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# **Feminine Ascendence: Rethinking Gender Hierarchies in "The Yellow Wallpaper"**

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### **Abstract**

The depiction of female entrapment in patriarchal society is a central issue for Gilman scholars, particularly the depiction of this entrapment through various allusions in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, such as the woman trapped in the wallpaper, the confining nursery and the restrictive rest cure prescribed to the narrator. This thesis enters this debate to argue, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, that central to the issue of entrapment in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is in fact the idea of “separation”. Engaging with the arguments of Gilman scholars who focus on the issue of gendered separation, such as Halit Alkan who presents the idea of separate spheres in society, and Greg Johnson who argues that women and men belong in separate universes, I will introduce the idea that women might well be considered as superior to men within this idea of separate universes. Focusing on the binary opposition of women and men paralleled with the binary opposition of day and night I will argue that “The Yellow Wallpaper” can be read as a narrative that sets out a new hierarchy in which women are superior to men.

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## Introduction

“The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman presents a stereotypical family where the gender roles of the wife and the husband appear to be clearly defined. She is a creative, imaginative, hysterical mother, while he is a rational, educated, physician-husband. When the wife, who is the story’s narrator, is diagnosed with “temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency” (Gilman 2) by her physician-husband, she is prescribed the rest cure, and they rent a house for the summer where she can rest and get well while her sister-in-law takes care of their newborn baby. It would appear therefore, that the male character occupies a superior hierarchal position in comparison with the female narrator. In this thesis, however, I will use Johnson’s theory of separate universes to argue why “The Yellow Wallpaper” can be read as an attempt to introduce a new gender hierarchy in which women are in fact superior to men. To do this, I will explore the separation of genders, both through Johnson’s theory of separate universes as well as Alkan’s theory of separate spheres, and how this perception of gender stereotypes insures the short story’s relevance in contemporary society. Ultimately, my close reading analysis will focus on the representations of these separations, looking closer at the dynamics between the narrator and her husband, the narrator and her sister-in-law, and the narrator and the woman in the wallpaper. In addition to this, the close reading will include an analysis of the act of creeping, culminating in the climactic scene of the short story in which the husband faints when facing his creeping wife.

The first key issue that we need to consider in our continued reading of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is the historical context of the text and its continued relevance when read from a feminist perspective. This thesis takes the direction of a feminist reading of gender hierarchies in the short story, and the narrator’s liberation from patriarchal entrapment. In the article “Women Entrapment and Flight in Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (2016), Azra Ghandeharion and Milad Mazari state that “This story has been viewed by many critics as a feminist declaration of liberty” (116). Feminist readings of the short story are the most common, and with good reason. The short story portrays a relatable experience of feminine oppression and liberation, and provokes discussion regarding patriarchy and women’s place in a patriarchal society. In the context of gender hierarchies, Ghandeharion and Mazari contextualize “The Yellow Wallpaper” in feminist history by exploring different feminist interpretations of the short story. The seminal nature of the short story, and its prescience in shedding light on women’s experiences within the gender hierarchy present in American patriarchal society is emphasized; “(...) the story heralds the issue of sexist gender roles and

foreshadows further feminist literature to emerge later on” (120). The stereotypical representation of the genders in the short story is an almost satirical portrayal of the expectations of society at that time, that is to say, the educated physician-husband and his caring, nurturing sister who happily takes care of his baby, and the narrator who tries to go against these expectations and end up considered mad. Representations like these are frequently used to expose women’s lesser standing in society, and how they are treated differently than men, in the feminist fight for equal rights.

In relation to the confining societal norms, the entrapment and urge to escape that women, in particular housewives, experienced is highly relevant as this is an experience the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” goes through. Yet, the challenge lies in the patriarchal society awaiting their emancipation. The problematic gender norms were deeply embedded in society to the extent that anything else seemed impossible, so when women started experiencing the urge to escape from the imprisonment they experienced, the focus was on *how* to escape, not what came after. Many American housewives, despite yearning for fulfillment beyond traditional gender roles, struggle to identify and pursue their desires due to societal expectations. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator, liberated from domestic oppression, faces the same uncertain freedom as many women through history. Like the other previously trapped women, she navigates her freedom aimlessly, unsure of life beyond patriarchal gender roles. This parallels feminist struggles through history, emphasizing the need to confront and dismantle not only the societal patriarchal norms, but also the internalized patriarchal beliefs restricting women’s aspirations and potential. The short story’s ambiguous ending encapsulates the universal experience of being a free woman in a world created for men.

### **Subverting Separation: Separate Spheres and Separate Universes**

The second key issue central to our continued reading of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is to establish a theoretical groundwork for the analysis of the gender hierarchies in the short story, therein the different separation theories utilized in this thesis. The two separation theories relevant for this thesis differentiate from each other because one is a socially visible distinction between the gender’s roles in society, while the other is a symbolic difference between femininity and masculinity, separating the traits into two universes. As patriarchal society is constructed by men, it is representative for the masculine universe. The first separation theory is Halit Alkan's theory of separate spheres, presented in "A Liberal Feminist Approach to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper," (2021). The theory outlines distinct social

realms for men and women: the private and public spheres. This division, prevalent in the 19th century, allocated men to the public sphere for work and education, while confining women to the private sphere for domestic duties and support. This hierarchical structure reflects the gender dynamics in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and underscores the societal expectations and limitations imposed on women. In a society like this, men are given rights and opportunities while women are given duties and domestic responsibility. The belief that women should only exist in the private sphere originated in the assumed inferiority of women in the nineteenth century, supported by important names such as Isaac Newton and Immanuel Kant, who stated that women were irrational and weak (Alkan 1230). However, Gillian Brown implies that the reason women were perceived as inferior was not due to their biology, but because "whosoever lives always in a small place and is always protected and restrained will become inevitably narrowed and weakened by it", implying that it was the private sphere itself that restricted and inferiorized women (Alkan 1233).

The second separation theory central to this thesis is the theory of separate universes, wherein men and women belong to different universes. The theory was first introduced by Greg Johnson in his article "Gilman's Gothic Allegory: Rage and Redemption in The Yellow Wallpaper" (1989) presenting the idea that women and men live in separate universes, "the husband's daylight world and his wife's nocturnal fantasy" (523). The opposition between women and men is used in relation to the binary opposition of night and day. The concept of binary oppositions, rooted in structuralist ideas, fundamentally revolves around the relational understanding of concepts rather than their isolated existence, as initially proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure: "We interpret the world by juxtaposing different concepts against each other in what structuralists call binary oppositions" (Parker 44). This opposition defines one element as positive and the other as negative, exemplified in pairs such as good/bad or life/death (Aimukhambet et al. 12), and as men/women are seen as a binary opposition in relation to "The Yellow Wallpaper", one might argue that there is an implied gender hierarchy wherein men are superior to women.

Within the theory of separate universes, the binary opposition between day and night, and the corresponding gender roles of man and woman, serves as a lens through which patriarchal structures and societal expectations can be examined. The central binary oppositions explored in this thesis are exemplified in the contrast between the husband's realm of daylight and the wife's nocturnal fantasies within "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Johnson 523). This thematic opposition symbolically associates "man" with "day" and "woman" with "night," suggesting deeper implications about gender roles and societal expectations. Johnson

states that the narrator of the story goes through a transition, in which she moves “from conscious struggle against the daylight world to her immersion in the nocturnal world of the unconscious” (525). This explicit differentiation between the two universes highlights the text's exploration of gender hierarchy and societal structures that prioritize men's needs while imposing strict expectations on women, causing them to struggle. Within patriarchal societies, women are confined to the daylight world, constrained by rigid gender roles and societal expectations, thereby hindering their ability to freely explore their nighttime abilities, such as imagination and creativity.

## **Expectations and Liberation: A Closer Look at Gender Hierarchies**

The separations between men and women, both socially through the separate spheres and symbolically through the separate universes, are reflected in the gender hierarchy in the short story, and in this close reading I want to argue that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper” attempts to introduce a new gender hierarchy, where women are in fact superior to men.

### **Gender Hierarchy in “The Yellow Wallpaper”**

The first key issue in this close reading analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is the gender hierarchy presented in the story. Firstly, I will look closer at how men and women are portrayed in the short story, more specifically how they are separated. The narrator of the short story is trapped in the private sphere, both physically and symbolically. Through the rest cure and her confinement in the nursery, which is closed off both by bars on the window and a gate at the top of the stairs, she is trapped, restricted, and controlled by her patriarchal physician-husband. Her husband, who enjoys his sense of self-realization in the public sphere, denies her the freedom to write or do anything that can help her move from the private sphere to the public sphere, forcing her to do nothing but rest and eat. The narrator, however, fights against the restrictions of the private sphere, wanting to indulge in her fantasies, and fight against the rest cure her husband has prescribed to her. He tells her not to write, so she writes in private. He tells her to rest and sleep as much as she can, so she stays up all night exploring the wallpaper and the woman she sees behind the pattern. This resistance is ultimately what leads the narrator to her supposed freedom.

The unequal expectations for men and women are visible in several aspects of the short story, both within the narrator's marriage and other relations. In the following quote, the

narrator describes her husband's endeavors in the public sphere, while expressing her own sense of disappointment at her perceived failure to fulfill the supportive role expected of a wife in the private sphere: "John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious. (...) It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!" (Gilman 5). Here, the different expectations of husband and wife are exemplified by the husband going to work, while the narrator is at home, feeling guilty for not being able to provide a comforting environment for the husband when he returns from the public sphere. Instead of staying home and taking care of their baby himself, the husband lets his sister, Jennie, stay with them to take care of his child when his wife is supposedly unable to do so herself. Because his sister is a patriarchal woman, that is a woman who has internalized the patriarchal expectations and standards for women (Ghandeharion & Mazari 120), she is very comfortable and satisfied with the work assigned to her and doesn't seem affected by the restraints of the private sphere at all though the narrator's perception. When the narrator's condition worsens, her husband expresses his concerns for her, not because he is worried about her, but because he is worried about her domestic capability: "He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well" (Gilman 12). His concerns seem to regard her ability to perform her duties in the private sphere, and not her well-being. As the story progresses, it is evident that the narrator challenges the expectations of the private sphere, although she is still physically confined to it. She defies the instructions of the rest cure, writing in private and staying awake when she is supposed to sleep. The inherent trust and respect that wives in the private sphere are expected to hold for their husbands begin to waver: "The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes" (Gilman 17). This doubt and suspicion signifies her defiance of the confining private sphere, and further, the narrator's eventual liberation.

Secondly, the symbolic separation between the masculine daylight universe and the feminine nighttime universe can be identified through a close reading of the narrator's observations of the wallpaper. The pattern of the wallpaper seems to change in different lighting: "There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes" (Gilman 16). The everchanging pattern is what initially intrigues the narrator, and throughout the story there are several descriptions of the pattern changing in different lighting: "At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be" (Gilman 16). The woman the narrator observes in the wallpaper also behaves differently during the day than she does in the nighttime:



“By daylight she is subdued, quiet” (Gilman 16). The daylight seems to repress the woman in the wallpaper, supporting the theory of separate universes and therein the daylight universe of masculinity, indicating that the woman feels out of place in the daytime. This parallels with the narrator’s own experience of daytime as the narrative continues: “In the daytime it is so tiresome and perplexing” (Gilman 18). As the narrator delves deeper into the secrets of the wallpaper and persists in resisting her limitations imposed by the rest-cure, the daytime seems to become more challenging to endure. This journey from the confining daylight universe into the nighttime universe of femininity is characterized by the narrator behaving more like, and relating more to, the woman in the wallpaper, and less like the patriarchal woman society expects her to be.

### **Internal Gender Separation: Patriarchal Women**

The second key issue in relation to the gender hierarchy in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a different gendered separation, namely the internal separation among the women in the short story. Throughout the short story, we get two different representations of women in patriarchy. The women we meet are the narrator and her sister-in-law. Both these women live in a society molded after the daylight universe of masculinity, forced to adapt to the expectations of a society that is not created for them. Initially, both women start out as patriarchal women. Yet, as the story unfolds and the narrator engages with the wallpaper, she distances herself from patriarchal norms, moving further away from the daylight universe. In contrast, her sister-in-law continues to live up to patriarchal standards. The sister-in-law epitomizes patriarchal ideals for women, she is described as “a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession” (Gilman 8). Women like this are women who are completely adjusted to the standards of the daylight universe, and we can see similar qualities in the narrator in the beginning of the short story. “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!” (Gilman 5). However, we might argue that the situation is much different for the narrator. Through the narrator’s interactions with the woman in the wallpaper, the narrator slowly starts to realize her entrapment. The narrator, as a wife, is expected to rest in the private sphere, and stand ready to comfort her husband when needed, but since she is suffering from what her physician-husband calls a temporary nervous condition, she is not able to complete her duties, and fulfill her purpose as a wife. As she is unable to perform the role of the wife in the private sphere, her performance as a patriarchal woman starts

to falter. Her wifely duties are taken over by her sister-in-law, and she slowly moves away from the rationality of the daytime universe into the imaginative fancy in the nighttime universe.

As the narrator's journey into the realm of the nighttime universe unfolds, her depictions of her sister-in-law undergo a notable change, reflecting the shifting dynamics of her own perceptions and experiences. The first time the narrator writes about her sister-in-law, she uses warm and loving language; "Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me!" (Gilman 8). It is clearly visible that the narrator is fond of her sister-in-law, and that they have a mutually endearing relationship, but as the story progresses, this relationship seems to change. When the narrator starts fighting against the restrictions put on her by her husband and move towards the nighttime universe, her suspicion against her sister-in-law also grows: "The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look" (Gilman 17). My interpretation of this change is that prior to the narrator's interactions with the wallpaper, the societal separation was the most evident, but after exploring her imagination and creativity, it is palpable that the symbolic separation also affects the narrator's perception of her companions. The narrator goes from being used to the separate spheres, in which the narrator and her sister-in-law were together in the private sphere, to now experiencing the separate universes, where the sister-in-law resides with the husband in the daylight universe. In this new separation, the narrator's perception of her sister-in-law changes from that of a peer to an adversary, enhancing the separation growing between them. This distinction also makes the narrator feel more entitled to the secrets of the wallpaper, and when she catches her sister-in-law with her hand on the wallpaper, she accuses her of studying the pattern, too. The sister-in-law then states that her reason for touching it was because "the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!" (Gilman 17). This excuse does not seem to convince the narrator, who doubts the sister-in-law's intentions: "I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!" (Gilman 17). The developing suspicion and division ultimately enhance the separation between the women in the short story.

Alternatively, the narrator's growing awareness of the differences between herself and her sister-in-law also affects how she perceives the relation between her husband and his sister. In an interaction between them, the husband asks his sister "a lot of professional questions about me" (Gilman 21), implying that the husband trusts his sister to truthfully give him a report on the narrator's condition. This conversation illustrates the husband's preference for the patriarchal woman who adheres to societal expectations for women over his own wife, who

deviates from this expected behavior. When he asks the narrator similar questions later, she perceives his interest to be orchestrated, and not genuine: “He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind. As if I couldn’t see through him!” (Gilman 22). The husband’s interactions with the two women illustrates how differently women are treated based on how well they adhere to the societal expectations. A patriarchal woman who conforms to the expectations of the private sphere tends to place inherent trust in her male superiors, namely the men in her life. Consequently, the husband has no reason to distrust what she communicates to him. The narrator, however, has proven unable, and arguably unwilling, to conform to the societal expectations, making her untrustworthy in the eyes of her husband. This observation further distances the narrator from her sister-in-law, shifting the division among the three characters from a distinction between societal spheres to a separation based on separate universes.

### **Creeping Towards the New Hierarchy**

The final key issue concerning the gender hierarchy in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is how the climax of the short story portrays the narrator’s liberation from the patriarchal daylight universe, and how this can be read as an indication to a new gender hierarchy in which women might be seen as superior to men. To lay the groundwork for this analysis, I will firstly explore a defining trait of the nighttime universe, namely the act of creeping. Through a close reading of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the word “creeping” in any form is found twenty times throughout the short story. “Creeping” is defined as “to move slowly, quietly, and carefully, usually in order to avoid being noticed” (Cambridge Dictionary), indicating that this behavior is intended to be secretive, a person who is creeping does not want to get caught. The first time it is used is when the narrator is describing the figure she sees behind the pattern of the wallpaper: “And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind the pattern” (Gilman 13). This characterization suggests a deliberate attempt to move secretly, avoiding detection and scrutiny. The choice of the word "creeping" conveys a sense of stealth and concealment, implying that the woman depicted in the wallpaper is engaged in secretive behavior, perhaps to evade the patriarchal gaze of the narrator's physician-husband. This portrayal aligns with the notion of the woman as a subjugated figure, confined within the domestic space and compelled to navigate its confines covertly. Additionally, the narrator's use of the term "creeping" may also reflect her internalized patriarchal perspective, as she adopts condescending language to

describe the woman in the wallpaper, revealing her own adherence to gendered norms and expectations.

Further in the short story, the adjective form of the word “creeping” is used in connection to the nighttime. “(...) I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy” (Gilman 13). This sensation of feeling "creepy" during the nighttime reinforces the notion that "creeping" and the associated unease are elements intertwined with what Johnson defined as the nighttime universe, illustrating the impact of the wallpaper on the narrator. The word is also used to describe the moonlight itself: “The moon shines in all around just as the sun does. I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another” (Gilman 13). This feeling portrays the narrator’s initial unease with the nighttime universe, as she is regulated to the daytime universe. As the story progresses the word “creep”, in any form, is only used in association with the wallpaper or the woman within. At one point, the narrator even states that “most women do not creep by daylight” (Gilman 20), indicating that creeping indeed is a nighttime activity.

To build on the analysis of the act of creeping in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, I want to argue that creeping is read as a form of agency representing the narrator’s developing autonomy throughout the short story. “Creeping” is a key action in relation to the narrator’s journey from the daylight universe into the nighttime universe. The first instance of creeping takes place within the wallpaper, when the narrator first realizes that the shape behind the outside pattern is a woman stooping down and creeping about. In this encounter, the narrator is not yet familiarized with the act of creeping, causing her to feel distressed: “I don’t like it a bit” (Gilman 13). As the narrator still inherits some of her patriarchal values, her encounter with a creeping woman is experienced as uncomfortable and unsettling. Further in the story, when the narrator starts to identify more with the woman in the wallpaper, and distances herself from the patriarchal expectations and standards, the frequency of the usage of “creeping” increases. In one passage, there are nine instances of the word “creeping” in any form, including when the narrator explains that the woman in the wallpaper escapes the wallpaper during the day: “I think that woman gets out in the daytime! (...) she is always creeping” (Gilman 20). The narrator recognizes the woman because she creeps, an action already established as an activity belonging to the night, and the narrator states that “It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight” (Gilman 21). On one hand, she separates herself from the woman in the wallpaper by establishing the distinction that she would never creep outside, only behind locked doors. On the other hand, she relates to the woman in the wallpaper in the sense that they both like to creep during the day. This

development, from discomfort when encountering a creeping woman to a desire to engage in creeping even during the daytime, reflects the narrator's evolving autonomy, and her journey into the nighttime universe. She understands that she should creep behind locked doors, because as a former patriarchal woman, she knows that creeping is not accepted daytime behavior, but she still urges to creep whenever possible as a way to engage with the nighttime universe.

Continuing the exploration of the connection between the woman in the wallpaper and the narrator, who have had their differences and similarities accounted for, the following passage encapsulates the moment where the narrator reveals herself as the woman in the wallpaper. When peeling the wallpaper, the narrator states that she has a rope, and that "If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her" (Gilman 24). She then goes on to notice the creeping women outside, wondering if they all came out of the wallpaper "as I did" (Gilman 24), revealing that she now believes herself to be freed from the wallpaper. To ensure this revelation, she circles back to the rope: "I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope" (Gilman 24). Whether the narrator truly is the woman in the wallpaper or not is uncertain, but their interconnectedness is unmistakable, and they now have a shared fate, both victors over their previous captivity and victims of their uncertain freedom. The narrator is now established as a free nighttime woman, who has successfully escaped the bars of the private sphere, creeping aimlessly around in her newfound freedom, uncertain what to do next.

Ultimately, the relation between creeping and the nighttime universe is crucial for this reading of the short story's final scene, as this climactic scene of the short story portrays the narrator creeping around the nursery, saying "I've got out at last, (...) And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman 26). When the husband finally enters the nursery, he is met with his wife, no longer a patriarchal woman, but a freed nighttime woman, creeping around the room. As established, creeping is not appropriate behavior in the daytime universe, and as that is where the husband resides, this encounter creates a cognitive dissonance within the husband, causing him to faint. Here, I want to remind the reader that this short story portrays women who have successfully navigated and adapted to the daytime universe. These women have had the patriarchal daytime societal structure forced on them their entire lives, and found ways to endure these conditions. Contrastingly, we have the husband, who, upon his first encounter with the nighttime universe, faints, and becomes nothing more than an obstacle to his wife: "I now had to creep over him every time!" (Gilman 26). For a liberated nighttime woman, the limp husband is merely an obstruction of her actions, and she nonchalantly creeps over him to continue her exploration of the nighttime universe. My interpretation of this

interaction is that Gilman's short story portrays women who are able to adapt and survive in a society constructed for men, while men do not have the same ability, thereby challenging conventional notions of gender hierarchy. In this alternative gender hierarchy, women are in fact superior to men, and their inferior place in society arguably just made them stronger instead of suppressing them. After all, pressure makes diamonds.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis utilizes a close reading of several scenes from the short story to analyze the gender hierarchy in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", and eventually substantiate how a new gender hierarchy might be introduced, wherein women are superior to men. Gilman's short story presents a nuanced critique of gender hierarchies prevalent in patriarchal society, and through a feminist reading, the story challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, highlighting the confinement and oppression experienced by women within the private sphere. The analysis presented in this thesis delves into the theoretical frameworks of Alkan's theory of separate spheres and Johnson's theory of separate universes, illuminating the social and symbolic divisions within gender hierarchies. The separation between men and women are exemplified through several interactions from the short story, but arguably more fascinating is the separation within the women of the short story, and how the internalized patriarchal norms affect the characters and their relations. The journey from the socially visible separate spheres into the juxtaposition of the masculine daylight universe with the feminine nighttime universe representing the societal expectations imposed on men and women portrays the narrator's journey from confinement to liberation. Gilman's short story portrays a nuanced exploration of agency and autonomy, ultimately challenging conventional notions of gender hierarchy. Central to this exploration is the act of "creeping," which symbolizes the protagonist's evolving autonomy and her transition from the patriarchal constraints of the private sphere to the emancipation of the nighttime universe.

In the climactic scene of the story, the protagonist's assertion of her newfound freedom culminates in a symbolic confrontation with her husband, whose fainting symbolizes the cognitive dissonance and inability to adapt to the liberated woman's autonomy. This scene serves as a powerful challenge to traditional gender hierarchies, suggesting that women possess the resilience and adaptability to thrive in a society constructed for men, while men do not inhabit the same ability. In this alternative gender hierarchy, women are superior to men, their strength and resilience forged as a result of decades under patriarchal oppression. Through this

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interpretation of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman challenges readers to reconsider conventional gender hierarchies, suggesting that women's entrapment and suppression may in fact empower them to transcend societal constraints and assert their autonomy as superior to men.

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