

Patterns of Entrapment and Emancipation in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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"If I were only well enough to write a little, it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman- "The Yellow Wallpaper"

This paper seeks to explore the various patterns of female entrapment in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". Medical entrapment is specifically an expression of social and cultural patterns confining women in the 19th century. This is the focus of this paper. Having little or no knowledge at all of women's particular psychological nature, or certain misconceptions about them and their specific illnesses, men doctors dominating the medical field at the time, sometimes led their women patients to insanity, instead of curing them. The confinement of these women and the unprofessionalism of those doctors were exposed by Gilman's professional writing. Using what can be called her 'patterns of entrapment' of various types in "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman provides a woman's perspective into this issue of woman's insanity; prevents the suffering of more women, and also revealing some chances of emancipation from their confining conditions.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, thus, wrote this autobiographical story to "show the gradual psychological journey of women from sanity to madness as a result of this inappropriate diagnosis of the time" (Bak 1), which depended mainly on the medical profession's experimentations that took men's experience "as a universal standard and applicable to both genders" (Gandeharion and Mazari 119). Some medical men assumed that women were naturally weak, that education would make them physically ill and that 'rebellious' and 'unconventional' women are more liable to suffer from "nervous disorder and its attendant pathologies." (Gilbert and Gubar 145). Thus, Gilman wrote this short story to expose the failure of the medical practices that prevailed in the 19th century and the falseness of their assumptions. Perhaps she also wanted to assert that women's emancipation from such beliefs is possible, creating a protagonist that transformed her confinement and entrapment into liberation.

These patterns of entrapment to be explored in Gilman's short story include the social, cultural, and medical patterns confining women in the nineteenth century, the labeling and stereotyping of women and their

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specific diseases in that age, the dismissal of women's views considering these 'whimsical' and 'fanciful', the continuous exposition of the gift of imagination on the part of the woman narrator and a repeated reminding by the husband that "she had better not succumb to her fanciful imagination at all," the internalization and assimilation of patriarchal ideas by women, the infantilization of these women by the men in their lives, and the entrapment of men by their own misconceptions and presuppositions about women. This paper also explores Gilman's own 'patterns of entrapping readers' in "The Yellow Wallpaper", which she might have used in her short story to create alternative choices for her protagonist or lessen her suffering. She used an unreliable narrator, some recurring linguistic patterns, some spatial symbols to convey her feelings of confinement, some recurring linguistic patterns, the power of the gaze, and the technique of self-split. Using self-split near the end of the story may also be seen, in a different light, as a step towards woman's emancipation and a shift in the pattern of man-woman relationships in the future.

Generally defined as "a series of actions or events that together show how things normally happen or are done" or as "a set of lines, shapes or colours that are repeated regularly" (Macmillan, 2nd Ed. 2007), a pattern is mainly concerned with following certain norms that show how things usually are expected or made to happen or are done, depending on repetitions. Thus, it might be 'safer' to follow a pattern; especially the socially and culturally accepted ones, as it was the case for women in the nineteenth century. Denying women 'a room of their own' i.e. a way of treatment that does not conform to men's ways of perceiving and reacting to the problems and expectations of a male dominated world, men doctors, in the 19th century, projected typically social and cultural patterns of confinement on their professional treatment of specifically women psychological problems, relegating them to the realm of insanity.

Also defined as "a regularity in the world, man-made design or abstract ideas", where the elements of a pattern "repeat in a predictable manner", we learn that a pattern has to do with the labels of acceptable and unacceptable; the safe to do/leave patterns where conformity means wellness and deviation means sickness. Being mostly 'man-made', 'repeated' and 'predictable', these patterns are closely related to stereotypical ideas and images about woman at that age; like that of the characteristics of the 'ideal' woman/mother/wife, and the popular images connected to women as that of 'the angel in the house' which formed a source of women entrapment.

One main source of entrapping women in the nineteenth century is these stereotypical images of 'ideal' femininity. Established through centuries of "gendered doctrine and amplified in mid-victorian conduct manuals and educational pamphlets, the "angel in the house" was the bastion of womanhood idolized by Coventry Patmore in his famous 1854 poem of the same name" (Leonardi ed. 296). The stereotype of "the angel in the house", O'callaghan states, thus, describes "a self-sacrificing female subject whose domestic and familial subservience and elevated moral character demarcates her womanhood" (Leonardi ed. 298). Describing an 'ideal' woman as the 'angel' in the house, with all its implications of docility and piety, entailed expecting her to play a certain role. Imposing such a role on wives demanded that they act in a divine way, but they are only humans who err and flaw. Portrayed as an angel, entailed perfection in everything, celestial attributes, self-control, showing no feelings of anger, making sacrifices and all the things that the word 'angel' connotes, and the related expectations of what women should or should not do accordingly. From the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies "had proliferated, enjoining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, selflessness; reminding all women that they should be angelic" (Gilbert and Gubar 23). However, this superhuman image of woman entailing perfection practically impairs a woman and dehumanizes her. Such an imposed and impractical role expected from women in the 19th century is shown to be behind the suffering of many of them, being in O'callaghan's words "unattainable, unrealistic and decidedly un-feminist" (298). In her very popular novel, *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte's heroine, Jane, asserts to her lover, Mr. Rochester, that she is not an angel as he called her. She argues (244):

"I am not an angel", I asserted; "I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me- for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate."

Bronte's unconventional woman character relates between being an angel in that age and 'dying'. Perhaps, she means the spiritual death women faced at that time when they played the roles imposed upon them, conforming to the social and cultural norms, feeling great psychological unrest due to their contradictory feelings and duties. Ironically enough, this woman is the one who referred to the importance of being practical in man-woman relations. Like Bronte, Gilman also rejected the too idealistic inhuman ideas middle class women were brought up to, such as 'living for others' and making 'complete abnegation of themselves' (Dodd 3), and

above all, thinking their men partners are always right. She also rejected the unfairness of the binary way of describing women in relation to men.

Using the language to 'label' women in a dualistic way, as 'good' or 'evil', 'angel' or 'witch'/'monster', as 'Mary' or 'Eve', is a related pattern of entrapment; using the language as a trap. The woman described by the anthropologist, Sherry Ortner, to have always been seen in every society to "stand at both the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating" (Gilbert and Gubar 19), to be both "under and over (but really simply outside of) the sphere of cultural hegemony" is not only "excluded from culture... but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing." (19) In introducing his and Nicola Humble's book, *Victorian Heroines*, Kim Reynolds maintains that the Victorians tended to see women in terms of 'pairs of opposites'(1993:1): 'Angel or fallen woman', which is another pattern of entrapment for these women. If they do not want to be described as 'fallen', they will have to make sacrifices to look like angels, for instance. He adds:

"Victorian woman is either the sexually passive and angelic wife, sister, and/or mother, or she is the sexually charged and demonic mad-woman-in-the-attic. The Victorian temper is described as 'unyieldingly dualistic', capable only of understanding sexuality in terms of polarities (2)".

This, not only added to women's suffering, but it also led to some psychological problems on the part of these women who were forced to act in a specific way to meet the requirements of an ideal woman in their age. Being "ravenous for a fuller life than their society offered them", they "famished for the freedom to act and to make real choices." (Shawlters 144) Their nervous disorders "expressed the insoluble conflict between their desires to act as individuals and the internalized obligations to submit to the needs of the family, and to conform to the model of self-sacrificing "womanly" behavior."(Shawlters 144)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman criticizes these prevalent misconceptions in the Victorian age whether about marriage, or the role of woman in that social institution or the stereotypical diagnosis of women in the medical field as sources of confining women. She rejects the idea of one partner as superior, usually the man, and the other as inferior. As a socialist thinker, Gilman returned to her roots in the States "in search of a theory to explain women's confining, dependent roles as wives and mothers" (

Davis and Knight xv). In Gilman's poem; punningly titled "In Duty Bound", Gilman reveals the 'spiritual constrictions of what she ironically called "home comfort":

In duty bound, a life hemmed in,
----Whichever way the spirit turns to look;
No chance of breaking out, except by sin,
----Not even room to shirk--
----Simply to live, and work.
An obligation preimposed, unsought,
----Yet binding with the force of natural law;
The pressure of antagonistic thought;
----Aching within, each hour,
----A sense of wasting power. (qtd. In Gilbert and Gubar 84)

Here, it is very evident that the author suffers from lack of fulfillment and boredom of the confining monotonous domestic life she is leading with all its pre-imposed obligations and spiritual suffering; something which is also reflected in this particular 'powerful' and 'representative' story of "The Yellow Wallpaper", in what it says about the situation of women in the nineteenth century. That it is represented by a nameless narrator "is significant because of her archetypal position as the womanly 'other', a term created by Simone du Beauvoir in The Second Sex, to explain women's secondary status in society." (qtd. in Frouman-Smith 51)

Being "a feminist besides being a medical iconoclast", Charlotte Gilman also rejected the dominance of men doctors over the medical field, mistreating their women patients, causing them more suffering. She knew that "the cure for female despair must be spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as social" (92). It is due to the suffering Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself went through because of this 'Rest Cure' treatment, prevalent at the time, that almost led her to insanity, that Gilman wrote this particular story of a woman, like herself, suffering from post-partum depression. She is wrongly diagnosed as suffering from 'Hysteria' and is thus prescribed by her husband doctor a 'rest cure' and spends three months in an ancestral house confined to a room covered with an ugly yellow wall paper with an unconventional pattern that attracts her attention and actually 'haunts' her. She, then, sent this story after it was published to her famous physician at the time, Dr. Weir Mitchell, "whose strictures had kept her from attempting the pen during her own breakdown, thereby aggravating her illness" (Gilbert and Gubar 91). She told him about the failure of his treatment as an attempt to save other women from such cure and such stereotyped diagnosis and medications. She was "delighted to learn, years later, 'that he had changed his

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treatment of/ nervous prostration since reading her story" (91-92). "If that is a fact", Gilman declared, "I have not lived in vain" (92).

This nameless narrator, John's wife, in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", confesses in her diary that perhaps one reason that she did not get well faster is John himself, "you see, he does not believe I am sick!", the narrator explains, adding: "And What can one do? 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?"(131) The narrator's brother, to emphasize Gilman's point of criticizing the dominance of men doctors over the medical field, is also a physician of high standing, and says the same thing about her case; a diagnosis that emphasizes that these men doctors did not intend to make women suffer, they actually cared for them, but they were ignorant of some illnesses particularly related to women.

Just as there were stereotypical images of women as inferior, irrational, childish, and dependent, which added to women's suffering at that time, there were also "stereo-typical diagnosis of serious ailments, psychological or physical, simply as 'hysteria', as suggested by Freud and many other physicians to be routine female trouble at the time" (Gandeharion and Mazari 115). And just as women were silenced in their houses by the imposed roles upon them, female patients were also silenced as part of their routine psychological treatment. This popular diagnosis of 'hysteria' satisfied men doctors and this was enough, as it was the case in "The Yellow Wallpaper". While the popular hysterical theorist, Charcot, for instance, looked carefully at hysterical women, he paid very little attention to what they were saying. "You see how hysterics shout," he noted on one occasion; "much ado about nothing." (Shawler 19) The traditions of English psychiatric medicine during the nineteenth century had also tended to silence the female patient, to make her the object of techniques of moral management, or of photographic representation and interpretation." (19) This is evident in "The Yellow Wallpaper. While the narrator describes her troubles as "dreadfully depressing", she says "John does not know how much I really suffer. He does not listen to her complains. He knows there is no reason to suffer and that satisfies him" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 134). When John tells his wife that if she does not get well faster, he shall send her to Weir Mitchell in the fall, she mentions a friend she had who was in his hands, and she says "he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (137), referring again to Gilman's point that the medical field, to women's

misfortune, was dominated by un-understanding men doctors. This improper diagnosis on their part led to improper treatment of these women, as it is the case with the woman narrator in this short story, by confining them to enclosed places, away from social interaction or any intellectual efforts, prescribing them a “Rest Cure”. This medical practice, depending mainly on total inactivity, especially forbidding any intellectual efforts on women’s part, added to their dilemma, caused them more psychological disorders, and finally led these women to madness. “The Yellow Wallpaper”, which may be seen to form ‘a turning point in medical therapy’ in my opinion, foreshadows the importance of ‘graph therapy’ or treating patients using writing, as the nameless wife suggested as a solution to her case, but abides by her husband’s failing treatment at the end due to patriarchal considerations. The nameless woman narrator ‘resists’ being silenced by her husband by writing in her diary. The taking place of the event of writing, Wolfreys argues, is “an act of affirmative defiance” and resistance (75). Writing, thus, “constitutes a projection of female identity which is implicitly affirmative of identity, whilst being resistant indirectly to masculine definitions of female identity” (76). The paradox here, Wolfreys claims, is that, “as a sister and wife she must not write; yet as a woman she must write and write that she is forbidden to write according to the ‘inappropriate’ forms of identity that are projected onto her” (77). She disagrees with her husband’s medical treatment, feeling that her case is not improving, believing that contrary to her supposed total inactivity, “congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” (“The Yellow Wallpaper” 131), but she has no choice: “But what is one to do?” She thinks sometimes that “if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me” (135). Like other women of her time, despite her attempt of resistance, she was seen but not heard or taken seriously.

Other stereotypical ideas and images about women included certain suppositions about women’s roles and women’s thinking. Women and men were thought to belong to two different worlds. The world of masculinity, in Johnson’s view, is a world of “rules and regulations which exists only in terms of whatever can be observed and focuses on empiricism rather than subjectivity” (524-525). This world “belittles and condemns women’s dependence on fancy as frenzy” (525). Women have been said to “view the universe through an imaginative and fanciful lens; while men look at the world in terms of reality and factuality” (Gandeharion and Mazari 118). Ironically enough it was the ‘rational’ men who have always imposed the ‘fanciful’ role of the super human/angel on woman and even punished her and excluded her when she, as an ordinary human being failed to perform it. It is also ironical that, though

supposedly empirical in their judgment, depending mainly on observation and examining phenomena, men doctors at the time did not treat women as phenomena to be observed, depending on 'prescription' rather than 'description' in their treatment. Those men doctors were controlled by stereotypical presuppositions and popular diagnosis of women, also belittling her imaginative powers. One might wonder with Gandeharion and Mazari "what happens to one's imaginative powers when they are seen as feminine and frail by a society that only prizes the actual and the practical?"(118) A woman, like Charlotte Gilman's narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper", thus, chooses to abide by the pattern of true womanhood suggested by the 19th century, believing that her husband is always right, that he does what is best for her, even when she feels that he is mistreating her case. And though she knows what would make her feel better, she prefers to keep that to herself and abide by his rules, preferring 'personal frustration' over the constraints imposed on her "by her culture's prescriptions for womanhood" (Holly 43). In addition to increasing her suffering and frustration, the narrator's silence and acceptance of all this led her to insanity in the end.

This is closely related to another form of entrapment in "The Yellow Wallpaper"; the dismissal of women's views for being 'whimsical and fanciful'. Since all that a woman views is through the lens of fancy and imagination, as was sometimes claimed, then all her views concerning her likes and dislikes, like the wallpaper colour, for instance, are explained or dismissed by physicians as "just a whimsical feminine impulse that must be curbed" (Gandeharion and Mazari 118). The wife in this short story is a case in point. John, the doctor husband, convinces his wife that her hate of the wallpaper is just one of the fancies of a nervous patient; And that "nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies" (134), as if she gives way to it, other fancies will take hold of her. This can also be related to another form of entrapment women were exposed to, I agree with Shumaker; a continuous exposition of the gift of imagination on the part of the woman narrator, and a repeated reminding by the husband that "she had better not succumb to her fanciful imagination at all," (qtd. In Gandeharion and Mazari 118), as if woman's imaginative power was the real cause of her sufferings. These various types of entrapment formed a larger pattern of entrapping women based on false ideas concerning their mindset and imaginative abilities, reflecting again the immense suffering women experienced in the nineteenth century.

A highly suggestive and provoking image that Gilman used to make her case against the suffering women went through in the 19th century in her short story is that of the ‘horrid yellow wallpaper pattern’ signifying all patterns of entrapment and confinement women suffered from in that age. It may represent all the stereotypical images and ideas about women and the stereotypical diagnosis of their illnesses which formed patterns of entrapment suffocating women in that age figuratively and literally at times, exposing them to immense suffering, leading them to more serious conditions, varying from losing one’s mind to losing one’s life. This yellow wallpaper pattern does not only seem ugly to the heroine, but it also seems to have a life of its own (145). It is very expressive. “I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before”, the narrator states. It has a great influence on the nameless wife narrating the story. The wallpaper pattern attracts her attention and influences her, and in spite of herself, she starts following its lines and curves, excited to make meaning out of its patterns. This paper, she thinks, looks to her “as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!”(135) And gradually, it reveals things to her. The translation of what is remarked in the paper's patterns, of what the woman can bring meaningfully to such patterns, “is what gives the woman a voice, what allows the inscription of a female writing and meaning resistant to male enclosure and erasure; even if that translation is of the untranslatable, unreadable nature of the patterns” (Wolfreys 79). The more she stares at it and concentrates on understanding its lines and solving its mysteries, and the more meaningful it becomes to her, the farther she moves away from her husband and her real life into an alternative new one.

The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is “inevitably entrapped by having unconsciously accepted that John is the epitome of logic and reason, and that she is acting erroneously, according to the standards of the same society that John and his look alike stand for”(121). The tragic truth that Gilman has pointed to is that not only the narrator, but also other women, like John’s sister Jennie, who was described in the story as “a perfect, an enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession”, have somehow internalized and assimilated the patriarchal values as a normal part of their lives, to the extent that she thinks, like the men doctors, that it is the writing which made the narrator sick. Internalizing patriarchal ideas is a form of entrapment that women could not at most times escape.

‘Infantalization of women’, treating them as infants who childishly depend on men characters and have no insight concerning their future, perhaps, to ensure that they continue to play their assumed role of obedience and self-abnegation under man’s control forms another type of

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entrapment in this short story. John performs several acts of treating his wife as a child that actually constitute a pattern of infantilizing her. Thus, John insists on calling his wife "little girl" and "blessed little goose". He is "very careful and loving", the narrator/wife writes in her journal, "and hardly lets me stir without special direction." So, one sign of one's love and care at the time was to interfere in his wife's life directing her on every single detail, as if she were a child. And though calling him wise and loving, the narrator here describes talking to her husband as "so hard". Though it seems to be contradictory, the narrator/ wife, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", says: "It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so."(139)Ironically, she means to say that her husband is by no means wise and that he only loves himself. For being 'wise' and 'loving' entails knowing everything about his wife, and letting her express her fears and needs. When this wife insisted on talking and arguing that she was not getting better as her husband says, he deals with her as one might deal with a child, gradually trying to influence her, saying: "Blessed her little heart!"(140), giving her a big hug: "She shall be as sick as she pleases. But now let's improve your shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning". Not convinced still that she was better, he, then, states to her once more that "Really, dear, you are better". When she attempts to argue more, saying "Better in body, perhaps", not showing the expected response of totally approving of his words, he "sat up straight and looked at me[her] with such a stern, reproachful look that I[she] could not say another word" (140); a typical way of silencing a child giving him a hard look to make him/her stop talking, if he/she does not respond appropriately. Silencing a woman (patient) was one way of treating her at that time, as some psychiatrists "believed that their therapeutic authority depended on domination over the patient's language" (Showalter 154). "If a patient interrupts the speaker" as the wife has done here, "she must be told to keep silent and to listen; and must be told...in such a manner as to convey the speaker's full conviction that the command will immediately be obeyed" (qtd. In Showalter 154).

Not only is a woman treated like a dependent child by her husband, but she is sometimes also described as a spoilt attention-seeking child if she showed any complaints of a psychological illness. A typical nineteenth century middle class wife who suffers from any psychological ailment, would be seen as "a desperate attention-seeker who acts just as irrationally and sentimentally as a spoiled infant to be the center of attention, and her serious case of nervous breakdown would be viewed as

trivial”(G and Mara. 126). John’s comforting words to his very depressed wife when she complained of not feeling any progress in her health in the house where they are staying, “Blessed her little heart!”(140), giving her a big hug: “She shall be as sick as she pleases”, emphasizes that point of a woman being an attention-seeker if she declares she was not feeling well. Infantilization of woman in its various forms is not the final pattern of entrapment to be explored in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, as Gilman presented other subversive patterns.

Gilman, I assume, had her own patterns of ‘reader entrapment’ which she used in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, perhaps, to expose the mistreatment of woman at that age, convey her anxieties and create alternative choices for her protagonist or lessen her suffering. She used an unreliable narrator, some ‘spatial symbols’ to convey her feelings of despair and confinement, some recurring linguistic patterns, ‘the power of the gaze’ and the technique of self-split.

Gilman’s readers are entrapped by a nameless narrator, who narrates the whole story, letting them believe her voice, because it is all they have, until they discover, to use Grace’s words, “the elaborate deception at work. We remain locked within the perception of an unreliable narrator” (qtd. In Höhn 86). The lack of reliability of the narrator, shedding doubt on her version of the story adds more perspectives to seeing the events, creates a multiplicity of voices in the story and gives meaning to the silence of these women. Using an unreliable narrator, Gilman also suggests that this is not the whole story, perhaps it is not the real or right story you are reading. This is not the ending you have read. The ending of this story if re-read might be the beginning of a new one: a new story where patterns confining women no longer exist; where women’s inner selves have a wider space to expand and their voices are better heard.

Using an anonymous woman character also casts light on the fact that the story is not just about one specific woman in a particular setting; rather, “it relates and accounts the story about female suffering which has taken place and still can occur in any part of the world” (Gandeharion and Marazi 127). The lack of name and outer appearance can also be claimed to represent “the lack of power and identity in the woman” (Höhn 86) and intensifies the sense of the protagonist’s isolation; a trait that changes near the end of the events, when the imprisoned woman gets out of the wall pattern into a freer space.

Gilman also used some ‘spatial terms’ to convey her feelings of despair and spiritual suffering and confinement. According to Gilbert and Gubar, it was “inevitable ...for a female artist to translate into spatial terms her despair at the spiritual constrictions of what Gilman ironically

called 'home comfort' " (84) Women artists, like Gilman, found themselves "describing dark interiors and confusing their sense that they were house-bound with their rebellion against being duty bound." (84) She "characterized the middle-class housewife's responsibilities as "quiet, unnoticed whirlpool that sucks down youth and beauty and enthusiasm" (Allen 5). Gilman believed that women "would remain subservient to men as long as the architectural setting of family life required them to do quantities of solitary domestic work" (5). Houses are thus used by 19th women writers as symbols of imprisonment and entrapment which led at times to women's mental disorders, as it is the case in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper".

Reversing the use of the gaze, from scaring a woman, silencing her or making her feel uncomfortably watched all the time, into a power to assert her ability of making meaning of the wallpaper pattern, and making a case for herself; now she can finally look her husband in the eye, is one of the patterns Gilman used in her short story in order to correct the power imbalance in the man woman relationship in her short story. Gazing at the wallpaper pattern, the nameless wife starts seeing shapes and figures, making meaning out of the wallpaper text. Gilman started by letting her protagonist see the strangled heads with bulbous eyes hanging upside down from the pattern staring at her. This added to her suffering, feeling watched all the time by these eyes. This idea of the gaze also recalls John's hard look that he gave his wife when she insisted that she was not feeling well. However, in different lights, the narrator actually starts seeing a woman imprisoned behind the pattern, trying to escape, whom she sympathizes with and decides to help her get out by peeling off the wallpaper in every way possible. Seeing the Wallpaper as a prison where

"her husband and brother have shut her off from the world, surrounding her by walls covered in 'the yellow wallpaper'. She has no access to the world, and, therefore, no access to meaning or life. Enclosed by the yellow wallpaper - and by, within The Yellow Wallpaper - woman is silent and silenced, her self being dead paper, her meaning placed under erasure by male circumscription" (Wolfreys 79).

"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

paper” (“The Yellow Wallpaper” 145). They [the nameless narrator and the woman behind the wall pattern] were exchanging roles and helping one another peel off the paper; an act that foreshadowed the shift of narrative voice that took place soon after the imprisoned woman was set free. “Exemplifying disruptiveness through the abrupt change of voice of the narrator”, the short story... ‘brings up haphazardly well-known cases of mental imbalance in women affected by their interactions with men so much that they lose their good looks, ability to function, and sanity (Schaub 5). It is now the woman who came out of the wall, from behind the pattern, that is addressing the readers and looks the shocked husband/John in the eye/gazes at him, saying that she is finally free in spite of him and Jane/ the narrator/wife. The woman’s gaze in the final scene is a sign of a shift in man-woman power relations; now that the woman can finally look her husband in the eye.

Gilman’s recurrent use of some linguistic forms such as the ‘but-structures’ also formed another pattern of entrapment for her readers, using the language as a trap. Not being able to directly oppose the prevalent ideas and principles of her age, or directly say that her supposedly ‘flawless’ husband is actually wrong, Gilman many times stated her point clearly then used a ‘but’ in the second part of her sentence to reveal or add a contradictory thought; which, the researcher assumes, she does not necessarily agree with, but is obliged to mention. This second part may also signify the narrator’s helplessness and lack of choices in a particular situation and her attempt of reconciliation with her reality. This pattern, however, gave the wife/narrator the chance to voice her inner thoughts, which she could not directly do in the presence of her husband. Expressing her dissatisfaction with her husband’s medical treatment, for instance, especially his forbidding her to work until she is well again, giving an alternative suggestion for her treatment, she says: “Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” BUT [capitalization mine] “what is one to do”? She found a way out for herself in writing: “I did write for a while in spite of them, [BUT] it does exhaust me a good deal- having to be very sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” (131-132). Here, again, she asserts that she wrote in spite of them, but she used “but” once more to make a clarification. It exhausted her to be ‘sly’ about her writing, the act of writing itself did not do that. Another example: “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. Using such linguistic forms repeatedly, such as what can be called ‘but- structures’, the story, to use Link’s wording “creates points of emphasis and importance” and breaks the established pattern (Link 67-

74), by shifting the focus from John's views to the narrator's unheard ones.

In the end of "The Yellow Wallpaper", we find a sudden shift in the narrative voice, and we are told that the one addressing us now is the woman who was imprisoned in the wall behind the pattern and has just come out. It seems that the nameless protagonist, the typical obedient 19th century wife narrator, who undergoes pressures she could no longer bear, and at the same time is forbidden to show her anger or rejection out of propriety, finally splits into two personas: One that was quiet and voiceless, obeying her husband till the end; The other is the woman that came out from behind the wallpaper pattern. She finally escapes her prison and asserts her power over her husband, who loses his consciousness at her sight. She tells him she got out at last: "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (147). It is now understood that Jane is the name of the wife/narrator, who, perhaps, was too powerless and helpless to have a name of her own. It is only then, when the real woman in her came out that she deserved to have one. This second self/ mad woman or literary double of the wife narrator is all that the wife is not: She is able to look at her husband in the eye, make a good case for herself, and tell him directly: I am out "in spite of you and Jane" (147), signaling a new turning point in their relationship and a redistribution of roles. She crawls fast on the room floor and does not care about concerns of propriety and self-control, enacting the author's anger, acting out "the subversive impulses every woman inevitably feels when she contemplates the 'deep-rooted' evils of patriarchy" (Gilbert and Gubar 77).

There is a different perspective on the story now. That strong, though crawling woman who has just come out of the wall paper pattern-like bars, blames Jane as well as John for her imprisonment. They were both guilty of locking her in and both, she claimed, did not want to get her out, as she came out 'in spite of' them both. Using an unreliable narrator is very enriching, as readers are, thus, invited to give their voices as well. They are let in inside the protagonist's mind, seeing its inner workings; they are also entrapped to share with her the pressures around her and the sufferings she is enduring and her moments of perplexity and confusion. They witness the protagonist's gradual descent into madness and her self-split.

This self-split and possible doubling is explained psychologically in terms of the pressures thrust upon a woman. As Freud suggests, if there is no defense against the flooding of the self's interior by exterior objects,

“there is equally no containment of the ego ideal projected outward into the world” (qtd. In Coyle et al. 626). In a world like that of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s, a woman is required to behave according to certain patterns. Abiding by these patterns of entrapment whether social, cultural, patriarchal or medical ideals and ideas of that age was the criterion according to which a woman was to be judged and held socially acceptable. She, for instance, should be the angel in her house, with all the effort and sacrifices entailed, maintain her propriety and self-control at all times, not showing anger, not having any fancies, playing the role of the doll or the dependent child who needs advice on every detail of her life at times, not trusting her own judgment. Still, she should also be ready to accept all kinds of judgments, criticism and presupposed ideas about her sex all the time. Silently, confronting all these pressures, where her anxieties and emotional needs are left uncontained, the self splits and consciousness is divided.

And though Gilman described the pattern imprisoning the woman in this story as being made of paper; showing perhaps that it is weaker than we think and not deeply rooted in our human nature, being skin deep, it was, however, actually the reason so many women lost their lives or their social lives in the process of attempting to escape from it. That is the reason, also, that many strangled heads and bulbous eyes are hanging on the pattern. Entrapped by such a pattern, with no choices or voice, women either give in and play their required roles, in order to be socially accepted, or try to break out of their traps and perhaps lose their lives, or their social lives, while doing that, described as being fallen or insane. Thus, in Gilman’s story, the heroine splits near the end of the events into two characters: the obedient voiceless wife, internalizing all the principles of her age and the other woman imprisoned by the horrid paper pattern, who takes some time to attract the wife’s attention that she is there, and that she is actually trying to get out. Gradually, the wife sees her and sympathizes with her, and even decides to help her get out to the real world, not perceiving that she will come out at the expense of the wife’s own life. The moment Jane, the wife/narrator, sets that imprisoned woman free, she takes over and becomes in full control. And though she came out of the wall crawling, she was crawling very fast and continuously. She went on moving in her track, quickly, not stopping, and when the husband, shocked at the scene passes out and falls on the floor, in her path, she crosses over his motionless body more than one time, signaling a shift in power relations; now she is on top and the husband is no longer in a superior place, having this woman crossing over his unconscious body several times.

Patterns of Entrapment and Emancipation in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

This final scene can be viewed as a "liberating act of self-hood and assertiveness", I agree with Gandeharion and Marazidi (127). Sometimes madness, I also agree with them, is "prized over silenced sanity". I even go as far as to suppose that in an 'insane' world as that of Gilman's, where women were unfairly treated, asked to do so many things, deprived of almost all their rights, fettered by presupposed ideas about their sex, judged by insane criteria, why not end one's suffering, avoid too much thinking, over expectations, too much depression, get rid of all meaningless restrictions and hold back all your energies just by going insane? Perhaps it is insane to hold on to one's sanity in such world.

I believe that the women who went mad at that time were not actually insane, but rather unconventional. "During an era when patriarchal culture felt itself to be under attack by its rebellious daughters, one obvious defense was to label women campaigning for access to the universities, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed" (Showalter 145). Perhaps they were attempting to reverse all these patterns of entrapment, or lock the whole world with all its sufferings out and live peacefully inside one's own mind, full of all the fancies, voices, and endless alternatives and choices forbidden for a woman in the real world. Gilman's patterns of entrapping her readers may at the same time be seen as patterns of liberating and emancipating women of her age in general and her own heroine in "The Yellow Wallpaper" in particular.

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