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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm, ambient light. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and historical research.

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Desexing of the Male Text With Reference to Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"**Dr. N. Kavidha***Asst. Professor, PG Dept and Research Centre in English, Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi, (T.N.) India***V. Sakthivel***Lecturer in English, Alagappa Govt. Polytechnic College, Karaikudi, (T.N.) India***Abstract**

Patriarchy, the oppressive power-structured system has become the most pervasive ideology of our culture and it dictates the fate of women. Patriarchy rules the female race with its male oriented principles that subjugate women socially, economically and politically. Self-expression in the form of writing is the most powerful weapon with which women writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman employed to challenge patriarchy and explode its clutches effectively. Through a female tradition of writing, women can refute all the essential arguments that present women's subordination as the 'divine' law of patriarchy. Feminist writing and feminist literary criticism powerfully explode the patriarchal beliefs of dominance that are embedded deeply in the culture's conscious ideology. Women writers were expected to reflect the feminine values and encourage women to be docile and submissive to man. "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer". Gilman as an eighteenth century proactivist, pioneered the women writers through her unique novel "The Yellow Wallpaper". It is the story of a woman who suffers from acute nervous disorders and is taken to the country and a rest cure is imposed on her. She is forbidden to engage in any form of physical or mental exertion. It is her physician / husband John, the representative of patriarchy, who orders the nameless narrator to give up creative writing and to undergo a three-month rest cure. The story points out how the will power of the protagonist leads her to challenge her husband and pursue her creative energy in her own way.

Key Words: Power-structured system, proactivism, ideology, creative energy, male text, nervous breakdown, rest cure

Patriarchy, the oppressive power-structured system has become the most pervasive ideology of our culture and it dictates the fate of women. Patriarchy rules the female race with its male oriented principles that subjugate women socially, economically and politically. The relationship between a man and a woman has been one of dominance and subordination and the "birthright

priority" of men ruling women has become institutionalized in our social order (Millett 33). The masculine birthright of superordination has pervaded into culture, literature, arts, humanities, education, law, folklore, anthropology and all realms of life. To contend with the patriarchal society, one of the powerful instruments that a woman makes use of is creativity. Patriarchy strives

to stifle the creative impulse in women because, if left uncontrolled, it will shatter the framework of patriarchal institutions and blow out the laws that it has established. Women seek to escape this trap and exercise their human freedom to recapture their sense of self. Betty Friedan insists:

The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way. (309)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a powerful woman writer of the late 1890s fought for a political and economic reorganization, which would pave way for the true literature of women. She challenged and undermined patriarchy's strategies by her daring act of self-expression. She realizes how the creative energy of women gets wasted. In her essay "Women and Economics", she notes:

Half the human race is denied free productive expression, is forced to confine its productive human energies to the same channels as its reproductive sex-energies. Its creative skill is confined to the level of immediate personal bodily service, to the making of clothes and preparing of food for individuals. . . (584)

Gilman points out how patriarchy represses the innate abilities of women and relegates them to the domain of domesticity.

Friedan states that only creativity can relieve a woman from drudgery and patriarchal repression. Indulging in any aesthetic vocation, like taking interest in music or painting or writing creatively revives a

woman from her dull monotony and gives her an independent identity of her own. These activities trigger a journey for a woman into the recesses of her being and the woman becomes a quester. She seeks her self that is repressed by patriarchy. She struggles to break out of the encapsulating taboos that restrain her, by resorting to creativity. Simone de Beauvoir explains the impulse in a woman for self-expression:

To prevent an inner life that has no useful purpose from sinking to nothingness to assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being, she must resort to self-expression. (274)

Self-expression in the form of writing is the most powerful weapon with which women writers like Gilman employed to challenge patriarchy and explode its clutches effectively. Through a female tradition of writing, women can refute all the essential arguments that present women's subordination as the 'divine' law of patriarchy. Feminist writing and feminist literary criticism powerfully explode the patriarchal beliefs of dominance that are embedded deeply in the culture's conscious ideology. What distinguishes the woman writer is the additional dimension of power involved in the act of writing, through which the interior world finds expression. In an exclusively male domain, a woman's ambition to be a writer is an act of defiance that is punishable by patriarchal law.

Creation other than motherhood has always been excluded from the patriarchal

definition of ideal femininity. This ideological bias has been reflected in almost every field from psychology to anthropology and literature. Patriarchy always tries to thwart the needs of a woman – her needs as a woman and her needs for a private space of her own as a writer. Suzanne Juhasz shows how a woman writer is scorned in a male dominated sphere. She pictures the patriarchal view on female creativity.

Traditionally the poet is a man, and 'poetry' is the poems that men write. . . . It is men who make art, who make books; women make babies. (1)

Women Writers in the beginning of their career, felt handicapped in a number of ways. They had to face disapproval, criticisms and oppression from patriarchy that sought to suppress them. Women's writings were considered to be inferior to men. In addition, women writers were bestowed with the massive duty of not only breaking out of the shell of the male clutches, but also to set a tradition of female writing exclusively their own. They had to dedicate themselves to the forging of a new consciousness among other women, inspiring them to break out of the patriarchal yoke. They had to deconstruct the identity given to women by patriarchy and had to replace it with an authentic and primary identity for themselves.

Women writers were expected to reflect the feminine values and encourage women to be docile and submissive to man. But women writers sought "to kill the Angel in the House, that phantom of female perfection who stands in the way of freedom" (Eagleton 26). "Killing the Angel in the

House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (Woolf 5). Writers like Charlotte Bronte outgrew the constraining feminine role. Charlotte Bronte wrote in her letter to Lewes:

Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms, or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand. (Quoted in Showalter 80)

Gilman's commitment to advance the lives of women led to writing. Literature offered her an opportunity to challenge the restrictions imposed upon women. In 1887, Gilman suffered a nervous breakdown following a postpartum depression and she was treated by S. Weir Mitchell, a specialist in women's nervous disorders, who had attended to many well-known female literary figures through his famous rest cure therapy. Although Mitchell's rest cure was in accordance with the most advanced neurological thinking of the day, it can also be considered as an attempt to reorient women to the domestic sphere so that they could cater to the needs of man and fulfill "the most important" role of bearing and rearing children. George Meredith had apparently experienced no ill effects from his prescriptions, whereas Jane Addams, Edith Wharton, Charlotte Gilman and Virginia Woolf had suffered a lot from his rest cure treatment.

Mitchell diagnosed Gilman's condition as "nervous prostration" or "neurasthenia", a breakdown of the central nervous system and prescribed his rest cure. Typically lasting for six to eight weeks, the rest cure

focused on nutrition and revitalization of the body. It included five components: total, enforced bed rest – the patient was forbidden to sew, converse, move herself in and out of bed, read, write, and in more extreme case even to feed herself; seclusion from family and familiar surroundings; a carefully controlled diet which included overfeeding, the key ingredient being milk and cream to create new energy by increasing body volume; massage and electrotherapy to prevent muscular atrophy. In the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Gilman narrates the experiences that she felt with Mitchell’s treatment, through a fictitious character.

Gilman perceived that the rest cure treatment was a patriarchal strategy framed to circumscribe the development of women. Hence, she challenged the rest cure treatment and emerged successfully cured without the ‘rest’ treatment, thereby rooting out all the efforts of patriarchy to curb the creative pursuits of women. She defies the doctor and the whole of patriarchy through the story “The Yellow Wallpaper”, by creating a protagonist who also writes. Her creative life and fiction reveal that she “overwrote” Mitchell’s efforts to make her more like the ‘ideal’ women and she ultimately “overwrites” men and the male dominated society as a whole (Golden 143).

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is the story of a woman who suffers from acute nervous disorders and is taken to the country and a rest cure is imposed on her. She is forbidden to engage in any form of physical or mental exertion. It is her physician / husband John, the representative of patriarchy, who orders

the nameless narrator to give up creative writing and to undergo a three-month rest cure. She is made to rest alone and that initially repulses her. Later, the yellow wallpaper in her room creates a weird interest in her to write her story. She writes covertly, hiding her journal when she hears John approaching because he “hates to have her write a word” (13). The narrator persists in exploring the only text allowed to her - the yellow wallpaper in her prison. She says:

By daylight she is subdued – quiet. I fancy, it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling . . . I really have discovered something at last . . . The front pattern does move – and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one and she crawls round fast. And her crawling shakes it all over . . . But nobody could climb through that pattern, it strangles so. I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down . . . I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I’ll tell you why – privately – I’ve seen her . . . seen her in that long shaded land, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbours, creeping all around the garden . . . I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind. (49-50)

Finally, unable to bear her servile existence, the protagonist crawls in madness in front of her husband, like the woman that she found

in the wallpaper and in all inability, Dr. John faints before his wife. The nameless narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” shows the extreme consequences of a woman living in a society in which the ‘sanctified’ home confines and chokes her. The narrator disobeys the doctor’s prescription of extended rest and prefers to stay “mad”, instead of taking up the patriarchal cure to give her sanity. In overruling her physician’s attempts to oppress her, she writes herself into a position of power, by which she creeps over him. . . .

“The Yellow Wallpaper” has been read as a powerful feminist text that attacks the patriarchal invasion on women who try to express themselves. Her “madness” towards the end of the story is seen as a higher form of sanity and her search for meaning in the wallpaper is seen as a quest for liberation. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in “The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination” record the persistent denigrations that the protagonist and the woman in the wallpaper suffer in the clutches of patriarchy:

. . . like most women in the patriarchal society, the woman writer does experience her gender as a painful obstacle, or even debilitating inadequacy. . . . the loneliness of the artist, her feelings of alienation . . . her fear of antagonism, her culturally conditioned timidity about self dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention – all these phenomena of

‘inferiorization’ make up the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition . . .(444)

For tracing the path of the disintegration in the unnamed protagonist of the story text of Gilman, Simone de Beauvoir’s view on “the expression of duality” is notable (xviii). This classic exposition of alterity – of the Self and the Other explains how man is assumed as the Self and woman, the Other.

humanity is male and man defies woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (xviii)

Society is organized on the assumption of the Self and the Other and the consequences of this become deleterious to women. The Self treats the Other as either a supplement or a threat. The Other does not become accidentally lost, but becomes deliberately erased. Women, relegated to the status of the Other, have been always in the plight of accepting the dominance of men. Feminist language is actively a projection of one’s own self – the image of the self that yearns for expressing itself. It is the language that succeeds in rediscovering and reviving the female benumbed sensitivity. In the essay “The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic”, Diana Price Herndl writes:

If her language is something other than silence, it must either be a usurped language (the language/logic of men used by women), or it must be something fundamentally other itself... Because it is spoken by “no one”, that is because it comes from the “place of absence”, a feminine language does not assume the authority of logical discourse and therefore, escape the hierarchy of the official language... Feminine language then is marked by process and change, by absence and shifting by multivoicedness. Meaning in feminine language is always “elsewhere”, between voices or between discourses, marked by a mistrust of the signified. (10)

Symbols and images are a few devices that express the latent voice of women. They serve as a vehicle to signify complex meanings in the literary text and to bring to light and to counter the covert sexual biases embedded in a literary work. Recurrent use of allusions, metaphors, irony and ambiguity empower women writers to represent the negative and subsidiary social roles forced on them. Women writers commonly resort to metonymy too. Once deconstructed they expose the unsaid – the voice of the afflicted, striving to give vent to their tortured selves. Finding themselves beyond the bounds of sayable literal language, women use the symbolic language – the unspoken and the unsayable language.

Most of all it is the female ‘pathology of the loss of the ‘self’ in service to ‘others’ that is

dramatised in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. She cannot articulate her sense of her ‘self’ to her husband, although she tries, because she does not have a language adequate to counter the patriarchal terms in which he (and she) thin. Consequently, the only outlet for her rebellion is to strip away the structure of illusions, the false and superficial pattern, which has kept her sense of individuality repressed. Finally, the paper on which she could write her journal is replaced by the wallpaper, as her objective observations are replaced by subjective imaginings.

In reality, women writers in the late eighteenth century. were bestowed with the massive duty of not only breaking out of the shell of the male clutches, but also to set a tradition of female writing exclusively on their own. They yearned to create a language with no gender specifications that degrade women or include them with men as the patriarchal whole. Also, they wished to forge a new consciousness among other women, inspiring them to break out of the language that submerged the identity of the women in men. As language is the product of the social construction of gender, they felt that women could acquire a reformed language only when the patriarchal imprints in it were wiped out totally. Virginia Woolf pointed out “killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (5). Apart from finding out “a room of their own”, women have to create a language of their own.

Perceiving all these, the protagonist attempts to become a writer and her active

efforts are thwarted and she feels herself similar to the woman that she finds imprisoned behind the wallpaper. Her attempts to resist the cultural mechanisms that reduce individual women to stereotypes by repressing their sense of individuality leads to her total rejection of the social world in favour of the only alternative available to her – a private world of madness. Her crawling at the end of the story is seen as a sign of rebirth or of revival and her husband's fainting is a proof that she has outwitted him. Patriarchal power has been cowed down by the stern persistence of the protagonist. Elaine R. Hedges, in her essay, "Out at Last? "The Yellow Wallpaper" After Two Decades of Feminist Criticism" speculates on this:

The Wallpaper, as the story's key metaphor, has been read as inscribing the medical, marital, maternal, psychological, sexual, socio cultural, political and linguistic situation of its narrator – protagonist; as an image of the situation of the woman writer and hence a way of understanding the dilemmas of female authorship; as revealing the relations between gender and reading and gender and writing; and as a description of the problems of female self-representation. (222)

Critics interpret that the wallpaper is "the facade of the patriarchal text" (Quoted in Hedges 223). By relearning the woman inside the wallpaper, the narrator deconstructs the identity designed for her and becomes ready to author her own text. Judith Fetterley too considers "The Yellow Wallpaper" to be the expression of the male

control on textuality – on the script or stories through which women try to define and understand themselves.

Gilman used language in her novel to situate herself within and to the norm. She worked in the margins to rupture the dominant culture, to work to generate social change. Language has become one of the many arenas in which gender discriminations are set forth. Women writers claim that the language that the language that is left to them is man-made (Spender 407). Men, as the dominating gender have produced language and women have all along played a vital part in validating this. In the thought and practice of our society, it is the man who becomes the foreground, whereas woman becomes the blurred and often the indecipherable background. The language left in the society promotes male domination so much that it seems reasonable to assume that the world is male and for male only. It reinforces the belief that males are the universal, the central and the important category and women are the dependents created to serve man. Finally, at the end of the story, the narrator through her own unique use of language as it appears to her in the wall paper achieves an authority of her own. The end is equivalent or becomes equivalent, by narrative affiliation, to the concept of the dark Double or Other, that projected male fear of the unmaning and unknowable female.

Had the fictional character of Gilman followed the rest cure prescription specially meant for female patients, the righteous Dr. John would not have been "floored". Rather, the narrator would have been "cured" of her

ambition to develop her intellect and would have lost all her creative powers. She would have thereby fallen a victim to the patriarchal tyranny of stifling the power of creativity in women. Gilman has very poignantly created the character of the protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper", who ultimately succeeds in overpowering the man-made assaults on her. Gilman concludes that if women follow the dictates of patriarchy and abandon their creative pursuits, their fate would also be the same as that of the imprisoned protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and same as that of the imprisoned women that the protagonist finds hidden in the wallpaper.

The yellow wallpaper is symbolic of the Cult of True Womanhood, which binds women to the home and family. Getting beyond the yellow wallpaper, women defied the corrupted power that men wielded over women, escaped their confinement, and created for themselves a new ideological role. Gilman advocates self-dependence and she motivates women to adopt a profession for their living, which will drive them in the right path, away from the patriarchal yoke. Her woman in the story too, prefers to be self-reliant and shuns the therapy given by her husband-doctor. At last, she shatters the

patriarchal domination over her by making her husband-tyrant helpless.

Through this story, Gilman highlights that women have to break out of the male oppression and acquire what Helene Cixous calls "the distinct identity and the profound power" that writing gives for a woman. Gilman reflects what Cixous tells about the weapon of writing that a woman writer potentially carries with her:

. . . To write. An act which will not only realize the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality but also . . . tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty . . . To write and thus to forge for herself the anti-logos weapon. To become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process. . . . It is by writing, from and toward women and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than silence. Women would break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (221)

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