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Female Gothic and the Domestic Space: The Downfall of Women and the Transgression of Social Expectations in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories.

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Dedicated to my grandmother, Yolanda del Carmen

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Introduction

Under the context of the seminar “The Gothic in English-Speaking Fiction: Terror, Horror, and Other Aesthetic Forms of Fear,” this research focuses on Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Giant Wistaria’ (1891), ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892) and ‘Through This’ (1893). From these short stories, I aimed to explore the basic arguments behind Gilman’s interpretation of the Female Gothic and the constraints of domestic space. Thereupon, I will attempt to focus on how Gilman’s female characters reflect the many issues women face at the core of a male chauvinist society during the 19th century.

Although the gothic genre offers a advantageous niche for aesthetic studies and in-depth analysis of terror, supernatural elements, and others, this research intends to analyze the discussed stories under a gender mainstreaming approach. In this genre, we can identify the sub-genre Female Gothic, which as Smith and Wallace identify in their book *The Female Gothic New Directions* (2009), is a politically subversive genre that reflects the dissatisfactions of women with patriarchal structures (2). Besides, it provides a coded expression of the fears and entrapment that women face within the social sphere.

The analysis of Gilman's short stories can be addressed to the theme of gender-related issues as it has a significant impact on the female characters' lives. Thus, it can be noticed that Gilman found on the Female Gothic a profitable niche to unfold and reflect on her ideas regarding women's constraints from living in a hegemonic society. For instance, Gilman exposes different aspects of patriarchy, such as its tradition, its intention to deprive women from finding their own self-expression, among others. It may be a pivotal study attempting to elucidate Gilman's Female Gothic under the consequences of male-dominated societies, especially, considering Gilman's bounty emphasis on gender assessment. Moreover, it could provide a broader and more explanatory understanding of Female Gothic to externalize how women become subdued agents of patriarchy.

For the purposes of the present work, it is essential to entail the notion of domestic space and the imposition of social roles on women at the core of the 19th century society. These concepts have acquired strong notoriety in Gilman's theoretical work, which might help delimit the mentioned assignment. One of the first and most remarkable nonfiction works written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (1898), have gained recognition because of its original and pioneering current of thought. According to Kimmel and Aronson (1998) She based her arguments on the ideas of Marx and others to stand on the theory of production and the workplace as the site of both oppression and liberation. However, unlike Marx who mainly

concentrated on social classes, she handled this perspective to gender (xx). Following this line, she proposes that women are seen as inferior to men because of their dependence for their survival, paying off their debts mostly with domestic work. To provide a solution, Gilman proposes that women should work and obtain economic independence just as men do, thus balancing their lives in all social spheres. In her words:

the reason why this great race-function of cooking has been so retarded in its natural growth is that the economic dependence of women has kept them back from their share in human progress. When women stand free as economic agents, they will lift and free their arrested functions [...] (241)

For Gilman it was a central issue that women were bound only to the social roles of housewife, housemade, and mother, which unattainable leads women to economically depend on men. Despite the fact that Gilman keeps approaching the concepts of motherhood and marriage as essential in women's lives, her ideals regarding economic dependency and development of personal expression might be related to one of the first steps to understand gender-related issues.

In this line of thought, I will consider Gilman's theory to understand the domestic space as a synonym of the social roles imposed on women by the 19th century. At the same time, I would address the downfall of women in terms of being secluded according to the patriarchal norms. Furthermore, it can be worth understanding the transgression of social expectations in the sense that women try to depart from the imposed constraints,

considering access to work and education. On that account, at the end of the eighteenth century the acclaimed writer and feminist activist Mary Wollstonecraft promoted in her book *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the idea of constructing a society in which women could have entry to education and knowledge that could lead her to work and gaining economic independence, as well as the right to become a participant of society's processes (71). Bearing in mind these definitions, I aim to identify and analyze Gilman's 'The Giant Wistaria', 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'Through This' as portraits of the Female Gothic experience and personal thinking that externalize the impositions and the consequences of male-dominated societies. However, at the same time, women also portray their desire to transgress these norms.

The conception of domestic space and Female Gothic has been widely analyzed in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories. Most of these studies highlight the submission of female characters under patriarchy. For instance, in a general overview of some critiques, Gilman adopted gothic conventions to present an allegory of literary imagination regarding the social, domestic, and psychological confinements of women in 19th century society. Critics such as Carlot M. Davison and Denise Knight have linked Gilman's theory of women's rights and "sexuo-economic" relationships to the image of the Female Gothic and the elements of the domestic space in Gilman's fictional works. As an example, Knight interprets that in 'The Giant Wistaria' "the climbing vine is at once both a symbol of maternal sacrifice and a grotesque reminder of the silencing

of the woman” (175). Moreover, Biamonte addressed that the tree that grasps the protagonist's body on its roots disrupts the foundation of the "haunted house." which is built up under the severeness of patriarchal norms. (36)

Regarding the story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, Davison highlights how the gothic mode of the story stresses the ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood (48). Furthermore, Gilman’s ‘Through This’ also presents a similar argument, as Knight states, it strikes back with Gilman's feminine (and feminist) anger toward the patriarchy, in general, which subjugated women to their "feminine" role (288).

Considering these interpretations and the outlooks of nonfictional works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Wollstonecraft, the present study intends to carry out the idea that throughout Gilman’s short stories, the gothic mode of the domestic space, and the downfall of women stand to bring up a broad understanding of the submission of women at the core of the male chauvinist society in the 19th century. The analysis of Gilman’s ‘Through This’, ‘The Giant Wistaria’ and ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ searches for the similarities and differences that we may find throughout their plots. In this sense, it can provide a more in-depth and extensive understanding of Gilman’s feminist theories, her perception towards the construction of the Female Gothic, and her interpretation of the limitations of the domestic space.

This study is divided in three chapters with the intention to explore Gilman's main arguments and characteristics of her short stories. Bearing in mind the pivotal purpose of this seminar regarding the study of 'Gothic in narrative', the first chapter analyzed different approaches and understandings of early female gothic to stress that Gilman's perspective on the subject offers a far-reaching analysis on how women stands under patriarchal supremacy, and the dreadful consequences they may face.

The second chapter meditates on the interpretations of the elements of the domestic space and the image of the haunted house as an allegory of the main mechanism for submitting women to patriarchal norms in Gilman's 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. The last chapter explores the consequences of the rigid structures of the patriarchal system on women's development, leading to the encounter of their downfall.

Chapter I. Re-vision of the Female Gothic in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Short Stories.

In the 19th century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote a series of fictional stories adopting different gothic tropes such as supernatural, confinement, and terror. In these stories, she embedded crucial topics about how women were subdued by male dominance. Gilman complained about the fact that women were demanded to fulfill not only the duty of being a mother but also the conventionalism of playing the roles of wives and housekeepers, leaving aside their personal and individual will. In Gilman's fiction, gender roles are portrayed in stories like 'Through this', in which an unknown female narrator immerses the audience into her daily routine, which seems to leave little space for activities outside of her family duties. Following this line, one of Gilman's main arguments for building a story within the Gothic genre was to lay bare the consequences behind women's restrictions under male power. It may entail that society denies women's rights as human beings, capable of making their own decisions and working in the social sphere.

However, by the 19th century, the female gothic was ascribed under other reasonings. Early works in this genre seem similar to Gilman's stories since women had to face the consequences of patriarchy. Yet, female gothic was usually described as portraying a naive and innocent character who confronts the fears and dreadful emotions of being chased and oppressed by a male character. Considered one of the first gothic novels, *The Castle of Otranto* started claiming this perspective. Matilda, a young and ingenuous

character, was chased by Manfred, the ruler of Otranto, to obtain a new offspring to inherit his title. Although this argument carries out a crucial understanding of the male behavior towards their female counterparts, it does not provide a more intricate comprehension of women's struggles. I argue that Gilman does include a far-reaching analysis of how women were constructed under patriarchal supremacy and how it shapes their minds towards their social role and personal goals, bringing appalling consequences to their lives. To address these perspectives, I will introduce some early understanding of the female gothic and I will review the main arguments and female characters of Gilman's short stories 'Through This', 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Giant Wistaria'.

The Female Gothic has been one of the main themes in the gothic genre since female characters are often the ones who are more likely to be afflicted and constrained under hideous events. Some Gothic writers have aimed to develop a terrifying plot to provide a more realistic view of women's lives by posing the various issues they might face in a male-dominated society. Most of the female characters become heroines by daring to stand up to these situations. At the same time, some fortunate events help them to achieve a happy ending, which in some cases results in a respectable marriage. To understand how the gothic genre evolved to become a suitable niche for discourses about women's struggle and gender oppression, Eva Figes in her book *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850*, a study of the most important contribution and themes for

female writers during the 18th and 19th century, discussed the relation between gothic mode and feminism.

[...] the Gothic mode eventually became an imaginative vehicle for feminism, since it provided a radical alternative to the daylight reality of conformity and acceptance, offering a dark world of the psyche in which women were the imprisoned victims of men. (57)

As Figs discusses, the gothic genre offers an enormous opportunity to address gender-related issues. It may be crucial to highlight this idea of imprisonment, which came out as a disclosure of a society that accepts and integrates male supremacy. Female gothic was regularly confronting not only male dominance but also people who advocated to follow the hegemonic institution. Thus, what the Gothic mode did is to externalize the subconscious submission of gender that supported and rectified this matter.

Another perspective of how female gothic might be defined is proposed by Ellen Moer, who, according to critics such as Wallace, Holland and Sherman, and Lenoux, was one of the first researchers in identifying the basis of female gothic. In Moer's book *Literary Women: The Great Writers*, she introduced this term explaining it as follows:

The work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic. But what I mean—or anyone else means—by "the Gothic " is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear (90)

Following this definition, unlike Figs, Moer notes that female Gothic was associated with female writers (rather than the female characters), who introduced the principal

theme of Gothic related to fear. Apart from this perspective, she provides some examples, alluding to the work of contemporary critics such as Walter Scott. He proposed that Ann Radcliffe was one of the first female authors who introduced gothic elements in terms of supernatural and fantasy, intending to curdle the audience's blood by boosting their physiological reactions to fear (Moer 90). Certainly, Radcliffe's works such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Romance of the Forest* have settled a gothic cannon in which a female character is constantly fleeing from a tyrannical male figure, forcing her to face her most inner fears and sorrows. She also adopted elements such as dismal castles, commanded imprisonments, and night scenes, enhancing the feeling of fear, being crucial models for the following gothic narratives related to women. This is the case of Adeline, the female protagonists of *The Romance of the Forest*, a beautiful girl with seeming innocence (Radcliffe 10) who after settling into the rooms of a haunted Abbey is chased by the Marquis of Mantalt. It is crucial to mention that in this type of narrative, a series of Gothic elements came out at some point in the plot, giving space to find a happy ending.

Undoubtedly, Radcliffe has built up a female gothic who is immersed in dreadful events, complaining about the ideals of male dominance, and highlighting her unlikely possibility to fight back. However, while similar plots occurred in other Gothic novels, it has left many crucial themes related to how women's lives unfold under the constant oppression from tyrannical figures. Following this line, other authors have criticized Radcliffe's ideals of female gothic as a faithful example to the sub-genre, considering

that even Gilman herself critically discussed how some writers had developed gender issues. Regarding this perception, Lenoux in her work *Was There Ever a "Female Gothic?"*, objects about how this concept usually reflects the ideals of second-wave feminists, but no early gothic writers. In this sense, Lenoux discusses that the sub-genre is mostly associated with female victimization, leaving behind significant interpretations regarding women and the gothic mode. Radcliffe's work is considered a pioneering example of the female gothic, but this idea triggered that other fictional works regarding similar topics were treated as a "servile imitator" of her formula (Lenoux 2), narrowing the space for broad interpretations. I would agree that this is a turning point in the construction of female gothic. It is remarkable how some gothic writers convey Radcliffe's ideas, including naive women in events where they might get rid of their predators, emphasizing a sexualized perspective of gender inequality. However, they were rarely given a chance to understand what is behind the men's mindset to feel in the right to subduing women or how women's performance was affected not only personally but also socially.

For this reason, I consider Gilman's short stories and her ideas related to gender and literature a valuable object of study for a deeper understanding of the female gothic. She did not only criticize older paradigms behind women's victimization upon writers but she contributed by integrating into her fictional works an original viewpoint about gender inequality. Even more so, she embedded her pieces of fiction in a more realistic scenario, which made for the enhancement of women's identification with the genre and

the issues of the domestic space. In her essay *Masculine Literature*, Gilman discussed the supremacy of the male chauvinist perspective upon literature and the lack of a feminine point of view, highlighting the fact that literature has only focused on the formula of man's love for a woman:

It is the story of the pre-marital struggle. It is the Adventures of Him in Pursuit of Her—and it stops when he gets her! Story after story, age after age, over and over and over, this ceaseless repetition of the Preliminaries. Here is Human Life. In its large sense, its real sense, it is a matter of inter-relation between individuals and groups, covering all emotions, all processes, all experiences. Out of this vast field of human life fiction arbitrarily selects one emotion, one process, one experience, as its necessary base. (4)

Gilman complains about the monotony of the stories' plot, and I believe her to be correct when asserting that many writers have focused mainly on love stories. Moreover, most of them did not consider the love of women towards men. Instead, they frame their stories around men persecuting women, trying to gain their affection or an opportunity for sexual intercourse. As I mentioned before, early gothic novels have also introduced this perspective. By doing so, they have disregarded, as Gilman mentions, a crucial opportunity to address other meaningful experiences in human life, especially if we consider the richness and vastness of elements that the gothic mode offers. It may be capable of addressing issues and subconscious patterns behind personal and collective behaviors and experiences by fictional and original tools.

In this respect, Gilman's short stories offer an alternative to the invariability of the female gothic formula. This author took the advantages of the genre to provide a more

varied perspective of gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, it is worthy of notice that in her gothic stories, women who struggle with men are usually nameless characters. Gilman may have highlighted the lack of identity of these characters in the eyes of society, since most people demanded women to live subscribed to their social duty as mother and wife, giving up other significant personal experiences.

Moreover, in stories as ‘Through This’ and ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ Gilman presents two main women characters being first-person narrators, opening up a possibility to recognize women’s voice and mindset under oppressive situations, as opposed to early gothic narrations which did not consider this possibility. Another crucial point is that instead of addressing explicitly how men aimed to restrain women’s lives through terrifying persecution, Gilman preferred to put forward how a male-dominant society could cut down women's will and personal development, bringing fatal consequences. For instance, in the case of ‘The Giant Wistaria’ instead of finding a love story and a happy ending as other gothic plots, it concluded with the scene of a woman who is found dead along with her son, suggesting that an early quarrel with her father led to this woeful demise.

I would assert that this plot showed an innovative way to bring up the theme of patriarchal oppression in the 19th century. Although it is not about how men aim to take

advantage of women to form a family or to have a sexual encounter, it addresses other crucial, male agents of the hegemonic formula. In this case, as the woman does not seem to have a husband or any other formal relationship, it is her father who calls her duty as a woman. If she has a baby at a pre-marital stage, it would surely bring dishonor to her family, leaving no other option than cut down the family tie between the woman and her son. It might also suggest that from the masculine perspective being a mother cannot be possible for a woman alone because she must be married. In this way, Gilman proposed another alternative to treat the male supremacy over women, which remarkably transcends close relatives.

Undoubtedly, Gilman's short stories 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'Through This' shed light on her theory. These three plots interact to offer a broad vision of how women deal with a society based on a male chauvinist mindset by using elements from the gothic mode. Furthermore, I would argue that it is important to emphasize how these stories present the unfortunate experience of a female character who, instead of being described as virtuous and innocent, like early Gothic works, are women who even subconsciously think about taking an active position in the face of the male-dominated system. For example, in the case of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the main character decides to write a diary hiding it from her husband, who does not allow this type of practice for the sake of her health and hate that she writes a word (181). What is more, she also has her perspective towards her illness advocating that "I disagree with

their ideas. I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.” (180). I would propose that this is also a crucial turning point regarding female gothic. Not only does she want to flee from her husband’s ideas and oppressions, but she proposed an alternative to bring up her life in another way, in this case by her work and independent thinking.

Moreover, it is remarkable to observe that throughout these stories Gilman emphasizes the fact that male supremacy came after a long and established tradition that supports the ideals of women complying with the roles of wife and mother, while men exercise their power outside the house and upon them. This is the case of ‘Through This’ in which the narrator mentions that “Mother looks real tired. I wish she would go out more and have some outside interests. 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.” (210). In this passage, the narrator emphasizes her empathy for her mother’s work, she understands what she is going through since it is the same feeling she might contain over her family duties. Although they might be from different generations and her mother may have stopped raising her children, the narrator reflects on the fact that this male figure ‘Harry’ puts more weight on her mother’s shoulders. Thus, even though these two women may live under different times, the cult of male chauvinism is constantly present in their lives, without distinction of their ages.

To conclude, Gilman's treatment of the female gothic proposed a more analytical and fresh-looking view of the oppression of men towards women. Her narrative started when old paradigms succumbed to the idea of a masculine perspective of the female character's experience, focusing mainly on the fear and anxious feelings over her predators. She was clever in noticing that gender mainstreaming is part of a complex system, where women's perspectives and personal developments are not usually noticed and included under fictional works. For this reason, it might not be surprising that she aligned the vastness of women's experience towards male domination with the richness of the gothic mode to unfold the basis and the consequences of these gender-related issues. Thereupon, we notice that in her fictional works 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'Through This' she introduces other ways to look at male supremacy by addressing its tradition and how it might even break strong family ties. Besides, unlike other early gothic works, she focused on how women's personal development is affected, and how this male-dominated society silenced their voice. These characteristics of Gilman's narrative are crucial to understanding her work, and it would be useful to recall in the following chapters.

Chapter II. Gilman's Gothic Domestic Space and the Image of the Haunted House

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, unlike other early writers, Gilman proposed a different outlook to integrate the gothic mode along with gender-related issues. In doing so, during her short stories, she emphasized elements of the domestic space and the matters inside the house, opposed to other gothic narratives which are more likely to be set under castles or old-fashioned buildings. Such is the case of *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis, whose plot is set among monasteries, convents, and catacombs, treating subjects such as sexual harassment towards women. Gilman proposed a more realistic backdrop to unfold the stories of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Giant Wistaria'. In this sense, it might be revealing to understand the reasons behind Gilman's adoption of the house in these gothic narratives, considering that it can be construed as a safe space.

Domestic space becomes undoubtedly crucial in her theory. She develops these ideas in her work "The Home, Its Work and Influence", in which she asserts that "The home should offer to the individual rest, peace, quiet, comfort, health, and that degree of personal expression requisite; and these conditions should be maintained by the best methods of the time." (3). According to this viewpoint, a house is a place for asylum and it should provide the commodities and the tranquility to carry out everyday life. However, in Gilman's short stories, another reality is depicted since the house is no longer a place for living deliberately. It is portrayed under supernatural events and dark

scenarios, providing the sense of being haunted and a place of confinement. Especially, throughout these two fictional works, the house turns out to be a dismal place for the female characters who at the same time are dealing with different problems related to men's ideals. In 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' there are female characters who face the decisions and prescriptions of a male figure. Undoubtedly, for these reasons, it could be considered that these women are secluded in this place, and it should not be rare since as Gilman discussed "to a house of some sort the woman has been confined for a period as long as history." (206) referring to the fact that in early times women were doomed to work at the house, attending family and house matters. Following this line, I would argue that in Gilman's short stories, the elements of the domestic space and the house itself become uncanny and a place of seclusion due to the subjection and oppression of women by a sexist society.

For this study, it would be worthy to mention that in the endeavor to define what might be considered uncanny, Sigmund Freud referred to the German translation *unheimlich* which is the opposite of *heimlich*, meaning "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home". He asserts that "we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (931). Thus, to analyze these stories, it is crucial to contemplate this concept, considering that the houses are transformed into a frightening and uncanny place due to its departure from the familiar description of the house (as described by Gilman) and, in the same vein, it could be interpreted as attempting against women's nature.

In the story 'The Giant Wistaria', the haunted house introduces pivotal aspects of the gender-related issues and the brutal consequences it might carry out. Gilman's opening takes place in the 18th century in the house that is rented a hundred years later by a group of friends. A father wants to punish her daughter for an illegitimate, outside of marriage, pregnancy, and he is willing to abandon the child in the town since "if the town hath a child unaccounted for to rear in decent ways—why, it is not the first, even her" (168). Despite the woman's desire to keep her child, her father could not bear this situation under the yoke of the social norms of the time, thus suggesting that it is only logical to get rid of a child born in unrespectable circumstances.

Although the end of this situation is unresolved, as time passes by in the house the consequences and the fate of the young mother remain. In the essay 'The Haunting Idea: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory,' Diana Wallace pinpoints the key features regarding the use of "female Gothic metaphors", discussing the alienation of the house and male supremacy within Gothic Genre: Both men's houses and 'their' beds – the domestic and sexual spaces, equally under male ownership – are compared to 'graves' within which women are to be 'buried', potentially 'buried alive', a state which Freud called the 'most uncanny thing of all'(29). I believe Wallace explains a meaningful interpretation of the house in the gothic mode. The patriarchal norms have been hardly implied in this place, becoming the basis for secluding women into the demanded roles of wife, mother, and housekeeper. In this manner, I would include that

the house becomes the graves of women as free human beings, losing any possibility to define their own identity or living on their terms.

The house and the elements depicted in 'The Giant Wistaria' represent the issues described previously, and as Wallace proposed, it turns out to be a lethal place for the female character, becoming her own grave. Jenny, one of the following visitors to the house, thinks: "what a house! what a lovely house! I am sure it's haunted!" (168). Following her description, it is revealed that the house's heirs are in Europe, and the discovery of the "huge wistaria vine", suggests that the owners are the ones from the previous story. In this sense, the haunted house might be directly connected to the issues of the previously described, especially if we consider how the wisteria vine reflects the conflict between the young unmarried mother and her parents.

The wisteria vine was the backdrop of the discussion of the fate of her daughter, and while the mother says that the vine they brought in the ship "groweth well", the father responds "and so doth the shame I brought thee! Had I known of it I would sooner have had the ship founder beneath us, and have seen our child cleanly drowned, than live to this end!" (167, 168). I would suggest that his shame and wishes for her daughter to encounter a fatal destiny started manifesting through the wistaria vine from this very beginning, as the father explicitly compares his feelings along with the growing plant. Thus, the wistaria proposes a likely metaphor for the father's outraged feelings towards the disrupted behavior of her daughter. It is important to notice that his feelings are not based on the well-being of her daughter or the obstacles she could face by raising a child

alone. Instead, the father complains about the, no doubt undesirable, social reputation that could bring to their family since, according to patriarchal norms, a woman giving birth to a child outside marriage was extremely frowned upon. Following this line, the wisteria vine started to surround the house as a way to externalize the oppressed social group, demanding women to remain in their social roles of mothers and wives which are performed mainly inside the domestic place. Moreover, the new dwellers finding the wisteria vine bigger than it used to be in earlier times, covering the whole front of the house, suggests that the father's anger might also reach considerable consequences. After long research, the new visitors finally find the reasons for their current nightmares and the oddity of their wistaria: "in the strangling grasp of the roots of the great wistaria, lay the bones of a woman, from whose neck still hung a tiny scarlet cross on a thin chain of gold." (175). According to Knight in her study of the context behind 'The Giant Wistaria', she states: The climbing vine is at once both a symbol of maternal sacrifice and a grotesque reminder of the silencing of the woman whose skeletal remains are literally and metaphorically rooted in a "strangling grasp." (175). I agree that the climbing vine is a reminder of the oppression of the woman's voice, and more likely than not, of maternal sacrifice. Bearing in mind that the dead body was in the cellar, it suggests that she preferred to stay there rather than going away with her father, as he demanded.

However, I consider that the giant wistaria leads to other significant results. As I mentioned, the giant vine is aligned with the father's rage towards her daughter due to

her unwillingness to follow social norms. Along these lines, the plant laying its roots throughout the house, along with the corpses, suggests that the suppression of women to social roles could thrust fatal results upon women's lives. As Wallace claimed, the house under patriarchal terms signifies that women are buried alive, since they strip them of their rights and the option to speak out on their own will.

Just as in 'The Giant Wistaria', in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' a female character suggests a house is a haunted place, as she describes it "A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house" (179) as if it were the prelude for a gender-related discourse. Here the supernatural elements of the house are reflected in the room of a secluded woman who beholds images embedded in the yellow wallpaper of the place. Although the unnamed character does not seem to have her mental health in optimal conditions, I discuss that the house turns out to be a manifestation of the uncanny as a consequence of the oppression and the influence that her husband exercises on her, supported by patriarchal norms. The male figure not only is a close relative, his husband, but he is also a well-known physician, providing him the faculties to decide about the state of his wife's health. Although the female character does not share the ideas of her husband regarding her illness, she comprehends that "If a physician of high standing, and one's husband, assures friends and relatives that there is nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?" (179). From this passage, it is understood that she realized the great impact of her husband on society, compared to hers, minimizing any chance of escaping her husband's

forced prescription to remain in the confines of the house. Even though the unnamed character notices in the very beginning that “there is something strange about the house” (180), and she begins to see people walking through the wallpaper of her room, his husband is skeptical to believe in her assumptions, as she asserts “He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency”. (182). Despite this, she can speak out and communicate with her husband about her situation, however, he does not trust her testimony, suggesting that she must take charge of her behavior since he will not restore anything in the house.

At the end of the story, as there is no other way to escape from her current reality, the woman’s obsession regarding the yellow wallpaper starts, getting stronger, as well as her hallucinations. In her narrative, her writing practice, which has signified a great relief as she can express her emotions and feelings, is slowly fading away as the yellow wallpaper starts occupying all of her attention. Moreover, she is even able to distinguish a woman inside the patterns of the wallpaper who “shakes the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out” (192). I suggest that to be read as her husband leading her to repress any possibility to follow her desire to get out of the house and even keep a personal practice, she starts unconsciously suppressing her desires to break free from the husband’s demands. Thus, she projects her secluded feelings with the allusions of the woman trying to get out of the wallpaper. In Treichler’s analysis of the discourse of the unnamed character, she claims that: I interpret the wallpaper to be women's writing or

women's discourse, and the woman in the wallpaper to be the representation of women that becomes possible only after women obtain the right to speak (64). I agree with Treichler's remarks in his attempt to accept that the wallpaper projects the unnamed woman's discourse. Besides, the woman behind the wallpaper represents the ability to speak out about her rights which offers a new perspective of a woman under patriarchal terms. However, as I explained before, I believe that the woman projects onto the wallpaper her repressed emotions involving her husband and the anger at the inability to carry out her will. Following this line, as his husband insisted on taking charge of her wife's life, despite the woman's protest, it leads to her expressing it out of her mind through the vision of the woman trying to escape from the wallpaper.

In Gilman's 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' the elements of the domestic space, such as; the wisteria vine, the wallpaper, and the imprisonment imposed by male characters, are a reflection of women's issues that find themselves constantly at stake under a male-dominated society. As a result of the ruthless behavior towards women, the female characters are doomed to experience, as Wallace called, the feelings of being 'buried alive'. What leads to the deadly fate of these women is the lack of opportunities to carry out their will and independent-thinking in patriarchal society. This analysis sheds light on the study of the gothic mode in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories as a way to denounce the suppression of women by the rigidity of the patriarchal norms of the 19th century. In the following chapter, I will explore how the female gothic

proposed by Gilman is constructed by the social roles imposed by a male-dominated society.

Chapter III. The Downfall of Women: Women as commodities of Patriarchal Society

This research has focused on discussing how Female Gothic is depicted in Gilman's narrative in the context of an unequal society ruled by patriarchal norms. In these narratives, women are seen as objects by their male counterparts since they are demanded to fulfill their social roles of being mothers and wives who must follow men's needs and beliefs, restraining them from becoming independent individuals and finding their own expression. Besides, this study highlights the downfall of women in Gilman's narrations as a consequence of this chauvinist ideology.

The stories 'Through This', 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Giant Wistaria,' portray women facing the adversities of living at the core of a hegemonic society, providing an intricate perspective of women's lives in the late 19th century. Regarding this problem, Gilman suggests that women are seen as objects of society that only serve to carry out social standards and the paradigms of the patriarchal system with no other retribution than the accomplishment of fulfilling their roles. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman brings up an animal analogy of the patriarchal system and women's oversexualization and exploitation under a male-dominated culture:

The wild cow is a female. She has healthy calves and milk enough for them; and that is all the femininity she needs. Otherwise than that she is bovine rather than feminine. She is a light, strong, swift, sinewy creature, able to run, jump, and fight, if necessary. We, for economic uses, have artificially developed the cow's capacity for producing milk. She has become a walking milk-machine, bred and tended to

that express end, her value measured in quarts. The secretion of the milk is a maternal function, a sex function. The cow is over-sexed. (43-44)

Gilman asserts that for economic reasons, society has exploited the maternal capacity of the cow, making her a milking machine as we bred them exclusively for that purpose. She explains that this process is similar to women's subjugation to the roles of domesticated wives, child-bearers, and housekeeping, encouraging them to develop "sex-functions alone" (75). Therefore, according to her perception of 19th-century society, women are not considered human beings capable of having their own opinions and decisions over their bodies. Moreover, they are restricted from speaking out their thoughts and from the social sphere's participation.

Following this notion, it is important to notice that Gilman did not complain about the social roles mentioned above, but she emphatically criticized that society has placed women into a box to perform those roles alone. In her own words, "Only as we live, think, feel, and work outside the home, do we become humanly developed, civilized, socialized" (222). Thus, independent thinking and an active role in social matters would free women from the control of the patriarchal system and, at the same time, they would also be considered human beings. As discussed in the previous chapter, the narrator of 'Through This' goes through the several chores of the house, depicting a busy schedule that underlines her role as a housekeeper, a mother, and a wife. In this narration, there is no space for other voices rather than her mind, involving the reader in her stream of consciousness over her domestic duties. She asserts that "Housework forbid, This is my work" (209), emphasizing the importance of the housework's significance in her life, as

she expresses only the emotions that she experiences from accomplishing the tasks “Through this man-made happier and stronger by my living; [...] through this small, sweet, well-ordered home, whose restful influence shall touch all comers; through me too, perhaps—(208)”. In her discourse, this woman begins her day emphasizing the importance of her actions, and how it directly affects her relatives. Although she doesn't even seem convinced that her work would touch herself too, she carries out all the house chores with the confidence that she is being a great help. It would be important to notice that her work, as she called it, is not paid as the work performed by men outside the house. She is economically dependent on her male counterpart, which may lead to holding back part of her freedom. However, the narrator's life is shaped according to her accomplishments in the house, feeling fulfilled by doing her work in the right way and by “the right spirit” (210).

The implication of the latter suggests that the capacity to perform her roles takes absolute control upon her. She left part of her own identity and development as an individual for the well-being of her family and the demands of her husband. These restrictions could be explicitly noticed in two different instances. Firstly, even though she asserts that the housework fulfilled her life, at times this dialogue is ambiguous as she also points up her reveries outside the house. She says “By and by when they are grown, I can—0 there! the bell!”(209). At this moment, she reveals that she is already considering what to do with her free time, at the core of being secluded to perform mostly her role of mother and housekeeper.

Furthermore, regarding her reveries, she expresses “As if I could buy a sewing machine every week! I’ll put out a bulletin, stating my needs for the benefit of agents.”(209) This is a pivotal passage to understand women’s social situation in the 19th century. By that time, the sewing machine occupied an important role for women’s vindication of their independence, gaining a chance to become economically independent. However, it was also still based on prejudice over women’s work. According to Friedrichs in her analysis on the sewing machine and how it allows women to access modern industrialization, she claims that the sewing machine still “reinforced traditional gender roles”(71) under the notions of domesticity, motherhood, marriage, and dependence upon the husband. However, it also allowed “women’s entrance into the public sphere through mass cultural production and consumption, education and employment, politicization, emancipation, spatial movement, and individual expression”(71). Undoubtedly, Friedrichs is on the right to assert that this machine entails a duality for women’s development. Although it is aligned with the conception of women as housemaids, it also brings up an opportunity for women to find their expression and entrance to the economic sphere, working outside the house. Besides, bearing in mind her historical context, it is also understandable why this practice would be a compelling opportunity for the story narrator as she is already limited and immersed in the domestic space, doing something that she already knows and can use for her advantage at the same time. However, in her tight schedule, she must restrict and repress this type of work for the benefit of others and the urge to perform her work properly.

Following this line, it can find that what probably boosts her emotions to complain about house duties is also a feeling of fear of her husband's dissatisfaction. An example of this is the argument about not getting milk. She claims "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!" (210) In her short answers, we can interpret that he is upset with the situation, and although it is not directly her fault, he asks her to respond for the milkman's irresponsibility. There is a sense of submission at the man's accusation since she explicitly apologizes beforehand for the inconvenience even though this complication was out of her control. Moreover, what could be more unexpected is that she prioritizes her husband over the demands of her baby since no one else can speak when the man is talking. In this sense, I would argue that the unnamed character does not only carry out her house duties by feelings of affection and accomplishment towards their beloved, but also her urge for fulfilling the house roles based on the inquiry to be obedient and attain her husbands' expectations, since there may be consequences by failing. After all, "home duties forbid" (210) based on the fact that in this context, men are the ones who rule the house.

The consequence of carrying away this lifestyle, this discredit as the result of the demands of the patriarchal system, leads to the protagonist's downfall. These results are reflected in the protagonist's psyche, illustrated mainly in the narrator's discourse. Regarding the discourse of the female narrator in 'Through This', Knight, in the

parallels between 'Through This' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper', explains: "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" (292). I agree with Knight's interpretation of the woman's discourse. In this short story, Gilman aimed to reflect the chaotic system in which the protagonist, and 19th-century women, are immersed since the house duties signify to deal with many tasks at the same time such as attend the children, prepare the meals, clean the house, buy supplies, clothing repairs, and others. All these works are carried out alone by the unnamed character, while men only manage to deal with their work outside the house. Thereupon, I would argue that the employment of the stream of consciousness technique not only externalizes the protagonist's psyche but also reflects how patriarchal ideologies rely on the work of women to satisfy their personal and familiar needs, leaving aside their own.

Undoubtedly, it creates the basis for positioning women into submission and stresses the fact that men validate themselves as 'the strongest gender', since their work outside the house is paid, making women economically dependent on them. In this case, the downfall of this character can be interpreted in terms of restricting her expressions and actions by validating the system in which she is secluded. It can be seen as she reacts towards her friend's letters, Jenny, who seems to tell her about her ideals and beliefs. She replies: "a woman cannot do that way and keep a family going." (210) suggesting that in her mindset a woman must not pursue other matters outside the house because in

doing so, she will most likely neglect it. Moreover, she reflects “Jennie isn’t happy, I know—she can’t be, poor thing, till she’s a wife and mother.” (210), this passage entails that for the narrator a woman’s main achievement is reached only through marriage and motherhood altogether. For this reason, it can be interpreted that this female character met her ruin at the same time she is submitted into the house chores, normalizing social roles, resulting in identity’s oblivion and the repress of her reveries under her daily routine.

Following Gilman’s ideology on the submission of women, there is another crucial aspect regarding its validation. Not only does the male society of the 19th-century value women only by performing their social roles of mother, wife, and housekeeper, but also demand that women conform to the condition that these roles must not be separated. This sexual-ethic entails that a mother would be condemned if she is a single mother, while a wife might be condemned if she does not rear any children. In line with this, Gilman’s story ‘The Giant Wistaria’ is a faithful portrayal of the severeness of the patriarchal norms when a woman violates them. The discussion presented at the beginning of the story between an unnamed woman and her father is highlighted by the father’s shame and anger because, under social perceptions, the woman’s behavior dishonored her family. She wants to rear a baby who was born outside marriage. For Samuel, her father, it signifies that “She hath already lost what is more than life” (168), suggesting that conserving their virginity stands over women’s lives as it is their only guarantee to marry and therefore, to have a man who provides for their economic needs.

This sexist perspective on women leads to the notion that they are measured by the capacity to follow social standards. This situation leads Samuel to oblige her daughter to leave her baby behind and accept a forced marriage to hide her failure, as he expressed, “He maketh an honest woman of her, and saveth our house from open shame. What other hope for her than a new life to cover the old?” (168). In this sense, he relies on the fact that only a man might restore women’s validity and truthfulness in the social sphere by making her become a legitimate wife, covering the embarrassment that it could mean transgressing patriarchal constraints. The extol of man’s superiority and their decision over women’s bodies is also evidenced by the unnamed character’s mother. Although at first glance, she seems to advocate for her husband’s decision, she ends up trying to downplay it. She asks him, “Thou art very hard, Samuel, art thou not afeard for her life? She grieveth sore for the child, aye, and for the green fields to walk in!” (168). For that matter, it can be discussed that she eventually attempts to empathize with her daughter’s decision, because as her daughter previously mentioned, she is a mother as well. Thus, not only would her daughter lose her baby, but also she would lose her offspring due to the harshness of her husband under patriarchal traditions.

In the end, despite her mother’s attempt to change the fate of her daughter, the unnamed character encountered her death along with her baby, yet it is unknown if her father killed her. The end opens the possibility that she might decide to be imprisoned in the chamber rather than leaving her baby. It may be interpreted that her father’s constraints lead her to face this fatal end, reflecting the cruelty of his violent behavior.

Moreover, it could also signify that her downfall is the only way to carry away her will, being freed from male domination.

Furthermore, Gilman's short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' portrayed another aspect of the men's perception of women as passive agents, fulfilling social roles. Although the unnamed character's mental condition prevents her from performing the social roles of housewife and housemaid, her restrictions reveal that she must conform to patriarchal norms, which hold back women to develop as human beings. One of the main prescriptions of John, who is both her husband and a reputable physician, is to stay away from meaningful work suited to their natural abilities and preferences, as writing in her private journal. She asserts "I'm forbidden to "work" until I am well again" (179). Although she is consciously aware that speaking out her feelings could mean a significant relief at the core of her mental illness, her husband demands that she should leave behind this type of practice. As in 'The Giant Wistaria', the annihilation of women's will reflects how the patriarchy triggers their ideals of submission over women. In this case, it demonstrates that during the 19th century, men aimed to diminish women not only by restricting their actions and decisions to the house chores or by controlling how they perform their social roles, but also they manipulate their intellectual development.

Thereupon, if women want to endeavor their time into intellectual activities, it might be an obstacle because of patriarchal ideologies.

Although in this story the narrator mostly complains about her husband's arrangements, there is a sense of ambiguity in her discourse since she cares about not reaching the social roles of housemaid and housewife due to her mental illness. She claims "I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!"(182). It can be argued that the help that she refers to is similar to what the unnamed narrator does in 'Through This' since she tries to accomplish all the house chores. For this reason, the man relies fully on the woman's work to meet his basic domestic needs such as food, clothes, cleaning, and others. Thus, the protagonist may gravitate around an ambiguous duality since she is already immersed in a society that has made her accept and normalize social roles that she longs to meet.

Nevertheless, she also wants to break down the boundaries imposed by her husband, as she secretly writes a diary and she expectedly asserts that she does not share her husband's imposition of prohibiting "congenial work with excitement and change" (179). Even though she already suffers from a mental illness, it can be discussed that these contradictions (and especially the husband's demands) lead the protagonist to remain in the house and eventually to her downfall. According to Saha in her analysis of female characters and hysteria, the ending scene of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', in which the protagonist peels off the wallpaper to free the woman she sees inside the bars of the patrons, suggests that "the sight of her deformed, deconstructed body is both a sign of

the deformity of language and the triumph of the female body over strong patriarchal ideals” (27) This interpretation can be considered accurate since in the end, the woman’s hallucination is a subconscious reflection of her own self, and also serving as a metaphor for the consequences of patriarchal stereotypes over women and their longing to escape. Certainly, it is evident that her mental illness might have been caused by other reasons and also that she breaks down because of her mental state, but her current condition aggravates her state, limiting the finding of her expression.

Finally, Gilman's stories pinpoint the consequences of standing under a chauvinist society that not only restricts women into the social roles of housewives, housemaids, and others but also holds back women from becoming independent individuals able to speak out their expressions and will. In the analyzed stories, it can be seen that the patriarchal society has crucial participation in the downfall of women, whether by shaping women to normalize the system or by finding a fatal end, as in the case of ‘The Giant Wistaria’ and madness in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. Moreover, women are validated only on how they deal and to conform to societal expectations, being considered as commodities for the men’s basic needs and accomplishments of the domestic space.

Conclusion

The comprehension of Female Gothic as a result of male-dominated culture is certainly an inescapable subject to take into account when interpreting Gilman's short stories. Besides, this topic has been constantly the theme at stake in the literary criticism surrounding Gilman's nonfiction and fictional work. Undoubtedly the nameless female characters at the centre of these short stories lead to a broad understanding of Gilman's Female Gothic, yet it does not follow the gothic mode of early gothic writers. Gilman promoted unconventional and valuable insights into female gothic and the gender-related issues of the domestic space.

The importance of her vision of the Female Gothic rests on the feasibility of conceiving a truthful perspective of women's reality living under the boundaries of patriarchal society in the 19th century. It can underline that by this period, women were hardly bound to the social roles of housewives, housemaids, and mothers, denying other personal expressions and achievements. The reading of her short stories paved the way towards a more extensive understanding of this process, offering the explanation of its different facets. For instance, Gilman points up how difficult it was living in a male chauvinist society that cut down women's will, as well as their personal development for the sake of assuring the sexual ethic of the patriarchal norms, such as remaining virgin until marriage and eventually becoming wife and a mother at the same time. Moreover, it may be important to address that Gilman also highlighted the ideas of tradition of

patriarchal norms, as it can be seen in 'Through This', and the feelings of women towards the transgression of social standards and seclusion. Bearing in mind that these are decisive ideas of Gilman's notion of Female Gothic, along with her theoretical approach, it supports an in-depth analysis of the elements of Gilman's domestic spaces and the interpretation of women's downfall.

Considering the elements of the domestic space and the house as a central, pivotal mechanism of the submission of women, an important argument arises: although the house may entail a safe place, it can become an uncanny and terrifying space. Following this line, this study has also shed light on the idea of the house as the grave of women since it delimits women's personal expression and will to seclude them into the severeness of performing, as Gilman proposed, 'sex functions alone'. Furthermore, the analysis of the elements of the domestic space under a gothic tone, such as the yellow wallpaper and the wistaria vine reflect two important arguments in the stories. On the one hand, they portray women's imprisonment on the patriarchal ideals, and on the other hand, it also aimed to reflect the women's yearning for transgressing male impositions.

Following the understanding of the house and the domestic space as the main and basic mechanism to submit women into the male-dominated culture, the consequences and results of these ideals on women's lives are evident. One of the most remarkable aftereffects that it can be addressed from this situation is that the unnamed narrators of 'Through This' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' develop a biased discourse, in which

although at times they are aware of their reveries and the long for getting rid of the masculine system, they insist on accomplishing the tasks imposed by it. Thereupon, the narrator of 'Through This' even asserts that a woman cannot be happy until she is a wife and mother. (210). From this perspective, it can be interpreted that this last example signifies the downfall of this character as it seems that she will always remain into the masculine ideologies, restricting her own identity and self expression for the sake of others. Nevertheless, 'Through This' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' present women's downfall as the result of the aim of transgressing the patriarchal limitations.

The exploration of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Female Gothic and the domestic space throughout these three stories in light of its social context, helps to reflect on the basis of gender-related issues and how patriarchal norms have settled into women's lives. In this sense, the present work paves the way towards a new standpoint of the gothic genre and the horrors of everyday life. Moreover, bearing in mind Gilman's nonfictional theories and the broad perspectives of the submission of women under patriarchy provide a more explanatory understanding of the constructions of Female Gothic. Nevertheless, this study could have done a broader examination of the main themes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories, including other gothic fictions as 'The Rocking Chair', yet it might lead to an extended series of other studies. Moreover, I would have included as part of my second chapter an analysis of the domestic space and an interpretation of the images at the beginning and end of the story 'Through This'. However, addressing this

subject would possibly mean an excessive extension of the discussion, and possibly another whole new chapter.

As a final comment of this current work, this research strongly believes that Charlotte Perkins Gilman is an author that deserves more attention in the light of the understanding of the sub-genre Female Gothic. Beyond her unvaluable fictional and nonfictional work as well, the author can be a milestone for feminist studies, especially at the task of finding out the basis of gender inequality. Furthermore, it cannot be denied the difficulties of interpreting Gilman's stories. At times, I believed she aimed to meditate on the fact that women do not necessarily need to fulfill the roles of mother and wife, after reading her theory I realized she advocated the idea that women should carry out these social roles. Notwithstanding, her work is still valuable for contributing the first steps that women took historically for gaining economic independence, participation on the social sphere and developing independent thinking; key aspects of the feminist movement that are at stake til nowadays.

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