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**Women and the Rest Cure in “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte
Perkins Gilman**

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation*

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Dedication

They said what's wrong with you? I said I'm eager for success! They said you are just daydreaming and that's just ridiculous! They said many more and I have always been ambitious nevertheless! They were spreading bad vibes that were so dangerous... today I'm leaving them jealous and speechless! This is the first step and it's going to be limitless and endless!

It would have been impossible to reach this level without the huge support of my mother, nor without her patience and love. I am today dedicating this achievement for you and I am grateful for you, I will never be able to thank you enough and every achievement is to make you proud of me. May Allah bless you with a long life to maintain my successes.

Every step I take is for your benefits. Dear siblings, Yacine, Safaa and Marwa I have your back now and always.

To my source of inspiration I am thankful. Fares you have been such an amazing motivator and supporter. I am blessed to have you.

At last, I would like to thank those who believed in me in my darkest moments and helped me to go through it all.

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Epigraph

And woman should stand beside man as the comrade of his soul, not the servant of his body.

-Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Abstract

In the late 1800s postpartum was not defined as a mental illness, but it was thought that women were helpless, incompetent and unstable specially after giving birth. It was claimed that their role becomes unnecessary, since they lose their powers and energy also becoming unable to think straight. Charlotte Perkins Gillman in her short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” described exactly what women felt and thought of during the postpartum period and how their mental and physical health got worse after following “the rest cure” as a treatment. In this research work, postpartum will be defined together with the rest cure; two of the most important themes in the story. The story will be discussed from a gothic point of view and through the lenses of feminism.

The aim of this research work is to highlight the fact that with a short story not more than ten pages, Perkins depiction of postpartum and the impossibility to be cured through the imposed rest, that was supposed to make things better, succeeded to call many male doctors to reconsider their postpartum diagnosis and give up “the rest cure”. This research also aims at demonstrating that with a feminine Gothic voice, Perkins contributed to make women and mothers’ lives better.

Keywords:

Postpartum – The rest cure – Women – Gothic – Feminism.

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General Introduction

General Introduction:

In the early 1900s, postpartum depression was not recognized as a mental disease, but women were believed to be weak, inept, and insecure, especially after giving birth. Because of this phenomenon, it has been claimed that women's roles are rendered obsolete, as they lose their abilities and vitality, as well as their ability to think clearly. One of the literary figures to deal with this phenomenon in one of her works is Charlotte Perkins Gillman. In her story "The Yellow Wallpaper", she described exactly what women felt and thought of during the postpartum period and how their mental and physical health got worse following "the rest cure" treatment. Isolation and men's way of dealing with women was neither right nor helping but only making the situation worse.

One of Gilman's major aims to write this story is to tell her own experience with postpartum and to address it to Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, who prescribed her the rest cure that did not help in any way to alleviate her symptoms but the opposite it made her close to lose her mind and had a nervous breakdown, as she mentioned in the essay that she wrote explaining her motives of writing the story. The story was addressed to him to make him reconsider his treatment, fix his mistakes and his ways of dealing with women and she was also warning women from his treatment at the same time.

By the Nineteenth century, Gothic fiction had succeeded to be a leading genre of literature. The Gothic genre is characterized by strange and twisted works that are filled with odd characters, saturated with scenes of lunacy, ghosts, abuse, and incest, and encircled by marginal, unsure, and illicit individuals. The Gothic realm is intrigued with violent power disparities, and its narratives are filled with restraint, imprisonment, and forced acts. Situations of severe peril and solitude, whether physical or psychological, are always taking place or are going to take place. "The Yellow Wallpaper" was an outstanding demonstration of this genre. Gilman used the gothic genre to tell a story that drew attention to postpartum

depression, the rest cure, and inequality between men and women in society and marriage. The collapse of women's minds created a gothic feature which is madness; which raises important questions related to the way this genre was used and wonders why it was used in the story.

At nearly the same time that the gothic genre in literature was flourishing, women in America and Britain began to stand for their rights and liberty from the beginning of the nineteenth century, to conquer the same opportunities for education, employment, and life as males. The story was a way to fight and stand for women and help them figure out what is the right way to be treated and how to face men and their ways of controlling women. Women started to use literature to help the feminist movements spread and capture more attention. Literature was the primary mean of conveying thoughts and opinions on that issue; it was also one of the mediums of communication since literature could go throughout the world as people did. Writing from a feminist viewpoint shed light on many of the daily struggles that women face, and it made other women aware of what they lack as human beings and members of society.

Since Gilman was a feminist author, she did not miss the chance to include her orientations in the story. She made women's mistreatment on spotlights, by describing it in a gothic way. She also highlighted the misery and the struggle women were going through in their daily lives after giving birth and having depression and forcing them to stick to the rest cure away from social life. Women were treated unequally in life generally and in marriages specifically. Men found the rest cure as a weapon to aim it to their faces as soon as they give birth and get depression to limit their social activities and end their careers and lock them in a housewives or slaves cage (domestic life).

“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gillman, discussed the postpartum and the rest cure by highlighting it through the story. She defined postpartum as depression

and not as some kind of madness. Gilman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” showed the readers, the physicians, and women that being curbed away from energetic activities and company can lead to insanity especially while suffering from postpartum depression.

The biggest issue that the main protagonist faced was oppression, gender inequality, postpartum depression, and the forced isolation in the rest cure treatment. Gilman analyzed the restrictive gender norms that were placed on women at the period via the protagonist's insanity, which appeared to stem from her failure to establish her individuality. The narrator strived to be heard and desired to express her thoughts and emotions, but she was unable to do so because of her husband's commands to stick to bed and do absolutely nothing.

The aim of this extended essay is to bring answers to the questions that occurred to me during reading the story and triggered me, which made me search and think of what Charlotte was trying to deliver through her story. It left a huge impact on me which lead me to raise questions about it and seek to satisfy my curiosity by devoting this research work to and obtain a better knowledge of postpartum depression and the role of the failure of the rest cure in the lives of women in the nineteenth century and also examine the story's gothic and feminist interpretations by finding answers following questions:

1. What is postpartum and how is rest cure defined?
2. The failure of the rest cure was described in a gothic way. How and what was the aim behind using elements of the gothic genre?
3. Was the rest cure just an excuse for men to dominate women?

Particular answers to the preceding questions may be taken into account since it is hypothesized that:

To start with, postpartum depression is a mental state that occurs two weeks after or before giving birth in which during women experience sorrow, anxiety, and mood swings. Unfortunately, it was regarded as a mental illness in the nineteenth century, which is why Weir Mitchell developed the rest cure therapy, which purported to heal postpartum depression.

Secondly, the rest cure failed, causing the protagonist to go insane. Gilman used the lunacy as a theme to portray it in a gothic manner to bring attention to the failed cure and its consequences on women's physical and mental health.

Third, the rest cure was created by a man who believed that women were solely meant for domestic chores. That treatment prevented women from becoming authors or members of society, as well as from participating in social and dynamic activities. "The Yellow Wallpaper" functioned as an eraser to such ideas, and it was written to combat the treatments employed by men to control women as if they were a threat to society.

This extended essay is divided into three chapters and each chapter will try to find possible answers for the questions:

The first chapter will discuss the postpartum depression and the different methods and concepts related to the treatment and cure of this illness. It will examine the postpartum and rest cure from a medical standpoint, as well as from a literary standpoint, by tying them to the narrative of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and utilizing illustrations from it to provide a clear explanation and definition of the postpartum and rest treatment.

The second chapter will tackle the gothic theme of the story by defining the gothic genre and highlighting it in the story. This chapter will also discuss the use of Gothic elements in the story to express the failure of the rest cure as a treatment for postpartum. It also highlights the fact that Gilman aimed to convince people of the absurdity of gender roles and the harsh

societal constraints on women, which were prevalent during the nineteenth-century patriarchal society.

The last chapter will revolve around the feminist perspective. “The Yellow Wallpaper” was a one of the most effective feminist works which marked a huge impact on women and societies back then. The third chapter emphasizes on the physical and mental obstacles that women faced during that historical period and relate it to the narrator and her struggle.

Chapter One

Defining Postpartum and the Rest Cure from Medical and Literary

Perspectives

Chapter One: Defining Postpartum and the Rest Cure from Medical and Literary Perspectives

Introduction

In 2009, the *Jane the Virgin* star and author of “In down Came the Rain: My Journey through Postpartum Depression” Brooke Shields told *People* magazine

I finally had a healthy beautiful baby girl and I couldn't look at her. I couldn't hold her and I couldn't sing to her and I couldn't smile at her ... All I wanted to do was disappear and die. ... If I had been diagnosed with any other disease, I would have run to get help. I would have worn it like a badge ... I didn't at first—but finally I did fight. I survived.

Postpartum was a phenomenon that most women experienced, after or before giving birth, women were not able to do their roles as mothers and house wives. The lines above carry the story of Brooke Shields that suffered from the symptoms of Postpartum. The coming of her baby was the start of a long suffering to her for she could not act as an ordinary mother. Postpartum led many women like Brooke to depression and anxiety, though they had to deal with it to heal and comeback to their normal life.

Using specialists' testimony and Gilman's point of view and experience, this chapter will give a clear and convenient explanations and definitions, to introduce and highlight the postpartum disease and the rest cure treatment. Through this chapter postpartum and the rest cure will be tackled from the medical and the literary perspectives.

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1.1. Postpartum and the Rest Cure from a Medical Perspective

According to Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, most new moms experience baby blues after childbirth which commonly includes mood swings, crying spells, anxiety, and difficulty of sleep. Baby blues typically begin within the first two or three days after delivery and may last for up to two weeks. But some new moms experience a more severe, long-lasting form of depression known as postpartum depression rarely an extreme mood disorder called postpartum psychosis also may develop after childbirth.

Postpartum depression or PPD is not a character flaw or weakness. Sometimes it's simply a complication of giving birth. Basing on this study, postpartum can be defined as severe depression new mothers suffer from after giving birth. This form of depression begins after delivery with few days and lasts more than two weeks up to months. Postpartum symptoms are intense such as severe mood swings, crying breakdowns, solitude preference, doubts, and feeling empty towards the baby as well as feeling helpless, hopeless and shameful plus inadequacy. These symptoms extend with time and can reach a level where women cannot be able to even do the things they used to like before (hobbies etc ...) nor do any kind of energetic activities. They also suffer from anxiety, unstable thinking, panic attacks and even having thoughts of harming the baby and suicide.

According to Flynn, Heather A, a recent study shows that over 70% to 80% of women experience some form of depression during the first two weeks after giving birth. This kind of depression symptoms is recently widely acknowledged as appearing in a variety of ways with varying degrees of severity. Soon after, tears and mood swings are witnessed and many women experience postpartum depression or "baby blues" after giving birth. The postpartum blues are seen as a "natural" reaction to childbirth. However, other women endure more chronic severe

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depressive episodes in the weeks and months following delivery, manifesting as a loss of pleasure, interest, sleep, and self-worth. These are the episodes that are referred to as PPD or what was referred to earlier a Postpartum Depression, which is believed to afflict 10 to 13% of women during the postpartum period. Finally, in addition to postpartum blues and significant depressive episodes, around 1 or 2 in 1000 women have cognitive abnormalities, strange behavior or hallucinations, and a severe disease known as postpartum psychosis (*Epidemiology of Postpartum Disorders* 551).

Louis Victor Marcé's "Treatise on Insanity in Pregnant, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding Mothers", published in 1858, was the first official study devoted solely to puerperal mental disorder. He wrote about 310 instances of pregnant and postpartum women that he had personally examined and was the first to address the classification of their illnesses methodically. According to his findings, 9 percent of pregnant women experienced depression, 58 percent experienced depression during the early partum phase, and 33 percent had depression during the post-partum phase.

Marcé observed no significant differences between the psychoses of pregnancy and those of non-pregnant women. He did, however, feel that postpartum depression had several characteristics that separated it from other mental diseases and recommended that this should be treated as a different diagnosis. He also argued that postpartum psychiatric problems were caused by the major organic and physiological changes that happened in the female body after delivery (Hamilton 127).

James Hamilton was a physician from Scotland. In 1791, he was a co-founder of the Edinburgh Lying-In Hospital, according to him Jean Etienne Esquirol was one of the first physicians to offer extensive case reports on postpartum mental diseases in the mid-nineteenth

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century. He documented 92 cases of postpartum psychosis and depression, implying that the figures! The number of women suffering from postpartum mental problems was very certainly greater than the number of instances he encountered in psychiatric institutions. He assumed that minor illnesses were presumably treated at home and never arrived at his hospital (126). Esquirol recommended a therapy that included attentive nursing, tepid baths, and purgatives, which were often used to treat numerous medical illnesses at the time... referring to now as the rest cure

Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell was an American scientist, novelist, poet, and well-known physician. He was the one who created the rest cure that was prescribed for women in the 19th century, which is a period women spend in bed and away from any kind of social activities and energetic doings, as a treatment for mental disorder and hysteria. Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell in an essay he wrote on the nervousness of women called "Fat and Blood." Stated that in carrying out his general plan of treatment it was his habit to ask the patient to remain in bed from six weeks to two months. At first, and in some cases for four or five weeks, he did not permit the patient to sit up or to sew or write or read. The only action allowed is that needed to clean the teeth... In such cases, they arranged to have the bowels and water passed while lying down, and the patient is lifted onto a lounge at bedtime and sponged, and then lifted back again into the newly-made bed. In all cases of weakness, treated by rest, he insisted on the patient being fed by the nurse, and, when well enough to sit up in bed, he insisted that the meats shall be cut up to make it easier for the patient to feed herself".

Women have long struggled to conceal indications of sadness, often with disastrous results when their depressed symptoms escalate into suicidal thoughts about themselves or their children. Judy Dippel, the inspirational author and speaker who encouraged women to survive

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and thrive, during the challenges of life, stated in her book *Breaking the Grip of Postpartum* said that “Postpartum depression makes a woman feel like she is in the grip of something dreaded and dark, and it's scary. . . but she's likely ashamed to admit it because she can't explain it”

Stacey, Wescott mentioned Melanie in Chicago Tribune Stokes, who died on June 27, 2016, is a well-known case. Melanie Stokes struggled with postpartum depression and committed suicide by jumping from a Chicago hotel window many months later. Medical practitioners have not always been supportive of postpartum depression therapy. The psychiatric community did not formally acknowledge postpartum depression until the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was published in 1994.

1.2. Postpartum and the Rest Cure from a Literary Perspective in the Eyes of Perkins

“For many years, I suffered from severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholic and beyond” Because the author, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, suffered from postpartum depression, these symptoms were noticed clearly and reported as if by a doctor in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The narrator said: “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” (Perkins 03). It is clear through what she said; that she was not capable to take care of her child and seeing another woman doing her role made her feel helpless, guilty, sad and pressured to get better soon.

In the story, the rest cure was not mentioned but only referring to, as when the narrator’s husband imposed quarantine in bed on her since he was a physician and diagnosed her case as a hysterical and a nervous condition. “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” (Perkins 02).

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The rest cure was an isolation period for the narrator away from people and the normal life the narrator used to have before. She was restricted by her husband and not allowed to do anything of her will only what he orders her to do. She was supposed to stay in bed only and to stay away from writing, work, and any kind of activity. As the narrator said while talking about what she is doing in that period "... and am absolutely forbidden to work" (Perkins 02).

In addition to being forbidden from work, the rest cure patients were not allowed to have any contact with their families and relatives to avoid any kind of dependency on them "It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now" (Perkins 03). The patients were only able to see the nurse who was taking care of them "There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me" (04) The narrator made it clear that she was taken care of by her husband's sister which was somehow her nurse.

Treatments for PPD evolved by following under medical views of the time through the nineteenth century. Many people at the time recommended bleeding to decrease inflammation and expel extra fluid in the body. Similarly, several people advised opium to help them relax. Separation from the woman's child and restraints were also prevalent. Perkins' story "The Yellow Wallpaper" memorialized them all. Gillman depicts the tale of a young mother who experiences weird ideas after the birth of her kid. The woman's husband placed her in a room at a summer cottage away from her kid to help her improve, but instead of improving, she becomes even more insane.

According to Brockington, Post-World War two in the mid-twentieth century, several physicians began researching milder types of postpartum mental illnesses. It was discovered

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that women frequently did not seek medical attention for postpartum sickness because they are afraid of being sent to a psychiatric facility and being away from their spouses and children and that made them get worse and more inferior. It was historically normal to segregate women suffering from depression symptoms from their newborns, as recounted in the illustration of Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper". Yet, in the late 1940s, psychiatric institutions in the United Kingdom and Australia began effectively combining mother and baby sections where women suffering from PPD could get care while remaining near to their newborns.

In Gilman's terrifying short story, a lady isolated by her rest treatment becomes infatuated with the yellow wallpaper in her chamber because she was forbidden from performing any actual activity other than lying in bed, eventually got mad. In the last part of the story, Perkins depicted the protagonist's loss of mind that was the result of using the rest cure as a treatment for postpartum even in real life. Gilman, who had experienced the rest cure herself, meant the narrative to be a denunciation of it. In her own words, the treatment irritated her so much that she...: "I came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over" (Perkins 804).

Applying the rest cure could also have possible drastic consequences. It was not the treatment itself that proved dangerous, but the fact that nervous women were not listened to, much like the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper". An example of this is Winifred Howells, the daughter of the author William Dean Howells. Ms. Howells was another 20 patients of Dr. Mitchell whose disease was assumed to be psychological. Mitchell applied the 'rest-cure and force-fed Howells who died shortly after. Her autopsy led to the realization that her symptoms were very real and not the product of her "hypochondriacally illusions" as Mitchell had

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supposed. Her illness might not have been treatable, but her last days alive might have been made more comfortable if anyone had believed her (Stiles 6).

Gilman wrote in her autobiography, released in 1935, of the "dragging weariness ... absolute incapacity." Months after the birth of her baby, she suffered "absolute misery," prompting her to seek the advice of Dr. Mitchell. Gilman, like the narrator of the tale, was treated with Mitchell's "rest treatment" she wrote the story based on the experience she had. She was medicated, fed at regular times, and most importantly, instructed to rest. Mitchell told Gilman to live a "domestic existence" and "never touch pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live." The narrative depicts the predicament of many women throughout the nineteenth century. Physicians saw all women as vulnerable to illness and mental breakdown due to biological frailty and reproductive cycles. Those who were creative and ambitious were seen to be much more vulnerable.

The narrator's imposed limiting of her powers, skills, and tasks led her to a mental realm where she may finally be free to behave as she pleases and do whatever she pleases with no one to restrict her. The narrator, as a result of separating herself from reality and turning to imagination to escape her living trauma, lost her mind along the road.

Gilman's life and short tale give a vivid image of what the rest treatment would have been like for certain Victorian ladies. Mitchell is portrayed as a medical evil, and the rest cure is portrayed as a Gothic torment. Gilman was not the only female author to decry the oppressiveness of the rest cure. Mitchell's treatment proved especially challenging for intellectual women who enjoyed reading, writing, and being active. Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, yearned for activity and a sense of moral purpose during her rest treatment in 1882. Most of all, she missed reading: "I have come to the time when I could not read and then

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found how much I had depended on that” (Poirier 24). During her 1915 rest treatment, Virginia Woolf yearned to write as well. Pen and ink were once banned to her, but then allowed to work on her novel (*Night and Day*, 1919) for some hours daily. For Addams, Woolf, and Gilman, recovery needed a meaningful activity (Poirier 28).

1.3. Conclusion

From investigating its symptoms and distinguishing it from other types of depression to finding effective treatments and solutions. Postpartum illness has historically been a source of debate. As seen in the tale “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator herself could not grasp her illness and behavior, nor did she accept the rest cure as a therapy. The rest cure, sometimes known as “bed rest” required women to remain in their beds and to do nothing. Sadly, that was contrary to the character of women as dynamic human beings. This first chapter defined postpartum depression and the rest treatment, as well as highlighted it from a medical and literary standpoint.

Chapter Two

“The Yellow Wallpaper” from a Gothic Perspective

Chapter Two: “The Yellow Wallpaper” from a Gothic Perspective

Introduction

By writing about her experience, Charlotte Perkins Gilman hoped to raise awareness of the fact that women have mental health issues. They are not inherently hysterical, and the world must stop characterizing women who dare to express themselves as hysterical in order to suppress them. She sought a technique to ensure that her thoughts, feelings, and all she had been through were taken seriously and understood clearly via the story, which inspired her to use the Gothic genre to attract readers and show the massive damage the rest cure had left women with.

Gilman’s plan to give the narrative a dark, horrific tone was not just motivated by the need to capture reader’s attention and empower her experience. It was also because the failure of the rest cure therapy had a negative, sorrowful, and disruptive impact on the lives of women. Thus, the present chapter focus will revolve around providing the reader with some useful background on the Gothic genre to offer a reading of the story from a Gothic perspective. This chapter will highlight some of the main Gothic themes of the story as well.

2.1. Drawing the Relation between Perkins’ Story and the Gothic Genre

“When “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is first published in *The New England Magazine* in 1892, most readers and critics perceive it to be first and foremost a gothic tale following Poe” (Haney Peritz) The Victorian era was undoubtedly the most fruitful period for the Gothic genre to develop and emerge. Gothic literature is a genre of narratives that features themes such as mysteries, death, supernatural, and even gloomy romance. The Castle of Otranto, written by Horace Walpole in the mid-eighteenth century, is often acknowledged as the first authentic piece of Gothic fiction which shares similarities in themes and settings as “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Despite the fact that the genre contains supernatural aspects, events,

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and ideas, it gives the readers the impression that these occurrences are a part of their lives and can occur to them as well “Gothic supernatural appears very real, disturbing, and uncanny” (Bayer, Berenbaum 32).

The gothic style began to emerge when Victorian writers and painters began to include these elements into their works. The paranormal was more than only a source of amusement, such as scary stories before sleep, but it was also a source of inspiration. “Important aspect of the Victorians intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and imaginative worlds, and took its place in the domestic centre of their daily lives” (Bown 2) the gothic style gave authors more authority to express their dark thoughts and the reality they lived. Using the gothic style in “The Yellow Wallpaper” made Gilman more influencing and effective.

Many authors in the nineteenth century had recourse to the gothic genre for its literary effect which may be seen in two of its most prominent themes: the supernatural and lunacy. While studying and analyzing Gothic works, it is easy to notice the presence of ghosts and incomprehensible noises and incidents. Themes in fiction are usually a huge reflection of the culture in which the author lives. As the Nineteenth century evolved, so did disease, poverty and abuse that led the discipline of Spiritualism, both in terms of practice and renown emerge to reflect the reality in a dark way. Because of such a surge in curiosity, the regularity of fluid structure and supernatural occurrences quickly grabbed the public's attention.

According to Linda Bayer Berenbaum, mental and nervous disorders are excellent themes for Gothic stories because the illusions of the deranged often resemble traditional beliefs and superstitions (38). As in Edgar Allan Poe's short tale "The Tell-Tale Heart" when the protagonist thought he was hearing the murmur of a beating heart beneath his house's baseboards. The sound was actually a hallucination caused by his guilty conscience after murdering the elderly man he was staying with and concealing the dead body underneath the floorboards. Also the protagonist in “The Yellow Wallpaper” was seeing another woman in the

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wallpaper which only reflected her and her struggle. Many critics claim that Gothic fiction's dichotomy as a genre of both supernatural dread and insanity is primarily deliberate. “Gothic novelists [were] particularly fond of...visionary experiences, and extrasensory perceptions,” allowing their readers to access “the secret recesses of the mind” (Bayer; Berenbaum 25).

“Using a first-person narrator is simply a matter of hearing the voice inside yourself” (James Lee Burke). One of the main instruments in gothic fiction is the unreliable narration. Unreliable narration occurs when the story's narrator is lying, falsifying facts, failing to provide comprehensive evidences regarding the objects mentioned and events occurring, or is just mentally unstable. In the story there was no name for the protagonist and she seemed out of her mind which made her testimony unreliable. It could be believed and it could be just a bunch of hallucinations caused by the wrong treatment the narrator had to endure.

The rest cure or what was considered as a form of recuperation was intended to rehabilitate the patient from a detrimental social environment; yet Perkins made it clear in her story “The Yellow Wallpaper” that such a method was not beneficial for the narrator's health in general and her mental health specifically speaking. She demonstrated that the rest cure was useless, causing her to become completely insane. Gilman built a multidimensional protagonist with Gothic components demonstrating her talent as a writer. “The Yellow Wallpaper” was not an article on women and marriage; it was a short tale, a brilliant fictional story that made the readers ponder upon the effectiveness of the rest cure.

This tale was eye-opening in terms of mental illnesses in the medical field. Women's health was a notably neglected field of medicine, as women were considered as neurotic and hysterical individuals. The prevalent knowledge of that time held that rest would heal hysteria, whereas in actuality, tedium and a lack of motivation certainly exacerbated despair “Perkins Gilman used her own experience in her first marriage and postpartum depression as inspiration for “The Yellow Wallpaper”, and illustrates how a woman’s lack of autonomy is detrimental to

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her mental health” (Cabral). She advocated for a variety of depression testing, medications, and treatment options. Perkins was able to describe the bad impacts of rest cure to readers by writing from a personal experience. Having recourse to gothic tools enabled her catch readers attention and sympathy.

2.2. Reading the Story from a Gothic Perspective

The protagonist lost her sanity as a result of "the rest cure" therapy, which forced the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” to remain in. Because of her hallucination, the way her husband treated her like a child, and the excessive control over her life, she was deemed unreliable. Not only was her lunacy doubted, but so was the fact that her name was never stated throughout the whole tale. The unreliability is intentionally done by Gilman, on purpose so that the reader becomes unsure what or who to believe throughout the story. This madness and confusion allowed the readers to feel sad for the narrator and sympathize with her, and so the ending is likely to be unexpected.

By purposefully adding a psychological element to their work, authors using the gothic genre were able to “appeal to skeptical academics” attracting those academic readers while utilizing the supernatural elements of their work to “aim at believers’ hearts more than their minds” (Cooper 130). This ambiguity is evident in Gilman's short tale “The Yellow Wallpaper”, which was chosen from the American gothic literature. This work exemplifies how supernatural and insanity elements have grown widespread in Gothic fiction. The impact of the flourishing of Gothic fiction in the 1800s was very clear in the story. The protagonist’s analysis of the place quickly introduces Gothic elements such as the ancestral halls of a hereditary estate, the lonely ancient home, located within gloomy, walled gardens; all these were symbols of numerous gothic story settings. The broken greenhouses, the abandoned gardens and cottages evoke ruin and decay, both of which are common themes in gothic literature.

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She remarked in her first diary writing that there is something queer about the house being unoccupied for so long and rented to her husband for such a low price. She compares the mansion to a haunted home. “Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it” (Perkins 647). Various parts of the story symbolize the Gothic genre. In the first-person narrative that can be seen like a diary, it follows the narrator as she recounts her deteriorating mental state. Her obsession with the wallpaper in her bedroom is the source of her behavioral breakdown. Her fascination with it stems from her exclusion in an upstairs room of her and her husband's summer home. This solitude has prompted comparisons to Gothic literature.

Perkins did not paint the setting with gothic colors right from the start. At the beginning of the story, she chose to make her environment not appear to be a terrifying gothic location but a beautiful old cottage in a calm place.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people. There is a delicious garden! I never saw such a garden large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them (Perkins 648).

The house itself was giving a horrific impression with its gates and large garden like a maze. It was calm and isolated from the city which made it even more suitable to give the story that gothic theme. At first, the narrator seemed pleased with and grateful for the house. She afterwards got anxious about it and did not feel at peace with it describing her room this way:

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. The paint and paper look as if a boys'

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school had used it. It is stripped off the paper - in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life (Perkins 648).

The room looked as a play room for the narrator while for the reader as a torture room. Windows barred and rings in the wall as well as the scratched wallpaper gave impression that it was some kind of a rehab center. The narrator herself did not like it at first.

It is worth noting how the gothic themes of the story first appeared, with the narrator describing the wallpaper and its patterns “One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns commits every artistic sin. It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide - plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions” (Perkins 648). Gothic elements were also noticed in the way that she immediately developed feelings of hatred towards it. She hated that wallpaper with every time she focused more on its patterns “No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long” (649). She fixed her gaze on it and immediately drew her attention to it, as if she saw herself in a mirror. Yet her sanity started to be doubted when she described the yellow wallpaper saying “There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down”(Perkins 649). The narrator’s mind was dark and getting darker. She saw broken necks and bulbous eyes staring through the wallpaper which put her stability on spotlight.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper! At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies. (Perkins 649).

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John noticed that his wife was having fancies and warned her from letting it control her, yet he did not do much to help her nor to make her understand that situation.

From gothic lenses, John her husband is portrayed as a domineering male figure who confines his female victim in solitary confinement while he is away. Even though the protagonist was not able to bare that loneliness she was left in and her husband did not care nor did he realize how bad that affected her "'And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily. Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really dear you are better! " " Better in body perhaps - " I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word" (Perkins 652).

Despite being a story about a mental collapse, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has elements of conventional Gothic fiction. The narrator shared what appeared to be concealed feelings about her baby and her suffering from not being allowed to bond with it. She was depressed, but she was denying her feelings and not expressing her darker inner thoughts

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper. If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds. I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see. Of course I never mention it to them any more - I am too wise, - but I keep watch of it all the same" (Perkins 652).

The narrator admitted that it was better for her baby to stay away from her because she was not feeling ready to handle it nor stable to take care of it. She was neglecting the baby because of the depression she was dealing with and because of her messed up mind. Sooner she started to lose her mind and entered a vortex of hallucinations and fantasies. It was clearly seen

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in “The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out. I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper did move” (Perkins 652). The protagonist started to be afraid from people around her, like if she lost trust in them because they were suppressing her “The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look. It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis,- that perhaps it is the paper!” The narrator's illness worsened, but her symbolic language got clearer and understandable as she proceeded to narrate about the wallpaper. She stated she was scared by her own husband and his treatment of her, as well as the notion that he was controlling her.

The way she was kept confined away from real life and actual activities caused her to seek for any kind of entertainment, and the paper with its patterns was such a thrill to her that she focused all of her attention on getting away from her captivity to it “Life is very much more 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 am quieter than I was. John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wall-paper - he would make fun of me” (Perkins 653).

The narrator did not stop there, but went on to fantasize and hallucinate that there was a woman in the wallpaper and, often more than one “Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometime only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over” (Perkins 654). Her mental condition became quite gothic, mirroring her own self and struggle, but the way she described what she believed she saw in the yellow wallpaper was unmistakably frightening and confusing. The readers were able to comprehend who the woman in the wallpaper was and what she was trying to shatter towards the end of the story, and the gothic symbolic language began to provide the sense that Gilman was attempting to deliver.

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All of her conflicting feelings about her family were transferred onto the house, which was characterized as exquisite yet odd and unsettling. Her attention changed to the yellow wallpaper that enveloped the walls of her jail cell. As she started to write, the wallpaper gradually awakens, fictionalizing her experience. She altered her viewpoint after initially examining it with rigorous objectivity. The wallpaper became her own narrative or tale, the witness of her traumatic experience, as she fictionalizes her experience. She gradually fits the shape of a woman inside it “a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design” (Perkins 650).

The distressing final event of the narrative is the result of an early clash between a limited yet energetic body at odds with a frantic conscience. Gilman's story ends obscurely, making readers confused how to interpret the narrator's triumphant declaration that “I've got out at last” because it is followed immediately by a backward image of her “creeping” (656).

2.3. The failure of the Rest Cure

Discussing the failure of the rest cure as a postpartum therapy is impossible without addressing the ending of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” It was the most stunning section of the entire narrative, but it also disclosed many truths and answered many questions. “One of the most controversially discussed aspects of the short story is its ending” (Hedges 222).

The narrator takes advantage of the chance of her husband's departure at the end of the story to close the door and pull away the wallpaper. When her husband comes at the door, she informs him that she is free and emancipated. He passed unconscious, and she continued to creep about the room. “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. A strip about as high as my head and half around the room. And then when the sun

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came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it to-day” (Perkins 655).

It was the narrator's final act of disobedience, explosion and getting sick of her condition as she removes the wallpaper toward liberation. She was finally rejecting her husband's established control and expressing her own redemption. John had been neglecting his wife's feelings, emotions, and complaints for so long that he was surprised to see her in that state in the end. Her spouse faints as a result of the narrator's activities. Instead of tormenting her or attempting to communicate with her, he just fainted, having finally lost control over what he believed he was regulating. The narrator made it clear that she and the woman in the wall were one. Unbelievable! But all her way of seeing things in the wallpaper was. “I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did” (Perkins 656).

When her husband was laying on the floor at the end of the story, she climbs over him, symbolically towering above him. This is viewed as a win over her husband at the cost of her mental health. “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” (Perkins 656).

The gothic genre represented everything that is dark in writings “The gothic speaks to the dark side of domestic fiction: erotic, violent, perverse, bizarre and obsessively connected with contemporary fears” (qtd. in Cavallaro11). By embracing a lunatic language in which the supernatural overpowers reality and the calm domestic story, the yellow wallpaper questioned the foundations of domestic life in family relationships and stable families. Despite its tediousness and stereotyping, the feminine Gothic allowed many feminist authors to discover their own literary voice different from the so-called patriarchal voice of Realism. Ripping the wallpaper off was a symbolic gothic action that represented the disintegration of the artificial shell of family life. The lady was effectively imprisoned in her own home while searching for the enigmatic, unpleasant truth hidden beyond the wall which was her freedom.

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2.4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that “The Yellow Wallpaper” contained a huge amount of Gothic elements into it and it is clear that this genre was the most used one in that era reflecting the real life the authors were living at that time. Gilman was such a creative author to take advantage of it to depict her experience and fight for what she believed in through a gothic story. In this narrative, Perkins Gilman condemns the rest cure by demonstrating its negative effects on women and arguing that women require mental and physical activity to be healthy, as well as the freedom to choose their own health and life choices.

Gilman had to utilize the Gothic genre to make her voice heard in the male dominated world she was trapped in. She aspired to make a difference. She aimed to persuade people of the folly of gender role mandates and the repressive behavioral restrictions for women that were prevalent in nineteenth-century patriarchal culture. The gothic genre enabled her to deliver her direct themes forcefully through the story and even empowered her to demonstrate how horrible, insane, and fanatical employing the rest cure treatment was.

Gilman's decision to give the story a dark, horrific tone was driven by more than simply a wish to bring readers' awareness to the failure of the rest cure treatment and its painful, sad, and disruptive influence on the lives of women. Instead, the feminine Gothic permitted many feminist writers to develop their own literary voice separate from the so-called patriarchal speech of Rationalism.

Chapter Three

“The Yellow Wallpaper” from a Feminist Perspective

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Introduction

For centuries, most western societies considered women as unequal since they differ in physical and moral characteristics. Men were perceived to be superior to their counterparts of the opposing gender. In the nineteenth century, women were dominated, controlled, and taken for granted. Women's rights as human beings and members of society were violated. They were thought to be foolish, weak, and minor beings, during a time when men were the leaders and the most powerful. According to BBC's article about women's suffrage in the 19th century women were seen as the weaker sex (The campaign for women's suffrage BBC).

The inequality which reigned over the American society at that time made some female authors, such as Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman advocate for women's equality and criticizes the patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf said in one of her works that “A feminist is any woman who tells the truth about her life” (goodreads quotes). Charlotte Bronte explained that women and men are emotionally equal “Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel” (Jane Eyre 128). Charlotte Perkins Gilman was also a fighter for women's rights and a defender of those women who were curbed and locked in cages in the name of marriage and society laws. She advocated for female empowerment liberation, believing that once liberated of the constraints of the traditional family, women's motherly instincts could alter the society. Thus the focus of the present chapter is to highlight Perkins' feminist contribution with the writing of her short story.

3.1. Perkins and the Rise of Feminism in the U.S.

Gender inequality was prevalent among European and American societies in the nineteenth century. Women had minimal legal, social, or political rights before the turn of the century; they could not vote, testify in court, sue or be sued, and had limited authority over private possessions after marriage. In divorce cases, they were hardly granted legal parental responsibility, and they were prevented from entering schools.

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The rights and liberties of women were restricted, and both unmarried and married women experienced difficulties and disadvantages. Women experienced financial and sexual obstacles, as well as inequalities in their marriages and in society. There were evident discrepancies in men's and women's rights at the period. In 1892, in a medical journal, James Crichton-Browne wrote that, “There is a growing tendency around us to ignore intellectual distinctions between the sexes, to assimilate the education of girls to that of boys, to throw men and women into industrial competition in every walk of life, and to make them compeers in social intercourse. And as, to my thinking, this tendency is unphysiological, and likely if indulged to lead to some unfortunate results”.

Women lacked many, if not all, of their rights, especially after marriage. When women marry, they become the property of men, just like slaves. Women were perceived to be physically inferior but more moral than men, meaning that they were better suited to family life. Their mission was to neutralize the moral stench of the public realm, where their husbands worked all day, while simultaneously training the next generation to go on in the same way. The fact that women exercised so much influence at home, they were constantly rejected when it comes to giving opinions since they were seen incompetent and emotional rather than logical, and that was used to justify depriving them of the right to vote.

K. Theodore Hoppen, mentioned in his book *The mid-Victorian generation* that in the Nineteenth century, the notion of "pater familias," or the husband as head of the home and leader, had been deeply ingrained. As stated in her marriage vows, a wife's legitimate job were to love, honor, and obey her husband. Her position in the context of family was lower, but far from being overlooked, a wife's duty was to care for her husband and properly rear her children.

Discrimination and oppression were the most prominent issues that women experienced at the period. These difficulties were mostly societal in nature. This led to gender differences, men's superiority and dominance, and women's subjugation existing in socioeconomic class

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and the hierarchical system, culminating in women's movements against inequality and appearing in real life and works of literature. Women became conscious of their position after living in a patriarchal atmosphere and enduring unequal treatment for a long period of time. By expressing their aspiration, women aimed to achieve equality of status. Feminism is a women's movement that seeks independence or self-determination. Feminism aims for two things that women do not have in general, mainly equality with males and the freedom to choose what is best for them.

Feminism refers to women's fight against inferiority in order to achieve equality with men in society. Women began the feminist movement in response to the unfairness and inequality of relationships in their houses. The word feminism comes from French word “feminisme” and according to the Cambridge online dictionary feminism is “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.” The term “feminism” refers to a cultural, political, and economic movement that seeks equal rights for men and women. However, the names “feminism” and “feminist” did not gain popularity. They did not have broad meaning use until the 1970s, when they began to be used in public (Cambridge dictionary).

Feminism's history is divided into three periods known as feminism waves. The first wave lasted from around 1850 to 1940, commonly known as the suffrage movement, was largely concerned with winning women's voting rights. It also fought for women's equal economic and contractual rights. “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written in the first wave’s period where Gilman used that reality fight into her fictional tale. The first wave of feminism evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in the context of economic industrialism and liberal, socialist politics.

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Women were influenced and affected because they lived under gender inequality and toxic masculinity; women were restricted, controlled, and locked in their homes in an obedient position as Angels of their households. Furthermore, their legal rights were completely neglected and denied to them. The feminist movement's major goal is to achieve social equality in areas such as rights and education. The feminists did not only stop expressing their misery through protesting, they also did through literary works.

Some female authors, such as Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Brontë and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, were among the first to advocate for women's equality and to criticize the patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf said that “A feminist is any woman who tells the truth about her life” (minimalist quotes). She pioneered Theory Feminism in her 1929 book *A Space for One's Own* in the early twentieth century Charlotte Brontë explained that women and men are emotionally equal “Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel” (*Jane Eyre* 128). Through her work, Gilman was complaining about that misery and was calling for equality as well as justice for women to be independent

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was fighter for women’s rights and a defender of those women who were curbed and locked in cages in the name of marriage and society laws. She advocated for female empowerment liberation, believing that once liberated of the constraints of the traditional family, women's motherly instincts could alter the society. The story of “The Yellow Wallpaper” marked a huge impact on society, it made women think again about their situation and stand strong defending and claiming their rights in being free in marriages, doing what they see better for themselves and choosing what they like and want freely.

Perkins got the offer of editor for the Pacific Coast Women's Press Association's newspaper *Imprint* in 1894. She was also the journal's director for a while. (Scharnhorst, 36-37). In 1895, Perkins collaborated with the “PCWPA” Pacific Coast Women's Press Association to organize the Woman's Congress in San Francisco. During this event, Gilman

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met a number of influential women, namely Anna Howard Shaw, Susan B. Anthony, and Jane Addams. She embraced Addams' invitation to Hull House in Chicago (Scharnhorst 44).

Gilman's stay at Hull House influenced her idealistic writings, including her book *Her Land*. Gilman also befriended Anthony, who subsequently asked her to appear at the January 1896 Women's Suffrage Conference in Washington, D.C, and to speak to the House Judiciary Committee in favour of suffrage (Scharnhorst 45). Gilman has always wanted to catch more attention to women's needs and more awareness to their situations and rights either by her works or events she organized and attended.

3.2. Highlighting the Feminist Side of the Story

Her 1892 story is regarded as a feminist literary classic. The gothic story of "The Yellow Wallpaper" attracted a great attention from readers, feminists, and even doctors, but it took nearly a century for a really understanding public to arise. The story's sheer fear was recognized by early readers, and it still represents a superb example of the genre today.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” was published for the first time in *New England Magazine* in January 1892 and it was notable for its feminist genuine first-person depiction of a physically privileged woman's mental breakdown, as well as the connections between its protagonist's illness and the author's actual experience. It was one of numerous works dealing with feminist equality in the nineteenth century, yet one of the most effective and strong feminist works in that era. The author tackled many debating feminist themes in the 19th century through the story, such as women's health, women's emotional freedom and their right to make their life's choices. One of the main issues that Perkins tackled in her story was related to the fact that women were not permitted to have a voice in the house in the 1890s. Their husbands were the only ones who could make decisions. For this, Perkins Gilman approached the story from a feminist perspective since the protagonist was fighting against male thoughts and social rules.

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The author employed journal writing to illustrate the narrator's fall into lunacy both subjectively and objectively that is, from within and outside.

If Gilman had delivered her narrative in typical first-person narration, with events reported from within the narrator's mind, the reader would never know what to believe: a lady inside the wallpaper would truly exist. “I 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” (Perkins 648). The narrator here claimed that she had a different perspective to working than the one her husband and brother had. The narrator saw things differently because she was a woman and that was her life and her health. She knew what was best for her and that is what Gilman wanted to deliver to the readers.

The story illustrated society's critical stance to the treatment of postpartum depression. The husband, John who is a physician, tried to treat his wife's neurotic condition, which is causing her to collapse with the rest cure therapy, by advising her refrain from engaging in any physical or creative activity. Yet that was more as curbing her activities rather than curing her. She was not allowed to read, write, or interact with her new baby; all she was permitted to do was sleep and breathe fresh air. John kept her in a supporting position by convincing her that she lacked the ability to make her own decisions. The narrator struggles with sadness and male domination, both of which were common in the 1800s.

Women in that era were not able to even have the control over their own bodies and health. As in “The Yellow Wallpaper” the narrator could not protest against her husband's control over her body, like if she had no right to do so “You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do?” (Perkins 847). John continuously controlled and monitored her, which led to her collapse by the end of the story. Gilman utilized symbolism to disguise the feminist calls for which she stood. John, the narrator's spouse, is the one of those symbols. He is a symbol of masculine domination and oppression. Greg Johnson notes that John exhibits a near-

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obsession with “reason,” even as his wife grows mad. He is the narrator’s necessary counterpart, without stifling influence her eventual freedom would not be gained. And he is also transformed at the end of the tale—in a reversal of traditional gothic roles—because it is he, not a female, who faints when confronted with madness (Perkins 529).

The narrator repeated the sentence “what can one do?” giving the reader the impression that she is helpless under the mercy of her husband. And she cannot claim for what she wants or protest against her husband’s decisions. She also mentioned her brother who agreed with her husband’s treatment since he is “a man” too. “My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing” (648). She was not happy about the way she was restricted. “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). The narrator was surrounded by men who symbolized the men’s world she was locked in, with no ability to protest on their commands or rebel. Her situation made her struggling between finding a way to express her feelings, her thoughts and what she wanted and obeying what men and society forced her to do and think of.

After she started with that impression on her husband and the male control she was in, the narrator went to describing the house that she was seeing as a summer cottage while the readers saw as a rehab or a mental illness hospital “It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people” (Perkins 648). The house was in an isolated area away from people and social life. The house was preventing the narrator from interacting with her contacts and other people, beside her husband and the nurse his sister.

She suspected that the house was creepy and haunted but could not move out since it was not her decision to make. “There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the

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heirs and coheirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years. That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care - there is something strange about the house - I can feel it” (648). Going back to her husband and him being the male, the controller and the dominant. He was also ignorant and careless and taking his wife's thoughts as silly ideas that needs no attention. “I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window” (648). She did not have the right to even pick a room she liked. It may seem that her husband was being extremely dominant in the story, but that was a part of reality in the 19th century.

The narrator discovers her secret self, as well as her final damnation and release, behind the wallpaper. “I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” (Perkins 648). Her sadness, struggle, fears and hopes were all within that wallpaper. Even though her first impression was unpleasant, the narrator became fascinated by the pattern later, and she started to see more than simply the exterior pattern. Because of her suppression and limited activities, she had only the wallpaper to spend time with, “it is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide - plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions” (Perkins 648). The wallpaper became her obsession because she had so much empty time with no hobbies and no work. The narrator had to put her focus on something to distract her from her misery.

The protagonist of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a writer; however when her husband forbids her from writing in her diary, she is forced to find another method of expressing herself. She found herself following the design in the paper for hours, trying to find a solution to the mystery that was the wallpaper. “am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with

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excitement and change, would do me good” (648). People have different ways of expressing feelings, thoughts, ideas and energy and when they are not allowed to use those ways they become suppressed and that is the case of the narrator. She was not able to do what made her feel better, what made her relieved and satisfied, she was not allowed to talk about herself.

Coming back again to her husband, the narrator was not being supported or really taken care of. She was left alone with her imagination and the isolated house, like if she was in some kind of prison. “John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious. I am glad my case is not serious! But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing. John does not know how much I really suffer” (Perkins 649). If the husband is not giving enough importance and attention to his wife, she can be driven to insanity even if she was not having a severe depression. The narrator was over thinking, in need of support, care and love and not getting any from her husband only underestimate.

John was neglecting his wife’s feelings and demands, which was one of the reasons her case got complicated more. Karen, Kleiman the Founder and Executive Director of The Postpartum Stress Center, where she provides treatment for prenatal and postpartum depression and anxiety, advised husbands that they should follow some advises, when they are dealing with a wife with PPD. Research has shown that a woman's depression will improve markedly with the consistent support of a significant other. The longer he pretends that the depression will go away by itself or deny it is happening, the longer her recovery will take and the more this other expects of her, the more difficult her recovery will be.

As time passes, the wallpaper swallows the narrator's being, revealing more intricate pictures. She started being more into it and into discovering its patterns. The yellow wallpaper was an adventure for the narrator, to discover the life she can have; when she is no longer strangled by man’s rule. Gilman skillfully used this dreadful, unattractive paper to depict the household life that restricted so many women. The Wallpaper represented a domestic and

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simple way of life. Women in marriages were suffering in silence from neglect, desertion, despair, ongoing issues, and personal desires for a better sort of life. Sadly for them, marriage was the only way for a woman to establish a place in society. The wallpaper represented the tyranny that many women felt as a result of the institution of marriage. The narrator was lonely, in need for company yet was not allowed to have any contact with her friends and family. “It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now” (Perkins 649). This limitation made her put all her focus on the wallpaper, ignoring her pain and looking for a better amusement.

The protagonist seemed to be fighting against men’s dominance since a young age, since she was just a kid. “I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store” (Perkins649). Here in this part, the narrator mentioned that even in her childhood she used to do the same thing by analyzing the things around her. That meant that she looked for freedom since she was young. She was not only controlled by getting married, by a husband but also by a father before. Every male she had in her life curbed her activities and energy.

Gilman and her debate with Weir Mitchell, has been on spotlights since she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” and mentioned her trauma of postpartum and “the rest cure” through it. She even mentioned him in the story when the narrator stated “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). The country's foremost expert on neurological diseases, whose therapy in such situations consisted of a "rest cure" imposed passivity. Time was passing and the wallpaper swallowed the narrator's mind, revealing more intricate imagery. She was observing a woman who "creeps"

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and rattles the outside pattern, which the narrator interpreted for bars. “And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit” (Perkins 652). The narrator's pessimism expressed itself in her illusion of the woman on the wallpaper, which she finally recognized as a reflection of herself. Her need for friendship resulted in an exhibition of her restricted existence; basically driving her into a state of insanity from which even her husband's terror could not bring her out.

In the opposite Jennie, John's sister, held to traditional values. When compared to the narrator, one can observe how much they differ from one another. Jennie as contrary of the narrator, she devotes herself to men's rule, most likely because she was afraid of being publically shamed if she objected. She undervalued herself and underestimated women by embracing her inferior status and thought that education is something a woman should not have to cope with. The same thing did Mary the babysitter. “It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby” the narrator even got jealous from Mary, that she was able to be with the baby and take care of him more than her. Jennie and Mary embraced their disadvantaged position in society. They even increased the narrator's sorrow about her own incapacity to be a conventional wife and mother. They were representing those who were constrained but never objected.

The husband's character developed through the story, later on he was represented as manipulative or narcissistic. He convinced his wife, that everything he was doing was for her benefit and for her best and that he was a loving husband which was contradictory to his behaviour. That was the case of men at that time, playing the role of loving, caring and wise husbands yet that was only to make women obey and become submissive to them. As in the story John made his wife believe his intentions “It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so” (Perkins 652). While she was drifting into insanity, he was not even aware of how bad her case is getting, he even thought she was

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recovering just because she was hiding her madness well behind her blushed cheeks. “you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you” (652). He treated her like a kid rather than a self-assured adult. His work as a doctor made him think that he is more superior and wiser, but unfortunately that was her mind and body and she was more aware of what was happening to her.

The last parts of the story left readers with many question marks. At the same time, it revealed many truths about the narrator and the whole story. By the climax, the narrator became sure that there are many crawling women about and that she too has emerged from the wallpaper and was the imprisoned female. That's after she decided to rip the wallpaper off, to rescue the woman she was seeing in there. “There are only two more days to get this paper off” (Perkins 655). The narrator wanted to make her husband amazed by the way she ripped the wallpaper to show him what she was capable of and to make him believe her. She was trying to tell him that even with his hands chocking her, she managed to leave her sadness, lack of energy, underestimate and control to freedom of doing whatever she wanted. . “I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes. I want to astonish him” (Perkins 655).

Through the story many phrases were statements were short but had a huge deep meaning such this illustration “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” (Perkins 656). This sentence by the end of the story was a debate material on what the narrator meant by it and what Gilman aimed by concluding her story with it. A confusing sentence which gave the impression that the narrator herself was locked in, that resulted that the wallpaper was like a mirror for her, all the time she was only describing herself, what she felt and what she wanted. The narrator was only seeing herself and her struggle within this scary and disturbing design. The wallpaper was the domestic

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life that she was kept in as a prisoner. It was what Gilman was fighting against through the narrator.

The narrator mentioned the name “Jane” which was never mentioned before. Jane probably was her name, was the name of the woman that John wanted her to be, as an obeying and restricted wife and mother. However she refused that role, she wanted to be the writer and not the underestimated wife he asked for.

The narrator's mental restrictions, more than her physical ones, are what eventually drove her mad. The most unpleasant element of her therapy from the start has been the forced stillness and inactivity of the "rest cure." She was obliged to become entirely passive, and she was not allowed to exercise her intellect in any manner. She was compelled to conceal her fears and worries in order to maintain the appearance of a stable happy marriage and to appear to be gaining support over her melancholy."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" (Perkins 648). Writing is specially forbidden, and John reminded her numerous times that she must employ self-control to keep her mind in check but that was tiring her because she was suppressing. John always laughed at his wife's ideas and thoughts, never took them seriously, he neglected his wife's true needs. It made him happy to see his wife doing what he ordered her to do and being on a rest treatment, but it didn't heal her; instead, it exacerbated the protagonist's actual sadness, until it was too late to save her from insanity. Obviously from this remark that John laughed at his wife because it was socially acceptable to do so, referring to marriage's atmosphere back then. Men forbade women from utilizing their minds through writing or reading since doing so would lead to their self-determination.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman stated that she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” to send a message through it. “The little book is valued by alienist and a good specimen of one kind of literature. It has to my knowledge saved one woman from a similar fate-so terrifying her family

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that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered” (*Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper*). In 1884, Charlotte married Charles Stetsman, and her daughter was born in 1885. After delivering her daughter, Katharine, she developed severe postpartum depression. Her experience with postpartum depression and the physicians she saw during her sickness prompted her to create “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Gilman got divorced in 1888, breaking free from the unhappy marriage she was living in.

3.3. Conclusion

“The Yellow Wallpaper” was a portrayal of how an anxious mind may decay and start to feed on itself when pushed into passivity and barred from productive employment. Mitchell, who is featured in the narrative, took Gilman's criticism to heart and quit the “rest cure”. This means that her voice became heard, she finally could let the world take her side and change the way they were treating women that time. By viewing women simply as a passive object of therapy and not giving importance to what they felt Gilman suggested that both types of power (husband and doctor control) may be readily misused, even when the husband or doctor intends to assist the women who are the passive victims of this dominance become emotionally traumatized, or worse, Gilman intended to attack medical treatment that overlooks the patient's needs through the story.

Overall, this narrative is meant to illustrate the author's feminist beliefs while also highlighting the physically and psychologically challenges suffered by women during this time frame. These concepts are portrayed through the acts of the spouse (the masculine character) and the narrator's thoughts, as well as the environment of the tale.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion:

Literature is a method and a way to express and share sentiments, thoughts, and worries with others. Literature contributes to the comprehension of individuals, communities, situations, and cultures. It consists of more than just poetry and stories. Literature is a message, an experience, and, most importantly, an artistic expression. It enables humans to communicate with and comprehend one another. The writers strive to transmit specific ideas via literature; while they are conscious of audience judgments. Once a work of literature is published, it is up to the readers to begin to grasp it and decide whether they agree with it or not. After tackling and discussing “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Gilman's motivations for composing it, it became obvious that it was a great illustration of how literature can be used to express, educate, and advocate for what one believes in.

This extended essay examined “The Yellow Wallpaper” from a medical, Gothic, and feminist standpoint. This extended essay aimed to define the postpartum depression and “the rest cure” treatment, as well as to emphasize on the consequences of utilizing “the rest cure” on mental health and how that treatment failed causing a mental damage on the narrator. It also aimed to illustrate women's struggles in marital cages in that era and to raise awareness of women’s needs and their rights.

As previously covered in the preceding chapters, “The Yellow Wallpaper” was a story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman that told about a woman who suffered from a mental illness (postpartum) and her physician husband prescribed the rest cure treatment for her. The mental issue the narrator was dealing with was postpartum depression. That kind of depression known now as “baby blues” is a period that starts before or after giving birth with two weeks and includes symptoms such as mood swings, crying phases, dark thoughts (suicide or harming the baby) losing energy and anxiety.

Despite tremendous medical advances, physicians were unable to provide appropriate prescriptions and treatments for women at the time. It was either because they were regarded less significant as women, or because they just did not grow as much in the psychological field. “The rest cure” was one of those deceptive therapies and prescriptions. It was a therapy that forced women to stay in bed, away from family and friends, away from hobbies and jobs, and away from social and any other activity that required energy. This treatment was comparable to that of a jail, full with limitations and banned acts.

Weir Mitchell was a well-known physician at the time. He was the one who invented “the rest cure” therapy, the one who prescribed it to Gilman, and the physician to whom the narrator was frightened to go. He was a part of the story, because the treatment he created made a huge effect on the narrator and author. His treatment caused the narrator’s decline into madness, since she was isolated, curbed and unable to live normally. The narrator because of that therapy lost control over her imagination and made of the wallpaper an entertaining puzzle, which she tried to discover.

While she appeared to be trying to follow the patterns on the wallpaper, she expressed her gothic, dark thoughts. The narrator created the impression to the readers that she was seeing things in the wallpaper and gradually lost her mind. However, towards the end of the narrative, she revealed to the readers that the wallpaper was a reflection of herself, and she was just explaining her position via it. The Gothic genre developed into a unique and influential one, attracting critical attention. Nevertheless, it was a very famous genre after its debut in the nineteenth century. This genre transformed, reflecting the major changes in society, in the face of factors like industrialization and the collapse of the landed aristocracy, the Gothic genre in realism writings was able to portray what audiences could already connect to while also hinting at what readers were acquainted with.

One of the most essential aspects of Gothic fiction is insanity. Gilman utilized the gothic motif of madness to show the failure of “the rest cure” and how it drove women insane and did them more damage than it was supposed to fix. By utilizing Gothic themes, the author brought greater attention to that harmful cure, as well as sympathy to the women who were undergoing that therapy, which cost them their sanity, souls, and lives.

The study also looked at how the narrator was mistreated by her husband and how society viewed it. Women were supposed to marry and give birth and their spouses would look after them. Women were forced to remain reliant on men, first as daughters and then as wives. Women utilized a variety of weapons to combat men's dominance over women, societal inequality and limitation, one of which was literature. Literature was a mirror of what already occurred in actual life, and it was expressed in writing. Novels, plays, and poems, for instance, gave evidence of this type of reflection. Some authors frequently used their works as social criticisms to reflect women's circumstances. It then aided women in being aware of their situation, allowing them to make changes in their lives. In this study, the novel's author mirrored a nineteenth-century occurrence, namely men's dominance resulting to women's subjugation.

What Perkins accomplished by using supernatural, ghost, and figures as symbols of the anxieties buried beneath the yellow paper sparked a major rebellion because she intended to reflect the female author's intelligence, concerns about the human mind, and emancipation from the enforced preconceptions and norms that women needed to overcome in order to earn the respect they deserved. As it was discussed in the third and the last chapter of this research, during the nineteenth century, writers began to highlight the need of liberty for women, as well as their desire for respect and freedom. “The Yellow Wallpaper” was a story which Charlotte Perkins Gilman created to highlight the control of men on women. The narrator and her way of describing her feelings and thoughts toward her husband, who was a controller, an under estimator and a careless man, gave a clear image to the misery they used to live in. John found

the rest cure as a great weapon to control and dominate his wife. He was ruling her life like if she was one of his properties.

Charlotte Perkins's short work has supplied women mostly with a variety of attributes that make it a wonderful representation of the beliefs drawn from feminism, the Victorian crises, and the inner change blossoming in women's minds when it comes to knowing themselves and seeking their own strength. Even if it was horrific, gothic and confusing the story never meant to scare people nor make them insane but actually to keep them away from craziness “but the best result is this: Many year later I was told that the greats specialist had admitted to friends of him that he had altered his treatment neurasthenia since reading *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked” (Gilman).

To conclude, women struggled for the same human, political, and social rights as men, as well as equal chances in their own decisions regarding jobs, politics, and expression. Female authors were merely transmitting those requirements to the rest of the world. That era needed voices like Gilman's to raise awareness of women's mental health and persuade men that women are not insane or ill; they simply need freedom, and acceptance.

Essentially, the goal of this extended essay was to illustrate how Perkins contributed to the growth of feminism in the United States, as well as the role she had in enhancing women's lives. How she succeeded in making the voices of countless moms suffering from postpartum symptoms heard with a short narrative of 10 lonely pages, and how the story influenced male doctors to abandon the "rest treatment" and seek other methods to cure women suffering from Postpartum symptoms

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