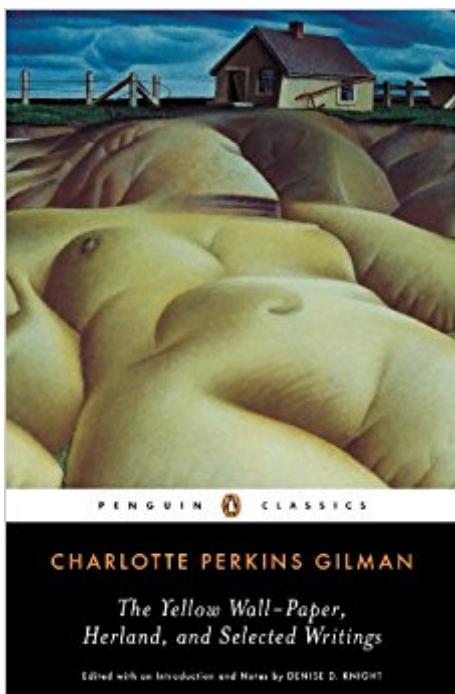


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# The Yellow Wall-Paper, Herland, And Selected Writings (Penguin Classics)



## **Synopsis**

Wonderfully sardonic and slyly humorous, the writings of landmark American feminist and socialist thinker Charlotte Perkins Gilman were penned in response to her frustrations with the gender-based double standard that prevailed in America as the twentieth century began. Perhaps best known for her chilling depiction of a woman's mental breakdown in her unforgettable 1892 short story 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', Gilman also wrote *Herland*, a wry novel that imagines a peaceful, progressive country from which men have been absent for 2,000 years. Both are included in this volume, along with a selection of Gilman's major short stories and her poems. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## **Customer Reviews**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was born in New England, a descendant of the prominent and influential Beecher family. In 1884 she married Charles Water Stetson. After giving birth, Charlotte sank into a deep depression. She entered a sanitarium in Philadelphia to undergo the 'rest cure', a controversial treatment, which forbade any type of physical activity or intellectual

stimulation. 1892, she published the now-famous story 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'. In 1898, her most famous nonfiction book, *Women and Economics*, was published. With its publication, and subsequent translation into seven languages, Gilman earned international acclaim. In 1900, she married her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman. Over the next thirty-five years, she wrote and published hundreds of stories and poems and more than a dozen books. Denise D. Knight is a professor of English at the State University of New York at Cortland, where she specializes in nineteenth-century American Literature. She is author of *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* and editor of *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *The Abridged Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and *Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, and *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. She is also the author of numerous articles, essays, and reviews on nineteenth-century American writers.

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Â EXPLANATORY AND TEXTUAL NOTES  
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THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER, HERLAND, AND SELECTED WRITINGS  
CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN (1860-1935) was born in New England, a descendant of the prominent and influential Beecher family. Despite the affluence of her famous ancestors, she was born into poverty. Her father abandoned the family when she was a child, and she received just four years of formal education. At an early age she vowed never to marry, hoping instead to devote her life to public service. In 1882, however, at the age of twenty-one, she was introduced to Charles Walter Stetson (1858-1911), a handsome Providence, Rhode Island, artist, and the two were married in 1884.

Charlotte Stetson became pregnant almost immediately after their marriage, gave birth to a daughter, and sank into a deep depression that lasted for several years. She eventually entered a sanitarium in Philadelphia to undergo the *ærest cure*, a controversial treatment for nervous prostration, which forbade any type of physical activity or intellectual stimulation. After a month, she returned to her husband and child and subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown. In 1888, she left Stetson and moved with her daughter to California, where her recovery was swift. In the early 1890s, she began a career in writing and lecturing, and in 1892, she published the now-famous story *æThe Yellow Wall-Paper.* A volume of poems, *In This Our World*, followed a year later. In 1894, she relinquished custody of her young daughter to her ex-husband and endured public condemnation for her actions. In 1898, her most famous nonfiction book, *Women and Economics*, was published. With its publication, and its subsequent translation into seven languages, Gilman earned international acclaim. In 1900, she married her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman. Over the next thirty-five years, she wrote and published hundreds of stories and poems and more than a dozen books, including *Concerning Children* (1900), *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), *Human Work* (1904), *The Man Made World; Or, Our Androcentric Culture* (1911), *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Herland* (1915), *With Her in Ourland* (1916), *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers* (1923), and *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (1935). From 1909 to 1916 she singlehandedly wrote, edited, and published her own magazine, *The Forerunner*, in which the utopian romance *Herland* first appeared. In 1932, Gilman learned that she had inoperable breast cancer. Three years later, at the age of seventy-five, she committed suicide, intending her death to demonstrate her advocacy of euthanasia. In 1993, Gilman was named in a poll commissioned by the Siena Research Institute as the sixth most influential woman of the twentieth century. In 1994, she was inducted posthumously into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. DENISE D. KNIGHT is professor of English at the State University of New York at Cortland, where she specializes in nineteenth-century American Literature. She is author of *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* and editor of *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *The Abridged Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *æThe Yellow Wall-Paper.* and *Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, and *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. She is also the author of numerous articles, essays, and reviews on nineteenth-century American writers. Published by the Penguin Group Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division

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envision only in her imagination. Born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 3, 1860, Gilman was the great-niece of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tomâ™s Cabin (1852), and Henry Ward Beecher, the renowned minister. Despite her famous ancestry (her great-grandfather was the distinguished theologian Lyman Beecher), Gilman lived a troubled childhood. After her father abandoned the family, her mother, a part-time day-school teacher, was left to raise two children on her own. With only meager earnings, it was a precarious existence. During her adolescence, Gilman became a passionate rebel, defiantly rejecting the conventional roles deemed appropriate for late-nineteenth-century women. At the age of eighteen, she entered the Rhode Island School of Design, where she studied drawing and painting. By the time she was twenty she had decided to devote her life to public service. Although she had vowed never to marry, in January 1882 she met Rhode Island artist Charles Walter Stetson, who proposed marriage just two-and-a-half weeks later. Fearing that marriage would compromise her desire to work, Gilman quickly declined. In a letter to Stetson, Gilman tried to express her reservations: âœAs much as I love you I love WORK better, & I cannot make the two compatible.... I am meant to be useful & strong, to help many and do my share in the worldâ™s work, but not to be loved.â•2 Stetson persisted with marriage proposals for nearly two years, however, and despite serious misgivings on Gilmanâ™s part, they were married on May 2, 1884. Within weeks after the wedding Gilman became pregnant and sank into a deep depression. Her daughter, Katharine Beecher Stetson, was born on March 23, 1885. Gilman recalled in her autobiography both the severity of her distress and the self-blame that she suffered: Absolute incapacity. Absolute misery.... Prominent among the tumbling suggestions of a suffering brain was the thought, âœYou did it yourself! You had health and strength and hope and glorious work before youâ" and you threw it all away. You were called to serve humanity, and you cannot serve yourself. No good as a wife, no good as a mother, no good at anything. And you did it yourself!â• ... I would hold [the baby] close, and instead of love and happiness, feel only pain.... Nothing was more utterly bitter than this, that even motherhood brought no joy.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1887, Gilman traveled to Philadelphia, where she underwent the âœrest cureâ• from the leading nerve specialist, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell. The treatment he prescribed required Gilman to live as domestic a life as possible, to have the baby with her at all times, and to never touch a pen, a paintbrush, or a pencil for the remainder of her life. Within months after returning home, she suffered a nervous breakdown. With the modicum of rational intelligence that remained, Gilman garnered the courage to reject Mitchellâ™s advice and to immerse herself again in her work. Her marriage could not survive under the strain of her resolve, however, and in the fall of 1887, she and Stetson agreed to separate. In 1888, Gilman left with Katharine for Pasadena,

California, where her recovery was swift. Freed from the constraints of marriage, she formally launched her career as a writer and lecturer, preaching about the marginalized status of women to increasingly large audiences. Over the course of her lifetime, Gilman proved to be enormously prolific, publishing some five hundred poems, nearly two hundred short stories, hundreds of essays, eight novels, and an autobiography. She also emerged as one of the key figures in the late-nineteenth-century women's movement. Her most famous story, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," was published in 1892, followed by a book of poetry, *In This Our World*, a year later. The publication of her landmark feminist treatise *Women and Economics* (1898) quickly launched Gilman into the spotlight. At the heart of *Women and Economics* is Gilman's insistence that as long as women were economically dependent on men, they could never reach their full potential as human beings. Translated into seven languages, the book won Gilman international acclaim and established her as the authority on the relationship between female sexual oppression and economic dependence on men. With Gilman's public visibility increasing, changes in her personal life were inevitable. The extensive travel and long workdays made it difficult for her to find time for her young daughter. In 1894, she made the agonizing decision to relinquish custody of Katharine to Walter Stetson, whom she divorced the same year. Gilman was publicly condemned for her actions and branded an "unnatural" mother by her detractors. For his part, Stetson soon married Gilman's long-time friend, Grace Ellery Channing. With Katharine back East with Stetson and his new wife, Gilman resumed her work with renewed vigor. During her early years in California, Gilman read Edward Bellamy's socialist-utopian romance, *Looking Backward* (1888). She was drawn to Bellamy's emphasis on political, social, and economic equality and quickly became a convert to Nationalism, the movement spawned by Bellamy's novel. Based on the principles of reform Darwinism, Nationalism reflected a belief in environmental determinism and embraced the view that society would evolve peacefully and progressively. It also promoted an end to capitalism and class distinctions and advanced the idea of the democratic improvement of the human race. Gilman was particularly attracted by the novel's emphasis on women's rights and began actively advocating such social reforms as economic independence, the restructuring of the home and child-care practices "based in part on a 'social motherhood' (a system that would enlist the skills of highly trained child-care professionals)" and dress reform, all themes that would recur in her fictional utopias years later, most notably in *Herland*. In 1900, thirty-nine-year-old Charlotte Stetson married her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman, a Wall Street attorney. The couple settled in New York, and Gilman continued to write and lecture, often embarking on national lecture tours. In 1909, finding it increasingly difficult to secure an audience for her progressive

views, she began her own monthly magazine, the Forerunner, which enjoyed a seven-year run. Like nearly all of her writing, the Forerunner was primarily didactic and featured short stories, serialized novels, essays, articles, fables and fantasies, satires and sermons, and comments and reviews. It was in the Forerunner that the utopian romance *Herland* originally appeared. Serialized in 1915, *Herland* was the perfect forum for illustrating Gilman's idealized vision of a world reformed. By satirizing sexism and inequality, Gilman effectively exposed the absurdities and limitations of patriarchal practices and institutions. One of Gilman's objectives throughout *Herland*, in fact, was to remind us that historically society has assumed that various traits are gender-specific (for example, that women are vulnerable and fearful), when, in reality, vulnerability and fear are human traits. Through an extended cultural analysis of the progressive, utopian *Herland*, Gilman demonstrates how much better the rest of the world could be if it, too, were free of the gender biases that preclude women from reaching their full potential. *Herland* begins with three young male American explorers discovering a remote country inhabited exclusively by women who reproduce parthenogenetically, giving birth only to daughters. The narrator, Vandyck Jennings, and his companions, Terry O. Nicholson and Jeff Margrave, hold traditional androcentric views of women, but once they arrive in *Herland*, their notions are quickly put to the test. While Jeff, a tender soul and hopeless romantic who worships women, anticipates finding something akin to a nunnery in this strange new land, the supremely egotistical and sexist Terry believes that *Herland* will fulfill his wildest fantasies with its population comprised of just Girls and Girls and Girls. Only Vandyck (also called Van), a sociologist by trade, is open-minded enough to reserve judgment. Still, while he prides himself on holding a middle ground between the two extremes represented by Jeff and Terry, his adherence to prevailing stereotypes is evident near the beginning of the novel when he remarks that this is a civilized country! There must be men. Soon after their arrival in *Herland*, the three explorers are captured and taken prisoner by a group of women. "We were borne inside, struggling manfully, but held secure most womanfully, in spite of our best endeavors," Van remarks. Gilman humorously extends the role reversal after the men are rendered helpless by being chloroformed, undressed, and put to bed by their captors. When they awaken, they are disconcerted by the women's treatment of them not as men, but as human beings. Since gender roles are nonexistent in *Herland*, the frame of reference through which the men have historically identified themselves is no longer relevant. The members of this all-female nation are calm, grave, wise, wholly unafraid, evidently assured and determined. The primary means by which the women are distinguished from the female population at large, in fact, is through appearance and behavior. Because the country has been without men for so long, the *Herlanders*

have had no reason to develop their sexual attributes. With no opposite sex to attract, the women have become the epitome of practicality, wearing comfortable tunics and short, carefree hair. Much of the humor in the novel is derived from Gilman's playful examination of accepted social and cultural practices, many of which are based on blind and often unconscious adherence to gender roles that have evolved over time. By demonstrating viable alternatives to traditional roles, Gilman asks readers to reevaluate their assumptions. In using a series of conversations between the male explorers and the women as a form of mutual discovery about their countries' respective traditions and practices, Gilman exposes not only inherent gender biases but also social customs that make women look vain and foolish. For example, while the Herlanders wear hats only for protection from sun or cold, the men confess that American women wear them to look à œbecoming. • When the Herlanders ask if elaborately decorated hats are worn by both genders, the men are forced to admit that they are not. The women quickly learn that double standards are enormously pervasive outside of their country with respect to such things as hairstyles (long hair is considered feminine), marriage (wives assume their husbands' last name), language (the term à œvirgin • applies only to women), employment practices (in some households only the men work), and the myth of man as protector of woman. Gilman also uses Herland as a forum for exposing her support of cremation, her indictment of the meat industry, her assertion that war is a male construct, her impatience with those who embrace the idea of immortality, and, most important, her views on child-rearing, which she also discusses at length in such works as *Concerning Children* (1900) and *Women and Economics*. Of the various reforms depicted in Herland, social motherhood was closest to Gilman's heart. In both the novel and in her own life, Gilman advocated a system in which the young child would be trained by professional caretakers and raised communally. Because not every woman has the talent, training, or experience to make her effective in child-rearing, Gilman argued, children who were raised by professional caretakers would be healthier, brighter, and better adjusted. Moreover, such a system would free the child's mother to engage in work outside of the home with remunerative benefits. (All of the women in Herland are actively engaged in one form of employment or another.) In Herland, motherhood is deified and children are the à œcenter and focus • of the Herlanders' existence. As Somel, Van's personal tutor, explains, à œChild-rearing has come to be with us a culture so profoundly studied, practiced with such subtlety and skill, that the more we love our children the less we are willing to trust that process to unskilled hands "even our own. • Indeed, the Herlander children, who have no surnames since they are à œall one family, • are happy, bright, vigorous, and well-adjusted. Initially skeptical, Van becomes a convert to the Herlanders' child-rearing

methods by the novelâ™s end. After observing the practice at work over a period of months, he is forced to conclude that they have developed a âœperfect system of child-rearing,â• while the American system is highly flawed. Housekeeping is another subject that Gilman addresses in Herland. She realized that, in life, the home served vastly dichotomous functions for each separate gender, an issue she expounded on at length both in *Women and Economics* and in *The Home* (1903). For a man, it was a haven to retreat to after a long day at work; for a woman, it was a place of veritable enslavement, where from dawn until dusk she would be engaged in the most menial type of domestic labor. The solution Gilman proposes is to have the housekeeping, like the child-rearing, performed by trained professionals to minimize the isolation and mental myopia that housebound women are doomed to suffer. As for marriage, Gilman pairs each of the men in Herland with a mate, and each union has a markedly different outcome. Terry, who is alternately viewed as a womanizer (he believes in âœtwo kinds of womenâ "those he wanted and those he didnâ™tâ•) and a sexual predator (âœhe was like a creature about to springâ•), marries Alima but is quickly expelled from Herland for attempting marital rape. Jeff and his wife Celis become âœthe most absorbed of loversâ• and soon announce her pregnancy, an historical event that is celebrated by the entire country. And Van marries Ellador, who is confused by the notion that married people would desire to engage in sexual intercourse âœout of season.â• While she sympathizes with Vanâ™s wish to experience the âœsweetest, highest consummation of mutual love,â• she declines his advances until she is convinced that regular sexual relations are both proper and desirable. In the final analysis, *Herland* is at once a utopian romance, a satire, and a social reform novel. It served as a forum through which Gilman was able to demonstrate the majority of her reform theories at work. Its sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916), follows Van and Ellador after they leave Herland and travel the world during the Great War. At the conclusion of the novel, the disillusioned pair returns to the utopian Herland, which offers a sanctuary from the disease-infested, poverty-stricken, and decidedly inequitable masculine world. Despite the fact that Gilman became enticed by the social reform movement in the 1890s, she did not begin writing social reform fiction on a regular basis until the *Forerunner* was launched in 1909. By contrast, her early fictionâ "those works written in the 1890sâ" range from ghost stories to humorous tales to autobiographical fiction. One of her earliest published stories, âœThe Unexpectedâ• (1890), centers around the character of Edouard Charpentier, a struggling, Europeanized American âœartisteâ• living in Paris, who is fickle, pretentious, and humorously melodramatic in his love for Marie, a distant cousin he discovers on a trip to the States. After knowing her a week, courting her a month, and being married to her a fortnight, Edouard suspects his wife of committing adultery. While the storyâ™s

denouement is somewhat predictable, the first-person male narration is entertaining and Edouard delightfully whimsical. "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) is a remarkable piece of fiction comprised of two connected stories set a hundred years apart. In it, Gilman weaves an intriguing tale of illegitimate birth, repressed sexuality, female rebellion, physical and emotional abuse, and murder-suicide. The giant wisteria vine, a major symbol in the story, is both emblematic of maternal sacrifice and a grotesque reminder of the suffering of women who are literally and metaphorically silenced by the patriarchy. "An Extinct Angel" (1891) is a clever satirical tale examining the history of the "angel in the house," a metaphor for the perfect wife and doting mother who adheres to the tenets of "true womanhood." Presented as a fairy tale but with a subtext rooted in historical fact, Gilman alludes to the "rule of thumb" and other forms of violence affecting women bound by the cult of domesticity. "An Extinct Angel" effectively illustrates Gilman's view that domestic servility is both unhealthy and potentially dangerous. It is, of course, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892) for which Gilman is best remembered. The story has received more critical acclaim than any of her other work. In artistry and execution, it is superior to any of her other literary works. Yet critics have disagreed vehemently over the meaning of the story, variously arguing the significance of everything from linguistic cues to psychoanalytic interpretations to historiographical readings. Based upon Gilman and her own breakdown, the story's protagonist is slowly driven mad by her physician husband while undergoing the rest-cure treatment for nervous prostration. Gilman uses the symbol of madness as a powerful metaphor in the story. Madness manifested as progressive incipient insanity and madness manifested as extreme and repressed anger at female bondage become dichotomous components of the protagonist's condition. The opening of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" quickly establishes the narrator's circumstances. She is spending the summer in an isolated mansion with her husband, John, a well-respected physician whose character is defined by pragmatism and reason. The narrator is suffering from an illness, which John downplays as a "temporary nervous depression." As part of her treatment, she is "forbidden to work," a remedy with which she strenuously disagrees. Writing of any kind is prohibited, since John has cautioned her "not to give way to fancy in the least." But the narrator is convinced that writing might prove therapeutic, and, despite John's admonitions, she keeps a secret diary. The diary entries reveal much about the narrator's state of mind. She is apparently suffering a severe form of postpartum depression, a condition neither acknowledged by John nor by the late-nineteenth-century medical community of which he is a part. So extreme is the narrator's depression that the care of the new baby has been assumed by a nursemaid. Deprived of the freedom to write openly, the narrator gradually shifts her attention to the

wallpaper in the attic nursery where she spends most of her time. She soon begins to detect a subpattern that crystallizes into the image of a woman attempting to escape from behind the wallpaper, which also appears to the narrator to have prisonlike bars. As the entrapped woman becomes increasingly desperate to escape, the narrator comes to her aid. Eventually, the narrator's own identity becomes merged with that of the entrapped woman, and she begins to collaborate in her own escape. At the end of the story, John breaks into the locked room, discovers his wife crawling on the floor, and faints *â œright across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!*<sup>4</sup> While some critics have hailed the narrator as a feminist heroine, others have seen in her a maternal failure coupled with a morbid fear of female sexuality. Some have viewed the story as an exemplar of the silencing of women writers in nineteenth-century America; others have focused on the gothic elements, comparing the story to those by Edgar Allan Poe. The conclusion of the story, too, has been variously read as a victory and as a defeat. Those who argue that the narrator triumphs cite John's appearance in her room (he has been reduced to an impotent lump on the floor) as evidence for their point of view. It is worth noting, however, that John is still obstructing the narrator at the story's end by physically blocking her path so that she has to *â œcreep over him.*<sup>5</sup> When asked why she wrote *â œThe Yellow Wall-Paper,*<sup>6</sup> Gilman insisted that her objective was to convince Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell of *â œthe error of his ways*<sup>7</sup> in treating nervous prostration. In following his prescription, Gilman reflects, *â œI ... came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over.*<sup>8</sup> When she allegedly heard many years later that Mitchell had read the story and subsequently changed his treatment of nervous prostration, Gilman was pleased. *â œI that is a fact,*<sup>9</sup> she wrote, *â œI have not lived in vain.*<sup>10</sup> *â œThe Rocking-Chair*<sup>11</sup> (1893) is another story replete with gothic elements, including the specter of a beautiful young woman, a rocking chair that mysteriously *â œwalks*<sup>12</sup> across the room, and the disclosure of a coffinlike chamber. Like *â œThe Giant Wistaria,*<sup>13</sup> *â œThe Rocking-Chair*<sup>14</sup> culminates with the discovery of a brutal death. The narrator of another early story, *â œThrough This*<sup>15</sup> (1893), is hauntingly reminiscent of the deeply disturbed protagonist in *â œThe Yellow Wall-Paper.*<sup>16</sup> *â œThrough This*<sup>17</sup> chronicles a day in the life of a young wife and mother immersed in the cult of domesticity. She subordinates her own needs to those of her husband and children so that they will grow strong and happy. The unrelenting demands of her duties, however, leave her exhausted and unhappy, despite her protests to the contrary. Like the narrator in *â œThe Yellow Wall-Paper,*<sup>18</sup> the protagonist in *â œThrough This*<sup>19</sup> is mesmerized by the colors that creep up and down her bedroom walls. Both stories deftly demonstrate the potential cost to women who subordinate their own needs to those of others. A story with Christian overtones, *â œThe Boys and*

The Butterâ • (1910), is actually a reflection of Gilmanâ ™s thoughts on the indignities that can be suffered by children at the hands of cruel and thoughtless adults. Rarely one to miss an opportunity to instill a moral, Gilman adds a plot twist that restores the faith of the children and publicly humiliates the self-righteous aunt who has caused them to suffer. A recurring theme in Gilmanâ ™s fiction is that of women who desperately struggle for the autonomy and freedom that is restricted in an androcentric society. In â œMrs. Beazleyâ ™s Deedsâ • (1911), the protagonist, Maria, lives under the thumb of her tyrannical husband William, who espouses the philosophy, â œWives, submit yourselves unto your husbands.â • William coerces Maria into signing over nearly all the deeds to a large tract of land inherited from her late father. To further assert his control, William arranges to keep a boarder, giving Maria virtually no advance notice. The boarder, Miss Lawrence, is a bright, dynamic, and sympathetic attorney who convinces Mrs. Beazley to leave her husband for the sake of the children. When she is advised of her legal rights, Mrs. Beazley starts to get a clearer vision of her personal rights as well; she recognizes the emotional costs of her husbandâ ™s domination and triumphs at the end of the story. The story â œTurnedâ • (1911) examines the themes of adultery, female victimization, and sisterhood. When Mrs. Marion Marroner, a former college professor, discovers that her eighteen-year-old domestic servant, Gerta, has been impregnated by Marronerâ ™s husband, she is initially consumed by jealousy and outrage. After the initial shock wears off, however, Mrs. Marroner begins to see Gerta for what she is: a helpless victim of her husbandâ ™s exploitation. She vows to stand by Gerta and her child, and at the storyâ ™s conclusion, the two women stand united before the duplicitous Mr. Marroner.â œOld Waterâ • (1911) weaves the elements of dreams, fate, and dÃ©jÃ vu into a tale of mystery and intrigue. Pendexter, a famous poet, is overzealous in his pursuit of a friendâ ™s vibrant young daughter. As she struggles to repel his sexual advances during a moonlit stroll, the two lose their footing and tumble off of a cliff into the lake below. She survives; he does not. Gilman leaves the ending ambiguous, and the question of whether Pendexterâ ™s death was the result of accidental drowning or murder is left unanswered. In â œMaking a Changeâ • (1911), Gilman once again pairs an older woman â œcounselorâ • with a younger woman and combines her advocacy of day-care centers and social motherhood with her call for economic independence. The storyâ ™s protagonist, Julia Gordins, is a young wife and mother who discovers that abandoning her career as a musician to become a full-time, housebound caretaker for her infant son involves such a forfeiture of her â œselfâ • that suicide seems to offer the only means of escape. Juliaâ ™s mother-in-law discovers her intentions in time to prevent the suicide, and the two women together effect a solution to the crisis. Without telling Juliaâ ™s husband, they conspire to have Julia return to work outside of

the home while her mother-in-law indulges her own desires by opening a *œ*baby-gardenâ • on the roof of their apartment building. The change engenders a positive outcome on a number of levels. Not only is Frankâ ™s mother providing a valuable community service, but, more important, the restructuring of the environment has freed Julia to return to the musical world which was her livelihood prior to marriage. Another happy ending is seen in *œ*Mrs. Elderâ ™s Ideaâ • (1912) after a compromise is struck between the decidedly mismatched Grace Elder and her husband, Herbert. When Herbert announces one day that he has sold his business, his city-loving wife is horrified to learn that he has purchased a farm. Grace perceives life on a farm as analogous to *œ*penal servitude,â • and there arises in her *œ*a slow, boiling flood of long-suppressed rebellion.â • She begins to formulate a plan, and within a few weeks she announces that she is moving to Boston to become a professional buyer. She assures her husband, however, that he will always be welcome in her new home. Gilman demonstrates that a commuter marriage can work, especially when two half-homes are more satisfying than one whole home with an *œ*unhappy wife withering in discontent.â • *Scandal* informs *œ*The Chair of Englishâ • (1913), a story that hinges on the themes of deception, blackmail, and the misuse of power. Dr. Irwin Manchester, the chair of the English department, is an unscrupulous man who fabricates a story about a colleagueâ ™s infidelity, hoping to force the colleagueâ ™s resignation so that he might secure the vacant post for a relative. Gilmanâ ™s protagonist, Mona Beale, is a wise and intelligent woman who confronts the devious Manchester after catching him in his own web of deceit. She retaliates with her own form of blackmail and forces him to vacate his chairmanship under the threat of exposure. While the representation of the ideal is obvious in *Herland* and in other works featuring utopian landscapes, the impact of Gilmanian idealism spills over, perhaps more subtly, into much of her short fiction as well. Among those stories depicting utopian communities, *œ*Bee Wiseâ • (1913) is perhaps her best. Like *Herland*, *œ*Bee Wiseâ • provides the perfect forum for illustrating her idealized vision of a world reformed. The story focuses on a group of enterprising women who establish two utopian communities in California. These communities contain many of the same amenities as those described in *Herland*, such as sensible clothing, baby-gardens, and kitchenless homes. The story serves as yet another treatise-in-miniature of Gilmanâ ™s life philosophy: that work is the first duty of every human being. A power struggle is one of several themes in *œ*His Motherâ • (1914), a story centering on a middle-aged policewoman, Mrs. Martin, and her son, Jack. As a procurer of young prostitutes, Jack epitomizes everything his mother repudiates. At the conclusion of the story, Jackâ ™s mother is forced to arrest her son for trafficking in prostitution. If the ending is melodramatic, Gilmanâ ™s message is not. The story expresses her views not only on the

exploitation of the innocent, but also on the powerful issue of maternal guilt. We are left with an image of Mrs. Martin still trying to expiate Jackâ™s crimes by spending âœa long life in trying to do good enough to make up for her own share in his evil.âœDr. Clairâ™s Placeâ• (1915) presents an alternative to the conventional rest cure treatment that Gilman describes in âœThe Yellow Wall-Paper.â• In this story, Octavia Welch is an archetypal death-in-life character who is contemplating suicide after battling nervous prostration for many years. A casual acquaintance gently persuades her to see Dr. Willy Clair, a woman who has opened a sanitarium specializing in the treatment of nervous disorders. Unlike the rest cure, Dr. Clairâ™s treatment of chronic depression requires both physical and mental activity on the part of the patient. The themes in âœDr. Clairâ™s Placeâ• are similar to those in many of Gilmanâ™s stories : The issues of control, empowerment, and work are of paramount importance, as they were in Gilmanâ™s own life.âœJoanâ™s Defenderâ• (1916) is a story with androgynistic overtones and is mildly reminiscent of Herland. Joan, a petulant child, is rescued from a destructive and hostile home environment by a kindly uncle. When they arrive at his ranch, Joan discovers that because all of her cousins wear the same short hairstyle and loose trousers, she is hard-pressed to discern the boys from the girls. In this gender-neutral environment, similar to that described in Herland, Joan thrives. The formerly whiny, whimpering girl is transformed into a bright, cheerful, and self-sufficient child. Venereal disease is the subject of âœThe Vintageâ• (1916), a deftly sketched story and one of Gilmanâ™s most moving. At the heart of âœThe Vintageâ• is Gilmanâ™s reminder that venereal disease transcends class and afflicts people from all walks of life. She chooses as her victim/heroine a member of a proud and aristocratic Southern family, Leslie Vauremont Barrington Montroy, whose husband infects her with syphilis. The surprise ending is poignantly rendered. When the truth is revealed, the coupleâ™s young son, who is also infected, rises to incredible levels of altruism to console his grieving father. Gilman uses the story âœThe Unnatural Motherâ• (1916) to expose the hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness of people who villified her for relinquishing custody of her daughter Katharine to her ex-husband and his new wife in 1894. Significantly, the story was published three times during Gilmanâ™s life. Esther Greenwood, the protagonist, is a healthy, free-spirited woman who is ostracized by the community because of her unconventional and liberal child-rearing techniques, which the townspeople deem inappropriate. The communityâ™s criticisms are drawn from Gilmanâ™s own experiences, as she candidly acknowledged in her autobiography. âœThe good mamas of Pasadena were extremely critical of my methods.... They thought it scandalous that I should so frankly teach [Katharine] the simple facts of sexâ• and allow her to play âœbare-footed in the ... California sunshine.... For all this I was

harshly blamed, accused of "neglecting my child."<sup>7</sup> Gilman uses "The Unnatural Mother" to respond to her detractors by depicting Esther Greenwood as a martyred heroine. Esther sacrifices her life to save fifteen hundred townspeople, including her daughter, yet they still continue to pass judgment on her actions and consider her an unnatural mother.<sup>8</sup> In addition to fiction, Gilman was a poet, publishing her first volume of verse, *In This Our World*, in 1893. During her lifetime, in fact, she was better known as a poet than as a fiction writer. Although she enjoyed reading the lyrical works of such poets as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Rudyard Kipling, Jean Ingelow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Gilman's poetry, like her fiction, tended to be heavily didactic. Gilman's strongest poetry was her satirical verse. Her most famous poem, "Similar Cases" (1890), a satire on social conservatism, was praised by numerous critics, including William Dean Howells. In addition to satirical work, however, Gilman also wrote occasional verse, political and philosophical poetry, nature verse, poems about women's oppression, and works advancing her belief in the inevitability of progress. The selections in this edition offer a sampling of Gilman's range as a poet.<sup>9</sup> In January 1932, Charlotte Perkins Gilman learned that she had inoperable breast cancer. Her work ethic still intact, she tried to maintain as normal a life as possible, lecturing on occasion and publishing in newspapers and magazines. Then, in 1934, Houghton Gilman died very suddenly after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage, and later that year Gilman returned to Pasadena to be near her daughter and grandchildren. She was joined there by her old friend Grace Channing, who had herself been widowed for many years. On the night of August 17, 1935, just weeks after her seventy-fifth birthday, Gilman ended her life by inhaling chloroform. She died quickly and peacefully. Like the Herlander women who thought that personal immortality was a singularly foolish idea,<sup>10</sup> Gilman had no fears about dying and no interest in the afterlife. Rather, she was concerned with making an impact while she was here "by engaging the intellect, engendering discussion, and examining alternative ways of viewing the world. Doubtless she would be pleased to know that works such as *Herland* have reached a whole new generation of readers and continue today to stimulate thought and dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

**DENISE D. KNIGHT**  
**NOTES**

1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1935; reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 331.

2 Quoted in Mary A. Hill, *Endure: The Diaries of Charles Walter Stetson* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 63.

3 Gilman, *The Living*, 91-92.

4 *Ibid.*, 121.

5 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'?" *Forerunner* 4 (October 1913): 271.

6 Gilman, *The Living*, 121.

7 *Ibid.*, 171.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

WORKS BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

Benigna Machiavelli. Serialized in

Forerunner 5, 1914. Reprint, Santa Barbara, Calif.: Bandanna Books, 1993. Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader. Edited with an introduction by Ann J. Lane. New York: Pantheon, 1980. Concerning Children. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1900. *The Crux*. Serialized in Forerunner 2, 1911. Reprinted, New York: Charlton, 1911. *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. 2 vols. Edited by Denise D. Knight. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994. Forerunner 1-7, 1909-1916. Reprinted, with an introduction by Madeleine B. Stern, New York: Greenwood, 1968. *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers*. New York: The Century Company, 1923. *The Home: Its Work and Influence*. New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1903. *Human Work*. New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904. *In This Our World*. Oakland, Calif.: McCombs & Vaughn, 1893. Third ed., Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898. Reprint, New York: Arno, 1974. *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Edited by Denise D. Knight. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996. *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. Foreword by Zona Gale. New York: Appleton-Century, 1935. Reprinted, with an introduction by Ann J. Lane, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. *Mag-Marjorie*. Serialized in Forerunner 3, 1912. *The Man-Made World; Or, Our Androcentric Culture*. Forerunner 1, 1909-1910. Reprint, New York: Charlton, 1911. "Moving the Mountain." Forerunner 2, 1911. Reprint, New York: Charlton, 1911. *Our Brains and What Ails Them*. Serialized in Forerunner 3, 1911. *Social Ethics*. Serialized in Forerunner 4, 1914. *Unpunished*. Catherine J. Golden and Denise D. Knight, eds. New York: Feminist Press, 1997. "What Diantha Did." Forerunner 1, 1909-1910. Reprint, New York: Charlton, 1910. *With Her in Ourland: The Sequel to Herland*. Serialized in Forerunner 7, 1916. Reprinted, with an introduction by Mary Jo Deegan and Michael R. Hill, eds., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1997. *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898. Reprinted, with an introduction by Carl Degler, New York: Harper & Row, 1966. *Won Over*. Serialized in Forerunner 4, 1913. *The Yellow Wall-Paper*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1899. Reprint, with an afterword by Elaine Hedges. 2nd ed. New York: Feminist Press, 1996. *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Edited with an introduction by Denise D. Knight. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994. **SECONDARY SOURCES** Allen, Polly Wynn. *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. Bauer, Dale M. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1998. Biamonti, Gloria A. "there is a story, if we could only find it." Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria." *Legacy* 5, 1988, 33-43. Cane, Aleta. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* as a Feminist Response to Male Quest Romance." Jack London

Journal 2, 1995, 25-38.Ceplair, Larry, ed. Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.Degler, Carl N. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Theory and Practice of Feminism." *American Quarterly* 8, spring 1956, 21-39.DeLamotte, Eugenia C. "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wall-paper'." *Legacy* 5:1, spring 1988, 3-14.Donaldson, Laura E. "The Eve of De-Struction: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Feminist Recreation of Paradise." *Women's Studies* 16, 1989, 373-87.Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Making a Change: Strategies of Subversion in Gilman's Journalism and Short Fiction." In *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Edited by Joanne Karpinski. New York: G. K. Hall, 1992, 234-48.Fleenor, Julian E. "The Gothic Prism: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Gothic Stories and Her Autobiography." In *The Female Gothic*. Edited by Julian E. Fleenor. Montreal: Eden, 1983, 227-41.Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Guber. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.Golden, Catherine. *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1992.Hedges, Elaine. Afterword to "The Yellow Wall-Paper." 2nd ed. New York: Feminist Press, 1996.Hill, Mary A. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860-1896*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980."Endure: The Diaries of Charles Walter Stetson". Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985.

I had originally meant to purchase a book with several short stories by Gilman, but I guess I must've accidentally purchased this one instead. Regardless of my mishap, I was still pleased to re-read this wonderful short story. It's very sad and very fascinating. The main character is a woman suffering from postpartum depression, her husband is a doctor and (due to the beliefs of the time) makes all the wrong decisions in concern to her health. He may very well have loved her but oppressed her to the point of insanity. Her own opinions and desires were of no importance, as per usual for this era. I can see how every one is interpreting this as a feminist story, however, I read it more from a psychological stand point. I don't blame the brother or the husband, I'm sure they genuinely thought they were administering the best form of medical help.

Two years or so before I had the pleasure of reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" for the first time. High school is not the optimal place to read stories as different as this short story because most classmates do not appreciate the art of literary writing, but most importantly the teacher you have can make or break the experience of reading said pieces. It was no surprise at all that after finishing my second read through, I found I had missed a lot of jewels in this little trove. This short story

follows a woman's mental leaps between relating what's going in her life (she had a baby, her husband is a doctor, etc.) and her strong feelings against the yellow wallpaper in her and her husband's room. Mrs. Gilman's notes about the story later revealed that the reason the main protagonist sounded mentally ill but not melodramatically so was because the author herself went through the "rest cure", which nearly drove her into a mental breakdown before she decided to ignore the guidance of her doctor and return to work. There are many themes you can glean from the text. It can 1) be an inside look at how women were treated pre-suffrage, 2) be used as honest proof that postpartum depression is and has been a real struggle mothers have had to face for centuries, or 3) be a little Gothic horror story that explores what happens in the mind of the mentally ill. Below are two of my favorite quotes because they're just so chilling in depth: "I don't like to LOOK out of the windows even--there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?" (loc. 378). "I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (loc. 388). Overall, I like to look at it as both a haunting Gothic piece of fiction and as an inside look of how it feels to slowly go mad. The fact that the narrator started believing there was a woman locked in behind the bars of the paper could very well be her own mind's way making sense of the cage holding it back. It's also moving that at the end the narrator says she feels most at home around the wallpaper she'd spited through the majority of her entries. This massive little story just goes to show how complex our minds truly are, and the dangers that unfold when a mind is oppressed. I highly recommend purchasing an ebook version so as to take plenty of notes while reading.

A great book for future and current psychologists. Gets into the mind of the character in effective and shocking ways.

After enjoying "The Yellow Wallpaper" by this early feminist, I was anxious to read more. I bought a softcover edition which at 70 pages contains seven short stories written in the early 1900s. These stories depict very different times for women who were often subject to the decisions made by the men in their lives. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a chilling short story that shows the consequences of this type of situation. All the stories are very well written and enjoyable. It's hard to imagine such a repressive time. It's sad what so many women had to endure and I'm very grateful for early feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman who dared to voice her opinions in a public way. These stories depict a part of our history and the women in them are tragic and brave and clever. I highly recommend this collection of short stories.~

very interesting

Lanzetta offers an exploration of the "Via Feminina" as the way to find spiritual release from the suppressions ("soul wounds") of male domination. Our "sin" is not pride, as has often been identified, but rather self-negation. Lanzetta writes with spiritual depth and authentic authority from personal encounters along her own journey.

Exactly as shown

I truly enjoyed these short stories, which cause a deep reflection upon the enlightenment experienced by the characters. And how I might react in turn...

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