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A Turn-of-the-Century Woman's Journey into Madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892): A Fatal Self-Assertion

رحلة جنون إمراة في مطلع القرن العشرين في قصة ورق الجدران الاصفر: فرض ذات مهلك(1892) "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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Abstract

This paper explores the plight of the turn-of-the-century women swinging between the necessity to fit into domineering social and patriarchal constructions, and the desire to be self-determining women. More precisely, it examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a representative work of that era highlighting the female protagonist's awakening andaspiration to stand against the dominating figures in her life. However, due to overwhelming social constraints and androcentric hegemony, Jane, the protagonist, experiences repressive anger and frustration, and ultimately displays aggressive behaviours to spurn the revered beliefs about true womanhood. This paper, thus, maintains that in the light of the suffocating social milieu, the shift from submissiveness to emancipation can be achieved through silent and subtle rejection and ultimately unconventional aggressive behaviours. Seemingly unheroic, these unconventional behaviours, mainly madness, enable Jane to dismiss the conventional role assigned for her as a woman and wife.

Keywords: Madness; New Woman; Turn-of-the-Century; True Womanhood.

ملخص

يبرز هذا المقال محنة نساء مطلع القرن العشرين حول ضرورة التوافق والانصياع للهياكل الاجتماعية والأبوية المسيطرة من جهة والرغبة في أن يصبحن نساءً متحررات من جهة اخرى. وبتعبير أدق، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على القصة الموسومة بورق الجدران الاصفر "The Yellow Wallpaper" لشارلوت بيركنز جيلمان باعتبارها عملًا يعكس تلك الحقبة، جوانبها الاجتماعية، وانشغالات المرأة. كما انها تدرس وتحلل صحوة بطلة القصة وطموحها للوقوف ضد الهيمنة الذكورية في حياتها. بالرغم من طموحها، وبسبب القيود الاجتماعية الساحقة، جين، البطلة، تعاني من غضب وإحباط قمعي نتج عنه ظهور سلوكيات عدوانية. وعليه تؤكد هذه المقالة أنه في ضوء البيئة الاجتماعية الخانقة، يمكن العبور والتحول من الخضوع إلى التحرر من خلال الرفض الصامت والسلوكيات غير التقليدية والمتمثلة أساسا في الجنون. وعلى الرغم من انه يبدو غير بطولي، الا ان الجنون، يحرر جين من الصياغات النمطية والتقليدية المتعلقة بدورالمرأة في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنون؛ المرأة الجديدة؛ مطلع القرن العشرين؛ الأنوثة الحقيقية.

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Introduction

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth turned to be a watershed in women's writing history. This period was characterized by a growing sensibility, and most importantly by a conspicuous dissatisfaction about women's status within the domestic and public sphere. The disparities between women's capacities and ambitions as well as the limiting conventional roles imposed on them generated protests at different levels. Thus, most women's writings attacked concepts such as "the Cult of Domesticity" and "True Womanhood"[2] and, at the same time promoted what is called "the New Woman"[3]. They also "challenged many of the restrictions on women's self-expression, denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice, attacked patriarchal religion, and constructed a theoretical model of female oppression" (Showalter, 1977, p.29). Their writings shifted drastically from romantic unrealistic accounts to self-defining works of literature. However, dangling between their mothers' past, a past they wished to leave, and an emancipatory future they have not yet reached resulted in an unconventional body of literature. The latter was generally not heroic in the proper sense of the term; female characters tried to contradict or reject their phallocentric societies, but could never reach an absolute victory or freedom. Thus, many of these female characters go mad or commit to suicide in an attempt to escape the confines of their patriarchal societies.

This article, thus, explores the plight of the turn-of-the-century woman through the protagonist of the "Yellow Wallpaper", Jane. Gilman in her novel, like many of her female contemporaries, created an unruly woman character who goes mad in ordernot to live according to androcentric regulations. Making of madness the sole means of defying the patriarchal societies, Gilman provides a new meaning of escape- an escape that celebrates anger and aggressiveness to prove the protagonist's ability to transcend her reality in an unconventional manner. The novel, thus, succeeds in erasing limits, transmuting the conventional, and legitimizing the illegal.

[2]The terms refer to the prevailing social percepts about middle class 19th century women. The concept "Cult of Domesticity" was coined and initially used by the 1960s by historian Barbara Welter. Later on, "True Womanhood" came to be used interchangeably with the "Cult of Domesticity". Both concepts entail virtues like piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. For further details, see (Welter, Barbara (1996). *"*The cult of true tomanhood: 1820-1860*." American quarterly,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, www.csun.edu/~sa54649/355/Womanhood.pdf. Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1, pp. 151-174.

[3]The concept appeared during the Progressive Era (1890-1920) referring to women's changing position as more economically, intellectually, and physically free. For a detailed explanation see, (Ledger, Sally (1997). *The New woman: Fiction and feminism at the fin de siècle*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press).

I.“The Yellow Wallpaper”: Context and Significance

The significance of the “The Yellow Wallpaper” resides in the fact that it is so encompassing, expressive, and revolutionary. It is not a mere story of a woman who goes mad despite the care and attention of her husband; otherwise what is the message behind the madness of the woman? Is it to prompt women to go mad? Or, to encourage men not to take care of their wives? In fact, Gilman goes beyond that superficial reasoning. Through her story, she portrays not only her lived experience, but also goes to make of it a case for many women during the nineteenth century in general and women writers in particular. For this reason, feminist critics reissued this short story and made of it the starting point of second wave of feminism. In that, Ruth Robins (2000) explains that

the quasi- autobiographical content and the historical context have laid the story open to most obviously to materialist feminist criticism. The story and the autobiography, the individual's fiction and her history alongside the evidence of Mitchell's own writing's on the treatment of neurasthenia, are read as a metaphor for the collective experience of women on general, and women writers in particular. (p.246)

Interestingly, at the time of it publication, the story was harshly attacked and criticized. And although William Dean Howells (1837- 1920), American journalist, critic, editor and novelist, expressed his disapproval concerning the publication of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Gilman in her *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1990) explains that she persisted to publish it. Finally, when she did, Howells described the story as “perilous stuff” which is written in “somewhat sensational style” and posed the question if such a story deserves to be published and read by people (p.121). The repulsive reception of the story is neither due to its style nor to its gothic setting; it is owing to the fact that it is about a woman who overthrows the conventions of domesticity and “True Womanhood”. Because of these cultural and social pervading beliefs, the story was ignored for about seventy-five years until its republication in 1973.

When writing “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Gilman aimed at shedding light on her own experience as one example of the many Victorian women who suffered from social stereotypes about femininity, domesticity, sanity and hysteria. The story depicts, as Gilman intended it to be, her depression after giving birth to her daughter Katherine in 1888. Her state worsened with her sojourn with her husband and newly born daughter. Her depressive state is simply due to her dissatisfaction if not rejection of her role within the domestic sphere as wife and mother- a point that she feared even before getting married. Inthat, she explained in one of her letters to her husband that she prefers to stay single for two major reasons: to remain free and not to be bound to any other person. She, also, states her strong belief that marriage will imprison her in an atmosphere overwhelmed by obedience, passivity, and dependence. Full of ambition, Perkins, on the other hand, believed in the necessity of utilizing her talent and energy in promoting social development, in general, and

advancing women's state in particular (Horowitz, 2010, p.36). Torn between her convictions and actual state, Gilman's mental and psychological state degraded. As a result, she accepted to be subject to the "rest cure" developed by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, a prominent nerve specialist (Robbins,2000, p.243). But what Gilman ignored is that Dr. Mitchell "considered women to be patently inferior objects to be coddled and condescended to" (Harris,2003, p.38). Gilman's state worsened during the "rest cure" owing to the exaggerated passivity and idleness she experienced. Thus, she decided to stop being subject to it. Experiencing the evils of this cure, Gilman became determined to portray the devastating effect it has upon women especially because she was aware of the fame of Dr. Mitchell and the numerous women who were subject to his cure. Ultimately, she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" which was "on one level a defiant response to Mitchell's rest cure and what it meant for women of her social background and education" (Harris,2003, p.38). Accounts affirm that Gilman succeeded in pursuing Mitchell, after sending him a copy of her short story to change his cure (Robbins,2000, p.246).

Besides the fact that "The Yellow Wallpaper" depicts Gilman's own experience with her husband and Dr. Mitchell's "rest cure", this story has, furthermore, a social perspective since it attacks publically social and medical practices that were rooted in history as well in culture. It depicts the existing tensions between men and women during the late nineteenth century. More precisely, it portrays men's desire to dominate and imprison women within the domestic sphere to ensure and instill their presumed superiority mainly through marital confines and patriarchal authoritative pragmatic discourse. "It articulates a conflict between masculine and feminine modes of discourse," Alfred Bendixon and James Nagel (2010) explain, "and between a male authority which defines women in limiting ways and a feminine need for more commodious modes of self-definition" (p.113).

I.1. Hysteria: A Female Disease

The "rest cure" is designed to cure women, in particular, from what is called hysteria. Sigmund Freud, a pioneer in studying women's hysteria, described it through the connection between "psyche*"* and "*soma"* or in other words as the "female disease". This illness, deriving its name from the Greek word for womb, was thought to be caused by the female reproductive system (qtd in. Gilbert and Gubar,2000, p. 52). Throughout history, women were believed to have weak and vulnerable bodies. Thus, women were considered as inferior creatures whose bodies make them not only unable to perform steadily any activity, but whose smaller brains having plain nervous system make them predisposed to mental illnesses. Consequently, any intellectual activity would lead women to have severe bodily dysfunctions. It was believed, thus, that any attempt by a woman to be intellectually distinct "suggested not only a self-destructive imitation of a male skill but also a masculine physical development" (Showalter,1981, p.77).

Linking hysteria to intellectual women was a social male agenda more than anything else. It was mostly to keep women away from the intellectual sphere and to warn men not to allow women indulge in such activities. The whole issue became a point of great interest and took many dimensions. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000) explain that the mad intellectual nineteenth century woman occupied the centre of not only medical accounts, but also of literary works written by women among whom Jane Austin, George Eliot, charlotte and Emily Bronte, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (p.55).

I.2. The “Rest Cure": A Medical or Cultural Remedy

What fueled Gilman’s utmost anger and rage was “the rest cure” she was subject to. She realized that the cure fossilizes the social perception about women as dependent and submissive creatures. During her first visit to Dr. Mitchell, she prepared a detailed account of her illness, but he deemed it irrelevant and cared only about the exact application of his prescription. While Dr. Mitchell ordered her to “Live as domestic a life as possible. …Lie down an hour after every meal... And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live” (Gilman,1990, p. 96), Gilman (1990) explained that it drove her to the verge of madness. She explains:

I could not read nor write nor paint nor sew nor talk nor listen to talking, nor anything. I lay on that lounge and wept all day. The tears ran down into my ears on either side. I went to bed crying, woke in the night crying, sat on the edge of the bed in the morning and cried-from sheer continuous pain. (p. 121)

What is noteworthy about this cure is that it is based on the belief that any intellectual effort would be harmful to women's state. Such a belief, undoubtly, is rooted in the cultural premise considering women as being intellectually feeble. Besides the apparent objective of curing women, this treatment focuses on diminishing if not erasing all forms of self-expression as well as intellectual and artistic activity (Robins 245). Instead of mollifying the patient, it forces inactivity and lethargy resulting into an overall mental regression and agitation. Elizabeth Ammons (1992), furthermore, explains that

The rest cure responded to middle-class white women's trauma of unsuccessful role adjustment, which the medical establishment labelled "hysteria," by instituting a rigid and highly symbolic therapeutic regimen of enforced idleness and induced, infantile dependence. Whether her disease manifested itself in symptoms of depression or of heightened excitability—she might be apathetic, morose, uncontrollably tearful, hypersensitive, delusional, or any combination of these—the patient found herself forcibly relieved of all physical and mental responsibility. Denied freedom of movement and intellectual stimulus (books, friends, writing, or drawing) in the first stage of treatment, she was transformed into nothing but body, a mass of pure passive, ostensibly desexualized flesh without self-control (p.37).

II. The Story of the Unnamed Narrator

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is about Jane, the initially unnamed narrator, who suffers from a mental break down and is subject to a treatment imposed by her doctor-husband. The story is set in a colonial mansion away from the protagonist's own house to ensure her mental rest. However, this gothic setting becomes the main incentive of the protagonist's mental activities and focus of interest. And although the protagonist describes the house and the room she was put in as "a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore" (Gilman,2009, p. 3), she feels more confined and isolated than ever. The fact that the house is isolated reflects the protagonist's husband, John, intentions to sequester his wife from any social interaction. The latter, according to Sadan (1997), leads to a "complex kind lack of knowledge" causing the impossibility of creating "an alliance in order to resist power" (p.47). John is not only satisfied with his choice of the house, but goes to choose the room his wife stays in. In fact, the choice of the room, which is originally a nursery, reflects John's superiority and full control over his wife. Just like a child, Jane has been deprived of her position as an independent adult in control of her own life (Robbins ,2000, p.255).

Seemingly concerned about his wife's clinical state, John fails to know what is exactly wrong with Jane due to his unaffectionate attitude towards her. Jane describes him as "practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (Gilman,2009, p.1). In addition to John's extreme rational attitude there is his neglect and sarcasm about his wife's opinions; he laughs at her because he considers what she feels as mere fancy, and rejects her demands when she asked him to change the room or leave the house. The narrator explains:

John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imagination power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of existed fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. (Gilman,2009, p. 4)

Gilman's feminist attitude is vested in her depiction of madness as a means of escape from the various confines Jane lives in. Jane experiences a gradually growing consciousness that challenges the "rest cure" she was subject to. She declares that the "rest cure" is not only useless but harmful as well. She disagrees with that method, but all she could say at the beginning was "And what can one do?" (Gilman,2009, p.1). When Jane comes into grasps with herself later on, she becomes more aware of the harmfulness of such a method and starts to learn how to violate her husband's orders. She thought that the best form of defiance was through going back to writing. Though writing secretly, her rebellious spirit starts to emerge rejecting the domestic, patriarchal, and medical dictates. Writing,

however, seemed exhausting to Jane, and, thus, changed her interest towards the wallpaper in her room.

Jane's infantilization is further accentuated when starting the treatment that emphasizes her dependency on her husband and his sister. Furthermore, Jane's isolation reflects what Ellen Annandale (2009) explains as a solution for a crisis that the character experiences concerning socially established roles (p.20). So, by isolating his wife, John thinks that he would adjust his wife's social function as a woman, wife, and mother. It is true that the whole process deepens his superiority and imprisons Jane, but above all, it created a gap between her body and her mind. Since Jane's body could not move, her imaginative and creative powers grew stronger in response to her physical entrapment. Interestingly enough, these growing imaginative powers enabled Jane to create an entire world out of the mysterious wallpaper. She even succeeds to establish a contact with a woman she sees imprisoned behind the patterns of that wallpaper. John's remarkable mistake lies in undermining the might of imagination. He unthinkingly imprisons her body and unleashed her "artistic degeneration and psychic chaos" (Johnson ,1989, p.29).

Obliged to follow the regimen her husband prescribes to her, Jane confesses that she may be fine physically but not mentally. John, however, convinces her that physical progress is the key to her overall wellbeing. He further urges her to quench her fancies and feelings for the efficacy of the treatment. As such, having John basing his treatment on his own speculations and refusing to listen to his wife asserts the superiority of the patriarchal, rather than medical, discourse over the feminine and imaginative one. In the same vein, Janice Haney-Peritz (1986) explains:

Since we have an account of John's discourse on his wife's condition, a discourse based on the unspoken and therefore "unheard of contradiction" that somehow she is both well and ill, we may want to be even more specific and say that the oppressive structure at issue is a man's prescriptive discourse about a woman (p.116).

Once discovering his wife examining the wallpaper, for example, John told her with an agreeable and at the same time manipulative tone "what is it, little girl?" asserting his authority over her by reminding her that she is dependent on him like a little girl. His wife's answer, however, stupefies him for he no longer feels the obedience he used to. He says "Why, darling!". Then, he comes back to his usual assertive tone providing a number of reasons because of which they cannot move. And he ends the conversation reminding his wife with his authority as a doctor explaining: "… you will never for one instant let that enter your mind! It is false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell so?" (Gilman,2009, p. 9). This was, probably, the last time when the protagonist tries to communicate with her husband because after that she shifts to dissecting the wallpaper and the woman she sees behind the bars. Jane ends up engulfed by the wallpaper, submerged in its gothic world, and gone mad. While, initially, the

protagonist was not allowed to express her feelings or opinions, once mad, though she uses a discourse of a mad woman, she could verbalize her inner thoughts and reflections contradicting her husband's rational patriarchal discourse. In a way, female psychosis turns out to be sanity in the face of male's megalomaniac craziness.

II.1. Self-expression through Writing

Writing is presented as a pertinent factor in the protagonist's psychological change. While John forbids his wife to write because, supposedly, he thinks that this would worsen her state, she firmly states that writing "would relieve the press of ideas" and make her more comfortable and relaxed (Gilman,2009, p.4). She, also, states that: "I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way_ it is such a relief" (Gilman,2009, p.7). Jane's desire to write marks her determination to escape the silence and submission imposed by her patriarchal surrounding. Her attitude reflects Gilbert and Gubar's (2000) idea of replacing the contemplative, silent, and submissive feminine life by a one of "significant action" and "female rebellion" induced by "the monstrous pen [that] tells a terrible story" (p.36). Gilman, herself, experienced a stable mental state only after ceasing to be subject to the rest cure, quitting matrimonial life, and devoting herself to writing. So, depicting her protagonist finding consolation in writing reveals much about Gilman's perception about the act of writing.

The emerging desire of the protagonist to write down her thoughts and reflections in order to get rid of "the press of ideas" is exactly what Hélène Cixous labeled as *écriture feminine*[4]reflecting the urging need of a woman "to write herself".Once starting to write, the woman manifests a great deal of "emotional spontaneity" through which she rejects the "syntactic" patriarchal order affirming her femininity (In. Morris,1993,p. 125).

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the more the protagonist writes, the more her senses and mental faculties grow stronger and unruly. It is only after immersing herself in the fanciful disruptive world of writing that Jane becomes fully aware of John's manipulative nature. She says: "He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be lovable and kind. As if I couldn't see him!" (Gilman,2009, p. 13). She "… becomes aware that John's self-reported concern for Jane's welfare is not much more than a selfish desire to maintain the order/Order of his own life" (Herndel,1988, p. 88).

[4]It is first introduced by Helene Cixous in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" referring to the feminine unique writing style. Cixous maintains that due to the many years of imposed silence on women's voice, once starting to write the feminine writing overthrows all forms of repression including the linear logical phallocentric language. This results in the creation of eccentric texts full of gaps, imagery, disruptions, etc. For more information, see (Cixous, Hélène (2000). "The Laugh of Medusa". Eds. Burke, Lucy, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin. *The Routledge Languageand Cultural Theory Reader*. London: Routledge).

Thanks to writing, the protagonist moves from what Helene Cixous (2000) in her "the Laugh of the Medusa" named as "place reserved for the guilty" (p.90), to a realm where she desires to exert her full powers through turning the printed page and the dead wallpaper into a gothic vivid world of self-revelation (Johnson,1989, p. 25). In such a gothic world, Jane is able to step out from the conventional role her husband along her society has defined for her. Within this same world, she is able to reinstate the feminine unruly discourse at the expense of the biased oppressive androcentric one. More than that, the feminine discourse employed in Jane's journal adheres to the principles of gynocriticism[5]- a writing concept that does not only condemn patriarchy, but mostly celebrates feminine nature. Janie's written account is non-phallocentric par excellence. It is non-linear, rambling, inconsistent, and full of contradictions and psychological tensions. It is only an antithetical gynocritical text that transgresses the traditional literary form and is able to portray the psychic degeneration and torment of a woman.

II.2. Jane's Descent into the Wallpaper's Gothic World: Moving from Object to Subject

Gilman genially turns the wallpaper into a means that permits interaction. Gilbert and Gubar (2000) even maintain that Jane deems the wallpaper as "hieroglyphics" onto which she projects her own quest of freedom from conflicting social demands (p.33). She starts to isolate herself from the rigid patriarchal surrounding, and moves to the wallpaper that seems to carry much significance to her. The less she is attached to her husband's patriarchal rational world, the more she becomes absorbed in her fanciful world. The wallpaper appears to be more than a mere means of expression, but a one of feminine affinity and imagination. The visionary penetration of the wallpaper activates Janie's ingenuity as well as her communion with the other imprisoned woman. As she tries to read and interpret unseen and incomprehensible signs that she alone can see as moving and changing shapes, she, also, manages to see and interact with the woman behind the bars that she associates with herself. In that, she says: "Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day. It is the same shape, only numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (Gilman,2009,p. 8).

The account of the woman in the wallpaper does not only mirror Jane's status as being locked down within matrimonial and gender confines, but also acts as a trigger for Jane's consciousness and desire for change. Lisa Kasmer (1990) maintains that the wallpaper is a "liberating and disruptive force which at once mirrors and contains her narrator's consciousness. This force allows the narrator to begin to surpass her husband's language and desires to establish her own" (p.4). The merger with the wallpaper, thus, can be said to be the marker of the emergence

[5] The term is coined by Elaine Showalter in the seventeenth. Gynocriticism marks the beginning of the second phase of the feminist criticism. It brings back female/feminine authorship, experience, history, and literary tradition to the center. It does not only invite women to establish a literature of their own, but also provides a critical framework for analyzing women's literature. For further details, see, (Showalter, Elaine (1977) *A Literature of their own.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

of a wild feminine discourse. Though, this discourse brings out finally a madwoman, what is important is that it succeeds in erasing any possibility of a "repetition of patriarchal language" since the protagonist is determined to escape patriarchal confines through her unconventional and eccentric behaviour (Kasmer, 1990, p.13).

Being yet subject to her husband's regulations, Jane, at the beginning, finds that thinking about and analyzing the wallpaper, the patterns, and even the woman behind the bars annoying and repulsive. She even begs her husband to take her away from the room explaining that residing there is very disturbing. While, initially, she says: "it makes me tired to follow it" (Gilma,2009, p.7), few days later, Jane affirms that the wallpaper completely changes her life. She states:

Life is very much exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and more quiet I was. John is pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him that it was *because* of the wallpaper- he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away. (Gilman ,2009, p.11)

This passage marks Jane's "spiritual nadir", as well as complete immersion in her gothic, nocturnal, empowering world (Johnson,1989, p.28). This immersion affirms her resolution to shift from repressive anger into madness and from "idle fancy" into "empowering imagination" (Johnson,1989, p. 29). Though seemingly tragic, madness is the only possible and plausible strategy for Jane to escape gender confines. Similarly, Judith Harris (2003) maintains that "the process of healing required her re-entry into the chaos of the wallpaper, which offers both escape and the safety of containment" (p.40).

The theory of R. D. Laing is very enlightening as far as Jane's madness is concerned. He explains that insanity is often a temporary response to a life dominated by social oppression. In order to achieve "superior sanity", one may resort to madness as a strategy and a stage in the realization of a self-determining selfhood. Jane's hysteria, thus, becomes not only an uncanny form of rebellion, but most importantly a witty response to the stifling societal prescriptions. Madness gives Jane the opportunity to retreat safely from gender and matrimonial obligations in order to look for and approach a more self-actualizing identity. Her madness should be seen as a "breakthrough" rather than a "breakdown" (Laing, 1967, p.84).

The woman behind the wallpaper becomes the alter ego of the protagonist. By the end of the story, Jane does not only try to help the woman, but acts mostly like her; she does not sleep at night, shakes and pulls the paper, and creeps just like the woman behind the wallpaper. The relationship between the two women trespasses the level of a "doppelganger"[6] or reciprocity and turns to be a merger

[6]The doppelganger, meaning in German "double-goer," is a literal or symbolic double of a certain character in a literary work. The term was coined by the German author Jean Paul in his

leading to single ecstatic triumph using the pronoun "I" rather than "we". Their unity releases the caged woman behind the Victorian bars, previously, torn between the pragmatic and fanciful, the sound and mad, as well as the masculine and feminine discourse. It is through identification with the woman in the wallpaper and ultimate madness that Jane's unruly nature emerges, succeeds in opposing phallocentric authority, and creates her own world away from the symbolic order, albeit momentarily (Bendixon& Nagel, 2010, p.110).

The very last scene in the story is very enlightening and pivotal. Jane says to John: "I've got out at last…And I've pulled off most of the wallpaper, so you can't put me back" (Gilman, 2009, p.19). This scene reflects her ability to impose her own disorderly order at the expense of the symbolic one. Being able to "creep by daylight", Jane asserts her ability in blurring the rigid limits between the feminine and patriarchal worlds. And, again, being able to walk over and press John's face, a symbol of patriarchal authority, over the floor asserts Jane's victory through resorting to madness. She is finally able to transgress the patriarchal sentence, and accomplish her emancipation, although in a fatal way. The fact of having John faint when he sees her creeping accentuates the power of her newly acquired "transcendent sanity" (Treishler, 1984, p.67). Creeping is very significant. Throughout the process of John's infantalization, Jane has been reduced to the state of complete inertion. Though may be seen as physical degeneration, again, Jane's insistence to crawl marks her growth into a new stage. "From the helpless infant, supine on her immovable bed, she has become a crawling, "creeping" child, insistent upon her own needs and explorations" (Johnson, 1989, p. 31).

Conclusion

Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper* is a feminist counter discourse, par excellence. It trespasses the level of a mere fictional introspective account by proving to carry a social agenda through publically critiquing a medical treatment and the entire androcentric encapsulation of women at the time. Above all, the story is a one that celebrates the feminine unruly nature. A nature that Virginia Woolf (1929) in her seminal article assumes capable to transgress all limits. In that, she states "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (p.76). It is this freedom of mind that enables Jane to resort to strategic insanity rather than accept a seemingly happy conventional life, yet full of submission. Jane's madness is very suggestive. Though it ensures her psychological emancipation, her physical one is not yet reached. As such, her triumph is momentary and evocative of potential possibilities of change for the turn-of-the- century woman. The story marks the threshold for Victorian women to turn to be "New Women". And though seemingly fatal, Jane chooses madness to assert her selfhood and mark her initiation to the new turn-of-the century world.

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novel *Siebenkäs*. Though the concept had been used widely in literature, it became popular especially in Gothic fiction. In general, it refers to two persons (characters) who bear a striking resemblance reaching the level of symbolic significance.
For further detailed explanation, see (Vardoulakis, Dimitris (2010). *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy.* Modern Language Initiative: Fordham University Press).

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