

Desperate Housewives in the Late 19th-Century: Ch. P. Gilman and Her Story "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Veronika Janků

Bachelor Thesis
2012



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

akademický rok: 2011/2012

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Veronika JANKŮ**

Osobní číslo: **H09475**

Studijní program: **B 7310 Filologie**

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**

Téma práce: **Zoufalé manželky na konci 19. století: Ch. P. Gilman
a její příběh "The Yellow Wallpaper"**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Ženy na konci 19.století v historickém kontextu v USA

Vymezení postavení žen, hysterie a rest cure

Rozbor povídky The Yellow Wallpaper

Shrnutí

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Volo, James M., and Dorothy Denneen Volo. *Family Life in 19th-Century America*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2007.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." *The Forerunner*, 1913.

Mitchell, S. Weir. *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1884.


Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Alexandra Hubáčková, M.A., Ph.D.**

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky


Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **30. listopadu 2011**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **4. května 2012**

Ve Zlíně dne 6. února 2012


doc. Ing. Anežka Lengalová, Ph.D.
děkanka




doc. Ing. Anežka Lengalová, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

PROHLÁŠENÍ AUTORA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Beru na vědomí, že

- odevzdáním bakalářské práce souhlasím se zveřejněním své práce podle zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby ¹⁾;
- beru na vědomí, že bakalářská práce bude uložena v elektronické podobě v univerzitním informačním systému dostupná k nahlédnutí;
- na moji bakalářskou práci se plně vztahuje zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, zejm. § 35 odst. 3 ²⁾;
- podle § 60 ³⁾ odst. 1 autorského zákona má UTB ve Zlíně právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla v rozsahu § 12 odst. 4 autorského zákona;
- podle § 60 ³⁾ odst. 2 a 3 mohu užít své dílo – bakalářskou práci - nebo poskytnout licenci k jejímu využití jen s předchozím písemným souhlasem Univerzity Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, která je oprávněna v takovém případě ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které byly Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně na vytvoření díla vynaloženy (až do jejich skutečné výše);
- pokud bylo k vypracování bakalářské práce využito softwaru poskytnutého Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně nebo jinými subjekty pouze ke studijním a výzkumným účelům (tj. k nekomerčnímu využití), nelze výsledky bakalářské práce využít ke komerčním účelům.

Prohlašuji, že

- elektronická a tištěná verze bakalářské práce jsou totožné;
- na bakalářské práci jsem pracoval samostatně a použitou literaturu jsem citoval. V případě publikace výsledků budu uveden jako spoluautor.

Ve Zlíně 4.5.2012

Jandl

1) zákon č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 47b Zveřejňování závěrečných prací;

(1) Vysoká škola nevýdělečně zveřejňuje disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce, u kterých proběhla obhajoba, včetně posudků oponentů a výsledku obhajoby prostřednictvím databáze kvalifikačních prací, kterou spravuje. Způsob zveřejnění stanoví vnitřní předpis vysoké školy.

(2) *Disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce odevzdané uchazečem k obhajobě musí být též nejméně pět pracovních dnů před konáním obhajoby zveřejněny k nahlázení veřejnosti v místě určeném vnitřním předpisem vysoké školy nebo není-li tak určeno, v místě pracoviště vysoké školy, kde se má konat obhajoba práce. Každý si může ze zveřejněné práce pořizovat na své náklady výpisy, opisy nebo rozmnoženiny.*

(3) *Platí, že odevzdáním práce autor souhlasí se zveřejněním své práce podle tohoto zákona, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby.*

2) *zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 35 odst. 3:*

(3) *Do práva autorského také nezasahuje škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení, užije-li nikoli za účelem přímého nebo nepřímého hospodářského nebo obchodního prospěchu k výuce nebo k vlastní potřebě dílo vytvořené žákem nebo studentem ke splnění školních nebo studijních povinností vyplývajících z jeho právního vztahu ke škole nebo školskému či vzdělávacího zařízení (školní dílo).*

3) *zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 60 Školní dílo:*

(1) *Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení mají za obvyklých podmínek právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla (§ 35 odst.*

3). *Odpírá-li autor takového díla udělit svolení bez vážného důvodu, mohou se tyto osoby domáhat nahrazení chybějícího projevu jeho vůle u soudu. Ustanovení § 35 odst. 3 zůstává nedotčeno.*

(2) *Není-li sjednáno jinak, může autor školního díla své dílo užit či poskytnout jinému licenci, není-li to v rozporu s oprávněnými zájmy školy nebo školského či vzdělávacího zařízení.*

(3) *Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení jsou oprávněny požadovat, aby jim autor školního díla z výdělku jím dosaženého v souvislosti s užitím díla či poskytnutím licence podle odstavce 2 přiměřeně přispěl na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložily, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše; přitom se přihlédne k výši výdělku dosaženého školou nebo školským či vzdělávacím zařízením z užití školního díla podle odstavce 1.*

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá hlavní hrdinkou z povídky Charlotte Perkins Gilman Žlutá tapeta a vlivů, jež ji přivedly k psychickému zhroucení. Dále zkoumá postavení bílé ženy střední třídy v 19. století ve Spojených státech amerických. Práce dochází k závěru, že ženy byly nuceny do svých rolí, což vedlo k jejich psychické labilitě.

Klíčová slova: Žlutá tapeta, Ch. P. Gilman, Rest Cure, hysterie, šílenství, bílá žena, rodina ze střední třídy, 19. století

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the main heroine in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story The Yellow Wallpaper and the influences which led her to a psychological breakdown. It also examines the status of a white middle class woman in the late 19th-century in the United States of America. The thesis concludes that women were forced into their roles, which resulted in their psychological instability.

Keywords: The Yellow Wallpaper, Ch. P. Gilman, Rest Cure, hysteria, insanity, white woman, middle class family, 19th-century

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Alexandra Hubáčková, M.A., Ph.D., for her constant help and support throughout the whole process of writing this bachelor thesis. I would also like to thank my family and friends.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 9 |
| 1 HISTORY AND CULTURAL CONTEXT | 11 |
| 1.1 Women's Movements..... | 12 |
| 2 THE STATUS OF WOMEN | 14 |
| 2.1 The Cult of Domesticity | 14 |
| 2.2 Ideal of Beauty..... | 16 |
| 2.3 Marriage and Family | 16 |
| 2.4 Education and Work | 18 |
| 3 HYSTERIA AND THE REST CURE | 20 |
| 3.1 Hysteria | 20 |
| 3.2 The Rest Cure..... | 21 |
| 3.3 Women and Scientific Research..... | 25 |
| 4 THE YELLOW WALLPAPER | 27 |
| 4.1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman | 27 |
| 4.2 The Yellow Wallpaper | 28 |
| 4.3 Setting | 30 |
| 4.4 The Wallpaper..... | 31 |
| 4.5 Characters..... | 34 |
| 4.5.1 A Woman in the Wallpaper..... | 34 |
| 4.5.2 The Heroine | 36 |
| 4.5.3 Jane..... | 39 |
| 4.5.4 John | 40 |
| 4.5.5 Doctors and the Rest Cure | 42 |
| 4.5.6 Mary and Child | 43 |
| 4.6 Writing | 44 |
| 4.7 Hysteria and madness | 44 |
| CONCLUSION | 47 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 49 |

INTRODUCTION

"Dear Madam, Mr. Howells has handed me this story. I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!"¹

Horace Scudder, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*

Some stories have to overcome a lot of difficulties before they are published. "The Yellow Wallpaper" was not different. As Horace Scudder responded to the request for publishing it, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has an ability to leave an unforgettable trace in our mind. When I first heard about this story, I did not know what I was getting into. It begins slowly by just few queer details and a depressive end; however, when you read it again and again the story reveals other hidden meanings which are unseen at first sight. After reading the essay "Why I wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"", I was completely shocked. Somebody did really experience this? That cannot be true! And unlike Horace Scudder, I was not able to reject this story; on the contrary, I wanted to know more.

The nineteenth century was full of political, economic and social changes which highly influenced people's attitudes and lives. In this insecure world, they had to face the constant threat of another possible radical change. The more anxious they got, the more desperately they held the illusion of the safest place - a home. The home represented rules and traditional values and for a white middle class family it was the woman who became the guardian of the home because the man himself was able to ensure the economic future of his family. The woman was expected to be the perfect mother and wife. However, this burden was often too heavy for her. As a result, instead of a safe harbor the home was broken, and the rules of society were shaken.

The aim of this thesis is to look at the heroine of "The Yellow Wallpaper" written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and explore the influences which led her to the mental collapse. The first part of my thesis briefly describes economic and political changes of that time which caused a change of values. The next chapter is focused on the role of the woman and the pressure under which she had to live and which often led to the psychological breakdown

¹ Response of Horace Scudder to a request for publishing "The Yellow Wallpaper" Conrad Schumaker, "Too Terribly Good to Be Printed": Charlotte Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," *American Literature* 57, no. 4 (December 1985): 588, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2012), 588.

cured by Rest Cure. The last part of my thesis deals with Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her story “The Yellow Wallpaper”. By this part I want to examine the woman’s situation through the literature to show how the situation of a middle class woman may have led to insanity.

1 HISTORY AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

During the nineteenth century, the United States of America experienced several radical changes which significantly influenced American society. The Civil War (1861–1865) was the result of a struggle between the American government and states for the power. Agricultural southern states were economically dependent on the ownership of slaves, and they were determined to keep this economic standard. Rich northern states with natural resources, which gave them the economical independence, decided to fight against immoral slavery. The war ended by abolishing the slavery. “Slavery is dead, the negro is not, there is the misfortune.” The slogan from Cincinnati Enquirer (1877) captured the remaining problem of American’s race. Laws were changed, and black men were set to free with rights to vote, but the attitude of Americans stayed the same.

As a result of the Civil War, the country came into the Reconstruction Era in the attempt to solve political and economic problems. The Reconstruction Era was later followed by the Gilded Age. These eras meant massive economical changes to capitalism and population growth caused by incoming immigrants. During a few years, the United States of America were transformed from an agricultural and mercantile economy to a modern urban society dominated by tycoons and industrial corporations. The term Gilded Age was coined by Mark Twain. "Gilded" referred to the glittering period on the surface but corruption inside the system. The rapid industrialization brought new problems. Cities were overpopulated, and people had to live in unsanitary conditions with low paid jobs. Consequently, it was the cause of highly spreading diseases.

Along with changes in the country, writers and journalist rejected romanticism with its moral truths, ideas and feelings. Writers were looking for the real world. People feared that all tradition was being forgotten. Thus, the local color became very important. To keep traditional values, many important authors included regional dialects and background of American regions in their work. Mark Twain was one of the first authors who used colloquial English with a distinctive humorous slang. A realistic novel focused on everyday life and characters with weaknesses as well as strengths. Realism was soon followed by naturalism which described causality and determinism. According to naturalism, which emerged 1970s and took an inspiration from Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, humans were

shaped mainly by their living environment and heredity. Naturalists also explored dark sides of a human life including poverty and sexuality.²

1.1 Women's Movements

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, women and blacks had no rights to vote. In 1840 on the World's Antislavery Convention in London, Lucretia Mott and other women were refused to sit next to other participants of the conference only because of their gender. This was the first impulse which led Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to organize the Women's Rights Convention in 1848. The Women's Rights Convention was an annual meeting where several men and women were calling for the same rights which a white man already had. The Declaration of Sentiments was signed by 68 men and 32 women in Seneca Fall at the first Women's Right Convention. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman."³ The Declaration described the whole woman's situation. Women were not allowed to vote, divorce, own property, money and wages, and the Declaration also pointed at the insufficient access to the education and career. Moreover, women wanted an appreciation for their work and they demand a possibility to be economically independent on their husbands. The Declaration raised anger and resentment but what was the most important it attracted the attention and began the discussion among many women who were also interested in women's rights. In 1848, Married Women's Property Act that allowed a married woman to own property separated from her husband was passed and later in 1860, women's property rights were even more expanded. Nevertheless, after the divorce the property usually still belonged to the husband.

During the Civil War, many women took part in reform movements for abolishing slavery and feminist activity was slightly shade. After the Union victory, women abolitionist believed that they shared the same position with blacks. During 1868 - 1870, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution were passed. However, it granted citizenship and suffrage only to blacks. Women had still no political rights. This

² Kathryn VanSpanckeren, *Outline of American Literature* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, 1994), 47-50.

decision caused another wave of feminist protests. In 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed a pure woman organization called the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). Men could take part in it only as the members. The association focused on federal constitution amendment, and mainly it opposed the passage of the Fifteenth amendment. Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, Julia Ward Howe and Wendell Phillips had a different point of view. They founded American Woman Suffrage Association in the same year as NWSA. However, AWSA preferred the state-to-state level to gain the woman's rights. Both organizations argued for twenty years, but finally NWSA and AWSA merged together in National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890.⁽⁴⁾

During the second half of the nineteenth century, many women supported organizations which were established for a prohibition of alcohol. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) tried to provide education to children. Well educated society could refuse alcohol, and there would be no longer dominant alcoholic husbands who were usually blamed for poverty of a family. This organization was also more feminine and less controversial follower of the woman's rights so women could easily show tacit consent.

In 1920 after decades of suffrage fights, the United States Congress passed the Nineteenth amendment which gave women the rights to vote.

³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *A History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (Rochester, N.Y.: Fowler and Wells, 1889), 70-71.

⁴ "Women's International Center, "Women's History in America," Women's International Center, <http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm> (accessed April 18, 2012).

2 THE STATUS OF WOMEN

2.1 The Cult of Domesticity

The Cult of Domesticity, or so called the Cult of True Womanhood, emerged around 1830, and its ideals remained for all century. The Cult of Domesticity developed slowly under the influence of ongoing changes. Before the Civil War, the new type of a white middle class family had arisen. Families became economically prospering, and there was no need to require a working woman. Men had well-paid jobs in offices as lawyers or teachers, and women could focus only on a housekeeping. This ideology was supported by society, government and even the religion and those who did not share this idea were disrespected. The True Woman should have preserved four virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Piety put a great emphasis on the connection with God. Women representing a new kind of Biblical Eve should have redeemed the world through their suffering and love. Moreover, the woman had to keep her purity for the wedding night. To be seduced by a man before a marriage was a sin which was supposed to lead to a lifelong misfortune. On the other side, in skilled hands the purity was recommended to be used as a weapon against man's sexual desires. Submissiveness meant a complete obedience to a woman's family, husband and God. The passivity was a sign of a lady who knew her place. The last characteristic, domesticity, was the most appreciated virtue. A good woman had to rule the household with a grace. The woman's job was to create a hostage from the world which was rough and materialistic. The family represented an independent unit of peace where a man could found a release from his work.⁵

Later in the nineteenth century, the Civil War rapidly followed by Reconstruction Era took place. Small family factories were replaced by large corporations due to industrialization, and many immigrants began to come for a work in factories, which resulted in overpopulated cities. From the American family point of view, this era was an era of decay. As a result of these radical changes, people feared for their jobs and lives. Consequently, they began to crave for more secure and certain values in which they could

⁵ "The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," College of Staten Island Library, <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truewoman.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).

find a safe harbor. Therefore, Americans tended to keep the tradition by women who represented the moral values and who centered their life on the home.⁶

With the commencement of this emphasis on traditional values, the society started to be flooded by magazines, advice books and articles about how to be a good wife and keeper of the house. This advice literature was meant to help women to create a moral place for their husbands who worked and provided money for family. The moral home was essential because it reinforced the morality of the man and in general, the morality of the whole society. The first wave of such literature began in the first half of the nineteenth century. *The Godey's Lady's Book* was a popular woman's magazine with prose and poetry. This magazine promoted the ideology of a True Woman by pictures and articles discussing the most satisfying role of a woman - mother and housekeeper. Poems or other fragments of this ideology also spread to the serious newspapers.⁷

The right to love whom others scorn,
The right to comfort and to mourn,
The right to shed new joy on earth,
The right to feel the soul's high worth,
Such woman's rights a God will bless
And crown their champions with success.⁸

This poem, which was written by Mrs. E. Little and published in 1848 in the *Republican Compiler*, granted woman only a few rights about her role in the family. These rights completely corresponded with the then expectations. The woman was an angel or a guardian of the home. Another magazine which gained popularity by promoting “the light of home” was *Good housekeeping* which focused mainly on the training of children and another helpful advice about the home.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The University of Virginia, "Home," Advice for Women, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/gilded%20Age%20Home%20page.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).

⁸ E. Little, “The Rights of Women,” *The Republican Compiler*, February 1, 1848.

⁹ The University of Virginia, "Industry, Anxiety and New Social Conditions," Advice for Women, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Age%20Anxiety.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).

2.2 Ideal of Beauty

On the basis of romantic paintings from the late nineteenth century, the ideal woman was described as a sick, pale woman desperately staring at her husband or her doctor. She never stood upright; on the contrary, she was supporting her husband or listening to her children. For instance Mary Cassatt, who was a famous artist at that time, focused her work on mothers and children with romantic symbols of innocence and love. Popular heroines of the literature also reflected this ideal. Women appreciated stories in which heroines died very young or in which heroines died for dedication to their family and husband. Sickness and death were one of the most favorite topics.¹⁰

Being sick became a modern sign of a higher class. In many cases, women did not suffer from any disease; however, it was socially acceptable and trending to spend weeks in spa and purify the body and mind. Hysteria and various problems with nerves were considered to be a sign of an intellect and sensitivity which meant a better lifestyle. "...the man who does not know sick women does not know women."¹¹ Another sign of a wealth and prestige was the usage of services of specialized doctors.¹²

The then fashion also supported this ideal. Stylish women were obliged to wear corsets which could apply a pressure of twenty one pounds deforming the natural body shape and internal organs. Moreover, the layers of clothes could have reached the weight of thirty seven pounds. Altogether it was one of the causes of the weakness, lack of breath and injuries of internal organs.¹³

2.3 Marriage and Family

The role of the woman had been started by her birth. As a white middle class girl, she was surrounded by toys which predetermine her future role, for example stove and washer representing the housekeeping. A typical family had two or more children and in such

¹⁰ The University of Virginia, "Marriage," Advice for Women, <http://roads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Ag%20Marriage.html> (accessed April 18, 2012); The University of Virginia, "Motherhood," Advice for Women, <http://roads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Age%20Children.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).

¹¹ Suzanne Poirier, "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients," *Women's Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 1983): 15. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2012).

¹² Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 118 – 119.

¹³ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, 120.

family, the girl was viewed as a gentle, weak being that was always calming her brother. Throughout the girl's coming of age, her brother could interfere in his sister's issues with or without her permission, because as a weaker sex she had to be always looked after and protected from everything not appropriate. During the childhood, she had the only chance to feel a certain kind of freedom.¹⁴

From their fourteen years, young ladies were allowed to make a contact with young gentlemen. By the age of eighteen, they had to focus only on finding husbands from an appropriate class. A crossing of classes was inconceivable. On a date with a suitable man, a couple was accompanied by an older relative or another married couple. Only after a marriage, the young couple could spend some time alone. To choose a good future husband was not so easy. A man, who was in charge of proposing, had to come from the same or higher social class, and his physical health and property always mattered. However, if he was not approved by the girl's family, their relationship did not survive in most cases. The family ruled the girl's life; therefore, it was simple to prevent all contacts or send a girl on a long trip.¹⁵

After the marriage, the woman moved from the dominance of her father or brother to the dominance of her husband with all her property. Until 1848, a woman was not allowed to own property and as such she became economically dependent on her husband who gained the power to manage all their common property. Moreover, she could not sign documents without his permission.¹⁶

The woman was the sole keeper of the house. She had to cook, care for children and smoothly maintain the house. However, on the contrary to the role from the first half of the century, this work was usually passed on servants who got orders from the woman. The only true task was to become the symbol of the home and to bear as many children as was possible. To work outside the home was not really permitted, but it was almost impossible because of the lack of education and pressure from the husband. As it is stated in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* written by Thorstein Veblen, by keeping wives at their homes

¹⁴ The University of Virginia, "Motherhood," Advice for Women; James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo, *Family Life in 19th-Century America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 34.

¹⁵ Harvey Green and Mary-Ellen Perry, *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 12; Volo and Volo, *Family Life in 19th-Century America*, 35.

¹⁶ Volo and Volo, *Family Life in 19th-Century America*, 39.

husbands could show their dominance as sole breadwinners because women did nothing except for their leisure activities, such as sewing and baking.¹⁷

2.4 Education and Work

The nineteenth century meant a never-ending fight for women's education in the United States of America. Women had to deal with several prejudice even from the scientific part of the society. According to some opinions and scientific surveys, too much intellectual thinking in an early age could cause an irreversible damage to reproductive organs. Consequently, young girls were taught only music and arts.¹⁸

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, women started to be allowed to attend dame schools or state funded schools because it was supposed that woman in her role of mother has an educational influence on her child sooner than the educational system. Thus it was intended to secure a certain level of education for every young lady. However, colleges and academies, which offered a higher education, were still forbidden.¹⁹

Around 1830s, many women as Catherine Beecher or Mary Lion stood up for women's education and pushed through the opening of schools for women. These schools provided girls knowledge necessary for running a household or meal preparation. Later, Catherine Beecher, sister of the author of Uncle Tom's cabin and Ch. P. Gilman's aunt, founded The American Woman's Educational Association in 1852. From her point of view, an educated woman could be a better mother and daughter. She also tried to put the woman's work at home at the same position as the man's work in the economic world; however, this idea was not accepted by the majority at that time.²⁰

It was possible for a woman to get a higher education in the first half of the century. However, she had to meet the opposition of the academic field, society and her family. Even if she overcame the disagreement, it was almost impossible to get a job in a corresponding

¹⁷ Thorstein Veblen and Stuart Chase, *The Theory of the Leisure Class; An Economic Study of Institutions*, (New York: Modern library, 1934).

¹⁸ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 140.

¹⁹ S. J. Kleinberg, *Women in American Society, 1820-1920*, Brighton, (England: British Association for American Studies, 1990), chap. 4.

²⁰ Joan N. Burstyn, "Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women," *The New England Quarterly*, No. 3 (1974): 386-403, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/364378> (accessed April 18, 2012)

field. In the late nineteenth century, women could work only in offices or shops as an auxiliary labor.²¹

During and after the Civil War, the profession of female nurses experienced an expansion because of the lack of male nurses and the increasing need of skilled and cheap labor. This progress in women's employment meant a shift of domestic labor to the public sector. A woman, born to bear babies, had a close relation to the medical science and what is more, she usually had an experience with her sick relatives. Midwifery became a typical woman's job. Nevertheless, the work of nurses and doctors was separated.²²

²¹ Kleinberg, *Women in American Society, 1820-1920*, chap. 4.

²² *Ibid.*

3 HYSTERIA AND THE REST CURE

3.1 Hysteria

From the young age, wealthy women from middle and upper class were taught to be dependent only on a domestic life. They had to focus only on their family and household. They were seen as compassionate, passive and irrational beings. A man was rational, intelligent and money earning. This distribution of roles resulted in several ways how women tried to cope with their responsibilities. Some women accepted this role and became perfect mothers and wives in the eyes of society. Other women refused to take care of others and they ended up as bedridden patients. This pretended inability ensured them the protection and care from other members of a family; and moreover, these women lost their duties to supreme husbands who could demand a sexual obedience. The last group of women involuntarily yielded to the difficulties of managing of a household usually soon after the marriage. High psychological demands, wasted dreams and failure in something which should have been their sole source of self-esteem brought them on the edge of psychological exhaustion. These women were called hysterical and were defined by a worsening physical condition and inability to participate in a normal life.²³

There remains, in the second place, the larger class of nervous, and exhausted, and hysterical women who are, as a rule, weak, pallid, flabby, disfigured by acne or at least with rough and coarse skins; poor eaters; digesting ill; incapable of exercise, and suffering from the cold extremities which lack of this, with thin blood, occasions. They lie in bed, or on sofas, hopeless and helpless, and exhibit every conceivable variety of hysteria.²⁴

The hysteria was just one of a lot of names for this diagnosis, for example neurasthenia, nervous prostration, dyspepsia. Many women had symptoms of this disease; however, nobody was truly sure what the cause of it is. The disease itself was not really fatal, but it

²³ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, chap. 4.

²⁴ S. Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* (Philadelphia: Lea, 1881), 221.

took the woman from her place; thus, it was necessary to cure the woman and restore the ideals of the society²⁵

3.2 The Rest Cure

In the nineteenth century, male doctors were considered to be an unchallenged authority, which supported the superior role of a mankind and resulted in special medical treatments that could be rarely refused by women. One of these influential doctors was an American physician and writer, Silas Weir Mitchell who wrote several books, essays and dissertations about diseases of the nervous system and its medical treatments. He was deeply concerned with cases of women's hysteria and after several years of experiments in 1873, he introduced a special medical treatment called the Rest Cure which he found the most successful in the majority of his cases. Around 1914, the Rest Cure was translated into four different languages, and many famous women experienced this treatment, for instance Virginia Woolf and Jane Addams. He also used this method for Charlotte Perkins Gilman who wrote about this experience "The Yellow Wallpaper", the story about sinking into insanity. All three women have a negative experience with the Rest Cure. These women were able to cure not because of the Rest Cure, but because of the meaningful activity, which was an opposite of what was allowed to women at that time²⁶

In S. W. Mitchell's work, there are several references to the relationship between the doctor and the patient. On one hand, S. W. Mitchell claims that this relationship should be very personal, harmonious yet with the superior position of the doctor. The female patient should have a complete confidence in her doctor because the state of mind has an influence on the physical body and vice versa. "If you can cause such hysteric women as these to believe that you can cure them, you enlist on your side their own troops, for as you can create symptoms, so you can also create absence of symptoms."²⁷ On the other hand, he shows incongruity with this statement. "Wise women choose their doctors and trust them. The wisest ask the fewest question."²⁸ The patient could never ask or disagree with the doctor and such relationship is clearly unbalanced and based only on a boundless confidence

²⁵ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, 114.

²⁶ Poirier, "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients," 15.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women*, 66.

²⁸ S. Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 48.

in the doctor without patient's cooperation, which could be a problem when it relates to more thoughtful and stronger patients.²⁹

As well as other men, S.W. Mitchell believed in the importance of a domestic life for women. Children, the husband and the entire family had to be the center of the woman's world. On the other hand, he admitted that the breakdown of his patients could be caused by the lack of an understanding and attention in a family life.³⁰

In that time, S. W. Mitchell was one of the few physicians who concentrated not only on the physical body but also on the psychical health. "You cure the body and somehow find that the mind is also cured."³¹ According to his writings, the mind could be cured along with the psychical symptoms of disease, which means that when the patient feels physically good, his mind is supposed to improve too. He applied this simple principle for his treatments, and that is how he laid the foundations of the Rest Cure. To cure the physical body, the Rest Cure was based on gain and loss of weight, entire seclusion, rest, massage, electricity and dietetics and therapeutics.³²

As he states in his book *Fat and blood*, most of hysterical women suffered from anemia, which was a common disorder of blood. Anemic women felt a weakness, fatigue and had problems with breathing. According to their physical condition, the doctor prescribed a diet for gain of fat because he observed that farmers bleed their animals to increase their weight. Regarding this procedure, he assumed that under the supervision of a physician, the gain of fat, which meant a restoration of blood cells, could be acceptable and healthy in case that the patient observes the rest and takes a regular special massage transforming fat into flesh and color.³³

Another very important part of the Rest Cure is seclusion. According to S. W. Mitchell's research, many hysterical women were surrounded by their female relatives, who took care of them. However, this relationship was often very unhealthy because this kind of attention supported the woman's illness.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Poirier, "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients," 19.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mitchell, *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*, chap. 1.

³³ Ibid., chap. 2.

It is the self-sacrificing love and over-careful sympathy of a mother, a sister, or some other devoted relative. Nothing is more curious, nothing more sad and pitiful, than these partnerships between the sick and selfish and the sound and over-loving. By slow but sure degrees the healthy life is absorbed by the sick life, in a manner more or less injurious to both, until, sometimes too late for remedy, the growth of the evil is seen by others.³⁴

Another unhealthy impact of female relatives was their tendency to influence each other. Two women with slight symptoms of exhaustion could support themselves in their bad condition and enjoy their short indisposition. By discussing their sickness, they could develop these symptoms into a serious case, and later on, they could unknowingly resist to the cure. To reduce these negative effects of this companionship, the seclusion was very important, and it had to be done carefully and consistently. Nor relatives nor friends had to be in a contact with a patient for a several weeks, and the selection of well-trained nurse was absolutely essential. The nurse had to never excite the patient. With only necessary attention, a woman who only enjoyed the pleasure of a care was not able to stand this treatment and soon after her seclusion, her physical condition improved. On the other hand, a woman who indeed suffered from hysteria had a chance to focus on a regeneration of her body and mind.³⁵ Nevertheless, he contradicts himself. First, he admits that the lack of attention from the family is one of the causes of hysteria, and then he prescribes a complete seclusion for all patients as a part of the treatment.

One of the most controversial features of the Rest Cure was the absolute bed rest which was criticized in medical circles and mainly by patients. However, on the basis of his observation S.W. Mitchell stated that: “As a rule, no harm is done by rest, even in such people as give us doubts about whether it is or is not well for them to exert themselves.”³⁶ The patients were not allowed to sit up, read, work or even use their hands. Every single action was forbidden or it had to be done with the help of a nurse. Staying in bed all day for at least six weeks should have cured the body and filled the patient with the will to get better. S. W. Mitchell later admitted that a rest which is improperly prescribed could make

³⁴ Ibid., 12.

³⁵ Mitchell, *Fat and Blood*, chap. 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

more harm than good. However, in general cases the harm which is done is lesser evil for a full recovery.³⁷

To avoid muscle atrophy, it is necessary to substitute the blood flow which is naturally done by every movement. However, patients who were experiencing the Rest Cure were not able to fulfill this demand, and that is why the massage and electricity were prescribed. The massage consisted of rubbing and squeezing of legs, arms, chest, back and abdomen for one hour. The circulation of blood was signified by a higher body temperature after the massage.³⁸

The electricity was another type of exercising muscles. This exercise had to be done only by a physician or a highly skilled nurse to ensure the painless course of the treatment. Two poles covered in cotton were put at the beginning of the muscle, and then, they were quickly moved along the muscle to its end. Electric impulses caused a muscular contraction exercising the blood flow.³⁹

The Rest Cure was also very often connected with a diet and medical tonics. S. W. Mitchell had observed that milk diet causes the loss of weight which is soon after followed by a greater gain of weight and as he mentioned several times in his work, the gain of weight was a positive symptom of the cure. According to his observation, it was possible to live only on milk ingestion, and that is why S. W. Mitchell did not hesitate to use a milk diet for every patient at least for a certain time.⁴⁰

For each day, patients had a prescribed daily routine, which had to be obligatorily observed without any changes. The daily routines differed from patient to patient; however, the main features of the Rest Cure, such as a rest and a massage after meals, were preserved.⁴¹

Without a doubt, it is clear that Doctor Mitchell wanted with pure intentions to help his patients. On the other hand, the question is if the S. W. Mitchell was not blinded by his success, professional arrogance and selfishness. In short, the Rest Cure was meant to cure women and turn them from their own unique desires to the universal patterns of expected woman's behavior set by society. Furthermore, S. W. Mitchell did not give weight to

³⁷ Ibid., chap. 5.

³⁸ Ibid., chap. 6.

³⁹ Mitchell, *Fat and Blood*, chap. 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., chap. 7.

opinions of his patients and their families, which resulted in a miserable failure in a few cases. Nowadays, such protest against a medical treatment would never be overlooked. In his books, he always mentioned only extreme and successful cases. However, there were other people who suffered more under the Rest Cure than without it. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was experiencing the Rest Cure after her breakdown and she got on the edge of madness because her objections against the Rest Cure were not recognized. Her case became famous thanks to her story “The Yellow Wallpaper”. The question remains how many of such women existed who had no chance to share their stories about the Rest Cure.

3.3 Women and Scientific Research

At that time, doctors were respected authorities who set the position of women patients. Their opinions and decisions were unquestionable. This fact leads to the question how they viewed the woman in the nineteenth century if they had so much power to influence her image in the society.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin released his research about the theory of evolution and natural selection. One of the most important themes of this research was that the normal course of living is to evolve. Species have ability to adapt to their environment; therefore, they evolve from a lower form to higher and higher forms. This ability to evolve was assigned to the male sex because of the observation of animal behavior supposing that such evolution requires a certain level of cleverness. This theory was accepted in 1873, and it led to more broaden speculations about a superior race and sex.⁴²

Women at that time were recognized as a weak and sick throughout their life. Menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, mental instability, predisposition to diseases, physical weakness, all these women characteristics supported the image of a sick and anxious woman who is born with this invalidity by nature. Additionally, many doctors held the view that woman was created around her reproductive organ; and thus, her sole role is to reproduce and care for her family. Moreover, scientists introduced researches dealing with the brain weight and size and the result was that the white man is the superior form because

⁴¹ Ibid., chap. 5.

⁴² Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, 127 – 132.

of his heaviest and biggest brain. Women were placed at the same position with blacks, old whites and children. Regarding the theory of evolution and all these researches about sex and race, scientists concluded that women with their reproduction ability maintained mainly by their organs are the lower form. On the contrary, men with their biggest brain, which means a greater intelligence and a greater ability to adapt and evolve, are clearly the higher form.⁴³

These statements defined the attitude of educated men towards women. As a lower form with the main reproductive function, women were not allowed to get higher education because it was supposed that it is meaningless for them. Men also did not understand why women tried to extricate from the natural patterns. The facts were clear, and the roles were distributed by a superior power. Nowadays, it is known more about genes, mutations and heredity. However, in the nineteenth century they had only little information about it so they had to rely only on observations, misleading logic and incomplete facts.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., 127 – 132.

⁴⁴ Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*, 127 – 132.

4 THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

4.1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Anne Perkins was born on 3 July 1860 to Mary Fitch Westcott and Frederick Beecher Perkins who was a brother of great women of that time, Isabella Beecher Hooker and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The marriage of her parents was unhappy and Charlotte had a difficult childhood. When her mother was young, she was highly admired by men because of her education, musical talent and pretty appearance. However, after her marriage with Frederick Beecher Perkins, everything had dramatically changed. From charming young woman, she became “a deserted wife”.⁴⁵ As a loyal wife, she had to move nineteen times in eighteen years. Charlotte stated that she had connected childhood memories with railroads or steamboats because of that. Moreover, Charlotte’s father was almost never at home and her mother had to deal with debt and poverty. As a result, she decided to protect her children of such harm so she showed only a little affection to them. Charlotte in her autobiography mentioned that only when she was asleep, her mother came to caress her. Charlotte had also very complicated relationship with her father because her only chance to communicate with him was to write him letters in which she asked him for books. “The word Father, in the sense of love, care, one to go to in trouble, means nothing to me, save indeed in advice about books and the care of them – which seems more the librarian than the father.”⁴⁶ Her desperate desire for expressed affection resulted in her dream world which she was later ordered to give up. When she was fifteen years old, she got her first diary. Through this writing, she developed a habit of relief from her emotions and ideas and she continued with it throughout her life. At the age of eighteen, she studied at Rhode Island School of Design and later she became an artist and painter.⁴⁷

In 1884, Charlotte married Charles W. Stetson. In 1885, she gave birth to her daughter Katherine Beecher Stetson. Charlotte loved children, and she was looking forward to her own; however, soon after the birth Charlotte suffered from a post-partum depression. “In

⁴⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1972), 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷ Cynthia J. Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010).

place of a warm efficient love I could feel nothing but that dull, constant pain.”⁴⁸ When her daughter was 5 months old, she accepted invitations and went on a trip without her husband and child. Her health got better; however, soon after her return, she again fell into depression. Her condition was so bad that she had to visit a professional in that field, Dr. S. W. Mitchell in Philadelphia, and she had to take his Rest Cure. She obeyed all his directions. “Live as domestic a life as possible. Lie down an hour after each meal. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live.”⁴⁹ Although, after months of this cure, Charlotte stated in her autobiography that she suffered from an unbearable mental torment. Four years of marriage passed and Charlotte Perkins Stetson got divorced. After her leaving the house, she began to recover.⁵⁰

After this seclusion from her family, Charlotte moved to California where she began to earn money by her writing and where she took part in reformist movements. In 1892, she wrote short story “The Yellow wallpaper” in which she described her losing of mind and the Rest Cure. However, she became famous mainly because of her book *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Relations* written in 1898. This book, which became a bestseller at that time, promoted an economical independence of women. In 1900, she married George Houghton Gilman, who was her cousin. In the next years, she wrote many remarkable pieces. *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), *Herland* (1915) and more. In 1932, she was diagnosed with a breast cancer and on 17 august 1935, as an advocate of euthanasia; she committed a suicide by chloroform. “I had not the least objection to dying. But I did not propose to die of this, so I promptly bought sufficient chloroform as a substitute.”⁵¹

4.2 The Yellow Wallpaper

“The Yellow Wallpaper” was published in *New England Magazine* 5 in 1892. In this story, Charlotte Perkins Gilman describes the role of a white middle class woman in the late nineteenth century and her inability to break chains set by patriarchal society. This struggle leads to the emotional and psychical harm. The events are based on the author’s own experience with psychical breakdown. At that time, the story was not appreciated and

⁴⁸ Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, 154.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 90 – 107.

accepted. "The Yellow Wallpaper" was rejected by *The Atlantic Monthly*, a famous literature magazine, and Ch. P. Gilman received a clear message. "Dear Madam, Mr. Howells has handed me this story. I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!"⁵² The story was overlooked for over fifty years until it was discovered and praised by Elaine Hedges. In the twentieth century, it was considered to be a feminist story; however, the author herself never thought of the story in this way.⁵³

The story is written in the first person, so the narrator represents also the main protagonist. The author offers an access to heroine's ideas, fantasies and inner emotions which struggle inside her, and the reader can accept her perception of the world. As a result of this connection, the reader feels certain sympathy for the heroine. Furthermore he/she can slowly plunge into the madness along with the heroine. A sensitive reader could consider this story disconcerting or dreadful. However, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her essay "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" claims that: "It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy..."⁵⁴ From what we know from her autobiography, she once met somebody who personally knew S. W. Mitchell and who said that this story had compelled Mitchell to consider his treatment; although, he never mentioned it in his books, and he never replied to her letter, which she had sent him.⁵⁵

The author used the epistolary style. The story is a set of secret diary entries, which means that every heroine's thought and perception of the world is recorded in a written form. By this feature, Ch. P. Gilman reflected her own habit of writing a diary throughout her life.⁵⁶ The heroine tells the story through her thoughts as an inner monologue which is ordered mainly by her associations of things. On one hand, it is more difficult to understand the heroine and to follow the story. On the other hand, the order of the associations and events could be essential because it reveals things which are not even clearly said.

⁵¹ Ibid., 333.

⁵² Schumaker, "Too Terribly Good to Be Printed": Charlotte Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," 588.

⁵³ Ibid; Karen Ford, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Women's Discourse, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn, 1985), 309-314.

⁵⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'," *The Forerunner* (1913)

⁵⁵ Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, 121.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography*, 22-24.

The heroine does not suppose that anyone will read her diary. “I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper”⁵⁷ However, sometimes it seems that she visualizes an unknown reader, for instance by repeating questions in a rhetorical manner or by the emphasizing. “And I’ll tell you why—privately—I’ve seen her!”⁵⁸ “It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you.”⁵⁹ The diary entries lack of timestamps; nevertheless, it is possible to determine the time by the comments of the character. The events happen during a few months in a summer.

4.3 Setting

The story is set in a large mansion with a garden. At the beginning, the heroine finds it beautiful and romantic because it reminds her of the English style. On the other hand, she feels a slight apprehension. The house had been inhabited for years, and this fact arouses a lot of questions and fantasies in her mind. “A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity – but that would be asking too much of fate.”⁶⁰ It is important how the heroine calls the house. “A hereditary estate” and “ancestral hall” were the typical features of the Western patriarchal society and so it sets the male dominance from the beginning. Her apprehension is probably connected with the location of the house. It is partially a lonely place because the nearest village is located a few miles away; moreover, the heroine subconsciously reacts to hedges, fences and locks, which she saw at first sight. By comparison with her old life, in which she probably had a normal social life, this means a huge change for the heroine, and the house is one the first indicators of it. All together it represents her separation from others and her impossibility to break away from the patriarchal environment, which will intensify later in the story.

The heroine has to reside in the nursery in the first floor because other rooms are unsuitable according to the opinion of her husband. In the room, the bed is permanently nailed to the floor, the wallpaper is stripped off, and there is a gate of head at the stairs. “It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are

⁵⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997), 1.

⁵⁸ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*, 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

barred for little children and there are rings and things in the walls.”⁶¹ From that part, it could be assumed that the heroine is highly credulous, she does not want to see that maybe another insane person was kept there because it should point at her own psychological instability when she is forced to stay there too. However, she knows that there is something weird about the room because she does not like it from the beginning. “I don’t like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings!”⁶² It is probable that her husband John was aware of the equipment of the room because he does not express any kind of surprise or willingness to improve the environment. Moreover, he refuses to leave this room even after heroine’s complains. Even though the narrator does not mention the equipment of the room, this environment most likely intensified the feeling of the imprisonment.

4.4 The Wallpaper

From the heroine’s point of view, the most significant part of the room, where she has to stay, is the yellow wallpaper. The wallpaper consists of yellow curves and angles creating an insoluble pattern which is really complicated and disorganized. From the beginning of her arrival to the house, the heroine does not like the wallpaper. Her feelings about the wallpaper are immediately hostile, and she uses only emotionally negative words to describe it, such as “lame, sickly sulphur tint, repellent, revolting”.⁶³ The pattern teases her mind, and she feels very uncomfortably in the room. “I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.”⁶⁴ The feeling of discomfort is so strong that she suggests moving to another room; however, her husband John argues that other rooms are not big enough for two beds or there is no near room for him. Later on, she accuses the pattern of her deteriorating physical condition. “This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had.”⁶⁵ The wallpaper was not the main and sole reason of her bad psychological condition which later develops. Actually, in a different room the heroine could suffer because of the carpet, curtains or bed linen, and her psychological breakdown could be still unavoidable. In this situation, the wallpaper acts as a trigger of her mental disease. Throughout the story, the

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶² Ibid., 2.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

wallpaper is one of the most critical influences on the heroine. At the end, it becomes so important for her that probably even after moving to another room, the heroine would still feel the presence of the wallpaper. Moreover, along with the involuntary confinement, the feeling of failure and the inability to be heard, the wallpaper means the only way how to express her fantasies or creativity.

In the nursery, there is nothing interesting or stimulating for her and because she suffers from hysterical nervousness, and her ability of housekeeping is highly weakened, she is released from her responsibilities of maintaining the house and taking care of her husband and mainly of her newborn child. Moreover, the heroine is constantly prohibited from writing, thinking and other activities regardless of her own choice. As a consequence of this idleness, the heroine spends hours just watching the wallpaper, following the pattern and trying to find the beginning of it.

With regard to the purpose for which the author had created this story and the historical background in which it was written, it could be assumed that the yellow wallpaper stands for the then oppressive society which tended to keep the Cult of True Womanhood. The pattern is as complicated as was the society that ruled that time. From one side, the pattern could be seen as beautiful; flourishing shapes, curves and arabesques are creating a remarkable pattern. From the other side, the wallpaper is old, the pattern behaves like a poisonous fungus with a repulsive and disgusting color. Later in the story, the yellow pattern becomes bars, and a woman in the wallpaper is not able to escape. Moreover, the same characteristic applies for the society. It seems that everything is all right, a woman as a symbol of home is running the household and living for the family, because the home was understood as a mirror of a human's inner beauty, and a woman was expected to be the sole maintainer of the home, but it was just a cover for the reality. In fact, the woman had to fight with the loss of her identity because during the nineteenth century, there was no other choice for her than staying at home. As a middle-class wife, the income of her husband was sufficient so there was no need to go to work for her. The society suffocated her life, and she was not allowed to fulfill her dreams.

The continuous presence of the wallpaper creates another feature. The heroine feels like it is watching her. "There is a recurrent spot where the pattern looks like a broken neck

and bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.”⁶⁶ “...and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere.”⁶⁷ And this is a parallel to her life. All her life, she is under the control of her family, husband John and the society. They are watching her every step and judging her. In the house, she is also under the control of Jane, the sister of John, who actually works as her carer and makes decisions about what heroine can do or not. In this situation, the heroine has no authority, she feels more like a baby or an incompetent person. As a result, the more watched she feels, the more secrets she wants to keep from them. Her secrets are the only way to express her real personality because her inner feelings, desires to write or think are not acceptable. The pattern and the surrounding are still watching.

As the story continues, the heroine’s attitude is changing. At the beginning, she clearly hates the wallpaper. Later in the story, her feelings are confused. “I’m getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper. Perhaps *because of* the wall-paper. It dwells in my mind so!”⁶⁸ Along with her deteriorating psychical health, the heroine starts to describe the wallpaper with more characteristics. The worse she feels, the more details she finds in the wallpaper. “This wall-paper has a kind of sub-pattern in a, different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.”⁶⁹ The obsession with the wallpaper begins to be pathological. As she is sinking into insanity, her feelings about the wallpaper develop. By the end of the story, she does not really like it; however, she looks forward to the revealing the truth.

The heroine tries to find the system of the pattern several times. However, she does not manage to do it. “It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap I guess.”⁷⁰ And again, trying to understand the pattern is a parallel to the understanding the society. The heroine tries really hard because understanding could help her to reconcile to her fate. Nevertheless, she does not find any sense in the wallpaper; thus, she will never understand and fit her role set by the society.

The yellow color is described as repellent and revolting. In the story, the heroine is annoyed by the color because she does not associate the yellow color with beautiful things, such as the sun, but it reminds her of illness, disease and decay. This suggests two meanings

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

of the yellow color. Firstly, it could relate to her own illness, hysteria, which could be seen as a form of her inner confinement in her body. The heroine is subconsciously aware of her psychological problem; however, she is not able to fight with it. Secondly, it could be another characteristic of the unhealthy society in general, and as such it represents the heroine's disagreement with this kind of society because she sees it as rotting.

Another important part of the wallpaper is a smell which she is relating to it. "But there is something else about that paper - - the smell!"⁷¹ The smell is spread through the whole house and even outside. As well as the wallpaper, at the beginning it is gentle and normal; however, it gradually becomes annoying and provoking. "It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house - - to reach the smell. But now I am used to it."⁷² The smell of the wallpaper means that the wallpaper is not just in the room, it is everywhere with the heroine. All the time, she feels it. The smell along with the wallpaper representing the society accompanies the heroine and points out that the heroine is imprisoned in every place and there is no shelter to hide. She will be never able to escape. Moreover, the smell is also personified by the heroine, and it has human's attributes.

4.5 Characters

4.5.1 A Woman in the Wallpaper

While the heroine's physical condition is getting worse, the wallpaper reveals a woman in the sub-pattern, and the heroine starts to be afraid of her. "And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder - - I begin to think - - I wish John would take me away from here!"⁷³ The question is why the mysterious woman in the wallpaper causes her fear. One of the versions could be that the woman is a ghost of other captured person from the room who had to live there before the heroine. However, a more probable version is that the woman represents the heroine's own craving for freedom, which is unacceptable from the view of the society and her education, and these two forces are struggling in her. In the daylight, the woman is hidden and forced to be quiet behind the pattern similarly to heroine's fantasies. In the moonlight, the woman leaves

⁷⁰ Gilman, *"The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*, 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

her hiding places and starts to freely creep behind the bars made from the rays of moon as well as the heroine can be only unrestricted in the cover of night when no one can see. Moreover, the night is the only time during the day when the heroine feels brave enough to talk with John about her illness. At the beginning, the heroine is not able to acknowledge her hidden desires and tries to keep herself within the required limits. Therefore, she asks John to leave the house, but he refuses. It is one of her last attempts to escape.

Later on, she begins to recognize the changes of the wallpaper, and it spoils her imagination and her curiosity. "Life is much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch."⁷⁴ Her physical condition is getting better; on the contrary, her possession of the wallpaper is intensifying. What is more, the heroine sees a great many women who crawl behind the pattern. The women may stand for all wives, mothers and housekeepers who suffer from the same restrictions as the heroine, which means that she is not the only one, but all society is diseased. The pattern is keeping them in their roles, but the heroine sees them shaking it, which can represent the women's movements at that time. These movements were calling for the rights to own property, vote and so on, for instance NWSA and AWSA. This symbolism is also supported by the fact that the author of the story, Ch. P. Gilman, was in her childhood in a close contact with her aunts Isabella Beecher Hooker, who was a prominent activist in a suffragist movement, and Catherine Beecher, who was an advocate of a higher education for women.⁷⁵

After that, the woman escapes from the wallpaper in the daylight. "It is the same woman, I know, for she is creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight"⁷⁶ Again, the heroine refers to more women. In general, creeping is not an usual activity, however the heroine perceives that as normal. From her point of view, many women creep at moonlight because they want to hide their acting. This opinion points again at the status of woman and their oppressed role. "I always lock the door when I creep by daylight."⁷⁷ By this statement, the heroine admits that one of her daily routine becomes the creeping along the wall also proved by yellow smudges on her clothes discovered by Jane. The difference between the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, 3.

⁷⁶ Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories, 12.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

heroine and the woman from the wallpaper is slowly disappearing. From this point, it is clear that the heroine's psychical condition is getting worse because of the coming madness.

The heroine is looking forward to the woman's escape and decides to help the woman out. The wallpaper is the challenge. Nevertheless, her intention is to tie the woman and astonish John when he comes back. It seems that her mind is still keeping the thought that such woman, who is representing her inner desires, should be imprisoned. The heroine still does not want to admit her feelings, her mind still obeys the rules set by her education.

When she peels off all the paper, the woman in the wallpaper and the heroine become one person. "I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard! It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please."⁷⁸ "I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"⁷⁹ Everything she tried to hide and keep inside is free. The restrictions and bars are gone. Suddenly, there is no need to hide under the cover of night. The heroine is irretrievably changed. She loses her sane mind; on the contrary, she adopts acting and thoughts of the woman from the wallpaper.

4.5.2 The Heroine

The author has created this character as a mirror of herself; thus, the heroine has some autobiographical features. For example, the heroine has an uncontrollable tendency to write and she experienced the Rest Cure which she took after her giving birth to a child. The heroine is a white woman in the late nineteenth century. However, the heroine is not named. It could be assumed that the author of the story purposely did not give a name to the heroine. The name would have created one concrete person; on the contrary, the anonymous heroine can represent many women.

The narrator is a young wife and mother who moves with her husband John to a remotely situated house for summer. There are several things which indicate that they belong to the middle class. Firstly, they are able to employ maiden, nanny and servants, and they could afford to rent "a colonial mansion". Next, the heroine does not have to go to work to earn money, which was very common for a woman from a lower class because one wage was not enough. Also, her husband works as a doctor, and this profession is typical

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

for a middle class family. And finally, later in the story they talk about Seir W. Mitchell who was a prominent doctor for higher classes. The usage of such specialized doctor was a modern sign of a higher society. However, the heroine perceives themselves as “mere ordinary people”, which means that she is used to this standard. Therefore, she had to grow up under such conditions for all her life. She was treated like a vulnerable being from her birth, and after the marriage, her husband continues with this treatment. Probably, this is one of the influences which cumulate inside her and which became later unbearable⁸⁰

According to her husband and other doctors (her brother and Seir W. Mitchell), she suffers from nervous depression, and the Rest Cure is the best treatment for her. Apparently, her anxiety has developed after her giving birth to a child. It could be assumed that the heroine suffers from postpartum depression because her emotions are not constant, and she is physically weak. However, in the nineteenth century, a diagnosis for such disease did not exist, so she was diagnosed with hysteria.

The heroine is very dreamy and childish. All what she perceives is connected with her fancies and ideas, for instance when she sees the mansion for the first time she describes it as “haunted house”. She is also highly imaginative, and she personifies inanimate things, which originates in her childhood. “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.”⁸¹ Therefore, the wallpaper takes human characteristics and actions from the beginning. “I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before and we all know how much expression they have!”⁸² However, she is forbidden to write, think or fancy so she suffers from unexpressed opinions and fantasies, and as a result, her concentration focuses on the wallpaper more and more, which causes that she is unable to participate in daily routine and that she has problems to distinguish her delusions from the reality.

The heroine is deeply dedicated to her husband. She loves him and appreciates his love and his solicitude to her. On the one hand, she will be highly happy if she could realize all his requests, which is impossible because she is unable to hold the post of wife and housekeeper due to her illness; on the other hand, she very often disagrees with him and expresses doubts about his actions. Also it seems that the heroine carries a hidden anger

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁸¹ Ibid., 5.

⁸² Ibid.

inside her which reaches the surface every time when John denies her feelings. “I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.”⁸³ Her tied living soul struggles between the obedient wife and desire to express herself and to be heard.

The heroine is aware of her inability of fulfilling the role of the wife; moreover, she is even not let to try to be a mother and a housekeeper. Due to this, she highly admires the women who are able to meet the expectations instead of her. “Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! She is perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession!”⁸⁴ Furthermore, the heroine's name is never mentioned so she perceives herself as nobody, woman who does not fit the stereotypes and later she gets used to it. “Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.”⁸⁵

During the story, the character of the heroine slowly develops. At the beginning, she arrives as an exhausted submissive wife with her loving husband. Trapped in the room, the heroine focuses on the wallpaper and starts to show symptoms of a mental disease which results in paranoia. “He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind. As if I couldn't see through him!”⁸⁶ The heroine's attitude to her husband is changed. The question is if it is the result of the final stage of her sinking into insanity which is connected with suspiciousness or if she really reveals that her husband does not love her and just plays his role. At the end, the heroine finally gains her freedom. By losing her sane mind, she gets rid of all restrictions and pressure upon her which eases her suffering soul; thus, she feels better and independent. Furthermore, she claims that she will never allow it again. “And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!”⁸⁷ To emphasize her release, the heroine starts to creep along the walls in the daylight in front of the John. She is no more submissive, she does not have to be the perfect wife, and she finds her way from her imprisonment.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 15

4.5.3 Jane

Jane is a sister of John and the heroine highly admires her because Jane replaces her in her role of housekeeping and takes all the care of the house and John. Due to heroine's characterization of Jane, it seems that Jane is really the ideal housewife who is content with her oppressive role, and this is a contrast to the heroine who fails in her life mission. Jane, a constant reminder of the heroine's failure, is one of the reasons of the heroine's worsening hysteria. "She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession!"⁸⁸ Furthermore, Jane behaves more like a nurse because she is in charge of controlling the heroine's fulfillment of the rest cure. However, it places Jane at the same position as the doctors are, and she slowly becomes another enemy who should not reveal any of the heroine's secret.

The heroine easily identifies with the woman captured in the wallpaper than with Jane, the perfect woman in the house, because when she is talking about Jane, she wants to be like her. When she mentions the woman in the wallpaper, she feels with her and understands her. Furthermore, the heroine is unnamed which helps her to identify more with the anonymous woman in the wallpaper.

As a result of Jane's housekeeping, it is her who realizes that yellow smudges on their clothes come from the wallpaper. The heroine is mistaken about this situation, she thinks that Jane has seen something in the pattern; however, Jane just found out that the heroine's improving physical condition may be just one side of a secret, and later she shares this information with John. "I caught Jennie with her hand on it once... But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!"⁸⁹ This paranoia is also a symptom of a worsening psychological health.

At the end of story, when the heroine peels off all the wallpaper and locks in the room, Jane occurs in the heroine's statement in which she claims that she gained freedom in spite of John and Jane. Consequently, it is highly possible that Jane was one of the main enemies in the perception of the heroine, although she was mentioned in the story very rarely.

⁸⁸ Gilman, *"The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*, 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

4.5.4 John

John is a husband of the heroine who works as a high-standing doctor. As it was normal at that time, men were allowed to gain higher education than women. On the contrary to the heroine, John is very practical, self-confident and rational, which results in his reluctance to imagination. “He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.”⁹⁰ As a result of his rational side, he forbids heroine to think or write because he is afraid that his wife with such big imagination could persuade herself that she is psychically ill. Thus, he is trying to make her believe that she is not a serious case. Meanwhile, her body along with the mind will get better.

Due to his profession, John is the main person who decides about everything around the heroine because he can rely on his professional knowledge, and of course, on his marital relations. He concluded from the heroine’s symptoms that she suffers from a temporary nervous depression and for this reason he decided for a few months stay in a mansion separated from the bustling life. This separation is one part of the treatment called the Rest Cure which was invented by Seir W. Mitchell and became a mostly successful procedure for hysterical woman. As it is seen from the story, John is a loyal follower of this procedure because he adheres to every rule of the Rest Cure and never yields to urges of his wife. “Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know.”⁹¹ It seems that John sticks with this treatment because as a husband, he is powerless, and he does not know what to do. Moreover as a doctor, he rather follows the treatment of somebody who is well-known and who succeeded in this field.

As a permanently adamant husband, John could be considered to be the main villain in the story. Nevertheless, it could be a very hasty prejudice. John acts according to his conscience, and he is deeply convinced that this treatment is the best cure for his wife. His actions are connected with endearments, for instance he calls his wife “his comfort and all he had”⁹², and he constantly begs her for observance of the rules for his and their child’s sake. However, this kind of love seems to be too binding and controlling. Also it should be

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., 8.

⁹² Ibid., 7.

clear that he was raised in the nineteenth century in which it was expected that the woman takes care of the house, so all his actions lead to the restoration of this ideal. In fact, John bears the burden of his own social role. On the one hand, he is worried about his wife. "He is very careful and loving, and hardly let me stir without special direction."⁹³ On the other hand, he has to meet the expectations of the then society. He is a man, he has to secure the family's future. Regardless his wife's sickness, he still goes to work and behaves according to his social status. "John is kept in town very often by serious cases..."⁹⁴ Furthermore, at the end of the story, when the heroine breaks invisible chains on her mind and becomes insane, John faints because he cannot stand the scene of his mad wife.

In spite of his good intentions, the consequence of his intransigence is a deteriorating psychological health of the heroine. John, blinded by his worries, disregards all heroine's objections to the treatment, and all his statements are the final decisions which cannot be changed. On the one hand, it is his ignorance and his strong believe about his truth; on the other hand, it is one of the steps of the Rest Cure in which it should be never complied with the patient's wishes.

He is loving and kind; however, he expresses a very paternal kind of love. He makes decisions about everything in the heroine's life. Moreover, all their common conversation is lead in the spirit of the childish manner. Several times he calls his wife "blessed little goose"⁹⁵ and "little girl"⁹⁶, and every time, he has the final word and then there is no place for objections. This behavior also sets their hierarchical relationship. The heroine is never called by her name, so she does not share the same status as John. Moreover, the heroine perceives her unbalanced position as normal. "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage."⁹⁷

Later in the story, when the heroine is getting more psychologically exhausted, John becomes one of the main enemies because of the restrictions which he imposes on the heroine who is not able to fulfill them. However, the heroine is very suspicious of him and thinks that he is secretly affected by the wallpaper, which is the result of her deepening madness. Additionally, she constantly controls her emotions and feeling in front him. "I cry

⁹³ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 8.

at nothing, and cry most of the time. Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone."⁹⁸ The heroine is clearly unhappy and depressed. Moreover, she does not see any way out of this situation.

4.5.5 Doctors and the Rest Cure

During the story, doctors in general demonstrate the patriarchal course of the society. Apart from John, the husband of the heroine, there is mentioned a brother of the heroine and a well-known physician S.W. Mitchell.

Doctors in the story are described as the main villains. At the beginning of the story, when the heroine mentions her illness, she claims that maybe she is not getting well because John is a doctor. Furthermore, her brother who is also physician agrees with the Rest Cure which John prescribes her. It could be assumed that the heroine feels a slight distrust to doctors because the Rest Cure is not an appropriate treatment from her point of view. However, nobody listens to her opinion because they are more trustworthy than the heroine, which fills her with a sense of hopelessness. "But what is one to do?"⁹⁹

The agreement on the treatment makes them opponents of the heroine. From her perspective, they are all the same. She observes some of the rules of the Rest Cure; however, she is not able to abandon her writing so she does so "in spite of them"¹⁰⁰. Later in the story, John uses a reference to Weir Mitchell as a threat for the heroine to motivate her in the cure. "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall."¹⁰¹ The heroine responds in a panic. According to her friend, Seir Mitchell is very similar to John or more so, which signifies that doctors are something bad, and they should be avoided.

The treatment prescribed to the heroine is called the Rest Cure. This cure was often used in the late nineteenth century because of the high success rate in hysterical cases. The inventor of this cure is Seir W. Mitchell, who is also mentioned in the story and who was one of the persons for whom the story was written. The heroine experiences all the procedures of the Rest Cure except for the electricity. She is forbidden to write, think or

⁹⁷ Gilman, *"The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*, 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

work, and her only duty is to sleep as much as possible, take phosphates and tonics, slightly exercise and focus on getting better. The main feature of the Rest Cure is to never permit the patient to become the center of the attention and to never make it easier him/her. The heroine reacts to the cure in the same way as the author of the story. Her nervous depression does not improve; on the contrary, her body slightly gets better at first sight; however, her psychological health unstopably deteriorates and results in insanity. The heroine several times argues against this cure; however, the authority of doctors and her husband is insuperable. “Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work with excitement and change would do me good. But what is one to do?”¹⁰²

4.5.6 Mary and Child

One of the causes of the heroine’s hysterical depression was a recent giving birth to child which happened before her arrival to the separated mansion. However, the heroine is not able to take care of her child, so they have to employ a nanny called Mary. “It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby!”¹⁰³ The name Mary arouses an association to the Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, who could be reckoned as a perfect mother highly dedicated to the motherhood. Additionally, the heroine perceives Mary as an ideal of a woman satisfied by her position as well as Jennie. Both women represent the opposite attitude to their role than the heroine, which intensifies the heroine’s feeling of failing because she is surrounded by perfect women.

The child never personally appears in the story, so it means that the heroine is separated from it for about three months, which also contributes to her illness. “Such a dear baby! And yet I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous.”¹⁰⁴ It could be assumed that if she had the chance to meet the baby, she would have mentioned it in her entries because it would have disrupted unexciting days. Thus the heroine has to rely on her memories. In spite of the fact that the baby is the trigger of the deepening hysteria, the heroine thinks about it with positive feelings. She is happy that baby is well and even more she feels easement that the baby does not have to occupy the nursery.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Nevertheless, the setting of the mansion frequently reminds the heroine of children. She has to stay in the nursery, the wallpaper is stripped off as the children would have done it. Altogether it points at her lack of maternal ability, and it creates an influence on her mind.

4.6 Writing

The story is written in epistolary form. The heroine writes her diary in which she expresses her inner thoughts and emotions or her unofficial version of the events. The writing is also an autobiographical feature. Ch. P. Gilman was thirteen years old when she began to create her own dream world to escape from the harsh reality. However, she had to abandon this world because such escape could be dangerous. Nevertheless, in her fifteens, she got her first diary and started to relief her feelings on the paper.

The writing is one of the forbidden actions for the heroine. John and Janie consider the writing harming. However, she is not able to abandon it because it is the only way how to gain relief by putting down her hidden fantasies. Her writing becomes her secret rebellion against them. Nevertheless, she fights with the desire for confession and exhaustion which is worsening with every written entry. "I don't know why I should write this. I don't want to. I don't feel able. And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way – it is such a relief! But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief."¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the heroine continues to write her thoughts till the end of the story.

4.7 Hysteria and madness

Through the story, the reader witnesses the heroine's sinking into madness. At the beginning, the heroine seems to be rational, maybe a little bit naive woman who only suffers from some kind of exhaustion. The heroine is influenced by many factors such as her unbalanced marriage, giving birth to a child, perfect women and so on. However, a few main points which supported and developed her psychological breakdown can be concluded.

Firstly, the heroine claims that John does not believe that she is sick. From her point of view, she is seriously ill. However, John concentrates only on the physical body and refuses her attempts to discuss it on the pretext of his profession. This lack of understanding arouses a feeling of desperation. "And what can one do?"¹⁰⁶ Moreover, she disagrees with

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1.

the treatment, but no one really listens to her so she yields to their press. Repeatedly, her opinion is dismissed and she has nobody to talk to. She is the broken one who has to be repaired.

Secondly, the heroine is locked in so-called nursery. The bed is nailed down with marks from biting, windows are barred, and there are rings in the walls and yellow wallpaper which is almost stripped off. Probably, another insane people were kept there. Moreover, the room has a beautiful view from the window; however, the heroine can just watch the life outside. With contrast to her obligatory stay in the nursery, the room seems to be more like prison than anything else. She is forbidden to write, work or go somewhere else, and the only thing to do in her room is to study the yellow wallpaper. "I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength."¹⁰⁷

Further in the story, the heroine's psychical condition is obviously worsening. "It's getting to be a great effort for me to think straight."¹⁰⁸ The surrounding influences deepen her possession of the wallpaper, and she starts to follow the pattern for hours just to find the system of it. She begins to realize two layers of the pattern, and later on, the woman in the wallpaper. Furthermore, the heroine is suspicious and starts to be afraid of John and Jane. "He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind. As if I couldn't see through him!"¹⁰⁹ However, in the same time when she catches Jane with her hand on the yellow wallpaper, it could be assumed that heroine's thoughts are highly influenced by coming madness. The heroine is not able to realize her own actions because she does not understand that the smudges on her clothes are made by her creeping along the wall. "There is a funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mop board....I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for."¹¹⁰ Later she admits this action. "I always lock when I creep by the daylight". From this point, it is clear that the heroine does not give an objective view of situation, and maybe that all her story is highly affected by it.

At the end of the story, the heroine tears off the wallpaper as an act of liberation. She bites the bed and thinks about jumping from the window because of the rage. She sees many

¹⁰⁷ Gilman, *"The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

women outside. “I don’t like to look out of the windows even - - there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?”¹¹¹ The woman in the wallpaper finally merges with the heroine. On the contrary with other passages of the story, the heroine does not want to leave the room because she would have to creep on the ground. After John appears, the heroine seems to be rational enough to inform him. “And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in.”¹¹² However, she is insane and starts to creep over him when he faints. The heroine mind is free, but the price for her liberation was her sane mind.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹¹² Ibid., 15.

CONCLUSION

The white society in the United States of America in the 19th century was almost exclusively ruled by patriarchal patterns. Along with the political and economical changes women started to question their position. They compared their status with the men's one. Regarding the power in hands of men, women began to call for their own rights. Many of them joined women's associations or promoted innovative thoughts through literature. However, during these fights on political fields, many women had to fight their battles in their own homes. The enemies were usually men; however sometimes, it was their own mind which was so restricted through years that suddenly it was very hard to change.

In the nineteenth century, woman were formed and raised under strict expectations which were so long preserved that it was very difficult to change these ways of thinking and behavior. To be born to a family of a certain social class was a one-way ticket to the life. Once the baby was born, he/she got his/her role which he/her had to carry till his/her death. On one hand, it was luck to be born to a white middle or higher class family; on the other hand, nothing has just a positive side. The girl entered life in which she was always protected. During the childhood she had the only chance to feel a certain kind of freedom. By the beginning of her puberty, toys and plays were replaced by manners and proper clothing and hairstyling. Suddenly she became available for the marriage. The girl was completely dependent on her family. Without an education she had no opportunity to succeed in an outside world and become economically independent. Thus to survive, her life was fully under the control of her family or husband.

The bride from the middle-class was expected to cultivate four virtues. Purity, domesticity, submissiveness and passivity. These virtues were features of the Cult of True Womanhood, and it was the legacy of the society from the time before the Civil War. However after the war, people's values became more home oriented, and these virtues had preserved. After the marriage, the woman instantly became a wise child bearer and home keeper. Some women were content with their status. Being a mother filled their desires, and they did not try to want more. They did not experience the lack of money, and moreover, they helped to create a better society with their moral home.

In consequence of the importance which was imposed on the perfect woman and home, a new type of woman aroused. These women did not managed to be the perfect ideal. They had dreams, they craved for more, and they wanted to be treated as equal beings. The lack

of understanding and appreciation of their work led them to the edge of a psychological breakdown. Doctors called them hysterical, because they were characterized by the same symptoms: lack of breath, anemia and physical exhaustion.

As a result of the then scientific researches and theories, a woman was considered to be the lower form of a human race. A woman was supposed to be always ill, it depended only on what kind of illness it was. Thus why should such a weak being get an education or be treated as an equal? The nature, the God or whoever has created the human race gave the woman the only task: to bear children and to take care about them. Consequently, when the woman was considered to be hysterical, the whole medical treatment was focused on forcing her into this role and restoring of the True Woman. The little freedom and free will that a woman had, were taken away and replaced by the Rest Cure. Doctors, such as Dr. Mitchell, mentioned only successfully cured cases, however it is known that there were women who became more psychologically ill due to this cure.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a remarkable woman not only for her modern thoughts in which she promoted the economical independence of woman but mainly for her courage to share her inner intimate emotions through her writing. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an outstanding story which offers an unforgettable and terrifying view of a fight between desires and chains of the society. In the story, Ch. P. Gilman reflected her own experience.

The author offers an insight into a life of a young middle-class woman who is considered to be hysterical. The story describes the woman's desire to express her own identity which does not fit oppressive conventions given by the society. As an imperfect woman, she suffers from deepening psychological problems. She finds the only way to relief her mind – the yellow wallpaper. Even though this way helps her to open her eyes, she is not able to find the way back to the normal life.

The story ends by heroine's madness. Gilman managed to escape from this depressive end; however she had to abandon her own daughter, husband and her old life. Both women found their own way how to deal with the pressure upon them, however after this experience, they both had to lose something precious and afterward they were never the same again.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood." College of Staten Island Library.

<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truewoman.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).

Burstyn, Joan N. "Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women." *The New England Quarterly*, No. 3 (1974): 386-403. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/364378> (accessed April 18, 2012)

Cady Stanton, Elizabeth. *A History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1. Rochester, N.Y.: Fowler and Wells, 1889.

Davis, Cynthia J. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Ford, Karen. "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Women's Discourse. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn, 1985).

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1972.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *"The Yellow Wallpaper" and Other Stories*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"." *The Forerunner* (1913).

Green, Harvey, and Mary-Ellen Perry. *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Kleinberg, S. J. *Women in American Society, 1820-1920*. Brighton, England: British Association for American Studies, 1990.

- Little, E. "The Rights of Women." *The Republican Compiler*. February 1.1848.
- Mitchell, S. Weir. *Doctor and Patient*. New York: Arno Press, 1972.
- Mitchell, S. Weir. *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1884.
- Mitchell, S. Weir. *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women*. Philadelphia: Lea, 1881.
- Poirier, Suzanne. "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients." *Women's Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 1983): 15. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2012).
- Schumaker, Conrad. "Too Terribly Good to Be Printed": Charlotte Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." *American Literature* 57, no. 4 (December 1985): 588. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2012).
- The University of Virginia. "Home." Advice for Women. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/gilded%20age%20Home%20page.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).
- The University of Virginia. "Industry, Anxiety and New Social Conditions." Advice for Women. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Age%20Anxiety.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).
- The University of Virginia. "Marriage." Advice for Women. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Ag%20Marriage.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).
- The University of Virginia. "Motherhood." Advice for Women. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/rodriguez/GildedAge/Gilded%20Age%20Children.html> (accessed April 18, 2012).
- VanSpanckeren, Kathryn. *Outline of American Literature*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, 1994.
- Veblen, Thorstein, and Stuart Chase. *The Theory of the Leisure Class; An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Modern library, 1934.

Volo, James M., and Dorothy Denneen Volo. *Family Life in 19th-Century America*.

Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2007.

Women's International Center. "Women's History in America." Women's International

Center. <http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm> (accessed April 18, 2012).