

Yellow wallpaper – critical comments

- **Gilman** – “it was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.” {Gilman, “why I wrote “the yellow wallpaper”, 1913}
- **Carl Degler** – Gilman was “the leading intellectual in the women’s movement in the United States’ in her time” {Women and economics (reprint ed., New York : Harper and Row, 1966(, p. xiii.)}
- **Elaine R. Hedges** – “the story is one of the rare pieces of literature we have by a nineteenth century woman which directly confronts the sexual politics of the male-female, husband-wife relationship”
- - “it is a feminist document, dealing with sexual politics at a time when few writers felt free to do so.” {Afterword, Elaine R. Hedges, 1973}
- **Gilbert and Gubar** – the author endows the narrators own imaginings like “a fairy godmother showering gold on a sleeping heroine.” {GILBERT AND GUBAR, *The Manwoman in the Attic*, 1978, pp. 89-92}
- - “what *The Yellow Wallpaper* shows she knew, too, is that even when a supposedly ‘mad’ woman has been sentenced to imprisonment in the ‘infected’ house of her own body, she may discover that, as Sylvia Plath was to put it 70 years later, she has ‘a self to recover, a queen.’”
- **Deborah Thomas** - “women were constricted to the set parameters that men determined. . . [and]conditioned to accept these boundaries and remain in place

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: {Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935)}

- (at 17 she wrote) “Am going to try hard this winter to see if I cannot enjoy myself like other people” (this is a painful indicator of the deprivations of her childhood).
- In her late teens she began to ponder “the injustices under which women suffered” {page 61}
- (Reflecting on her courtship with Charles Stetson) she says there was “no natural response of inclination or desire, no question of “Do I love him?” only, “Is it right?” {page 82}
- A woman “should be able to have marriage and motherhood, and do her work in the world also” {page 83} (yet she was not convinced by her own arguments)
- She describes depression as “a sort of grey fog drifted across my mind, a cloud that grew and darkened” {page 87}. “unbearable inner misery” “ceaseless tears”
- Within a month of birth she became “a mental wreck” {page 89}
- Dr. Mithell told her to “never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live” {page 96}

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- like the narrator she would often “crawl into remote closets and under beds – to hide from the grinding pressure of that profound distress”

WOMEN AND ECONOMICS {Charlotte Perkins Gilman. 1898/1998. *Women and Economics*. New York: Dover.} :

- “women are kept like horses” {page 13}
- “women are used like cows” {page 43}
- “The same human energies and human desires and ambitions within. But all that she may wish to have, all that she may wish to do...must come to her through a small gold ring” {page 71}
- “economic progress, however, is almost exclusively masculine”
- To take from any community its male workers would paralyze it economically to a far greater degree than to remove its female workers”
- “the male human being is thousands of years in advance of the female in economic status”
- “the economic status of women generally depends upon that of men”
- “the labor which the wife performs in the household is given as part of her functional duty, not as employment”
- “Because of her maternal duties, the human female is said to be unable to get her own living”... “Does the human mother, by her motherhood, thereby lose control of brain and body, lose power and skill and desire for any other work? [...] we do not. We see the human mother worked far harder than a mare, labouring her life long in the service, not of her children only, but of men; husbands, brothers, fathers, whatever male relatives she has”
- “The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more than they otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in society. But so are horses.
- “women work longer and harder than most men”
- “The human female, the world over, works at extra-maternal duties for hours enough to provide her with an independent living, and then is denied independence on the ground that motherhood prevents her working!”