Universidad Zaragoza

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Subversion of Male Literary Canon in the Female Gothic: *The Yellow Wallpaper* and "*The Bloody Chamber*"

La subversión del canon literario masculino en el Gótico femenino: *The Yellow Wallpaper* y "*The Bloody Chamber*"

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Abstract

Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Angela Carter, although a century apart, stand against more traditional feminism as progressive activists and authoresses of the movement at their corresponding era. Following their configuration of a more liberal ideology that revolved around women's self-definition, they wrote their renowned short stories: *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), respectively.

Perkin's and Gilman's revamp of elements taken from Gothicism is subverted through the Female Gothic, which is in charge of carrying narratives that are imbued with a social denouncement, whether in content, themes, or style. The reconciliation with the dealing of feminine autonomy and sexuality with its corresponding degree of respectability, is first seen in this literary movement that prompts the dethronement of patriarchal conceptions about women by allowing them to write their own stories.

Thereupon the intended objectives of this Undergraduate Dissertation is to go through the Female Gothic elements contained in these two short stories and how they are relevant in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century feminism, as well as to examine the implications the authoresses portray of the perils women face if they acquiesce to be accomplices of their own oppression.

Keywords: Female Gothic; feminism; Angela Carter; Charlotte Perkins Gilman; The Bloody Chamber; The Yellow Wallpaper; female sexuality; female autonomy; marital violence; oppression.

Resumen

Charlotte Perkins Gilman y Angela Carter, aunque separadas por un siglo de diferencia, se posicionan como activistas progresistas de un movimiento feminista que se opone al modelo más tradicional existentes en sus distintos periodos históricos. En línea con esta ideología más liberal que gira alrededor de una autodefinición de la mujer se crean sus respectivos relatos: *The Yellow Wallpaper*; (1892) y *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Los elementos que definen a la literatura Gótica se subvierten en el Gótico femenino por ambas autoras, con la intención de crear discursos impregnados por una denuncia social, ya sea de forma argumentativa, temática o estilística. Como primer movimiento literario que logra una representación respetable de la autonomía y sexualidad femenina, este promueve el destronamiento de las ideas patriarcales impuestas sobre la mujer y permite que ellas escriban sus propias historias

Por consiguiente, el propósito de este Trabajo Final de Grado es revisar los elementos pertenecientes al Gótico femenino de las dos historias ya mencionadas, así como su relevancia en los contextos del feminismo de los siglos XIX y XX, además de realizar un análisis de cómo las autoras presentan las consecuencias dañinas de la propia implicación de la mujer en su opresión.

Palabras clave: Gótico Femenino; Angela Carter; Charlotte Perkins Gilman; The Bloody Chamber; The Yellow Wallpaper; autonomía femenina; sexualidad femenina; violencia conyugal; opresión.

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Introduction

The flourishing of second wave feminism in the 1970s coincided with a renovated interest in Gothic fiction, in what Moers consolidated as the "Female Gothic" (Davison 50). Nonetheless, a century earlier Radcliffe already introduced Gothic conventions into English mainstream fiction, endowing female sexuality with a *première* reputable representation. Its foremost preoccupation revolves around the notion of "the conflict over female identity" (Munford 58) and its consequent longing for one's own sexual individuation and self-definition.

In this genre, the proto-feminist Gothic heroine triggers the demise of patriarchal figures or institutions which attempt to imprison her into the confines of domesticity. Contrariwise, traditional male Gothic's flight from the feminine and the domestic sphere suggests an "inextricable relationship between gender and genre" (Davison 49), which divides the feminised private home from the masculine public sphere and whose fears differ drastically from one another. As Restuccia indicates, "the gothic aspect of a woman's life is all in its normality" (53). The Female Gothic, as a gender-contingent genre, tracks a young girl on the verge of womanhood and marriage, whose experiences change irrevocably her marital and self-expectations. Through the lens of a gullible fiancée, a critique of modern institutions' revilement of women and their concerns is established.

This woman fiction was not solely crafted as "female" in terms of plot, but also of authorship. Nineteenth-century female writers, as Gilbert and Gubar suggested in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), were identified as "Gothic heroines in an attempt to obtain proper recognition away from the constraints of male literary canon". Dismally, this persistent social disavowal of female subjectivity in culture and feminists' quest to recover a displaced female literary tradition persevered until twentieth feminism, in which feminist literary criticism sprung.

Following the conventions of said genre, I will highlight two female authors whose work belongs to it. American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, with her semi-autobiographical short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), presents the testimony of a woman's postnatal depression in an attempt to save women from being driven insane, as a result of an emotionally draining and restrictive imposed Victorian rest cure. British Angela Carter authors a collection of

Gothic fairy tales titled *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Consisting of ten classical revised fairy tales, in which the namesake story Carter parodies Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard* (1697), she reinterprets from a female perspective, the rite of passage of a young girl into womanhood .

Both authors confer a female subjectivity upon their protagonists' narrations with a vouchsafed privileged status on the perspective of events, in which readers have access to the heroine's stream of thoughts. Therefore, the subsequent thematic concerns which arise from this female enduring are related to "violence against women, victimisation, the maternal, the female body and relationships between women" (Munford 59).

However, neither of these writers depicts their narrators as entirely naive. They address their complicity with the oppressive nature of patriarchal relationships, whose values they have internalised and have prompted their participation in their sexualisation and subduing, presenting a damning masochism. Their fostering of a gynocritic discourse allowed them to embrace a political perspective against ideologically-permeated literature works and their shaping role of the collective unconscious of society.

The limited freedom that Gilman's heroine gets by the end of the story shows the progress the feminist movement had achieved by that time, as well as the impending work yet to be done. Even though she has taken the first step in rebelling against her husband, her upcoming internment in a mental institution reveals her futile attempt to emancipate from a repressive regime. Per contra, Carter's heroine, by the closure of the narrative achieves a total escape from her autocratic and violent relationship, which sheds lights of hope in the evolution of the feminist movement towards a more apologetic mentality in society.

Part I: Context

Context and Theoretical Framework

The usage of the term *féminisme* in 1895 emerged as an attempt to connote the impending ideology that pleaded for women's emancipation from the male yoke. As Pam Morris defines, it is a political perception based on the presumptions of "structural inequality between women and men" being consolidated by a "gender difference" that systematically protracts social injustice; and of that said disparity among genders, being perpetuated by a long-standing tradition of "biological essentialism" that pigeonholes women's nature as an inherent consequence of her reproductive role (Morris 1). This deterministic approach acts as a social construct which has historically served to justify women's subservience (2). In this refusal of the biological undermined status inscribed to women, de Beauvoir stated in *The Second Sex* (1949): "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", in a societal imposition of her destiny as the *Other* (qtd. in LeGates: 342).

The prevailing interwoven relationship that connects the human experience to its embodied representation, acts as a tool to perceive the collective's reality. Therefore, literature acts as discernment for the feminist critique to delve into the literary canon as an "influential cultural practice" (Morris 8). Similarly, it provides images of "acquired gender identities of femininity and masculinity" (2), together with an insight into women's social repudiation through the times. The alteration of this canon in its processes that encompass publishing, reviewing and literary response, as stated by Plain and Sellers, is a consequence of the influence of feminism on literary criticism. Said influence conforms to a brand-new endeavour whose central point is reforming the established hegemonic patriarchal agenda (Plain and Sellers 1). The purposeful forethought of erecting a woman centred authorship tradition and deviance from male literary supremacy, slots "women writing about women, from the standpoint of a woman, and about women's minds, bodies and ideas" (Heilman 7; Plain and Sellers 2) into a newly opened female space. A century earlier than the flourishing of this women-centred literary criticism in the 1960s, protofeminist writers of the first wave had already formed the basis of the modern feminist doctrine (2). Dotted with a gynocentric conception of culture and literature, female literary criticism crafted "similar metaphors and

myths" in both *fin de siècles*, in their sharing of an undeniable "ideological instability" (Heilman 10) which, rather than a unifying story of the new woman, presented an ample "cross-fertilisation of ideas" and a "multitextuality" of genre which acknowledged the "dissonant, divergent and challenging" nature of the female campaign and thought (Plain and Sellers 3; Heilman 44).

The liberal atmosphere of the 1850s-60s allowed European and North American women to assemble for the creation of permanent organisations that enabled female vote after WWI (LeGates 197). Their core business was thriving on the improvement of the *couverture*'s legal position, the facilitation of economic independence for single women, and the possibility of women's self-determination. Whereas this era was an "age of progress" in the aftermath of the United States abolition of slavery, "restraints of class and race" remained among the movement, only representing white heterosexual middle-class women in their pursuit of a voice in the domestic and public spheres (198). In this New Era, the New Woman is born. In their strive to voice their social renovation project, literature surfaced as a crucial mechanism to fight for women's rights (Heilman 5). Heilman depicted a literary practice that opposed established conventions and representations of realism mirroring the upcoming modernist discourse, however, to extend its range of audience, it dived into the "allegorical, utopian, mythical and surrealist" (9) modes of writing while women's downtrodden position acted as their realist trope. In this feminist new writing "fragmentation, dissonance and multiplicity of styles/forms" (9) came to display the inconsistencies they faced as women, writers and feminists. These concerns, forms and challenges reverberated through twentieth century second wave feminism (10).

By the late 1960s-1970s, the New Woman was rediscovered as liberal feminist involvement reemerged thanks to the addition of a younger sector who found the women's liberation movements and took part in massive demonstrations (LeGates 327). Feminists now openly declared their ideological affiliation, after years of a "quiet" conservative feminism (341). This second wave of feminism coincided with the 60s' climate of violence whose large protests and Cold War fears posed an atmosphere imbued with unwelcomed social change. Nevertheless, an expanded consumer economy that pictured the perfect family, attempted to forge a sense of national stability based on family stability (332). This visualisation of the mother as the homemaker, did not illustrate the latent breach between the

ideology of domesticity and their actuality after female involvement in the workplace during men's absence in WWII (329), which prompted many women to see beyond their occupation as housekeepers. The unceasingly rearranged portrayal of women, created an urge of re-reading texts to gain leverage of the persuasive possibilities they contain in "defending' or defaming" women (Plain and Sellers 2). Moreover, even if feminist literary criticism is ascribed to this second wave, Wilcox discusses that women "play the part of a protofeminist, simply by virtue of her decision to write" (qtd. in Plain: 7), was sparking off a reconciliation between women and literary culture.

Notwithstanding similarities, each century had its distinguished fictional heroine. The nineteenth century protagonist is a "feminist intellectual thwarted by biology and destiny" in the modern era (Heilman 11); and often linked to the so-called female disease of the century: hysteria, which replicated the aforementioned inconsistencies women faced as women. Subsequently, the twentieth century heroine, is a "learning from past fiction feminist literary critic" (11) in postmodernity. As New Woman fiction of the first wave was rediscovered in the 70s, feminists' aims shifted "from patriarchal attacks towards the liberation of themselves" (Carr 124) and of their "gynocritic" writing which would be reinterpreted and adjusted to their cause.

Coinciding with the rise of the 70s' feminist critique, the Gothic heroine's fight against patriarchy gains relevance as a protofeminist figure in what Moers called in 1976, the Female Gothic (Davison 50). As a genre it expressed "women's repressed fears, desires and protests" (Showalter, qtd. in Munford: 59) and starred a "young maiden persecuted by a rapacious menacing tyrant, who is virtually imprisoned in a maze-like castle or manor where she unravels at night the secrets of the past" (Davison 51; Milbank 125). Her "rite of passage into womanhood" concludes with her acquiring of her sense of identity and individuality, and revealing "her ambivalent relationship with marriage and motherhood" (Davison 48). The Gothic space that surrounds her reflects her "psychological and psychic crisis in her stay within it" (Warwick 34), and this enclosure in it, is what helps her realise her compelling necessity to escape. Aside from the Gothic strategy of "empowerment through pretended weakness" (Hoeveler, qtd. in Munford: 60) presented as a part of a "victim feminism" of internalised masochist demeanours, the concept of "power feminism" addresses that "domination, sexual exploitation and aggression are not only-male urges"

(Munford 59-60) . Contrary to traditional male Gothic fear of the supernatural, the distraught damsel's fear will be humans (Milbank 158) while the supernatural will be disrupted for political ends. Irrespective of its constant reinvention as a "dynamic genre" (McEvoy 8) that allowed feminist rewriting of the literary canon into new separated works, it retains the recurring motifs of laberinthical castles and damsels in distress, as well as the grotesque and uncanny elements of the Gothic of the eighteenth century. Even though the Female Gothic was conceptualised in the 1970s, its predecessors of the nineteenth century were "women writers that attempted to search for their own place outside a ritualistic male canon" (Gilbert and Gubar, qtd. in Milbank: 156) with the bourgeois home as the setting that confines her into the domestic realm. This *fin de siècle* Female Gothic "anticipated the themes, concerns and formal experimentation" that would be central to that of the twentieth century (Spooner 39). Leaving aside their dissimilarities, what unquestionably binds the Female Gothic of these three centuries together is the eager "search for female sexual expression and sense of selfhood" (Munford 58).

Part II: Analysis

1. The feminist appropriation of Gothic fiction in the Female Gothic

Gilman's heroine is a distraught female couverte who suffers from an "hysterical tendency" (*YW*, p. 1) as a consequence of her postpartum depression in the "ancestral halls" (p. 1) of a "colonial mansion" (p. 1) to which her physician husband has relocated her in, in order to improve her condition. To mend her "nervous depression" (p. 1) she is prescribed the Victorian rest cure. Its methods of "enforced passivity, lack of physical exercise, lack of intellectual stimulation, and the prescription that a woman must return home and devote herself to husband and children" (Quawas 42), were an hyperbolization of the expectations placed upon the Victorian woman of the nineteenth century, which were in fact the incipience of their "female hysteria", expression of their long-suppressed rage.

Under these circumstances of imposed silence and quelling of one's desires, her narrator in an attempt to prevail goes insane by the end of the story in a subconscious display of her acrimony towards her wife-mother roles. Writing is a form of expression and identity for Gilman, and if that is denied , the only possible route to explore one's creativity is perhaps through insanity in a pleading for self-identity (Goodman 110). In this narrative, Gilman denounces "the social systems that politically and privately instigate psychological fragmentation, alienation and madness among women" (Quawas 42). Her discreditation of the gendered-permeated theme of madness constitutes her main endowment to feminist literary discourse by presenting insanity as a dissidence between the domestic and artistic in the format of a Gothic short story.

While her husband epitomises the rational and observable male discourse which reflects and produces reality (Treichler, qtd. in Ford: 310), Cixous as a way to revoke phallocentric discourse, proposes a "feminine writing or *écriture féminine* that retrieves the female body" (Ghandeharion and Mazari 123). The gaps delivered in her efforts to oppose her husband and the continued thematic leaps the narrator presents through her journal; mirror the contradictions and internal crisis she faces as an artist, mother and wife.

Thereupon, in her usage of this fluid, discontinuous and freely associative writing, she does away with the rigidness of chronologically "linear narratives employed by male authors" (124). Critics, such as Treichler state that the possibility of the wallpaper symbolising patriarchal discourse duress might be signalled in the immobilising effect it inflicts upon the narrator, it is not until she tears it down that a blankness behind it is revealed. In this blankness, gaps and silences feminine writing appears, and her only possibility of "talking back to her husband John, is by retreating from speech" (Treichler, qtd. in Ford: 312), since "language is a male-controlled system that masculinizes feminine writing as it is produced" (Gauthier, qtd. in Ford: 312).

Notwithstanding, blanks and borders are not a fair substitute for discourse and as Cixous declares "women must write through their bodies, submerge and get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of the word silence" (Ammons 38). The narrator's "dead paper" (*YW*, p. 1), that is, her journal, is a "great relief to [her] mind" (p. 1) and in this blank space along with the one on the wall, she must write her own story. One far from the castrating narrative her husband wishes to write of her, and in which she appropriates the historically linked to men's writing phallic symbol, "the pen", endlessly denied to women. Additionally, even though the tragic induced insanity state she has come to suggests her possible upcoming internment in an asylum, her strategy to overcome repression opens up new resolutions to deal with marriage, motherhood and conformity "beyond the heroine's death" (Ford 312), that is fighting back through her writing.

In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter immerses us into an "ideological re-exploration of old texts and of old interpretations" that enables readers to be introduced to new ways of contemplating our "mythic past" (Renfroe 91). This retelling of one of the largest contributors to the establishment of beliefs about gender ideology, the fairy tale, allowed many feminist writers such as Carter to challenge the embedded sexist dogma contained in canonical works. In other words, what Carter denominated as putting "new wine into old bottles" (qtd. in Munford: 62). Following this precept of revisioning old texts, Carter resorts to the intertextuality that provides the narrative form of the "literary Märchen" which draws "on traditional versions of oral tales" and "the contemporary voicing of the mores of the author" (Renfroe: 83) to burgeon into new patterns of thought. This intertwining of texts comprises along her ironic stance a blurring of the line that separates fiction and criticism

into a postmodern “paraliterary space” (Hutcheon, qtd. in Bartu: 51). With this in mind, Carter portrays a naive seventeen-years-old girl in her journey towards maturation and self-definition in a tale that shatters conventional gender and sexuality representations, deconstructs predominant ideology and dives into the “religious representation of guilty femininity” (Marchetti 56). Through her experiences as a newly-wed, she uncovers her double role as a victim and perpetrator as her husband’s sadistic manners surface and she is not fully exempted from partaking in her objectification.

Manley draws upon Gubar’s essay on Dinesen’s “The Blank Page” to express women’s difficulties in the telling of their stories, as Carter’s heroine, whose husband is keen on writing hers. However, the blank page ascribed to the heroine rather than reducing her to the patriarchal definition of “an absence, a tabula rasa” (Manley 72) opens up a space for her own definition. The result of her loss of virginity in her bloody sheets symbolises Cixous’ idea that “women must write through their bodies” (Ammons 38) and not allow patriarchy to tell their stories by placing them in an object position rather than a subject one. Despite this, the protagonist has the possibility of establishing herself as a knowledgeable subject. She is not entirely a blank page because since the beginning she can count on her musical capabilities and her mother’s life, her sources of strength against her fiancée (Manley 73).

In her demythologizing enterprise, Carter attempts to dethrone myths of women which intend to perpetuate the role of male as master/subject dynamic and of female as a “supporting object of the former’s autonomy” (Plain and Sellers 88). For this Carter alludes to the myths of Pandora’s box and The Fall. In Perrault’s version the protagonist’s curiosity is seen as undesirable. However, Carter subverts this by placing the responsibility on both parties, he expected her discovery: “I must pay the price of my knowledge. The secret of Pandora’s box; but he had given me the box, himself, knowing I must learn the secret” (*TBC*, p. 34). In this contemporary version, Perrault’s devoiced heroine is also given a chance to narrate her history as a subject. The heroine’s entry into the forbidden chamber, emulating Eve’s violation of God’s prohibition, is used by Carter to shift the culturally accepted ideological approach of female curiosity as a defect into encouraging women to seek knowledge (Marchetti 57). Moreover, in her sexual initiation and disobedience to her husband’s prohibition of entering the gruesome chamber, the subversive narrative supplies its protagonist with, is the “key to selfhood”. The inherent parallelism established between the

door and key alluding to the act of the "impalement" (*TBC*, p. 14) of the heroine, denotes the girl's movement beyond being her "master's object" and declaring herself as her own subject.

Through the idea of the discovery of a blank space, both women are able to write their own stories far from that ascribed by their husbands to them. Gilman's heroine finds her self-expression in deafening silence, while Carter's subverts this idea in the rewriting of Perrault's muted heroine into a ruminant one capable of accepting her own susceptibility to a materialistic marriage. The conceding of independence granted by the writing of one's story is obtained by the heroines through an escape. Whereas Carter's female lead commits a successful escape out of her initial volitional following into an entrapping castle and marriage, Gilman's flee is relegated to her imaginative power, her still physical confinement denotes the delimitations that loomed over first wave feminist writers such as Gilman.

2. The subordination of women in marriage and the power play in the heterosexual couple

The power dynamics portrayed in both stories' pairs exemplify the dichotomy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that entrapped women into the domestic sphere, whereas it rejoiced men in the free-mobility of the public sphere. This casted women in total subservience to the master of the house, ergo, the male figure whose salary established him as the family's breadwinner. Gilman defended the necessity for women to have careers outside the home that provided them economic independence (Quawas 36). Likewise, Carter acknowledged that the "relationship between sexes was determined by the historical economic dependence of women upon men" (Bartu 60).

The stance of economic dependence is present in both tellings. However, while *TYW*'s heroine is forbidden to practise as a writer, that is, her medium for an income; *TBC*'s voluntarily relinquishes her pianist career beguiled with a marriage that will potentially bring her out of poverty, but which will pigeonhole her at the same time in a marital yoke. Women instead of pursuing an occupation that allowed their self-definition, were compelled to seek "fulfilment out of their partnership with a male" (Marchetti 60), either for love or status respectively. Their job is complying with their marital and motherly obligations, and maintaining blind docility towards their fiancées at the house, while John works as a doctor, and the Marquis as a businessman outside of it.

If said functions of servitude towards her household duties as an obedient wife and nurturing mother were repudiated, she emerged as "monstrous" (Fallaize 92) in her detachment from patriarchy's definition of her. Correspondingly, due to the increased role women were obtaining in the public domain, the implementation of handling women as a "child-woman who demands male taming and protection" (95) allowed men to reassert their dominion over them once again. John acts as a figure of double dominance as "a physician of high standing, and one's own husband" (*TYW*, p. 1) in charge of an "infant", despite their similar age; albeit in the Marquis' case the imbalance of power is accentuated by their significant age gap, "he [is] much older than [her]" (*TBC*, p. 3) so he addresses her as if she were a little girl. This is furthered by the distinction between the two marriages' duration.

While the first couple stands as a prolonged relationship with a child in common, the second one is conformed by two newly-wed lovers in which the husband sexually initiates his young wife.

The viewing of women as more biologically predisposed to hysteria, and curiosity, as in Gilman and Carter's stories respectively, have conceived a literary canon that asserts the aforementioned monstrosity as a result of this breaching of their marital responsibilities. By presenting these two traits, they fall out of the patriarchal designation of what femininity is. Gilman's heroine in her indisposed state is unqualified to fulfil her housewife tasks, in which her sister-in-law Jennie, supersedes her as the "perfect housekeeper" (p. 3). Furthermore, as a consequence of her postpartum depression, she feels deeply alienated from motherhood: " I cannot be with him, it makes me so nervous" (p. 2) so Mary has to substitute her in her maternal role. In this conflict with her assigned roles, she suffers a dissociation of the self as a result of the insane state her husband has induced her into in his denial of her every request. Per contra, in her newly procured role as a wife, the young protagonist of *TBC* is displaced to a luxurious castle in which her spouse grants all of her fancy requests. Her infatuation with marriage begins as soon as she is seduced by an incessant demonstration of his refined taste and possessions. It is not until the ordeal of the chamber that her disenchantment with the institution of marriage occurs as realises that she "ha[s] sold [herself] to this fate for a ring" (p. 28).

Despite the fact that both women wrestle with an unrelenting infantilization, they acquiesce to abide by their assigned social roles internalising the patriarchal values exerted by their partners. Their cathartic moment of rupture from such values is achieved through one's descent into madness and the other's trespassing into the forbidden chamber. The male villains' resoluteness to subdue their wives annihilates any possibility for a reciprocal relationship based on egalitarianism (Fallaize 92). In the face of a marriage that deems them as a passive recipient of dominance, it stands irrevocably as an equation to death (Davison 55). Either a physical one, considering the Marquis' intention of decapitating his wife, or symbolic as in Gilman's heroine's creative restraint on the part of her husband.

In a disguised mask of vulnerability, they enable their wives' to succumb to a facade of affection. This erects a bond of susceptibility with their spouses which serves them as an utter tool for manipulating their thoughts and actions. Consequently, right after the heroine's

deflowering, the Marquis brings her to tears with his "lover's recitative": "My dear one, my little love, my child, did it hurt her? He's so sorry for it, such impetuousness, he could not help himself; you see, he loves her so…" (*TBC*, p. 14). Underneath his veil of tenderness that conceals his actual delight in the infliction of sexual violence in the bedroom, she feels as if she "had seen his face without a mask" as he "impals her", losing his usual "funereal composure" as he shrieks (p. 14). Irrespective of her conjecture, a fathomless sense of dependency arouses in her as she "long[s] for him" after his departure (p. 19). However, this same realisation "disgust[s] [her]" (p. 19) upon she comprehends her acquired neediness towards him.

Contrarily to Carter's spoiled heroine by her fiancée, Gilman's protagonist's requests are continuously refuted by her husband not "to give way to such fancies". His empiricist approach to life impedes him from accepting his wife's "diagnosis grounded on her personal experience" (Davison 57). She reiterates throughout the story how "he is so wise" and " loves [her]" (p. 4) in her acceptance of John as the epitome of reason, because "he is right enough" (p. 2), which in fact just strips her of voice and choice. Therefore, writing and social interactions which she perceives as positive for her recuperation but which he sees as depleting, are forbidden for her under his medical tutelage. John's mask consists of asserting his authority through the lovingly sugarcoating of his words. He oscillates between affirming "I am a doctor, dear, and I know" (p. 5) and demonstrating a deep concern for her: "My darling…I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own" (p. 5). *TYW*'s protagonist acknowledges her excessive attachment to her fiancée when she utters: "my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!" (p. 5). This extortion together with his seclusion of her, assures her infantile overreliance on him (Quawas 44).

The dependency portrayed in both wives alludes to the fatalistic configuration of "the female complicity with the oppressive structures of the patriarchal relations" (Munford 64) that engulf their routines.

Upon realising the intention of their husbands' deathly assigned destiny for them, either mental, in a total invalidation of one's volition, or physical, in the involvement with a libertine of a ritualistic murderous nature; both women resort to a strategy of subverting the manipulation previously placed on them. As she starts to identify with the woman trapped in

the wallpaper, Gilman's protagonist notices "[John] pretend[s] to be very loving and kind. As if [she] couldn't see through him!" (p. 7), alluding to a recognition of his schemes. Forlornly, she will simply undergo a shift in the authority in charge of her, from her fiancée's surveillance to that of an asylum. In Carter's case, her female couverte attempts to seduce the Marquis to strangle him in bed (p. 34) after infringing her promise of not trespassing the room, she as well dawdles to allow her mother to arrive in time and prevent her beheading (p. 39). The young girl is liberated as "the puppet-master…[sees] his dolls break free of their strings" (p. 40), contrarily to Gilman's character, she is aided in her emancipation from her perilous marriage and incarceration in a suffocating residence.

3. Transgression of gender norms

Biological essentialism dictates traditional gender roles of what constitutes femininity and masculinity (Bray, qtd. in Ghandeharion and Mazari: 119). Whereas the former is comprehended by passive, unassertive and emotional attitudes; the latter is characterised by powerful, logical and strong-minded ones (Tyson, qtd. in Ghandeharion and Mazari: 120) . In tandem with these definitions, Gilman and Carter project both heroines early in their subversive texts as "patriarchal women" (121) who merely depend on their husband's authority, and who at the same time assert their own objectification in their acceptance of being ruled-over. Per contra, as the stories are built on, they begin to repudiate their feminine role's impositions of maternity, sexual passivity and male superiority. Each woman's disobedience, either by writing/removing the wallpaper or by trespassing the bloody room, signals a metamorphosis in them that catapults them towards self-knowledge and self-independence, in a pivotal transition from object to subject.

Gilman's heroine's insanity stands as a form of rebellion against the Victorian tradition of "invalid women" in which her "very act of writing is asserting both her individuality and autonomy" (Quawas 41) in a refusal to view herself as incapable of possessing agency. Both, madness and writing, collaborate to shatter sex-role expectations of women and feminine propriety/virtue. Furthermore, her roles as a housewife and mother are casted aside to John's sister, a devotee of the Victorian cult of domesticity. In her final flight from her domestic repression she has eventually gone mad, but far from defeat, her final image crawling on all fours is the antithesis of the "inhibited lady" (Ammons 39). Contrariwise, John is emasculated as he faints upon seeing the mental derangement of his now creeping wife. Gilman here ridicules the "fainting lady" trope of the nineteenth century weak woman and as if the narrator was mimicking John's usual corseted speech when he dismisses her "fancies", she states "Now why should that man have fainted?" (*YW*, p. 8).

In Carter's tale, a revamp of the incongruities of the victim and saviour archetypal roles is presented. In the apprehension of the heroine's victimhood, Carter has conferred on her protagonist a voice that posits her subjectivity as the centre of her narrative. As her moral conflicts are unravelled and her just-discovered sexual desire is explored, a new space for female subjectivity emerges along, one that does not pigeonhole a woman as the prototypical

Gothic female masochist. Her protagonist's active partaking in her own victimisation assists Carter's attempt to demystify the moral superiority presented by "victim feminism" (Munford 59) which serves to reinforce the "good girl/bad girl" binarism.

Bedazzled by the promise of a husband that will deluge her with wealth and power, he enthrals her into the depths of a deadly ritualistic marriage. In the face of her presumably inescapable fate, she reflects that she could "create a pentacle out of music that would keep [her] from harm" (*TBC,* p. 33), recognising therefore her pianist career as a source of independence beyond her Marquis' reification of her as the object of his gaze (Manley 78). The courage she bears through her music and the inheritance of her mother's "nerves and will", leads her to actively devise a ploy to escape from death, "if he had come to bed, [she] would have strangled him (p. 35).

Contrary to Perrault's version, in which the heroine's brothers act as her saviours, Carter reconciles the traditionally fractured bond between mother-daughter of fairy tales through a "maternal telepathy" (p. 41) that connects them, to subvert the role of the hero as a maternal saviour. Through her mother, another transgressive idea is brought to the front, marriage for love (p. 2); based on mutual respect and companionship rather than a master/servant dynamic. Finally, as a deconstruction of a "masculinity based on an erotization of domination" (Sheets 654) and of the "virile hero", Jean-Yves emerges as an emasculated defenceless blind boy who stands as a helpless companion to the heroine as she faces her upcoming beheading but whom despite this "sees [her] clearly with his heart" (p. 42).

4. The infantilization and the hypersexualisation of women in marriage

The contradictory nature of myths that postulates “women as a representation of that which men do not identify with” (Fallaize 90), exposes the feminine mystery as a patriarchal farce used to ignore women’s opinions. This predilects male domination and female passivity as the basis of the relationship among both genders, since women constitute a mystery to themselves beyond their bodily reproductive role. Said dynamic assumes a distinction between master/saviour and puppet/damsel in distress hierarchy. The methods both stories’ starring husbands resort to reaffirm their dominance in the married couple depict an infliction of violence upon their “blinded by love” fiancées. In this enactment of a privileged-deprivileged structure, the sexual violence of infantilizing and hypersexualising both protagonists is not exempt. They are confined to a constraining “prison” in which all eyes are on them, the patriarchal “male gaze” that unfolds in a dichotomy of “those who look, being in control and those who are looked at, as being powerless objects” (Ghandeharion and Mazari 125).

In Gilman’s tale, Victorian prudery of feminine expectations did not acknowledge women as sexual entities of desire (Ghandeharion and Mazari 122). Rendered instead as “passive, intellectually inferior and inclined to the domestic sphere”, a transgression to their duties entailed them a “hysteric” label. John, in an attempt to cure his wife’s nervous state, places his distressed wife in a nursery-like cellar which merely reinforces the “nineteenth equation of non-maternal women—that is, spinsters and “hysterics”—with helpless children” (Johnson 524). Under his “very careful and loving” protection he conceals a treatment of her as a helpless pampered “little girl” in a therapy that consists of “isolation, inactivity and excessive feeding” (Ammons, 36). This, together with her transfiguration as nothing but a passive desexualized body, enables him to ensure her infantile dependence on him. “John gathered me up in his arms and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed” (*YW*, p. 4). Sugar coating his manipulation of her as affection, he asks her to “take care of [herself] for his sake” (p. 4) and in complying with her prescribed role of the woman manipulated, she makes sure “not to be so silly as to make him uncomfortable for just a whim” (p. 2). John sees the heroine’s condition as a fanciful result of her “habit of story-making” in which she demonstrates a lack of restraint.

The intent of his cure coincides with the Victorian ideal lady in which the "fixation on reproductivity, a prohibition of intellectual activity and childlike submission" dismisses women as asexual in a similar state to that of an "extrasexual pregnant woman" or a "presexual baby" (Ammons 36). Contrarily, the bed, nailed to the floor, suggests her "sexual crucifixion" (Johnson 527) to a site for a woman "of birthing, dying, and sleeping but also of an intercourse dominated by male sexual violence" (Ammons 37). Whereas the room "denies her adult female body", the bed limits her as "nothing but a body" (37). This unmasks the cure's concealed hypersexualized nature underneath a seemingly infantilising *modus operandi*, which incarcerates women in their alienated bodies under the pretext of being helpless. In her final descent to insanity, she is crawling on all fours, just like the child John treated her as.

Carter's final empowerment of her heroine dismantles the archetypal victimisation of women in fairy tales. In her conversion from a self-objectifying position to her acquisition of a subject perspective, Carter portrays the alienating effects of marriage which urge women to seek fulfilment through conjugality. To establish the hierarchy ruling their relationship that presents his wife as a vulnerable vessel and himself as the assertive oppressor, the Marquis infantilizes his victim: "Baby mustn't play with grownup's toys […]" (*TBC*, p. 13).

Their partnership stands as a commercial transaction in which he "purchases the heroine like a bargain commodity" (p. 11) to "join his gallery of beautiful women" (p. 5). This "predatory hunger for consumption" (Bartu 61) is implicit in his "inspecting [of her as] horseflesh, or even [as] a house-wife in the market" (p. 6) and the "carnal avarice" of his regard when he lustfully looks at her in the opera. The act of objectifying the heroine as a "bare lamb chop" (p. 11) is related to the voyeuristic manner of his "male gaze" which according to Mulvey is analogous to sadism (Bartu 62). The sadomasochistic tendencies of the heroine are visible in her consensual enjoyment of her submission, a desire that eradicates her victim status. It is not until the disrobing scene where the "most pornographic of all confrontations" (p. 11) occur leaving a fully clothed experienced man against a naked child except for her gloves and ruby choker, that she realises her desire for defilement. She was "aghast to feel [herself] stirring" (p. 11).

Furthermore, despite this portrayal of her initiation on desire creates a female-centred representation of sexuality (Marchetti 61), her sexuality is subdued by his husband's fiendish sexual rites as he puts an end to her excitation "clos[ing] [her] legs like a book" (p. 11). In this pornographic image, she realises his recreation of one of the pictures from his collection of sexually violent portrayals of men towards women who disobey: an etching by Rops (p. 11). Albeit, it is not until the intercourse scene occurs where the mirrors reflect the Marquis' view of her as a mere object of desire, that she realises that in their relationship she is dispossessed of any sense of subjectivity.

Described as a fight, a "dozen husbands [impal] a dozen brides" (p. 14), in a performance of a female initiation, where the "act is imposed on women from the outside as an indoctrination or assault meant to subjugate" (Lincoln, qtd. in Renfroe: 91). The oppressive nature of the rite defines women in the passive case as objects of desire, in which submission equals being murdered. (Carter, qtd. in Sheets: 650). In a permanent remembrance of her volitional acceptance of her husband's reification of her, the red mark on her forehead causes her an irredeemable sense of shame (Renfroe 85).

5. The imposed role of passiveness and inactivity of married women in the Gothic house

The traditional equation of women with irrationality, sentimentality, silence and the corporeal, has led women to "a gender-based oppressed view of themselves" (Goodman 109) which is opposed to male rationalism, pragmatism, discourse and the mind. In this correlation of women to the objectifying realm of the body, the female body is depicted as "highly vulnerable to physical and psychological derangement because of the delicacy of the female reproductive system" (117). Under this premise and in concomitance with economic and social factors, women have been relegated to submission and lack of autonomy to "support male subjectivity" (Fallaize 88). In the stalemate on their reproductive function, women are "bred for marriage" (Goodman 130) and have to passively "wait to be chosen" (130) for a marriage that will provide her with a livelihood.

Subordinated to these terms, the Female Gothic recognises the denied identity of the married woman which by posing as "another of her husband's properties" (Davison 55), condemns them to a metaphorical death. Likewise, the authoritativeness of both stories' husbands within the domestic sphere presents the "house as a prison" in which they act as the prison-master and where women are locked in (55). Therefore, imposition of passivity on their wives conceals a negation to their self-definition and self-rule in the Gothic house where their emancipation will occur. As a space where their autonomy is threatened, the Gothic house "mirrors women's ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection" within marriage (53). It acts as a reflection of the psychological crisis they are undergoing as women in their displacement to torture chambers. In their "night-time exploration of the house" (54), the heroines explore as well their very own selves subjected to their husbands' jurisdiction. On the one hand, Gilman's heroine probes the cellar's wallpaper in an attempt to rescue the trapped woman within it. In this effort to liberate her she is projecting a subconscious search for her long denied agency. On the other hand, Carter's initiation into womanhood occurs during the ordeal of the bloody chamber in her curious enquiry about her husband's past. By crossing the threshold of the forbidden she acquires a knowledge that triggers the establishment of herself as a subject. The violence perpetrated towards their female bodies is portrayed through elements of the house. In Gilman's bedroom, the windows

are barred, the "floor is scratched, gouged and splintered" (*YW*, p. 3) and the bed "looks as if it had been through wars" (p. 3), which suggests the rejection of a coercion that seems to resemble more an asylum than a nursery. However, in Carter's story, it is his collection of books and paintings which first hint at his perverse nature. The pictures "Reproof of Curiosity" and "Immolation of the wives of the Sultan" (*TBC*, p. 13) or the painting "The Rape of the Sabines" (p. 25) foresee his arousal towards the infliction of pain upon women. This premise is confirmed in her desecration of the room, the corpses of his previous wives are discovered in a room filled with torture devices.

Moreover, the heroines exert their self-definition through culture. Gilman's heroine faces a deauthorization of the voicing of her opinions which are compiled in her journal where "[she] says what [she] feels and think[s] in some way" (*YW*, p. 4). For her, writing " is such a relief!" (p. 4), but the disapproval of her husband to have her write a word as part of her resting cure leads her to "put [it] away" since the effort of hiding it from him is "greater than the relief" (p. 4). Similarly, Carter's protagonist is already a pianist at the start of the story. In an initial stance, music is what allows the young girl to meet her betrothed, but in the final redemption of her subject position she "retain[s] sufficient funds to start a little music school" (*TBC*, p. 41). In addition to possessing a musical career, this rescinding from the marital economic dependence furthers her just retrieved autonomy thanks to her new method of supporting herself. Thereupon, the importance of women exercising a career as a method of self-fulfilment is implicit in both stories. Inactivity drives women to an insane state upon the refusal to realise themselves through an occupation, whereas relinquishing one's career as a musician in order to live a leisure life of passivity leads one to a symbolic death as an object.

The sequence of prohibition and subsequent violation of said forbiddance, of writing and of disobedience, acts as a reminder of a female indispensable flee from patriarchal definition towards a gynocritic conceptualization of the female experience as self-defining.

Conclusion

Carter and Gilman's depiction of the struggling heroine in their passage towards self-discovery and self-expression, presents the collision of two women whose grappling with their assigned subservient role leads them to avow their yearning for a voice and choice on their own.

In their opening of a female space that encompasses sexuality, desire and voice; they appropriate elements of Gothic fiction, with the help of feminist discourse and parody, to shatter conventional representations of women. The satiric elements portrayed in Gilman's heroine's sarcastic viewing of her husband along with her subversive act of writing, and the inherent parodic nature of Carter's retelling through subverted fairy tale elements, dwell upon the sexist ideologies reigning over motherhood and marriage. This places both heroines as self-critical and active subjects of their very own story as they realise their non-equal position in the constraining marital relationship.

Their emancipation from the bearing of male print is consolidated in each of the stories' endings where their transfiguration into subjects is completed. Gilman's protagonist's final madness acts as the metaphorical enactment of her long-suppressed feelings of alienation concerning her "feminine roles", and of isolation in her confinement to passivity. In the case of Carter's heroine, her apprehension towards her still unknown husband and her entrapment in a looming castle, ignites a curiosity within herself not only about the uncrossable room, but about her newly discovered sexuality and the "unguessable country" of marriage. Madness and curiosity act respectively as the key that unlocks the door to self-knowledge. The first one is a willing decision on the part of the narrator in her refusal to accept an everlasting patriarchal silencing of her voice in a long-term marriage. The second one is a necessary step in the rite of passage of a young woman into womanhood's search for self-knowledge and self-definition outside of male boundaries.

The subversive character of the stories' endings lies on the heroines' deconstruction of their own role within the household and the flee from the patriarchal tale settled for them. In both stories, the presence of sorority is proffered, unfortunately, this remains utopic in Gilman's case. Her narrator's violence towards the paper serves as the externalisation of her internalised rage. In the releasing of said emotions, she cooperates with her *doppelganger*, "a

woman trapped behind the wallpaper" that she wishes to liberate, ergo, this woman is the projection she does on the paper-ripping act of her desire to free herself from bondage. However, this female world of mutual assistance is circumscribed to the imaginary realm of the paper, since in her reality, women are completely alienated from one another. Jennie is an accomplice of her brother's rigid oppression of her sister-in-law and the narrator's sister and mother do not involve in her recovery process assuming John's method's adequateness. Contrarily, in Carter's tale, the quixotic aspiration of female solidarity is finally attained through the restoration of the traditional mother-daughter severed bond, which enables the heroine to save her life eventually.

These representations of female sabotage and support respectively, condemns women's complicity in their assistance to structures that oppress other women as well as themselves, and favours the determination of one's subject position far from patriarchy's objectification through a recomforting female bonding.

With all of these shifts in the female portrayal, the occupations of both heroines as a writer and pianist reinforces the importance of women exerting a career outside the household in order to achieve economic independence and the opportunity to define themselves through it. Moreover, the wide-opening experiences they undergo through marriage raise the question of the sexual double standard stigma, in which both heroines' violation of sex-role expectations of feminine proprietry and sexual constraint, stand as a freeway towards a new space for female behaviour and sexuality.

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