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"I've Got Out at Last": The Subversion of Hegemonic Masculinity in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

القد خرجتُ أخيراً ": تقويض الذكورية المهيمنة في قصة جارلوت بيركنز جيلمان "الخلفية المقد خرجتُ أخيراً "

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Abstract

Drawing on Raewyn Connell's concept "hegemonic masculinity" and engaging the critical line of feminism, this article argues that Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" unearths the institutional dynamics that sustain the masculine hegemonic discourse. This article reads this short story as counter-hegemony, the narrator of which critiques what Gramsci called "manufacture of consent", wherein ideas and beliefs are shaped, and hegemony is reproduced, through culture. We argue that Gilman accounts for the ways in which gender hierarchy is maintained through consent rather than force, and she endorses a struggle over ideas and beliefs to create counter-hegemony that contests socially-constructed dominant ideas and beliefs. This article therefore demonstrates the narrator's counter-hegemonic practices that allow for self-representation and positional autonomy. The article further illustrates ways in which these practices shape coherent female community that aims to subvert patriarchal power and undermine gendered binary structures. It concludes that the story anticipates the transformation of women from the periphery

to the centre; it instructs the counter – mechanisms that women need to use to subvert authority and invent their own world.

Keywords: Autonomy, Counter-Hegemony, Culture, Hegemonic Masculinity, Subversion.

ملخص

بالإعتماد على مفهوم ريوين كونيل "الذكورية المهيمنة" وإشراك الخط النقدي للنسوية، تجادل هذه المقالة في أن القصة القصيرة لجيلمان "الخلفية الصفراء" تكشف عن الديناميكيات المؤسسية التي تدعم الخطاب الذكوري المهيمن. يركز هذا المقال على قراءة هذه القصة القصيرة على أنها هيمنة مضادة ، تنتقد راويتها "صنع الموافقة"، التي تتشكل من خلالها الأفكار والمعتقدات، ويعاد فيها إنتاج الهيمنة من خلال الثقافة. ويبين هذا المقال أن جيلمان تفسر الطرق التي تحفظ التسلسل الهرمي بين الجنسين من خلال الموافقة بدلاً من القوة، وتؤيد الصراع على الأفكار والمعتقدات المهيمنة مضادة تتعارض مع الأفكار والمعتقدات المهيمنة التي تتشكل الأفكار والمعتقدات لخلق هيمنة مضادة تتعارض مع الأفكار والمعتقدات المهيمنة التي تتشكل والاستقلالية الموضعية. توضح المقالة ممارسات الروائية المضادة للهيمنة التي تسمح بتمثيل الذات والاستقلالية الموضعية. توضح المقالة كذلك الطرق التي تشكل بها هذه الممارسات مجتمعاً نسائيًا متماسكًا يهدف إلى تقويض السلطة الأبوية فيه وتقويض الهياكل الثنائية الجنسانية. ويخلص المقال إلى أن القصة تتوقع انتقال المرأة من الهامش إلى المركز. وتوجه الأليات المضادة التي تحتاج الأساء إلى استخدامها لتقويض السلطة، وابتكار عالمين القوم القوم المقال الذات متماسكًا يهدف إلى تقويض السلطة، وابتكار عالمين الي المران. ولمعانو المعانية. ويخلص المقال النساء إلى استخدامها لقويض السلطة، وابتكار علمهن الخاص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستقلال، الهيمنة المضادة، الثقافة، الذكورية المهيمنة، تقويض.

Introduction

Drawing on Raewyn Connell's concept "hegemonic masculinity" and the critical line of feminism, this article argues that Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", originally published in 1892, unearths the institutional dynamics that sustain the masculine hegemonic discourse. This article presses upon reading this short story as counter-hegemony, the narrator of which critiques what Gramsci (1971) called "manufacture of consent", wherein ideas and beliefs are shaped, and hegemony is reproduced through culture. In other words, Gilman accounts for the ways in which gender hierarchy is maintained through consent rather than force, and she endorses a struggle over ideas and beliefs to create counter-hegemony that contests socially-constructed dominant ideas and beliefs. This article therefore reads this story as counter-hegemonic practices that allow for

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self-representation and positional autonomy. The article further illustrates ways in which these practices shape coherent female community that aims to subvert patriarchal power and undermine gendered binary structures. It concludes that the story anticipates the transformation of women from the periphery to the centre; it instructs the counter – mechanisms that women need to use to subvert authority and invent their own world.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 - 1935), writer, philosopher and socialist, is one of the 19th-century feminist authors who employed female protagonists who are able to turn women's incarceration into a subjective space for self-discovery and empowerment. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story that features a female protagonist who suffers from sickness and depression. Her husband, John, a physician of high standing, uses his medical power to subject her to the patriarchal conventions, claiming that his mechanisms are therapeutic. The story shows that oppressive patriarchal authority seeks to maintain its hegemony through exposing women to maddening and captivating masculine instructions and regulations. However, the narrator, in defiance of her husband's dictates, resorts to identification with another oppressed woman, her double, whom she imagines as imprisoned behind the hideous and uncanny wallpaper. Furthermore, the narrator embarks on writing, appropriating the domestic sphere as a subjective space of creating her authorial identity.

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" has traditionally been analyzed from a feminist perspective. The story is, after all, "an American feminist classic" (Lanser, 1989, p. 415). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar portray "The Yellow Wallpaper" as symbolizing the "oppressive structures of the society in which [the protagonist/narrator] finds herself" (1979, p. 90). The story represents Victorian society's confinement of women within the masculine construction of the feminine ideals of submission and obedience. Generally speaking, feminist critics have shared similar thoughts, but as Jeannette King and Pam Morris explain, feminist critics who followed in the footsteps of Gilbert and Gubar endorsed the "tendency to enclose the heroine's problems within her own abnormal psychological state" (1989, p. 24). Most contemporary critics have therefore chosen more

specific approaches to analyze the feminist concerns in this story, focusing on genre (Davison, 2004), linguistic and stylistic analysis (Betjemann, 2008), psychoanalysis (Suess, 2003), and pedagogy (Nolan, 2004). Barbara A. Suess advises critics to make their readings of this short story as specific as possible to address its themes pertinently and meticulously; she recommends examining specific notions and linking them to the narrator's responses to the "oppressive structures of the society" (Suess, 2003, p. 81)

In its utilization of Connell's concept hegemonic masculinity, our article seeks to examine the female tactic of subversion in "The Yellow-Wall Paper" from a new angle that suggests a new contribution to feminist studies of this short story. Our analysis does not fall in line with those of early critics who "enclose the heroine's problems within her own abnormal psychological state" (King and Morris, 1989, p. 24). Nor does it support the claims of more recent critics who blame the protagonist for her own abnormality. To the best of our knowledge, none of the researchers have used Connell's concept to address the issues under discussion; however, the use of this concept adds a new understanding to the feminist concerns in this short story.

The sociological concept of hegemonic masculinity originates from the theory of cultural hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, and it examines power relations that dominate social classes. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci proposed two widely influential notions "hegemony" and "manufacture of consent" (Gramsci 1971), using the later concept to suggest that the State can rule its civil society through consent, a society wherein ideas and beliefs are shaped, and hegemony is reproduced through culture. Gramsci initiated a struggle over ideas and beliefs to create counter-hegemony (Gramsci 1971) that contests dominant ideas and beliefs that are socially constructed. Gramsci's thoughts about how power is shaped in the realm of knowledge, and can be maintained through consent rather than force, have inspired many approaches and theories in various domains.

By building on Gramsci's concept, Connell utilizes the concept of hegemonic masculinity as an instrument of critical analysis to identify the

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masculine practices that aim to maintain gender inequality. The adjective hegemonic entails cultural dynamics through which a social class claims and sustains its dominating and superior position. Hence, hegemonic masculinity connotes the culturally idealized masculine figure that positions himself at the top of social hierarchy, associating manhood with power, knowledge and public domain. This concept has widely been debated and redefined (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 831). The basic idea, however, remains that hegemonic masculinity is "a culturally idealized form" and "is both a personal and collective project" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645-646). Male-centered culture has positioned men superior to women; it has empowered them socially and financially and made public practices exclusively masculine, whereas women have been relegated to unfortunate and inferior status. In "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?" (1993), Mike Donaldson explains that while there are men who might not practice this hegemony, they benefit from the culture that enforces male dominance. This concept therefore shows power politics that underpin the construction of hierarchal gender-based relations.

Hegemonic masculinity suggests that there are certain ideals espoused exclusively by the masculine figure based on certain characteristics that are exclusively masculine, which, in turn, encourage men to internalize codes that form the basis of their treatment of women. These characteristics include: physical strength, aggression, toughness and success, to new a few (Donaldson, 1993). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity exists in relation to the subordinate other (Connell, 1987). According to this logic, hegemonic masculinity imposes a set of characteristics if not achieved a man cannot be fully unfeminine.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity in literary studies suggests "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Hegemonic masculinity positions men in power and women in complete, oppressive, submission to patriarchal figures of authority. Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt maintain that "hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through

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culture, institutions, and persuasion" (2005, p. 832). The story shows that the husband's mechanisms demonstrate Connell's theory that masculine hegemony is achieved through cultural reproduction of values and beliefs, institutional control of knowledge and regulations, and its forceful, convincing and binding instructions.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Its Representation in "The Yellow Wall-Paper"

Within the context of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", hegemonic masculinity is exercised by the husband, a physician who imposes his definition and interpretation of his wife's "psychosis" which is the result of his oppression. The "rest cure" the husband imposes on his wife is a defensive mechanism he uses to secure her submission to patriarchal demarcation of societal spheres. It is a caricature of the feminine ideals of submission and obedience expected of women in the Victorian society. The wife-husband relationship in the story is illustrative of the asymmetrical dynamic of power in gender relations, and this ordering of power prefigures Connell's "hegemonic masculinity", which entails the ability of patriarchy to impose a definition of the situation, to set the conditions in which life matters are understood and issues should be discussed, to devise ideals and demarcate spaces and boundaries. John seeks to use the male-run medical institution to dismiss his wife's right to autonomy and power, which she eventually attains through active imagination and writing. John's prevention of his wife from writing, a traditionally masculine domain, originates from his conception of female writing, a silent form of speech, as defiance to patriarchal authority that curtails women's means of expressions. His imposition of the "rest cure" over his wife can therefore be explained as a strategy to disempower the narrator, that is, the wife who seeks to contravene patriarchal structures. In other words, the rest cure aims to clip his wife's agency, relegating her to a submissive, passive role in the male-dominated society.

The husband in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is associated with reason and the physical, perceptual world, while the wife is linked to imagination, fantasy and superstitions. The narrator's sentimental hallucination about the "queer house" she inhabits is, arguably, the product of the Gothic

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readings she imbibed: "A colonial mansion, a hereditary state, I would say a haunted house and reach the height of romantic felicity" (Gilman, 1980, p. 647). The house is based on a gothic setting. The narrator remarks that "there is something strange about the house – I can feel it" (Gilman, 1980, p. 684). This apparent irrationality of the narrator / wife is in contrast to her husband's rationality and reason: "John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (Gilman, 1980, p. 647). The irrationality of the wife is illuminated in her repetitive use of the anonymous pronoun "one", which highlights her selfnegation and her dependence on her husband who controls her bodily movement and mind. While the narrator's voice is associated with "fantasy" and "hysterical tendencies", she sarcastically represents doctors - her husband, her brother and Weir Mitchell - as the voices of reason and rational discourse. The narrator is torn between her personal feelings and the society's view of what is proper for women. Since she has internalized her husband's demands, the narrator tells readers that "so I take phosphates or phosphites - whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again" (Gilman, p. 648). While these lines show the wife's disbelief in the maledominated institution of medicine, she also highlights her exclusion from this discourse of reason. In Lacanian terms, the wife inhabits the imaginary order of fantasy and irrationality while the husband figures out the symbolic order of reason and law. Suess's Lacanian reading of this short story represents the oppressive and arrogant abuse of patriarchal authority "as the primary source of the protagonist's ultimately incomplete inability to separate fantasy from reality" (2003, p. 81). This Lacanian reading reveals that the "abnormality" of the narrator is an inevitable consequence of the Victorian Society's oppressive patriarchal order⁽¹⁾.

For a comprehensive Lacanian reading of this short story, see Barbara A. Suess. (2003). The writings on the wall: Symbolic orders in "The Yellow Wallpaper". *Women's Studies: An inter-disciplinary journal 32* (1), 79-97, DOI: 10.1080/00497870310086.

This social order, which is nurtured by male-run familial and medical institutions, intimidates the female narrator and coerces her into a perpetual state of uncertainty. The wife narrates "if a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?" (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). This quotation reflects that the patriarch, the male-run medical institution, and the male-dominated family impose a definition of the situation of the (sick) woman and set the terms in which her circumstances should be perceived and issues should be discussed; it devises ideals and demarcates spaces and boundaries. The tone here suggests various layers of masculine hegemony practiced over the narrator. Hegemonic masculinity urges the woman to conform to the established patriarchal conceptions of the (psychotic) female. Even though the wife is the narrator, she is, as in the words quoted above, spoken rather than speaking, and she is supposed to internalize her husband's construction of her.

The wife's internalization of the dictates of her husband prefigures Foucault's notion of disciplinary power as a panopticon as it reflects the wife's internalization of John's defined feminine ideal role as a system of self-surveillance. The panopticon functions as a paralyzing and haunting force that restricts people and perpetuates their fear and paranoia; it is "a cruel, ingenious cage" that aims to discipline human actions and impose surveillance (Foucault, 1995 [1975], p. 205). This disciplinary force ultimately aims to etiolate the observed wife; it precedes but anticipates the complete submission of the female protagonist⁽²⁾. The structure of the haunted house in "The Yellow Wallpaper", where John confines his wife so as to treat her "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency", is an instance of this hegemonic masculinity (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). The narrator refers to the house using images laced with prison overtones: "there are hedges and walls and gates that *lock*, and lots of separate little houses" (Gilman, p. 648); "the windows are *barred* for little

⁽²⁾ For further analysis of this story within the framework of panopticism, see John S. Bak. (1994). Escaping the jaundiced eye: Foucauldian Panopticism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". *Studies in Short Fiction 31* (1), 39-49.

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children" (Gilman, 1980, p. 648); "she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard" (Gilman, 1980, p. 654). The barred windows and "gates that lock" signify the wife's imposed physical and mental confinement. The wife's imprisonment connects her with the madwoman in the attic as she is confined in "the nursery at the top of the house" (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). The confinement of the wife in the house where she imagines that she is crawling behind the yellow wallpaper shows that, in a male-dominated society, men suppress women and any anticipatory dissent.

John's hegemonic and panopticon practice reflects the gender-based delimitations of 19th century society; in other words, John represents "law and order and reality" (Suess, 2003, p. 86). He is the representative of the patriarch in the story who imposes his own order and constructs and observes the reality of the protagonist. The wife's description of her husband as rational rather than emotional (Gilman, 1980, p. 647) emphasizes his position as a "censorious and paternalistic physician" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 71). His treatment of his wife's mental sickness by isolation and prevention of any intellectual stimulation is "a cure worse than the disease" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 89). John acts as an oppressive ruler who suppresses his wife in all domains: personal, professional and social. He orders "a schedule prescription for each hour in the day" and imposes his instructions on the narrator (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). John enforces his wife's inactivity which deepens her despair and desolation (Gilman, 1980, p. 648-84). Rest is what her husband says is right so "he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal" (Gilman, 1980, p. 653). The narrator learns to "never mention" what John does not want to hear or when she tries, John gives her "such a stern reproachful look" which silences her (Gilman, 1980, p. 652). John seeks to maintain his patriarchal control grip through creating his own definition of how a sick woman should be, wherein he calls her into conformity and suspends any imaginative tendencies that would impel any disorder or disruption. John's use of his medical power goes beyond a loving care; he uses it to officially institutionalize his hegemonic masculinity. King and Morris (1989) contend that the narrator "accepts the terms that are used to define her", and they see her complicity as self-acknowledgment of her

mental illness (p. 28). They believe that the narrator's illness stems from guilt over her inability to achieve the feminine ideal of a caring mother and a dutiful wife, that is "complicity with the ideology that labels such dissatisfaction as 'abnormal'" (King and Morris, 1989, p. 27). The narrator says explicitly that the woman has to come to terms with the gender-basedinferiority imposed by her society to the extent she equates her disagreement with this rhetoric to deterioration in her health conditions. The husband here is in charge of controlling his wife's thoughts and potentials. The narrator's nervous condition is, therefore, socially constructed in the sense that her depression is exacerbated by her thinking of her well-being, which runs counter to her husband's dismissiveness of society, stimulus and thinking as ways out of the confines of depression.

The fact that the wife's movement and thinking are curtailed by her dominating husband reflects the ultimate, nightmarish purpose of marriage in 19th century hegemonic masculinity contexts. Gilman depicts marriage as the negation of the female identity, marking her physical and psychic imprisonment. The Victorian society constructed the image of the ideal wife suitable to the institution of the Victorian marriage as the one who submitted her will to that of her husband. 19th century American society propagated that there are biological and mental differences between the man and the woman, a belief that informed the gender-based differentiation and hierarchy, where women should be silent, obedient, loving, pretty, delicate, fragile and submissive, and men are of strong, powerful, protective and superior nature. As Susan Cruea (2005) argues, "at that time, women were the continual victims of social and economic discrimination", and even the choices of middle-and upper-class women "were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood" (p. 187). These limited choices entail women's subjection to domestic dependency, depending on their husband to gain personal worth and financial support. In other words, the perfect woman (within the Victorian cult of domesticity) is the woman who dedicates herself and all resources to the well-being of her husband and the patriarchal society. The wife is not an independent and autonomous individual; she is expected to repress her wishes and she has no power over her own person or mind, "but one

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expects that in marriage", she notes (Gilman, 1980, p. 647). This parodies the Victorian man's belief in domination over women and their status as 'Angel in the House', which is a phrase, or a longstanding cliché coming from Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House" (1854), a poem he dedicated to his wife whom he considers perfect in the eyes of the patriarchal society.

Gilman's story forms a counter- hegemony (Gramsci 1971) that contests dominant ideas and beliefs that are socially constructed, deconstructing the Victorian construction of gender. Gilman writes back against hegemonic masculinity that suggests that there are certain ideals espoused exclusively by the masculine figure based on certain characteristics that are exclusively masculine, which, in turn, encourage men to internalize codes that form the basis of their treatment of women. As noted by Rula Quawas (2006), Gilman "calls for a literature that presents women with complexity and in a realistic variety of ways, rather than merely as innocent ingénues, angelic wives and mothers, or shameful fallen women" (p. 38). Her female protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a madwoman, schizoid whose adoption of her husband's construction of her turns out to be a complex form of subversion. Throughout the story, the protagonist demonstrates a repulsive attitude and disagreeable practices that precede but anticipate her identification with mysterious and grotesque nature of the wallpaper which ultimately animated her and precluded resolution. This story ostracizes the representation of women within a simplified framework of representation that would condemn their behaviors and manners, or at least call them abnormal. This story, therefore, functions as an instructional piece of work that aims to teach what it means and how complex it is to be a woman in the Victorian time.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" should be understood as a warning call to the patriarch not to hegemonically repress women's physical and intellectual vigor. The narrator says that she "tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him [her husband] the other day" to ask for his permission to let her "go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia" (Gilman, 1980, p. 651). John's denial of this wish aims to instruct his wife not to think about her conditions and wishes independently, and to thwart her attempt to think

of herself as a person who is able to get into a reasonable conversation. She is treated like a hospitalized patient who is unable to make the right decisions; even she will endanger herself if she does not stick to the medical prescriptions and regulations. According to John, his patient wife should, instead, appreciate the restrictions imposed on her, which aim at improving her health and saving her from deterioration. This suppression of the protagonist's conversationist agenda resuscitates embedded, expansive model of spatial, as well as linguistic, systematic process of multiple and amputated oppressive patriarchal representational praxis for women. This illustrates the concept of hegemonic masculinity which has recently been described as "a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways" (Jewkes and Morrell, 2012, p. 40). This gendered spatial division aims to reinforce the alleged superiority of the man and the inferiority of women, which suggests gender-based hierarchy that entails and justifies the domination of men over women.

John's control of his wife's mind and movement and his disregard of her imagination resonate, as we pointed out, with Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity which is maintained through the subordination and exclusion of opposing discourses that contravene patriarchal structures of rationality and reason. However, John's aural closure to his wife's fantasies and his inability to engage with a dialogue with her shows that the hegemonic masculine mode of control is an oppressive system that suppresses the tensions of the narrator's and John's lived experiences. The narrator's indulgence in thinking and writing that escape John's control and appropriation demonstrate resistance to the hegemonic masculinity that John perpetuates and his inability to fulfill the hegemonic, masculine identity, for he, as we will see, becomes the known object to his wife's authority.

Subversion of Hegemonic Masculinity

"The Yellow Wallpaper" demonstrates women's awareness of what Gramsci called "manufacture of consent". Gilman shows an awareness of how patriarchal ideas and beliefs are shaped in ways that reproduce male cultural hegemony. Her protagonist, therefore, contests this hegemony by

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trying to interpret her situation in feminine terms. The narrator's obsession with the mysterious wallpaper reflects her endeavor to interpret her mysterious presence and grotesque nature under the hegemonic masculinity so as to break free from the masculine construction of social reality in the 19th century. The narrator's writing and her obsession with the wallpaper mark her vulnerability to insanity which turns out to be a defensive strategy - what Gramsci called "counter-hegemony" - against the roles and prescriptions imposed upon her by her husband. In other words, she is subversively complicit with the patriarchal order in the sense that her apparent submission is a subjective space of contemplation and subversive plots. There are many instances in the short story that illustrate the narrator's fighting spirit against John's condescending power. This is revealed through her contradictory discourse which eventually leads to her revolution: "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?" (Gilman, p. 648). Here the wife asserts her need for a life beyond the duties of being a submissive, obedient and dutiful wife. The repetitive use of the adverb "personally" and the first pronoun (of subjectivity) "I" show that, in spite of her adherence to the dictates of male figures of authority, she has her own voice and emerging authentic selfhood lurking behind the false "self" created by her husband's pressure and, oxymoronically, "kind" oppression. As an act of subversive complicity, she adopts the oppressive position of self-abnegation via her use of the anonymous, impersonal pronoun "one". However, the narrator's subversive views should be kept secret and beyond the control and appropriation of her husband or they will be met with "heavy opposition" as is her writing which she perceives as therapeutically relieving, and intellectually empowering (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). Quawas (2006) argues that:

[i]n The Yellow Wallpaper, Gilman presents the narrator's insanity as a form of rebellion against the medical practices and the political policies that have kept women out of the professions, denied them their political rights, and kept them under male control in the family and the state (p. 41)

The narrator's diary, for example, shows an attempt to subvert John's authority. In the house, she creates her own writing space that allows imagination and power that defies the limits imposed on her own creativity. She narrates that "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" (Gilman, 1980, p. 649). The narrator's confinement has allowed a critical stance, subverting the link between the signifier and signified.

While the house conventionally signifies the exclusion of women from the masculine domains of writing and politics and their immersion in the domestic business, the narrator uses this gothic space as an inspiring force that yields insights and introduces a female gothic powerful practice that runs counter to patriarchal narratives and modes of representations that John and his practices manifest. Because John is not immediately dominating her body and mind when he is physically absent from the house, she is able to rethink her relationship with him, and thus the patriarchal institutions. She now has a temporal and spatial relief from a restrictive narrative and representational patriarchal agenda. Using an ironic language, she narrates "it is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so" (Gilman, 1980, p. 652). The narrator's irony suggests her astute awareness of John's patriarchal mechanisms that seek to maintain hegemonic masculinity through soft and disciplinary power that ironically expects in return the wife's passive devotion and sagacity. As the above quotation suggests, John uses his profession to intimidate his wife into accepting his superiority and acting the way he would like her to act. Furthermore, the narrator's ironic description of her husband as "wise", which, of course, reveals his foolishness and inability to control his wife's subversive thoughts and actions, sheds light on the psychological defense of splitting and projection. The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1946) referred to this defensive state as the "paranoid-schizoid" position where through splitting, that is, experiencing oneself and others in polarized ways (e.g., strong or weak), and then projecting the unwanted qualities onto the other, the subject can remain in seeming control. While John links himself to

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reason and his wife to irrationality that he disregards, his defensive repudiation of irrationality shows that his power is based upon illusions. He becomes a text to be read by his wife who is, in turn, beyond his reasoning.

The narrator's physical and intellectual practices inside the house suggest a revolutionary attempt, counter-hegemony, to subvert this hegemonic masculinity. Writing, in particular, is described by the narrator as an imaginary release from the restrictions imposed on her. Some critics, as stated above, have read the following words as a sign of complicity: "am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again". However, these words signify the narrator's critique of the patriarchal mechanism that aims to prolong her illness, and thus passivity (Gilman, 1980, p. 648). While John's treatment aims at stripping her of any potential that could challenge his hegemony, she gains power and autonomy, imagining and inventing a world of her own.

The narrator seeks to create a new self-identity and sense of communality through her connection with and ultimately her release of the women/woman in the wallpaper. At the end of the story, the narrator is no longer imprisoned and locked by her husband/the patriarch; she instead locks him outside the door and the text that she inhabits and writes. She says to John, "'I've got out at last, [...] in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the wallpaper, so you can't put me back'" (Gilman, 1980, p. 656). These lines signify the wife's assertion of her personal identity and subjectivity as she transcends her former, oppressed self, Jane, who is defined in relation to John and to the male-dominated institution of medicine. Elaine R. Hedges (1973) points out that:

There has been no previous reference to a 'Jane' in the story, and no one must speculate as to reference. It could conceivably be a printer's error, since there are both a Julia and a Jennine in the story (Jennie is the housekeeper [and the narrator's sister-in law] and functions as a guardian / imprisoner for the heroine, and Julia is an infernal female relative). On the other hand, it could be that Gilman is referring here to the narrator herself, to the narrator's sense that she has gotten free of both her husband

⁻ An - Najah Univ. J. Res. (Humanities). Vol. 37(3), 2023

and her 'Jane' self: free, that is, of herself as defined by marriage and society (pp. 62-63).

Thematically, we concur with Hedges' argument that Jane is the narrator's patriarchally constructed self. However, her suppression of this oppressed self-shows a transformational stage in the narrator's/women's lives who declares her achievement of autonomy and release.

The narrator thinks of the wallpaper as an imprisoning space that aims to strip the women behind its bars of agency. Therefore, she needs to undermine its power and shake off its limiting structure. Gilman's narrator and the women behind the wallpaper "become doubles, mirroring each other's fragmentation", ultimately combining themselves together to form a coherent identity and female community (Dosani, 2018, para. 4). The narrator's identification with the entrapped women behind the wallpaper suggests an attempt to piece fragmentary struggles of women for selfrepresentation and power together to be able to claim recognition and restore unity. Behind the uncanny wallpaper, the protagonist discovers not only reflections of suffocation and confinement but also her doppelgänger, who "embodies patterns that the patriarchal order ignores, suppresses, fears as grotesque, or fails to perceive at all" (Treichler, 1984, p. 62). The disavowed intricacies of collective identity and coherent female community subvert power and undermine gendered binary structures. The narrator/author initiates a female counter discourse that claims the right of personal, social and professional self-definition in opposition to the patriarchal binary framework of thought that established specific boundaries: rational/irrational, superior/inferior, wise/mad that respectively defined what the man and woman is.

This subversion allows a new perception of the world in feminist terms. The narrator is now moving outside the oppressive bars of the patriarch and acting independently of the usual confines of the patriarchal oppression. This marks female ascendency to power and liberation. The narrator now has the power to question the actions of the patriarch and muse "now why should that man have fainted?" (Gilman, 1980, p. 656). "Now" suggests a temporal transition from the past to the present and change; while in the past the woman was situated in an inferior position

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that entails lack of voice and power, in the present John – the physician of high standing – is voiceless and powerless. The excision of John in the end of the text is a type of oral revenge in that the wife pushes her husband to her previously oppressed and spoken about self. The narrator is powerful enough in her new sense of collective identity to "creep over him every time" (Gilman, 1980, p. 656). She overturns the masculine hegemony that John represents and declares a "feminine counter-hegemony". Creeping women ascend to power, and they relegate men into the margin at the end of the spectrum. While she is treated like "blessed little goose" (Gilman, 1980, p. 649) and "little girl" (Gilman, 1980, p. 652) by her husband, she, once she sets the woman behind the wall paper free, refers to her husband using terms of address that emphasize her subversion of patriarchal authority. The narrator uses the words "that man" instead of John to emphasize that John represents masculine power in general and "that" suggests his lack of immediate presence in the present, or the physical distance between both. By referring to her husband as "that man", she suppresses his proper name, John, and the multifaceted power he used to represent; she dehumanizes him and pushes him to the sphere of monsterity the way he tries to objectify and deprive her of identity. Respectively, the narrator represents women who are able in the present to claim central power and move freely, whereas the man is locked out, and he even lost consciousness, remained "fainted" and spoken about rather than speaking. In other words, the narrator claims authority and control over the spatial and in extension the textual space that she creates in secret.

The ending of this story, therefore, marks the triumph of women at many levels, even at the medical one. Within the context of the new historicist paradigm of resistance, subversion and containment, the story ends with the containment of the dominant patriarchal ideology represented by John. Gilman calls the reader to rethink the patriarchal fallacy that the narrator lives in a state of psychosis and her intensified mental illness leads her to suffer more at the hands of the patriarchal establishment. The author suggests that this establishment purposely (mis)diagnosed the woman with mental illness to formalize/legalize their oppression of her. In this sense, Gilman calls the reader, once more, to

appreciate her critique of the medical institution that has been complicit and dominated by the patriarch. The ending marks unprecedented triumph of women after they have identified with each other and have combined their efforts together.

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