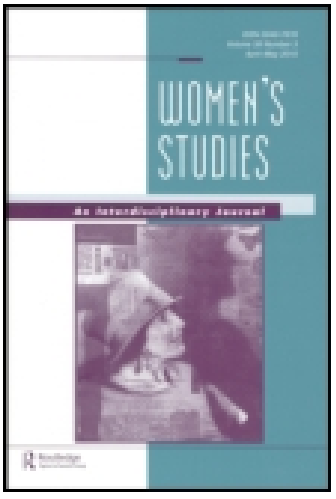

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The reincarnation of Jane: "Through this" — Gilman's companion to "the yellow wall-paper"

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The Reincarnation of Jane: "Through This" — Gilman's Companion to "The Yellow Wall-paper"

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Are you content, you pretty three-years' wife?
  Are you content and satisfied to live
  On what your loving husband loves to give,
    And give to him your life?. . .

What holds you? Ah, my dear, it is your throne,
  Your paltry queenship in that narrow place,
  Your antique labors, your restricted space,
    Your working all alone!

Be not deceived! 'T is not your wifely bond
  That holds you, nor the mother's royal power,
  But selfish, slavish service hour by hour —
    A life with no beyond!

Charlotte Perkins Gilman,
from "To the Young Wife" in
In This Our World, 1893[1]

IN *Women and Economics* (1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman complained about the destructive impact of what she termed "sexuo-economics" in the home. Such a system, she argued, was based on the unequitable distribution of power in male-female relationships and relegated women to a dependent, and hence, subservient position. Several years later, in *The Man-Made World* (1911), Gilman extended those complaints to include limitations placed on women even in fiction: "Fiction, under our androcentric culture, has not given any true picture of a woman's life, very little of human life, and a disproportioned section of man's life."[2] At the same time, Gilman's own resentment toward both the traditional roles of wife and mother and the lack of opportunity for

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women to engage in meaningful work became the thematic focus of much of her writing. Her best-known story, "The Yellow Wall-paper,"[3] first published in 1892, depicts the tragic consequences of one woman's struggle against the patriarchal values that determined her position in society.

That story was followed a year later by "Through This" (1893),[4] a little-known but important story which requires a figurative reading of the text, much like "The Yellow Wall-paper." While "The Yellow Wall-paper" was written largely as an indictment of the "rest cure" for nervous prostration (a treatment prescribed for numerous late 19th century women), "Through This" strikes back with Gilman's feminine (and feminist) anger toward the patriarchy, in general, which subjugated women to their "feminine" roles, and toward Charles Walter Stetson, in particular, who advocated a gender-based division of labor, and from whom Gilman was divorced in 1894. Gilman's relationship with Stetson is a key to understanding the poignancy represented in "The Yellow Wall-paper" and in "Through This," since both stories have their origins in the early years of Gilman's marriage.

Born Charlotte Anna Perkins in 1860, Gilman long rejected even the possibility of marriage, believing that wedlock would require a total subordination of what she saw as her life's work — a life dedicated to helping humanity.[5] In 1882, however, after meeting Rhode Island artist Charles Walter Stetson, the 21 year-old Perkins began to reconsider her position on marriage. Still, Perkins' fear of subjugation tempered her enthusiasm for matrimony. To Stetson she wrote, "Were I to marry, my thoughts, my acts, my whole life would be centered in husband and children. To do the work that I have planned I must be free."[6] A few weeks later, she was still in the throes of dilemma: "[A]s much as I love you I love *WORK* better, & I cannot make the two compatible."[7]

Despite her misgivings, Perkins and Stetson continued to plan the marriage. As the wedding day approached, Charlotte Perkins became increasingly apprehensive.[8] In letters and in conversations with Stetson, Charlotte tried to articulate her fears: "I have lost *power*. I do not feel myself so strong a person as I was before. I seem to have taken a lower seat, to have become less in some way, to have shrunk."[9] That loss of power was even manifested in Perkins' artwork, a pastime that grew out of her training at the Rhode Island School of Design, which she attended from 1878–79. Just six months before the wedding, Perkins drew "a picture of a wan creature who had traversed a desert and came, worn out, to an insurmountable wall which extended around the earth."[10] Not only was it a bold and poignant self-portrait reflecting her troubled state of mind, but the wall imagery would recur, significantly, in both "The Yellow Wall-paper" and "Through This."

On May 2, 1884, Perkins and Stetson were married. Almost immediately, Charlotte Stetson became pregnant and gave birth to her daughter, Katharine, in March 1885. Following the birth, Charlotte grew even more despondent. Stetson, who believed his wife's melancholia was due to some "uterine irritation," recorded in his journal his distress over the manifestation of her "affliction":

> [H]er illness brought back all the thoughts of how strong she was before marriage, how much she wanted to do, the remembrance of "her mission" and a fierce rebellion at the existing state of things. . . . She forgets that she could do good right at hand, even in our family.[11]

Predictably, the marriage crumbled. The reality of subjugation continued to prey on Charlotte's fears: "[Walter] cannot see how irrevocably bound I am, for life, for life. No, unless he die and the baby die, or he change or I change, there is no way out."[12] Eventually, Charlotte underwent the "rest cure" for nervous prostration from the prominent nerve specialist, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell of Philadelphia. The results were near disastrous after Mitchell forbade her to touch "pen, brush, or pencil" for the remainder of her life:[13] "I went home, followed those directions rigidly for months and came perilously near to losing my mind."[14]

In the fall of 1887, Charlotte and her husband agreed to a separation; they were finally divorced in 1894. Charlotte later relinquished custody of Katharine to her former husband, and subsequently resumed the "work" she had reluctantly abandoned in marriage.[15] Throughout her life, in her speeches and writings, Gilman campaigned for women's rights, admonishing women to cultivate their non-domestic work skills, lest they become victims of "sexuo-economic" relationships with men:

> Although marriage is a means of livelihood, it is not honest employment where one can offer one's labor without shame, but a relation where the support is given outright, and enforced by law in return for the functional service of the woman, the "duties of wife and mother." Therefore, no honorable woman can ask for it. . . .It is economic beggary as well as a false attitude from a sex point of view.[16]

Many of Gilman's concerns about female obsequience were underscored in her classic story, "The Yellow Wall-paper," which traces the descent into madness of a woman who receives the "rest cure" as treatment for nervous prostration. Because her physician/husband, John, believes "there is no *reason* to suffer,"[17] the narrator, Jane, is systematically disempowered as John and his sister/housekeeper, Jennie, assume control over nearly every aspect of her life: "I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more".[18] As part of the rest

cure, the narrator has been relieved of all domestic responsibilities, including the care of her newborn son.

Confined to a large attic room in an isolated mansion, the narrator, Jane, is at first repelled by the yellow paper that covers the walls. As the narrator increasingly fixates on the wallpaper, she discerns a shape behind the pattern, "like a woman stooping down and creeping about. . . ."[19] Eventually, Jane perceives the image as a woman entrapped behind bars — her symbolic sister in bondage. "Together" they try to effect an escape: "I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning, we had peeled off yards of that paper."[20] Symbolically, Jane struggles to extricate herself from the pervasive patriarchal bondage of both her body and her mind. Her "madness," a potent metaphor for feminine anger, escalates until her identification with the imprisoned woman is complete. Her regression to an infantile state at the end of the story not only suggests the effects of sensory deprivation on intelligent women, but the crawling on one's hands and knees is emblematic of the crudest form of servility.

The year following the publication of the "The Yellow Wall-paper," Gilman recreated the oppressed "Wall-paper" narrator in the short piece, "Through This" (see Appendix), but with one dramatic change: the new "Jane" is metamorphosed into the doting wife and mother that John tried in vain to invoke in the earlier story. With satirical precision, Gilman reassembled nearly the entire "Wall-paper" cast. Husband John, Jennie, Mary, Jane's brother, and a male first-born child all either appear or are alluded to in "Through This," although Gilman modifies their personalities to suit the particular occasion. The most radical transformation in "Through This" is Jane's character, who has been changed from the mad female in the wall-papered attic to a woman who exudes cheerful enthusiasm for her traditionally "feminine" roles, much like Jennie in"The Yellow Wall-paper." Gilman has, in essence, effected a dramatic role reversal between each "Jane" and "Jennie." The new "Jane", however, shows subconscious signs of resentment toward her roles of wife and mother. Beneath the gracious veneer lies an enormously conflicted woman who embodies what Gilman feared she would herself become should she consent to marry Walter Stetson: "Were I to marry,. . .— I fear I should give all up and become of no more use than other women."[21]

Gilman's marriage to Stetson confirmed, of course, her worst fears. As a result, her writing became both a forum for political expression and a kind of self-therapy. "Through This" is a case in point. Written in part as an exposé of "the obedient house-servant" and in part as a psychological profile, the story chronicles a typical day in the life of a young married wife and mother.

Repeatedly, the protagonist attempts to convince herself and the reader of her profound happiness. Still, the effects of subjugation are apparent in every phase of her existence, and despite her declarations to the contrary, her stream-of-consciousness narrative is riddled with tension, contradictions, and enormous ambivalence. Gilman blends a meditative point-of-view with delicate imagery to impart a vision of quiet isolation.

In this restructured protagonist, Gilman has created Jane's alter-ego, a woman who can carry out the mission Jane intended, but abandoned, in "The Yellow Wall-paper": to be "such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort."[22] The new "Jane" fulfills the role that Stetson wished Charlotte to follow in their marriage when he wrote, "[Charlotte has become] more like what is best in other women — more thoughtful, bland, gracious, humble, dependent."[23] "Through This" is an obvious vehicle through which Charlotte could express just how demeaning she found that role to be. Ironically, Stetson, too, found housework to be laborious and time-consuming, complaining about the way it eclipsed his "other" (i.e. "real") work:

> There is housework to do and though [Charlotte] does what she can, I find enough to tire me, and make me feel sometimes that I am wasting my energy, power that should be applied to my art. Yet it plainly is my duty and I do it as cheerfully as I can. For love's sake one must bear all things. I fancy I shall be stronger for it after it is over. But I feel certain that my other work is not so well done because of it. I cannot let my mind roam in sweet fancy's field now. It is utterly impossible. I find so much to do here at home. Well, that must be done. But if it seems to last very long I must hire help, move into a larger house, for I cannot afford, nor would it be right for me, to give up all my time and strength to such things.[24]

Not surprisingly, Charlotte's own sentiments mirrored those recorded in her husband's diary. To vent her frustration, Charlotte crafted her unnamed protagonist in "Through This", whose identity is defined exclusively through her subservient roles, to show what happens to obedient women who devote their time and strength to "such things" as even Walter objected to for himself. The protagonist neglects her own needs in order to perform "the sweet home duties through which [her] life shall touch the others!" (lines 6–7) As her family "grows happier and stronger by [her] living," the narrator's strength and energy is proportionately depleted. Indeed, in the course of one day, we witness her vigorous attention to tasks that constitute an extended exercise in self-annihilation: buying baked goods, making breakfast, washing dishes, ordering groceries, soaking tapioca, cooking beets, baking potatoes, bathing the baby, cutting and basting nightgowns, watching the children, dealing with solicitors and salesmen, making the noon meal, discussing her husband's job with him, worrying about house repairs and fuel consumption, running downtown, expressing concern about her mother's health, buying sewing

notions, rushing home again, preparing dinner, apologizing to her husband for the milkman's tardiness, putting the children to bed, reciting nursery rhymes to them, and finally, chiding herself for failing to write a letter because of fatigue.

The story also offers an intriguing stylistic parallel to "The Yellow Wall-paper." Set forth in short, halting sentences, the narrative is confused and fragmented. The narrator's language is as chaotic as is her day. The limited vocabulary Gilman allows the weary woman parallels the limitations in her life: her restricted choices, her troubled state of mind, her repressed anger. Like Jane in "The Yellow Wall-paper," the protagonist in "Through This" has a "schedule prescription for each hour in the day" which necessitates a rigid adherence, in turn robbing the woman of the freedom to escape domestic drudgery, even through fantasy.

The narrative begins with the protagonist noticing the dawn colors reflecting off her bedroom wall at daybreak. But the beauty of the new day is limited by the verb used in her description: "The dawn colors *creep* up my bedroom wall, softly, slowly" (line 1, emphasis added). Readers familiar with "The Yellow Wall-paper" are immediately reminded of the throng of creeping women behind the wallpaper and in the garden outside the nursery window. The verb "creep" suggests furtive, sly movement, and, indeed, the woman seems to be unconsciously captivated by the colors, the only variegation in an unbearably bland and predictable routine. Only in the few quiet moments before she slips out of the soothing embrace of sleep to begin her day can the woman allow her mind to migrate intellectually — to wander, to create, to envision. Like the "Wall-paper's" Jane, this protagonist possesses a fanciful imagination which is frustrated, not because she is explicitly forbidden to cultivate it, but because the demands of her roles preclude any opportunity for intellectual growth. After the first four sentences, the softness and slowness of the narrative is consumed by the frenzied pace of this housewife's activities.

We are told that "with the great sunrise great thoughts come" (5). But the woman's "great thoughts" never reach fruition. Four times during her busy day she drifts into reveries that are aborted either consciously, because of deep-seated guilt, or inadvertently, because of external intrusion. The first two early-morning daydreams of a domestic utopia (10–11, 18–19) are interrupted by the realistic demands of the woman's socially-prescribed roles. It is significant that the other two reveries, which take place later in the morning, just before the noon-time meal, are no longer idealistic visions of a well-ordered home, but rather escape fantasies that are abruptly interrupted by the call of domestic duty. As the day wanes, so too does the narrator's conscious

idealism. The aborted escape fantasies were to be contemplations of life after the children were grown — a life in which the woman would finally be free.

The third interruption, significantly, is by someone who apparently invites the narrator to join a "progressive" organization. The woman initially expresses an interest in joining: "Ah, well — yes — I'd like to have joined. I believe in it, but I can't now." (Can't believe in it?) "Home duties forbid" (32–3). The juxtaposition of "I can't now" with "home duties forbid" reveals much about the narrator's unstated ambivalence. That she is forbidden by "home duties" transfers blame away from herself (and from John) but paradoxically empowers an inanimate object (the home) to require her to perform tasks that forbid engaging in interests or activities outside of the domestic realm. She follows this statement with an almost defensive-sounding, "This is my work," (49) as if to elevate to a more prestigious level the monotony of cooking, sweeping, sewing, and washing dishes. Immediately after she makes this statement, she attempts for the fourth time to escape into a reverie about the future, but she is again interrupted by the doorbell, which not only brings an abrupt end to her daydream, but awakens the baby as well, curtailing her escape attempts, and marking a return to the reality of her domestic responsibilities.

The defense of housework is made explicit when the narrator declares, "I like to cook. I think housework is noble if you do it in a right spirit" (52–53). The clause beginning with "if" suggests that housework is *not* noble unless it is performed in the right spirit. Again, the ambivalence underlying the narrator's statement is apparent. She is trying to live her whole life according to the *right* spirit, which implies that any deviation from the rigidly-prescribed role is the *wrong* spirit. Like Jane, the woman is imprisoned in her own home, but as long as she is incarcerated, she will do her best to be a model inmate, conforming to the rules of the institution (marriage).

In the meantime, the husband and children parasitically draw nourishment and sustenance from the woman's existence: "Through this man made happier and stronger by my living...." (7–8) Clearly, the woman is drained by the dependence of her family. But, her only happiness, her only purpose, she would have us believe, lies in relation to what she can give to others — a literal giving of her self. The entire story, in fact, centers around a very pronounced forfeiture of self. Gilman breathes more viability into the inanimate props in the setting than into her protagonist. The morning light *grows*, the fire's swift kindling and gathering roar *speak* of accomplishment, the rich odor of coffee *steals* through her house. While her time is occupied, her mind remains stagnant, as she automatically surrenders herself to meeting the needs of others. The protagonist's own mother, too, is imbued with a sacrificial spirit:

Mother looks real tired. I wish she would go out more and have some outside interest. Mary and the children are too much for her, I think. Harry ought not to have brought them home. Mother needs rest. She's brought up one family. (74–77)

Ironically, the protagonist's own actions contribute to her mother's fatigue: "So glad you could come, mother dear! Can you stay awhile and let me go down town on a few errands?" (71–73) Although employing her mother as a temporary caretaker enables the protagonist to make a brief escape from the confinement of her home, she unintentionally subjects her mother to the servitude that she herself has just condemned. Even when her mother leaves her own home, her role as "mother" remains intact. Furthermore, the demands place upon the two women do not even allow them an opportunity to visit with one another. The protagonist's "escape" downtown is merely an extension of her home duties, as she hurriedly searches for sewing notions and contemplates winter clothing for her oldest child. The narrator's grandmother, too, although an absent figure in the story, unwittingly perpetuates the protagonist's domestic bondage by sending her knit edging to be used in sewing nightgowns for her great grandchildren (38–40). The edging becomes a subtle metaphor characterizing the implicit borders which define the protagonist's domain. The only "free" maternal figure in the story is Amaranth, the cat, who leisurely "lies on the grass under the rosebush, stretching her paws among the warm, green blades" (26–28). She stands in contrast to the other mothers in the story; she is the picture of bliss, as her kittens playfully tumble about her.

Like John in "The Yellow Wall-paper," this John is a powerful patriarchal force in the story. Although Gilman has changed his vocation from physician to politician, his influence and control over his wife is visible throughout the narrative and advances Gilman's view of sexual politics in relationships. His role as politician, in fact, pegs him as an opportunist who has symbolic license to legitimate the "sexuo-economic" laws by which his wife must abide.

John's likes and dislikes, needs and whims, shape the narrator's day. John likes flowers on the breakfast table (lines 14–15), John likes the way his wife cooks his steak (45), he has to go out early to campaign for election (86–87), he is annoyed that his wife didn't prepare a dish he likes (88–90), he hates to have her wait up for him late (99). It is obvious that his wife's complaisancy accommodates John's every whim. Her economic dependence further disempowers her, and disempowerment has limited her self-confidence. Emotionally debilitated as a result of her husband's authoritarianism, she engages in self-deprecation when asked for an opinion on a civil matter: "Why no — not *personally* — but I should think *you* might. What are men for if they can't keep the city in order" (49–50). Her deliberate and emphatic

reticence in speaking out on public issues reinforces the intellectual boundaries created by her limited sphere within the home. At the same time, her remark, "I should think *you* might [have an opinion]" underscores the extrinsic value of John's life outside of the house. While she soaks tapioca and recites nursery rhymes, her husband shapes government policy. The contrast between their two spheres, hers contained within the house, and his "out there", is enormous. Too, Gilman's frequent reference to John by name underscores his prominence and, at the same time, further diminishes the nameless narrator's status. She has become John's helpmate, but the cost in doing so is a forfeiture of her independence.

Like the "Wall-paper" Jane, this narrator is consumed by guilt: "I must get the dishes done and not dream" (18–19). "I meant to have swept the bedroom this morning.... It does look dreadfully" (41–42). "I ought to take the baby out in the carriage...." (59) But a more significant feature both stories share recalls Gilman's old grievance: the frustration of not being able to write. In "The Yellow Wall-paper," Jane, like Gilman, was forbidden to write as part of the "rest cure" for nervous prostration. In "Through This," the protagonist, also like Gilman, is plagued by a fatigue so debilitating that she cannot even compose a letter.

The segment of the story concerning Jennie's letter is the most crucial revelation of the narrator's ambivalence over her own roles. "It's no use, I can't write a letter tonight, *especially* to Jennie" (99, emphasis added). Earlier in the day, the narrator had reminded herself that she really "ought to answer Jennie's letter. She writes such splendid things, but I don't go with her in half she says. A woman can't do that way and keep a family going. I will write to her this evening" (64–66). By delaying the task until later, the narrator is postponing a confrontation between her conscious self-denial and her subconscious desire to be free and Jennie's alluring life about which she writes "such splendid things." After consciously deferring the matter until later, the narrator immediately lapses back into thoughts of the excitement and enthusiasm that characterize Jennie's life. "Of course if one *could*, I'd like as well as anyone to be in those great live currents of thought and action" (67–8). But clearly she cannot be. Her role as wife and mother, her "home duties", have condemned her to a life of banal predictability. The "great *live* currents" she alludes to underscore her own unarticulated mourning for her past, since she immediately follows that statement with a nostalgic memory: "Jennie and I were full of it in school. How long ago that seems" (98–9). Her life used to be "full"; now it is simply busy. And her rather wistful remark, "How long ago that seems", suggests how swiftly the protagonist's identity has been subsumed by the demands of her marriage. And then comes a retraction.

"But I never thought then of being so happy. Jennie isn't happy, I know — she can't be, poor thing, till she's a wife and mother" (69–70). The narrator moves from an expressed wish ("if one *could*"), to a denial ("but . . ."), to an unconvincing expression of sympathy for Jennie, whose failure to fulfill her feminine "duties" is bound to leave her unhappy, despite her immersion in the great live currents of thought and action. Again, the action and freedom that characterize Jennie's life make the narrator's domestic obligations resemble a primitive form of obsequious bondage.

When the narrator returns to thoughts of Jennie later that evening after the children are finally asleep, she still cannot confront her ambivalence: she is too tired, even though it is still "early." Because a confrontation with even herself is too threatening, it is immediately dismissed. The fatigue the narrator cites, a classic symptom of depression, suggests that she is simply too conflicted to write her friend. In truth, Jennie's letter paradoxically represents an affirmation of the narrator's subconscious desire to be free and a repudiation of her conscious choice to be enslaved. Jennie, who was the "perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper" in "The Yellow Wall-paper," has been dramatically transformed in "Through This" into a dynamic activist at the center of current thought, much like Jane could have been had she been permitted to indulge her intellectual inclinations. Gilman has effected a dramatic reversal, with the protagonist of "Through This" assuming the docility of the former "Jennie" while at the same time repressing the tendency to acknowledge her anger, unlike the "Wall-paper's" Jane. While Jane would occasionally vent her anger,[25] ("I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes"; "I get positively angry with the impertinence of [the wall-paper]"; "I am getting angry enough to do something desperate"), the narrator of "Through This" represses any expression of frustration or resentment.

Perhaps the most enigmatic line of "Through This" appears near the end, when the narrator states, "I'll go to bed early. John hates to have me wait up for him late. I'll go now, if it is before dark. . . ." (lines 136–38) The "if" raises the obvious question as to why the protagonist will only go to bed *if* it is not yet dark. Her decision may suggest a fear of the dark: a literal and figurative allusion to the woman's subconscious despair and resentment. Either way, her somnolescent withdrawal enables the narrator to escape the threatening darkness that increasingly surrounds her own life. Even Gilman's title suggests that the narrator's survival, perhaps even her sanity, depends on her ability to get "through this." We are reminded, of course, of the "wall-paper" narrator, who was haunted by the light that crept through the window. "I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another."[26] As the protagonist of "Through This" frames her narrative with

allusions to the light reflections on the wall, the reader is left wondering how long it will be before the narrator transforms the wall's creeping colors into objects of her imagination, into concrete projections which will emblematize her repressed psyche.

In his 1985 essay on "The Yellow Wall-paper," Conrad Shumaker posed the question: "What happens to the imagination when it is defined as feminine (and thus weak) and has to face a society that values the useful and the practical and rejects all else as nonsense?"[27] The answer Gilman seems to offer in both stories is that it figuratively runs up against a wall, walls being powerful symbols of both isolation and entrapment. Like the "Wall-paper" narrator, who as a child used "to get more entertainment out of blank walls ... than most children could find in a toy store,"[28] the narrator's creative imagination in "Through This" has been arrested and sublimated by socially-sanctioned behavior. Thus, while the dawn colors that greet the narrator's morning may be emblematic of hope, promise, and optimism, they are replaced by evening shadows, which reflect her weariness, her disappointment, and her quiet desperation.

By publishing these two suggestive stories a year apart, and in contrasting the two female protagonists — one who tries to cope, and one who cannot — Gilman ironically shows two sides of the same coin. Both stories demonstrate what inevitably happens to women who subordinate their own needs to those of others. While the loss of identity is poignantly obvious in "The Yellow Wall-paper," it is shrouded somewhat in "Through This" by the narrator's pretense of normalcy. Still, there is no mistaking it. "Through This" begins and ends in a metaphorical darkness.

Notes

1. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "To the Young Wife," in *In This Our World,* 3rd ed. (Boston: Small, Maynard, & Co., 1898), pp. 129–131.
2. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture* (New York: Charlton Company, 1911), p. 102.
3. "The Yellow Wall-paper" was originally published in *New England Magazine* 5 (January, 1892), pp. 647–56. Page numbers in this essay refer to the reprint edition, Elaine Hedges, ed. *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1973). Hereafter, *Wallpaper.*
4. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Through This," in *Kate Field's Washington,* (13 September 1893), p. 166. The story is reprinted at the end of this essay; numbers in the text refer to line numbers in the appended story.
5. "Work" became one of the unifying themes of Gilman's posthumously-published autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1935). Hereafter, *Living.* Gilman expresses her "calling" to help mankind frequently throughout the autobiography. For example:

From sixteen, I had not wavered from that desire to help humanity which underlay all my studies. Here was the world, visibly unhappy and as visibly unnecessarily so; surely it called for the best efforts of all who could in the least understand what was the matter, and had any rational improvement to propose. (*Living,* 70).

6. Mary A. Hill, *Endure: The Diaries of Charles Walter Stetson.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), p. 32. Hereafter, *Endure.*
7. Ibid., p. 63.
8. Stetson, too, was deeply affected by Charlotte's ambivalence. He recorded his despair privately:

   She had one of those spasms of wanting to make a name for herself in the world by doing good work: wanting to have people know her as Charlotte Perkins, not as the wife of me. She drew back with her old time feeling of independence from the prospect of sinking herself in our community. . . . She had changed her mind often, but I never saw it expressed so hotly & cruelly as this time. I had been lifted away up by her masterful passion & caresses and it brought me low and stabbed me with a rugged edged knife. (*Endure,* 144).

9. Ibid., p. 149.
10. Ibid., p. 244.
11. Ibid., pp. 279–280.
12. Diary, August 30, 1885.
13. *Living.* p. 96.
14. Ibid.
15. Although she suffered periods of depression for the rest of her life, Charlotte eventually found happiness in an 34-year marriage to her first cousin, Houghton Gilman, whom she married in 1900 at the age of 39. Gilman ardently supported Charlotte's work until his death in 1934.
16. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* was originally published in 1898 by Small, Maynard & Co. of Boston. References in this essay refer to the reprint edition, with an introduction by Carl Degler. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 89.
17. *Wallpaper,* p. 14.
18. Ibid., p. 12.
19. Ibid., p. 28.
20. Ibid., p. 32.
21. *Endure,* pp. 32–33.
22. *Wallpaper,* p. 14.
23. *Endure,* p. 140.
24. Ibid., p. 276.
25. *Wallpaper,* pp. 11, 16, 34.
26. Ibid., p. 23.
27. Conrad Shumaker, "Too Terribly Good to Be Printed": Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Reprinted in Sheryl L. Meyering's collection of essays *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 65–74.
28. *Wallpaper,* pp. 16–17.

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Appendix

THROUGH THIS

THE dawn colors creep up my bedroom wall, softly, slowly.

Darkness, dim gray, dull blue, soft lavender, clear pink, pale yellow, warm gold — sunlight.

A new day.

With the great sunrise great thoughts come.

I rise with the world. I live, I can help. Here close at hand lie the sweet home duties through which my life shall touch the others! Through this man made happier and stronger by my living; through these rosy babies sleeping here in the growing light; through this small, sweet, well-ordered home, whose restful influence shall touch all comers; through me too, perhaps — there's the baker, I must get up, or this bright purpose fades.

How well the fire burns! Its swift kindling and gathering roar speak of accomplishment. The rich odor of coffee steals through the house.

John likes morning-glories on the breakfast table — scented flowers are better with lighter meals. All is ready — healthful, dainty, delicious.

The clean-aproned little ones smile milky-mouthed over their bowls of mush. John kisses me good-by so happily.

Through this dear work, well done, I shall reach, I shall help — but I must get the dishes done and not dream.

'Good morning! Soap, please, the same kind. Coffee, rice, two boxes of gelatine. That's all, I think. Oh — crackers! Good morning."

There, I forgot the eggs! I can make these go, I guess. Now to soak the tapioca. Now the beets on, they take so long. I'll bake the potatoes — they don't go in yet. Now babykins must have her bath and nap.

A clean hour and a half before dinner. I can get those little nightgowns cut and basted. How bright the sun is! Amaranth lies on the grass under the rosebush, stretching her paws among the warm, green blades. The kittens tumble over her. She's brought them three mice this week. Baby and Jack are on the warm grass too — happy, safe, well. Careful, dear! Don't go away from little sister!

By and by when they are grown, I can — O there! the bell!

Ah, well! — yes — I'd like to have joined. I believe in it, but I can't now. Home duties forbid. This is my work. Through this, in time, there's the bell again, and it waked the baby!

As if I could buy a sewing machine every week! I'll put out a bulletin, stating my needs for the benefit of the agents. I don't believe in buying at the door anyway, yet I suppose they must live. Yes, dear! Mamma's coming!

I wonder if torchon would look better, or Hamburg?[1] Its [*sic*] softer but it looks older. Oh, here's that knit edging grandma sent me. Bless her dear heart!

There! I meant to have swept the bed-room this morning so as to have more time to-morrow. Perhaps I can before dinner. It does look dreadfully. I'll just put the potatoes in. Baked potatoes are so good! I love to see Jack dig into them with his little spoon.

John says I cook steak better than anyone he ever saw.

Yes, dear?

Is that so? Why I should think they'd *know* better. Can't the people do anything about it?

Why no — not *personally* — but I should think *you* might. What are men for if they can't keep the city in order.

Cream on the pudding, dear?

That was a good dinner. I like to cook. I think housework is noble if you do it in a right spirit.

That pipe must be seen to before long. I'll speak to John about it. Coal's pretty low, too.

Guess I'll put on my best boots, I want to run down town for a few moments — in case mother comes and can stay with baby. I wonder if mother wouldn't like to join that — she has time enough. But she doesn't seem to be a bit interested in outside things. I ought to take baby out in her carriage, but it's so heavy with Jack, and yet Jack can't walk a great way. Besides, if mother comes I needn't. Maybe we'll all go in the car — but that's such an undertaking! Three o'clock.

Jack! Jack! Don't do that — here — wait a moment.

I ought to answer Jennie's letter. She writes such splendid things, but I

don't go with her in half she says. A woman can't do that way and keep a family going. I'll write to her this evening.

Of course if one *could,* I'd like as well as anyone to be in those great live currents of thought and action. Jennie and I were full of it in school. How long ago that seems. But I never thought then of being so happy. Jennie isn't happy, I know — she can't be, poor thing, till she's a wife and mother.

O, there comes mother! Jack, deary, open the gate for Grandma! So glad you could come, mother dear! Can you stay awhile and let me go down town on a few errands?

Mother looks real tired. I wish she would go out more and have some outside interest. Mary and the children are too much for her, I think. Harry ought not to have brought them home. Mother needs rest. She's brought up one family.

There, I've forgotten my list, I hurried so. Thread, elastic, buttons; what was the other thing? Maybe I'll think of it.

How awfully cheap! How can they make them at that price! Three, please. I guess with these I can make the others last through the year. They're so pretty, too. How much are these? Jack's got to have a new coat before long — *not to-day.*

O dear! I've missed that car, and mother can't stay after five! I'll cut across and hurry.

Why the milk hasn't come, and John's got to go out early tonight. I wish election was over.

I'm sorry, dear, but the milk was so late, I couldn't make it. Yes, I'll speak to him. O, no, I guess not; he's a very reliable man, usually, and the milk's good. Hush, hush, baby! Papa's talking!

Good night, dear, don't be too late.

Sleep, baby, sleep!
The large stars are the sheep,
The little stars are the lambs, I guess,
And the fair moon is the shepherdess.
Sleep, baby, sleep!

How pretty they look! Thank God, they keep so well.

It's no use, I can't write a letter to-night — especially to Jennie. I'm too tired. I'll go to bed early. John hates to have me wait up for him late. I'll go now, if it is before dark — then get up early to-morrow and get the sweeping done. How loud the crickets are! The evening shades creep down my bedroom wall — softly — slowly.

Warm gold — pale yellow — clear pink — soft lavender — dull blue — dim gray — darkness. 105

Notes

1. Torchon lace is made of coarse linen or cotton thread in simple geometric patterns. Hamburg lace is lace imported from Hamburg, Germany.