

## Feminine Invalidism and Creativity in *fin de siècle* Fiction

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Insanity is recognized as a crucial issue in the history of Western societies in the nineteenth century. The branding of “sane” or “insane” connects ideologies and authorities, even though the definitions of sane and insane are approximate and unfixd. As Michel Foucault demonstrates in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), a definition of madness has perpetually changed and remained unfixd since the authorities first defined it (Foucault 199). In general, though, as a society is established by law and discipline, one who resists those laws and discipline is thrust into the periphery and considered to be a lunatic. In other words, a determination of insanity reflects the transition of what is considered normal, the law, ideology and power in a society. As for diagnoses of lunacy during the 1800s, gender differences echo in the discourses on mental illness. During this time, femininity and masculinity were clearly divided; in a female-male relationship, the female/domestic sphere was distinguished from the male/public sphere. As Joanna de Groot points out, in nineteenth century Western perceptions, the “concepts of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ or of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are frequently invoked to explain the separation of masculine and feminine, or civilized and savage, or occidental and oriental” (de Groot 92). Therefore, the concept of feminine inferiority and masculine superiority contributed to the idea during the period that the weaker sex/race accepted the authority of the stronger.

Within dualistic systems of language and representation in the nineteenth century, women were located on the side of irrationality, while men were situated on the side of reason. Since the influence of psychiatry and neurology affected literature and culture during the period, it is no surprise that the differences and inequalities of the genders gradually disappeared and that the

representations of feminine and masculine madness were different from those in early Victorian literature.<sup>1</sup> As George Gissing described the period as one of “sexual anarchy” (Korg 186),<sup>2</sup> critics have tended to regard sexuality in the *fin de siècle* as “sheer conceptual chaos” (Kaye 53). As Elaine Showalter points out the relationship between male insanity and homosexuality in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) (Showalter *Sexual* 105–6), a fragility of the boundary between rational/masculinity and irrationality/femininity is implicitly and explicitly interwoven into cultural and literal works in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In particular, uncertainty of the defined gender-specific norm was frequently described in short stories written in the *fin de siècle*. Such short fiction gave both male and female writers<sup>4</sup> opportunity not only to satirize contemporary feminine crusaders but also to invent experimental and innovative literary works to represent an unwritten aspect of femininity, thereby disclosing this fragility of the boundary between femininity and masculinity. In these works, feminine invalidism, disease, and mental breakdown are depicted in order to disclose unfulfilled matrimonial lives, female eagerness for life and freedom. With a focus on “By Accident” (1898) by George Fleming and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), this essay aims to explore how female vulnerability interacts and affects female creativity in *fin de siècle* fiction.<sup>5</sup>

Historical surveys of insanity reveal a distinction between women and men in respect to representations of discourses on sexual identity. These surveys are a suggestive and efficient source to use in investigating the interaction of femininity and insanity in the nineteenth century. During the Victorian period, the number of asylums increased (Rutherford 6), which has implications for the number of mad women. As for the number of male and female lunatics in mental institutions, citing “a study by John Thurnam, medical superintendent of the York Retreat” (Showalter *Female* 52), Showalter indicates that the mad male population in psychiatric hospitals outnumbered mad females in 1845. A few years after the passage of the Lunatic Act, the number of female lunatics was larger than that of male ones (Showalter

*Female* 52). Several reasons for the increase in female lunatics during the period are found. First, since the definition of madness is dependent upon the authorities, male superiority influenced the number of females diagnosed as suffering from insanity. The overflow of the female population is potentially regarded as another reason. Moreover, the contribution of a male-dominated psychiatry is considered to be an essential element in developing a theory of hysteria, which influenced a diagnosis of female insanity (Showalter *Female* 147).

In addition, the ideology of the Victorian period had a great influence upon the discourses on mental disease. As Showalter points out, there were prevailing Victorian psychiatric superstitions about the transmission of insanity in a female line. That is, people believed, “since the reproductive system was the source of mental illness in women, women were the prime carriers of madness; they were twice as likely to transmit it as were fathers” (Showalter *Female* 67). Moreover, it was believed that daughters were more likely to inherit maternal madness than were sons (Showalter *Literature* 166). In order to penetrate the ideology, contemporary visual and verbal works effectively functioned. For example, the motifs of feminine insanity and invalidism were frequently used in such works, which contributed to producing and reproducing the image of feminine inferiority which men needed and developed for an idealization of masculine superiority (Dijkstra 28). Feminine vulnerability was one of the most popular motifs in the *fin de siècle*. In fact, as Bram Dijkstra explains, “A healthy woman, it was often thought, was likely to be an ‘unnatural’ woman” (Dijkstra 26). A certain trend in art emerged called “the cult of feminine invalidism” (Dijkstra 28), wherein ill and dying women represented in paintings and illustrations spread as a familiar icon of contemporary femininity. According to Kimberly Rhodes’s research, for instance, over fifty pieces of art representing Ophelia in *Hamlet* (1601) were created from 1791 to 1901 (Rhodes 189–192).<sup>6</sup> Ophelia’s drowned body figuratively symbolizes allegiance and purity (Dijkstra 25), which projected and promoted a peculiar treatment of women in the imaginations of Western men.

In the early Victorian period, intellectual curiosity about the inner life

appeared in new medical journals and, as a regular subject, the workings of the mind were weightily and popularly debated (Wood 110). In Victorian literature as in Victorian artwork, representations of insanity reflect patriarchal ideologies. Demonstrating the belief in feminine inferiority, female insanity is frequently described in works of literature such as Wilkie Collins's *Basil* (1852) and *The Woman in White* (1860), and Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878). As Tess O'Toole indicates, feminine insanity in the maternal line is considered as a convention in literary works in the 1860s and 1870s, as demonstrated in works such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Mrs Henry Woods's *East Lynne* (1861), and Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) (O'Toole 178–9).

The economics of publishing changed in the 1890s, which created a market for short stories. The female writers of this period in particular preferred short stories because they offered flexibility and freedom from traditional plots. Short stories created opportunities to explore femininity, allowing female authors to produce various experimental and innovative literary works. As a consequence, the traditional three-volume novel disappeared, while a large number of short stories were published (Showalter Introduction viii–ix).<sup>7</sup> The change in publishing also prompted female writers to find their vocations as both writers and artists. Their peculiar attitude toward their profession functioned as a key element of gradual yet drastic transformation of sexual description from the early nineteenth century literature to literature in the *fin de siècle*, which became a menace to power relationships between women and men. In comparison with female writers who produced sensation novels in the 1860s and 1870s, female writers of the *fin de siècle* were not productive, but their efforts to develop their innovative style of narrative and to produce artistic works were strenuous. This implies that their diligence in production and their adherence to creativity were distinct from previous women writers.

In fact, the influence of female writers' views of female nature had a strong impact and was brought to public attention. New perceptions of femininity were labeled 'New Woman' in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Since "the New Woman was a cultural icon of the *fin de siècle*" (Richardson

and Willis 12), numerous illustrations, photographs, and caricatures of the New Woman emerged. Moreover, there were various parodies of *fin de siècle* fiction. George Egerton was one of the most suitable targets for criticism and burlesque. For instance, in a *Punch* parody called “She-Notes” (1884) by Borgia Smudgiton, a nameless woman says, “Yes, we are all witches, we women. We can read men but they can’t read us” (71–72).<sup>8</sup> Her utterances ironically yet definitely imply male interpretation of new forms of femininity and masculinity depicted in *fin de siècle* fiction, which discloses that, for men, female writers’ perceptions of femininity and masculinity are far from the actual recognition of gender norms. The nameless woman, moreover, figuratively indicates a male inability to interpret female psychology. Such miscomprehension between men and women both in fiction and fact, therefore, stimulated women writers.

In literary works in the *fin de siècle*, female writers frequently describe the male incomprehension/miscomprehension of the female nature. In “A Cross Line” (1893), Egerton describes a misunderstanding between a female and a male: the woman’s husband never imagines what his wife thinks. Her repressed desires are represented as fantasies of herself as an exotic dancer like Salome. Kate Chopin, similarly, depicts sexual fantasies of seduction in “An Egyptian Cigarette” (1900), in which Chopin impressively describes female unconsciousness. The hallucination of the nameless woman in the short story represents her suppressed sexual desire, and her thirst for freedom and sexuality.

In George Fleming’s “By Accident,” misinterpretation between a man and a woman is depicted. A nameless woman who is involved in an accident and confronts her death intends to confess her hidden passion for a man her husband does not know. Descriptions of her visage function as certain evidence that effectively evokes her tragic accident as well as serving as a prophecy of her wretched death in the future:

She was lying in bed, very pale, all rolled in spotless white bandages, but she lifted one hand a little as he came and stood close beside her. Her face was not in the least disfigured—that was the first thing he noticed.

Then he laid his own hand on hers, and she smiled, quite naturally and cheerfully. He bent over the bed to kiss her. (76)

Unlike beautified female invalids or female bodies in artworks, the woman's visage is "rolled in spotless white bandages" (76), which suggests that she has been involved in a terrible accident. Her pale complexion signals her death. Despite her mortal wound, she "smiled, quite naturally and cheerfully" (76) at her husband, who stands beside the bed. Although she confronts her death, her patience and dedication to her husband are underlined, which evokes an angelic and saintly figure. Her lack of a name, moreover, implicitly reveals that she is generalized and categorized as a typical invalid feminine figure forged by a dominant male ideology, which symbolizes innocence and chastity.

Apparently, the dying lady represents a stereotypical female figure of the period: women are spiritual, asexual, and guardians of domestic happiness. But it is imprudent to interpret that she merely serves as a conventional symbol of femininity in the language and imaginations of Western men. In "By Accident," the mirror figuratively functions to disclose concealed feminine psychology: "Now, she saw the empty, shining mirror again, shining darkly, like water in deep shadow, with nothing reflected on it: nothing of herself or her life; never—never any more" (81). Because of her physical weakness she confronts difficulty grasping her physical appearance and narrating her feelings and considerations. Here, the shadowy and unclear mirror, which reflects nothing, indicates her mental and physical debilitation, her isolation and her death. Her incapacity and psychical inferiority, moreover, implicitly disclose her limitations, which induces her to make an impulsive confession of her secret passion for the unknown man to her husband:

'You can look at the eyes, you know, but never behind them; oh, never behind. And each one is living inside there; shut away, all alone—alone! I'm tired of being alone now. And I want to live, you know,' she broke out with sudden sharp fretfulness. 'And—oh, dear me, I wish some one *would* tell me—if Jim—Jim Trafford—you know, Edward—has been

out—out on the hills—shooting all to-day. And—’

‘She has begun to wander in her mind now, poor lady. It’s what had to be expected, sir,’ said the nurse.

‘What had to be—expected. But *I* wouldn’t shoot if *you* were dying,’ repeated the choked, wavering voice.

Then she died (82–83).

This passionate confession, apparently, is a brave trial, which efficiently emphasizes the woman’s eagerness for life and anxiety about isolation and death. Because of her suffering and agony her utterances are fragile and incomprehensible. For this reason, her husband and the nurse have difficulty interpreting her confession correctly and accurately, and as a consequence, the nurse believes she is stupefied. In “By Accident,” crucial differences between males and females are depicted and emphasized, revealing the process by which the woman is portrayed as a physically and mentally inferior figure who needs the protection and care of male authority in defense of the identity and needs of women or Others whom Western men had discovered and needed. The woman’s confession of her secret is unsuccessful, but her husband’s miscomprehension underlines the distinction between idealized femininity which Victorian men needed for an idealization of masculine superiority and actual femininity which the female writers intended to create.

Mental breakdowns as depicted in nineteenth century fiction have been frequently discussed.<sup>9</sup> Laura Marcus, in regard to feminism and hysteria, points out, “Hysteria and feminism were, a number of recent critics have argued, two sides of the same coin—two forms of protest in the nineteenth century against women’s lack of freedom and self-determination” (Marcus 137). As representations of hysteria, female mental illness in nineteenth century fiction symbolically represents feminine eagerness for freedom and protest against a dominant male society. Mad, impulsive and scandalous acts by women were frequently depicted in Victorian sensation novels as coming from a hereditary disease in the maternal line, which obscures many profound tensions in female lives (Showalter *Female* 72). In *fin de*

*siècle* fiction, sensational achievements, impulsive deeds, collapse, immoral conduct, mental disorders, and death are described as key phenomena signaling female eagerness for freedom, the struggle against patriarchal authority, repressed feminine sexuality, and female suffering confronted in matrimony and motherhood.

Regarding the relationship between female creativity and nervous disorders, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's personal experiences as interwoven into "The Yellow Wallpaper" are a pivotal and controversial source. Gilman was troubled with "a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia" (Gilman "Why" 331). She was diagnosed with "nervous prostration" by Silas Weir Mitchell and treated with the rest cure in his sanitarium in Philadelphia for a month (Bak 39). The short story, as Gilman suggests, aims to save "one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered" (Gilman "Why" 331–32); not to "drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy" (Gilman "Why" 332). As Showalter demonstrates, Gilman's rich texture is a prominent source to investigate the relationship between insanity, sex roles, and female creativity.<sup>10</sup>

The rest cure and Silas Weir Mitchell are key elements in arguments about female lunatics and their treatment in nineteenth century psychiatry on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>11</sup> The cure was evolved by the American physician Mitchell after the Civil War. Mitchell specialized in cures of neurotic women, using a drastic treatment that reduced his patients to infant-like dependency on the physician. The essential elements of the rest cure were isolation, immobility, daily massage, prohibition of all intellectual activity, and overfeeding.<sup>12</sup> Jane Wood states, in regard to the treatment of women under Victorian psychiatry, "It is clear from most medical reports that the practitioner's aim was to restore their female patients to their proper functioning within the domestic economy" (Wood 41). Considering Wood's suggestion, it is obvious that the rest cure contained the particular purpose of restoring femininity as well as female identity, both of which depended on nineteenth century Western perception.<sup>13</sup>

In developing their particular styles of narration, female writers in the *fin*



*de siècle* supplied impressive figures representing female unconsciousness and repressed sexual desire. Egerton used fantasies and dream sequences, constructing “a counterpart to Freud’s case studies of hysterical women, which were also being written in the 1890s” (Showalter Introduction xiii). Gilman used a lunatic narrative in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a style that is peculiar and distinct from other literary works such as *Jane Eyre* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*. “The Yellow Wallpaper” is narrated by an insane woman with pathological precision and piercing tact. While the narrator is nameless, she gives other names in the story: her husband John, her doctor Weir Mitchell, and her sister-in-law Mary. The numerous nameless female characters in *fin de siècle* fiction are potentially interpreted as mere generalizations about contemporary women, but in “The Yellow Wallpaper” the woman’s loss of identity implicitly suggests a male-centered perception: that the nameless woman is an object whose identity, subjectivity, and even diagnosis are given by masculine authority. On the other hand, the tale of monstrous madwoman Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* is mainly constructed/reconstructed by authority figures (her husband Rochester and the narrator Jane), demonstrating Bertha’s own inability of narrative and lack of verbal authority. Bertha has been frequently considered in criticism as a symbolical figure of protest against patriarchy and repressed feminine sexuality.

The prominent concept shown by the lunatic narrative in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is that the woman, depersonalized by patriarchy, reveals the way she becomes insane, which is grotesque yet precise. Like other stereotypical lunatic women, the woman is isolated in a “colonial mansion, a hereditary estate” (98) which is like “a haunted house” (98). She is confined in a nursery by her husband John so that she will conform to treatment. She seems to share characteristics of typical female literary characters in the nineteenth century: she is passive, inferior, unintelligent, childish and obedient. Her imprisonment in the nursery and her lack of a name evoke a structure of power in a closed institution such as a prison, school or hospital, indicating that she is under observation and control to effect a cure.<sup>14</sup> Due to the cure she is undergoing, moreover, she is “forbidden to ‘work’” (99) until she recovers. Her strong eagerness for “a meaningful and fulfilling occupation”

(Heilmann 131) is a considerable cause of her insanity. In other words, being deprived of humanity, occupation, and freedom effectively make her a victim of male diagnosis. Despite her inferiority and subordination, her possession of visual and narrative authority enables her to reveal the progression of one person's (her own) neurosis and its grotesqueness with clinical precision.

Using the gothic genre, in which conventional mad women live in old and decaying mansions, Gilman describes the process in which the rest cure drives the nameless woman mad:

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!  
And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!  
I can see her out of every one of my windows!  
It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.  
I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.  
I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!  
I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once. (113)

Gilman's sentences are frequently divided into curt and chopped phrases. Paragraphs frequently contain only one or two sentences, which effectively represents the distraught mental state of the narrator. Moreover, each paragraph is slightly incoherent. In regard to lunatic narrative, Gilman's invention of an impressive style and technique which evoke insanity itself is undeniable. The madwoman's hallucinations are a certain kind of monologue, illogical, yet a significant sign of modernity.

In creating an innovative and impressive narration, both a peculiar style and language are employed in "The Yellow Wallpaper." For example, Gilman figuratively uses the word "creeping" (113), which efficiently represents nervous depression. In her hallucination, the narrator of the story refers to another woman who "is always creeping along" (113). The narrator

perceives many “creeping women, and they creep so fast” (116) outside the window. Moreover, the narrator declares how creeping is fulfilling: “It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!” (116). She also indicates her ability and efficiency of creeping: “I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way” (116–7). The woman’s ability to creep like a trapped animal effectively evokes madness, but, like a secret code, only women comprehend its hidden purpose: creeping is considered a protest against gender stereotyping. While the woman savors her freedom and triumph in creeping around, her husband John enters the room and cries in astonishment: “What is the matter?” and “For God’s sake, what are you doing!” (117). While for the woman creeping represents the symbolic achievement of freedom from both a subordinate role and a dominant male system, it is merely a sign of madness to her husband, a symbolic embodiment of the male miscomprehension of femininity. Without regard for his inquiry, she continues to creep in the same way, looking at him and saying, “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!” (117).

Since the wallpaper is presented as a mysterious and grotesque object, its symbolism is problematic and provides much to dispute. Karen Ford suggests that the wallpaper represents “male discourse in its capacity to contradict and immobilize the women who are trapped within it” (Ford 311). Under this interpretation, destruction of the wallpaper figuratively implies female attempt to ruin male discourse, but it is far from the construction of feminine discourse because language is male-controlled.<sup>15</sup> In other words, here, such insane and grotesque deeds as tearing down the paper and crawling around the room represent her demand for emancipation and protest against patriarchy.

Furthermore, John’s reaction to his wife’s creeping represents a reversal of gender roles. Shocked at her aberration, he faints, like the inferior female characters in Victorian literature. The wife wonders, “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (117). This gender reversal is ironically

yet somewhat comically underlined in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” While her creeping over him implies female ascendancy and superiority, his fit explicitly suggests that his conventional role as a mentally and physically superior masculine figure has been altered.<sup>16</sup>

Creeping is familiar imagery that evokes reversion to a beast or wild animal in visual and verbal works during the *fin de siècle*.<sup>17</sup> In particular, beastliness and lack of human nature contribute to representations of the boundary between race, class, sexuality and gender in *fin de siècle* gothic literature.<sup>18</sup> The lunatic woman who is different from man is branded as an inferior Other, which is necessary in defending male authority; but, in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a contradictory aspect of feminine insanity emerges: female madness as a projection of masculine anxiety.<sup>19</sup> The non-human monstrous woman embodies rebellion against the ideology of patriarchy. At the *fin de siècle*, those who terrorize the gendered identification, homosexuals and the New Woman, are depersonalized and categorized into lunatics, beasts, and inferior Others.<sup>20</sup> The madwoman’s depersonalization thus represents a transformation from static and fixed gender norms in the nineteenth century to ambiguous sexed and gendered subjects in the twentieth century.

This essay investigates how feminine invalidism connects to female creativity in George Fleming’s “By Accident” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Fleming ironically depicts a woman’s deathbed confession, which is incorrectly interpreted by her husband. His misinterpretation of her confession reflects the contemporary image of women as being in need of promotion and protection of male authority by virtue of their weakness, innocence, and inadequacy. Furthermore, his misunderstanding underlines the differences between femininity and the image of feminine inferiority that Victorian men needed and developed for an idealization of masculine superiority. However, in consequence, it ironically yet effectively discloses a concealed female sexual desire.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman relates female insanity to female creativity: the madwoman’s narration describes the process by which the

“rest cure” drives her mad. Gilman invented an innovative style for the representation of insanity, which is considered one of the “missing links” between female writers in the Victorian period and such twentieth-century writers as Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein (Showalter Introduction viii). In describing female physical and mental weakness, female writers of *fin de siècle* fiction invented and formed an original art of narrating that connected feminine creativity with invalidism.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, the subject of mental disorder was actively discussed in medical journals. Contemporary authors interested in mental illness read these articles, which were reflected in their literary works. For instance, Rick Rylance indicates that, for her companionship with a liberal psychiatrist, Charlotte Brontë’s sympathetic comprehension of depression and psychosomatic illness is found in *Villette*, see Rylance 165. Critics have argued about Charlotte Brontë’s curiosity about mental illness, see Small 155; Showalter *Female* 69; Wood 110. Charles Dickens had an intense interest in madness, which had a great influence on his creations, see Schlcke 362–64. In fact, their active participation in the debates through the forum of *Household Words* implies that Dickens and Wilkie Collins had interest in medical discussion in the period, see Wood 110. In addition, Dickens visited the Christmas Ball at St. Luke’s Hospital in 1851, and wrote “A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree” with W. H. Wills, as published in *Household Words* 17 Jan (1852), see Showalter *Female* 38.
- <sup>2</sup> Initially, in his letter to Eduard Bertz, June 2, 1893, George Gissing wrote that he accepted that “the readjustment would bring ‘sexual anarchy’ for a time” (Korg 186) because it was necessary for women to receive the same education as men for “social peace” (Korg 185). He considered that “sexual anarchy” would not become a serious threat or destroy anything of value. See Korg 185–86.
- <sup>3</sup> When *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was published in 1886, multiple personality disorder was simultaneously reported as a crucial case in medical journals. Regarding multiple selves, critics have argued that in nineteenth-century literature “doubleness” and double names are a key motif evoking homosexuality, see Showalter *Sexual* 105–26. Jill L. Matus investigates interactions between *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and contemporaneous ideas about the multiple self as developed by the Society for Psychical Research, see Matus 160–82.
- <sup>4</sup> New Woman fiction was written by both female and male authors. Thomas Hardy, George Moore, George Bernard Shaw, Henry Rider Haggard and Grant Allen are regarded as conspicuous male writers of New Woman fiction, see Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst 75–76. This essay focuses on New Woman

- novels written by female authors in order to reveal how feminine invalidism and creativity interact in their literary works.
- <sup>5</sup> The literary definition of female writers of *fin de siècle* fiction covers a wide range and is unfixed. This paper follows the classification of a collection of women writers of *fin de siècle* fiction as presented in *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Elaine Showalter. London: Virago, 2008. This paper also focuses on two short stories written by George Fleming and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Fleming (Julia Constance Fletcher) was born in America, but she produced most of her works in Europe. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born in Hartford, Connecticut. Showalter's selection of *fin de siècle* writers is also various and cosmopolitan; she includes female authors from England, Ireland, India, South Africa, Europe, and America. In general, *fin de siècle* writers were cosmopolitan. For instance, George Egerton was born in Australia; Sarah Grand was born in Ireland; and Olive Schreiner was born in Cape Colony. Furthermore, Henrik Ibsen and his literary works had great influence on not only intellectuals but also authors of the *fin de siècle*. In 1889, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was performed in London's Novelty Theatre. George Bernard Shaw, Eleanor Mark, Olive Schreiner, Edith Lees Ellis and Emma Frances Brooke were in the audience, see Ledger 79.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ophelia* (1851–2) by Sir John Everett Millais is one of the most popular Victorian paintings symbolizing feminine purity and chastity.
- <sup>7</sup> Because of the change in publishing, the 1890s developed women writers as well as short fiction writers. Numerous short stories were produced by contemporary writers such as H. G. Wells and Robert Louis Stevenson.
- <sup>8</sup> All quotations in this essay are from *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2008) edited by Elaine Showalter.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar is a classic feminist account that includes significant statements of representations of female insanity in nineteenth century literature. Elaine Showalter has studied female madness in her books. See Shoshana Felman's "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5–4 (1975): 2–10, Helen Small's *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity*. and Jane Wood's *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction*.
- <sup>10</sup> See Showalter *Female* 142.
- <sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, who was also treated using the rest cure, depicted a victim of shell shock Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* (1924).
- <sup>12</sup> In respect to the rest cure, this paper refers to Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Penguin, 1987). In regard to mental disorders and their treatment in the nineteenth century, Jane F. Thraillkill's study is helpful to grasp the history and development of psychiatry. See Thraillkill 525–66.
- <sup>13</sup> The definition of insanity and its treatment related closely to the development of psychiatry in the Victorian period. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer suggested a new interpretation for the origin of hysteria

- and thus a new therapy for its treatment, see Showalter *Hystories* 38. Victorian representations of madness reflect the transition from Darwinian psychiatry to Freudian psychoanalysis, yet the transition to psychiatric modernism occurred not during the heyday of the famous female hysterics but during the First World War, when the urgent necessity of treating thousands of shell-shocked male soldiers suffering from hysteria made the theoretical and therapeutic bankruptcy of Darwinian approaches all too clear, see Showalter *Female* 18.
- <sup>14</sup> Similarities between Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and "The Yellow Wallpaper" are studied by John S. Bak. Bak indicates that the mansion suggestively evokes "a prison and a mental ward" (Bak 42). See Bak 39–46.
- <sup>15</sup> See Ford 311–12.
- <sup>16</sup> Fainting is a conventional act of female characters in nineteenth-century literature, constructing a stereotypical weakness in nineteenth-century women, see Hume 478.
- <sup>17</sup> Crawling or creeping is a familiar motif depicted in *fin de siècle* fiction. For example, Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (1895), Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* (1902), and José Silvestre in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) all creep. Animal-like features in humans are interpreted as signs of a grotesque criminality or degeneracy in neo-Darwinist theories.
- <sup>18</sup> Monstrous and abhuman figures are frequently depicted in *fin de siècle* gothic literature (for example, Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, Kurtz, Dracula, Salome and Dorian Grey). See Hurley 120 and Halberstam 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Ayesha, who becomes a monkey in H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), has been categorized as a New Woman by critics. Nicholas Ruddick points out that Ayesha embodies "anxious male fantasies" (Ruddick 193). See Ruddick 189–206.
- <sup>20</sup> See Cozzi 128 and Hurley 121.

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#### Keywords

feminine invalidism and insanity, female creativity, *fin de siècle* fiction