

“THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” – A MIRROR OF UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN’S CONDITION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

“The Yellow Wallpaper” – Gambaran Kondisi Kaum Perempuan Kelas Atas dan Menengah di Abad 19 Amerika

Nurhayati¹, Soebakdi Soemanto², dan Ida Rochani Adi²

*Program Studi Pengkajian Amerika
Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada*

INTISARI

Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk membahas cara berpikir Charlotte Perkins Gilman yang menentang masyarakat yang berkultur patriarki seperti yang terlihat dalam novellanya yang berjudul “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Penelitian ini menggunakan kajian pustaka dan bertumpu pada sumber referensi yang berkaitan dengan topik yang dibahas. Studi ini didasarkan pada interpretasi atas cara berpikir Charlotte Perkins Gilman yang memberontak, sebagai seorang feminis radikal di antara pemikir sosial lain sezamannya di abad kesembilan belas.

Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Pengkajian Amerika milik Tremaine McDowell; yakni rekonsiliasi waktu (lampau, kini, dan akan datang), dan rekonsiliasi disiplin ilmu, yakni pendekatan sejarah sosial, pendekatan budaya, konteks sejarah pada zaman Charlotte Perkins Gilman dan pendekatan sastra; dalam hal ini kritik sastra feminis, strukturalisme genetik.

Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat yang didominasi oleh kaum laki-laki yang cenderung menindas kehidupan kaum perempuan dalam norma yang disebut Pengkultusan Keperempuanan yang Baik menyebabkan pengkultusan yang lain yaitu Pengkultusan Pencacatan kaum Perempuan. Kedua jenis pengkultusan ini menyebabkan munculnya gejala kegilaan perempuan.

Kata kunci: *Pengkultusan Keperempuanan yang Baik, Penindasan Kaum Perempuan, kegilaan perempuan*

1. Jln. Pusponjolo Tengah 56 Semarang 50141
2. Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada

INTRODUCTION

That patriarchal culture has existed for ages and always given privileges toward men is already well-known. Many articles have discussed this topic too. However, that this patriarchal culture then also decides who is sane who is insane has not been popularly discussed yet. In her book, *Women and Madness* (1972), Phyllis Chesler, proposes an idea that because the mental health system is patriarchal, women are often falsely labeled as being 'mad' if they do not conform to stereotypical feminine roles.

Having the dominant position in society, men decide the feminine roles women are supposed to have. In the nineteenth century America, society created an ideological prison for women that were called the Cult of True Womanhood. To strengthen this norm, many books, magazines, or journal that are popularly known as Conduct Literature were abundantly published. When women did not conform to the norms of this Cult of True Womanhood, they would be easily deemed mad.

The objective of this study is to find out that this norm created by patriarchal society oppresses women's lives. To some extent, it increased the number of women who were labeled mad because they chose to deviate the norm. As mental evidence, the novella entitled "The Yellow Wallpaper" written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is chosen.

This study is carried out under the American Studies theory proposed by Tremaine McDowell – the reconciliation of tenses (past, present, and future), and the reconciliation of academic disciplines that is interdisciplinary approach (82). This interdisciplinary approach comprises sociohistorical approach, cultural approach, historical contexts of the writer and literary approaches, namely genetic structuralism and feminist literary criticism.

The method applied in this study is library research. It means, it concentrates on reference source related to the topic discussed. Besides the novella itself, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's other books are utilized. Some other books and online references closely linked to the study are of big help to conduct the research.

ANALYSIS

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story telling about a young woman who is eventually driven mad by the society. The narrator is apparently confused with the norm defining "true" and "good" woman constructed by society dominated by man.

Upper and middle-class women in that era mostly had a role as their husband's ornament, the angel of the house. With the emergence of middle-class society due to the Industrial Revolution, many new rich men wanted to show off their valuable "treasure"; a wife that is passive, obedient, beautiful, submissive, pious, and pure. This beautiful-to-be-looked role of a wife is similar to that of wallpaper.

Gilman herself as the writer said in "Why I wrote The Yellow Wallpaper?" that "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written to attack the wrong rest cure proposed by Dr. S. W. Mitchell for women who were considered to suffer from mental illness. At the same time, the story also turns out to be one way of Gilman to criticize her male-dominated society's way to oppress women during her era. Imposing "true" and "good" woman norm to all women obviously engendered women's madness phenomenon in that era.

The Cult of True Womanhood

The Cult of True Womanhood consists of four attributes; namely piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. (<http://www.pinzler.com/ushistory/cultwo.html>). In "The Yellow Wallpaper", two attributes—submissiveness and domesticity—were clearly seen.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator was taken to a solitary mansion to undergo treatment. The narrator's husband named John who happened to be a high standing physician diagnosed her to suffer from temporary nervous depression. To cure that kind of depression, a woman had to undergo an isolated rest cure.

In that isolated place, the narrator was not allowed to go anywhere, but stayed in her yellow-wallpapered room. She was somewhat imprisoned there. She had to be domesticated while her husband could go out of the house to do his job to his heart's content, even sometimes he was away for days. It showed dichotomy of public sphere and domestic sphere for men and women. He enjoyed mobility where he could gain his identity to enhance his position in society, while at the same time he showed his authority toward his wife, the mentally disturbed wife. As someone who had the most professional profession in that era—physician—the husband showed that whatever he said is right, his prescription to cure his wife—to isolate her in a solitary place—was the best for her. This was undebatable.

To convince the narrator, the husband said they went to that isolated place only on her account so that she could get perfect rest. The loving nicks her husband used in calling her—my dear, darling, blessed

little goose—gave the narrator feeling that her husband loved and cared for her much. The imposing of the true womanhood norm on upper and middle-class women, the loving feeling her husband tried to evoke in her using loving nicks and the condition that the narrator was suffering from temporary depression made her not able to debate her husband.

Referring to the third characteristic of the Cult of True Womanhood—submissiveness—where true feminine genius was supposed to be timid, doubtful, clingingly dependent, and a perpetual childhood, the narrator was treated as a child. She was 'imprisoned' in a room where the windows were barred for about three months. It showed that she was legally a child; socially and economically she must be led by an adult—her husband. Therefore, the nursery was an appropriate place to house her.

In a patriarchal society, relationship between a husband and a wife was similar to a relationship between a parent and a child. A parent had a right to say things and a child had an obligation to listen and to do what the parent said. A child was not supposed to disagree. The child must submit him or herself to the parent. It made the child dependent on the parent.

It can be seen clearly that the husband treated his wife as a child. He called her his "blessed little goose" (Bauer, 1998:44), and "little girl" (Bauer, 1998:50). When the narrator tried to tell him what she thought was good for her, but not appropriate to the husband's opinion, the husband used sweet words to force his idea toward the wife.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! ... Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?" (Bauer, 1998:51)

As socially dependent on her husband, the narrator let her husband take care of things for her, for example, to choose to stay in such a solitary place where she did not need to socialize with neighbors because John thought that the narrator needed a full rest and she did not need to get along with people. Since the narrator suffered from a mental disturbance, John, asked his sister, Jennie, to take care of the rented house so that the narrator did not need to do anything. She only needed to take care of herself.

When John thought that the narrator was in a mentally good condition that enabled her to need company, he chose some certain people to come to visit them. That illustration shows how John controlled the narrator's social life. He decided where they stayed when he thought

that his wife needed time to cure her mental depression. He decided with whom the narrator got along, who could stay there with them, what she had better do during their three-month stay – only to take care of herself.

As economically dependent on her husband, the narrator did not need to work either. Moreover, in her mentally depressed situation, John forbade her to "work" until she was well again. While she herself thought that congenial work, with excitement and change would do her good. The narrator instinctively felt that only her work could transport her out of the world of childhood. Surely, her craving to write – meaning to work here – endangered her husband's position as an authority. He would not have control any longer toward the narrator – his wife.

Living in an era where people worshipped the Cult of True Womanhood, Gilman wrote that novella to criticize the situation, the husband was the authoritarian, and the wife was the submissive. It is clearly seen when she illustrated the situation where the husband forbade the narrator to write and the narrator had to do it in secret. By questioning, "What is one to do?" Gilman wanted to expose the weak position of the narrator. She could just follow what her husband said to her, believe in things he thought, and not what she thought. Since she was considered as a child, not mature yet, she did not have any choice but to agree with whatever her husband asked her to do.

Another important thing in the Cult of True Womanhood is novel reading prohibition. The word 'novel' in *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* means 'new and not resembling something formerly known or used' (2003:849). It is known that novel is a new kind of literary work, compared to poetry. Industrial revolution of the nineteenth century America produced middle-class society. Novel was mostly produced by this middle-class society.

Industrial Revolution produced new rich people that then were considered the middle class society. These new rich people absolutely had different taste from old rich people. When old rich people loved reading poetry – an established literary genre at that time, the new rich people could not do the same thing due to the different taste. Poetry was considered too high for them. They could not enjoy reading it because they could not understand it. However, they needed to read something. Novel was the best solution because novel did not use 'high' and complicated (connotative) words.

One of novel's characteristics is being critical toward government and society's norm. As *Literary World* observed in 1850, "The novel is now almost recognized with the newspaper and the pamphlet as a legiti-

mate mode of influencing public opinion" because of its "strong, emotional, political, and cultural agendas for change" (via Herndl, 1993:45) Society (read à men) were worried if reading novel would make women critical about their so-called destined role as a domestic creature. When women became critical, men suspected that those women would question their 'natural' characteristics as mentioned in the Cult of True Womanhood. It would endanger their position as the only owner of the public sphere. When women wanted to get involved in public affairs too, they would compete with men. Besides, if both men and women were busy in public sphere, who would worship God? As a pious country with its Puritanism before the nineteenth century, American men put their forebear's religious values on women's shoulder. Therefore they created the Cult of True Womanhood norm to confine women.

If novel reading is prohibited, it is understandable, then, if writing is much more condemned. Because the narrator was still undergoing treatment for her mental disturbance, she was not allowed to do anything but rest herself, rest her body as well as rest her mind. The narrator had to write her journal secretly, when nobody was around her. She herself thought that she needed to write. "Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (Bauer, 1998:42) and "I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me." (Bauer, 1998:46) However she was not free to do that. The narrator wrote in her journal what her husband said about her eagerness to write

... with my imaginative power and habit of story making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. (Bauer, 1998:46)

Every time she wrote in her journal, she had to stop herself when her husband arrived, "There comes John, and I must put this away, — he hates to have me write a word." (Bauer, 1998:44) or when she saw Jennie coming to her. "There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing." (Bauer, 1998:47) It can be understood then if that kind of life tired her. She really wanted to do one thing she likes—writing, and she perceived that by writing she could express herself well and it even could help her cure herself. However, she could not do that freely, because her rest-cure treatment prohibited her to do that. And as a true woman, she had to obey what her husband said to her.

The narrator's deteriorating mental breakdown was understandable. She could not be the woman she was because of the standards set by society at that time. Her husband did not appreciate her creativity and

thought. She was not entrusted to do anything or make any decision for herself. While the narrator herself was illustrated as a woman who wanted to conform society's norm; belittling her own ideas and respecting her husband's.

Social expectations in the decade of the first half of the nineteenth century encouraged a kind of selflessness that could have resulted in a woman's thinking of herself as nothing, or less than nothing. This is what can be seen in "The Yellow Wallpaper".

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's personal background in writing "The Yellow Wallpaper"

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is often considered as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's semi-autobiographical short story since she mentioned Mitchell's name in it to acknowledge the autobiographical roots. Besides mentioning that noted neurologist's name, "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall." (Bauer, 1998:47) the story also contains an obvious similarity between the narrator's problem and Gilman's. As stated before, this novella tells about a woman who suffers from a postpartum depression. Gilman herself also experienced that in her first marriage with Charles Walter Stetson.

During her childhood, Charlotte had a loveless relationship with her mother who never showed her care and love toward her children, Charlotte and her brother Thomas. It happened after her husband left her, because the doctor forbade her to get pregnant again. Charlotte wrote in her autobiography about her mother, "After her idolized youth, she was left neglected. After her flood of lovers, she became a deserted wife" (via Golden, 1992:212).

She saw her mother—a woman whom she described as someone who had passionate feeling for being a domestic wife—live in suffering. Her mother's suffering made her also live unhappily due to lack of parental love. In Charlotte's eyes, her mother became a victim as well as a victimizer. This bitter experience made her doubtful to get married because after getting married, a couple would have sex that would probably result in pregnancy. Having a baby was something unpleasant for Charlotte because she was afraid if she could not love her baby well, just like her own experience with her mother. In *Concerning Children*, Charlotte wrote that the act of childbirth evoked the fear of mutilation, motherhood was the ultimate human sacrifice. Once a woman became a mother, she had to sacrifice all her life for the child, for the family, and she could not have her own life (via Golden, 1992:218). Therefore, the

emotions Charlotte felt when she gave birth were appropriate for a funeral. Instead of welcoming the baby happily, she went into a period of mourning.

Not wanting to do her mother's mistake that causes three of them (Charlotte, her mother, and her brother) to live in suffering—to get married and to have children—but thinking that a woman was supposed to get married following the nineteenth century's society's norm, Charlotte was in a big dilemma when Charles proposed her. She was afraid if marriage and motherhood might incapacitate her for her work in the world. After considering Charles' repeated proposal for some time, Charlotte married him.

Her fears for marriage and motherhood soon made her suffer from postpartum depression after delivering her baby one year after that. She could no longer do her intellectual activity, such as writing and painting due to the breakdown. Wanting to be cured to continue doing her intellectual work, Charlotte visited the most noted neurologist at that time, S. Weir Mitchell.

Mitchell was well known for his rest cure treatment when he handled mentally breakdown patients, both men and women. He also prescribed the same treatment toward Charlotte. He suggested Charlotte to avoid doing her intellectual life. She was supposed to lead a passive life instead because Mitchell believed that her intellectual work was the cause of Charlotte's depression. Mitchell—as other physicians at that time—believed that women's reproductive organs in their bodies hindered them from doing things intellectually. The capacity of women's brain was not as good as men's to get knowledge. (Golden, 1992: 97-100) Therefore, women were not supposed to have intellectual ambition in their life. When a woman forced to have it, she was condemned to suffer from mental illness.

Charlotte wrote this personal experience in her novella entitled "The Yellow Wallpaper". The narrator suffered from postpartum depression after delivering a baby. It was clearly seen that she was not ready to be a mother. Only because she was married and consequently had sex with her husband did she become pregnant and then become a mother. Here, Charlotte illustrated her idea that childbirth meant the death of the mother.

The novella tells that the narrator was not ready to have motherly and wifely chores. To cure her mental depression, her husband took her to a summer vacation house for rest therapy. As Mitchell, John—the narrator's husband—also asked her not to involve herself with intellec-

tual activity – writing. To substitute her to do motherly and wifely chores, John invited a woman named Mary to be the nanny of their baby, and his own sister, Jennie, to be the housekeeper.

The narrator was asked to stay home all day long while her husband was free to pursue his career to be high standing physician. The narrator followed her husband's suggestion and tried to make herself busy in that rented house. She let her husband go away and busy with his own job that sometimes made him away for some nights.

On the contrary, in Charlotte's real life, after marrying Charles, she still continued her career by writing and painting. She still used her maiden name as Charlotte Anna Perkins, and not as Mrs. Charles Walter Stetson. It hurt Charles's pride. Living in a male-dominated society, a married woman was not supposed to have her own identity. She had to bear her husband's family name.

In handling her mental disturbance, Charlotte realized that Mitchell's rest cure prescription did not do her any good. In *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), Charlotte proposed her idea that mother's world symbolized death and martyrdom, while father's world promised work, achievement, and power (via Ceplair, 1991:124-144). Mitchell's paternalistic therapy locked her into the mother's role, and at the same time, it deprived her of the opportunity to pursue her father's achievements and thus blocked her life. Therefore, she stopped it. She resumed her intellectual life instead. She started writing again, while at the same time also traveling around America to give lectures about women's rights. She was successful to cure herself by working, and not by having a passive life.

In this case, Charlotte wrote different thing from her own experience, because, as she wrote in "Why I wrote The Yellow Wallpaper?" she wanted to criticize Mitchell's rest cure prescription and also to attack the Cult of True Womanhood.

To show Mitchell that he gave a wrong prescription for women who suffered from hysteria, Charlotte finished her story by leading the narrator to insanity. The message was clear, mentally ill women needed to work to cure themselves, and not on the way around. In "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper?" Charlotte wrote that she

sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad.

But the best result is this. Many years later I was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading *The Yellow Wallpaper*. (via Bauer, 1998:349)

She also showed society that this depressed narrator became insane because she was forced to be domestic and submissive toward her hus-

band. Not all women shared the same idea to enjoy being domestic and submissive. For intellectual and ambitious women, just like Charlotte and her heroine in "The Yellow Wallpaper" it was a very difficult thing to conform to the tenets of the Cult of True Womanhood.

Although Charlotte refused to be called feminist during her lifetime, the twentieth and twenty first century critics crown her as radical feminist theorist. She saw that what feminists struggled to get – right to vote – to be equal to men was not enough. Right to vote only was not enough to make women's position equal to men. Based on her personal life, Charlotte had her genuine ideas about marriage and motherhood. The inequality between men and women in a marriage was caused by women's financial dependence on their husbands, like what she wrote in her most famous book entitled *Women and Economics*

Her living, all that she gets – food, clothing, ornaments, amusements, luxuries – these bear no relation to her power to produce wealth, to her services in the house, or to her motherhood. These things bear relation only to the man she marries, the man she depends on – to how much he has and how much he is willing to give her. (via Bauer, 1998:325)

It is clearly seen in "The Yellow Wallpaper", the unequal relationship between the narrator and her husband was caused by economics, John worked as "high standing" physician while the narrator was "imprisoned" in her room. Charlotte's intentional choice of physician as the narrator's husband's profession had some reasons to show the sharp inequality between the narrator and the husband. First, the husband earned much money because physician was the most professional profession in that era. When it was compared to his idle wife, it showed high financial dependence on the part of the wife. Second, physician as the most respected and scientific profession dictated people to always believe in what a physician said. In the middle of the cult of science of the enlightenment in the eighteenth century, doctors really had a say to shape people's way of thinking among "rational" society.

The financial dependence of the wife on the husband was similar to a child's dependence on his or her parents. In *Concerning Children*, Charlotte criticized parents-children relationship that obliged children to obey their parents.

...obedience has a bad effect on the growing mind. A child is human creature. He should be reared with a view to his development and behavior as an adult, not solely with a view to his behavior as a child. ... The work of "parenthood" is not only to guard and nourish the young, but to develop the qualities needed in the mature. (via Ceplair, 1991:117)

In the story, Charlotte illustrated the relationship between the narrator and John, her husband, was similar to that between a parent and a kid, e.g. the way John called his wife, "little girl". A child was considered not knowing what was good or bad for him or herself. A child always needed parents' guidance. Sometimes more extremely, parents dictated what the child had to do, and the kid just listened and did what the parents said. Every time the narrator tried to express her ideas to the husband, he always belittled her.

The difference between husband-wife relationship and parents-children relationship with the financial dependence as a result was that the wife served the husband in bed and did the household chores, while a child had to pay back the parent's financial support by obeying whatever the parents said and asked the child to do. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator paid her husband back both by serving him in bed and obeying whatever John said. Her inability to do household chores was understandable because she suffered from mental disturbance. The presence of Mary and Jennie represented the narrator's domestic side.

Woman's Madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper"

As stated in the introduction that that feminist critics propose an idea that woman's madness is spurred by patriarchal society, this sub chapter will show how John—the narrator's husband in "The Yellow Wallpaper"—as the representative of patriarchal society leads his wife into insanity.

When the first time the narrator and her husband arrived in the solitary summer mansion, the narrator sensed something peculiar about the house. She wrote in her journal

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity — but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I would proudly declare that there is something queer about it. (Bauer, 1998:41)

However, when she told her husband about what she perceived—that the house was haunted—her husband laughed at her idea. This laughter shows that he underestimated his wife. Her suspicion was caused by her curiosity how such a big building like that was untenanted for so long and rented to them very cheaply. This physician-husband was described as someone who "has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (Bauer, 1998:41). As someone who had the

most "scientific" profession in the nineteenth century, obviously he believed only in logical things, and he considered his wife's superstition as something illogical.

It definitely discouraged the narrator. She even suspected that because of the fact that her husband was a physician, who imposed his prescription to his patient, and did not pay attention to what the patient said and thought, she did not get well faster. "John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster." (Bauer, 1998:41)

When using what Luce Irigaray stated in *Speculum of the Other Woman* that a woman is defined as mad because her self expression is different from what men define for her, one can conclude that the narrator had her own way of thinking about herself which was different from her husband's. This different way to see things between the husband and the wife urged madness phenomenon on the woman's side.

Her sentence in her journal stating "You see he does not believe I'm sick!" (Bauer, 1998:41) shows that she thought she was sick, while her husband did not think that way. He just thought that there was really nothing the matter and the narrator only had "temporary nervous depression, a slight hysterical tendency" (Bauer, 1998:42).

Since the most famous treatment for women suspected to suffer from hysteria at that time was rest cure with its solitary confinement and avoiding intellectual stimulation, the husband brought his wife to that isolated place. He prohibited his wife to socialize with other people without his knowing, and he did not let her write in her journal. While on the contrary, the narrator believed in something contradictory, "Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change would do me good." (Bauer, 1998:42) The husband, with his authoritarian position and sanity decided that his wife's writing in her journal would make her depression worse so that he asked her to stop writing and stop having "illusion" about the house. In the husband's eyes, that the house was haunted was only his wife's illusion. On the other hand, for her, it was a fact. In her journal, she wrote the reasons why she thought that way—the house was untenanted for so long and rented cheaply.

Furthermore, she wrote:

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. (Bauer, 1998:42)

The above quotation showed the contradictory ways of thinking between John and the narrator. She opined that probably she would be recovered soon if she socialized more with people and got stimulus. However, her husband eliminates that idea by telling her to stop thinking about her condition—to be confined in a solitary place, to perceive that the house was haunted, and his prohibition to write in her journal.

John said that they came to that house merely on the narrator's account so that she would get better soon. However, he ignored what his wife wanted. He denied her request a room on the first floor with access to the air outside, and confined her in the attic instead. When the narrator felt troubled with the wallpaper and asked her husband to change it, he said that he would even whitewash the cellar if the narrator asked him to do it. However, he did not do anything about it. He went on forcing his wife not to give fancy toward the wallpaper and the house.

The husband encouraged her to exercise "self-control" and avoid expressing negative thoughts and fears about her illness; she is also urged to keep her fancies and superstitions in check. In other words, it can be said that the husband defined what was sanity to his wife, and what his wife felt and thought as insanity. Sanity for a woman was that she had to believe in and agree with what her husband said; she had to be quiet, selfless, and submissive. On the other hand, when a woman had her own feeling and thought that opposed to her husband's, it was insanity.

The husband kept telling her that all he did was for her benefit, because he loved her. Troubled with the idea of "true woman" and believing in what her husband said to her, the writer wrote in her journal "He is very careful and loving" (Bauer, 1998:43) and "He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick." (Bauer, 1998:49). However, it is obviously seen that what he did toward his wife did not show his loving character. It even showed his egotism and arrogance. He was not empathetic. He never listened to what his wife said and wanted. His imposing his wife to believe in what he said to her and asked her to do what he thought the best for his wife even made his wife's depression worsened quickly.

The explanation above shows Luce Irigaray's theory about the cause of woman's madness is right. Woman's madness' phenomenon is triggered by the different way to view problems or things in this life between man and woman. Since this is a male-dominated world, men decide that their views are right and sane while they consider women's views as wrong and insane.

Referring to Helene Cioux's theory about woman's madness—society sees a mad woman as a courageous figure refusing to accept mascu-

line norms, it can be proven in the way the narrator's courageous critical idea that housekeeper is the best profession for women. In her journal, commenting on Jennie, her sister-in-law, the narrator wrote, "She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession" (Bauer, 1998:47). She compared it to her writing journal that she considered as her work. She realized that the best profession for women in that era was homemaker, according to the Cult of True Womanhood. But still, she criticized it. Besides that, she also knew that she opposed the society norm that condemned novel writing. She kept on writing her journal. She wrote, "I verily believe she (*Jennie*) thinks it is the writing which made me sick!" (Bauer, 1998:47) Apparently she did not believe that the writing made her sick. She even thought of on the way around, writing could help her release her stress. She did not really pay attention to any norm confining women to be "true" and "good". She did what she believed good for her. She continued writing, kept perceiving that there was something wrong with the house. She did not try her best to conform to the society's norm to be a "good" mother for the baby she just delivered, and she did not have any idea either to be a "good" wife. She also kept thinking that she was sick despite her husband's saying that she was not.

As a result of her courage to refuse the norm was that people around her labeled her mad.

A little bit different from the theories proposed by Luce Irigaray and Helene Cioux, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the nineteenth century norms for women's behavior – selflessness and submissiveness – were the causes of women's mental illness. Charlotte Perkins Gilman apparently illustrated her nameless narrator as an intelligent and energetic woman who would feel restless if she had to live a boring life, without intellectual challenges as a housewife.

Since the beginning of the story, John always tried to make his wife as a submissive and selfless wife. He designed a treatment to pressure the narrator into concluding that something was wrong with her, not with her husband nor the people around her nor the values people adhered at that time. When she tried to be assertive, to express her feelings and thought toward her husband, he cruelly asked her to control herself. "... so I take pains to control myself – before him, at least, and that makes me very tired." (Bauer, 1998:43) By "proper self-control", John meant to control the possibility that the narrator had her own version about her sickness and decide her own treatment to cure herself. By controlling her, John forced her to do what he told her instead.

In her book *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler proposes the similar theories. As stated in Chapter three, Chesler's first theory is that women who exhibit traditionally "male" traits are often diagnosed as mentally ill. The narrator's traits—such as self-assertiveness—emphasized this. She did what she thought right and good for her. Telling her husband that the house had something peculiar and keeping thinking of it though her husband asked her to forget that idea is one example. The event when her husband forced her to stay in the room upstairs and she asked him to move downstairs because she did not feel comfortable in that room shows that she tried to be assertive, to have her own way of thinking. Being self-assertive was considered as men's traits because women in that era were supposed to be selfless and obedient.

Chesler's second theory is that mentally ill women are less likely to get understanding and support from family, friends, or employers and co-workers. None of the people around the narrator—especially John and Jennie—showed their understanding and support to her. John did not pay attention to what she said. He did not do what his wife asked him to do. The narrator's statement in her journal "It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work" (Bauer, 1998:46) shows her complaint. In that era, men did not consider their wives as companion—meaning having equal position with them. Women were just the "second sex". Wives were just the angels of the house, the ornament for their husbands. Wives were just breeders and cooks. Charlotte criticized this situation by writing in her autobiography that women in that era were just "The 'charmer' before marriage and the cook afterward" (via Bauer, 1998:337).

John did not show sympathy toward his wife. The narrator had to write her journal—something that gave her comfort and relief—behind his back because she was worried if her husband would take away her freedom to write. She did not find anyone to share this enjoyment. No one understood her.

Jennie who thought that housekeeper was the best profession for women often looked at the narrator oddly. Jennie did not understand why the narrator did not conform to the society's norms. If John represented the oppressive males in society, Jennie represented all the women who were ignorant of society's oppression toward women. Jennie believed that women were created to be inferior and men superior.

Chesler's idea that social change is needed to eliminate mental illness caused by oppressive patriarchy is supported by Gilman's writing "The Yellow Wallpaper". She wrote it to indirectly tell S. W. Mitchell

that his rest-cure prescription was wrong. Recent feminist critics see it as Gilman's struggle to criticize that patriarchal society with its idea about "good" and "true" woman oppresses women's life. Forcing all women to be "true" and "good" women without giving any space to women who do not share the same idea to be such persons is not a wise thing. It even leads women to insanity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, it can be said that there is a very strong relationship between what is going on in society and a theme of literary work. The Cult of True Womanhood strongly affects women's lives in the nineteenth century. Charlotte Perkins Gilman portrays it in her novella entitled "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).

The analysis shows that women are divided into two categories. The first, woman who believes that she is born as a weaker sex or as the second sex. It is represented by Jennie; the sister-in-law of the nameless narrator. This kind of woman supports the status quo of patriarchal society. The second category is woman who becomes the victim of such culture. The imposing practice of patriarchal culture with its true womanhood norm on all women is obviously harmful to intelligent and creative women. This second category of woman is represented by the narrator.

As a victim of such culture, Gilman writes "The Yellow Wallpaper" to attack the practice of the Cult of True Womanhood. Such culture really oppresses intelligent and ambitious women like Gilman herself. The forced practice of that culture then triggers woman's madness phenomenon.

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