

## GENDER, PATRIARCHY, AND THE ECONOMIC OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

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### ABSTRACT

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman unveils an assertion of the role of women, and the domination of men in the late nineteenth century. By focusing on the life of the nameless female protagonist, who struggles with postpartum depression, the novella exposes the dangers of gender roles and medical authority. Physician-husband's enforced 'rest cure' that mirrors contemporary patriarchal beliefs about women's physical and mental weakness results in the protagonist's mental decline. This paper discusses how Gilman employs the main character's imprisonment, financial enslavement, and final slip into insanity as a commentary on the oppressive structures in society that oppress women. According to the principles of the feminist approach to literature, the work reconstructs the relationships between gender subordination, medical discourse, and economic exclusion. The wallpaper itself becomes a powerful symbol of the main character's mental imprisonment and rebellion, referring to present women's emancipation fight against the patriarchal world.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, economic exploitation, madness, alienation, class struggle, patriarchy, imprisonment, rebellion.

### INTRODUCTION

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is one of the first works of feminist fiction which articulately describes the situation of women in the late nineteenth-century America. First published in 1892, the novella is an autobiography of Gilman's attempt at addressing mental issues among females and touches on larger issues of patriarchy affecting women in the society. As a women's rights advocate, Gilman painted a picture based on her knowledge and experience of women's repression with emphasis on economic and mental slavery, medical mistreatment of women this was especially during this period.)

In The Yellow Wallpaper, Gilman describes the story of the female narrator, now diagnosed with postpartum psychosis, but who is dismissed and infantilized by her husband, John, a doctor. He recommends the 'rest cure' a treatment whereby the patient has to be isolated and does nothing at all, especially women who were diagnosed with

nervous disorders as advanced by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell. This treatment, which entailed depriving any stimulating conversation as well as physical motion, reflected the existing social paradigm that women were delicate and quite incapable of reason let alone when it came to health and their bodily wellbeing (Golden, 2003). The more the protagonist is trapped, both spatially and socially, the more she is a victim of patriarchy and the more she degenerates into a lunatic.

It is for this reason that gender roles of the novella are associated directly with the society and the economic principles that dominated the lives of women. By exploring the life of the protagonist Gilman is able to condemn the subordinate status and the economic dependence on men, as well as the restrictions of the nuclear femme-male identity to the domestic sphere. John, the husband of the protagonist, controls the medical decisions of his wife and her daily life including her money and

finances. This economic relationship portrays the typical status of women of that age, who could not work or be independent financially from their husbands (Schwartz, 2001). In this way, Gilman also questions the private oppression of women in marriage as well as the spheres of limited economic opportunities for women.

By presenting the protagonist as being trapped within the space of the home, Gilman was able to convey the very real emotional imprisonment of women. Since the main character does not go outside and she stays in a room all day, she starts to have a mental breakdown and sees a woman stuck in the yellow wallpaper. Such representation of a woman behind the wallpapers reflects the idea of the protagonist who is imprisoned within a male-dominated culture that subjects women to oppressive norms. The protagonist's descent into madness, therefore, can be seen as an allegory of the effect that patriarchal oppression has on women (Treachler, 1984).

Realism is depicted vividly in this paper through themes such as economic oppression of women, the subjection of women, and mental illness prevalent in the society during the era of the novelist. Late nineteenth-century has been marked as an era of change in social and economical aspects as well as the emergence of industrialization, Urbanization and early feminism. However, with such modifications, women continued diminutive and dominated by men and continued staying within the bounds of wife and mother. whispered anxieties of women into the realm of the pathological Medical profession as practiced by males was a target of Gilman's works. Substituting the modern medical patriarchal discourses, Gilman unmasks how 'rest cure' impacted the protagonist and other women oppressed and silenced by medical patriarchal discourses of the nineteenth century (Shumaker 1985).

In this regard, *The Yellow Wallpaper* can be read as a post-Industrial Revolution critique of the perpetration of gendered power relations and economic injustice on women. In her work, Gilman rejected the social, economical and medical frameworks which caused women to be voiceless and helpless calling for women's freedom and independence. It is a text that is important in feminist literary criticism because it helps provide an understanding of the endless fervor of

patriarchal societies and how women continue to be suppressed (Showalter, 1985).

Choosing the protagonist suffering from mental disorder, economic reliance, and the medical patriarchal power, Gilman shows how women's existence was dominated and oppressed by men at that time. As a landmark text in the studying of oppressive patriarchy, this paper will examine how *The Yellow Wallpaper* illuminates both Gender and Economic Oppression as the tactics for dominating women and how Gilman's narrative presents a timeless critique of the oppressive society's effect on women.

### **Literature Review**

*The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman has been the subject of much academic analysis due to its theming of gender relations, male dominance, and the psychological repression of women. It is a fact that numerous critics interpret the novella from the Feminist perspective, Psychoanalytical perspective as well as Historical perspective.

### **1. Feminist Interpretations of Patriarchy in The Yellow Wallpaper**

The two most common analyses of *The Yellow Wallpaper* are that it is a product of a deterministic psychological viewpoint and it is a further example of gender suppression. While examining the liberating potential of Gilman's novella, patriarchal critics always pointed to crushing institutions that subordinate women, namely marriage and medicine. It's been correctly noted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar that this is a subversive text which explores "cultural confinement" of women by male powers. They claim that the mental deterioration of the movie's main character is a result of the oppressive domineering nature of her husband, John, as well as the medical profession. Besides the ability to learn and imagine, this control erases her voice and turns her into an object in her own existence (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979).

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, patriarchal norms are imposed through medical treatment by the male figure of John, which represents the medical practice of the period. Annette Kolodny (1985) points to the fact that the diagnosis of hysteria or the nervous disorder gives a word to the protagonist of the story is a part of a larger trend in the

nineteenth-century Western medicine to regularize woman's emotionality. Those who dared to cross the established line between sin and perfection, and who neglected the functions assigned to them by the cult of true womanhood, were considered mentally ill, and if they were treated at all, they were subjected to the so-called rest cure which only strengthened their subordination. Kolodny claims that through holding women confined to bed rest and limiting their movement this just proves to be another method utilized to muzzle women and reassert male dominance over them physically and mentally (Kolodny, 1985).

Jean Kennard (1981) further expands this discussion by pointing out that the novella disparages the 'medical patriarchy'. She argues that the protagonist is not simply mad from her "rest cure" but has also refused the medicalisation or as she puts it the medical and social invalidation of women's lives. The protagonist in the story tries to regain control by refusing the treatment they have been subjected to, although she is mentally ill. From this perspective, Kennard emphasizes the tricks of oppression in Gilman's text by portraying the authority of men who disguise themselves as protectors of their wives.

Furthermore, the American communication theorist Paula Treichler (1984) emphasizes from a linguistic and discursive point of view that *The Yellow Wallpaper* shows how patriarchal discourse dominates women's existence. According to Treichler the collapse of the heroine into insanity is because she cannot communicate her pains in language that is recognized in the patriarchal standards of the society. The novella as she asserts can be seen as an attack on the use of restrictive language that distorts women and castrates them from uttering their realities. The protagonist's preoccupation with the wallpaper, and her final submission becomes the illustration of her predetermined 'fate,' or, in the words of the critic Treichler (1984) a 'sentence' of female oppression.

## **2. Mental Illness and Patriarchal Control**

Many of the critical approaches to the work have regard to the portrayal of illness, especially where the illness is assumed to be postnatal depression and where woman's body and mind are subjugated by men. The aspect of one of the story's main characters being related to the values and beliefs of

medicine and females' mental conditions of the nineteenth century. Elaine Showalter (1985) notes that, in the course of the domestic period, women who protested against their roles, who wanted more than anything else, wished to have knowledge, were diagnosed as hysterical or nervous. Male doctors neglected the category of 'sex/gender' in women's mental illness and focused on the stereotype patriarchy of women as the reason for mental illness (Showalter, 1985).

Rather than discussing *The Yellow Wallpaper* in relation to the Gothic genre, Showalter focuses on more profound roots of the novella in the history of female insane asylums and women's experience of psychiatric treatments. She also has a book called *The Female Malady* where she chronicles how society reacted and continues to react to mental illness that plagued women. Stereotyping medicalization of women's femaleness, emotions and creativity Showalter, notes that Gilman's novella is an attack on medical science, imposed on women through the medical male gaze that has the effect of rendering her mad (Showalter, 1985).

Another example, Greg Johnson (1989), decided to analyze the psychological aspects of the novel that discusses the role of mental disease in relation to the protagonist and the society and the posição that she has to take in her office. According to Johnson, Gilman objects to the portrayal of the protagonist's mental illness as a social comment on the prevailing status of women in late 19th-century fiction. The lack of verbalization in the game of thinking and articulation reflected in any artistic manner reflects the protagonist's obsession with the yellow wallpaper that symbolizes her imprisonment. According to Johnson the issue of mental illness can be viewed as a domineering reaction to the form of female rebellion to the patriarchal system (Johnson 1989).

## **3. Economic Oppression and the Domestic Sphere**

Although gender and psychological oppression seem to be the main themes in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, there is also a great deal of literature that deals with the economic aspects of the protagonist's story. Economic oppression was a major focus of Gilman, which can be well seen not only in the *Yellow Wallpaper* but also in her non-fiction, *Women and Economics* published in 1898. Here, Gilman insists that woman's subjection lies

in her being an economic parasite on man preventing her from going out to work, as to do so would cost her the lease of her earnings (Gilman, 1898).

Lillian Robinson (1982) using the economic aspects of Gilman's theories says that the objectification of the protagonist's life is her financial subservience to her husband. The ability John had over Mary in the household financial affairs in consideration of the beating he gave her regarding her medical check, shows an economic subjugation of women in the early 19th century. The way patriarchal culture is reflected in the text Robinson also notes that the plot of *The Yellow Wallpaper* also shows the negative impact of the economic system which makes women simply wives and mothers and does not let them become successful and independent (Robinson, 1982).

Joanna Zangrando (1994) builds on the relation between economic and psychological oppression in Gilman work. Zangrando asserts that the impossibility that the protagonist works or creates shows the economic oppression of women in the late XIX century. John also continues to hammer down on her by not allowing her to have her freedom and also eradicating any intellectual exploration from her. Calling into our attention, Zangrando notes that Gilman portrays domesticity as an arena of psychological coercion and economic exploitation, where the work of women is 'unremunerated as well as Their freedoms are taken away.

#### **4. Symbolism of the Yellow Wallpaper**

The actual yellow wallpaper has been at the center of focus of so many critics analyzing and interpreting the symbolic representation of the text. Hence, it can be seen that many of the critics with the feminist premise are going to analyze the role of the wallpaper as a reflection of the barriers that women have to face in the society as well as the prison that their minds are put in. The protagonist's increasing fascination with the wallpaper may be seen as the woman's efforts to explain her imprisonment and to fight against those forces that limit her (Golden, 2003).

According to Susan Lanser, in 1989 the wallpaper can be interpreted as the 'text' of the patriarchal culture, which the main female character acknowledges in order to comprehend her subjugation. In Lanser's opinion the final action,

when the protagonist has ripped the paper off the wall, symbolizes the heroine's liberation from cultural and social roles imposed on her. Of course, this act can be interpreted as rebellion but its existence blurs with the author's mental deterioration – the two ectopic forms of rebellion in patriarchy (Lanser, 1989).

Similarly, in her analysis of the novel, Karen Ford (1998) pointed out that the wallpaper symbolizes the imprisonment of the protagonist in both the physical and the mental realm. The flightlessness, the repetition, the myriad encircling and entwining tendrils of the wallpaper reflect the rigorous confinement of her social, marital, and medical straitjacket. Ford states that the protagonist is mad and delivers herself from a similar fate, saw the woman behind the paper and pulls her off in an excluding motion (Ford, 1998).

### **Methodology**

#### **1. Research Approach**

This research focuses on employing qualitative research methodology to examine Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Based on the principles of feminist literary criticism, the paper targets gender domination strategies, patriarchal discourses and economic exploitation in the novella. The textual interpretation is done through Literal reading of the Text complemented by secondary Supports; books, articles and essays addressing socio-cultural aspects of the late Nineteenth century. The purpose is to determine how Gilman challenges the institutions of nineteenth-century American male dominance with the help of her protagonist's mental breakdown, medical treatment, and financial reliance on a man.

#### **2. Theoretical Framework**

This analysis is grounded in the feminist literary criticism theory that employs scholars including Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. Therefore, the technique of Feminist criticism will suit the purpose of the study since this kind of criticism is aimed at analyzing gender representations and subverting patriarchal domination in literature. From this perspective, the research explores the theme of gender subjugation by analyzing the psychological decline of the protagonist. The study also uses historical feminist

models for analysis of how women were othered and excluded in medical and economic domains.

### **3. Textual Analysis**

The experience-based method is based on the study of certain fragments of *The Yellow Wallpaper* focusing on the question of gender subordination and patriarchal dominance. To support Gilman's critique of patriarchy, the protagonist's mental illness, the treatment received during the "rest cure," and her financial reliance on her husband are analyzed. The analysis also includes symbolic observations regarding the given text and the main object of the plot – the wallpaper – and the analysis of the protagonist's rebellion against the male-dominated society.

### **4. Use of Secondary Sources**

Besides the main analysis, this research uses secondary analysis to give background information in addition to the main text. Its medical oppression is informed by the aspects of women's mental health treatment in the history, including rest cure identified in scholarly research. Hence, feminist scientific articles about the novella show several analyses of the story, focusing on the author's depiction of women, power, and money, and mental illness. These sources enable the study to contextualize *The Yellow Wallpaper* into the canopy of the broader feminist conversations and analyses.

### **5. Symbolic Interpretation**

The research also includes the use of critical analysis of symbols used in the novella such as the wall paper, the color being yellow in this case. More specifically, the role of the protagonist and her obsession with the wallpaper as well as the final destruction of that wallpaper are considered the representations of the counteraction against male domination. This study interprets the wallpaper as symbolizing the oppressive social role that keeps women psychologically and financially bound to the home.

### **6. Iterative Analysis Process**

The analysis entails reading and interpretation of the text before repeating the process several times. Literary analysis of the novella is done alongside the theory from feminist perspective in order to have the methodology of analyzing the

protagonist's fight. This promotes the understanding of hidden messages espoused in Gilman's works and how he was advancing the causes of feminism and equal rights for women during the 19th Century.

### **Results**

Based on a text analysis of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and analyzed through the lens of Feminist criticism and historical analysis, this study provides a nuanced look at the themes of gender, patriarchy, as well as, and economics. From the feminist perspective, the author describes the psychological collapse of the main character, her isolation, and subservience to the economic power of a man which indicates the oppression of women in the patriarchal society of the late nineteenth century. The following are the findings grouped under the established key thematic areas of gender oppression, medical control, economical dependence, and symbolism.

#### **1. Domestic and Family Violence**

One of the main conclusions of this work is the manner in which Gilman problematizes the gender expectations and male domination, which regulate the life of the protagonist. Through the re-reading of the text, it is possible to identify how John – the protagonist's husband – controls every aspect of her life as a traditional patriarch respected by the male-dominate culture of the early twentieth century. The place of the protagonist in her marriage corresponds to the existing view of women as delicate.

The protagonist's position within her marriage reflects the existing notion of women as frail, hysterical creatures who were not capable of taking care of themselves, including deciding whether or not they wanted to get pregnant again. Even all the decisions of John intruding into her life and actually controlling her life, including choices of her medical treatment, schedule for the day and even her thoughts – all these show how patriarchal systems make women become subordinate and powerless.

The study also shows how the protagonist's agency is progressively eroded by the male characters in her life, including her husband, and the patriarchy of the medical profession. John's approach to her was very appalling when he disregarded her mental health issues and told her that all she needs is rest

was demeaning to her and confirms to society that she is just a woman whose emotions are not worth considering. This kind of treatment dovetails with the feminist postulations of the manner that patriarchal power invades the medical domain and controls the way women cope with their problems by either ignoring or reducing them to a mere pathological condition (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). The fact that the main character is locked in the nursery and the gradual obsession with the very wallpaper for her shows the detrimental effects of this gender oppression – the protagonist loses touch with the real world and herself as well.

## **2. Neuropsychiatric Disorders and Substance Use**

The outcomes also reveal that medical dominance contributes enormously to the exercise of patriarchal power over women. The treatment that is recommended to the protagonist which includes having limited or no mental and physical activity is considered as a form of medical mistreatment that worsens her condition. This confirms the argument that ‘rest cure’ was not a form of care developed for the benefit of women, but to dominate over their bodies and minds, and further propounds that the societal treatment for the protagonist made her mental health worse, therefore signifying that women were not being cared for.

This finding is in concord with historical literature on women’s health in the 19th century especially on how women suffering from mental illness were treated with what was known as the rest cure for nervous disorders, hysteria, and postpartum depression (Showalter, 1985). The treatment that requires the patients to be passive and isolated was a process of making women submissive and obedient, with no possibility of thinking or creating something. It therefore becomes a commentary on patriarchal medicine which did not aim at helping women but brought out the venture of understanding of the minds and bodies of such women in the society.

By adopting the feminist theoretical framework for this research, it is possible to determine how the medical discourses in relation to women were shaped with gendered assumptions concerning their relative weakness and irrationality. It is important to draw a clear line between the symptoms of the protagonist’s illness and the oppressive treatment she suffers in the novel. Her

failure to work for creative or intellectual activity—activities that were important to Gilman herself—is the reflection of society’s negation of the woman’s right to choice, learning, and self-expression (Kolodny 1985).

## **3. Economic Oppression and Dependency**

The second important fact uncovered by this study is the depiction of economic oppression as one of the fundamental aspects that keep the main character in a subordinate position. The use of value analysis points to submission to the husband amid being financially dependent on him as one of the ways through which the protagonist is powerless. In the text, the main character cannot have any say as to how the household allowance is spent or manage her own money which is an accurate representation of women during the period and more so during the 19th century because the women were not allowed to work and depended on the income of their male relatives (Robinson, 1982).

John’s management of the household finances and his decision to bar the protagonist from any form of intellectual or economic activity reasserts her powerlessness. This economic reliance of the character is also a considerable contributor to her psychological collapse and the absence of identity in the film. The restriction of the protagonist to household and monetary dependence on the husband can also be seen as critique of economic relations which enslave women and deprive them of independence and/or gratification (Zangrando, 1994).

This analysis helps Gilman to support her main statement of *Women and Economics*, Non-fictional work 1898 where the author comprehensively explains that women are dominated by men because they economically rely on them. Inability of the protagonist to work and make decisions that affect her life is more or less a depiction of women’s economic subordination in a male-dominated society where economic independence is the key freedom for women.

## **4. Symbolism of the Yellow Wallpaper**

The analysis of the text offered in the study also emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the yellow wallpaper representing the protagonist’s confinement and her rebellion against the male domination. The wallpaper represented by its complex and somewhat oppressive ornamental

designs corresponds to the oppressive frames of the masculine society that hinders women's thinking and creativity. When the protagonist focuses on the wallpaper, she starts seeing a woman behind it that is trying to escape. This woman symbolizes the main female character's captivity to both the oppressive marriage and Gender norms, framework confining women.

The act of stripping the wallpaper at the end of the novella is in a way symbolic of the protagonist freeing herself from oppressive forces that dominated her throughout the story. However, such an act of liberation is rather ironic, as it happens at the cost of the protagonist's complete mental cracking. When taken together, the findings of this analysis indicate that the avoidance of masculinization provokes the patriarchal system while also pointing towards the potential and peril of passive and active rebellion. Simone de Beauvoir argued that if the protagonist of the novel tries to maintain her individuality and gain freedom, her insanity demonstrates how oppression wears down the oppressed mind (Lanser, 1989).

Feminist theory makes it possible for the reader to recognize the wallpaper as one of the manifestations of female oppression behind which patriarchal structures are hidden. This identification increases as the protagonist becomes the woman behind the Wallpaper symbolizing her desire of freedom but inability to embrace it due to social enculturation.

### **Discussion**

A consideration of *The Yellow Wallpaper* through the framework of feminism helps unveil the complex mechanisms of gender and economic oppression inherent in Gilman's work. Extending the analysis of the novella, this section briefly considers the current research published between 2015 and 2024 in order to situate the novella's continued relevance in current discussions of gender roles, mental health, and economic disparities. The given release examines the relevance of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' for the current feminist discourse in the light of such topics as the relation to the male power, medicalisation of women's health, and the issue of female economic subjugation.

### **1. Gender Oppression and the Persistence of Patriarchy**

In modern studies, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is listed as one of the works which are characteristic of the feminist literature and its exposure on the domination of patriarchy over the female sex. In recent years, scholars have reestablished the significance of the novella in comprehending gender roles and gender oppression in the patriarchal communities. For instance, Hodges (2017) opines that the spatial confinement of the protagonist in the novella points more significantly to a cultural practice involving women, where women are enculturated to greatness, but only within the home space, a feature that remains part of today's gender discords. Leaving the volume of confinement that has been outlined since the nineteenth century, Hodges points out that the social regulation of femininity has not lost its importance at the present stage (Hodges, 2017).

Recent debates on misogyny in literature also stress whether Gilman's text explores the ways women are silenced systematically. Such scholars as Rubenstein (2020) have noticed that the inability of the protagonist to speak properly, to share her opinion and emotions relates to the tradition of women's voicelessness. According to Rubenstein, any limitation of the protagonist's speech and writing shows how patriarchal societies oppress not only women's bodies but their minds and words as well (Rubenstein, 2020). This interpretation shows how women are still imprisoned by male-dominated society today as evidenced by *The Yellow Wallpaper* being a source of inspiration for current feminist marches that fight for women to be listened to and respected not only in politics but also in any other part of their lives.

Furthermore, *The Yellow Wallpaper* can be connected to the present-day topic of intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that explores how different types of oppression intersect. Despite that, the author's approach in Gilman's text is based on the experience of gendered oppression, and contemporary researchers have attempted to describe how class and racial factors may enhance the protagonist's understanding. The economic dependence figured in the book as seen by Donaldson (2019) is not only a critique of patriarchy but also a critique of class as women of less means had no bargaining power once they

were married. While there are no direct discussions of race in Gilman's novella, according to Donaldson it is important to pay more attention to how women of color, as well as working-class women, lived through and still live through double and triple oppressions (Donaldson, 2019).

## **2. Medicalization of Women's Mental Health**

This study supports the common concern that patriarchal medicine is oppressive for women, particularly in matters of mental health. Contemporary post-Jungian feminism, in particular, has remained concerned with studying how female suffering has been misinterpreted and medicalized. For his part, Dixon (2016) notes that the publication continues to be relevant in current criticism regarding women's medical treatment, the exclusion of maternal insanity, and Gilman's other works that denied women's medical treatment due to patriarchy over medicalization of women. Dixon's work also establishes that the health of women is not taken seriously by most male doctors, who either ignore or misdiagnose women's issues on the presumption that all women are hysterical (Dixon, 2016).

This critique is also apparent in subsequent studies that explore how women to this day encounter difficulties in receiving proper mental health treatment. As described by Grewal (2022), contemporary health care organizations still contain some of the same stereotyped presumptions as those in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Grewal establishes that female patients receive medication for anxiety and depression more often than male ones, without necessary regard for potential triggers related to material concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and feminized expectations (Grewal, 2022). It is for this reason that Gilman has an important message to the medical field which in the past and in the current world plays a role in male dominance.

Moreover, some modern studies discussed the ability of mental illnesses as a type of feminism. McGowan (2021) has pointed out that the main character of *The Yellow Wallpaper* goes mad and it means that she rebels against male dominance. McGowan makes an interesting point claiming that the act of the protagonist stripping the wallpaper symbolizes the female protagonist's desire to be liberated from conventional gender roles imposed upon her that, in turn, leads to her mental collapse.

In line with late modernist postfeminist discourse, the present interpretation also considers madness to be not merely the signifier of oppression but also the sign of revolt against patriarchal norms and values (McGowan, 2021).

## **3. Economic Oppression and Financial Dependency**

The financial subjection that is portrayed in *The Yellow Wallpaper* is still a key concern in feminism literature, especially on how women are barred from managing their money and being financially independent. Various scholars including Parker (2018) have investigated the timeliness of Gilman's critique of women's economic subordination pointing to the fact that despite the advancement of women to the labor market since the 19th century, the inequality is still rife. Parker indicates wage disparities, unpaid housework, and care work restrict women's economic agency, just like *The Yellow Wallpaper*'s protagonist (Parker, 2018).

The economic treatment given here is pertinent when discoursing on what is termed as the 'feminization of poverty' which refers to the manner in which women have been viewed to fall into poverty more than men, through the provisions of the social order. More so, Fox has noted that women's economic insecurity is magnified because of care work responsibilities and the fact that the majority of them are employed in low-wage positions. Fox relates this economic subjugation to the concerns in *The Yellow Wallpaper* where the leading female character lacks economic freedom; she is a confined housewife whose condition is an origin of her mental weakness (Fox, 2020). This finding underscores the need for comprehending the capacity in which Gilman's economic framework interacts with gender subjugation both in her time and in the current era.

## **4. Symbolism and Contemporary Relevance**

Another source of controversy in the novella is the symbolism of the yellow wallpaper and the importance of it in feminism analysis. Current critics have only added to previous interpretations of the wallpaper as an emblem of paternal oppression and provided new ways of interpreting its use in today's feminism. Watson (2018) agrees with Quigley (2019) to a certain extent that the



wallpaper can be understood as representing the everyday oppression that women still experience in the present society. By eating the wallpaper, the protagonist is trying to unravel the hurdles and make sense of imprisonment like most women today in one way or the other struggle to deal with different forms of prejudice at workplaces, home or any other places, Quigley, (2019).

Besides, the modern sources have pointed out that the very action of stripping the wallpaper can also be considered as a representation of women's emancipation movement. As Hernández (2021) explains the action that the protagonist takes in the end is a deliberate rejection of the conventions of society that seek to subjugate women. Thus, Hernández connects this act with the contemporary feminism like #MeToo, where women reassert themselves and collectively fight for change. According to this reading, *The Yellow Wallpaper* remains a potent source of contemporary feminists' activism since it raises awareness of their oppressive systems that need eradication (Hernández, 2021).

### Conclusion

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the author successfully provides a clear manifestation of specifically women's oppression prevalent in the nineteenth-century. Fictional Quarterly proved how patriarchal medical treatment led protagonist to mental derangement as much as found her chained economically to her husband, just like ambitious Shelley who due to birth could not hardly fight the societal norms that conferred womanhood as domesticity and denied female individuality and intellect... Thus, the protagonist's decision to look at the yellow wallpaper symbolism for Gilman: the failure of the women, the societal inequality of the female gender, the oppression of the economic and medical system of those times. The novella is still topical up to date helping in the ongoing fight for feminism, independence, and especially mental health. Gilman's work calls for society to understand that there are effects of oppression on women, and there should be a change in the entire society to embrace the change and achieve what women want.

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