but the narrator describes her as being so good with the baby.

“It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby! And yet I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous” (649)

We understand that Gilman’s portrayal of female character in the story all together embodies or reflects the women’s roles in the time it was written. Women's choices were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood. Both choices resulted in domestic dependency (Cruea). "Female role was bound by kitchen and nursery, overlaid with piety and purity, and crowned with subservience" (Smith-Rosenberg 13).

b. Male Characters

John is the narrator’s husband who is a doctor, a respected physician and the one who takes care of the narrator’s mental condition, the one who put her under “rest cure” treatment. John does not take her wife’s condition seriously, and cannot see her illness and does not really believe she is sick. And he is confident to the extent that he believes his instructions will make her condition better, it means that he is certain about the usefulness of the “rest cure” treatment. He does not believe that her condition is serious that he even tells family and friends about her illness and describes it as a temporary nervous depression, which shows his carelessness and ignorance of her sufferance. The narrator’s physician brother also has the same opinion as John. The writer tries to show that all men had the same point of view concerning women at the time, when women were neglected, ignored and had no voice. And all men mentioned in this story are similar, they think in the same way. Gilman created the male characters as being doctors to show that men have the right to be educated and get a respected job unlike women who are restricted only to the domestic work, and also to critique the male-dominated medical practice of the time, due to her tough and unsuccessful experience with the “rest cure” treatment.

“If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do? My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing” (648)

In the following line the narrator shows that her husband makes fun of her because she does not like the house and she feels weird about it. And by saying ‘*of course*’ she expects that he will make fun of her and not paying attention to her feelings and thoughts but rather than seeing this laughter as disrespectful, she thinks that it’s a normal thing in married life, and that also reflects the misogyny and authority exercise of man in marriage.

“John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage” (647)

This following passage indicates that John is threatening her wife by taking her to Weir Mitchell and the narrator seems afraid and does not want to be sent to him. The narrator’s friend said that he is just like John and her brother. It is clear that all male characters in the story share common traits and described as similar, through which Gilman refers to the majority of men in the 19th century patriarchal society.

Weir Mitchell is a real person mentioned in the story, a physician and a specialist in nervous diseases who put Gilman to bed and applied the rest cure. Gilman said in an article from her feminist journal *Forerunner* “he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to “live as domestic a life as far as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,” and “never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.” This was in 1887.” She also said in the same article “the physician who so nearly drove me mad.”

“John says if I don’t pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don’t want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (650)

Through the illustration of male characters, Gilman describes patriarchy. John’s character presents men in general in patriarchal society, and that can be seen through the analysis of male character in this story which reflects the men’s dominance over women and society’s patriarchal norms during the late 1800s.

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. You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do? (647)

In this quote, the narrator suggests that the reason why she remains sick is probably because her husband is a doctor. This joke seems to criticize male doctors who misunderstand and mistreat their female patients.

Gilman’s short story is a warning to her readers about the consequences of fixed gender roles assigned by male-dominated societies, the man’s role is being the decision maker, the controller and the rational thinker, and the woman’s role is being a dutiful wife who does not question her husband authority and following his order without discussion (by Elizabeth Carey, April 2011).

In an article titled “WHY I WROTE THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” Gilman said “It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.”

For a long time, gender roles have been deep-rooted in societies all over the world, shaping people expectations of how women and men should behave. These societal expectations and norms concerning the roles of genders have severe implications on human's mental health. There is a complex relationship between gender roles and depression, as gender roles contribute to the development of depression in both genders. The influence of traditional expectations and societal norms concerning the roles of genders can be so harmful for mental well-being. It is known that since childhood, boys and girls are treated differently and taught to follow a predetermined gendered behaviors and roles. Boys are raised to be strong, independent and emotionally stoic, and expected to study and work, but girls are taught to be weak, dependent on man, and emotional, and expected to stay at home and fulfill the roles of wife and mother. These rigid expectations restrict the freedom of individuals and can lead to depression or even mental breakdown if it keeps increasing (Hodge).

2.2.2. Mental Illness

In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the protagonist is a young woman who is married and her husband named John, and has recently given birth. As a result of having the baby, her husband is a doctor who diagnosed her condition, she suffers from temporary nervous depression, her statement, john being a physician. The unnamed woman said:

"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". (647)

And prescribed her with a medication consisting of phosphate and tonics, and prevented her from doing any work that affects her mental health. Her husband decided to bring her to a house.

“So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again”. (648)

The story gives the reader an idea about the women’s mental illness and its treatment, and how this kind of treatment can lead to mental breakdown. The story is a semi-autobiographical, which was written based on the author’s experience with post-partum depression and the “rest cure” treatment, prescribed by Dr Silas Weir Mitchell who is mentioned by his name in the story. The forced confinement of the story’s narrator, and her husband’s instructions that forbid her from writing or doing any kind of activity, reflect the ‘rest cure’ in the author’s life. Moreover, the story highlights the case of many women in America during the nineteenth century. All women were seen as prone to mental illnesses and breakdown, because of their biological weakness and reproductive cycles, as male physicians thought (Hilary).

Gilman said in one of her that she has suffered from a severe continuous nervous breakdown, and after many years of suffering she decided to seek help from a specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country at the time named Dr Silas Weir Mitchell, the same doctor mentioned in the story. She said “This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as far as possible,’ to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,’ and ‘never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.’ This was in 1887” (1). Gilman went home and obeyed his directions for three months, that almost ruined her mental health, but she refused to continue the treatment and went to work again. The author’s refusal of the rest cure treatment is a clear indicator of its ineffectiveness.

“Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the winds and went to work again—work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite; ultimately recovering some measure of power” (Charlotte).

Here in the last quote Gilman is trying to convey a message about work, which she has preferred over the treatment. She describes work as a source of joy, growth and power, without which a person would be a burden to society. She also generalized that work is a normal right for every human being, either a man or a woman.

Gilman have restored power and recovery from her work and not the rest cure treatment, which shows that active work and writing never causes mental illness or breakdown as the nineteenth century physicians thought. This experience was the main reason behind writing “The Yellow Wallpaper” and publishing it with the aim of helping other women who are going through similar situation, as Gilman said about the story, “It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.” (Charlotte)

She did not intend to make people afraid or crazy but to save other women’s lives, and warn them from the danger of this treatment and confinement. And it really worked when she stated in the same article, that this story has saved a woman from a similar condition.

“It has to my knowledge saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered.”
(Charlotte)

When Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” she sent a copy to the physician who nearly drove her crazy to make him realize that his treatment is a wrong and harmful treatment. He did not acknowledge it at first, but after many years, Gilman was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading The Yellow Wallpaper.

It is clear that doctors of that time had no idea about how someone feel when having depression or any mental disorder, in addition to the lack of knowledge concerning psychology made them diagnose people depending on their physical state. Especially, when women have these mental troubles, male doctors diagnose them depending on their physical well being, exactly like the case of the narrator and her husband. They completely ignore the woman’s feelings and thoughts, and do not even try to know how these poor women feel, which indicates that women were extremely marginalized and ignored.

The writer has proven that the social assumptions and expectations about women and their mental state are completely wrong, and at least she did change some of the people’s opinions during that time.

2.2.3. Freedom and Identity

Freedom and identity is one of the central themes in “The Yellow Wallpaper” that is portrayed through the narrator's journey toward self-discovery, self-empowerment, and breaking free from confinement and oppression (Jain).

John, the narrator’s husband puts restrictions on her freedom, by confining her into a big room alone without doing anything and forbidding her from engaging in any stimulating activities, and

she cannot even take care of their child. So the narrator is imprisoned and living like a jailed person, and this is shown throughout many passages and lines in the story.

“So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas.” (648)

"I sometimes fancy that in my condition, if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad." (648)

“But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.” (648)

The narrator’s husband gives her strict orders and tries to control her mentally and physically, through cautioning her to not think a lot and to not write at all or even express her thoughts and feelings. She is unable to share her worries with anyone, and she is locked in a big nursery room with barred windows, isolated and alone between four walls covered with yellow wallpaper which she becomes obsessed with, and which symbolizes her confinement and her lack of freedom. The image of women that appears in the wallpaper is a reflection of her confinement in the room. The narrator starts to fully lose her identity and seems to ignore her real personality.

“At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be. I didn’t realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.” (653)

The void and the absence of activity, in addition to the lack of social interaction made the narrator look at things around her, the reason why her obsession and hallucination with the wallpaper have increased. The narrator's emotional restrictions hurt her more than the physical ones. Because she is unable to share her thoughts and worries with people due to the lack of social interaction, even with her husband, who refuses to listen to her complaints and how she really feel. She fully trust and obey her husband despite her sufferance and rejection of the treatment.

“I really have discovered something at last. Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out. The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over. Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.” (654)

The narrator becomes totally obsessed with the smell, color and patterns of the wallpaper, which make her hallucinating. While she becomes gradually obsessed with the yellow wallpaper that decorates the room's walls, she intensively observing it and trying to follow its patterns, and by any kind of light especially moonlight she sees that the wallpaper changes and becomes bars. Her obsession starts to increase until she finds that there is a woman and sometimes many women trapped behind it, hardly shaking the bars and trying to get out.

The narrator begins to feel that she must free the woman before she leaves the house, she started to peel the wallpaper little by little, and she was so careful trying to free the woman without making anyone feels or knows about it. And in an attempt to free the woman, the narrator locked herself in the room and started to peel massive pieces of the wallpaper in the final moments of the story. She does not know that the women behind the wallpaper represents her own self, it is her who is imprisoned and trying to find a way to be free, and her own desire to free herself from confinement.

In the following passage the narrator seems to be so happy to help the woman by peeling off the wallpaper and free her. Actually the woman behind the wallpaper presents the narrator herself as she is refusing to be trapped and wants to free herself from the restrictions which limit her freedom and the confinement she is living.

“Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John to stay in town overnight, and won’t be out until this evening. Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone. That was clever, for really I wasn’t alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her. I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.” (655)

The following passage indicates that the woman who creeps behind the wallpaper and on the road is the narrator herself, as she describes the woman as similar to her by saying “I always lock the door when I creep by daylight”. (654)

“I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I’ll tell you why—privately—I’ve seen her! I can see her out of every one of my windows! It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight. I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines. I don’t blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can’t do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.” (654)

At the end the protagonist removed all the wallpaper to help the woman escape which actually represents her, it was her desire to escape and be free from the confinement she is leaving. The narrator's insanity was the only form of escape, and the only way to get freedom, and she preferred to be insane than to leave in such conditions. In the following line the narrator restored her freedom by pulling off most of the wallpaper which reflects the desire of women to destroy or remove the social restrictions and limitations that prevent their freedom during the 19th century.

“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!” (656)

The story concludes with the narrator losing her mind and tearing down the wallpaper, which can be interpreted as a symbol of her rebellion against the confinement and oppression imposed upon her by John who represents the patriarchal society (John).

Throughout the story, the narrator transforms from a passive and submissive woman to a strong and independent one. She begins to actively rebel against her husband's treatment and societal

expectations, representing her breaking free from her confinement and oppression, and becoming her own person.

The story portrays a woman's struggle to free herself from her confinement and the oppressive forces in her life, and that is why it is seen as a powerful feminist critique of the societal expectation that women should be confined and restricted to domestic roles during the 19th century (Jain).

2.3. Symbolism

Symbolism in literature is the idea that a thing represents another thing or has a hidden meaning. It can be an object, character, or action reflecting or representing another thing, person, or idea.

There are multiple symbols included in "The Yellow Wallpaper" short story that carry substantial meanings and reflect realistic phenomena. The main symbols will be analyzed are, the yellow wallpaper, the country estate, the baby, the creeping woman, diary, moonlight.

2.3.1. The Yellow Wallpaper

The clearest concept in the story is the yellow wallpaper, and it is also the major focus because the events of the story revolve around this motif. It represents the social organization in which the father is the head of the family "patriarchy". In the novel, the narrator was looking at the wallpaper all the time, trying to figure out a pattern, so she saw a woman trapped behind the wallpaper. The narrator believes that the image of the woman is herself, confined behind the wallpaper. The idea is that the wallpaper and patriarchy keeping the woman subjugated.

At the beginning of the story the narrator described the wallpaper as old and irritating. She seems to hate it, and she also felt weird about it, and its pattern was the worst part for her. The isolation in the room makes her keep staring at the wallpaper which gradually starts to fascinate and obsess her.

When the narrator's obsession increases, she becomes more and more interested with the pattern and its shapes, as she starts to follow the lines and waves on the wallpaper trying to figure out how it was created and organized. And then after observing it day and night, she finally figured out that there is a woman behind it, and this woman keeps still in the daytime but moves a lot at night. Obviously the woman entrapped behind the pattern is the narrator herself, because she is the one who is imprisoned in the room, but she does not realize that until the end of the story. The narrator confinement and hallucination is actually because of her husband treatment and ignorance of her feelings and thoughts. So, the pattern she imagined as bars entrapping the woman represent the treatment's directions and restrictions set by her husband, which extremely limit her freedom.

The author used the yellow wallpaper to symbolize the standards and expectations of male dominated society, and the narrator's opinion about the wallpaper reflects the growing dislike of gender roles' expectations within the nineteenth century culture. The description of the wallpaper as old and irritated also depicts the fact that women have been suffering from social expectations for a long time.

a. The Yellow Color

By looking at the gothic nature of the story and the sad and creepy experiences, it is obvious that there is a specific reason behind choosing the color yellow for the wallpaper.

Yellow is an attractive color that gets the attention and lets people know that there is something they need to notice. It can symbolize various meanings and emotions, and it can have both positive and negative connotations. Yellow reflects positive feelings and traits such as intelligence, happiness, hope, peace and many. But it can be a disturbing color which represents negative traits and emotions like cowardice, betrayal, illness, deceit and so on. Yellow is used also for warning to represent caution or hazard (Morton).

Depending on the different interpretations of the yellow color, Gilman may have used this color as a symbol of mental illness, cowardice, or for the purpose of warning.

2.3.2. The Country Estate

The estate reflects the narrator's own isolation and confinement. The illustration of the gardens, house and room symbolize her limited physical and mental freedom.

The narrator describes the country estate as being beautiful, quite alone, and far away from the village, and the place has been empty for years, this clearly shows that the house is isolated, abandoned, and ignored. The narrator feels that there is something strange about the house and the room she is staying in. She and her husband took an old big room upstairs of the house, because her husband thinks that it is the most appropriate place for her, where she can have the amount of air and sunlight she needs, to help her recover from the nervous condition. The room was a nursery at first covered with yellow wallpaper that narrator finds hideous and disturbing. The room has barred windows, and has rings and things in the walls like if they were people chained in there, making the room look and feel like a prison. The narrator does not like

the room and does not want to stay in it and she wanted one downstairs, but her husband refused her desire because he does not feel that her thoughts about the house and room are rational.

“So we took the nursery at the top of the house. 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”. (648)

The author used the word hunted at the beginning of the story to show that the house has something mysterious and strange, and as the story progresses the narrator starts to be influenced by the house, especially the wallpaper. The house is where the narrator is confined and restricted more specifically in a former nursery covered with old sticky yellow wallpaper having confusing patterns on it, and there a great heavy immovable bed nailed down to the floor, the room’s windows have iron bars over them for little children, and the floor is scratched, gouged, and splintered. Through the description of the room it is clear that the house is too old and deteriorated.

“The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred. Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars”. (650)

The author illustrates the house as a jail for both the narrator and the woman behind the wallpaper, creating bars over the windows of the narrator’s room, and when the narrator’s state

got worst she started to see bars on the wallpaper by moonlight, that imprison the women behind it. The author tries to reflect and illustrate the form of women's life during the nineteenth century when women had an absolute lack of freedom and when women's life was so limited and restricted only in the house. The author's description of the room may represent marriage, because marriage in that time is about being controlled by a husband, staying at home as a servant or a slave, following his orders, taking care of him and the children, and doing the domestic tasks.

The story has a horror nature, which gives the readers the feelings of discomfort and fear. Perhaps the author wanted it to be scary and tragic for the purpose of warning women, who are living this kind of life or undergoing the "rest cure" treatment. The estate in general symbolizes confinement and isolation.

"I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper. Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees. Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least." (649)

The narrator's description of the outside environment is completely different of that of the house or indoors. She seems impressed by the nature, the flowers, the garden and the exterior in general. She seems also enjoying walking or spending time outside the house, and she even

sometimes imagine people walking in many paths and arbors, which reveals her desire to be free from the confinement and the bars surrounding her freedom.

“So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.” (650)

2.3.3. The Diary

The story is told through a series of secret entries in the narrator’s journal. As a form of written expression, the diary represents the quality of life that the narrator is living during her “rest cure” treatment, and gives the reader a view of her experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The diary is also a symbol of the narrator’s rebellion against her husband and the treatment.

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. You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do? (647)

The narrator’s husband John does not want her to do any type of mental or physical activity including her writing. He thought that doing any activity will make her mental condition worse, but she asserts that it helps her relief when she writes down what she feels and express her worries she has to face in her life. The diary does not only symbolize the narrator’s self expression but also is a symbol of rebellion against the limitations imposed on her by her husband. The narrator’s husband has a total control over the life of her wife, which made her look for any way to escape and feel a little bit free at least.

“There comes John, and I must put this away, —he hates to have me write a word.” (649)

“I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.” (649)

The diary plays a significant role in keeping the narrator mentally relived and entertained. During the treatment the narrator is also forbidden to have any kind social interactions because her husband thought that staying alone will make her feel better. But the narrator’s isolation and loneliness made her condition deteriorate more and made her hallucinate, so the diary was a kind of escape from the bitter reality she is living.

“I don’t know why I should write this. I don’t want to. I don’t feel able. And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief! But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.”
(651-652)

This also indict that the author and narrator are closely similar, they both like to write and both have experienced the “rest cure” treatment, which emphasis that the story is based on the author’s life. It means that the narrator represents the author herself and the other women behind the wallpaper represent the women living in such situations or all women living during the nineteenth century.

2.3.4. Moonlight

Normally, during night time everyone is asleep and almost no one is doing any activity. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” the narrator uses the moonlight symbolizing that; in the moonlight it is

dark and everything is invisible and when everyone was sleeping and could not see, and when the moonlight shines on the wall, the woman begins to change position and drift for climbing, because the moonlight hides her.

The woman is motionless and immobile during the day time, but at night when the moonlight shines on the wallpaper she starts to move and creep behind the pattern. The woman mirrors the narrator's daily habits, as she sleeps during the day and lies awake at night. The narrator's hallucination makes her relate her situation with things around her.

2.3.5. The Creeping Woman

During the narrator's confinement, there is a clear increasing of her obsession with the yellow wallpaper, and everything about it. She becomes obsessed with the smell, color, and patterns of the wallpaper, which gradually turns into a severe hallucination, leading her at the end to a mental breakdown.

Her obsession was mainly with the wallpaper, when she started observing it and tracing its patterns, she began to see strange shapes formed through the patterns, such as broken necks and staring eyes moving up and down.

“There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down. I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place

where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other." (649-650)

In this quote, as the narrator's obsession increases with the wallpaper, she starts to fancy that there is a mysterious figure trapped within the wallpaper. Over time, these formless figures or incomplete shapes start to take a clearer and more complete form in the narrator's mind. She discovers that the figure appears like a woman bending and creeping behind the pattern of the wallpaper.

"There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will. Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day. It is always the same shape, only very numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern." (652)

One night the narrator has confirmed that the figure represents a woman trapped behind the outside pattern, because she fancies that at night by any kind of light this outside pattern changes, and becomes bars that prevent the woman from escaping. The woman is quite still by daylight but during the night she keeps creeping and hardly shaking the bars, and she also tries to climb through the pattern all the time to get out. As the story progresses the narrator starts to discuss the figure with sympathy and compassion, feeling that she must help her to get out. The narrator is determined to free the woman out, while she is also entrapped, and because of her mental condition, she does not realize that the woman actually represents the narrator herself and all the creeping and the futile escape attempts represents her own desire to be free.

"At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman

behind it is as plain as can be. I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman. By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour." (653)

Sometimes the narrator sees not just one woman, but many women who also keep creeping trying to escape. Perhaps the author created those women in the story, to show that the majority of women are living the same kind of life. The author wants to reveal the reality and the fact that women are living a tragic life, referring to the women who are suffering from the restrictions and limitations of patriarchal society and who are living under the authority of men.

"Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out. The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over." (654)

In the following passage, the narrator said that she always locks the door and creeps by daylight, just like the woman within the wallpaper, and this is one of the many similarities between them. Through the description of both the narrator and the woman in the wallpaper, there is a great similarity between them, which means that the woman represents the narrator herself, who is after all, a woman imprisoned between the room's walls by her husband.

"I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her! I can see her out of every one of my windows! It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight. I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a

carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines. I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once." (654)

The identity of this mysterious figure will not be resolved until the end of the story, when the narrator transfigures into the woman within the wallpaper, but by looking to the wallpaper's previous condition, and the peeling traces on it, there is a possibility that this woman is a past inhabitant who previously lived in this room, another mentally unstable and oppressed woman. This may be an indication that all women are living the same life of the narrator, under confinement, oppression and depression.

"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!" Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!" (656)

The narrator keeps this woman's existence a secret from her husband, and everyone. She is so careful in liberating the woman without making anyone feels, or notice anything. At first she starts secretly by peeling off the wallpaper little by little, and then in the final moments of the story, in an attempt to free the woman, she locks the door and starts peeling off large pieces of the wallpaper, and after completing this task, she eventually identifies herself with the woman, and she starts creeping around the room just like her. When her husband, John enters the room, and sees her in that state, he gets shocked to the point of fainting in her path, so she creeps over him

every time. The action of removing the wallpaper is a symbol of rebellion and rejection of the societal constraints.

The woman behind the wallpaper seems to symbolize the narrator's own confinement and oppression in the story, and also symbolizes all the women, who have been suffering from being kept in their houses, and forced to do the roles imposed on them by male-oriented societies.

The word "Creeping" is mentioned many times in the story's text, which may symbolize the women's struggle to overcome domestic captivity and societal expectations. And the act of creeping over her husband may symbolize the desire to defeat the domination and superiority of man.

Conclusion

This chapter includes the analysis of different aspects and passages of the story such as themes, symbols and characters to get a full understanding of the story's substantial meaning, and to see how Gilman illustrated the social issues and struggles experienced by women in the late 1800s. Charlotte Perkins Gilman has a critical perspective towards social expectations of women's role and the psychological treatments based on her personal experience. Gilman shows the struggles of married women and their subjugation to men during that time. Therefore, the married woman in this dissertation can be called the nineteenth century's woman as she represents the majority of women who were living at that time.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This paper attempts to provide a special perspective on the fictional short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” written by a female American writer of the nineteenth century. Through conducting a feminist analysis of the story, many topics related to the lives of the sexes were found, such as gender roles, confinement and freedom, and mental illness. Through which the author tried to reflect the harsh living conditions experienced by women during 1800s. The story focused on the women’s struggles under male-dominated or patriarchal systems and how have social expectations about women affected their lives negatively, especially their mental health.

The story is an exaggerated autobiography, written in a fictional creepy way to reflect the nineteenth century way of life, when there was a high level of discrimination between genders, and male and female roles were predetermined. At the time women had a secondary place and lower position in the society, and they were unappreciated, ignored, and nearly unseen by men.

It is clear that the nineteenth century was such a difficult period for women. However, despite the difficulties they have encountered, it did not prevent them from standing firm and fight for the freedom and independence they deserve. And the story is such a good example of women’s opposition and rejection towards the social conditions, and it proves that the restrictions and limitations built on them did not prevent them from writing and showing their voices, like Gilman who has tried through her writing to reach out to all the women who are forced to follow the rules assigned by their social system. Moreover, the author seems to address more female readers in this context with the aim of warning them about the danger of both “rest cure” treatment and their subjugation to men, and empower them against male domination, to achieve freedom and independence.

Through analyzing both male and female figures in the story, there exists a huge difference between their roles, duties and positions in general. This suggests that gender was a significant factor in identifying human's status in society, in addition to the ways in which people should behave and be treated. In the story, man is identified as rational, educated, and independent, but woman is completely the opposite, she is identified as irrational, weak, and dependent on man.

The story's analysis explored some contradictions and complexities within the characters, such as the narrator's internal struggle between conformity and rebellion, as she disagrees with her husband's orders but at the same time she does not want to disobey him, and this struggle led her to do things she does not agree with, such as lying and writing in spite of her husband.

The narrator in the story has preferred madness over remaining submissive and imprisoned. Madness in the story may be seen as a kind of freedom and discovery of identity. The act of going mad or the breakdown action shows the women's strong desire of being free and independent, but not all women have the power and courage to speak and show this desire, unlike the author who tried to express and represent all of them through her masterpiece.

Female authors use feminist criticism to defend female characters and fight against stereotyping, and to express female authors' desires to break the social chains that restrict the woman freedom and achieve gender equality. Gilman portrayed woman as a victim of both her husband and the 'rest cure' treatment to save other women's life by showing them the result of being under the control of men and the treatment.

Men and women are not created similarly but they are created equally, and every human being has to possess legal rights, the right to be educated, to have a respected job, to enjoy

freedom and so many. The differences, characteristics and capacities do not make of anyone superior or better than the other, they just make them different and unique, to achieve a harmonious life.

- **Recommendations and Suggestions**

Some suggestions and solutions according to this study, women's issues are noticeable between writers and critics, it is clear that feminist criticism important for the investigation of the issues of women in my literary work. Different feminist writers talked about the oppression of women, their secondary role, and the strong domination men in societies. In terms of recommendations, the study suggests the need for feminist criticism in literature and calls for other mediums, such as mass media, to depict the image of women and raise awareness about women's issues, or by teachers must begin to presenting lessons that contain women's issues and this is in order to restore respect for women under patriarchy system in the societies.

It is true that women nowadays are more free and independent comparing with women in the past, but there still exist a lot of oppressed and controlled people in different parts of the world. We also recommend conducting future research using diverse methodologies to explore the current state of women in society and reach out to the oppressed women and oppressed individuals in general. Another type of research in the field of feminism may be useful, such as mixed method which gives the researcher an insight into people's experiences and way of thinking through interacting with them by conducting different procedures like interviews, focus group, and observations.

- **Limitations of the Study**

During the conduction of this study we found some limitations faced in the searching process due to the lack of references and resources concerning the topic and there are some difficulties in reaching some scholarly kind of resource and sites that needs availability, in addition, to the lack of information within some resources.

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