Hysteria in Late Victorian Literature: The Portrayal of Women's Mental Disorders as a Means of Liberation and Oppression from the Cult of True Womanhood

By: Kerri A. Barron



A Senior Comprehensive Project in English
Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree
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I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.

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Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, the United States began to move from the Victorian way of life into a period of industrialization and expansion. This period change that occurred was coined by Mark Twain as the Gilded Age. In a time of great economic growth, which seemed beneficial for all, there were still a number of underlying social problems facing the country. During this time, the United States faced a period of change and recovery in response to the Civil War, while still practicing the more traditional values of the Victorian era (Link 98). The Victorian ideals emphasized a rigid societal structure that involved specific expected behaviors from both men and women. Men and women were each held to their own respective spheres; the man belonged in the workplace, where the woman belonged at home. However, these traditional ideals were challenged in the later 19th century by the industrialization of America. Vast expansion was taking placing within the economic sphere, which required more of the nation to work productively (Bauer 3). Simultaneously, new laws were being put into place as a result of the Civil War. As legislation was being passed to give African American men the right to vote, women became upset that they were not being recognized as equals as well, driving more women question their assigned roles in society and in the business world. Paired with women moving into the workplace, the "Woman Question," appeared, which was the confusion surrounding women's place in society following a time of complete restriction from the male domain (3).

This created a clash between the ideals of the Victorian "True Woman" and the Gilded Age's "New Woman." The Cult of True Womanhood was comprised of the virtues of purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 52). These were important tenets for all women to follow, especially those women of the middle to upper class who were involved in society. This idea began long before the Victorian era, however. To be womanly was considered to be her

duty, which girls were taught from a young age. Women were accustomed to having to simply deal with their mental anguish and internal struggle against the seemingly easy natural path that all women's lives took. No matter the influence that it had on them, women were believed to be the agent that held the home together, making it a hospitable environment for both their husbands and children. Under a patriarchal code of morals and duties, the idea that women were deemed mentally incapable of handling the type of intellectual stimulation that men were able to handle was commonplace. Women were thought to be physiologically other than men, therefore it was safest for them to be confined to the domestic sphere, as not to overtax their brains.

The overuse of the brain became of high interest by physicians in the Victorian era. During this time, the science behind mental disorders was becoming a major field in medicine, which was bolstered by the cultural fascination of mental illness. The most commonly diagnosed mental illness among women at this time was hysteria, which was, in essence, an umbrella term for any sort of nervousness that caused a physical or psychological response. Hysteria had always been a disease that was ever-present among women, but never truly understood or defined. The resurgence of the diagnoses of hysteria occurred in the early to mid 19th century as a result of the cultural influences surrounding the disease, which included the increase in the study of mental health and the changing role of women in society, as well as the cultural debates occurring surrounding the definition of insanity. This then sparked the discussion of the causes and suggested treatment surrounding mental illness in the Victorian era, specifically regarding women's illnesses.

Hysteria became a defining disease for women. It was a reflection of how much more vulnerable women were to disease, and therefore unfit to stray from their designated roles. It became the reasoning behind physicians, such as S. Weir Mitchell, to advocate for the

continuation of their fulfillment of the True Woman (Micale 39). By asserting that women are too weak to mentally and physically handle the type of lifestyle that men were capable of, whether that be receiving a higher education, holding a career, or through physical exertion, the patriarchal structure of society remained, since nobody dared to challenge what these well-known physicians were stating. This resurgence of the diagnoses of hysteria became a reason behind why the male-dominated structure of society was the best way to proceed into the industrial era, since this sudden revival occurred right when women's traditional roles were put into jeopardy (Bauer 5).

Throughout history, there have been varying opinions as to what was the cause of hysteria. Some claimed that the disease was linked to female sexuality, a result of having either too much of a desire for sex, or not enough, an idea founded in Ancient Greece by philosophers Melampus and Hippocrates. Some said that hysteria was a cry for attention, or an attempt to be noticed amongst family members, in order to receive the same attention that males received, a hypochondrial attitude believed during the Middle Ages. Others said that the female brain was much more prone to the over-taxation of the mind through school, work, or other engagements that required more critical thinking, such as Charcot and Mitchell of the Victorian era. This was the common thought during the 19th century (Micale 179-200). Women were believed to be more susceptible to mental disorders, according to the leading physicians of the period, because their brains were not designed to comprehend as much as their male counterparts. These mental disorders, though they varied in symptoms and potential causes, were mostly classified as cases of neurasthenia, which was a loose term referring to fatigue, headaches, and instability caused by an emotional disturbance. For female patients suffering from neurasthenia, the illness was categorized as hysteria. Hysteria was not necessarily defined by physical symptoms, but rather

the mindset that accompanied common physical symptoms. Physical symptoms often lead to the diagnosis of other ailments, but when these symptoms were matched with the nervous mindset, it was believed to be because the woman's mental state was taking affect on the rest of her physical well being (Micale 124).

Victorian physicians experimented with a number of cures for the hysterical woman on an international scale. The 19th century marked the rise of the mental asylum, where a number of treatments were tested, such as electroshock therapy, doctor-induced orgasms, massage, and isolation from strenuous activity (Micale 120-123). Dr. Mitchell, a prominent American physician, writer, and philosopher, tested a combination of treatments, which became known as the rest cure. This involved isolation of the patient and minimal intellectual activity, such as reading and writing. His reasoning behind his cure was in correlation with the cultural ideals regarding women of the time. He believed in the importance of women remaining in the domestic sphere, in order to raise healthy children and to take care of their husbands. He did not think that women were cut out to do the same work as men, and cautioned against this overzealous type of woman.

Mitchell's assertions were not only a diagnosis and a treatment, but rather a reflection of the opinion of a patriarchal society. During this time of change, the dominant role of men in society was being threatened by the upheaval of social structures that had been around for ages. In order to justify why women should remain in their respective sphere rather than intrude on the male sphere, there needed to be solid reasoning behind their assertion (Bauer 4). Physicians at the time provided this reason. Mitchell's cure was both an explanation as to why women were so susceptible to mental illness, but also the solution to halt the changes that would disrupt the entire cultural sphere surrounding sex and gender. By stating that women were making

themselves sick by not embracing the Cult of True Womanhood, he provided reasoning as to why this attempted flip of the patriarchal structure that dominated social and cultural norms was dangerous and selfish of women. S. Weir Mitchell was a mouthpiece for those who did not think it was right for women to venture outside of the domestic sphere, which was influential during a time of such vast change.

However, not everyone was in agreement with Mitchell's practices and opinions. Upon being treated with the rest cure by Mitchell in 1887 for hysteria, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a writer, wrote her rebuttal of the cure, the restrictions being placed on women, and hysteria as a disease. Gilman, who had married and bore a daughter, found herself unhappy with the life that she had thought all women wanted. Gilman was an advocate for women to extend themselves outside of the home in order to pursue their interests, and encouraged women to question if a society dominated by men had the best interests of women at heart. Gilman considered herself to be an intellectual, and felt as though the restrictions put on her by Mitchell's cure caused her more insanity than rest. Gilman was raised by her single mother after her father passed away, and felt the need from a young age to be educated enough to be able to support herself in a career if need be. She felt as though all women should have the ability to be independent from men. This contrasted the male opinion of the time, and entirely went against what Mitchell believed and disseminated to be true.

The relationship between S. Weir Mitchell and Charlotte Perkins Gilman is extremely unique. Not only are their respective literary works in contrasting conversation with one another, but also their experience with one another transcends those written pages into reality. Gilman, Mitchell's patient, was highly expressive and sought to publish her works not only for recognition as an author, but also to provide the feminine insight that seemed to be lacking in

publications of the time. Though Gilman never considered herself a feminist, she promoted the participation of women in areas of education and intellect. This is in contrast to Mitchell's viewpoint, which discouraged women from entering the intellectual sphere. Mitchell takes on the more classic Victorian view, as described by Carol Smith-Rosenberg: "Women were sharply discouraged from expressing competitive inclinations or asserting mastery in such 'masculine' areas as physical skill, strength, and courage, or in academic, scientific, or commercial pursuits" (212). These masculine traits were not attractive in a woman, nor conducive to the rest of society. Women could not have both a career and continue to make the home a hospitable environment for their husbands and children through the lens of a patriarchal structure. Both of these figures were widely read, and their differing opinions were clashed with one another. One directed women, for the sake of their health, to remain in the positions where they were most comfortable, and the other urged women to realize their potential in their education and careers. One preached that there was a limit on the capacity of knowledge of the female mind, and the other denied this assertion. Both opinions, however, were widely read and discussed, making each opinion influential in this period of change (Bauer 8-12).

Gilman married and had her child as she felt was her womanly duty, but found no satisfaction in this role, whereas Mitchell preached that if a woman kept busy within the house and reared her children in the correct fashion, she should not experience hysterical symptoms. Mitchell also exhibits the ambivalent attitude that men tended to display in response to hysterical women; generally, hysteria was ignored by the medical community because of the vagueness that surrounded the condition, as well as the fact that women were refusing to fulfill their womanly duties, and therefore defying the authority of man over woman (Smith-Rosenberg 202). Hysterical women were a threat to the pre-existing social structure, as they no longer sacrificed

themselves for the sake of their husbands and families (210). Gilman, however, expresses clearly through the narrative "The Yellow Wallpaper" that women's voices were not to be ignored, as it was neither beneficial to them or those surrounding them.

Perhaps the most important factor of Gilman's outspokenness about women's mental illness is the fact that the majority of the history surrounding hysteria was recorded by men who were writing about a female experience, which allowed people for the first time to view hysteria through the lens of the feminist tradition. My argument then becomes that Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" shed light on the womanly perspective of a disease that was classified as feminine, yet diagnosed, treated, and dictated by men. Mitchell's texts, then, reinforce the Victorian ideals that men projected on women in order to confine them to the domestic sphere. Gilman publicly refutes Mitchell's real life prognoses through her literary works in order to give women a voice for an illness that only pertained to their sex. Up until this point in time, the female hysteric had always been depicted in literature by men, who stigmatized the characters as burdensome and wild without giving insight to the mental and physical anguish that the actual female patient experienced (Micale 239). Gilman's narrative was bold in that sense, as she aimed to prove that women's illness was not to be so easily written off by men. Likewise, she sent the message that women did not need to be dependent on men in order to lead happy and successful lives, especially with the onset of the industrial era.

Gilman was an advocate of the New Woman, leaning away from the strict Victorian ideals, while Mitchell directed women back into the domestic sphere, firmly believing that they would become ill if they strayed. However, Mitchell also says that hysteria was a disease that plagued the home, and that it was dangerous. Gilman, like Mitchell, recognized hysterical symptoms as a challenge in day-to-day life, as she was not able to function normally while

experiencing the illness. This difference comes with how each views the escape of hysteria; Gilman believed that it was through doing fulfilling work, and Mitchell thought that it was by not extending oneself outside of the sphere that women knew. Gilman aimed to redefine the disease through the womanly lens. This would mean not viewing the mental illness as a disease plaguing men, society, and families, but rather like any other disease that needed to be cured. This differs form Mitchell's idea that hysteria was the product of women who tried to adapt masculine behaviors to feminine life. Both assertions are reflective of the period of upheaval that the country was facing in regards to gender roles. However, both ideas could not coexist under the same societal structure that was constantly shifting at the end of the 19th century, an era that was rapidly throwing away rigid Victorian ideals for the sprawling industriousness of the Gilded Age.

Chapter I:
S. Weir Mitchell's Rest Cure and the Cult of True Womanhood

In the late 19th century in Victorian America, the idea of women being more prone to hysteria was complimented by overthinking and overuse of the brain, according to physicians such as George Miller Beard and S. Weir Mitchell, who were considered to be experts on the subject. Many notable practicing physicians, including Mitchell and Beard, noted that there was a difference in this overtaxing of the brain between genders. Men experienced fatigue from physical exercise and the overuse of intellect. Women, however, were fatigued by even attempting to extend their mind into this intellectual realm that was considered to be masculine. Originally considered to be a disease that only plagued the upper class, by the mid-19th century hysteria became a condition that spanned both middle and upper class women. Hysteria started to appear, then, in what Mitchell referred to as the "business class," or those who were of the upper class and enjoyed the benefits of their status, but applied too much thought to their daily routines. American physicians had the belief that it was both the combination of too much work or not enough that caused neurasthenia, or fatigue that brought on a number of physical symptoms, which was closely related to hysterical symptoms. Perhaps they were wary because of the cases of hysteria during the 1870s and 1880s at France's clinic for psychological disorders, Salpêtrière, a vast majority of the women diagnosed were laboring household women, such as laundresses, gardeners, or seamstresses (Micale, 155). Since the disease was no longer an illness affecting only the upper class, Mitchell felt as though the disease was becoming much too common, which influenced his shift to apply his medical knowledge to curing hysteria. S. Weir Mitchell took

notice of the over-taxation that women were putting their bodies through, and chose to aim his medical and literary focus on the hysterical woman.

Mitchell, who developed the rest cure for women in order to cure hysteria, sided on the assertion that overworking oneself was the path to any kind of neurosis, such as depression, anxiety, or hypochondria – all symptoms of hysteria. Victorian hysteria in America and Great Britain were predicated on the idea that hysteria was a pathological by-product of the middle class way of life, meaning that the middle class was more likely to overwork themselves because they had to. The discrepancy between whether the disease was one of the upper or middle classes is largely based off of the writings of "society doctors," who mainly focused on upper class patients (Shorter 572). However, there is an overlap of the middle class symptoms of overwork in the upper class diagnoses.

Silas Weir Mitchell was one of the most well respected physicians in America during the resurgence of hysteria from the 1880s into the early 20th century. He combined a number of opinions on hysteria and neurasthenia, creating a unique perspective on the causes and cures of the disease. His medical background began, however, not with treating women, but treating soldiers during and after the Civil War who had experienced cases of trauma. During the war, Mitchell's focus was on "nerve injury," which was prescribed to a number of physical and emotional ills that provided no organic detection within the body, falling in line with his interest in maladies that were both physical and psychological in nature (Crosby 22). He also focused on cases of phantom limb during the war, stating that patients experiencing phantom limb or other trauma related injuries or illnesses were able to relive and actually feel the existence of former memories. He wrote several fictional stories of various treatments that he administered during the war, putting him in the spotlight as both a physician, as well as an author.

It was during the war that he developed a treatment for soldiers and veterans who were experiencing cases of emotional and physical distress from various suffering that battle brought on. Mitchell's cure for this was experimental, combining physicians' treatments with that of a therapist. This was the start of his rest cure, which was prescribed to those who did not take enough time away from their work, and therefore had weary mental capabilities due to stress. Mitchell believed that without mental agility, the body would literally begin to erode, affecting the mental and physical capabilities the body was able to perform (Crosby 47). After the war that this treatment began to be administered to both men and women who fell victim to the hectic lifestyle that the industrial revolution brought on. This was influenced by his ideas that he developed years earlier, that if the body was overworked to any capacity, that it would become traumatized, and the deconstruction would ensue.

I. *Wear and Tear* – A Gendered Guide to a Healthy Life

With this experience with mental and physical exhaustion, Mitchell began to do more research in the field of neurasthenics. Perhaps his most important text delivered after his days of Civil War medical writings and fictional war stories, however, was *Wear and Tear, or Hints for the Overworked,* written in 1873, which highlights the differences between the various stressors that men and women experience. The essay is essentially divided into two sections; one for diagnosing and treating male stress, and one for recognizing and treating female distress.

Mitchell's interest in the hysteric wasn't solely based on his previous medical studies, which becomes evident in his writings that were not meant for medical instruction, but rather for general public guidance. Since they were written for a general audience, Mitchell was able to better express his own opinions on the disease within the writing without it being considered

scientific fact, but still considered to be of merit. It was through these works, rather than through his actual practice, that his opinions on the entirety of the female sex is truly shown. It becomes apparent in these works that he does not condone straying from the domestic lifestyle for women solely for the benefit of their health. In his essays, Mitchell strays from discussing the symptoms of illness to discuss social matters. These matters include how women raise children, how much exercise they get per day, how much labor they do, and how long they focus on their studies per day. Though these matters seem to be social concerns, Mitchell stresses that the "Woman Question" was problematic for everyone. It is then that he ties together his social concerns with his medical findings, which give validation to his concerns about women venturing away from the role as the True Woman.

An example of this is Dr. Mitchell's *Wear and Tear*. Though originally written for a general audience, there is most definitely a divide within the work itself, specifying that the male and female minds are susceptible to dissimilar illnesses, and therefore experience different symptoms. The difference lies in the fact that men would be stressed, and therefore need a break from their stressors, whereas women would become distressed due to an overly-emotional reaction to being over-stimulated. Mitchell explains why he chose his title, first, stating:

> "Wear is a natural and legitimate result of lawful use, and is what we all have to put up with as the result of years of activity of brain and body. Tear is another matter: it comes of hard or evil usage of body or engine, of putting things to wrong purposes, using a chisel for a screw-driver, a penknife for a gimlet. Long strain, or the sudden demand of strength from weakness, causes tear. Wear comes of use; tear, of abuse" (Mitchell, 4).

It is here that we are able to see Mitchell's personal beliefs laced together with his medical insight. Wear is normal and expected, and easily dealt with. Tear, however, is an unwanted strain. He says that tear comes from the "sudden demand of strength," or the unwarranted use of power that isn't necessarily present. Later in the essay, he attributes tear to women who are pushing their minds to adapt to a level of intellect that they are not used to. Here, he uses his reputation as a prominent Victorian doctor to manipulate the opinion of his readers to believe that his thoughts of the matter of the "Woman Question" were based in medical fact and personal discovery. Because of his position both as a doctor and author, he has much more of an affect on his audience. He is better able to express his thoughts on women potentially upsetting the current social structure than if he were simply and author or doctor.

The difference between mental acuity and physical acuity between genders is also emphasized by Mitchell in *Wear and Tear*, stating, "I have found that most men, when in health, recognized no such thing as fatigue in mental action, or else I learned that what they took for this was merely that physical sense of being tired…" (Mitchell 16). And when men's brains were taxed, rather than being driven to madness, they were simply unwise, or filled of disgust. Often, when men are taxed mentally, Mitchell claims, they feel a sense of relief when that tension comes to an end. For men, the thoughts produced by the brain are much more clear when the nerves are not overtaxed. The risk that men run of overworking the brain and the body seem to be minimal. Mitchell mainly worries about middle and upper class men becoming unwise due to mental exhaustion brought on by working too much, or studying with too much intent for too long of hours. However, the stress that the women put on their mind and bodies have a very different effect on their physical being, and his prognosis varies almost entirely from that which he prescribes to males experiencing bodily exhaustion. Therefore, Mitchell's suggestion to men

experiencing the wear of the age of industrialization were advised to limit their study hours to let their mind rest, and to enjoy more hours of leisure in order to allow themselves physical rest.

This is in contrast to what Mitchell prescribes women, which is more rest from an already non-stressful daily routine. Men need physical rest, so that their muscles may not tire, so that they stay agile. However, he also states, “Cases of cerebral exhaustion in people who live wisely are rare. Eat regularly and exercise freely, and there is scarce a limit to the work you may get out of the thinking organs (Mitchell 8).” This relates back to the Cult of True Womanhood; women had designated tasks to worry about, whether it be within their home, family, or religion, and Mitchell believed that women had less resilience when it came to multitasking, or overworking the brain. The section pertaining to men’s health may come first in Mitchell’s essay, but the section about women’s health is much longer, giving the sense that he feels more strongly about the cases of stress that women experience.

Mitchell also makes it clear that there is a difference between “wear” and “tear.” Mitchell focuses little time in his essay on the men, and that is because he truly believes that men are the stronger sex. With that, they are more capable than women to overcome any mental or physical strife that may come from being overworked. Men, then, experience stress, which they are generally able to overcome, but just may provide a temporary haze within their minds, or temporary muscular pain. Men can sometimes become worn down, but they are better able to recover and return to their routine activities. Women, however, experience a much more serious and lasting form of wear and tear. Once subjected to stress, women become distressed, meaning that they are in extreme agony, suffering from anxiety, or pained. This, then, falls in lines with the mentality and physical symptoms that hysteria brought on. Mitchell, because of this fact that women are much more affected by the stressors of life, focuses his attention on the rest cure.

After watching soldiers and veterans experience these symptoms from stressful past situations, Mitchell then feels as though he is capable of applying this cure to women. This begins his almost complete focus on the overworked, specifically on hysterical women.

Mitchell's differing reasoning behind his diagnoses between genders is questionable. Though men and women perform different roles, he believes that women and men actually experience exhaustion differently. Once again, we are reminded that Mitchell, a doctor, considered men and women to differ in physicality, the male being the dominant member of the two. His constant reminder that women are not capable of the tasks that men are once again partially based in medicine, but mostly is his opinion. Mitchell advises that it is unwise for anyone to believe otherwise. He recurrently discouraged women to exert any unnecessary energy, especially if it wasn't towards their purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. He continually redirects women back to behaving as the True Woman would in order to be happy and healthy.

Though Mitchell may come across that he cares more for the female cases, the first paragraph discussing women's stress is of concern to the public because it will affect the men surrounding the ill woman. He claims that, "If the mothers of a people are sickly and weak, the sad inheritance falls upon their offspring, and this is why I must deal first, briefly, with the health of our girls, because it is here, as the doctor well knows, that the trouble begins (Mitchell 134)." The concern then becomes that weak mothers will foster weak children, and generations will be impacted by the inability of a woman to provide enough attention to her role as a woman, especially when it comes to childrearing. He worries about the girls' futures as mothers and wives, and that "these self-made invalids can make a household wretched (Mitchell 136)." He compares women who suffer from wear and tear to vampires, who suck the blood of those

healthy around them, which “destroys generations (136).” With men, Mitchell was much more understanding of the levels of stress that came with day to day life; work, whether it be manual or physical, caused tension, but men were more capable of handling their stress, as they had to as part of their role in society. Women had much more to worry about, though, as they were responsible for rearing the next generation. Women also had to be cared for by men, so if the women were behaving as this negative vacuum of health to those around them, the men would in turn be affected, as well as the rest of their family. If a woman was weighing down her family with her illness, her husband had to spend energy and time to get her back into good health, when his time could be more productive to society if it was spent elsewhere. Women suffering from hysterical symptoms, then, became a hindrance on the productivity and progress of society.

With the industrialization of the United States happening concurrently with the “Woman Question,” how women would interact with this newfound progressiveness became apart of that question. As stated above, it is obvious that Mitchell did not see women aiding in the industrialization process alongside men. If women switched their focus away from her womanly responsibilities of homemaking and child rearing, then they lost focus, which put the rest of the family at risk. Mitchell presents this as a dangerous concept. If women allowed themselves to stray from their responsibilities within the home in order to join in with the men in order to expand the productivity of the country, their full attention could not be paid to the home. This, according to his projections, would actually decrease productivity. Since women were not cut out to do the same jobs as men, as Mitchell so clearly states in *Wear and Tear,* they were more likely to become ill with hysterical tendencies, since their minds and bodies were not equipped to handle the same wear that men’s could. Once a woman became hysteric, she took away from her husband’s productivity, since his attention could no longer be on his work, but rather on her.

This dates back to ideas surrounding hysteria since the conceptualization of it not only as a mental disorder, but a social disorder. According to Micale, it was believed that women would develop "hysterical," hypochondriac symptoms in order to turn attention on themselves (66). This caused men to become distracted, and sometimes even ill themselves, therefore negatively affecting their productivity. Mitchell's idea is that when women attempt to be as productive as men, they are more likely to be a hindrance on themselves and others. In order to truly aid in industrialization, women were to nurture happy and healthy husbands and children, so that they may fulfill their roles.

In that same vein, Mitchell worries that women are over-extending themselves by studying for too long of hours during the time that the body is developing from a girl to a woman. Mitchell references Dr. E. A. Clarke's *Sex in Education*, written in 1873, which states that girls should be educated with "proper precautions," meaning that girls should be educated only if their reproductive systems were taken into account and not harmed by too much instruction (137). This is a major concern for Mitchell. At this time, it was still believed that women were less capable of acquiring and understanding scholastic learning, as their natural instinct was that women belonged in the domestic sphere. It was the thought of several physicians that girls should be educated on the body, but not in scholastic knowledge, since their role was to reproduce. Mitchell thought that once girls started to become women, they needed to begin to move their attention away from scholastic learning to focus on their future roles as child bearers:

> "Not much unlike the boy in childhood, there comes a time when in the rapid evolution of puberty the girl becomes for a while more than the equal of the lad, and, owing to her conscientiousness, his moral superior, but at this era of her life

> she is weighted by periodical disabilities which become needlessly hard to consider in a school meant to be both home and school for both sexes. Finally, there comes a time when the matured man certainly surpasses the woman in persistent energy and capacity for unbroken brain-work. If then she matches herself against him, it will be, with some exceptions, at bitter cost" (139).

Where men craved intellectual stimulation and success, women were supposed to desire more maternal factors, and to be gentle beings. If the feminine needs weren't met, they were almost guaranteed to develop breakdowns, weak sensory organs, headaches, and neuralgia (140). Here, we once again see Mitchell specifying the female sex as "other" than the male as soon as they reach puberty. It is from that point on that girls and boys need to be separately educated, since scholastic learning becomes of little use to girls. He worried that if women overuse their brains, that it was "dangerous to health and to every probability of future womanly usefulness " (137). Essentially, women were useless if they abandoned their womanly roles in exchange for the education that males received. He cautioned against overtasking women's minds and bodies for fear that they may not be able to do their womanly function of reproducing, which is the "bitter cost" that he refers to. Women's brains weren't viewed as useful to society as their ability to bear children was. This also suggests that unless women reproduce, their lives will not hold meaning, once again reaffirming the role of women in the household. To avoid becoming useless to society, Mitchell says that girls should be limited in the hours that they study per day, only about four days a week, and only until the age of 18, when their focus should shift to educating themselves on how to run a household and rear children fit for the public sphere.

Also interesting to note is the use of the word "evil" in S. Weir Mitchell's essay. The word appears nearly 20 times throughout, almost always referring to the way that stress

manifests itself within a person, which is detrimental to both mind and body. Evil in this case is the illness that invades the body. The common use of such a dramatic word was not so unusual for the Victorian era. It was still the mentality that mental illness was caused by straying from moral righteousness, or by drifting from religious thought and practice. As aforementioned, S. Weir Mitchell had the belief that maladies often had a spiritual component. Piety was one of the virtues of the True Woman. Purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity were the four main components that any True Woman held. If a woman violated any of these components, she made herself more susceptible to mental illness, or hysterical outbreaks, as she was letting in the evil, and exposing those around her to the wicked symptoms as well. By associating the qualities of the New Woman with evil tendencies, Mitchell could instill fear into women. In a culture that was still heavily dominated by religious beliefs, Mitchell hints at the selfishness and sinful behavior of the working or educated. As Welter explains in her article on the Cult of True Womanhood, “If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic. It was a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American women had—to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand” (Welter 152). The tenets of the Cult of the True Woman was sacred, and those who violated those tenets, as Mitchell suggests, wished evil upon themselves, their home, their God, and their country. Women’s strength was in their piety, not their wit. As Mrs. S.L. Dagg, a writer for women in 1840, says, “No sensible woman will suffer her intellectual pursuits to clash with her domestic duties. She should concentrate on religious work, which promotes these very duties” (Welter 153). Mitchell undoubtedly was familiar with the importance of religion in women’s lives, so

damning the behavior of the New Woman would be effective in encouraging women to stay within their domestic duties.

"As women, their lives are likely, nay certain, to bring them a variety of physical discomforts, and perhaps pain in its gravest forms. For man, pain is accidental, and depends much on the chances of life. Certainly, many men go through existence here with but little pain. With women it is incidental, and a far more probable possibility" (Mitchell 6-13,155-120). Here, Mitchell recognizes the ease that accompanies the male existence, and the difficulties that automatically come with life as a woman. To stray from this role of self-sacrifice was considered unwise, though. Throughout *Wear and Tear*, Mitchell continually expresses that women were more likely to face hardship if they did not act as the True Woman. Women's lives were hard enough as it was, and Mitchell asserts that taking on behaviors that were considered masculine would only cause more suffering, and this is what brought about the hysteria in patients that he encountered in day-to-day life. Mitchell, then, threatened that women were only making their lives harder by attempting to adopt traits of the New Woman. Mitchell, as influential as he was, expressed the opinions of many men who felt as though the progressive woman would cause an upheaval not only of the patriarchal structure of society, but also cause a wave of instability due to mental illness to sweep the nation.

II. *Fat and Blood*—The Beginnings of the Rest Cure

Six years after *Wear and Tear* was released, S. Weir Mitchell released *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them* in 1877. This was the first publication in which not only his ideas and opinions towards women are expressed, but the rest cure, a 12 week treatment for hysteria, was described in detail as a cure to mental illness. This was read broadly by the public, and his

practice experienced tremendous growth after its publication. *Fat and Blood* recounts the stories of his first breakthrough cases with the rest cure by telling the stories of women, all patients who had tried numerous cures in attempt to heal her mental state, which was described as nervousness of the overworked brain, immense weight loss, the stop of her menstruation, extreme tiredness, and joint pain (Horowitz 125-126).

The work itself if divided into seven chapters, including “Seclusion,” “Rest,” “Massage,” and “Electricity,” all of which became critical components for the rest cure. Before these chapters, Mitchell discusses the dangers of becoming idle and overweight, but such is not an integral part of the rest cure. In “Seclusion,” he explains that women who are suffering from this particular mental illness are often not free from the influence of their habitual surroundings, making it difficult to treat these women in their own homes, or at least while surrounded by their normal ritual for day-to-day life. He states that, “It is needful to disentangle them from the meshes of old habits and to remove them from contact with those who have been the willing slaves of their caprices” (Mitchell, 36). He remarks that he has tried to allow women to remain in their homes, but that the treatment was unsuccessful. Mitchell believes that separation and seclusion of the invalid woman is necessary both for the recovery of the patient, as well as aids her family to return to a normal state. He describes the behaviors of hysterical patients as a “cherished habit” (37), suggesting that, although the women are sick, they may also enjoy being sick, because then they have desired attention, as well as some type of control over the people in their household as the central figure. However, this attention is not healthy in the eyes of Mitchell, and those affected, both patient and her support, need a break from the routine.

Mitchell, as he said in *Wear and Tear,* reiterates that, “A hysterical girl is a vampire who sucks the blood of healthy people about her,” and, “I may add that pretty surely where there is

one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women" (37). His repetition of the assertion that hysterical women are toxic to those surrounding them verifies his first tenet of the rest cure, which is the removal of the woman from her environment. Isolation becomes a key component to curing the hysterical woman. Once again, Mitchell remarks on the hysterical woman as a leech to those around her, falling in line with the male depiction of the stigma surrounding hysteria throughout literary history. She was attention seeking and toxic to those close to her. Therefore, Mitchell's solution is to remove the hysteric from those who would give her that desired attention, meanwhile removing the risk that her craziness will not begin to influence her husband or children. He now is also worried about the disease passing from woman to woman. Since the hysterical woman halted productivity, interrupted normalcy, and compromised morality, as previously discussed in *Wear and Tear*. Mitchell's solution was to remove her from her usual environment so that those surrounding her may return to their usual routines, so as not to interfere with the industriousness of daily life.

The following chapter entitled "Rest," focuses on two differing opinions held by Mitchell. The first, he describes, are the women who mimic the symptoms of fatigue. He says that this type of rest is indulgent, and that these women exhibit no other true symptoms of mental illness. He says that this type of rest spoils the nervous system, as well as influences the next generation by being to too yielding and to dwell on every little pain that they experience (Mitchell 40). He says that these are women who make excuses for being on the sofa or bed, and develop aches from being so idle. This is unhealthy, according to Weir Mitchell, and not the proper way that rest should be applied.

By being worried with the way that fatigue accompanies hysteria influences the patient, and therefore those around her, it seems as though Mitchell is genuinely concerned about the

outcome of industrialization. He realizes that if the following generation were to adopt this lazy lifestyle, the positive economic and manufacturing growth that was taking place in the United States would be negatively impacted. Mitchell realizes the need for hard working individuals in order to sustain the evolution that the Golden Age ushered in. He aims to avoid this lackadaisical attitude being passed onto the next generation, which is his reasoning behind condemning the hysterical woman who doesn't rise off the couch. Though Mitchell typically is fighting against the modernization of societal roles, here he at least acknowledges the need for strong-willed individuals to continue the work that was taking place as a result of industrialization. Instead of protecting society from the fall of the patriarchy, he is urging people not to adopt an apathetic attitude that would halt progress, using the bed-ridden hysterical woman as his example.

In contrast, the other type of woman that needs bed rest is the woman who views it as a "rather bitter medicine" (43). These are the women who don't want to stay in bed for extensive hours daily, but would rather "sew a little and read a little, and be interesting and excite sympathy" (43). However, these are the women, he claims, who also don't fight the prescribed treatment. They seek to get well, and to eventually rise from the bed. Mitchell says that, "The man who resolves to send any nervous woman to bed must be quite sure that she will obey him when the time comes for her to get up" (43). There was a process to the rest cure that Mitchell lays out in this chapter. He says that first, he does not permit the patient to sit up, sew, write or read for a period, only allowing the patient to take action to brush their teeth, even sometimes forbidding them to roll over. This period could be a day, but he also adds that it could be four to five weeks. He says that he arranges for the women to answer the "calls of nature" while lying down or close to, as well as bathed by nurses. After a few days, she is read to for one to three hours, visited by the doctor, and brought food. She is also massaged in order to engage the

muscles, and also undergoes very minimal electric therapy to stimulate the muscles slightly. There is also a moral medication portion, where the doctor directs the thoughts of his patients to their lapses in their womanly duties, and the selfishness of the invalid life (45).

Mitchell believed that those patients who took an active understanding of their illness were more likely to be cured of it. Since he thought that the one of the causes of hysteria was overextending oneself in the masculine realm and deserting one's womanly duties, he felt as though part of curing his patients was helping them realize the error of their ways. Once again, hysteria is characterized as a selfish disorder, which implies that women have a choice whether to behave as such. To Weir Mitchell, women who admitted that they had done wrong against their womanly ways were more likely to be cured of hysteria, since he believed that their choices to act out was a contributing cause of the disease itself.

This treatment is reflective of the culture of the Victorian era; men held the positions of power in society which dictated almost all aspects of life, including the care of women's own bodies. Because men were believed to have a greater capacity for knowledge, it was considered unwise to go against the advisories of professionals, especially as a woman. The degree to which men and women differed is expressed here with Mitchell. He truly believed that men and women had different blood, which influenced their threshold of pain (Horowitz 127). In fact, men who were experiencing similar symptoms of hysterical women were prescribed the "camp cure," a treatment similar to the rest cure in that it was mindful moderation of rest, exercise, mental stimulation, and a controlled diet, but the rest cure for women was far more invasive and stricter that the camp cure. Mitchell also emphasizes the importance of women obeying the men involved in the ousting of their disease (Horowitz 126-128). Regardless of the fact that women were responsible for maintaining an entire household and raising her children, they were still not

considered responsible enough by men to be able to determine what is best for them. This demonstrates just how dominant men were over women. They defied femininity and sanity if they opposed the men who gave them commands, simply because men were thought to have a greater capacity for knowledge, and therefore knew what was best.

III. *Doctor and Patient* –The Demands of a Concerned Physician

In 1887, a decade after the rest cure was publicized in *Fat and Blood,* Weir Mitchell published his book *Doctor and Patient,* which he describes as his address on the relationship between the female patient and the doctor, as told to the masses. He takes a cautionary tone when saying that this text is not to be viewed as medical instruction, but rather observatory of his findings and experiences in the medical field, stating that if people know how to recognize signs of ill-health, they can prevent the illness before it becomes uncontrollable. However, in the same vein of *Wear and Tear,* there is a hint of spirituality within Mitchell's text. He says he almost called his collection of essays sermons, as their subject matter is very serious and involve the marring or making of human character, which is gravely important (Mitchell 6). His mission in *Doctor and Patient* is similar also to *Wear and Tear,* but presented much more seriously. Again, though he describes the book more as a sermon than a medicinal guide, he bases he assertions about women in biological fact. However, in this publication, instead of warning against what will cause hysteria in women, he takes a much more aggressive and encompassing approach towards women's mental illness.

Beyond stating the intention of *Doctor and Patient,* Mitchell uses the introduction of the text to express his own views of women in regards to their illnesses, mental and physical capabilities, and behavioral tendencies. He remarks several times on the failures that women tell

him of that they take responsibility for, which undoubtedly influences their mental state. He says that, “Physicians are often told the long, sad tales of a whole life, its far-away mistakes, its failures, and its faults” (Mitchell 10). He goes onto say that cases of breakdowns and nervous disasters are often caused by the past of the woman, as she is unstable emotionally. This brings about the tendency of women to “morally warp” when nervously ill (11). Women were prone to sickness because of their feeble emotional states, as they were perceived as physiologically different from men, who were more apt to deal with nervousness, as Mitchell writes previously in *Wear and Tear*. He says that, “[…]The man who does not know sick women does not know women,” essentially saying that in most cases, sickness is an integral part of the woman as a living being(10). Weir Mitchell then says that mental illness is, for women, part of their normal physiological lives (13).

As previously stated, Dr. Mitchell’s former approaches towards hysteria seemed to be cautionary tales or advice that would promote the avoidance of hysterical tendencies, or remarks on his successful findings that either helped prevent or cure the disease. In *Doctor and Patient*, however, he seems to imply that the pain that he once said all women will endure for their lifetimes will most likely result in nervousness or mental disorder. He is almost suggesting that mental illness is innate among women because of their weakness. His texts go from preaching ways to avoid hysteria, to essentially stating that nervous states are a part of the womanly experience.

These ideas continue on in this compilation of essays. Mitchell’s first essay in the collection is entitled “Physician,” in which he focuses on the experience of the doctor in relation to the patient. He begins by stressing the importance of being knowledgeable about other medical research, taking special focus on the work of a Dr. Henry Morley of Cardan, who

implemented a strict regiment with his patient, similar to Mitchell's rest cure. Mitchell's careful attention to the work of other physicians using what seemed to be effective cures that were strict in nature and focused on allowing the body to relax had an obvious influence on his development of a cure for women's mental illnesses. By publicizing similarly successful cures used by other physicians, Mitchell bolsters his reputation as one of the leading physicians in the treatment of hysteria. He seems to want to prove to his audience that his methods are tried and true, and that he is an authority in the area.

After proving to his audience that his treatments not only work, but are also being used by other doctors to successfully cure their patients, Mitchell then emphasizes the importance of the trust that forms between doctor and patient. The doctor should prove himself worthy of the patient's trust through sympathy, while the patient should trust the doctor's professional capabilities. He specifically calls attention to the relationship between physicians and their female patients, differentiating between the sexes by drawing attention to the assertion that women are almost always more problematic patients than men, saying that, "Wise women choose their doctors and trust them" (Mitchell 48). He describes two types of troublesome female patients that he has experienced, but no difficult male patients.

The first challenging female patient is the woman that asks too many questions. Mitchell says that when patients don't trust their physicians and need everything explained in great detail, it is an insult to the physician, as well as problematic for the patient because they require explanations for complexities that only one trained in the medical field would understand. Mitchell expresses, believed to make the patient's condition worse. He also suggests the fabrication of problems that do not actually exist, which the physician then has to refute (48). The second woman that he describes as being a difficult patient is the one whose standards are of

"unearthly altitude" (48). She doesn't trust the doctor whatsoever, and believes him to be deceiving her. He says that when a woman is constantly questioning why she is being treated the way that she is, that the physician cannot correctly do his job. He didn't believe that he needed to explain his practices to women who didn't need to understand them, and were better off to be kept in the dark about the treatment process until they were returned back to their healthful state, and the inquiries made by women were an "annoyance to men" (49). Mitchell's somewhat condescending tone is being used to once again assert his greater knowledge and power over his female patients, stating that they need to trust his intellect over their own, since he knows more. By describing his problematic patients, he is reiterating the idea that women were incapable of truly understanding of medical knowledge, as they weren't physiologically as capable as men in terms of intelligence. Therefore, women were supposed to trust men blindly, whether it be doctors or husbands, since they knew more, and to be better capable of deciding what was in her best interest.

The book seems takes a much more firm and superior approach towards women's mental illness than Weird Mitchell's previous works. It is obvious that Mitchell has become somewhat flustered. Perhaps the most telling part of *Doctor and Patient* comes from the introduction:

> "The woman's desire to be on a level of competition with man and to assume his duties is, I am sure, making mischief, for it is my belief that no length of generations of change in her education and modes of activity will ever really alter her characteristics. She is physiologically other than man. I am concerned with her now as she is, only desiring to help her in my small way to be in wiser and more healthful fashion what I believe her Maker meant her to be, and to teach her how not to be that with which her physiological construction and the strong

> ordeals of her sexual life threaten her as no contingencies of man's career threaten in like measure or like number the feeblest of the masculine sex." (9)

This is not only a reflection of Mitchell's biological beliefs, but also a comment on his social and cultural views in the late-Victorian era. He, like many other men during the time, did not understand nor condone the new idea of women in the workforce, or straying from what was viewed as not only their social role, but also their biological role. Other than rural women who worked in the agricultural industry, it was believed that there was no reason for women to step outside the home. This sentiment felt by many men is clearly expressed here by Mitchell. He, however, supplements this popular opinion with his medical take on the issue, saying that no increase in education will change the way that women are naturally. This sentiment is remarked on previously to a great extent in *Wear and Tear*, explaining that the feebleness of women's minds do not allow for the prospect of higher learning and the stress that comes with applying that acquired knowledge within the workplace. Therefore, as he states in his last assertion in the introduction, his concern lies with aiding women in understanding their physiological make-up in a healthy manner, which, bluntly said, out of the realm that was perceived to be masculine. He believes it is his job, as the physician, to help women realize that it is natural for women to live a more relaxed lifestyle, as opposed to men.

However, we are lead to question why Mitchell suddenly becomes so intent on delivering his message. Written over 15 years after *Wear and Tear*, his ideas in *Doctor and Patient* are the same regarding the consequences of women straying outside of the domestic sphere, but are presented as very serious pressing issues. Mitchell's tone is somewhat frustrated as he states that he is only trying to help women be of sound mind and body, but if they continued to stray from the True Woman in order to adopt behaviors in the masculine sphere, it would only lead to more

illness. Perhaps this is because more and more women were fleeing from their positions as wives, mothers, and homemakers in order to receive complete educations and start careers. Mitchell most likely felt like many men during the end of the Victorian era felt, which was that their masculine sphere was being infiltrated by women, who were not physically cut out to perform the way that men were. Therefore, it makes sense that Mitchell's approach becomes much more forceful after 15 years of observing and increasing number of women leave behind their traditional roles to act more like the New Woman. Mitchell obviously is fighting this change in *Doctor and Patient*, making public his reasoning in the fact that women were not able to perform physically or mentally on par with men, and that this type of overzealous attitude would only lead them to trouble.

It is important to keep in mind that *Doctor and Patient* was written at the height of Mitchell's success as a physician. He was well revered in the medical community both locally in his home in Philadelphia, as well as nationally and internationally in Europe. He was known for his charismatic presence, resourcefulness, and bedside manner. Also noted by patients and their close ones was his ability to listen to his patients. Though he always listened to his patients, he expresses that their concerns and stories were often burdensome to him. Mitchell also was a well-known poet and novelist, as well as the author of several medical reference books. His assertions that he made through his academic studies, as well as through his fictional works, became a way of life. He not only was writing for those that were providing treatment, or those that needed treatment, but for the masses, which he states at the beginning of *Doctor and Patient*.

Mitchell, then, not only becomes an expert in the medical realm of life, but also an expert in social understanding. His medical and scholarly publications are intertwined with his social and cultural beliefs. Any medical opinion also ties into Mitchell's social opinion, which makes

that social opinion more grounded in fact rather than individual thought on matters pertaining to sex and gender. Mitchell was in a better position to perpetuate his own beliefs on the masses than most, and people were eager to listen, as he was a respected member of both the medical and literary communities. Therefore, Mitchell became a strong influence when it came to understanding women and hysteria as an advocate for the continuation of the Cult of True Womanhood.

Chapter II:
Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the New Woman

At the height of his career success in the mid to late 1880s, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell was treating a great number of female patients suffering from nervousness and fatigue with his renown rest cure. One of these patients was Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a Providence-based wife, mother, and writer. After a long period of experiencing what would contemporarily be described as post-partum depression, she was referred to Mitchell's practice, and, in a desperate attempt to cure her mental illness, agreed to seek out his help in April of 1887. Leading up to this time in Gilman's life was a period of extreme highs and lows in her mental state. According to the journals of both Charlotte and her husband, Charles Walter Stetson, called Walter, her bouts of mental unrest and instability are able to be tracked through the years that they were together, as well as through her letter to Mitchell requesting his treatment, which details her mental state from the time she was a little girl until that April.

The accounts by both Charlotte and Walter are most telling after their marriage in 1884. Charlotte was a very independent woman, and believed from a young age that she should develop other skills outside of the home that would allow her to have a career, so that she may not be financially dependent on a man (Horowitz 71-72). From an early time, there was a struggle between Walter, an artist that valued a more traditional way of life, and Charlotte, a progressive woman. He didn't understand her need to be involved outside of the home, a common feeling of men at this time. Horowitz describes this notion in a biography *Wild Unrest*, saying that Walter felt as though, "It was in Charlotte's best interest to yield to him, that in humbling herself, she was fulfilling her true destiny" (68). Horowitz recognizes the lack of understanding that is displayed by Walter's journals, and determines that he wished for Charlotte

to eventually compromise, to become less ambitious, and to fulfill her womanly duties. As a free thinking artist, he tried to believe in the pure expression of womanhood, which meant that women were able to have freedom, but struggled with the concept once actually faced with a woman that desired such independence. He wrote in a journal, "It is sin – surely sin: anything that takes woman away from the beautifying and sanctifying of home and the bearing of children must be sin" (69). Much like Mitchell, Walter held a similar opinion of women's roles in the home. He was trying to accept Charlotte's independence, but was still faced with the challenge of going against what were considered the social norms for the two genders at the time. Instead of outwardly rejecting the progressive woman like Mitchell does, Walter embraced certain qualities of Charlotte that did not match those of the True Woman. He liked her intellect, but did not see the purpose in her attempts at a career. Similar to Mitchell, Walter describes women that stray from their role as homemakers and mothers as sinful, and in turn depicting the True Woman as saint-like for making the home a holy place for those who dwell in it.

Despite their differing views, Charlotte and Walter married, while still maintaining their respective journals. A week after their wedding, Charlotte notes that their first fight as a married couple, writing, "I suggest that he pay me for my services, and he much dislikes the idea. I am grieved at offending him, mutual misery. Bed and cry" (Gilman, 9 May 1884, Vol. 19). Her language here is strong and clear. After suggesting compensation for cooking and cleaning, a fight ensued between the two newlyweds. These were tasks that women were expected to complete as their womanly duty, not as a job that one is paid for or as a chore. Charlotte was suggesting to Walter that it was unfair not to be paid to maintain a home that both of them lived in. She was upset because she had failed her husband by failing to act as a True Woman would,

especially so soon after her marriage. Obviously, Charlotte recognizes her inability to fulfill these duties, and feels insecure about herself as a woman, and is greatly distraught by the matter.

This is the beginning of a downward trend in Charlotte's health, as well as the beginnings of her depressive state, which begins to occur after her wedding. Weddings were normally a joyous time for women, since not only were they then taken care of financially for life, they were finally able to execute the role that they had been destined to take on. However, Charlotte didn't necessarily want the responsibilities that came along with marriage. She had no affinity for housekeeping, and didn't necessarily have an interest in marriage to begin with. By Mitchell's standards, there was something already wrong with Gilman's mental state if she had no desire to behave as a woman. Though marriage was supposed to solve women's problems by giving them a role in society and financial security, it was married life that triggered Charlotte's nervous mental state and the physical ailments that came with it.

A month later, Charlotte started to experience digestive problems and fatigue, which she attributed to her delicate mental state. However, months later, she discovered that she was with child. This was worrisome for both Charlotte and Walter because the popular medical literature for pregnancy at the time, Naphey's *The Physical Life of Woman*, "The child could be deformed by the mother's habitual, long-continued mental conditions or by her violent and sudden emotion," and was necessary for the mother to remain cheerful and calm during her pregnancy (Horowitz 93). Mitchell has this same idea in *Wear and Tear*, where he worries about the mental state of the mother affecting her family. According to Charlotte's accounts, she struggled with this routinely, writing, "I feel unable to do anything and am mortal[l]y tired of doing nothing" (Gilman, 4 September 1884, Vol 19). As the year came to a close, Charlotte reported that she was in "ill health," whereas Walter reported that she was "happy, happy, happy!" (Horowitz, 93).

There is a definite discrepancy between the two accounts. Gilman's husband views her mental state much more positively than she does herself. Later in Gilman's life, she comments on the inability for men to understand the pain that women experience, and their refusal to listen to women and value what they had to say, even if it was in regard to their own physical or mental state. Walter determining that Gilman was fine simply based on how he interprets her demeanor is a perfect example of the ignorance that men demonstrated when it came to valuing women's thoughts and opinions. Though Gilman seemed to be sliding deeper into her depressive states, making it much more difficult for her to recover, Walter believed otherwise. Sense is made of these two different interpretations from her journal entry from January 1st of 1885:

> I am a happy wife. I bear a child. I have been far from well. I do not know that I am better in any way. Unless it be better to be wider in sensation and experience, and perhaps humbler. Ambition sleeps. I make no motion but just live.
>
> And I am Happy? Every day almost finds me saying so and truly. And yet – and yet… I will see what my life counts when I am old… I should not be afraid to die now; but should hate to leave my own happiness and cause fierce pain. Yes. I am happy.

This passage perfectly encapsulates what many women were feeling at this point in history. Gilman felt as though she had all she could want from life; a husband, and a child on the way. These were things that were typically associated with happiness for women. However, she gets no satisfaction from this. The idea that women would marry and be happy was something that was instilled in girls from a young age. However, Charlotte was not content. Because society had impressed upon girls that this was their calling and this is how they would find joy in their lives, she felt as though there was something wrong with her for not wanting that life for herself. She

says that she has lost her ambition and questions if this is all the life will offer her. This caused somewhat of an emotional chain reaction for Charlotte.

Gilman's response to her vague desire for fulfillment outside of the domestic sphere correlates with the general feeling of women at the turn of the century, wavering between strict social norms and the independence associated with industrialization (Bauer 3-5). This passage reflects the internal conflict that middle to upper class women were faced with: whether to perfect the home, or whether to expand their knowledge and experience in a realm that was not considered to be theirs to explore, let alone thrive. Gilman began to struggle internally with these questions before she was even married, and then was pregnant so soon after her marriage that she did not fully digest her new role as a wife and mother-to-be. The doubt and nervousness of her tone is evident in her journal entries that February: "Not well in the morning; so hysterical indeed that Walter decides to stay with me," and two days later, "Hot, cold, hot; restless, nervous, hysterical" (Gilman, 2-19 February 1885, Vol. 19). Charlotte hardly ever used the word "hysterical" to describe her condition, but uses it to describe one of her lowest points. Stuck in a role that she didn't want, Gilman still attempted to behave as a True Woman would, but became mentally unhinged in doing so.

Gilman gave birth to a daughter in March of 1885, and from May until August, there is a gap in her journal. Walter's journal informs us that during the summer, she had a serious depressive episode, writing that Charlotte "broke down entirely, and has been since – a nervous invalid requiring the utmost care and tender treatment, lest it should settle itself into an incurable mind disease… There have been violent hysterical symptoms, and long periods of taciturnity, melancholy and utter loss of the desire or power to will" (Stetson, 24 August 1885). Her husband's recognition of her "hysterical symptoms" is telling of the commonness of the disease,

or even the use of the term, if a man who was not medically trained deemed her exhaustion, apathy, and need for care. This required her mother to come and take over the care of the baby while Charlotte was ill, and eventually Walter sought help from his friend, Dr. Knight (Horowitz 97). Like Mitchell asserted, Charlotte hysteria incapacitated her, and made her unable to do her job as a mother and wife. The pressure that Charlotte faced to fulfill these roles were having a major impact on her. Because the Cult of True Womanhood was so rigid in its structure, it is no wonder that women who could not meet each aspect it or did not desire to attain it became mentally ill. Women were prone not only to criticism from others if they did not fall in line with this cult of personality, but internally grappled with the reasoning behind why they were not able to act as a proper woman should, or desire to behave femininely.

Her unstable condition lasted through the summer, but in late August, her motivation for living outside the domestic sphere was rekindled, much to the dismay of her husband. He believed these desires to be selfish and bad for Charlotte's health, stating, "The true Charlotte is in a dreadful mist – oh, for recovery soon! I can't bear it much longer… I myself too have grown nervous" (Stetson, 24 August 1885). This echoes the exact concern that S. Weir Mitchell expressed in *Wear and Tear* and *Doctor and Patient*. Characterized to be a selfish disease, women suffering from hysteria ran the risk of infecting the rest of their household with illness if they did not learn to cope. Stetson expresses that he has devoted much time and attention to Charlotte, and she only gets worse, yet still strives to be outside the place where she is supposed to feel the most comfortable. Now that Charlotte had both a husband and child, the concern of her health not only affected her, but her family. Mitchell's idea of the woman as a vampire who sucks the sanity out of the people around her is not unfounded, then, since real mean were feeling the effects of their wives hysteria. Though the disease wasn't contagious, the attention

that those suffering from mental disorders required of those responsible for taking care of them could be draining. Perhaps this is the "bloodsucking" effect that Mitchell and Walter both describe when dealing with women suffering from hysteria.

Charlotte felt this burden as well, writing about her worry of an impending divorce, and even wishing death upon herself (Horowitz 98). Divorce was still shameful during this time, since religion was still a very prevalent influence on society. After all, marriage was a sacrament in the church, and to break the vow of marriage was to break a vow with God. Since it was still considered holy matrimony, there was a sense of sinful guilt that Charlotte was most likely experiencing in her failing relationship. It was also a definite indicator that she could not behave as a True Woman would, and if she couldn't make her marriage work, it was probably her fault.

Her condition continued on in this manner for the next two years, having both high points and low points, but a consistent state of what would now be termed manic-depressive. Walter and Charlotte had a period of separation where she travelled to California, and eventually through Rhode Island. It was here that she wrote a poem entitled "The Answer" in 1886, which awarded her a subscription to the *Woman's Journal*, as well as a request for more works (Davis 91). The poem is a strongly opinionated piece that comments on marriage from the perspective of a woman:

> A maid was asked in marriage. Wise as fair,
> She gave her answer with deep thought and prayer,
>
> Expecting, in the holy name of wife,
> Great work, great pain, and greater joy, in life.
>
> She found such work as brainless slaves might do,
> By day and night, long labor, never through;
>
> Such pain – no language can her pain reveal;
> It had no limit but her power to feel;

> Helpless she died, with one despairing cry,—"I thought it good;
> How could I tell the lie?"
>
> And answered Nature, merciful and stern,
> I teach by killing; let the others learn.
>
> (Gilman, *Woman's Journal*, 313)

In this poem, Gilman compares the life of the homemaker that of a slave's life, that they are never done with their work, as it extends beyond any career's regular hours. The poem tells the story of many women: the expectation of a greater life after marriage, but in reality, this particular lifestyle is unfulfilling for them. She also suggests that women are somewhat tricked into marriage by being told that it is good, and not being told the reality of the situation. Through writing this poem, Charlotte voices the feelings that she, and many other women, felt about the structure of marriage in a patriarchal society. By commenting on the way that girls are raised to desire marriage and not aspire to be anything but a wife, she takes the stance that marriage is not what women expect it to be, and that it isn't necessarily their best option in life. She exposes the side of marriage that doesn't focus on the security it provides, but rather the stress that comes along with the realization that it isn't a dream-like scenario. This poem was not intended as solely a reflection of her private thoughts on marriage, since she published it in the *Woman's Journal*. This was Charlotte's warning for women who weren't married, and an extension of solidarity to the women who were married and felt trapped.

This feeling of restriction in her role did not subside. Upon her return to Providence, she began to backslide into a nervous state. Walter and Charlotte were in financial debt, so she began to write more in order to try to stabilize their income, a responsibility that was not hers to take on, and a task that was definitely not feminine. Charlotte was also still actively involved in suffrage rights, which to Walter, seemed like an unnecessary stressor. He writes, "Charlotte of

late has been so absorbed in the woman question – suffrage, other wrongs, that she has tired be dreadfully with it" (Stetson, 9 February 1887). Additionally, Charlotte became "unhinged" when her child became ill, which brought about mood swings, journaling that she was "getting back to the edge of insanity again" (Gilman, 9-20 March 1887, Vol. 20). She continued to write during this time, however. All of these aspects were viewed by Walter to be agents that brought on her insanity, rather than being done out of pure interest. This was the patriarchal view of the New Woman, who Charlotte began to entirely embody. The New Woman was easily demonized by those who were comfortable in the patriarchal norms of Victorian society because she threatened a longstanding structure where men were the workers, the voters, and the intellectuals. Charlotte, however, aimed to acquire these masculine qualities, which were view by her husband, and eventually her doctors, as the reason for her psychosis.

By April, Charlotte had decided that she might need to enter a sanitarium in order to restore herself back to health. It was a close family friend that suggested that she see S. Weir Mitchell, the popular Philadelphia physician for hysterical women. Presenting her case to Mitchell, she wrote an extensive letter to him detailing her condition, past and present, and its potential causes. She begins all the way with her grandparents to account for family history. She then tells how she "reached womanhood in perfect health," as many physicians believed that when a woman menstruates for the first time, they became completely vulnerable to their surroundings, Mitchell included. As previously discussed, Mitchell developed very strong feelings regarding the education of women once they began puberty. Clashing with Gilman's desire to continue to be educated throughout life, Mitchell thought girls should focus less on academia and more on their biological function once they reached puberty. She expresses her concern for hygiene, exercise, fresh air, and simple dress, and how she expelled corsets, tea,

coffee, late hours, and “all other known evils,” demonizing the same things Mitchell believs to cause mental illness. She emphasizes that she was well physically until she married Walter, but does not suggest that marriage is not for her. As for her mental health, Charlotte recounts that when she was young, she used to have imaginative dreams and fantasies that she allowed herself to think about, but after her mother told her that they were “dangerous and wrong,” she attempted not to think such outlandish things, but in doing so, her fantasies continued, but got somewhat darker. She then began to read science and philosophy, as well as developed her own theories, believing that “till will and reason were free to act, and mind and body were strong and willing servants.” Charlotte then tells Mitchell that she overworked these vessels for eight years because they were ready and willing, stating that she “never rested.” She then describes her courtship and marriage, using language such as “torture called courtship,” and that she became “weak enough to marry him,” expressing regret towards her marital status, but praising her husband for his loyalty to her. She closes the letter saying, “I am an artist of sufficient merit to earn an easy living when well. I am a writer, a poet, a philosopher… I can do some good work for the world if I live. I want to work, to help people, to do good” (Horowitz 112-115). This long, explanatory letter is essentially Gilman’s confessional, revealing the potential reasons that Mitchell would definitely target at the source of her issues. However, she ends with the statement that this was who she was, and if she were only to heal her mental state, she would be successful in the endeavors that she took part in. As a writer herself, she undoubtedly knew Mitchell’s highly publicized views, and still the help of a man who whole-heartedly believed that women should not desire aspects of life that strayed from purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. Regardless of this, Gilman was accepted by Mitchell, and began her treatment at a sanitarium outside of Philadelphia in May, which lasted one month.

Charlotte, unlike the usual patients of Mitchell who were either overworked men or the social housewife, was deemed "insane at times" by Mitchell, but Charlotte deemed Mitchell's work a "doubtful experiment" (Gilman, 7 May 1887, Vol. 20). Once she entered her month of treatment, not much is known, as she wasn't able to journal or write home to Walter. However, years later in 1913, Gilman published her commentary on Weir Mitchell's treatment in *Forerunner* magazine:

> He kept me a month. Found nothing the matter apparently! Sent me home with this prescription: "Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time. Lie down an hour after each meal. Have but two hours intellectual life a day. Never touch pen, brush, or pencil again as long as you live." I did it, that summer, and came to the edge of insanity (Gilman 121).

The contrast between what the two believed was best for Charlotte's health becomes evident when she looks at the issue in hindsight. Charlotte obviously didn't believe that the treatment did anything for her, and the advice that Mitchell gave her clashed with her own desires and opinions of life. She says that he "kept" her, as though she was a prisoner to the doctor. It also seems that Gilman believes that she was taken advantage of, because no source of her declining mental state was found if nothing was the matter with her. It becomes evident that Mitchell had no regard for Charlotte's preferences for the way that she wished to go about her life. After her long explanatory letter in which she explained that she wanted to continue her scholarly work, he still applied the same prescription to her as he would any other woman suffering from a mental disorder, regardless of her request. Mitchell's disregard for his female patients as individuals capable of making decisions in their own best interest is clearly demonstrated here. The

ignorance of Gilman's own wishes is presented later in her short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," where she demonstrates the negative effects that it has on women's condition.

Weir Mitchell's prescription to Gilman was the same that he had given in his publications, as well as his patients. His first piece of advice was to live a domestic life. As expected, Mitchell told Gilman to return to the sphere in which she was initially assigned, or her proper spot. This aligns with not only Mitchell's personal beliefs, but also the Cult of True Womanhood, where one of the tenets is domesticity. The Victorian era still marked a time where women were expected to keep the home through cooking, cleaning, and child rearing. Their concerns did not lie outside the house. Charlotte, however, never valued this type of work, and preferred to travel. Her problems began to worsen, actually, when she attempted to fulfill her expected role in the household. She got enjoyment from travelling, writing, and socializing, essentially refusing the domestic sphere entirely. Walter believed that she should be more domestic as well, which is noted numerous times in his journal. He thought that these other realms were influencing Charlotte negatively.

Mitchell's second suggestion is to keep her child with her at all times. Charlotte found herself incapable to behave maternally because of her mental state, which is clear through her and Walter's journal entries that tell of Charlotte's inability to care for her child because of the stress that it gave her. In fact, after her divorce from Walter in 1894, she relinquished custody of her daughter, Katherine, to Walter and his new wife (Bauer 6). It is believed now that Charlotte was most likely suffering from postpartum depression, which makes it difficult for mothers to be alone with their children. If this were actually her condition, then this portion Mitchell's "cure" would have worsened Charlotte's condition. Postpartum depression symptoms also align with

Charlotte's behavior, such as loss of energy, lack of interest in usual activities, anxiety, and a lack of connection with the world around her (Horowitz 101).

The last and most important component to Mitchell's prescription for Gilman concerns how much time she spends doing "intellectual" activity per day. Gilman was a progressive woman concerned with culture and the arts. From the time she was young, she valued her education so that she may not have to rely on a husband to take care of her. Even in her letter to Dr. Mitchell asking for his aid, she explains to him that she is a writer, poet, and philosopher, and good enough to earn a steady living from her work. She even states that she wants to work, that it would be her choice to. Despite Mitchell knowing that intellect was and crucial component in Gilman's life, he still wanted her to limit herself from the one thing that was somewhat constant in her polarized life. He prescribed her the same cure that he gave to socialite women. Perhaps, because Charlotte was such a different case than his usual hysterical patients, he believed that urging her to adjust to a more common lifestyle, more similar to women who did not strive to live outside the domestic sphere, that she would begin to behave more like the True Woman. This idea is supported by the last line of advice: to "never pick up the pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live." Mitchell clearly believed that it was not only Charlotte's intellect that was plaguing her mental health, but her utilization of that intellect in the form of art. We know this to be true from Mitchell's *Wear and Tear*. He expresses a decade earlier that he believes that women are spending too much time in school, and that their brains were not physiologically built to endure the same type of learning and engagement that men were. "As long as you live" is also a very strict and lasting phrase, suggesting that the root of Charlotte's illness lies within her active pursuit and written expression of her intellect. Because Gilman was such a challenge to Weir Mitchell from both a medical standpoint, being difficult to cure, and from a demographic

standpoint, being that she was an intellectual with a career, he gave her a strict outpatient agenda so that she may tame her wild thoughts and return to the home, where he believed women truly belonged. It becomes clear that Mitchell believed that Gilman's illness was sparked by her straying from the realm of domesticity, therefore, the success of his "cure" lies in whether or not Gilman would return to the home and accept that, as a woman, this was her designated spot. Mitchell did not think that any good could come out of women pursuing areas of interest that were considered to be masculine. By giving this prescription, he is confirming the continuation of the patriarchal structure by limiting the spheres that women were to be active in. As previously mentioned, he firmly declares that women simply do not have the capacity to handle the tasks that were determined to be of the masculine realm.

Her statement against Mitchell in 1913 was not the first time that Gilman publicly refuted his rest cure. In 1892, she wrote and published the not-so-subtle short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" for *New England Magazine*. In her autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, published after her death in 1935, she says, "The real purpose of the story was to reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and convince him of the error of his ways" (Gilman, 121). The story tells the tale of a woman diagnosed with hysteria, and then treated with the rest cure. Confined to a bedroom, the narrator progresses into insanity as her requests for what she feels she needs in order to recover are ignored by the male figures in the story. The story provides the unique situation where the narrator is married to a physician, who is the doctor that treats her hysteria. Eventually, the narrator becomes so out of touch with reality that her husband even threatens to send her to Weir Mitchell. This is a reflection of the clashes of opinion that Gilman faced with the male figures in her life, who provided opinions on her mental state that she did not agree with, much like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper." The story was deemed both

controversial and celebratory by critics, as it confronted issues of patriarchal control over women's lives, social roles, and duties at the end of the 19th century.

Defined in *Fat and Blood,* part of Mitchell's breakthrough rest cure was seclusion, which was the first step he took with his patients. Coincidentally, it is the first thing that the narrator comments on in relation to her treatment in "The Yellow Wallpaper." The contrast in what is best for the patient begins with the woman saying that she has been isolated, but sometimes thinks that she would benefit from "society and stimulus," but that her husband, John, says that it is the worst thing that she could do, but also that it "always makes her feel bad" (2). Not only is she confined to the house, but also is put in a room that she despises. The windows are barred, and she hates the busy pattern of the "smouldering unclean yellow" (3). The setting is prison-like to the point where she says, "I lie here on this great immovable bed – it is nailed down, I believe…" (8). The narrator is trapped in a room that she despises. She states. "It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now" (6). Despite repeatedly expressing her interest in socialization, John insists that she is in no state to see people and be stimulated by conversation, as that would overwork her mind. This idea falls right in line with Mitchell's assertions in *Fat and Blood* and *Wear and Tear,* that complete isolation was necessary in order for the cure to work, as the fragile mind of women affected by hysteria were much too vulnerable to be influenced.

The other major part of the Mitchell's cure was the rest portion. Rest, here, refers to not only plenty of sleep and bed rest, but also to a break from all things that may over-stimulate the patient. The narrator in the story is not only confined, she is confined to a room that used to be a

former gymnasium. She says of John, “He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction,” and to her, he says, “Your exercise depends on your strength” (3).

Like Charlotte did, the narrator keeps journals of her experience, but hides such from her husband because she is not supposed to be reading or writing while under treatment. The mind was not to be burdened, but also the women who were treated under the rest cure had no other outlet to express themselves. There was no conversation occurring between patients and those outside of their treatment, but also the conversation with oneself was halted during treatment, leaving the person with the mental illness entirely alone. This is what occurs in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Gilman comments on this methodology when the narrator’s only conversations are with the figures inside the wallpaper of her isolation room. She is not allowed to socialize or spend time outside of her room. Her own voice has been almost entirely diminished by her husband and physician dictating what is best for her. This is shown best by the line, “John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him” (4). This is Gilman’s commentary on the lack of ability that men possess to truly understand the nervous states of women because they will never be able to empathize with their thoughts. Whether those thoughts be that of anxiety, like the narrator’s, or Gilman’s desire to work, men will never know the suffering of women. The narrator saying that John rationally knows that there is no real reason for her to be upset is Gilman commenting on the ignorance that women suffering from hysteria face. So long as the woman is provided for, she has no valid reason to be suffering. Because there were not physical symptoms of illness, the mental states of mentally ill women became characterized as crazed dwellings on false realities.

Gilman becomes creative in her portrayal of the idea that women let their imagination get the better of them, which, according to Mitchell and other experts of the time, is a cause of

hysteria. The narrator of the story is left alone so frequently in the room that the wallpaper's pattern entrances her, and eventually begins to move and take on a life of its own. She even leaves to love the wallpaper, as it gives her occupies her attention while she is in the room. When she sees the paper move for the first time, she says that, "The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out" (10). She later describes the wallpaper as "bars," once again comparing the room to a prison. Later, it becomes clear what exactly she is seeing in the wallpaper when she says, "The front pattern does move – and no wonder! The woman hind shakes it! Something I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes I think only one, and she crawls around fast, and her drawling shakes all over" (15). The imagery of the woman behind bars in the hated yellow wallpaper mirrors the narrator's situation of being trapped in the room with bars. Both of the women are trapped and trying helplessly to escape. When several women appear in the wallpaper attempting to get out, Gilman takes the story from being a commentary on her experience with hysteria to the experience of all women suffering from hysteria, or even constraints put on them by the patriarchal structure of Victorian society. However, when the narrator begins to see the women outside of the wallpaper out her windows, she starts to consider ways to get outside of the house to join her, but cannot jump out the window because of the bars. The story ends with the narrator saying, "I've got out at last… And I pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (18). The ending is ambiguous, but one is lead to believe that she thought herself to be the woman in the wallpaper by the end of her stay in the house. She was trapped and had lost her mind, so she tore the wallpaper off the wall in order to free herself of her confinement in the room with the yellow wallpaper.

From the time the story starts, the narrator continuously remarks on her hatred for the yellow wallpaper in her bedroom. As the story unfolds, the narrator writes increasingly more

about how much she despises the wallpaper, telling of various times when she requested to her husband and doctor that the wallpaper be changed. “He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on. ‘You know this place is doing you good,’ he says…” (4). The refusal by John to change the wallpaper or to pick a different room is not only another example of the unwavering stance that physicians took with their female patients, but also of the control that they maintained over women. John also says that if he changes the wallpaper for her, she will then want everything else to change as well. Perhaps this is Gilman’s representation of the unwilling nature of men to accept the New Woman in fear of losing the True Woman. Instead of accepting one small change, the idea was ousted entirely.

Gilman’s story is an integration of not only her experience with mental illness as a patient, but also a testament of the experience of all other women suffering from a disease that had been classified as a feminine problem, but was treated by males. Mitchell and Gilman are worth comparing because they encompass the reasons why men were advocating for the True Woman to remain and why women were progressing towards the New Woman. Gilman accurately presents the side of the feminine progressives who were pushing against the patriarchal structure that restricted education and careers in exchange for motherhood and marriage, which did not suit all women. However, Mitchell countered this assertion with the fact that diagnoses of mental illnesses were rising in America, and that it was no coincidence that stress and nervousness was being brought on in women because they were mentally taxing themselves in ways that were unfamiliar in the feminine sphere. Both presented to the public through literature valid points against the True Woman and the New Woman.

Conclusion

In 1913, after much criticism and conversation following the release of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman published an article in *The Forerunner* entitled "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' " which answered many of the questions that surrounded the intent of her story and also explained some of her personal beliefs on hysteria. After the story was released, Perkins comments that a physician from Boston protested the story, saying that it instilled madness in anyone who read the story. Another physician form Kansas said that it was the best depiction of insanity that he had read. Gilman admits that she did suffer from continuous nervous breakdowns, and then states Mitchell's cure was to "live as domestic a life as far as possible." After this suggestion driving her to near madness, she says that going back to work and removing herself from the domestic sphere is what saved her from the brink of insanity:

> I cast the noted specialist's advice to the winds and went to work again – work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite – ultimately recovering some measure of power.
>
> Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote, "The Yellow Wallpaper," with its embellishments and additions, to carry out the ideal […] and sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad. He never acknowledged it (Gilman).

This is Gilman's defense of writing "The Yellow Wallpaper," as well as her nameless criticism of Mitchell's technique, the general opinion of a patriarchal society in regards to women, and the benefits that honest work can have on the female body instead of its negative effects, which was what was usually focused on by critics.

Gilman, then, stands as the voice that fights for the freedom from the restrictions placed on women in Victorian society near the end of the 19th century. Regardless of the change being ushered in with the industrial era, women were expected by men to remain in the same role they had been in for nearly all of history. The Victorian ideal of the True Woman, who held true to the tenets of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, began to be deconstructed and eventually impractical with industrialization. This lasting image of society's proper woman was beginning to be forgotten about in exchange for a new generation of women who sought education and careers instead of husbands and children. She is attempting to redefine the female hysteric, and women's mental disorders in general by offering one of the first narratives written by a woman and from the feminine perspective that discusses hysteria. Blame is not administered to the woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Though men are not named as the cause

Gilman was in full support of this movement, but internally, she, like many women, struggled with the pressure placed on her to act womanly. Though she desired to write and work, she married Walter, despite what she thought was in her best interest, because it was what society expected of women. She had a child, and found no fulfillment in being a mother. By forcing herself to embrace a lifestyle that she did not value, she developed hysterical symptoms.

Gilman actually developed hysterical symptoms for the exact opposite reasons that Dr. S. Weir Mitchell preached was causing women to contract mental illnesses so vastly. Mitchell was widely influential, and published several essays blaming women for bringing mental illness on themselves because of the selfish behavior they exhibited in attempts to infiltrate the masculine sphere in regards to education and employment. Mitchell believed that men and women were physiologically other than each other, and used this as his reasoning behind why women should remain in the home performing womanly duties, since they were mentally and physically unable

to perform the duties that were considered to be masculine. Justifying his opinion with biological reasoning within *Wear and Tear*, *Fat and Blood*, and *Doctor and Patient*, Mitchell's authoritative voice, along with the general social construct of the time, lead women to feel guilt and nervousness if they chose to extend themselves outside of the Cult of True Womanhood, or did not find fulfillment through remaining in the domestic sphere. Gilman blames the guilt placed on her for her psychosis, whereas Mitchell blamed her need to push herself outside of her designated feminine realm.

S. Weir Mitchell and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's texts and their ideas surrounding them are in contrasting conversation with one another. They provide for the reader both the male and female perspectives of the role of women and mental disorders at the cusp of the Victorian era and the Guided Age. Dr. Mitchell was a firm believer in the Cult of True Womanhood, deeming it dangerous for a woman's health, a threat to the structure of society, and sinful in nature as a means to ensure that women stay out of the masculine realm. Gilman argues against Mitchell's assertions that women are solely meant for the domestic sphere, using her own mental breakdown resulting in hysteria as her inspiration behind writing "The Yellow Wallpaper," which refutes Mitchell's practices and the general beliefs of late Victorian society in the 1880s. Mitchell uses his texts as a means of confinement of women to the current patriarchal structure of society, whereas Gilman uses her text as a means of liberation of women from the role of the True Woman in order to progress towards the New Woman.

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