

# Critical Analysis and Feminist Reading of the Yellow Wallpaper

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## ABSTRACT

The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is an icon of feminist criticism of literature and medical humanities. It is a critical revision of the story that re-reads the text considering current feminist and medical-humanities perspectives and bases the argument on the more recent, Scopus- Indexed scholarly publications published since 2019. Through the analysis it is revealed how domestic medical authority, gendered epistemologies and pathologising female subjectivity are simulated in the story through the confinement of the narrator and his ultimate breakdown. Based on the recent medical-humanities-related research that links the Gilmanian critique to the modern-day clinical studies and the mental-health practice (Villar, 2024; Watson, 2021), and the recent literary studies that locate the Gilmanian afterlives in the texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Gaskill, 2020; Maxey, 2023), the paper contends Gilman stages madness as both the symptom of oppression and an unclear mode of resistance. The hidden writing of the narrator, her interpretations of the wallpaper, and the dramatic moment of defying the paper collectively together give a narrative that is interrogative of the patriarchal domination of the female body, knowledge, and creativity.

**Keywords:** *Feminist criticism, patriarchy, confinement, mental health, symbolism, women's identity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a gothic short story and a scathing examination of feminism simultaneously. Its narrator, though nameless, is prescribed the notorious rest cure, and locked away in an upstairs nursery by her doctor husband, and records the gradual breakdown of her mind. Traditional readings have long seen the force of the story in its revelation of patriarchal medicine and home-based confinement; this new analysis creates that hermeneutic more current by drawing on work that is indexed in Scopus and published since 2019 and explicitly relates Gilman literary critique to current medical-ethical and cultural issues (Villar, 2024; Watson, 2021), and contemporary literary analyses that trace the effects and symbolic resonance of the story in later Anglo-phone literary practices.

The goal of this paper is:

- (1) To reconsider the way medicine and household authority is portrayed in the story as an example of modern medical-humanities research;
- (2) To examine the wallpaper as a complex feminist symbol, of captivity, language, and embodied struggle; and
- (3) To demonstrate how the readings of 2019 and beyond confuse the motif of the madwoman by preempting the clinical, intersectional, and intertextual.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The most recent peer-reviewed, Scopus-based studies place the narrative by Gilman in the context of ongoing discussions regarding gendered medicine and changing literary traditions. Villar (2024) relates *The Yellow Wallpaper* to the contemporary issues of the clinical research sphere by proposing that the episode of the rest cure sheds light on how non-inclusive research and one-size interventions marginalise identified groups and obscure intersectional demands. Watson (2021) describes the case in terms of neurological/psychiatric clinical readers and highlights the utility of the story as a cultural case study of postpartum mental distress and the evils of paternalistic treatment paradigms. The literary afterlife of the text by Gilman is expanded by Gaskill (2020) and Maxey (2023), who demonstrate that the materiality and colour politics of the wallpaper are still used in future fictions and cultural criticism. These new studies are an addition to established feminist criticism (e.g., Gilbert and Gubar; Showalter; Treichler), and indicate that the interpretative power of the story has given new urgency to both health-science and humanities readers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is a qualitative literary analysis that involves the close reading, intertextual comparison and synthesis with modern medical-humanities writing. The primary material will be the text by Gilman; the secondary one will be the recent scholarship that is indexed by Scopus (Villar, 2024; Watson, 2021; Gaskill, 2020; Maxey, 2023) to ensure the historical context. Interpretive moves will unfold by (a) analyzing the major scenes of the text closely (journal entries, description of the wallpaper, scene of final tearing); (b) reading those scenes through the context of current clinical discourse of postpartum distress and medical paternalism; (c) comparing symbolic resonances which are relevant in the case of recent literary work as a continuation of Gilman.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Nostradamus and the Rest Cure-- Historicized, Resurfaced**

John is an example of paternalism, that is, a localised form of a wider medical culture that pathologises women's agency. Watson (2021) and Villar (2024) note that the story by Gilman is still clinically educative: the imposed inactivity of the rest cure, the ban on writing, and the medicalised infantilization of a person show the silencing effect of the medical discourse on the voice of patients. These are driven even deeper in the contemporary reading by Villar (2024), who claims that the logic of the Rest Cure reflects the contemporary failures, in which non-intersectional clinical research and paternalistic designs of treatment harm subgroups of patients. The interpretation of Gilman and Villar, therefore, makes the rest cure of historical become a persistent instance of epistemic violence in medicine.

### **The Surface of the Wallpaper and the Gendered Surface**

The wallpaper is an aesthetic object which turns into textual space: a pattern which cannot be easily described and can be decoded. Gaskill (2020) emphasises the importance of colour and surface as a means of recording political meanings; in this case, the yellow colour of sickness and the strangled graph become semiotic fields, where the repressed agency of the narrator first develops and then declares itself. The narrator reads, misreads and eventually writes to the wallpaper; her reading is a kind of counter-discourse with medical narratives which dictate silence.

### **Madness as an Indeterminate Resistance.**

The action of tearing the paper on a climactic moment of the book, which earlier critics interpreted as either abject psychosis or an act of desperate liberation, takes on a different tint when read in connection to the recent studies on patient voice and clinical marginalisation. Watson (2021) puts the symptoms of the narrator in frames of diagnosing conditions, including postpartum

mood disorders; Villar (2024) recalls the readers that the classification of clinical conditions can annul socio-political reasons. Put together, these views perpetuate an interpretation where the madness of the narrator is created by systemic oppression; and her eventual creeping is a dislocation and a performative assertion of independence.

### **Intertextual Afterlives and Cultural Memory.**

Maxey (2023) demonstrates that in later anglophone literature Gilman wallpaper continues to be used as an image, re-sequenced to investigate identity, race and sexuality. This underworld proves that the wallpaper is not just a personal nightmare but a cultural cliché that other authors employ to enact similar struggles between inner and social oppression.

Introducing the scholarship published in the recent Scopus index adds a point to two main arguments. To begin with, the story by Gilman is not just a historical document but a breathing interlocutor of contemporary medical ethics and research design. The emphasis on intersectionality in the development of treatment promoted by Villar (2024) makes the namelessness of the narrator an iconic representation of the people swept away by the generalized medical treatment. Second, the ongoing literary fascination (Gaskill, 2020; Maxey, 2023) with the wallpaper pictures demonstrates the enduring ability of this story to encode battles of color, texture, and containment that establish the connections between gender and other dimensions of identity and aesthetics politics.

The methodology of integrating close reading with medical-humanities scholarship creates a more nuanced ecology of interpretation: the literary form (diary entries, focalization, symbolic surface) can be regarded as the evidence of the social process, and clinical researches can provide the context through which the experience of the narrator can be interpreted by the contemporary readers and viewers without

turning her into a set of diagnostic categories only.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Yellow Wallpaper will survive, however, because it enacts at least two acts running concurrently the clinical control of the body of a woman and the personal control of a woman to tell and reclaim her subjectivity. Latest Scopus-indexed research (Villar, 2024; Watson, 2021; Gaskill, 2020; Maxey, 2023) proves that the critique by Gilman still has modern implications in the medical humanities and the field of literary studies. The textual analysis of the wallpaper, the journal of the narrator as a subversive practice, and the subversion of her sanity as a form of structural silencing enable critics to continue using the story by Gilman to argue about the voice of patients, inclusivity in research and the ethics of care.

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