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**The Representation of Women's Mental Disorder in
Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*
(1892)**

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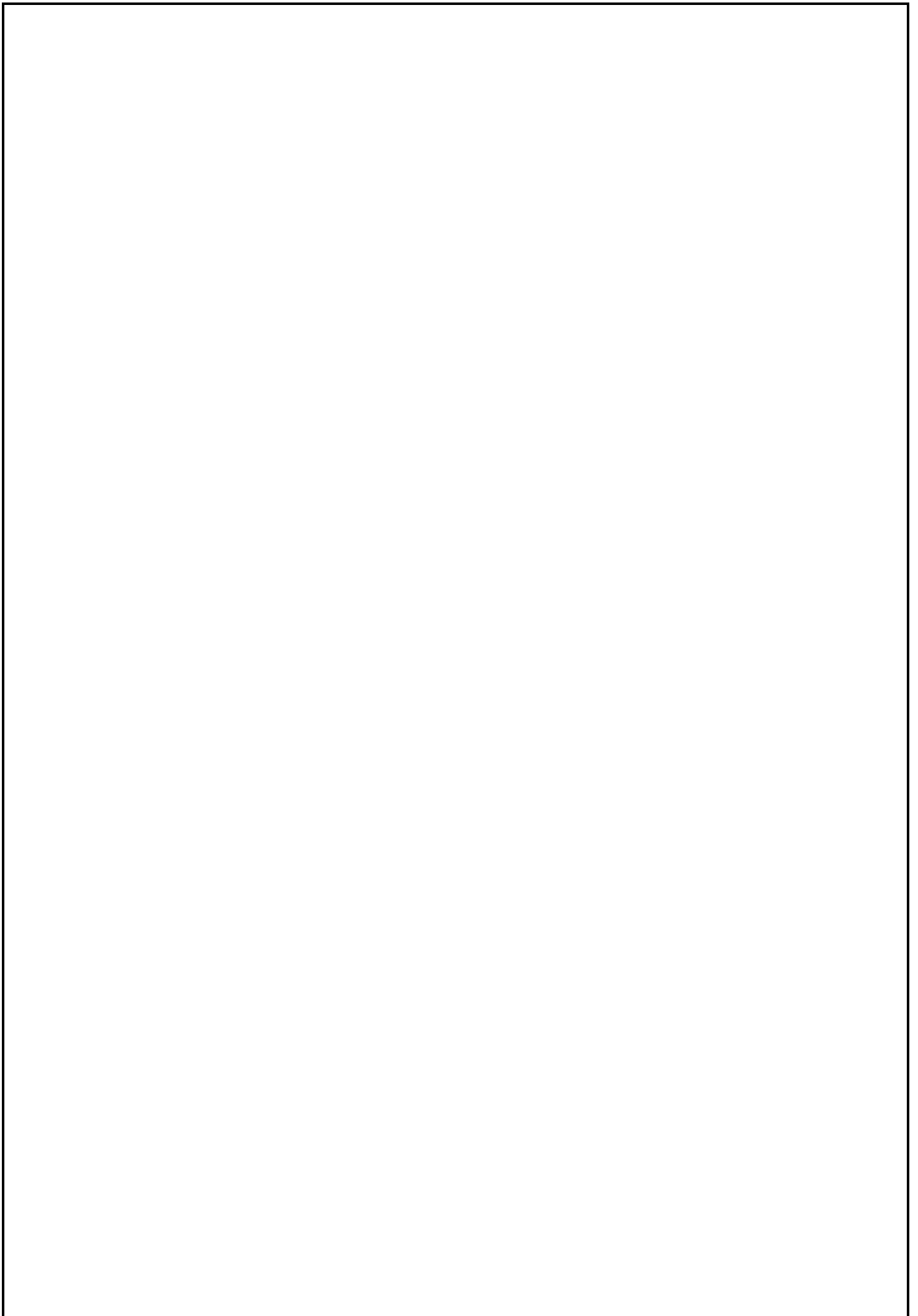
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Dedications:

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

I dedicate this work to my loving parents for their love and support

To my lovely sister and beloved brothers

To my loyal and close friends

May God bless you all

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Abstract:

During the nineteenth century, American women were regarded as submissive and weak creatures. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in her well-known short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), gave an image of women's struggles at that time. The purpose of this dissertation is to study the terrible consequences of true womanhood and male oppression on women's mental health. In addition, it reveals the serious effects of the "rest cure," the treatment followed to heal women with mental health disorders at that time, and how it drove the protagonist of "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" to madness. All in all, this dissertation demonstrates how Charlotte Perkins Gilman managed to write despite her illness and the oppression she was facing, as it emphasizes her fight as a woman and a female writer for her rights and freedom. This thesis applies the historical approach to analyse women's status during the Nineteenth century in order to reach the results.

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General Introduction

The nineteenth century is well known as the age of patriarchy and male dominance. Men were the primary wage earners and the "bread winners" of their wives, mothers, and sisters. On the other hand, women's lives were limited to the domestic sphere. Their duty was to make life easier for men by doing house chores, preparing food, and taking care of children. They were prevented from the smallest rights, such as speaking about their feelings, thoughts, or will for freedom. In the middle of this battle, the only weapon they had was their pen. Thus, female writers during that time used their literary works to talk about their tough experiences and the oppression they suffered from because of both society and men. In addition to this, they wanted to record an authentic image of the challenges of being a woman in the nineteenth century.

Feminist literary criticism studied literature written by women through the centuries and noticed that works describing women's status at the beginning of the nineteenth century belonged to the subordination phase. Since female writers used their female characters to reflect on their own experiences, the heroine of their works during this phase was pictured as weak and submissive to society's norms and the rules dictated by men.

As a result of all this submissiveness and oppression, many women, including some female authors, suffered from depression and several mental health disorders. Due to the fact that physicians were not equipped to deal with those kinds of illnesses, they introduced the "rest cure" as a treatment. It was basically a long period of inactivity for the sick woman, where she was prevented from leaving the room or doing any activity, including working, exercising, socializing, reading, or writing. All they were asked to do was eat and sleep, as doctors assumed that was all they needed to get well.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as a woman who also suffered from imprisonment, oppression, and the "rest cure," created feminist fireworks with her short story "*The*

Yellow Wallpaper". In this semi-autobiography, which took the form of a secret diary, she represented the image of American women during the nineteenth century, their resistance, and the mental health disorders they suffered from.

This dissertation serves to study the challenges of being a woman with ambition in the nineteenth century. "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" is taken as an example to shed light on the restriction of women's rights and the serious mental illnesses caused by this forced conformity, as well as the fight of female writers of that century for their voices to be heard. Therefore, the aim of this research work is to answer the following questions:

- What were the living conditions of American women in the nineteenth century?
- How did the nineteenth century's patriarchal society affect women's mental health?

This dissertation contains two chapters. The first chapter, "American Women in the nineteenth Century," is theoretical, and it provides a historical background for nineteenth-century American society. It focuses on the living conditions of women as well as society's beliefs and norms that restricted their rights and treated them as mere objects in the hands of men. The end of this chapter sheds light on female writers of that age and the aim behind their writings.

The second chapter, "Patriarchal Oppression and Forced Conformity in *The Yellow Wallpaper*," applies the aspects tackled in the first chapter to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*". It highlights the misunderstanding and mistreatment of the protagonist by everyone around her, including her caring husband, as well as her sufferance to reach freedom of self-expression, which ended with her going insane.

Chapter One:

American Women in the Nineteenth Century

1.1.Introduction:

During the nineteenth century, the United States of America witnessed tremendous changes in the domestic and social lives of its citizens. In addition to the civil war, the market revolution, and the social class system, this era was marked as the age when men's and women's roles were more defined than they had ever been. Although women were an important part of society, they were denied all their rights, such as working, studying, deciding who to wed, and even expressing their feelings and thoughts. As a result of all the oppression they were facing, female authors decided to start fighting for their rights through writing.

This chapter investigates the major historical and social backgrounds of the lives of American women during the nineteenth century. It represents their status in a patriarchal society and sheds light on the extent of their oppression as well as the restriction of their rights by society and men. Eventually, it presents the serious consequences of all this oppressive patriarchy. The end of this chapter enlightens the reader about women writers during this century and their call for freedom.

1.2. The Social Life in Nineteenth Century's America:

After the civil war (1861-1865) and the abolition of slavery, the American society witnessed an era of change as life started to be peaceful and prosperous. However, there were still some issues within the social structure. The American society of that time was known for being divided into classes: the upper class, new money, middle class, and lower class. However, only three of them were considered as the main classes in America: the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class.

A social class could be defined as a group of people who have the same living conditions and who are similar in terms of income and prestige in society. Therefore, different social classes had different working and living conditions, income, power, authority, life-style and life chances. (Marwick 2). People who belonged to the upper

class were lucky enough to never perform manual labour. They were landowners who gained their money by investments, and hired lower class workers who worked for them. In addition to this, entry into this upper class required both real money and the acceptance of those already considered as the social elite.

The middle class, on the other hand, was divided into two categories: higher level and lower level. For this reason, it consisted of those who earned their money by working in both high and low-wage jobs. The last class, or the lower class, was basically for poor people who did not have access even to clean water and food, education, or proper clothing. During this period and with this social structure, gender divisions grew more sharply defined than at any time in history. (Meade et al. 27)

1.3. The Cult of Domesticity:

As the American society was divided into classes, women also belonged to different groups. Although each class had its own lifestyle and different way of living, white American women were all victims of social and economic discrimination.

Thanks to the development of industry during the nineteenth century, some middle-class women found work in factories. On the other hand, women from the lower class were obliged to serve those who belonged to the upper one. They took care of their children and did household duties like cooking and cleaning. However, "low wages, the absence of upward mobility, depressing and unhealthy working conditions, all made marriage an attractive survival strategy for working-class women." (Smith13). In other words, women's working conditions were poor and safety measures were almost nonexistent. Therefore, their choices were limited to marriage and motherhood. They were forced by society to choose marriage over a career, and this gave birth to the so-called "Cult of Domesticity".

The "Cult of Domesticity", also known as the "Cult of True Womanhood", is a term used to refer to a set of beliefs that exalted women's role in the private sphere (Thompson 243). As believed by Americans in the nineteenth century, the true

woman is the one who upheld the four main principles: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. (Cogan 65). These virtues combined created a keeper of morality and decency within the home. The woman was not simply discouraged from all "manly" pursuits but punished in some manner for them. Smith-Rosenberg writes:

Women were sharply discouraged from expressing competitive inclinations or asserting mastery in such "masculine" areas as physical skill, strength, and courage, or in academic, scientific, or commercial pursuits. Rather they were encouraged to be coquettish, entertaining, nonthreatening, and nurturing. Male religious writers and educators forbade overt anger and violence as unfeminine and vulgar and they did not reward curiosity, intrusiveness, exploratory behaviour, in women. Indeed, when such characteristics conflicted with the higher feminine values of cleanliness, deportment, unobtrusiveness, or obedience, they were criticized or punished. (Smith 213)

Women and men were expected to fill separate spheres of society. While men were expected to be the voters, legislators, doctors, and the ones to create an industrialized civilization, a true woman was supposed to protect herself for her future husband, then get married and have kids rather than pursue a career (Cruea 188). In addition to this, husbands held authority over the choices of their wives. Everything at that time was male dominated, and society made females feel that, without men, they were nothing but weak creatures.

1.4. Male Domination and Social Barriers:

During the nineteenth century, women were controlled by a male dominated society. Their choices in life were limited to marriage and motherhood, so they would eventually fall in the domestic dependency. In other words, women's duty was doing house chores, offering a clean environment for men, taking care of their children, and remaining obedient to their fathers and then husbands after marriage.

Almost everyone was against the idea of women having control, power, a stable job, and a position alongside men in the public sphere. In fact, they were prevented even from talking about the need to have those rights. In her book *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, in Reference to the Duty of American Females* (1837), Catharine E. Beecher stated that:

Woman is to win everything by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that yield to her opinions and to gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of the heart. ...But the moment woman begins to feel the promptings of ambition, or the thirst for power, her aegis of defense is gone. All the scared protection of religion, all the poetry of romantic gallantry, depend upon woman's retaining her place as dependent and defenceless, and making no claims, and maintaining no rights but what are the gifts of honor, rectitude and love. (46)

Women were expected to protect religion, preserve a civilized society, and forget about the idea of freedom and gender equality. They were taught at a very young age that being a true woman was the most important goal for them, and their biggest responsibility was to shape the values of their sons, who were likely to have a strong impact on the nation's success (Woloch 90). Unlike boys, girls at that time were not allowed to go to school or have any access to education due to the concept of "true womanhood," which denoted that the place of a woman was in the domestic sphere. (Caughfield 7). Their role was to be mothers or wives, and they were forced to marry a man that their families chose for them.

American society of the nineteenth century taught women that they needed a man to survive. Men were the ones supposed to have a high education and work at any job. They had absolute control over their marriages and wives. On the other hand, women, who were seen as weak creatures, were forbidden from all those tasks,

and thus, they were obliged to depend on men in their lives. In his work *The Sphere and Duties of Women* (1848), George Burnap said that:

She feels herself weak and timid. She needs a protector. She is in a measure of her affection. She asks for wisdom, constancy, firmness, and she is willing to repay it all by the surrender of the full treasure of her affection. Women despise in men everything like themselves except a tender heart. It is enough that she is effeminate and weak; she does not want another like herself (70).

Moreover, women did not have the right to express their thoughts or talk about what was bothering them. Men assumed they knew better, even when it came to their wives' feelings and what was best for them. Thus, women felt like they were no longer human beings but objects and tools used by both men and society. This pushed them to feel lonely, empty, depressed, and miserable, which affected their mental health in a very negative way.

1.5. Mental Health in the Nineteenth Century:

The domestic gender roles of the nineteenth century had a huge impact on women's mental health. (Steen 186). During this era, they were pushed to sacrifice themselves and their own peace just to meet men and society's expectations and embrace the principles of a true woman. They lived with a feeling of helplessness, and weakness due to the lack of social power.

Although white women dreamed about their freedom every day and had a strong will to work and start a career, the idea of women being active in the public sphere was considered so unnatural in the nineteenth century. Society believed that women were less valuable and emotionally weak, and everyone was obliged to accept this idea as being accurate. If women's behaviour was against the social norms and they tried to achieve gender equality, they were labelled abnormal or even insane. (Ramsden 11)

In the nineteenth century, medical treatments for mental illnesses and psychological depression were nonexistent. For this reason, “doctors frequently administered S. Weir Mitchell’s famous ‘rest cure’ to women with severe nervous symptoms” (R. Suleiman 1). This treatment was basically a strict diet where the person treated was forced to stay in bed, eat well, and get massaged for at least six months, all in total isolation from family and friends.

Therefore, women who suffered from mental health illnesses were taken to asylums and prevented from leaving the room, or practicing any activity inside of the room. Some women who were lucky enough to know how to read and write started to secretly express their feelings and emotions using their pens. They could not write in front of their doctors or family members because they were not allowed to. Scientists thought that was the cure for their illnesses, but unfortunately that was not the case, and the treatment that was supposed to be a cure made women’s case even worse, and in many cases, they went insane.

1.6. Female Authors During the Nineteenth Century:

Women of the nineteenth century had many restrictions and barriers that limited their freedom and sphere of influence to the home. They were considered physically weak, and society taught them that the only way to survive was to get married and be totally dependent on their husbands. As William Blackstone, an English jurist and judge, explained in his *Commentaries on English Law* (1765-1769): "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything." (442).

On the other hand, “men filled the role of breadwinners in the public world” (M. Hawes 6). They were allowed to go to school, have higher education and the power to keep women under their control. All these gender ideologies led many women who had the ability to write to make a move and seek a place alongside men,

especially in the world of literature, so they could give history an authentic image about women's sufferance during the nineteenth century.

Female writers at that time were fighting both society and men through literary works. Each author's writings were unique, but they all used their heroine to convey a meaningful message. They put the main character in the position of women at that time, and they succeeded in portraying a veritable image of nineteenth-century society, mainly the boundaries that limited women's lives. They believed that "Only a woman can truly speak for a woman" (Cooke 129). Thus, their writings also highlighted the way men kept women in the dark, prevented them from expressing their feelings, and just used them as tools to satisfy their needs. In addition to this, they wanted to show society that women could also write about different topics, even scientific ones that were restricted to men only.

Among these writers, there were some women who suffered from psychological depression and many mental illnesses as a result of all the opposition they were facing for wanting their freedom. Those ladies were treated at home under the rest cure, and they used to express themselves in writing. Their works contained a detailed description of what was happening around them, the reason they were sick, and how their husbands and doctors treated them in a way that made their cases even worse. These literary works include Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" (1892), Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour* (1894), and Elizabeth Packard's books, such as *Modern Persecution* (1868) and *The Prisoners' Hidden Life* (1968).

1.7. Literature Written by Women Through Centuries:

In the Twentieth Century, a group of female critics attempted to go back in time and find poems, stories, and essays written by women in previous centuries, beginning in the Seventeenth century. This feminist literary criticism focused on the role given to women in literary texts by both male and female writers,

emphasizing the fact that women also had a literature of their own at that time, when everything was male-dominated.

This movement came in waves, and each wave had its own aspects. While the first wave focused on re-discovering texts written by female authors, the second one examined those female writers and their place in literary history and shed light on the treatment of female characters in works by both male and female writers. They aimed at analysing and re-evaluating the literary works by women, so that they can put them back on the right shelves next to male writers. After categorizing those books as women's writing and studying them, feminist critics, Elaine Showalter precisely, noticed that literature written by women moved through three phases: Subordination, protest, and autonomy. (Showalter 20)

Women's writings during the nineteenth century belonged to the subordination phase. Their writings were affected by the fact that they were controlled by men, as well as society and its barriers. They were ignored, kept in the dark, and unable to speak about their feelings, needs, opinions, or choices, even concerning their own marriage. However, the position of women started to change by the beginning of the twentieth century, during what is known as the protest phase. They had the courage to face men, and it could be seen through the female characters in their literary works as they started expressing themselves and speaking about their thoughts in a strong, masculine way instead of complaining about being voiceless. The last phase was the phase of autonomy, which according to Showalter was post-1960s. Female characters were finally pictured as completely independent, and they were no longer in need of a man to survive. (Tandon 85)

Almost every literary work written by women in the beginning of the nineteenth century belongs to the subordination phase. Women at that time lived in patriarchal society which was the prime obstacle to their advancement and development. Men were dominating in both public and private spheres, while women were prevented from the slightest rights and driven to madness. As a result to this oppression,

women decided to write their feelings and thoughts in the form of novels, short stories and diaries. A case in point is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's well known short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" (1892).

1.8. Conclusion:

This chapter shed light on American society during the nineteenth century, mainly the position of woman. In this respect, gender discrimination was an issue that no one is allowed to solve or discuss. Women were excluded from almost every occupation, and those who had a job did not hesitate to quit because of the awful working conditions. In other words, society made marriage the only "escape" for women. However, life after marriage was not any better due to the fact that men considered women as objects which are there to make life easier. As women were forbidden from every right and obliged to live voicelessly, they suffered from many mental illnesses, and all they had was a pen and a piece of paper to express themselves and their feelings secretly.

The following chapter is going to tackle all of these theoretical aspects within "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" (1892), a well known short story by the American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Chapter Two:

Patriarchal Oppression and Forced Conformity in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

2.1. Introduction:

In the nineteenth century's patriarchal society, when everything was male-dominated, even literacy was a masculine act. However, women who were educated enough decided to break their silence using their literary works. One of those authors is Charlotte Perkins Gilman, best known for her short story, "*The Yellow Wallpaper*". This chapter examines this story, focusing on the position of the protagonist and the miserable conditions she lived under, as well as her resistance and the awful consequences that forced obedience caused her.

2.2. Who is Charlotte Perkins Gilman? :

Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman, the American novelist, was born in 1860, in Hartford. She was a well-known writer and social activist who fought for women's rights and wrote about their suffrage in the early 1900s. Charlotte lived with her mother and brother only since her father abandoned them a short period after her birth.

As Charlotte's family was poor, she could only have a very little formal education. In 1878, she attended the Rhode Island School of Design for two years with some financial help from her father, and succeeded to get some skills. Thanks to this education, she was able to carve out a career for herself as an artist and designer of greeting cards. She also worked as a tutor and a governess in order to help and support her family. In 1884, at the age of 24, Charlotte got married to Charles Walter Stetson, a fellow artist. (Kessler 21)

One year after their marriage, in 1885, they had their first and only child, a daughter named Katharine. After her delivery, "Gilman suffered severe case of postpartum depression" (Scharnhorst XX), which is caused by profound hormonal, physical, and emotional changes. Unfortunately, the medical profession at that time

was not equipped to deal with these cases yet, and women's health problems were often diagnosed as mere nerves. Gilman visited a specialist who encouraged her to try the rest cure, and eventually, she went to the asylum to be treated.

During the period of her rest, Charlotte wrote a journal that included the smallest details about everything that happened to her every day. Once she was out of the asylum, she modified that diary and preserved the necessary details, then turned it into her best-known short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*". She hoped that this piece of work would enlighten other women who had similar experiences.

As her relationship with her husband was shaky, they both agreed to stop their marriage. She moved with her daughter to California in 1888, and they lived there until 1895. During those seven years, Charlotte focused on writing poems, short articles, stories, and child verses. In 1900, she married her cousin Houghton Gilman and lived a decent life with him until he passed away in 1934.

Two years before her husband's death, "Gilman learned that she had breast cancer in January 1932, and from that time on she prepared herself for death. She was determined not to suffer needlessly but to end her life when the pain made further work impossible and life pointless" (Gilman 19). She decided to end her life with an overdose of chloroform. She wrote in her very last letter that she preferred chloroform to cancer, and indeed, she committed suicide on 17 August 1935, after she completed her autobiography *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's writing and ideas remain an inspiration to the subsequent generations. She was a successful lecturer and intellectual who wrote about the need for women to achieve autonomy. Gilman wrote and published a dozen books and produced her own magazine, *The Forerunner* (1909- 1916), in which many of her stories appeared. Yet, her most famous work has always been "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" (1892)

2.3. Summary of *The Yellow Wallpaper* :

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" was first published in the New England Magazine, in 1892. It is a first person narrative of a nineteenth century lady suffering from postpartum depression. The story begins with the narrator describing the large house where her husband took her for a vacation. "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!"(Gilman 1) Her husband, John, was a physician, and he believed that the cure for her illness was taking a rest from literally everything. He assumed that she was suffering from nothing but a temporary nervous depression. However, her sickness was so much worse than that.

Just like any other husband in the nineteenth century, John had complete control over his wife and even her body. He forbade her from writing, working, socializing, or seeing her baby. "...and am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again." (Gilman 1). Thus, she was more like a prisoner in a room that he chose for her, spending her days alone and left with very little to do except watching the surrounding. She was not able to see her child either, and he was taken care of by a babysitter called Mary. "It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby." (Gilman 3)

The narrator was prevented from sharing her thoughts and feelings with a living soul; thus, she decided to secretly confess them to dead paper in a diary. She used to write discreetly as her husband would not allow it, and neither would his sister Jennie. Jennie was the couple's housekeeper, and although she was nice towards the narrator, she was complicit with John in preventing her from having a creative outlet. "There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing. She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!" (Gilman 4).

Since her first day in that room, the narrator felt so uncomfortable. It was a big, airy room; it had several windows with thick bars and yellow wallpaper with random patterns covering the walls. The paper was stripped off in some areas, leaving great patches, especially above the narrator's bed. (Gilman 3). She did not like the room, but she hated nothing more than that yellow wallpaper to the point that she wrote: "I never saw a worse paper in my life." (Gilman 3)

The narrator was constantly trying to convince her husband, who was also her doctor, that there was something mysterious about the room and the house. However, he never took any of that seriously. Whenever she tried to speak about her severe depression and negative thoughts, he would immediately interrupt her and try to convince her that her case was not serious. He was a physician, and perhaps that was the reason she did not get well fast, as he assumed he knew better, even concerning her own body and mental health. (Gilman 1). He prevented her from practicing any single activity because, for him, that was the cure she needed.

In her diary, the narrator wrote about how oppressed she felt because even her loving husband refused to listen and understand what she was suffering from. Then, she described her biggest fear in that house; the yellow wallpaper. She found it ugly and scary to the point that she referred to it as the worst paper she had seen in her entire life. After staring at all the patterns of that wallpaper for a long time, she found herself so obsessed with it that she started pulling all-nighters just to follow those shapes. She believed that the paper contained things that others could not see.

The narrator started seeing many women trapped behind that paper, and sometimes only one. According to her, that woman was crawling around fast, and her crawling shook the wallpaper all over. She could not endure all of that, and that woman behind the paper was driving her insane. Therefore, she asked her husband again to leave the house, yet he refused and insisted that she will feel better in that place.

Her sickness became more serious. She envisioned that woman crawling behind some bars then she shook them and tried to free herself. Thus, the protagonist decided to help her. On her last day in the house, she locked the door and threw the key into the garden, then started peeling off the yellow wallpaper to free the woman trapped inside. Once she was done, she started crawling around the room because she believed that the woman imprisoned in the wallpaper was her. When John succeeded to unlock the door, he found her roaming around the room on her knees. She told him that she finally got out of the paper and no one could put her back. He was so surprised that he fainted, yet she continued creeping over his body.

2.4. The Subordination of Women and the Will For Freedom:

In her short story "*The Yellow Wallpaper*", Charlotte Perkins Gilman tackled the subordination of women in marriage and the limitation of their freedom, as well as their willingness to be free. These themes could be seen in the relationship between the narrator and her husband, in addition to her experiences in the nursery, where she spent months isolated in a room with nothing but the yellow wallpaper.

Since the beginning of the story, the narrator pointed out her inability to share her burdens with her husband due to the difficulties of male-female relations. "John always laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (Gilman 1). He was the one who decided that she must remain inactive, and as he was both her husband and physician, she had no choice but to obey though he was unaware of her illness and what the real cure should be. "John is a physician, and perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster." (Gilman 1), "John does not know how much I really suffer." (Gilman 5)

John had almost complete control over his wife's body. He did not only prevent her from every activity she used to practice, but also from talking about her sickness and explaining her feelings. She knew that she was mentally sick, and with no one to help her. Even her brother, who was also a physician, tried to convince her that she will be okay if she follows their instructions. "You see he does not believe I am sick! If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures

friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do? My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.” (Gilman 1)

The two male characters assumed that they knew better concerning the protagonist’s body and illness. They did not give her a chance to speak about what she felt or needed. With society giving men absolute power, she was aware that, as a wife and a woman, she had to conform to the norms and accept whatever her husband said. For this reason, the question "what is one to do?" was raised more than once in the short story. It showed how oppressed the female character was.

Another image of men’s oppression was shown when the narrator’s freedom to write was associated with her husband’s absence. She used to write during the day when he was at work as that was her only chance for some freedom. “John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.” (Gilman, 4) In addition to this, she mentioned how the woman trapped in the wallpaper would come out in the daytime, while at night, she saw her struggling behind the bars in that yellow wallpaper. “At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all in the moonlight, it becomes bars!” (Gilman 12) “I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I’ll tell you why- privately I’ve seen her!” (Gilman, 15) Her imagination was a reflection of her life and imprisonment.

In this short story, the female character was desperately searching for the freedom of thought and expression. Since no one was willing to listen to her, she decided to express herself through writing. “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.*” (Gilman 4; my emphasis), this showed women’s will to be free and how men restricted their rights and had power over their lives. “There comes John, and I must put this away, — he hates to have me write a word.” (Gilman 2)

In addition to their will for freedom, Charlotte shed light on women’s desire to work. The narrator was forbidden to work during her rest because her husband

believed that working would make her case worse. “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, 1) .However, she did not agree to any of that. She knew that none of what they dictated on her was going to help her. “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 2)

The narrator knew that it was not an option for her to disobey any of her husband’s instructions, although they were harmful to her. Even if she tried to talk about her need to work and express her thoughts, nobody would support her. “It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work” (Gilman, 5). Just like any other woman in the nineteenth century, she knew that society would rise against her if she tried to ask for her right to work or join men in the public sphere.

By the end of the story, the protagonist finally witnessed freedom, her own type of freedom. In her mind, the woman trapped behind the bars in the wallpaper was her, and her bars represented the boundaries that society and her husband made for her. Thus, when she tore up the paper, she felt as though she finally gained her freedom. “I’ve got out at last...and I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (Gilman 11). The narrator went crazy due to all the oppression she faced, and that was the way she got free of her husband’s dominance.

2.5. Mental Illness and Psychological Depression:

“*The Yellow Wallpaper*” shed light on women’s mental health during the nineteenth century, as well as the "rest cure" followed by doctors to treat any mental disorder or depression. The narrator suffered from postpartum depression and her husband, who was in charge of healing her, believed that it was merely a slight hysterical depression. Therefore, he locked her up in a room for months and

forbade her from socializing or expressing her thoughts through writing. This so-called treatment was the reason behind her madness.

During the nineteenth century, medical treatments for depression, or any other mental illness, were not developed yet. Physicians were equipped to treat physical sickness only. For this reason, the narrator's husband, who was a physician, interrupted her whenever she tried to talk about her depression and explain how she feels. "John is practical in the extreme. 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."(Gilman 1). Therefore, instead of helping her mentally, he tried to help her physically by forcing her to follow the 'rest cure'.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was one of those women who experienced the rest cure in the nineteenth century, and using her protagonist, she wanted to enlighten the reader about the negative effects of this treatment, as it appeared to do more harm than good by restricting the patient's activity and independence (Mizock 16). Margaret Abigail Cleaves, an American physician and scientific writer, stated: "The hardest cases I have had to take care of professionally are those who have acquired the rest cure habit. I have a physician under care now, this time a woman, who regrets piteously that she was not given something to feed her intelligence instead of an unqualified rest cure" (Cleaves 148). In her case, the narrator needed to express her thoughts and be free to behave the way she desired. She said: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus" (Gilman 2). Charlotte wanted to show her doctor that this was not the cure she needed, and "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" became a key social protest against the mental health treatment of women during the nineteenth century (Mizock 17).

The narrator's mental illness was severe, and with the yellow wallpaper dwelling increasingly in her mind, she went insane. According to colour psychology, some colours are able to evoke certain moods and eventually have an influence over behaviour and well-being (Elliot 368). Although yellow is bright and associated with sunshine, "some parents have observed that their babies tend to cry more in a

yellow room. This colour tends to create feelings of frustration and anger in some people, and can be fatiguing on the eyes.” (S. Henry 22). For this reason, the narrator hated the yellow wallpaper more than anything in the room. She mentioned how she hated the colour, and how children hated it too. “The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight... No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.” (Gilman 3)

The protagonist talked about the unclear patterns that filled the wallpaper and how eager she was to know what they represented. After staring at them for too long, she started imagining things. She wrote: "There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will. Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day...And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. "(Gilman 6). In fact, the brain cannot tell the difference between imagination and reality. When imagining things, the subconscious mind catches those vibrations and starts reacting. As the entire body is under the control of the autonomic nervous system, which is in turn governed by the subconscious mind, imagination and visualizing can instantly control the autonomic nervous system, hormones, and blood chemistry in a positive or negative way (Sharma 29). Therefore, the negative imagination of the narrator affected her mental and physical health in an awful way because, for her, everything she saw was real.

The narrator was suffering from postpartum depression, and she believed that expressing her thoughts and feelings would make her feel better. “I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me” (Gilman 4). In fact, communication and self-expression ease depression, but in her case, nobody was willing to listen to her, not even her caring husband, and she was forbidden to write as a part of the "rest cure". This made her case get worse than it already was. “Here comes John, and I must put this away, he hates to have me write a word.” (Gilman 2)

The protagonist in this short story was an example of American women in the nineteenth century's patriarchal society. She was in a subordinate position, voicelessly obeying her husband and conforming to the norms of society. Thus, the woman she pictured in the paper was a reflection of herself, and the way she was looking for an escape showed how badly the narrator wanted her freedom. For this reason, the narrator decided to help her. She saw her freedom in setting that woman free. "As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her. I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper." (Gilman 9)

In the last scene, the narrator's mental illness reached its climax. She tried so hard to remove the paper that was stuck to the wall, and it was hard for her since there were some parts that she could not reach. Thus, she got so angry that she thought of throwing herself out the window. She wrote: "I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try." (Gilman 10). By ripping off the wallpaper and helping that confined woman, she wanted to show her husband that she finally found her freedom despite of his restrictions. "I've got out at last...and I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman 11).

In this way, Charlotte Perkins Gilman showed the reader how unhealthy and dangerous forced conformity and lack of self-expression could be. She unveiled the terrible psychological wounds of the narrator as a result of her imprisonment behind four walls. (González 169)

2.6. Conclusion :

"*The Yellow Wallpaper*" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is regarded as one of the most important works of American literature. The author succeeded in giving an authentic image of the attitudes towards women's mental and physical health during the nineteenth century. Using her secret diary, the narrator enlightened the

reader about the struggles of women at that time and the way they were misunderstood by everyone around them, including their husbands. Also, she emphasized the dangers this mistreatment and forced conformity caused. As in her case, she was already suffering from postpartum depression, and due to the mistreatment of society and her husband, she went insane, and that was how she tasted her own type of freedom.

General Conclusion

The nineteenth century in America was an era of oppressive patriarchy. Gender roles became more defined than they have ever been, as they were based on the assumption that men and women should occupy different spheres.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one of the prominent figures in American literature, was one of those female writers who wrote about their struggles during this century. In her short story, "*The Yellow Wallpaper*", she used her protagonist to show an authentic picture of women's struggles at that time, and focused on the fact that no one took their mental and psychological illnesses seriously, even the closest people to them. Society believed that women were less valuable than men, and everyone was supposed to accept this idea. The protagonist of "*The Yellow Wallpaper*", as a woman and a wife, was obliged to conform to society's norms. In addition to all that oppression, she suffered from postpartum depression, yet nobody was willing to help her in the right way, not even her husband.

Although this male character in the story was caring, he still mistreated his wife, the narrator, since he did not give her a chance to explain her case or express her thoughts because he was a physician, so he assumed he knew better. He followed the "rest cure" to treat her illness, although that was not the cure she needed. She needed to keep in touch with her family and friends, express her thoughts, and distract herself. With this, Charlotte wanted to show the reader that whether it was done intentionally or not, men were the cause of women's sufferance and that the so-called "rest cure" resulted in driving women to madness.

The protagonist was left with so little to do but stare at the yellow wallpaper she found in her room. It caught her attention with all the patterns drawn on it, and she spent days and nights studying it, until she started seeing women creeping behind bars, trying to free themselves. This image she pictured was a reflection of the bad conditions she lived under in a patriarchal society, and the bars those women were shaking were the boundaries set for her by both her husband and society. By helping those women get out, she helped herself to be free as well.

Although the narrator was under supervision and obliged to obey what her husband dictated, she found a way to write secretly and express herself. Thus, with this piece of work, Charlotte Perkins Gilman succeeded in showing the strength of women at that time and their ability to resist the male-dominated society in order to gain back their rights, starting with the right to write and putting their works on the same shelves alongside men's.

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Le Résumé

Les femmes Américaines au XIXe siècle étaient considérées comme des créatures faibles. Elles n'étaient pas autorisées à revendiquer leurs droits. Charlotte Perkins Gilman dans sa nouvelle *Le Papier Peint Jaune* 1892, a donné une image des combats des femmes à cette époque. Cette thèse examine les terribles conséquences de l'oppression masculine sur la santé mentale des femmes. En outre, elle révèle les effets graves de la « cure de repos », le traitement suivi pour guérir les femmes souffrant de troubles mentaux à cette époque, et comment il a conduit le protagoniste du Papier Peint Jaune à la folie. Dans l'ensemble, cet article démontre comment Charlotte a réussi à écrire malgré sa maladie et l'oppression à laquelle elle était confrontée, car il souligne son combat en tant que femme et écrivaine pour ses droits et sa liberté.

الملخص

خلال القرن التاسع عشر، كان المجتمع الأمريكي يعامل النساء كمخلوقات ضعيفة لا يسمح لها بالتعبير عن رأيها أو المطالبة بحقوقها. شارلوت بيركنز جيلمان في قصتها القصيرة خلفية صفراء 1892 أعطت صورة حقيقية لنضال النساء في ذلك الوقت. تتناول هذه الأطروحة العواقب الوخيمة لمعاناة النساء في وسط المجتمع الأمريكي الذكوري و كيف أثر ذلك على صحتهم العقلية. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن هذه الدراسة تكشف عن الآثار السلبية و العواقب الوخيمة لـ "علاج الراحة" ، العلاج المتبع لتطبيب النساء المصابات بأمراض عقلية في ذلك الوقت ، وكيف دفع بطلنة قصة الخلفية الصفراء إلى الجنون. يوضح هذا المقال كيف تمكنت شارلوت من الكتابة على الرغم من مرضها والقمع الذي واجهته ، حيث يسلط الضوء على نضالها كامرأة وكاتبة من أجل حقوقها وحريتها.

