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| Gilman, Charlotte Perkins (1860-1935) |
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| Charlotte Anne Perkins was born in 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut, to a family of preachers, abolitionists, suffragists and literary luminaries. In 1884 she compromised her youthful dreams of ‘world service’ for marriage, which she later skewered as unpaid ‘domestic service’. The constraints and demands of married life, compounded by postpartum depression following the birth of her daughter, contributed to her suffering from severe depression (Davis 2010; Kessler 1995). In 1887 she was sent to S. Weir Mitchell for his famous ‘rest cure’ – a regime of physical and mental passivity that, she said, nearly drove her mad. The ordeal spurred her best known piece of writing, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892), an account of the nervous collapse of a young wife and new mother. More Gothic than clinical, it was reissued in the 1970s to the appreciation of a new generation of feminist scholars (Allen 2009). Gilman authored an estimated three thousand works over the course of her career (Davis 2010), but *Women and Economics* (1898) had the greatest impact during her lifetime. This caustic assessment of the bourgeois marriage contract had been translated into seven languages by 1911 (Degler 1956). Gilman also self-published and single-handedly penned *The Forerunner* (1909-1916), an eclectic but intertextually dense monthly mix of sociological tracts, realist fiction, parables, and poetry. Here she serialized her utopian novel *Herland* (1915), another text later rescued by second-wave feminists. Gilman died by her own hand, preferring, she wrote, ‘chloroform to cancer’ (Gilman 1935). |
| Charlotte Anne Perkins was born in 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut, to a family of preachers, abolitionists, suffragists and literary luminaries. In 1884 she compromised her youthful dreams of ‘world service’ for marriage, which she later skewered as unpaid ‘domestic service’. The constraints and demands of married life, compounded by postpartum depression following the birth of her daughter, contributed to her suffering from severe depression (Davis 2010; Kessler 1995). In 1887 she was sent to S. Weir Mitchell for his famous ‘rest cure’ – a regime of physical and mental passivity that, she said, nearly drove her mad. The ordeal spurred her best known piece of writing, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892), an account of the nervous collapse of a young wife and new mother. More Gothic than clinical, it was reissued in the 1970s to the appreciation of a new generation of feminist scholars (Allen 2009). Gilman authored an estimated three thousand works over the course of her career (Davis 2010), but *Women and Economics* (1898) had the greatest impact during her lifetime. This caustic assessment of the bourgeois marriage contract had been translated into seven languages by 1911 (Degler 1956). Gilman also self-published and single-handedly penned *The Forerunner* (1909-1916), an eclectic but intertextually dense monthly mix of sociological tracts, realist fiction, parables, and poetry. Here she serialized her utopian novel *Herland* (1915), another text later rescued by second-wave feminists. Gilman died by her own hand, preferring, she wrote, ‘chloroform to cancer’ (Gilman 1935).  File: Soapine Company of Rhode Island.jpg  Soapine Company of Rhode Island 1  Source: As a young, unmarried woman, Charlotte Perkins illustrated trade cards for the Soapine Company of Rhode Island. Her depictions of cheerful domesticity take on an ironic tone in light of her later critical writings on women’s ‘domestic service’ in marriage. (Courtesy of A. J. Paravantes, personal collection). Image circa 1881-82. A similar image can be found online at <http://www.spiritsrevealed.com/PhotoAlbums/ccc/WashingSoapineClotheslineGilt.zm.jpg>  File: The Forerunner.jpg  The Forerunner 1  Source: From 1909 to 1916, *The Forerunner* was ‘written, edited, owned and published by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’. She wrote the entire content, including the ad copy. (Courtesy of A. J. Paravantes, personal collection). Cannot find link to exact image online. Selected List of Works Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. (1998 [1898]) *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, Berkeley: University of California Press.  ------ (1979 [1915]) *Herland*, New York: Pantheon Books.  ------ (1973 [1892]) ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. Old Westbury: Feminist Press.  ------ (1972 [1935]) *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, New York: Arno Press. |
| Further reading:  (Allen)  (Davis)  (Degler)  (Kessler) |