


## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: A Literary Discourse on the Evolution of Gender & Sexuality in the First and Second Waves of Feminism: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" Deconstructs Established Gender Roles as Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" Reconstructs Them

Abstract approved:



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The two literary touchstones of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Willa Cather examined in this thesis anchored a larger discussion of the discourse about gender and sexuality during the First and Second Waves of feminism in America. "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Gilman deconstructed the notion of "femininity" manifested at the turn of the century in America, while Cather's "Paul's Case" reconstructed the notion of "masculinity." Both Cather and Gilman wrote their short stories at the turn of the century in America during the First Wave of Feminism yet they resurfaced in discussions about gender and sexuality in the Second Wave of Feminism. Readings of both Cather and Gilman's writings have evolved with the First and Second Waves because their protagonists defied and undercut the established social norms enabling them to be re-examined much after their publication date. Although their writing styles are different, Gilman and Cather share a complex understanding of gender and sexuality that earmark the social position of women in America which can be interpreted by the most contemporary critics of present date.

During the First Wave of Feminism, women discussed how their ability to reproduce contributed to unbalanced gender relations, caused middle and upper class

women to remain confined to the household, and economically dependent upon their husbands. This devaluation of women's participation in valued economic work sickened many women and left them reliant on their physician's care as well.

Challenging this social structure, Gilman recorded her experience after being diagnosed with neurasthenia by Dr. Mitchell, ordered to remain in bed for months while consuming fatty foods and with no support from friends. Meanwhile, Cather expressed her discontent with the social construction of gender in America by asserting a male character that reconsidered the established norms for men and women of Victorian America.

When the Second Wave of Feminism emerged in America, the discussions about gender and sexuality reread these touchstone texts of Gilman and Cather as flexible visions of reality but in different discursive contexts depending on the social time frame in which they reviewed them. In the 1960s, the Women's Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement generated most theoretical discussions on the condition of women themselves, the issues pertaining to women's confinement like establishing a political voice and the "problem with no name." While in the 1970s, discussions about gender and sexuality concluded that the "sex/gender system," also known as patriarchy, defeated their purpose toward complete liberation because of its economic structure aimed at benefiting men. Although they appreciated the notion of a collective voice for all women, the development of individual voices among women played a more significant role in the 1970's discourses about gender and sexuality. Because men have predominantly controlled the medical field, women in the 1970s, who wrote about gender and sexuality then, also attacked physicians like Dr. Mitchell who diagnosed

women with strange treatments and also worked for the prohibition of the practice of mid-wifery in America at the turn of the century. Other critics of the 1970s decided that Cather's life reflected that of a lesbian, so that by the 1980s, literary discourses involving gender and sexuality began asking questions about the purpose of Cather and Gilman's writings. If female authors like Cather and Gilman lived such politically conscious lives, then why did they not create narratives that reflected their political agendas? After questioning their narratives, some critics decided that Cather and Gilman carried a "duplicitous nature" or a twofold message in their short yet complex stories. This duplicitous style of writing explained how that by the 1990s discussions about gender and sexuality had evolved into the "crafting of characters" that resulted in "gender performances," and one acting out one's gender.

While First and Second Wavers fought for the elimination of binary gender divisions and a balance in gender relations that supported the economic development of all women in America, Cather and Gilman's writings facilitated discussions during both Waves that contributed to the reasons why the social construction of gender and sexuality did not result in equal human treatment, and should therefore be reconstructed.

The literature concerning women during the First and Second Waves of Feminism can be summarized as a tactfully-formulated, continuing rumination on the question of the nature and genesis of women's oppression and social subordination, and how to change its effects on the future of the human race. What started off as strictly constructed and enforced gender roles in Victorian America evolved into gender performativity in the latter part of this century. This socio-sexuo evolution lies within the protagonists' discontent and total rebellion in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and

Cather's "Paul's Case," whose stories both surfaced at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, when socially-conscious citizens inspected these rigid Victorian ideals, and whose stories later resurfaced again during the Second Wave of Feminism at the middle to end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when individuals re-enacted these same socially constructed gender roles, and deconstructed them.

Cather's "Paul's Case" functions as a touchstone of her short fiction that even Cather agreed valued notice, since she only allowed it to be reprinted of all her other stories. With consideration toward conducting future research, a more thorough examination of say The Professor's House and A Lost Lady as well as My Antonia to explore more glimpses of Cather confirming this fluctuating, non-conforming, even elusive authorial approach toward gender and sexuality that has made her reputation outlast herself, should reveal even a deeper sense of her literary complexities. Gilman's utopian novels, Moving the Mountain, Herland, and With Her in Ourland, that came after "The Yellow Wallpaper" deserve a closer look in the same respect as she struggled to portray the possibilities and barriers facing a woman who attempted to combine love and work. The movement in Gilman's writing progressively develops the possibilities and highlights the key barriers for a woman: female resistance to social change and male incomprehension concerning the necessity for love and work in a woman's life. She visualized the transition from the present to the future as one of internal conversion to an egalitarian society. This is a dual process of women awakening to their own interior power and men renouncing oppressive power structures as individuals and as a society. Perhaps too this is why Gilman, like Cather, switched to a male narrator in order to express her utopian vision.

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**A Literary Discourse on the Evolution of Gender & Sexuality in the First & Second Waves of Feminism: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" Deconstructs Established Gender Roles as Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" Reconstructs Them**

**By**

**Tami Hotard**

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

*Tami Hotard*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tami Hotard, Author

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## I. Introduction.

This thesis focuses on the discourse about gender and sexuality during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, using as literary touchstones two short stories: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Willa Cather's "Paul's Case." Because Gilman and Cather created their stories in the early part of this century, when the First Wave of Feminism originated, and because their pieces resurfaced prominently in discussions during the Second Wave of Feminism in America, a discussion of these pieces will anchor the larger discussion of the discourse about gender and sexuality during the First and Second Waves of Feminism in this thesis. When establishing an evolutionary discourse about the history of feminism, the terms "first wave" and "second wave" engage a notion of resurgence or a continuum that emphasizes a birth, a life, a death, then a rebirth. This discourse also suggests that these feminist waves occur in cyclical motion with fluidity. For these reasons, it becomes almost impossible to precisely pinpoint the beginning and the ending of such feminist waves. Are we in 1999 still in the second wave? Will the new millenium be a new beginning, or a time of remission, prior to the next wave? Or, are we already in a feminist "third wave" at the end of the twentieth century?

For purposes of this graduate thesis, the dates for the "first wave" of feminism and the "second wave" (give or take a few years) can be determined as the following: the "first wave" dates are 1850 through the 1930; then the "second wave" 1960 through the 1990s (Nicholson 1). To designate exact "first wave" and "second wave" dates is

not entirely important, for in doing so, it limits the intellectual discourse and the very essence of this American literary *herstory*. Nonetheless, this thesis does not completely disregard the importance of precision and specific dates but rather sets a time frame that allows for evolution. It does so to steer away from the phallogentric order of ideas that reifies ideas within time. I argue that feminist theory, along with its ideology, is a continuum.

In the “first wave” of feminism, women discussed how their ability to reproduce was a site for all women’s oppression. They also argued against the sexuo-economic relationship that bound middle and upper class women to the home after giving birth to numerous children. Further, these women were a reserve capitalistic workforce, second to men--and, third, if they were women of color or poor. More to the point, women at the turn of the century debated the unequal structure of our economy where women were confined to the home and men were allowed to generate revenue through outside employment. This devaluation of women's participation in valued economic work affected many women so that some began questioning the male-dominated medical field that authorized itself to diagnose feminine maladies and to prescribe strange and unusual treatments for them, while suppressing the practice of mid-wifery. For example, women like Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) kept records of their horrific experiences after having been diagnosed with neurasthenia by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and confined to the bed for months with his “rest cure treatment.” Gilman as well as Jane Addams wrote about the restrictive life forced upon women by the sexuo-economic relation that denigrated women, socially constructing them as a controlled degenerative species who specialized in sexual functions and the home. After being

heavily criticized for starting America's first Birth Control League, Margaret Sanger published a compilation consisting of hundreds of real life stories that revealed how many women, whom she referred to as "breeders," because they had given birth to several children, had also suffered through multiple miscarriages and multiple abortions. During this period, Willa Cather(1873-1947) challenged the limited gender role allotted to women by developing stories using the literary freedom of a male voice. "Paul's Case" shall be examined here as a touchstone of Cather's work and how female authors strove to overcome the boundaries set by strict American Victorian ideals. Likewise, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" shall be examined because of its defiant components that explored why women at the turn of the century in America went insane, not only because of their confining domestic allotment, but because of the wrongfully diagnosed treatment forced upon them from within the male-dominated medical field. Readings of both Gilman and Cather's writings evolved with the First and Second waves because of the ways their protagonists defied and undercut the established social norms. These touchstone texts can be classified as flexible visions of reality and have been reread in different discursive contexts depending on the social time frame in which they are reviewed.

The "second wave" of feminism returned in the 1960s with the emergence of the Women's Rights movement. "This was a movement composed of largely professional women who began putting pressure on federal and state institutions to end the discrimination that women experienced in entering the paid labor force. This movement also drew on the dissatisfaction felt by many middle class housewives with their lot as housewives" (Nicholson 1). In the latter part of the 1960s, another

movement independent of this one emerged out of the New Left, the Women's Liberation Movement. "It is from the Women's Liberation Movement that most of the more theoretical works of the second wave have emerged"(Nicholson 2).

By the 1970s, most second wave feminists felt dissatisfied with the feminist exclusion within their discourse of lesbians, women of color, and working class women, who argued against many of the texts and demands of the feminist movement. There were few that acknowledged differences among women. "However, such assertions of differences were often made in conjunction with assertions of commonalities" (Nicholson 4). The 1980s discourse about gender and sexuality grappled with the notion of difference and the significance of uniqueness in the voices among women who were formerly grouped together incorrectly by the feminist movement. For instance, Adrienne Rich in "Compulsory Heterosexuality," questioned the historical assumption that most women are naturally heterosexual. Rather, she suggested that women's experience can be located on a "lesbian continuum," which "include[s] a range--through each woman's life and throughout history--of woman-identified experience, [and] not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (135). By the 1990s, the notion of a common language, the hegemonic messages this universal language sent out, and the various socio-cultural meanings it symbolized, had been earmarked for gender-related discussions that disenfranchised language as a dichotomizing and phallogocentric socially constructed linguistic system. Unfortunately, the dissection of our language resulted in negative interpretations of the notion of "woman," so that the idea of "woman" has almost shifted over history, and so thus should be re-evaluated.

The issue of significance here in both waves is the fostering of a discourse about gender balance. At the turn of the century men and women encountered strict rules on gender; by the 1990s, feminist discourse on gender viewed gender as an act that one performs from the time they wake up in the morning to put on their clothes until they get in bed and undress their gender at night. For this reason, "performance" became a key term and continuing motif in the 1990's discussions of gender and sexuality. After examining the reception of "Paul's Case" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the first and second waves, it becomes clear that the shift in their critical evaluation suggests that America's scope in understanding gender and sexuality issues has expanded so that twenty first century authors, unlike Cather and Gilman, who had to either conceal their private beliefs for publishing purposes or be critically scrutinized as a result of being forthright in their fictional challenges, possess more authorial freedom in their literary creations and choice with regard to style. Theatricality can certainly be unrobed in both stories, which shall be explored later in Chapter Three of this thesis.

For these reasons, authors like Willa Cather and Charlotte Perkins Gilman who lived and wrote at the turn of the century in America have resurfaced in the contemporary discourse about gender, and their writings a central angle to both the first and second feminist waves. Quite possibly the third. They wrote about the imbalance in gender relations during their time. Paul's story challenges the defined "masculine" gender role and reconstructs it. Gilman's rediscovery proves that her heroine's horror story of hysteria deconstructs the traditional way women were told to act and how they lived, and how women of today appreciate that effort.

## **Chapter II: Gender & Sexuality in the Creation of Characters at the Turn of the Century in America**

### **Description of gender roles for Victorian men and women.**

After having been elected to the Presidency in 1882, Theodore Roosevelt's socially constructed temperament epitomizes the establishment of an American norm for "manliness." "Early on in Roosevelt's political career, he was ridiculed and even compared to the infamous Oscar Wilde, who went to trial for sodomy," but once Roosevelt embraced his "manliness," the American public began to modify their negative opinions of him from "weakling" to the positive "Cowboy of the Dakotas" (Bederman 171). "Roosevelt's great success in masculinizing his image was due, in large part, to his masterful use of the discourse of civilization" (Bederman 171). He constructed his persona as a strong but civilized white man. "As he saw it, the United States was engaged in a millennial drama of manly racial advancement, in which American men enacted their superior manhood by asserting imperialistic control over races of inferior manhood" (171). Instead of working together to develop America, the manly solution was to oppress the Other, those they thought were the embodiment of an inferior race, or gender. "To prove their virility, as a race and a nation, American men needed to take up the 'strenuous life' and strive to advance civilization—through imperialistic warfare and racial violence if necessary" (172). These were the defining attributes of the discourse around "manliness." It "was composed of equal parts kindhearted manly chivalry and aggressive masculine violence" and required "serious attention and strenuous effort" (172). Roosevelt, like his father and other Victorian

men, embodied this mold of masculinity. “Throughout his life, [Roosevelt] would cherish this Victorian ideology of moral manliness—strength, altruism, self-restraint, and chastity—and identify it with both the manful strength of his father and his own authority as a member of the upper class”(172). Most American men then followed their lead and adopted their characterization of the male norm.

While men in America, like Roosevelt, were fighting to prove their “manliness,” women like Gilman were working to revolutionize society by “civilizing” women so that the future of America would be better. Her social vision was one of a balance between man and woman, and even the art on the cover of her monthly publication The Forerunner, which she self-published for nine years, portrayed a woman and a man mutually supporting a child who stood atop a globe. Ironically, she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” to express her true discontent and real life experience of having been diagnosed with a “nervous prostration” that confined her to bed for months because of the ill-directed treatment of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, a famous nerve specialist at that time in America.

As Ehrenreich and English describe this historical movement, “sickness pervaded upper- and upper-middle-class female culture,” mostly because of a trend that developed resulting from “the boredom and confinement of affluent women [which] fostered a morbid cult of hypochondria—‘female invalidism’—that began in the mid-nineteenth century and did not completely fade until the late 1910s”(E & E 17). They note Gilman as concluding bitterly “that American men ‘have bred a race of women weak enough to be handed about like invalids; or mentally weak enough to pretend they are—and to like it’”(19). However, Ehrenreich and English recognize that “*all* women



faced certain risks that men did not share, or share to the same degrees,” those being the risks affiliated with childbearing and tuberculosis, or the “white plague” which was common in young women in the mid nineteenth century(19). In their earlier Witches, Midwives and Nurses, Ehrenreich and English observe that “for the doctors, the myth of female frailty thus served two purposes. It helped them to disqualify women as healers, and, of course, it made women highly qualified as patients”(23). “So,” they conclude, “it was in the interests of the doctors to cultivate the illnesses of their patients with frequent home visits and drawn-out ‘treatments.’ A few dozen well-heeled lady customers were all that a doctor needed for a successful urban practice”(24). By presenting the medical industry from a feminist perspective, Ehrenreich & English show how “the upper-middle-class woman was the ideal patient”(24). More specifically, Mitchell “expressed his profession’s deep appreciation of the female invalid in 1888.” Ehrenreich & English cite him as asserting, “with all her weakness, her unstable emotionality, her tendency to morally warp when long nervously ill, she is then far easier to deal with, far more amenable to reason, far more sure to be comfortable as a patient, than the man who is relatively in a like position”(24). Keeping these women believing they were sick not only perpetuated Mitchell’s medical career but also garnered him national fame.

Finally, they noted how some women could “turn the sick role to their own advantage, especially as a form of birth control...a doctor *could* help a women by supporting her claims to be too sick for sex: he could recommend abstinence”(38-39). Suggesting the notion of theatrics, Ehreneich and English concluded, “so who knows how many of this period’s drooping consumptives and listless invalids were actually

well women, feigning illness to escape intercourse and pregnancy”(39). Margaret Sanger documented, in a published compilation of hundreds of real life confessions, how married women at the turn of the century evaded pregnancy because of their horrifying experiences affiliated with childbearing and marriage, which shall be discussed later on in this thesis in more detail. Ehrenreich and English's conclusion seem to describe Gilman's situation seeing that she did not want to have any more children, once her daughter Katherine was born. Ehrenreich and English also commented on the power of melodrama to give women a hold over their husbands and others as they incorporated it into their hysterical symptoms: “As a power play, throwing a fit might give a brief psychological advantage over a husband or a doctor, but ultimately it played into the hands of the doctors confirming their notion of women as irrational, unpredictable, and diseased”(41). Even if women tapped into this power source in order to exercise control over their doctor or husband, the power in the melodrama of hysteria was only temporary and even worked against them in the long term. Ehrenreich and English pointed out that performance did indeed establish its roots in the history of hysteria. However, they did not focus their discussion on hysteria's male counterpart that also existed at the turn of the century possibly perhaps because of America's partial denial of its existence.

In contrast to Gilman's short story of hysteria focusing on women, Cather's “Paul's Case” presents a protagonist, Paul, who exhibits some hysterical traits that relate to “gender performance” (“his eyes were remarkable for a certain hysterical brilliancy, and he used them in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy”[Cather 164]), which has been strictly and intentionally associated with

women's sphere of existence at the turn of the century in America, except for a few male instances documented in Dr. Jean Martin Charcot's recently translated medical journals in the 1990s. Dr. Charcot, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian neurologist who influenced Sigmund Freud to pursue the psychological causes of and possible cures for hysteria, examined hypnotic phenomena and studied cases of hysteria while developing the notion that hysterical symptoms are caused by a brain dysfunction. Citing approximately 100 male hysterical case studies, "[Charcot's] case studies are as crucial to understanding the construction of masculinity as his studies of women are to the construction of femininity" (Showalter 63). Otherwise, hysteria or neurasthenia has been deemed a female-only disease.

It is interesting to note that, as Elaine Showalter observed, "the cultural denial of male hysteria is no accident: it's the result of avoidance, suppression, and disguise" (64). Since the medical field has been predominated historically by men, it is no doubt that this intentional concealment of male hysteria occurred. Showalter cites Michael Micale who two years earlier, in Approaching Hysteria, noted that these hysterical medical documents have been concealed because they reveal "normative gender representations, encoded ideals of normal and abnormal masculinity that repay investigation by the social, cultural, and medical historian" (Showalter 64). Charcot's journals evidence the existence of male hysteria, which in a sense for Victorian society "proved" a male effeminate, because women were only known to have hysterical tendencies, and it demeaned the male ego to have evidence that proved that men suffered from hysteria, too. These hysterical men had added an extra feminine component to their already established masculine persona, a complicating element

which society had no desire to confront. In his "Introduction," Micale recognized that "the work of historians and critics in this tradition shares the view that hysteria may be read as a kind of metaphor both for women's position in past patriarchal societies and for the image of the feminine in the history of scientific discourse"(8). Hysteria, and its history, has been a systematic medical endeavor to create a female-only psychology. When men happened to exhibit hysterical tendencies, doctors applied a gender-exclusive treatment program. Furthermore, the treatment of male hysteria is evidence of the polarization of gender roles as they were constructed at the turn of the century. "Doctors frequently prescribed the rest cure for neurasthenic women, but not for men. ...With middle-class men the preferred treatment for neurasthenia was travel, adventure, vigorous physical exercise"(Showalter 66). Women were encouraged to rest and withdraw from any social activities and were thought to become healthier if they physically remained in place. Showalter expands on this notion by postulating a far-reaching cultural and psychological parallelism between the two entities: both feminism and hysteria, she contends, are "violent reactions against male-dominated societies--feminism in the world of organized public politics, hysteria in the realm of private psychopathologies"(85). She proposes that "the movement between feminism and hysteria was two-dimensional: physicians and laymen often branded voluble members of the women's movement hysterical while militant suffragettes employed quasi-medical strategies such as hunger strikes, a sort of willful collective anorexia, in the pursuit of their political goals"(85). In this way, the role of gender establishes its history in the disease of hysteria. Further, Micale sees that "it is not surprising that our historical understanding of the subject should have developed in this way," because he sees,

“hysteria in its everyday meaning denotes excessive or uncontrollable emotionality” (150). Women have historically been referred to as the emotional gender while men are the rational ones. “By its nature, it is a highly corporealized pathology in which psychological anxieties are played out on the stage of the human body”(Micale 150). Self-dramatization is an inherent part of hysteria, and women are associated with this theatrical performance.

Perhaps because women have been historically noticed for their emotional temperament, Micale linked theatricality to hysteria and thus to women. His observations also signify possibly why women who have been diagnosed as hysterical have not been taken seriously, as if they were performing their sickness or uncomfortable allotment in life, and not because they were ever physically ill. Micale points out that “it is imperative to maintain a distinction between the medicating hysteria and cultural-historical conceptualizations of the subject,” because only the “most spectacular aspects of hysteria’s history” have been portrayed, and thus have become representatives of the medical malady. These intricate distinctions locate where women enter the scene, and show how “upper and upper-middle-class women” have dominated the literary representations of this disease.

Jill Conway’s essay in Catherine Golden’s 1990 casebook on “The Yellow Wallpaper,” The Captive Imagination, elaborated the negative social effects of Patrick Geddes’s The Evolution of Sex published in 1889 as a scientific theory of sexual evolution that detailed the social construction of, as well as the medical reasoning for, treating women differently from men when either one reported hysterical tendencies to their physician. Conway reminds us how, as a result of doctors like Weir Mitchell, as

well as the social class in which he and Gilman and Cather lived, stereotypes of femininity as inferior to masculinity have been perpetuated historically: “Conway’s discussion of Geddes’s dichotomy of sexual temperaments, particularly his belief that the ‘emotional, intuitive female’ who must conserve energy for survival, provides a context for understanding two components of the rest cure treatment which Mitchell prescribed and Gilman defied”(Golden 71). They include (1) “total and enforced bed rest for periods of six to eight weeks”; and (2) “excessive feeding” of fatty foods while being physically restricted to only their bed. The logic in this prescription was that when these medically diagnostic elements were combined, energy would be restored to women, and their neurasthenic tendencies gone. However, the rest cure did not stop there; it also included total social isolation and absolutely no writing, mental or intellectual stimulation. In other words, women were transformed into infants and isolated from any support network to “encourage” her recovery. “By making sperm and ovum exhibit the qualities of male *katabolism* or female *anabolism* Geddes deduced a dichotomy between the temperaments of the sexes which was easily accommodated to the romantic idea of male rationality and female intuition”(Golden 74). He believed that “male cells had the power to transmit variation along with their tendency to dissipate energy, [and that] female cells by contrast had the power to conserve energy, support new life, and to maintain stability in new forms of life”(Golden 73). In other words, sex differences should be viewed as arising from a basic difference in cell metabolism that was innate and inherited.

His scientific study did not lead to the romantic ideas of heterosexual love; his scientific social theory reinforced it. However, Geddes recognized the possibilities for

an active woman in the future, but she had to somehow maintain her passivity. In fact, he contended that “the growth of feminine altruism might be arrested if women abandoned passivity for masculine altruism,” because it “placed them in competition with men [and] would be socially dangerous”(Golden 75). In other words, women should be controlled in their personal growth potential. Moreover, Geddes believed women should be confined or forced to remain in their gender allotment, which he viewed as necessary or natural because of women and men’s metabolism. “Once metabolism was considered as a basic factor determining social structures, it became clear that the male savage rested to accumulate the energy for sudden bursts of hunting, while the female merely kept going at routine occupations”(Golden 76). More specific, he saw, as Conway rightfully observes, “there was injustice in the routine”(Golden 76). Total and enforced bed rest for periods of six to eight weeks these doctors believed restored energy to neurasthenic women while excessive feeding increased body volume and thus provided them with new stores of energy. Conway's essay serves as a reminder of the theories of sex differentiation and the social position of women in the late nineteenth century when Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper."

### **Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” deconstructs “femininity.”**

Although Gilman wrote and published mostly social theory and utopian fiction, she is most known for “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a short but potent tale about the horror of her real life experiences through the fictional depiction of a female protagonist. After having been diagnosed with neurasthenia, her heroine was prescribed the rest cure treatment by a famous "nerve specialist," and she was confined to her bed for months, as Gilman was. The heroine went insane, but in real life Gilman recorded her terrible experience with Dr. Mitchell's rest cure treatment that symbolized women’s struggles,

not only with gender roles but also with the patriarchal understanding of what constituted a qualified publishable text, which shall be explained in more detail further on in this section. Besides serving as a critique of the social construction of gender roles, Gilman's story has been read as a depiction of incipient insanity as well as a corrective to the practice of the rest cure. "The Yellow Wallpaper" functions then as a literary touchstone of the social construction of gender and sexuality at the turn of the century in America because it crystallizes key issues in the discourse of gender and sexuality; the rationality for establishing such allotted roles; the biological essence of such socially constructed roles; and the reality of the performance of such roles, reflecting turn of the century thinking. From a 21<sup>st</sup> century point of view, Gilman's story earmarks the historical evolution of women's resistance to patriarchal institutions.

In their book The Madwoman in the Attic, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss Gilman's authorial technique as consisting of traits expressing "anxiety of authorship": "Since [women] were trapped in so many ways in the architecture—both the houses and the institutions—of patriarchy, women expressed their anxiety of authorship by comparing their 'presumptuous' literary ambitions with the domestic accomplishments that had been prescribed for them"(G & G 85). After being ordered not to by Dr. Mitchell and her husband who was also a doctor, the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" secretly kept a diary, recording her horrific experience while being subjected to the inhumane treatment of being confined for months to a double bed nailed to the floor in a former nursery. "Inevitably, too, [women] expressed their claustrophobic rage by enacting rebellious escapes"(85). Because the famous nerve specialist Mitchell prescribed the "rest cure" treatment also called the "Weir Mitchell Treatment" for the narrator's neurasthenia, which ordered her to complete inactivity, including not allowing her to write, she defied his treatment with the notion it was more hurtful toward her than helpful with her condition, and recorded her experience.



Fat and Blood written by Mitchell contains an in-depth and graphic description of the rest cure. However, it only worked on the symptoms and not the sources.

“The Yellow Wallpaper,” which was first published in the January 1892 issue of the New England Magazine, received mixed reactions because of its elements that contradicted the traditional roles of a woman and blatantly told of the horrors of them. In fact, Gilman was lucky it was even released to the public with her name on it. Gilman had learned that her agent at the time, Henry Austin, had sent it to the magazine for review and pocketed the forty dollars the publication had intended to pay her. Austin was not the only one who worked against Gilman’s literary success.

Initially, Gilman had sent “The Yellow Wallpaper” to William Dean Howells, and he, after noticing some of its merit, forwarded it on to Horace Scudder, the then editor of the Atlantic Monthly, a well known publication in the United States. According to Gilman’s account in her autobiography, Scudder rejected it remarking that “I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself”(27). However, Scudder’s criticism did not stop Gilman’s pursuit of having her story told. “In the 1890s, editors, and especially Scudder, still officially adhered to a canon of ‘moral uplift’ in literature, and Gilman’s story,” Elaine Hedges posits in her 1973 Afterword, “with its heroine reduced at the end to the level of a groveling animal, scarcely fitted the prescribed formula. One wonders, however, whether hints of the story’s attack on social mores—specifically on the ideal of the submissive wife—came through to Scudder and unsettled him?” (62). When he rejected Gilman’s story by openly declaring how it made him “miserable to digest,” Scudder also subtly admitted how he sympathized, even related, to the female protagonist’s feelings and the story’s merit. Yet he did not want to take the risk of publishing it.

Once the story was published and reviewed in 1892, the medical profession received “The Yellow Wallpaper’s” clinical content with both positive and negative feedback. “It certainly seems open to serious question if such literature should be

permitted in print,” one doctor wrote in 1892, following its initial publication, in an article entitled “Perilous Stuff” sent in protest to the Boston Transcript. “The story can hardly, it would seem, give pleasure to any reader, and to many whose lives have been touched through the dearest ties by this dread disease, it must bring the keenest pain. To others whose lives have become a struggle against an heredity of mental derangement, such literature contains deadly peril.” He ended his letter by asking, “Should such stories be allowed to pass without severest censure?” and signed it only “M.D.” (Gilman 64). In contrast, another doctor, Brummel Jones of Kansas City, Missouri, wrote Gilman personally, and praised her literary efforts, which Gilman recorded in her published autobiography The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography. He wrote, “I was very much pleased with it; when I read it again I was delighted with it, and now that I have read it again I am overwhelmed with the delicacy of your touch and the correctness of portrayal.” Then, he confirmed Gilman’s account by adding that, “From a doctor’s standpoint, and I am a doctor, you have made a success. So far as I know, and I am fairly well up in literature, there has been no detailed account of incipient insanity.” The insanity that was becoming apparent, however, to Gilman, was the insanity in the practice of this form of treatment and the pursuit of a society that perpetuates its constant use of it. Moreover, in Living, Gilman acknowledges her “purpose” for inventing “The Yellow Wallpaper” that was “to reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and convince him of the error of his ways . . . I met some one who knew close friends of Dr. Mitchell’s who said he had told them that he had changed his treatment of nervous prostration since reading ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’ If that is a fact, I have not lived in vain” (Dock 24). Identifying by name within the story, Gilman had decided who her target audience was: Dr. S. Weir Mitchell. Yet I insist her mission was to reach women also. Unfortunately, “that same year, [Mitchell] wrote to Andrew Carnegie that he wanted to build a hospital for the ‘Rest Treatment for the Poor’”(Dock 25). The medical villain had not been reformed and actually attempted to broaden his

practice beyond middle and upper class women to incorporate poor women into his practice of the rest treatment. A brief discussion of "The Yellow Wallpaper" follows.<sup>1</sup>

In the story, John, a physician, and his wife (name not provided) move for the summer to stay in the nursery of "a colonial mansion, a hereditary estate" out of town that has been vacant for years, because her doctor Mitchell (and the forthright Gilman directly refers to his name within the text on page 18) had diagnosed her with a nervous condition. Further, he said that she had a "slight hysterical tendency"<sup>2</sup> about her and that she must rest without any type of exercise or work, and was not allowed to write either. She described the nursery as "a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls"(12) The narrator's description of the room suggests that the room functioned in the past as a type of torture chamber for children. The narrator provided additional information that proved this: "The paint and the paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life" (12). From the narrator's point of inspection, whoever had previously been restrained in this room peeled the paper off the walls near the headboard of the bed and had probably been tied to the bed. The other places where the paper had been peeled back were low to the ground, which supports the premise that this room functioned as a disciplinary location in the mansion for a child.

In fact, the controlling way John treats his wife resembles that of a parent with their child. Her husband John insures that his wife obeys the rest treatment prescription. "[John] is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction. I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more. He said we came here solely on my

account, that I was to have perfect rest” (12). Even though she believed “that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good”(10), she has internalized guilt for being unappreciative of John’s efforts to help her condition. Hence, Gilman created a heroine’s story of how she went insane after being locked up in this one room without any outside stimulus.

The narrator does however have a few visitors who come to the estate to see her. One visitor, John’s sister Nellie, who assists in the carrying out the treatment, forces the narrator to have to conceal from her the writing efforts she makes while being confined to the nursery, because Nellie completely adheres to John’s orders. The narrator told of her: “Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing. She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick! But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows” (18). Nellie conforms to the allotted role for women at the turn of the century in perfecting her housekeeping duties. Gilman’s use of the word “profession” earmarks precisely where women contributed economically at the turn of the century: in the household as a maid. Any other role a women undertook could be construed, then, as satanic, masculine, deceptive, and against the overall primary functions socially allotted to women at the turn of the century.

As the story progresses, the yellow wallpaper begins to take on life forms and the narrator’s descent into madness is enhanced by that peculiarity. “This wall-paper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then. But, in the places where it isn’t faded and where the sun is just so,” she decides, “I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design”(18). Gilman’s protagonist admits of her private relationship with the wall paper designs that only she can see. “There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever

will. Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day. She visualizes the shapes to be “like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern” (22). This woman desires to be released, because as she reports, “the faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out”(23). This figure in the nursery interests the narrator so that she secretly watches the women in the wall at night for further definition of their cause.

While John was sleeping she watched: “He thought I was asleep at first, but I wasn’t, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately”(25). As she investigates the wall paper designs, the narrator decides these designs are actually women restrained behind them. In this instance, Gilman also signified the importance of considering women individually and with no set pattern. Further investigation revealed to her that from the reflection of the moonlight, the pattern in the wallpaper “becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be”(26). Eventually the figure imprisoned within the wallpaper begins to haunt her and even multiplies. The narrator confesses, “I think there are a great many women” (30). It soon becomes obvious that the figure behind the “horrible yellow-wallpaper” is the double of the narrator herself, which becomes by the end of the story enabled to escape from her own confinement: “I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before the morning we had peeled off yards of that paper” (32). Likewise, with the narrator, her final words are “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!”(36). With these words, John fainted in front of her, another sign that the gender roles were shifting because only women were thought to actually faint.

The heroine in "The Yellow Wallpaper" deconstructed the established gender roles after being prescribed the rest cure treatment and ordered to remain confined to "rest" for three months. Although Gilman provided the narrator no name, she wore the

face of many women at the turn of the century across America who suffered through similar medical treatments. In this short story, Gilman confronted these inequities by publishing her open disgust at the social construction of gender in America. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story of one woman who went insane, yet in Gilman's creating a story that confronted such political issues, her readers should have wondered: *Did the narrator go insane due to suffering from a nervous condition, or actually, did the heroine go insane because of her realization of the confined role women held in society?*

With this question and other mysteries about Gilman's writing agenda and her imagination left unanswered, other female writers adopted a male protagonist, like Cather did in "Paul's Case," where the issue of women's confinement sent her imagination into a different direction. Although Gilman focused her writing agenda toward expressing how women had become historically confined to the home, and in this instance a room, Cather in "Paul's Case" exhibited how men felt trapped in different ways because of their gender allotment.

### **Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" reconstructs "masculinity."**

"Paul's Case," the best known of Cather's first collection of short stories, Troll Garden, came out in 1905, just before she joined the McClure's staff and became a top editor. Unlike Gilman, Cather encountered no initial publishing problems and only made one attempt with McClure's where a contract was immediately signed. However, the critical reception of Cather's first collection of short stories resembled Gilman's because of the fluctuating reviews "Paul's Case" received. In an article written by Bessie du Bois in 1905 in The Bookman, the critic's remarks were entirely unfavorable in declaring that, after reading The Troll Garden, "one feels rather defrauded that the

author has omitted to say what came next; it would have been so easy to go on” (613). More obviously blatant in her disapproval, she criticized the stories as “a collection of freak stories that are either lurid, hysterical or unwholesome”(612). Yet, another reviewer was more concerned with biographical detail than with the author’s method of creating fiction, particularly in “Paul’s Case.” This 1905 Bookman review, “Chronicle and Comment,” included positive assessments like, “this story, of all the stories in the book, comes nearest to being based on actual occurrences; so that Miss Cather’s psychology is all the more a remarkable attainment . . . Miss Cather herself is a hard-headed, clear-visioned, straight-forward young woman.” It is the only story set in Pittsburgh, where Cather was writing at the time and its scenes have been noted to be from an actual experience. It was reported in a section of the Pittsburgh newspaper, Bookman, entitled “Chronicle and Comment” (1905), that two boys employed by a firm that managed a large estate ran away with two thousand dollars. They were found at the Auditorium Hotel in Chicago about ten days later, their money gone, and they were brought home. The papers were full of the affair for a time, but as one of the boys was a minister’s son, and as the money was refunded, the firm did not prosecute.

Similar to the “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Howells chose “Paul’s Case” as one of the anthologized Great Modern American Stories and for many years it was the only one of the set in The Troll Garden that Cather would permit to be published after its original release. “Paul’s Case” is a story of a young teenage boy, and quite presumably effeminate, who commits suicide because no one in his life—his teachers or his family—understand his way of thinking and his approach to life that contradicted his

allotted “masculine” role. The theater where he worked and New York city where he ran away prior to his death were the only places he felt he could relax and be himself.

In the beginning of the story, Paul is facing expulsion from high school for disrespecting authority, the underlying cause his total discontent with the whole educational enterprise. The teachers are not unkind, but Paul’s strange demeanor (he enters “suave and smiling” with a red carnation in his button hole) both baffles and angers them.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the hearing, they leave feeling “dissatisfied and unhappy; humiliated to have felt so vindictive toward a mere boy.” Paul rushes off to his ushering job at Carnegie Hall, first going up to the picture gallery in the Hall, where “he sat down before a blue Rico and lost himself.” Later, after helping patrons to their seats, he falls into a similar dreamy state as the symphony begins (“he lost himself as he had before the Rico”).

After the concert is over, Paul delays long enough to follow the singer’s carriage and watch her enter the hotel: “he seemed to feel himself go after her up the steps, into the warm, lighted building, into an exotic, a tropical world of shiny, glistening surfaces and basking ease.” A gust of cold wind and rain in his face rouses him, and he takes the cars to Cordelia Street, “where all the houses were exactly alike.” He pictures to himself his upstairs room, with its “horrible yellow wallpaper, . . . and over his painted wooden bed the pictures of George Washington and John Calvin, and the framed motto ‘Feed My Lambs,’ which had been worked in red worsted by his mother.” He expected his father, with his endless questions and complaints, to be standing at the top of the stairs. Paul’s mother had died when he was a baby, and Paul lives with his father and sisters, shadowy girls who barely appear in the story.



When the school principal reports that Paul has not improved following the faculty hearing, Paul's father takes him out of school and finds a place for him as a cash boy with a mercantile company Denny & Carson—the first step, as Cordelia Street sees it, to a solid future. Further, Paul is required to quit ushering, and the doorkeeper is to see that he does not enter the theater again.

Paul runs away to New York after having stolen almost a thousand dollars in cash from Denny & Carson, checks into the Waldorf hotel, and goes on an expensive shopping spree including Tiffany's. It had been "astonishingly easy," and now Paul looks ahead with relief to a few "precious days" of ease: "This time there would be no awakening, no figure at the top of the stairs." He luxuriates at the hotel and then goes out on the town where he meets a male freshman at Yale. "Everything was quite perfect; he was exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be."

On the eighth day, he learned from the newspapers that his theft had been discovered, and that his father was in New York looking for him: "It was to be worse than jail, even; the tepid waters of Cordelia Street were to close over him finally and forever. The grey monotony stretched before him in hopeless, unrelieved years; Sabbath school, Young People's Meeting, the yellow-wallpapered room, the damp dish-towels. After staying one more night, Paul takes the ferry to New Jersey, then hires a horse taxi to drive him into the countryside by the railroad track, where he dismisses the cab, walks to a high bank, and launches himself before an oncoming train. Before the story ends and Paul jumps, he takes one of the red flowers he has been wearing on his coat and buries it in the snow.

In "Paul's Case," Cather created a male character whose lifestyle did not conform to the established norms of his day. Like Gilman, Cather focused her writing agenda toward the reconstruction of socially constructed ideologies that confined gender and sexuality. Cather on the other hand restrained herself from overtly soliciting her own alternative lifestyle to her writing public by adopting a female narrator like that of Gilman. Instead, she selected a duplicitous approach by characterizing Paul in expressing her political concern for the confined role of men and women in society. After examining both of these touchstone texts of Cather and Gilman, the writing styles of both authors demonstrate how each of them shared a similar sexuo-political agenda but why each of them chose a unique writing platform in order to address them.

## Chapter III: Gender & Sexuality in the First Wave

1850-1930

During the First Wave of Feminism in America, women writers and political activists, such as Gilman, Sanger, Addams and Cather, constructed the women's liberation movement based on gender equality, which women of the Second Wave used as a backbone to address gender related issues in the latter part of this century. First Wavers created bodies of written work that primarily focused on arguments for equal treatment of both genders based upon examining the "sexuo-economic relationship" of women and men as a factor in social evolution. They also produced written arguments for the right to birth control among women by working to remove its negative social stigma and advocating it as a means for women to possess absolute control of their lives and their bodies; thus it was seen as a route to women's complete liberation. Sanger accomplished this feat only after having published a compilation of horrifying real life letters written by other women about their mortifying experiences of the childbirth/rearing process. Branching off into other directions, First Wavers re-evaluated the notion of "Democracy" arguing that its actual practice was inconsistent toward the liberation of women. However, Addams viewed modern education as a positive factor in the liberation of women because it recognized women apart from the home, the family and social claims, all of which placed pressures upon females that resulted in them having a lower self-image than men. In a tactful yet brief essay she wrote while working as an editor for McClure's, Cather described instances where art

and life unite to explore the social construction of their surroundings, which she referred to as "escapism." The example she gave was the commitment of 15<sup>th</sup> century Southwestern Indian women, who decorated their water jars, carried them up to nearby streams without even knowing if water was there, to illustrate her idea. Cather also discussed the practice of novelists intentionally employing themselves at sweatshop jobs in order to gather their creative writing materials. She saw their "exceptionalness" as "a willingness to pay the cost instead of being paid for it" (24). In both instances, Cather illustrated how "escapism" could be used personally to incite one's imagination and channel it resourcefully without entirely allowing social influences affect one's vision. First Wavers reconstructed the "sexuo-economic" relationships of the homes in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which also laid the groundwork for the Second Wavers to reorganize the "sexuo-economic" relationships outside the home.

### **Gilman's Women & Economics.**

The importance of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's social theory stands uncontested by the vast majority of critics. In Women & Economics (1898), subtitled "Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution," she stated that the fundamental concern for women was work. "Her views on the place and future of women were sought, commented upon, and avidly discussed in this country and Europe" (Degler vi).<sup>4</sup> Carl Degler's 1956 American Quarterly essay "inaugurated the revival of interest in Gilman's work, and in 1966, Degler brought forth a reprinting of [Women & Economics]" (Knight 165-166). He further notes in the introduction to the 1966 Torchbook Edition that "in the first two decades of the twentieth century her books ran through numerous editions and were translated into half a dozen foreign

languages”(vi).<sup>5</sup> Numerous articles by Gilman on social theory appeared in popular and scholarly journals alike, and as a paid lecturer, she was in great demand in the United States, England and on the continent.<sup>6</sup> On June 8, 1899, The Nation went so far as to pronounce Women & Economics as “the most significant utterance on the subject [of women] since Mill’s Subjection of Woman”(Nation 443). However, since Gilman wrote very little that was directly concerned with the achievement of the issue of suffrage, her work possibly was lost from sight because the minds of Americans at the turn of the century were completely taken up with the struggle for the vote.

Nonetheless, what Gilman’s W & E uniquely addresses is that the vote was only a peripheral part of the revolution she both prophesized and advanced for women.

Moreover, her social theory received a much different reception than her controversial short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Why were her economic treatises socially acceptable yet her gender related literary endeavors ridiculed so heavily? Was this consequence Gilman suffered a result of coming too close to the real truth of what goes on behind closed doors that appear so peaceful on the outside surface?

Basing her thesis squarely on the “natural tendency of any function to increase in power by use,” (58) and on the genetic transmission of these adaptations, Gilman charts the history of humankind from primal homogeneity to the point when “sex distinction” had become morbid and debilitating(33). She is referring here to the notion of cultural conditioning and the genetic determinism based upon this notion that negatively affected women, and benefited men. According to Gilman, the restrictive life forced upon women by the “sexuo-economic relation” (37) has made them into what amounts to “a degenerate species specializing in sex functions”(39). The “male of

our species,” on the other hand, “has become human, far more than male”(43). Gilman desired to ground her polemic in biology, leading her to portray cultural conditioning as genetic determinism. The only reason the female has not withered away completely is that each “girl child inherits from her father a certain increasing percentage of human development, human power, human tendency”(69-70). The constant infusion of male/human genes alone “has saved us from such a female as the gypsy moth”(70). Gilman's allusion to the gypsy moth relates a woman's nature to the transformed caterpillar that completely destroys its own environment as it releases pheromones to attract male gypsy moths to multiply at a rapid rate. Gilman defines historical women, as opposed to the essential woman, as deviations from the male, “who is a far more normal animal than the female of his species”(43). By encroaching on the freedoms of the woman to the point of reducing her to a state of dependency, man assumed the superior position of provider. “He was not only compelled to serve her needs, but to fulfill in his own person the thwarted uses of maternity. He became, and has remained, a sort of man-mother,”(125) who nurtures his child (read: woman) into a state of complete dependency based upon his preconceived concept of “wife” and/or “mother.” Gilman identifies this social process as “the maternalizing of man”(127), a paradoxical approach to maternity that has had adverse effects on both women and men, and thus makes the question of what an ideal human being should be like problematic. Deemed a leading feminist in her own time, Gilman, ironically, repudiated the term *feminist* when it came into use in her later years. Rather, she called herself a humanist. “Her world was masculinist, men having usurped human traits as their own, and Gilman wanted to restore an equal gender balance, to emancipate women from ‘house service’

to promote the best development of society” (Knight 164). Unencumbered by domestic service, Gilman believed that women could then serve in an industrial society and thus benefit the world as equals to men. Women needed to tackle their challenge with their household responsibilities of rearing children, however, before they could enter the workforce. Someone needed to focus First Wave efforts there first for any real change could begin.

### **Margaret Sanger & America's First Birth Control League.**

Another female theorist who lived in America at the turn of the century and who focused on the methodology toward equalizing gender relations centering on the development of women was Margaret Sanger. Her route however was through birth control;<sup>7</sup> she professed that pregnancy perpetuated the poverty of the family and forced women into solitary confinement within the household. Parallel to Gilman’s Women & Economics in their vital concern for the liberation of women, Sanger’s social treatises of the 1920s, The Pivot of Civilization (1922) and Motherhood in Bondage (1928), focus on how women must gain control of their lives and their bodies through birth control in order to free themselves from the control of their husbands and their doctors.

In The Pivot of Civilization, Sanger defended her work in the Birth Control League, while addressing criticisms of her passion for more order and awareness through what they called “Birth Control” or “the idea of modern scientific contraception”(12). Rebutting her critics, she demanded that, “Birth Control, therefore, means not merely the limitation of births, but the application of intelligent guidance over the reproductive power. It means the substitution of reason and intelligence for the blind play of instinct”(13). During this time, Sanger notes the league was criticized for

the use of the term “Birth Control” which she saw as “guidance, direction, foresight”(12-13). She attacked the “indifference of the intellectual leaders” who for centuries “have preached the doctrine of glorious and divine fertility” where “children brought into this world by unwilling mothers suffer an initial handicap that cannot be measured by cold statistics”(15-17). It is interesting to note here that in her 1928 book mentioned earlier, Motherhood in Bondage, Sanger provides her readers with a glimpse of such cold statistics that will be discussed later in this chapter. “For centuries, official moralists, priests, clergymen and teachers, statesmen and politicians have preached the doctrine of glorious and divine fertility” while they remain “the staunching adherents in their own lives of celibacy and non-fertility”(17-18). Sanger directed her Birth Control agenda against the teachings of the churches. She argued:

As long as sexual activity is regarded in a dualistic and contradictory light,--in which it is revealed either as the instrument by which men and women ‘cooperate with the Creator’ to bring children into the world, on the one hand; and on the other, as the sinful instrument of self-gratification, lust and sensuality, there is bound to be an endless conflict in human conduct, producing ever increasing misery, pain and injustice. (204-205)

More blatant and directed by the end of her treatise, Sanger purported that “the great central problem, and one which must be taken first, is the abolition of the shame and fear of sex”(271).

Motherhood is a selection of thousands of horrifying confessional letters compiled by Sanger from letters sent her by mothers from all parts of the United States and Canada. These letters “voice,” as Sanger notes in her introduction to Motherhood, “desperate appeals for deliverance from the bondage of enforced maternity”(xi). For them, Sanger saw herself as a “symbol of deliverance” from their enslaved womanhood



“extending help denied them by their husbands, priests, physicians or their neighbors” (xi-xii). She offered hope amid the reality of suffering.

Sanger forewarned her readers: “repetition the readers will find, but significant repetition” that “builds up the unity of this tragic communal experience”(xii). Sanger offered the American public a gruesome look at the personal lives of many unhappy mothers in detailed letters and statistics that summarized their horrifying experiences. In her introduction, it was clearly evident that she grappled with objectifying women in this manner for the public’s review. She notes “an easy and even a pleasant task is it to reduce human problems to numerical figures in black and white on charts and graphs, an infinitely difficult one is to suggest concrete solutions, or to extend true charity in individual lives” (xiii). More to the point, a subject cannot be reduced to an object with a completely predictable pattern, and Sanger wanted her readers to know she was concerned with the individual. “Yet life can only be lived by the individual; almost invariably the individual refuses to conform to the theories and classifications of the statistician”(xiii).<sup>8</sup> After acknowledging her respect for the individual, she reported that “of all the varieties of experience and humiliation recorded, a definite unity emerges”(xiv).

Each letter contains the record of a woman caught in the toils of unwilling maternity, enslaved not only by the great imperative instincts of human nature—hunger and sex—but hopelessly enmeshed in this trap of poverty, heredity, ignorance, the domination or the indifference of the husband, the timid passivity of the family physician, and the ever-increasing complications of successive pregnancies. (xiv-xv)

It is unfortunate that the unity Sanger noticed can be identified as multiple women suffering because of their reproductive capacities. Too many mothers reported to Sanger of the dangers affiliated with childbirth and childrearing, so that she organized

for publication the previously discussed two books detailing the devastating personal losses that had survived. Meanwhile, other women without children, and daughters who still lived at home, hurdled obstacles also in order to liberate themselves from the bondage of their family obligations that kept them linked to the household too. The First Wavers attacked this area of concern for women because their mission included the liberation of all women, and not only mothers.

### **Jane Addams' Democracy and Social Ethics.**

In her argument for the liberation of single women, Jane Addams presented various scenarios where the present form of "Democracy" was in place to impel her reader to consider a "new form of Democracy" which would lead to an acceptance of social obligations involving in each instance a new line of conduct. The design for this redefinition situated the responsibility of this task with her readers in order for them to question their existing notion of "Democracy."<sup>9</sup> She remarked in her opening chapter of Democracy and Social Ethics(1907), "no attempt is made to reach a conclusion, nor to offer advice beyond the assumption that the cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy"(12). In other words, she encouraged a reconsideration of the existing authority in Democracy, and she provided scenarios to elucidate her point.

One example in support of Addam's premise for a reconsideration of society's notion of "Democracy" she provided was how "the individual often sacrifices the energy, which should legitimately go into the fulfillment of personal and family claims, into what he considers the higher claim" that occurs whenever "daughters undertake work lying quite outside of traditional and family interests"(73). They are met with opposition. "These parents insist that the girl is carried away by a foolish enthusiasm,

that she is in search of a career, that she is restless and does not know what she wants”(73). Addams contended the parents believe that, at the cost of the family, the daughter was unsure of herself, needed unjust personal fulfillment, and only on a whim. “She was setting up her own will against that of her family’s for selfish ends” and “her attempt to break away must therefore be willful and self-indulgent”(74). Addams assumed that this was an overbearing family claim on the daughter because “for so many hundreds of years women have had no larger interests, no participation in the affairs lying quite outside personal and family claims”(74). Furthermore, “it is always difficult for the family to regard the daughter otherwise than as a family possession”(82). Comparing her to her career-minded brother, her parents assumed she was uninteresting and dumb. Along with her familial obligations, the daughter was an object that possessed distinct responsibilities to the household. Significantly though, Addams saw that “modern education recognizes woman quite apart from family or society claims, and gives her the training which for many years has been deemed successful for highly developing a man’s individuality and freeing his powers for independent action”(84). Thus, the daughter’s independence remains entangled in a web of “social claims” and “family claims” that is in conflict with her personal growth outside of this web. “The result is an unhappy woman, whose heart is consumed by vain regrets and desires”(86). Reminding Victorian America of its selfishness with regard to its treatment of the daughter, Addams insisted that a daughter’s own individual needs were not significant because the responsibility was not to herself but to the family’s success, and that this maltreatment of her only perpetuated more weak, dependent women. Because the family unit refused to waive their selfishness to balance the

personal respect that benefited the son with their daughter's needs, America showed their unwillingness to accept women on their own without men and away from the home. Women, who like Cather, chose not to get married were forced to consider alternative ways in order to express their desire for life. Consequently, some chose to direct their imagination toward art and literature.

### **Willa Cather's On Writing.**

Willa Cather, having focused her writing on fiction rather than social theory in comparison to Gilman, Sanger and Addams, did however write a brief essay entitled, "Escapism: A Letter to the Commonwealth,"<sup>10</sup> which broaches social issues in its theoretical content. In it, Cather demonstrates the multifaceted usefulness of "a new term in criticism: the Art of 'Escape.' Her initial questions were: "Isn't the phrase tautological? What has art ever been but escape?"(18). Her answer: "When the world is in a bad way, we are told, it is the business of the composer and the poet to devote himself to propaganda and fan the flames of indignation"(18). As the mind mulls over the term Escape, "implying an evasion of duty, something like the behavior of a poltroon," the term may at first glance appear negative, but it is actually a rhetorical tool utilized by people, artists, writers, etc. to express themselves within their surroundings. Cather gives the example of Southwestern Indian women, before European civilization had ever come to America, who painted geometrical patterns on the jars in which they carried water up from the streams, whenever there was water to collect, that is: "These people lived under the perpetual threat of drought and famine [yet] they often shaped their graceful cooking pots when they had nothing to cook in them"(19). Cather's

reasoning concerning their curious behavior was that “they sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man”(19). That thing is “his loyalty to a cause”(20). The unusual behavior of the Southwestern Indian women proved their dedication to the mission of shaping beautiful pottery to cook in with little chance of rain for anything to grow for cooking in them.

In this same essay, Cather also described her experience when she first lived in New York and was on the editorial staff of a magazine, how she became “disillusioned about social workers and reformers” “when they brought in an article on fire-trap tenements or sweat-shop labor apologetically explained that they were making these investigations ‘to collect material for fiction’”(23-24). Cather could not believe that “any honest welfare worker, or any honest novelist, went to work in this way”(24). After further discussion, she came to their reason. “Their exceptionalness, oftener than not, comes not from a superior endowment, but from a deeper purpose, and a willingness to pay the cost instead of being paid for it”(24). Then she could relate because she also possessed unquenchable personal missions. “Since poets and novelists do not speak in symbols or a special language, but in the plain speech which all men use and all men may, after some fashion, read,” Cather speculated, “they are told that their first concern should be to cry out against social justice. This, of course, writers have always done . . . This seems to be the writer’s natural way of looking at the suffering of the world”(22). Both of these examples explore the mysterious connection between art and life. Is this what she was attempting in the depiction of her effeminate character Paul?

During the First Wave of Feminism in America women writers and political activists constructed the women's liberation movement based on gender equality. They created bodies of written work that primarily focused on arguments for equal treatment of both genders based upon examining, as Gilman first referred to in Women & Economics, "the sexuo-economic relationship" of women and men as a factor in social evolution. First Wavers also produced written arguments for the right to birth control among women by working to remove its negative social stigma and advocating it as a means for women to possess absolute control of their lives and their bodies. First Waver Margaret Sanger accomplished this feat only after having published a compilation of horrifying real life letters written by other women about their experiences during the childbirth/rearing process. Branching off into other concerns for women during the First Wave, women such as Jane Addams, viewed modern education as a positive factor in the liberation of women because it recognized women apart from the home, the family and social claims, all of which placed pressures upon females. While some political activists pinpointed for women their challenges in social evolution toward personal liberation, other women writers, such as Cather and Gilman, found alternative ways to circumvent their discontent in America's socio-economic system by creating literary journeys that tested established gender roles, and caused people to reconsider the social construction of them.

## IV. The Evolution of Gender & Sexuality in the Second Wave

1960 – 1990

### 1960s: the question of sex

The Second Wave began with a new intensity in many societies in the degree of reflection given to gender relations. "The political movements that came into being in the 1960s meant that a radical questioning of gender roles was being carried out not only by isolated scholars or marginalized groups, but in front of and with the attention of many national publics. The consequence has been a major restructuring of institutions worldwide" (Nicholson 1). Two different movements in America during this time shaped this change. The Women's Rights Movement, which "drew on the dissatisfaction felt by many middle class housewives with their lot as housewives" led women into the paid labor force. Secondly, The Women's Liberation Movement encouraged "the more theoretical works of the second wave" that "explained the origins of women's oppression and the means by which it has been sustained over time"(Nicholson 2). They generated explanations that accounted for the fundamentality of women's oppression and the economic barriers women faced. While in the 1960s some women writers, such as Betty Friedan, looked inward for the solution to women's social challenges in America, other writers like Mary Ellmann and Tillie Olsen, broadened the scope of the 1960s discussion on gender and sexuality by speculating on how established gender roles have resulted in an unequal partnership between women and men. Their literary contributions opened the way for the assessment of and

appreciation for the individual voice of the female gender that women writers soon confronted in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1960s, a trend in literature written by women about women directed the responsibility of women's unhappiness in America within women themselves instead of focusing entirely on their uncontrollable external conditions. For example, Friedan's noteworthy Feminine Mystique (1963) internalized women's suffering. "The problem that ha[d] no name," Friedan determined, was "the problem [that] lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women"(11). In short, the problems these women encountered stemmed from their own insecurities, and not any outside force.<sup>11</sup> "If a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with *her* marriage, or with *herself*"(14, my emphasis). Fortunately, individual women struggled toward developing a discourse about their unsettled feelings and gradually they determined "that the problem that has no name was shared by countless women in America"(15). These countless women, she referred to, the majority of whom were white, represented the populace of women who could afford to stay home in their domestic settings. Other poorer and colored women had no choice but to work and financially support their family and could only imagine the life of a suburban housewife, while they changed bed sheets and scrubbed floors. Friedan explained, in her point of view, why it was so difficult for anyone to understand how suburban women came to be so unhappy with their lot.

The suburban housewife—she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. . . .She had found true feminine fulfillment. . . .As a housewife she was free to choose automobile, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of. (13)



The suburban housewife, therefore, became the envy of other women when she reached the social level of an unemployed (by capitalist America's standards) consumer.

Furthermore, becoming envied in this fashion characterized the high point in the evolution of a "real" American woman. Even if there were some romance to it, if this were the dream life so many women around the world were desiring, then how could a doctor like Mitchell have been so popular, when his income was based on the misery of this exact group of women?<sup>12</sup> Friedan also noted that a Newsweek article declared, "She is dissatisfied with a lot that women of other lands can only dream of . . . From the beginning of time, the female cycle has defined and confined woman's role"(19).<sup>13</sup> In this article, the author assumes that simply because things are more treacherous in foreign lands that women in America should be content with their own country's form of domestic torture. Unlike another outspoken French feminist of the period, Simone de Beauvoir, whom Friedan interviewed, Friedan did not advocate changing the system in America, but rather simply leaving the system intact and allowing women to enter the workforce with the same career opportunities as men to achieve the highest paid positions. Friedan paved the way for future speculation on women's involvement in American society and their evolution in it as well by starting such organizations as the National Organization for Women(N.O.W.), yet she advocated heterosexual marriage as the only life choice for women. De Beauvoir, on the other hand, adopted a more radical approach and believed that the entire system, including the institution of marriage and natural childbirth, needed to be thrown away because it worked against women.

A decade later Friedan would find herself interviewing France's most influential feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir,<sup>14</sup> at her residence with two interpreters in Paris

and discussing these issues which had caused Friedan to believe that the feminist movement was at an ideological standstill, and left her perplexed. In Friedan's eyes, gender issues had changed only minimally, with women still subordinate to men. Women, to Friedan, were still the nurses and men the doctors; women were still the secretaries and men their bosses. Consequently, she sought de Beauvoir's guidance with a "feeling that someone must know the right answer, someone must know for sure that all the women who had thrown away those old misleading maps were heading in the right direction, someone must see more clearly"(Friedan, 1975, 391). What she interpreted from her personal interview was that de Beauvoir had been "professing publicly to find in radical feminism an ideological blueprint superior to Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist communism"(392). In short, Friedan met face to face with "an intellectual heroine of our history" who she thought believed that "one must simply destroy the system"(392). This solution seemed unrealistic to Friedan because so many women, including de Beauvoir who shared her life with Jean Paul Sartre, the father of existentialism, were in committed relationships with men. Friedan believed women would succeed faster with men on their side and miscalculated de Beauvoir's view on gender relations. She reflected after her interview with de Beauvoir and wrote, "When one has lived a whole life in such dependence upon a man as she has—and by flaunting the absence of legal sanction, made a stronger bond than others do in ordinary marriage—how could she then advocate that other women renounce the very need to love and be loved by a man"(393). Friedan wondered why de Beauvoir resented her own position in the role she played in her personal life with Sartre, and so her arguments focused on eliminating all relationships with men? De Beauvoir may not

have felt insubordinate to Sartre but Friedan inferred from their meeting that quite possibly she did. The level of communication between the two women expressed through interpreters' assistance may have contributed to this confusion, or quite possibly the medium of communication used to tackle such complexities about gender and sexuality served as an obstacle because of its own restrictions. Significant to their discussion, de Beauvoir and Friedan discussed various topics about gender and sexuality and most definitely held distinct views on each and expressed them forthrightly.

Friedan suggested in her discussion with de Beauvoir that a minimum wage be attached to the value of housework. Yet de Beauvoir disagreed altogether claiming that "it keeps to the idea of women at home, and I'm very much against that"(400). Friedan rebutted by claiming that "I think you tackle the question of sex by tackling equality, not by renouncing or urging women to renounce love or sexual relationships"(405). De Beauvoir believed that a woman would only encounter personal freedom "in a world of equality" but "while it is not equal she takes a big risk"(405). Even in sex, Friedan pointed out what de Beauvoir had earlier posited in The Second Sex, that "a woman feels debased in sex because she has the underneath position"(405). They agreed that "it is not sex that reduces women; it is society" but that "sex becomes the symbol of what society does" so that "when we change society, we can choose our sexuality"(405). De Beauvoir had also directed her political agenda onto class inequality among women while Friedan was only interested in attaining the right for privileged white women to enter this class-based, unequal world in positions of authority. Thus, from her interview with de Beauvoir, Friedan developed her own

sense of existentialism toward the liberation of women that was fundamentally different from that of de Beauvoir. "I had learned my own existentialism from her," Friedan wrote. "It was The Second Sex that introduced me to that approach to reality and political responsibility--that, in effect, freed me from the rubrics of authoritative ideology and led me to whatever original analysis of women's existence I have been able to contribute" (Friedan 391). She had located her own existential authority within herself. Friedan realized that, "we need and can trust no other authority than our own personal truth" (Friedan 394). The significance of personal liberation had therefore established its place within 1960's Second Wave dogmas.

In comparison, Mary Ellmann, in Thinking About Women (1968) addressed the topic of confinement and women in her chapter entitled, "Feminine Stereotypes," where she contended that "range is masculine and confinement is feminine"(87). In Ellmann's opinion, "this natural law, repealed in the late nineteenth century, became then a social axiom instead. The sequence illustrates, in turn, a law of change: when nature ceases to enforce conditions to which the majority are accustomed or even devoted, these conditions are artificially prolonged by both sentiment and argument"(87). She employed Cather to illustrate her argument.

Willa Cather, for example—and for reasons I have never understood—found much picturesque charm in the sight of men, and particularly of women, performing heavy labor. When this labor was relieved by the introduction of farm machinery, she resisted its loss (1) by sentimentalizing its beauty and (2) by fulminating against the techniques which replaced it.(87)

While Ellmann agreed with society's replacement of manual labor with machinery, Cather resisted the implication of such, a possible sign of her own inability to accept difference or social change, and specifically with regard to gender distributed tasks.<sup>15</sup>

Cather saw that this type of lifestyle allowed for women to work with men respectively outside of the home. Cather envisioned the possibility of balance in the family because in an agricultural family, women may have performed different duties from men, but everyone shared in the overall preservation of the family unit. In the New Order women were left confined to the home, whereas men sought work outside the home and generated revenue from their outside employment opportunities.

Then Ellmann maintained how extreme efforts were exhausted during the nineteenth century in the continuation of the feminine stereotype of confinement, and its social attractability. “The narrowness of women is now an abstract sexual judgment; but it is difficult to know, from statement to statement, whether the characteristic is obligatory or chosen, or to be certain in which circumstances it is convenient and in which regrettable. Certainly, as long as it is recommended, it is presumably desirable”(89). Socially, Ellmann saw that women strove in their perfection of their confinement roles and that they perfected this confinement in their allotted lifestyles. “The domestic functions which are strenuously urged upon American women who are not yet involved in them are precisely the sources of complaint against the women who are. Many perform these functions too well, and perfection is as risible as imperfection”(89). Furthermore, Ellmann found “practicality” as a “subdivision of confinement: most often, it is noticed when the man’s theoretic, artistic or spiritual capacity is at issue”(91). As long as women stick to their confinement role, then the current establishment with the opposite genders in effect continues. “Women are incapable of grasping subtle principles of conduct, large aspirations, bold errors, grand designs. This is a forgivable limitation as long as they shut their mouths and chill the

beer. But unfortunately, many tend to form, and then to express, narrow and hostile opinions of masculine projects, and some may even prevent their realization”(91).

Ellmann concluded that, at times, women’s role could be read as a humble slave with limited tasks that only supplied assistance to their men or worked intentionally against them. Personal liberation of women, then, also included being confident in their interpersonal communication and not with their beliefs concealed from other people.

The absence of women's voices prevented the range of individual freedom between men and women in becoming clear and equal. Eliminating the silence of women too became part of the Second Wave platform.

In her 1965 book entitled Silences,<sup>16</sup> Tillie Olsen observed "the silences I speak of here are unnatural: the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot"(6). She referred to the struggle women have encountered while attempting to establish a literary voice for themselves, that has historically been a virtue ascribed only to men. "The power and the need to create, over and beyond reproduction, is native in both women and men. Where the gifted among women, (*and men*) have remained mute, or have never attained full capacity, it is because of circumstances, inner or outer, which oppose the needs of creation"(16-17 Olsen’s emphasis). Women dedicated and surrendered their lives to benefit others and have been traditionally conditioned to put the needs of others first. Being denied a full writing agenda, Olsen believed, has imprisoned women's creative abilities "lost by unnatural silences" (21). From this perspective, the context in which Olsen employed “unnatural” implies that the writing talents of women who desired to freely compose, like Cather and Gilman, were socially restrained because of male domination within the major writing arenas, so that it is

impossible to retrieve their lost passions. Here, Olsen underestimated the power of reticence within these texts that Cather has been recognized for, and she neglected to consider the historical element of these texts significant to their writing styles that throughout exhibit qualifying uniqueness and contemporary progression. Cather and Gilman both had unique and cutting edge writing styles for their age.

### **1970s: Feminist focus on "sex/gender system" as counterproductive.**

Although some women desired arriving at unified action with other women, and although some women recognized the concept of *strength in numbers*, individuality and difference became a central issue within discourses regarding gender and sexuality in the 1970's. As early as 1971, Elaine Showalter had advocated the study of women writers as a group but with common sense. "Women writers should not be studied as a distinct group on the assumption that they write alike, or even display stylistic resemblance's distinctively feminine"(32). She cautioned readers and critics who have previously misinterpreted or misunderstood the writing agendas of women because of stereotypes that have confined all women to possessing only a "feminine" style or approach to everything. However, Showalter further recognized that, "women do have a special history susceptible to analysis, which includes such complex considerations as the economics of their relation to the literary marketplace; the effects of social and political changes in women's status upon individuals, and the implications of stereotypes of the woman writer and restrictions of her artistic autonomy" (32). Without completely annihilating past interpretive attempts at deciphering the messages female authors sent out to their audience, Showalter understood that women, because of

their place within society and its economic structure, could have only been grouped together in discussions while attempting to locate a common ground, a collective message. Furthermore, Showalter believed that some women may undeniably possess common interests, but the individual voice should not be taken for granted or be denied, especially in a writing environment. Too much collectivism denies room for the individual female imagination. Moreover, Showalter's view acknowledges unity without denying the individual difference among women and their writing. Yet she only touched on the "economics" of women.

When Gayle Rubin published "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" for the first time in 1975, the feminist focus on the "sex/gender system" switched from being negative to the advancement of women toward developing theories that were not grounded in biology, as the central factor in the oppression of women. This article expanded the discussion of gender and sexuality as well as the perception of the oppression of women. Rubin pointed to the limitations of Marxism and claimed that the theorizing it did about women was too narrow: patriarchy. She also noted that the social whole encompasses at least three domains: the political, the economic and the sexual—and the first two cannot be discussed in the absence of the third. While Marx had developed a powerful theory of the economic and the political, what was also needed was an investigation into the domain of sexuality, or as Rubin referred to it as "sex/gender system." She preferred the term "sex/gender system" to "patriarchy," as the latter seemed limited not only to one form of "the sex/gender system" but even to one form of women's oppression. For this reason, Rubin turned to Levi-Strauss, who had argued that the exchange of women made possible the institution



of kinship, and for early societies organized around kinship, the construction of society itself. These insights into Levi-Strauss' ideas explained how, if the exchange of women were necessary for the construction of kinship, what also would be required would be the cultural elaboration of sexual differences into gender differences, a societal demand for heterosexuality and a prohibition against alternative lifestyles within the kinship group.<sup>17</sup> In her early Second Wave statement, Rubin accounted for the very construction of gender, its ties to heterosexuality and the incest taboo. "Individuals are gendered as opposites who are sexually desirable to the others outside their kinship group in order that marriage be guaranteed, and so thus this social structure reproduced" (Nicholson 40). She also wrote, "gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality. Kinship systems rest upon marriage. They therefore transform males and females into 'men' and 'women,' each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other" (40). Further she established that "the idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature"(40). On one hand, she recognized a difference and variation of traits in women and men, and on the other, an overlapping existence of similarities that men and women possess yet have been forced to repress for the preservation of a binary, heterosexual system of marital alliances.

Elaine R. Hedges viewed the preservation of heterosexuality as one of the reasons why Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" has only been recently discovered within American literature. In 1973, with the expansion of the women's movement, The Feminist Press resurfaced Gilman's short story in a tiny paperback edition with an

explanatory “Afterword” by Hedges that detailed the circumstances contributing to its suppression. Hedges contended that “‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is a small literary masterpiece” that “for almost fifty years has been overlooked, as has its author, one of the most commanding feminists of her time” (37). Significant to the current discussion of gender and sexuality in America, Hedges' interpretation of Gilman's neglect revealed that, if female authors like Gilman created negative portrayals of the established American Victorian ideal, then their work could be intentionally suppressed by publishers at the cost of their fame. Furthermore, Hedges claimed, “No one seems to have made the connection between insanity and the sex, or the sex role of the victim, no one explored the story's implications for male-female relationships in the nineteenth century” (41). Yet the message in Gilman's story rests within these relationships.

Within a few years, it became evident that Hedges' efforts opened the door for more detailed accounts of how the medical field betrayed women. For instance, The Horrors of the Half-Known Life (1976) and For Her Own Good (1979) were published and documented the sexuo-economic politics of the medical field and from which women like Gilman suffered at the turn of the century in America. In one of the chapters in Horrors, Barker-Benfield addressed the history behind the intentional maltreatment and suppression of the practice of midwifery by the medical field in America. “Doctors and obstetricians formulated and inspired two methods for the elimination of the midwife: propaganda and legislation”(B-B 63). For instance, in the Flexner Report of 1910, Barker-Benfield noted that “[physicians] set out to make potential mothers fear midwives by deeming them hopelessly dirty, ignorant and incompetent, relics of a barbaric past”(B-B 63). Through this propaganda they were

able to eliminate the midwife's market by persuading women that birth was so dangerous that they had to have obstetricians. "Since birth was unnatural, it was liable to affect the 'patient's' health in any number of unpredictable ways, with which only a fully trained expert was qualified to cope"(B-B 63). Pertaining to legal action and the elimination of the practice of mid-wifery, Barker-Benfield makes reference to "the outraged" Dr. George Kosmak who "refused to train [midwives] in his hospital, and worked toward legislation for their licensing"(B-B 63-64). In addition to propaganda, then, obstetricians worked to eliminate the midwife by legislation. Of course, others joined him in his attack: "One further line of attack on midwives was their investigation and prosecution by the Legal Bureau of the Medical Society of the County of New York. Young presents 99 cases of 'criminal practice,' the bald outline of which makes sad reading: 'Midwife Problem'"(B-B 317).

In Horrors, Barker-Benfield also condemned Mitchell's "rest cure," that "developed concurrently with castration (which Mitchell also performed)" and that was dangerous to all women. His critical analysis of it is as follows:

Mitchell's 'rest-cure' consisted of the patient's descent to womblike dependence, then rebirth, liquid food, weaning, upbringing, and reeducation by a model parental organization—a trained female nurse entirely and unquestionably the agent firmly implementing the orders of the more distant and totally authoritative male, i.e., the doctor in charge. The patient was returned to her menfolk's management, recycled and taught to make the will of the male her own.(B-B 130)

Barker-Benfield was not the only author who, during this decade, ridiculed the medical practices at the turn of the century and how they were used against women in order to make them dependent.

In 1979 and in substantiation of Barker-Benfield's arguments, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English published their For Her Own Good reporting on the past "150 years of the experts' advice to women" and investigated the results of such "expertise." In the first part of their book they traced the rise of the "psychomedical experts," who emphasized medicine as their paradigm for professional authority. Then, in the second section of their treatise, Ehrenreich and English examined how these experts used their authority to determine women's domestic activities. Lastly, they drew out the decline of this "romanticism" between these doctors and the women of their day that they treated.

Introducing this romantic affair between these middle to upper class women and their doctors, Ehrenreich & English initially alert their readers to its danger by pointing out that "the experts wooed their female constituency, promising the 'right' and scientific way to live, and women responded—most eagerly in the upper and middle classes, more slowly among the poor—with dependency and trust"(4). Because the wealthier women could afford the money to spend on such medical care, they were offered the opportunity to try out various medical techniques. Lower class women, in this instance, did not have the funds to seek out such medical attention; they could not afford to lay up in the bed, eat expensive fatty foods and miss work for a lengthy duration. Further, the experts drained more than the pockets of their wealthy female patients. "It was never an equal relationship, for the experts' authority rested on the denial or destruction of women's autonomous sources of knowledge: the old networks of skill-sharing, the accumulated lore of generations of mothers"(4). Ehrenreich & English are referring here to the Woman Question that arose during the historical

transformation of society from an agrarian society to an industrialized one. “From a masculinist point of view the Woman Question was a problem of control: Woman had become an issue, a social problem—something to be investigated, analyzed, and solved” (4). Ehrenreich and English discussed this period of time as the Old Order as opposed to the New Order, “when science was a fresh and liberating force, when women began to push out into an unknown world, and the romance between women and the experts began”(5). Physicians, like Mitchell, dominated the scene in finding the answer to the Woman Question. “These men—and, more rarely, women—presented themselves as authorities on the painful dilemma confronted by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, and so many others: What is woman’s true nature? And what, in an industrialized world which no longer honored women’s traditional skills, was she to do?” (4). During this time, Mitchell’s rest cure began being practiced in the upper and middle class with the poor showing most resistance toward his diagnoses. “The Old Order is *gynocentric*: the skills and work of women are indispensable to survival. Woman is always subordinate, but she is far from being a helpless dependent”(8, E & E’s emphasis). With the social transformation to industrialized society, the triumph of the Market economy dictated the lives of everyone, and Capitalism replaced the “natural economy” of the Old Order. Ehrenreich & English concur, “it was the end of the gynocentric order,” and they found Capitalism to blame (11). Perhaps Cather envisioned this whenever she expressed her resistance to the establishment of industrialization in America. Even though, in an agricultural family, women may have performed different duties than the men, everyone shared in the responsibility of the

financial success of the household, and women were not confined entirely to the home, as in the New Order.

The seduction of an alternative lifestyle of pampered seclusion in the home that science offered to women at the turn of the century in America at first appealed to those who could afford a new life style. Women saw this opportunity as a risk worth taking, and they somehow trusted the men who summoned their support. "Science had once attacked entrenched authority, but the new scientific expert himself became an authority" (E & E 28). This transformation established a trusting network among the medical experts, the husbands and their wives who underwent any of their treatments, because it was a chance to leave the old outdated pseudo-medical regime behind and forge on to the next age of science. "This was the basis of the 'romance' between women and the new experts: science had been on the side of progress and freedom. To ignore the dictates of science was surely to remain in the 'dark ages'; to follow them was to join the forward rush of history"(29). Gilman was one of these women who believed in the progressiveness of science and its representative experts, but only for a short while. Ehrenreich & English presented the most detailed synopsis of the events leading up to and following the rest cure treatment that Gilman suffered having been diagnosed with a nervous disorder by Mitchell.

After Gilman collapsed with a "nervous disorder," a friend of her mother's lent her one hundred dollars to seek out "the greatest nerve specialist in the country," who was Dr. S. Weir Mitchell. At this point in his career, he was renowned for his treatment of female nervous disorders that had led to a marked alteration of character, and he was fed by "torrents of adulation, incessant and exaggerated"(101).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, "his vanity

'had become colossal'"(101). Yet Gilman approached Mitchell "with [the] 'utmost confidence'"(101) and reported to him a complete history of her own case. She told him how her sickness vanished when she was away from her home, her husband and her child, and returned as soon as she came back to them. Yet he dismissed her "prepared history" as "evidence of 'self-conceit'"(101). He demanded "complete obedience."

Gilman recorded her reaction to the prescription Mitchell gave to her:

Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time. (Be it remarked that if I did but dress the baby it left me shaking and crying—certainly far from a healthy companionship for her, to say nothing of the effect on me.) Lie down an hour after each meal. Have but two hours intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live. (E &E 102)

After "some months" of attempting to follow his orders "to the letter," the result in her own words was that "I came perilously close to losing my mind. The mental agony grew so unbearable that I would sit blankly moving my head from side to side . . . I would crawl into remote closets and under beds—to hide from the grinding pressure of that distress (E & E 102). The romance of forging into a new scientific way of life had died, and Gilman had resolved that she did not want to be married anymore; she wanted to be an activist and a writer. Three years later, "The Yellow Wallpaper" was published as a fictionalized account of her own descent into madness as a result of Mitchell's method of treatment.

Nevertheless, as Ehrenreich & English noted, "thousands of other women, like Gilman, were finding themselves in a new position of dependency on the male medical profession—and with no alternative sources of information or counsel. The medical profession was consolidating its monopoly over healing"(102). Husbands paid for their

wives to be tortured, and women were brainwashed into contributing to this industry by trusting these medical experts who really were misleading them. Ehrenreich and English, along with Barker-Benfield, adopted a historical point of view toward the social construction of the oppression of women, then they thoroughly critiqued the medical industry that authorized themselves to provide medical treatments that did not help the women who trusted them. Ehrenreich, English and Barker-Benfield also specifically attacked medical experts like Mitchell who treated women, like Gilman and Addams who suffered from nervousness, and prescribed for them strange treatments that evidenced a gender bias in the diagnoses for men and women. Any woman who dared to step outside these confines, like Gilman did, might have ended up suffering for having thought for herself, or for having chosen an alternative lifestyle. The medical experts, however, were not the only ones on the attack for anyone who stepped outside the socially constructed confines.

As literary critics examined Cather's lifestyle, from the time she was writing at the turn of the century until the 1970s, they displayed in their critiques, subtle innuendoes about the strange secrecy of her life and her "psychology." Nonetheless, despite the new exploration into feminist issues, it was not until 1975 that a critic, Jane Rule, pointed out that Cather's alternative lifestyle may have meant she was indeed a lesbian. Prior to this point Cather critics had attacked her credibility as a writer, because of the reticence within her writing, but none so boldly deemed her a gay writer until Rule. "What they want[ed] out in the light of day," Rule determined, "[wa]s her emotional and erotic preference for women, and, if they [could] not have irrefutable biographical facts or [could] not use them in print, they [would] distort their reading of



her fiction to make their discrediting point”(Rule 76). Here she is referring to the three male critics, James Shroeter, Lionel Trilling, and John H. Randall III, who all implied from their evaluation of Cather that she could not write reliably about heterosexual relations because of her personal eccentricity. As negative as they were toward her writing, they only made, as Rule posited, “grossly inaccurate critical generalizations” about Cather (76).

Once other critics learned that Cather may have been secretly a lesbian, they immediately turned to her complete body of work and began investigating each piece for signs of her alternative lifestyle, more specifically her lesbianism. For example, later in 1975, Larry Rubin wrote an article entitled, “The Homosexual Motif in Willa Cather’s ‘Paul’s Case.’” In it, he first established how “with the virtual lifting of social taboos in the discussion of sex in recent years—a new freedom reflected both in the creation of literature and in its analysis—we have been getting some highly evocative (and sometimes highly provocative) reinterpretations of works considered classics of American literature”(127). What was once invisible was now obvious, especially regarding literature that possessed underdeveloped issues about gender and sexuality. Further, he posited that “particularly in the area of homosexuality, this newly unfettered approach to the libidinous urges of various literary characters has thrown the light of Freud upon certain dark and previously unmentionable aspects of the psychological motivation of those characters and even of the overall vision of the authors involved”(127). These well-known literary authors concealed their own lifestyle yet alluded to it, and may have possibly even lived through the literary characters they created. Of all these classic American authors, Cather and Paul in “Paul’s Case” was

one couple Rubin felt worthwhile investigating for such traces of similarities between the author and her protagonist.

Rubin begins his critical examination of the hidden homosexual elements within "Paul's Case" by asking, "What, then, are the clues with which Cather has been so lavish?"(129). Rubin examined Paul's physical appearance for support of his premise while he considered the actual text to further his point. "Here the most prominent feature is 'a certain hysterical brilliancy in his eyes' as he confronts his bewildered teachers; 'he continually used them in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy'"(129).<sup>19</sup> Because Cather provides this information regarding Paul early on in her story, the second paragraph of it, Rubin saw this as "one of the first links in a growing chain of evidence of Paul's deviation from what the culture of her day (and, to a great extent, of our own) would consider the sexual norm"(129). Some other clues that Rubin focused on that provide evidence that she was cleverly creating a homosexual central character was "the fact that Paul feels it necessary to keep his bottle of violet water carefully hidden from his father [which] could almost symbolize his sense of alienation from a society that has only contempt for what it considers effeminacy in a young man"(129). Rubin also found notable the relationship between the "wild San Francisco boy" from Yale and Paul, especially as the critic noticed, "the frostiness of their parting," which Cather referred to in her story as "singularly cool," and which Rubin declares is a "heavily loaded phrase"(130). Albeit Cather never came right out and stated it, "Cather [wa]s," Rubin concludes, "trying to show us the tragic consequences of the conflict between a sensitive and hence alienated temperament, on the one hand, and a narrowly 'moral,' bourgeois environment, on the other"(131). In the

end, Paul commits suicide. Rubin correctly assesses Cather's intent when he says, "does she have to spell it out?" Even if she wanted to, Cather could not because certain matters were not discussed in 1905 when the original version of "Paul's Case" was released to the public. Nonetheless, Cather's superb craftsmanship showed that she could convey such an experience, as Rubin determined, "without violating any of the literary taboos of her time"(131). The portrayals of the characters in Gilman and Cather's short stories, who did not abide by the established principles of the "sex/gender system," provide a worthy comparison for a re-evaluation of the reception of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Paul's Case" and their impact upon the 1970's American public.

Although historically the American public has wanted to create a "feminine style" of writing, individuality and difference among women played a significant role in 1970's discourses about gender and sexuality. The "sex/gender system" and the construction of kinship systems cultivated a social demand for heterosexuality in America that also contributed to the social construction of gender, which resulted in opposite genders: male and female. Meanwhile, the rebirth of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" contributed to the re-examination of heterosexual relationships in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her reappearance initiated critical discussions of the sexuo-economic politics of the male-dominated medical field that mistreated middle and upper class women in their medical treatments and suppressed the practice of mid-wifery. Dr. Mitchell became the focus of several critical attacks as the New Order replaced the Old Order with the establishment of industrialization. The romance between women and their physicians developed, and then ended. Also, at this time, Cather critics scrutinized her

life while identifying her openly as a lesbian for the first time. This new way of analyzing her life opened for a new examination of Cather's work for their hidden homosexual motifs. These new developments in the 1970's prepared America for the reconstruction of the notion of gender and sexuality, and both Gilman and Cather participated in this evolution.

### **1980s: Reconstructing differences by questioning narratives.**

Why then, if Cather were gay, did she choose to create in "Paul's Case" these literary adventures with a male protagonist and not a female *Paulette* one, who underwent the same conflicts? Why did she project these complex feelings in the form of a male, rather than a female character? These questions, rightfully asked, have perplexed many of Cather's critics and, in the 1980s, some began to question her credibility, as well as that of other female authors, as a result. Perhaps because of the work of women in the 1970s who demanded the appreciation and recognition for the individual female voice, critics in the 1980s began to question the effects of socially constructing gender and sexuality differently. Women of color, especially, entered the feminist platform to address their notion of gender and sexuality, which had, in the past, been unheard. However, most women had only begun to explore this notion of difference.

For instance, in "Muzzled Women," Marilyn French, an American feminist critic of the Second Wave, grappled with the lives of women writers that she felt underdeveloped the portrayals of the lives of their heroines, although, given their own eccentric lives, they could have done better.<sup>20</sup> Cather is one author that French was bothered by because "she had it all" but "did not create female characters who were

equally gifted”(219). French acknowledges that “it is understandable that in the area of sex she might not have wanted to use knowledge derived from her own life: she was a lesbian and could not, at that time, write about sexual fulfillment through a woman”(220). In her final paragraph, French offered a coy disclaimer, “Perhaps there are women writers I have not considered, who have granted their characters a scope similar to their own”(229).<sup>21</sup> *Gilman is certainly one*. Yet, French left her readers hanging, her argument unproven, because she did not take into consideration women writers, like Gilman, who forthrightly did in fact write about horrifying real-life experiences. Although she published at an enormously rapid rate, Gilman received so much negative criticism that she began her own “utopian” publication, The Forerunner, in which to vocalize her anti-patriarchal opinions that were not acceptable for publication in the Howells’ editing arena.

Yet, as one of the most popular Cather critics, Sharon O’Brien pointed out, Cather had reached a “reconciliation of gender and vocation”(213) wherein her adoption of a male point of view does not indicate “subservience to patriarchal values” (214). While expressing her discontent with the female experience, she placed the male consciousness on center stage bearing the onus of failing to confront the truth of their existence. Moreover, O’Brien remarked, “Throughout her literary career, Cather was both the writer transforming the self in art and the lesbian writer at times forced to conceal ‘unnatural’ love by projecting herself into male disguises”(215). O’Brien declared that in many ways “Paul is a male version of Willa Cather”(283), but a “backward glance at an earlier version of herself”(110). She shares with him a passion for the arts, a longing to escape the drab and ordinary, and a rejection of traditional

gender roles, which Paul expresses by abandoning his father's Horatio Alger values (283). Unable to instantaneously reverse America's "polarization of the sexes," O'Brien maintained, that Cather "could reject the female role she found limiting only by continuing to repudiate her sex"(122). The exclusiveness of the intellectual bond between the men is clear in "Paul's Case." All the while, Cather's writing agenda broadened the allotted female writing agenda, and in fact, totally changed it forever, as this thesis sets forth. Some critics have even evaluated the complexity in Cather's writing agenda that they claim may be observed in what she did *not* write.

In her third chapter entitled "The Duplicitous Art of Willa Cather," Janis P. Stout calculated Cather's deliberate attempts to be reserved "as a problem and an interest inherent in Cather's work," because "it accorded so well with her need to find a strategy of avoidance and suppression"(67).<sup>22</sup> In all that Cather was not saying, she held a secret mission. Stout argued that, "the need fueled the theoretical affiliation that gave it aesthetic respectability"(68). Cather constructed her writing strategy to be twofold: meaningful and proper. Yet her discipline was not a disguise or a rationalization of her neurotic need. "Each element," as Stout noted, "has its own interest, its own importance, and its validity as an explanatory rationale for her fiction. But they do overlap. And that, in essence, is why Cather is so difficult—much more difficult than she has generally been regarded. Her narrative is deeply, elusively duplicitous"(68). More pointedly, Stout resolved that "her purpose in adopting a male persona, is not, I believe, to deny her female identity but to deny or evade the conventional femininity"(74). Then Cather's reticence, Stout correctly argued, is

intentional. Nonetheless, Stout admitted that “it is impossible to know, of course, but the answer has a great deal to do with her old feelings about masculinity of art”(90).

Rather than focusing on specific female authors, as French and O’Brien did with Cather, Nancy Hartsock questioned the materialistic critique of society they have written. Hartsock argued that “the power of the Marxian critique of class domination stands as an implicit suggestion that feminists should consider the advantages of adopting a historical materialist approach to understanding phallocratic domination” and establish “a feminist materialism.” She compared a woman’s experience to that of the proletarians in Marxian theory and used this for the basis of her theoretical explanation of the “sexual division of labor:” “Like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women’s lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallocratic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy”(Nicholson 217). For this reason, women must adopt a “standpoint:” “rather than a simple dualism, it posits a duality of levels of reality, of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the ‘surface’ or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which the appearance inverts and distorts the deeper reality” (Nicholson 218). “The concept of a standpoint depends on the assumption that epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life,” Hartsock determined, such that “the adoption of a standpoint exposes the real relations among human beings as inhuman, points beyond the present, and carries a historically liberating role”(Nicholson 218). Historically, women have been confined to not only the home but to the economic system that governs it—Capitalism.

Like her first wave predecessors, Hartsock also noticed the difference between women and men's experiences that make life easier for men and harder for women in a Capitalistic society. She wrote:

First, women as a group work more than men. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of the 'double day' . . . Second, a larger proportion of women's labor time is devoted to the production of use-values than men's. Only some of the goods women produce are commodities . . . Third, women's production is structured by repetition in a different way than men's . . . women's work in housekeeping involves a repetitious cleaning. (Nicholson 224)

This "sexual division of labor" within America's capitalistic structure creates and perpetuates an imbalance in women/men's responsibilities in and out of the household, and so therefore affects the power relations within the heterosexual couple. Hence, the heterosexual bond can be analyzed as yet another social institution that forms a system of oppression for women, an institution that was explored in the 1980s second wave feminists, and that further identifies the entrapment female authors faced at the turn of the century in America as well as in the present.

In an essay originally published in 1980, Adrienne Rich argued that heterosexuality is imposed upon women and reinforced by a variety of social constraints, referred to as "compulsory heterosexuality"(138). Her notion of compulsive heterosexuality has branched off into all sections of society resulting in a heterosexual hegemonic culture that has evidently influenced the institutions, relationships, and even the imaginative constructions of literature. Because of their heterosexual compulsory, female writers like Cather and even Gilman have presumptively written texts that reflect such normative conditioning, instead of voicing their true feelings. However, when there is no language, or rather, the phallogocentric



language you communicate with works against the construction of such emotions, then silence results. For this reason, Rich suggests that rather than there being a simple divide between lesbian and heterosexual women,<sup>23</sup> all the experiences of a woman can be located along a "lesbian continuum," (135) a term she uses to remove some of the fear attributed to the notion of being a lesbian because of the deeply imposed heterosexual hegemonic culture in America. A "lesbian continuum" is based profoundly on female experience that contradicts the assumption that all women want and desire to marry a man. Moreover, "lesbian continuum" contradicts the historical definition of "lesbian" and reconstructs the notion of sexuality that can be identified in the 1990's feminist wave discourse.

### **1990s: the evolving role of gender into "gender performance."**

Joanna Russ justifiably inquired, *what is one to do when you want to write and you feel the world is against you* (Russ 151). Russ saw that within Cather's presentation of male characters, like Paul, evidence of her own complex sexuality lay. Russ also purported that Cather's depictions, which she sheltered in a creative literary fashion, masked her true feelings of sexuality from criticism of the outside world. While deconstructing the phallic, Cather felt it more appropriate to formulate "Paul's Case" with a male narrator so as not to have her portrayal be confused with the notion that she was against women; Cather was a woman. Rather, she was against the feminine generational hand-me-down, corseted role women modeled in society as well as in writing. From this mode of critical analysis, the protagonist in Gilman's story can be interpreted as fighting in her own way against phallogocentric thinking. She could not

perform anymore the allotted feminine role assigned to her. She was striving to recreate herself. Similarly, Russ arrived at this point: “so many of the other male personae of the books Cather gave us are, in a very precious and irreplaceable way, records not of male but of female experience, indeed of lesbian experience”(157). But was Cather masquerading, or playing, with the ludicrous notion that these “romantic friendships” were “pervert[ed]”(Russ 151) while people wondered? Or both? “If Willa Cather was masquerading, it was a masquerade she returned to again and again, despite Jewett’s advice, despite reviewers’ possible reactions, and despite her own belief, spoke if not felt, that such a masquerade was silly and presumptuous”(Russ 151). How would America at the turn of the century have reacted to a counteractive Paul in a female form who forthrightly expressed her romantic adoration for other women? “The innocent rightness in feelings of love for and attraction to women that Jewett and her contemporaries enjoyed was not possible in Cather’s generation; the social invention of the morbid, unhealthy, criminal lesbian had intervened”(Russ 151). It is interesting to note here how in one generation something is considered “perverted,” then the next “innocent,” especially with regard to ownership of sexuality and the discussion around it. Indeed as Russ points out “Cather’s ‘masquerade’ was a necessity,” because it protected her from the unsure, ever-changing views of the world around her. In fact, her “masquerade” was her shield as she strove toward personal liberation.

In her 1996 PMLA article, “‘But One Expects That’”: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and the Shifting Light of Scholarship,” Julie Bates Dock addresses this issue. “A study of the textual, publication, and reception histories of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ demonstrates how shifts in criticism from one era to another

cast different light on the evidence surrounding the story”(53). In other words, when scholars develop their scholarly approaches to a story, they reflect the era and the textual information that is available to the critical reader. “Hedges’ edition,” Dock identifies, “can justly claim to be the starting point for the renewed interest in Gilman and her work”(53). Hedges’ edition, including her forward, is the 1973 Feminist Press edition that prompted the 1992 casebook. Dock observes, “More recent critics, beginning with Hedges, seem to imply that ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ has been read either as a horror story or as a story of sexual politics, more specifically that the late-nineteenth-century audience read it as horror but that the enlightened readers of a century later see it accurately”(59). The temporal relationship between the two eras is what Dock discusses in her argument, and the significance of this analysis of Gilman, as well as her story, is that it is as if through time these authorities have been decade after decade peeling back layers of authorial tricks in order to get to some truth. My contention is that there is no one single truth, except that temporal element that distinguishes one generation of reception from another also demonstrates the distinctive evolution of America’s view on gender and sexuality. In her edition, Hedges assesses that “no one seems to have made the connection between the insanity and the sex, or sexual role, of the victim, no one explored the story’s implications for male-female relationships in the nineteenth century”(41). However, in answering Hedges’ assertion, Dock points out that “reviews demonstrate that the story’s first readers did recognize its indictments of marriage and of the treatment of women, although these discussions do not use modern terminology” (Dock 60). In a more recent article that has been published several times and including in the casebook on Gilman, Hedges identifies the

“wallpaper, as the story’s key metaphor, [which] has been read as inscribing the medical, marital, maternal, psychological, sexual, sociocultural, political and linguistic situation of its narrator-protagonist” (Karpinski 222). Hedges summarizes “two decades of feminist criticism” that have analyzed for their own writing purposes, including her own, the metaphor,

as an image of the situation of the woman writer and hence a way of understanding the dilemmas of female authorship; revealing the relations between gender and reading and gender and writing; and as a description of the problems of female self-representation within both the Lacanian world of the Symbolic and the capitalist world of [America] in the late nineteenth century. (Karpinski 222)

Initially, authorities gave Gilman’s story back to America, then they analyzed the text itself, and how the scope of understanding it has broadened over the past 100 years since its original publication, as if the story itself were a woman, and the protagonist in it, ever-evolving. It should be mentioned here that, likewise, Cather’s metaphorical “yellow wallpaper” symbolized a male-version of gender entrapment that epitomized the precise locale where this hegemonic brainwashing originates--the patriarchal home. Gilman recognized this in her Home too.

Although at this point of her discussion, Dock focuses on three 1899 reviews that support her contention, she later notes that one of the best-rubbed chestnuts of Gilman’s criticism concerns the hostility Gilman faced from her contemporary audience, especially from the male-dominated medical community (61). Dock employs Jean Kennard to illustrate exactly why the 1899 reviewers’ approaches to Gilman’s short story should not be denigrated, because to them politically, “the story of a female writer driven mad, in part by her husband, was a horrifying subject”(60). It still is. Moreover, Dock sees that “their comments may sometimes gloss over the radical social commentary of the story, but the evidence indicates that they saw Gilman’s feminist message”(6). Even now more than ever, we can use Gilman’s short story as a literary

springboard, along with her earlier critics, to see how the social position of women has evolved. Dock saw:

There would be scant pleasure in unearthing a nineteenth-century story if the original audience read it exactly as twentieth-century readers do. The thrill comes in finding the gem that others have overlooked. Critics must differentiate themselves from earlier readers, not just for self-gratification but also to validate the importance of the find. (60)

While we might challenge any idea that Dock finds "truth," perhaps what these "new finds" do generation after generation is clarify the interaction between women and social institutions shaping gender and sexuality. In other words, the relationship is dynamic, thus new insights keep appearing.

Dock challenges the validity of some of these gems. She noted that "even Berman, whose article about the 'unrestful cure' provides well-researched information about Mitchell's medical contributions, repeats [Gilman's] report that Mitchell changed his cure"(62). Dock found Berman's information based on the casebook to be false in this respect. Dock points out that "Mitchell's published letters contain no hint that he altered his thinking about the rest cure; on the contrary, as late as 1908 he wrote to Andrew Carnegie that he wanted to build a hospital for 'Rest Treatment for the Poor'"(62). She continues, "far from abandoning his methods, Mitchell proposed to extend them beyond the middle and upper classes, some sixteen years after Gilman's story appeared"(62). Gilman would seem to be the one to know this answer, but she reported information that was actually false. Maybe Dock puts it better when she warns, "American literature would certainly be the poorer without 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' but an understanding of such stories and of the culture that produced them requires careful scrutiny of assumptions made by critics and by texts and writers of the past"(62). I guess, as the title plainly states, *one should expect that*.

Of the recent critics, Judith Butler presented the most sophisticated analysis of "Paul's Case" and Cather, in general, of the recent critics. In Bodies That Matter

published in 1993, Butler examined “the workings of heterosexual hegemony in the crafting of matters sexual and political,” which further investigated her efforts in Gender Trouble published in 1990. To be more specific, she studied the “crafting” of our bodies to express a certain gender. “Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies ‘are.’ I kept losing track of the subject”(Butler ix). She criticized her own philosophical tendencies by saying that philosophers have tendencies to “sometimes...forget that ‘the’ body comes in genders”(Butler ix). By introducing “gender performativity” to the discussion of Willa Cather, Paul in “Paul’s Case,” and even including Gilman and the protagonist in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” this examination of gender and sexuality can be taken to a higher level of critical evaluation so that the critical lens is somehow focused more appropriately than in the past. In a seemingly unexplored literal awakening, Butler explored the notion that “bodies [are] in some way *constructed*, **perhaps I really thought** that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?”(Butler x, her italics, my bolding). When she intentionally incorporated the phrase “perhaps I really thought,” Butler signaled that she may even have been unsure of her written determination about the “crafting” of bodies. Because of the abstractness attached to the extension of the crafted body and the silenced discussion surrounding it, she stumbled through her own discussion of the embodied gender. To further illustrate she added, “one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night”(x). In this way, the sexual agent chooses to perform in such a routine manner, half asleep probably in this instance, so that one questions the agent’s conscious determination of their role. “Such a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender”(Butler x, her emphasis). As she deconstructs

gender, Butler demonstrates how “on” and “by” we actualize its perpetuation because of social conditioning. Social agents choose to dress a gender that has already been chosen for them, so that people act out what has already been acted upon for them.

This was not the first time that Butler linked gender with performance. In her 1988 article, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” published in Theatre Journal, Butler examined gender divisions in terms of a theatrical metaphor. “The acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts...One is not simply a boy, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well”(Butler, 1988 521). Butler contends that gender is not invented by an individual, nor is it the expression of an essential physical and psychological chemistry that predates an individual’s social interaction. Rather, “gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again”(526). These gender performances create in effect a reenactment of other, off-stage portrayals of engendered scripts. Meanwhile, these scripts subvert or reaffirm conventional binary divisions that in turn provoke audiences to re-examine their own scripted lives. Binary gender divisions however ignore the significance as well as the existence of a third option that encompasses components each side of the binary division. Or, possibly none.

Butler explored this notion of gender performance in her study of Cather’s “Paul’s Case.” “In Cather’s fiction, the name [she chooses for her characters] not only designates a gender uncertainty, but produces a crisis in the figuration of sexed morphology as well. In this sense, Cather’s fiction can be read as the foundering and unraveling of the symbolic on its own impossible demands”(139-140). Paul’s character functions as one example where Cather creates a protagonist performing gender under

“the guise of loyalty” to the paternal law. Cather never acknowledged Paul was gay; she carefully carved out a teenager who challenged the socially constructed gender norms of his day, that critics have identified linked to homosexuality. Butler later elaborated on this “guise of loyalty” and the taboos affiliated with Paul’s or Cather’s own sexuality. “To read Cather’s text as a lesbian text is to initiate a set of complications that cannot be easily summarized, for the challenge takes place, often painfully, within the very norms of heterosexuality that the text also mocks”(162). “The introduction to schoolboy Paul in ‘Paul’s Case’ makes clear that he is a figure ‘under the ban of suspension’”(162). Although Paul has not been expelled, his conduct has been noticed as unacceptable by the school officials: “As he is called in front of the local school authorities, his clothes are described as not quite or, rather, no longer, fitting the body within, and this incommensurability between the body and its clothes is recapitulated in the unexpectedly ‘suave and smiling’ demeanor of the body,”(162) Butler noted. “[This demeanor] suggests ‘something of the dandy about him,’ and in the ‘adornments,’ including the Wilde-reminiscent ‘carnation’ which ‘the faculty somehow felt was not properly significant of the contrite spirit befitting a body under the ban of suspension’”(162-3). These additive features--dandy, red carnation, suspect attention to this outward and physical appearance--constitute Cather’s construction of an existence unlike that usually accepted for boys. “Thinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself”(xi):

Given this understanding of construction as constitutive constraint, is it still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies? This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. (xi)



Of course, the latter domain is where Paul's body dwells in his refusal to be reduced to a singular sexuality, confirming Butler's difficult discussion of understanding and so interpreting Paul in terms of his sexuality. "Though it appears that the normativizing law prevails by forcing suicide, the sacrifice of homosexual eroticism, or closeting homosexuality," Butler correctly predicted that, "the text exceeds the text, the life of the law exceeds the teleology of the law, enabling an erotic contestation and disruptive repetition of its own terms"(140).

Butler also incorporated Eve Sedgwick's analysis of Paul into her discussion of "Paul's liminal sexual and gender status." Sedgwick had posited that Paul's sexuality could be documented as something more complex than simply male or female, heterosexual or homosexual. They both hinted at Paul's sexuality being somewhere across binary gender/sexuality divisions, that mandates what is the sexual and what is the gender allotted to individuals.<sup>24</sup> "If the story is as much about the dandy as it is about the liminal zone in which the figure of the dandy also carries for Cather the liminal predicament of the lesbian then," Butler contends that, "we might read 'Paul' less as a mimetic reflection of 'boys at the time' than as a figure with the capacity to convey and confound what Sedgwick has described as the passages *across* gender and sexuality" (163 her emphasis). Although she speculates on "Paul's Case" as Cather's "authorial 'passing,'" in this way Butler questions and confirms Sedgwick's approach to Paul because she agrees that he is shifting, or moving, in this passage between gender and sexuality but not going "beyond," Cather is not depicting a "fictional transcendence"(163). "The 'ban of suspension' under which Paul appears, then, puts into doubt to which gender and sexuality 'Paul' refers, confounding a reading that claims to 'settle' the question of which vectors of sexuality Paul embodies"(163). What results in Butler's exploration of the character of Paul and his obvious complexities is a "transference as well as the impossibility of its resolution into any of the gendered or sexual elements that it transfers"(163). The impossibility of Paul's transference speaks

of the authorial interjection in creating a character complex enough to raise these questions about gender that can never be answered possibly because Cather attempted to communicate how indefinable sexuality really is.

In “Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others,” Sedgwick explores resistance in the past in creating a gender/sexuality fusion. She refers to Gayle Rubin’s 1984 article that stated “gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as being as distinct from each other, as, say, gender and class, or class and race”(Sedgwick 53). Although Sedgwick “assumes that no issue of gender would fail to be embodied through the specificity of a particular sexuality,” she argued that “there could be use in keeping the analytic axes distinct”(54) for purposes of studying and evaluating interlocking systems of oppression that are in indicative relations to certain distinctive nodes of cultural organization. More specifically, women may benefit by maintaining that gender and sexuality be kept separate. Progressing in her discussion of gender and sexuality, Segwick begins resemble Butler’s examination of the theatricality or fluidity around gender performance.

Much feminist reading is moreover richly involved with the deconstructive understanding that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions--male/female, as well as culture/nature, etc--actually subsist in a more unsettling and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable. (Sedgwick 55)

The leap Sedgwick makes here situates her within Butler’s sophisticated reading of Cather as well as of gender and sexuality, offering a futuristic approach to the evolution of interpretations of the individual, interpretations that connect the two by granting the significance of each to the other, or the third entity, the sexender or gendrality. These characters absorb the complexities that their authors possessed. They are in fact what

Cather knew. The challenge, therefore, is creating a reading that would not conceal the effects either has on the welfare or oppressions of the individual. “The dichotomy heterosexual/homosexual, as it has emerged through the last century of Western culture, would seem to lend itself peculiarly neatly to a set of analytic moves learned from this deconstructive moment in feminist theory”(Sedgwick 55). Indeed this dichotomy peculiarly situates itself along an axis where our Western culture can investigate the unstable tendency of them both, thereby allowing for more options on the platform for discussion in the future. “An essentialism of sexual object choice is far less easy to maintain, far more visibly incoherent, more visibly stressed and challenged at every point in the culture, than any essentialism of gender”(Sedgwick 56). Because our American culture has almost solidified its approach to gender and sexuality, we have made it difficult to challenge these models of behavior by suggesting a new approach, and have concealed any alternative to this hegemonic model. “Our culture’s crystallization of gay identities over the past hundred years has persistently been structured by two conceptual impasses or incoherences, one concerning *gender* definition and the other concerning *sexual* definition”(57). “Paul’s Case” is an example of this willingness for culture to contest these incoherences and create a performance around them that mocks them.

Relative to his “homosexual” tendencies, in her discussion of “Paul’s Case,” Sedgwick like Butler, analyzed the “hysterical brilliancy [that in a] “theatrical sort of way [was] peculiarly offensive in a boy.” Sedgwick also discusses Cather’s “certain distinctive position of gender liminality” expressed in her attachment to Paul that in the beginning showed she identified with him: “the identification between Paul’s pathology on the one hand and his insincerity and artificiality on the other is so seamless that the former is to be fully evoked by the latter, through a mercilessly specular, fixated point of view that takes his theatrical self-presentation spitefully at its word”(64):

If Cather, in this story, does something to cleanse her own sexual body of the carrion stench of Wilde's victimization, it is thus (unexpectedly) by identifying with what seems to be Paul's sexuality not in spite of but *through* its saving reabsorption in a gender-liminal (and very specifically classed) artifice that represents at once a particular subculture and culture itself. Cather's implicit reading here of the gendering of sex picks out one possible path through the mazed junction at which long-residual issues of gender and class definition intersected new turn-of-the-century mappings of sexual choice and identification. In what I am reading as Cather's move in 'Paul's Case,' the mannish lesbian author's coming together with the effeminate boy on the ground of a **certain distinctive position of gender liminality** is also a move toward a minority gay identity whose more effectual cleavage, whose more determining separatism, would be that of homo/heterosexual choice rather than that of the male/female *gender*. (Sedgwick 65-66, her italics, my bolding)

Although she distinguishes Cather's efforts as a progression, Sedgwick continues to deal with gender and sexuality from a one or the other standpoint, instead of a push away from such polarizations. Once again, we see the use of forward slashes, "/" as a dichotomizing distinguisher, for "homo/heterosexual" and "male/female" yet it is that very forward slash, where the chord to the stage curtain hangs waiting to be pulled for the *real* show to begin.

Changing rhetorical garb, or possibly making a rhetorical outfit, from a "homosexual motif" into a "theatrical motif" brings Philip Page's 1991 article into this discussion, wherein he proves that Paul's story is "dominated by the metaphor of theatricality"(553). "Beyond Paul's interest in the theater and numerous allusions to it, the story's narration incorporates a series of highly dramatized scenes in which the shifts in Paul's actual and metaphorical roles reflect the unfolding of his 'case'"(553). In comparison, Cather's literal use of the theater in "Paul's Case," coincidental or not, is fitting for the topic of gender and sexuality at issue in this assessment.

"The Pittsburgh half of the story is built on five such scenes: the 'inquisition' at school, Carnegie Hall, outside the Schenley Hotel, the basement of Paul's house, and Sunday afternoon on Cordelia Street. Each scene is reinforced by theatrical

elements”(553). As Page analyzes Paul’s story from this theatrical framework, he cites from the story in a progression, the instances where “we see Paul off-stage, in the dressing room, changing costume and character to be ready for his next role”(553) to where “after the concert, Paul’s theatrical role expands further”(553). Page observes that “in the earlier scenes the theatrical metaphor is external--Paul acts his role within the constraints of a situation he does not control--but [standing outside in the rain and gazing into the lavish interior of the hotel] he internalizes the theatrical metaphor”(554). Thus, he becomes not merely actor or audience but playwright. “For Paul, Cordelia Street is not the actual stage of life but a backstage, where he does not live, but only endures”(554). Page commented on Claude Summers argues that “the integrity of King Lear’s Cordelia contrast ironically both with Paul’s weakness and with the conformist mediocrity of his middle-class world”(554). In so doing, Page intends for Paul an alternative approach to this monotonous lifestyle. “Despite Paul’s brief moments as metaphoric audience and playwright, his predominant role in this first half of the story is actor”(555). Although Page acknowledges that the character of Paul is a person, as expressed in the early part of the story, he concludes that Paul is still performing the role that someone else has written the script for him to play for the world. He is “split up between multiple sets on which he acts”(555). However, “just as Paul donned his costume before the concert, in New York he again assembles his ‘costume,’ clothes that this time fit perfectly”(555). In the Big Apple, “this is all possible because Paul has written the script” that “allow[s] him his desired role in his imagined world”(555).

In “Paul’s Case,” “the [theatrical] motif offers [Cather] a means of dealing with a difficult subject”(556). Page established that for Paul “in living out this fantasy in New York, he successfully combines the role of playwright, actor, and audience”(556). He continued, “In another sense, he is happy because, having found his place and himself, he no longer has to play a part at all”(556). It is the theatrical metaphor that Page argues provides Cather the double perspective she requires. “Through it, she can

portray Paul as intimately as she wants, and yet she can remain aloof, withdrawing into the audience watching [him]"(556). From this perspective, therefore, the metaphor of theatricality reflected the most contemporary discussions of gender and sexuality in America.

The most recent critics have noticed that Cather masked her sexuality because in her generation alternative lifestyles were considered perverted. Texts with male narrators actually relay female experiences, perhaps lesbian experiences. Dock noted that criticisms of a text, like "The Yellow Wallpaper," shift as history evolves and new discussions develop, as if peeling back layers of a text in order to get to the truth which the newer generation of critics have discovered, or merely "posited." These shifts in criticism pinpoint how the social position of women has evolved in the heterosexual hegemonic culture in America. Also during the 1990's, Butler implemented the notion of "the crafting of characters" by authors within literary texts that result in gender performances and which contribute to the "theatricality" toward the established gender roles of the past. Actually, when "one does one's body," as Butler posited, one acts out a constructed script that perpetuates conventional binary divisions of gender and sexuality. This theatrical metaphor in Paul's story supports the issue of gender performance and the gendering of sex; it also supports the notion of eliminating binary opposites when constructing genders. Thus, Paul's character functions not only as an actor but a playwright.

## V. Conclusion.

The two literary touchstones of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Willa Cather examined in this thesis anchored a larger discussion of the discourse about gender and sexuality during the First and Second Waves of feminism in America. "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Gilman deconstructed the notion of "femininity" manifested at the turn of the century in America, while Cather's "Paul's Case" reconstructed the notion of "masculinity." Both Cather and Gilman wrote their short stories at the turn of the century in America during the First Wave of Feminism yet they resurfaced in discussions about gender and sexuality in the Second Wave of Feminism. Readings of both Cather and Gilman's writings have evolved with the First and Second Waves because their protagonists defied and undercut the established social norms enabling them to be re-examined much after their publication date. Although their writing styles are different, Gilman and Cather share a complex understanding of gender and sexuality that earmark the social position of women in America which can be interpreted by the most contemporary critics of present date.

During the First Wave of Feminism, women discussed how their ability to reproduce contributed to unbalanced gender relations, caused middle and upper class women to remain confined to the household, and economically dependent upon their husbands. This devaluation of women's participation in valued economic work sickened many women and left them reliant on their physician's care as well. Challenging this social structure, Gilman recorded her experience after being diagnosed with neurasthenia by Dr. Mitchell, ordered to remain in bed for months while consuming fatty foods and with no support from friends. Meanwhile, Cather expressed

her discontent with the social construction of gender in America by asserting a male character that reconsidered the established norms for men and women of Victorian America.

When the Second Wave of Feminism emerged in America, the discussions about gender and sexuality reread these touchstone texts of Gilman and Cather as flexible visions of reality but in different discursive contexts depending on the social time frame in which they reviewed them. In the 1960s, the Women's Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement generated most theoretical discussions on the condition of women themselves, the issues pertaining to women's confinement like establishing a political voice and the "problem with no name." While in the 1970s, discussions about gender and sexuality concluded that the "sex/gender system," also known as patriarchy, defeated their purpose toward complete liberation because of its economic structure aimed at benefiting men. Although they appreciated the notion of a collective voice for all women, the development of individual voices among women played a more significant role in the 1970's discourses about gender and sexuality. Because men have predominantly controlled the medical field, women in the 1970s, who wrote about gender and sexuality then, also attacked physicians like Dr. Mitchell who diagnosed women with strange treatments and also worked for the prohibition of the practice of mid-wifery in America at the turn of the century. Other critics of the 1970s decided that Cather's life reflected that of a lesbian, so that by the 1980s, literary discourses involving gender and sexuality began asking questions about the purpose of Cather and Gilman's writings. If female authors like Cather and Gilman lived such politically conscious lives, then why did they not create narratives that reflected their political



agendas? After questioning their narratives, some critics decided that Cather and Gilman carried a "duplicitous nature" or a twofold message in their short yet complex stories. This duplicitous style of writing explained how that by the 1990s discussions about gender and sexuality had evolved into the "crafting of characters" that resulted in "gender performances," and one acting out one's gender.

While First and Second Wavers fought for the elimination of binary gender divisions and a balance in gender relations that supported the economic development of all women in America, Cather and Gilman's writings facilitated discussions during both Waves that contributed to the reasons why the social construction of gender and sexuality did not result in equal human treatment, and should therefore be reconstructed.

The literature concerning women during the First and Second Waves of Feminism can be summarized as a tactfully-formulated, continuing rumination on the question of the nature and genesis of women's oppression and social subordination, and how to change its effects on the future of the human race. What started off as strictly constructed and enforced gender roles in Victorian America evolved into gender performativity in the latter part of this century. This socio-sexuo evolution lies within the protagonists' discontent and total rebellion in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Cather's "Paul's Case," whose stories both surfaced at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, when socially-conscious citizens inspected these rigid Victorian ideals, and whose stories later resurfaced again during the Second Wave of Feminism at the middle to end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when individuals re-enacted these same socially constructed gender roles, and deconstructed them.

Cather's "Paul's Case" functions as a touchstone of her short fiction that even Cather agreed valued notice, since she only allowed it to be reprinted of all her other stories. With consideration toward conducting future research, a more thorough examination of say The Professor's House and A Lost Lady as well as My Antonia to explore more glimpses of Cather confirming this fluctuating, non-conforming, even elusive authorial approach toward gender and sexuality that has made her reputation outlast herself, should reveal even a deeper sense of her literary complexities. Gilman's utopian novels, Moving the Mountain, Herland, and With Her in Ourland, that came after "The Yellow Wallpaper" deserve a closer look in the same respect as she struggled to portray the possibilities and barriers facing a woman who attempted to combine love and work. The movement in Gilman's writing progressively develops the possibilities and highlights the key barriers for a woman: female resistance to social change and male incomprehension concerning the necessity for love and work in a woman's life. She visualized the transition from the present to the future as one of internal conversion to an egalitarian society. This is a dual process of women awakening to their own interior power and men renouncing oppressive power structures as individuals and as a society. Perhaps too this is why Gilman, like Cather, switched to a male narrator in order to express her utopian vision.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Dean Howells anthologized “The Yellow Wallpaper” in 1920 for one of his Great Modern American Stories. The Feminist Press republished it in 1973 with an Afterword by Elaine Hedges, which is when Gilman’s feminist perspective on the socio-cultural situation confronting women in the late nineteenth century came to life again, and has become the Press’s all time best seller having sold more than 225,000 copies.

<sup>2</sup> “Hysteria, the disease with which Freud so famously began his investigation into the dynamic connections between *psyche* and *soma*, is by definition a ‘female disease,’ not so much because it takes its name from the Greek word for womb, *hyster* (the organ which was in the nineteenth century suppose to ‘cause’ this emotional disturbance), [but because it was] thought to be caused by the female reproductive system”(Gilbert and Gubar 53). See Madwoman for further discussion of hysteria as a form of “patriarchal socialization”(53).

<sup>3</sup> When Cather published “Paul’s Case” in 1905, the “gender troubled” Paul wore a “stray flower” a red carnation which critics have suggested offered a veiled connection to Oscar Wilde who was imprisoned for sodomy. “In the appendix to Wilde’s trial it is ascertained that in France homosexuals wear green carnations to signal their availability, and Wilde flagrantly allies himself with this practice in the wearing of such flowers himself”(Butler 160). In 1890, Cather was also noted for having written newspaper columns and reviews that were about Oscar Wilde and were “unremittingly hostile” toward his behavior. She despised his aesthetic approach to art, his “insincerity” and his “driveling effeminacy”(Summers 104). Ten years later she would create a character that somewhat resembled him. All quotations taken from Cather’s articles on Wilde were taken from The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather’s First Principles and Critical Statements 1893-1896.

<sup>4</sup> W & E first appeared in 1898 after several months of intensive writing; it was almost immediately republished in 1899. The book attracted wide attention; ultimately seven editions appeared in the United States and Great Britain and it was translated into seven languages, including Japanese, Russian and Hungarian.

<sup>5</sup> The decade following the publishing of W & E (and her second marriage) was one of extreme productivity. During this major phase of her literary career, she wrote several book-length treatises: Concerning Children (1900), The Home: Its Work and Influence (1903), Human Work (1904), and The Man-Made World; Or, Our Androcentric Culture (1909-1910). In addition, between 1899 and 1910, she regularly contributed to major magazines including The Saturday Evening Post, Scribner’s, Woman’s Home Companion, and Harper’s Bazar. (Knight 162)

<sup>6</sup> A very dedicated writer, Gilman was the publisher and sole contributor to each monthly issue of her independent journal The Forerunner, which was published for

seven years through 1916. “The Forerunner and its cornucopia of [novels, three of them published serially,] essays, poems, and stories, . . . reflect not only Gilman’s private trials and experiences, but also her immersion in a variety of lively intellectual currents and personal relationships with a host of nationally prominent scholars, writers and social activists, . . . where Gilman defined herself professionally as a ‘sociologist.’” (Deegan 9)

<sup>7</sup> Following a visit to Europe, Sanger and a small group of women met in her home and organized the first American Birth Control League declaring it “aims to enlighten and educate all sections of the American public in the various aspects of the dangers of uncontrolled procreation and the imperative necessity of a world program of Birth Control”(281). Further, “the League aims to correlate the findings of scientists, statisticians, investigators, and social agencies in all fields”(281).

<sup>8</sup> For Sanger’s order of classification of her statistical analysis found in the ending pages of her book, she organized them covering the following eight areas: (1)geographic distribution, (2) economic status, (3)mother’s age, (4) number of children, (5) frequency of children, (6) family health, (7)pathological conditions at pregnancy, and (8), miscarriages and stillbirths. From these headings, number eight’s grid is presented partially below and represents data collected from 3,080 women, who they themselves and she referred to as “typical ‘breeders’” or “mothers of large families.” (446)

<i>Pregnancies</i>	<i>Living</i>	<i>Miscarriages</i>	<i>Fractional Loss</i>
19	12	7	7/19
12	4	8	2/3
9	1	8	8/9

<sup>9</sup> Each chapter represented the substance of 12 lectures delivered at various academic institutions by Addams. The five other areas of focus in her book are Charitable Effort, Household Adjustment, Industrial Amelioration, Educational Methods and Political Reform. The section discussed above comes from Filial Relations, the third chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Cather’s essay was published in letter format within this publication however the date on the letter is April 17,1936, and in response to an inquiry a Mr. Williams made to her “about a new term in criticism: the Art of ‘Escape’”(18).

<sup>11</sup> At the end of this first chapter, Friedan lists things wrong with women, “that have long been taken for granted among women,” of which some I list for you here. She listed, “menstrual difficulties, sexual frigidity, promiscuity, pregnancy fears, childbirth depression, the high incidences of emotional breakdown and suicide among women in their twenties and thirties”(27). The reason why I chose to include them here is because I feel that more emphasis needs to be placed upon them. Even though these complications may be true of women, they lead only back to women and not outside of women toward the root of the causes. Friedan believed women could become CEOs of companies within the American capitalistic system but she did not consider that this sexist system could have contributed to the list of complications she constructed

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regarding women. (On a significant side note, Friedan was the founder of NOW, the National Organization of Women.)

<sup>12</sup> Ehrenreich and English in For Her Own Good reported that he earned over \$60,000 per year “the equivalent of over \$300,000.00 in today’s dollars”(101). These figures from 1979 are almost 20 years old, which would average his income much higher in this day based upon their figures.

<sup>13</sup> Newsweek, March 7, 1960 was the date she referenced for her citation.

<sup>14</sup> Any thorough discussion about the evolution of America’s views on sexuality would be incomplete without the incorporation of the infamous French feminist and author of The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir, who in it traced women’s oppression from a biological standpoint and revealed the misconceptions of gender because of the male-dominated medical field that has determined women as the Other.

<sup>15</sup> Ellmann is referring to “the eloquent denunciation of the cream separator in One of Ours written by Cather.

<sup>16</sup> Her book reports that she had originally presented this article as a speech at the Radcliffe institute in 1962, worthwhile to mention because the earlier date almost situates her views a decade earlier.

<sup>17</sup> In this article, G. Rubin also focused on “the Oedipus hex” upon women and the Electra complex as a variant of the Oedipal complex described for males. Further, she homed in on Lacan’s theory of psychoanalysis and his explanation of the phallus and its relationship to systems of kinship.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrenreich and English relay this information to their readers and note that their reported information comes from “an otherwise fond biographer” (101).

<sup>18</sup> L. Rubin alerts us to which version of this short story he refers to, that is Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case,” in Youth and the Bright Medusa (New York, Knopf, 1920), p.199). He also adds that “all subsequent page references are to this collection”(129).

<sup>19</sup> French also criticized George Sand, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Edith Wharton for not creating female protagonists who shared in the same liberties they had and/or who exhibited the unique lifestyles the authors had.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note here that French capitalized on this “breaking the silence” concept that she expected of the group of authors she wrote about in the aforementioned article within that same year. In her book Her Mother’s Daughter, a daughter breaks the silence that her mother could not. French adds that the cycle of repetition can be arrested, if a woman decides to acknowledge the anger and frustration that women experience.

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<sup>21</sup> In Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion (1990), Stout explores the conscious and unconscious chosen strategies of these authors in their work which manifests qualities of silence or withholding for effect.

<sup>22</sup> "'Compulsive heterosexuality,'" Rich writes, "was named as one of the 'crimes against women' by the Brussels International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in 1976" (138).

<sup>23</sup> For a thorough comparative discussion of Butler and Sedgwick's approach toward gender and sexuality turn to Mark Micale's 1995 book Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations.

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