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INTRODUCTION

The Pedagogical Imperative: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short narrative, "The Yellow Wall-paper," is one of the most remarkable success stories in contemporary literary history. Although Julie Bates Dock's survey of the publication history of the story in her *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Case-book* indicates that, following its 1892 debut in *The New England Magazine*,¹ the story was republished at least twenty-three times (primarily in anthologies of supernatural tales), it was the 1973 reissue of the story by the Feminist Press accompanied by an afterword by Elaine R. Hedges that initiated a "renaissance" in Gilman studies (Dock 10). In Hedges' "Afterword," she begins by describing the tale as a "small literary masterpiece" that lamentably has been overlooked for almost fifty years (37).²

Although the reemergence of the story was not immediate following the Feminist Press edition, and, as late as 1985, Conrad Shumaker was able to write that "the work is highly spoken of by those who have read it, but it is not widely known and has been slow to appear in anthologies of American literature" (242), by the end of the 1980s, the incorporation of the "The Yellow Wall-paper" into the canons of American and feminist literature was complete.

Susan S. Lanser accepts the canonization of the text as a foregone conclusion when she writes in her important 1989 essay "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and the Politics of Color in America," that "The canonization of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is an obvious sign of the degree to which contemporary feminism has transformed the study of literature" (225–26). In 1992, Elaine Hedges, casting a backward glance over the development of the field of criticism on the story in her "'Out at Last'? 'The Yellow Wallpaper' after Two Decades of Feminist Criticism" is able to observe that, not only has the story become the Feminist Press's best-selling publication, but it is also "one of the best-selling works of fiction by university presses in the United States. It has been reprinted in England, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and Iceland, and has inspired several film and dramatic versions, a television adaptation, and even an opera" (319). Furthermore, whereas Shumaker had indicated that the story was slow to be incorporated into anthologies in 1985, Hedges is able to note that "It is of course regularly assigned in women's studies and literature courses and is by now firmly established in the literary canon, appearing in all of the major anthologies" (319). These observations allow Hedges to conclude that "Together with *The Awakening* it is probably the most well-known rediscovered work by a nineteenth-century American woman" (319).

The importance of the text for feminist readers and critics cannot be overstated. Despite the controversies attendant upon the conclusion of the story and the tale's status as exemplum of female oppression, Haney-Peritz noted in 1986 that, within the canon of feminist literature, the tale had assumed "monumental proportions" (192), an observation that is echoed by William Veeder when he writes that the story is "one of the premier women's texts" (40) and by Lanser when she refers to the tale as "An American feminist classic" (225) and as a "sacred" text (226).³ (Dock rather acidly remarks upon the canonization of Gilman when she calls into question the veracity of the "Gilman hagiography" [3, 16] that establishes Gilman as abused by male editors and that characterizes the story as a "victimized piece of literature" [2] misunderstood by the reading public in general.)

However, early in the new millennium, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" has emerged not only as a document important to feminist scholars or even as one of the best-known and most often-taught texts by a nineteenth-century American woman, but as one of the most vital texts in English, regardless of period or sex of the author. Dock notes that "Omitting 'The Yellow Wall-paper' from an American literature anthology has become almost as unthinkable as leaving out 'The Raven' or 'Civil Disobedience'" (1).⁴ Erskine and Richards are able to observe in 1993 that the story has "received more critical attention than perhaps any other American short story" (3). And,

whereas Hedges had referred to the text as a “small literary masterpiece” in 1973, Ann Heilman, in a perhaps slightly hyperbolic assessment, asserts in her essay in Golden and Zangrando’s *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (2000) that “The Yellow Wall-paper” is today regarded as “an almost unparalleled literary masterpiece” (175).

In roughly a twenty-five-year period, the text, therefore, has gone from being considered an overlooked tale to one of the most anthologized stories in the English language. The publication history of “The Yellow Wall-paper” bears out Dock’s assertion that “The story appears not just in hefty, two-volume collections of American literature, but in textbooks for women’s studies and genre studies courses, and more especially in the dozens of introductory literature texts that undergraduates purchase by the gross” (1). Beyond the world of the ivory tower, the frequency of the publication of “The Yellow Wall-paper” in decidedly less-than-scholarly collections of horror stories and suspense tales such as Alberto Manguel’s *Black Water 2: More Tales of the Fantastic* and Robert Phillips’s *The Omnibus of 20th Century Ghost Stories*⁵ suggests that the tale also holds appeal for readers with less pedantic tastes.

It is precisely the ubiquity of Gilman’s story in such a diversity of settings that served as the impetus for this collection. Prior to coming across Dock’s recapitulation of the publishing history of the text, I already had noted with interest the frequency with which the text was being included on college syllabi of colleagues, and what impressed me even more was the variety of thematic foci able to accommodate Gilman’s narrative. I myself had included the text in a survey course on American literature, a freshman composition course, a course on feminist theory, and a course on the American ghost story. Other colleagues in English departments were using the narrative in the context of courses devoted to autobiography, American realism, and madness and literature. I learned that, outside of English departments, the text was being utilized in women’s studies seminars and in a course on medicine and literature offered through a medical school. Searching on-line, I discovered the text included in courses around the world offered under the auspices of history departments, American studies programs, and psychology departments.

This diversity of academic settings able to accommodate Gilman’s story impressed upon me its flexibility as a pedagogical organ. However, given the ubiquity of the text within various academic settings, I was also struck by the absence of attention to the text within pedagogical contexts. Despite the large (and steadily growing) body of criticism on the story, very little of it explicitly addresses its importance as a tool to facilitate learning or various ways in which to make use of the text in the classroom.⁶ The purpose of this volume, therefore, is to introduce readers to a sampling of the multiplicitous ways in

which “The Yellow Wall-paper” can be employed productively in various academic contexts. My hope is that the essays here will suggest both to those new to Gilman’s text and to those already intimately familiar with the story a variety of original ways of approaching Gilman’s text and making use of it as a tool for teaching.

The Pedagogical Wall-paper

Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper” is a story that, as Golden observes, seems to “raise more questions than it answers” (19). Golden notes that “The nature of the story, the meaning of the wallpaper, the narrator’s fate, her act of crawling, and whether or not the narrator has outwitted John and ‘got out at last’ [. . .] emerge as some of the salient issues critics debate, often in conversation with each other” (19). Indeed, as Dale M. Bauer chronicles, the story compellingly has been interpreted in multiple ways that include:

as Gilman’s autobiographical commentary on her own depression and feelings of helplessness in her first marriage to Walter Stetson; as a critique of patriarchy and of male medical practices; as a fiction about women finding voice within the constraints of masculine language; as a reflection of the invalid women who seemed to be part of an “epidemic” of invalidism, neurasthenia, and disease in nineteenth-century, white, middle-class American culture; and as a study of one woman’s attempt to free herself from social constraints. (26)

According to Hedges,

The wallpaper, as the story’s key metaphor, has been read as inscribing the medical, marital, maternal, psychological, sexual, sociocultural, political, and linguistic situation of its narrator-protagonist; as an image of the situation of the woman writer and hence a way of understanding the dilemmas of female authorship; as revealing the relations between gender and reading and gender and writing; and as a demarcation of the problems of female self-representation within both the Lacanian world of the Symbolic and the capitalist world of the United States in the late nineteenth century. Analyses of the story’s formal and stylistic features have variously argued for it as a realistic story, a feminist Gothic tale, and one of the earlier modernist texts. (1992, 320)

The text has been tackled from numerous different critical perspectives including biographical, feminist, deconstructive, reader response, genre studies, discourse theory, psychoanalytic, new historicist, and cultural studies.⁷

As a text that raises so many questions and which has been approached

productively from so many varied perspectives, the work seems to offer a privileged opportunity for pedagogues to engage in what Paulo Freire refers to as “problem-posing” pedagogy. In brief, in Freire’s famous manifesto, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he vigorously opposes what he refers to as the “banking” concept of education. In this familiar model, the teacher-student relationship has a fundamentally “narrative” character: the authoritative teacher speaks, and the passive, empty students listen and are “filled.” Traditional education is thus likened to an act of “depositing.” According to Freire, the “contents” of the teacher’s narration tend to become “lifeless and petrified,” “detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and gave them significance” (57). Students in the banking model of education are not asked to think, but, on the contrary, are trained *not* to question.

In contrast to the banking model, Freire proposes his “problem-posing” model in which the world is not presented as natural, static, and finished. Students are not lectured to on how the world is and asked to memorize the narrated information. Rather, “reality” (as in “The Yellow Wall-paper”) is presented both as a *question* and as a *process* undergoing constant transformation. The task of the students and of the teacher is to become “critical co-investigators” (67), engaged in dialogue that seeks to “demythologize” the world. Freire insists that the process of problem-posing education can only be carried out dialogically, through communication between individuals situated as equals. The classroom for Freire thus becomes a supportive environment in which student-teachers and teacher-students *risk* confronting their ignorances and accepting the unknown as an imperative toward learning.

The essays in this volume are all concerned with the pedagogical possibilities of “The Yellow Wall-paper”—how the narrative teaches and how to teach the narrative. They present diverse approaches to the story in a variety of contexts that can be employed usefully by educators in classroom situations as varied as freshman composition, literary surveys, existentialist philosophy, and literary theory. However, taken together, I would suggest that they manifest a commitment to what Freire refers to as “problem-posing education.” The essays all develop approaches to Gilman’s text that seek to stimulate the critical faculties of students and to structure an engagement with the text in which the student-learner is asked to consider questions to which he or she does not already know the answers.

Leading off the volume is Debra K. Peterson’s cutting-edge approach to “The Yellow Wall-paper,” which provides a pedagogical blueprint for those who wish to make use of contemporary technological innovations and allow students to interact with Gilman’s text in a “virtual” environment. In “A Room with a View: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’ and the Use of MOO Spaces,” Peterson explores the ways in which, through the use of

computers, students actually can enter into Gilman's text, explore the space of the garden and house, and ask questions of the narrator and her husband. This immersion in the narrator's world emphasizes the literary text's narrative elements—including setting and characterization—as well as provides readers with “a participatory experience revealing the existence of multiple meanings and even contradictory interpretations of Gilman's text.” Peterson's approach provides a fascinating example of a technologically mediated pedagogical methodology in which students ask questions and develop and refine their interpretations based on the information that is—or is not—elicited through their process of exploration. An additional advantage of MOO Space technology is that students are brought together in the virtual space of the constructed world. An emphasis thereby is placed on the collaborative construction of meaning as students encounter and struggle with different interpretations together.

The next three chapters all approach “The Yellow Wall-paper” from particular critical or philosophical perspectives. Gilman scholar Joanne Karpinski in “‘I will follow that pointless pattern’: A Formalist Approach to ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’” provides a method of engaging students who either lack experience in textual interpretation or who are suspicious of teachers who “read in” levels of meaning that are not readily apparent to them at first glance. Karpinski's formalist approach emphasizes close reading and attention to the literary devices that Gilman employs to create her artistic effects. By focusing on formal structures and paying scrupulous attention to Gilman's language, Karpinski's approach to the text leads students to recognize that values and biases are embedded in the language of the text itself. Her method is designed to foster critical thinking in students by asking them to pay careful attention to the ways in which Gilman uses language to develop the polemical intent of the text. Through this process, students who are initially resistant to the feminist implications of Gilman's tale and who suspect that the instructor is “reading in” levels of meaning can discover the ways in which the text itself leads the reader to certain conclusions regarding the narrator and her symptomology.

In “Queering ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’: A Pedagogic View,” Jonathan Crewe returns to his famous essay “Queering ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’?: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Politics of Form” in order to explore the ramifications of his earlier analysis from a pedagogical perspective. In this essay, Crewe is concerned with queer pedagogy, with what it means to introduce queer theory into the classroom and how one discovers the queer reading embedded in a text. Keeping company with Karpinski's formalist reading practice, Crewe focuses on the language of the text itself in order to contend that Gilman's narrative “lends itself actively and singularly to queer-feminist reading.” Beginning with the prominence of the term “queer” within Gilman's

text, Crewe connects this salient semantic characteristic with “a play of desire and identification within and against any prevailing norm” manifested by the narrative as a whole. By extension, the “queerness” of Gilman’s text is derived from the ways in which it refuses to “signify monolithically.” Thus, as with Karpinski, Crewe’s close analysis of the language of the text itself allows students to reach conclusions about the ways in which meaning is generated out of the formal features of the text itself.

In “Teaching ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’ and Existentialism in the Classroom,” Robyn S. Shaw provides an approach to Gilman’s narrative that demonstrates the text’s compatibility with philosophy courses or courses investigating themes of human potential and development. Whereas Karpinski and Crewes’ approaches rely strongly on close attention to Gilman’s text itself, Shaw juxtaposes “The Yellow Wall-paper” with Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death* in order to open up larger questions of gendered existence and self-realization. Shaw elaborates an approach to Gilman that both universalizes her narrator’s predicament and simultaneously personalizes it by allowing students to explore the “existential repercussions” of their own situatedness in time and space. This process of looking at “The Yellow Wall-paper” through a philosophical lens thereby allows students to appreciate the implications of Gilman’s narrative for their own lives.

The next two chapters focus on “reading dialogically,” that is, on juxtaposing “The Yellow Wall-paper” with other texts in order to lead students to certain conclusions. In the same way that Shaw asks students to read “The Yellow Wall-paper” alongside works of existentialist philosophy in order to arrive at an understanding concerning the relevancy of the story to their own lives, Jim O’Loughlin in “Teaching Genre Through ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’” also details a pedagogical approach to the text defined by juxtaposition of texts. However, the purpose of O’Loughlin’s approach is not to allow students to derive an interpretation of the text specific to them but to prompt them to discover the ways in which their interpretations are influenced by the expectations they bring to the text, their reading histories, and the generic cues the story provides. By having his students read Gilman’s text alongside of either Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” or Gloria Steinam’s *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, O’Loughlin leads his students to question the ways in which reading practices are shaped by social contexts and to consider how generic classification structures reader expectations. Although O’Loughlin suggests these particular companion texts for “The Yellow Wall-paper,” other texts could easily be substituted. As O’Loughlin indicates, the larger point of his pedagogical method is that one can never simply read the text in front of one; rather, one’s process of textual interpretation is always influenced by one’s reading history and social context.

Marjean D. Purinton, in her “Reading Marital Relationships: The Wallpaper in ‘A Room of One’s Own,’” also employs an intertextual approach to Gilman in order to analyze a thematics of turn-of-the-century women’s oppression and efforts at emancipation. Purinton develops a productive dialogue using “The Yellow Wall-paper” and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Susan Glaspell’s play *Trifles*, and Lillian Hellman’s drama *The Children’s Hour* and provides discussion questions and activity suggestions for the reader interested in exploring the pedagogical possibilities of these juxtapositions. Appropriate for a course focused on issues of gender, the conversation Purinton develops among “The Yellow Wall-paper” and a variety of other texts is designed to allow students to make connections among texts written by women at the end of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century and to develop a sense of the political concerns and larger social context of these women authors.

The final chapters all focus on pedagogical approaches that privilege student responses and validate student interpretations. These essays are particularly concerned with process and dialogue. Paul Reifenhiser’s reader response approach is geared to allow students to develop their critical thinking faculties by encouraging students to develop their own interpretations. According to Reifenhiser, removing students from the “interpretive bondage” of believing that texts have only one “correct” interpretation and that their own insights are not valid involves a process of demonstrating that stated authorial intentions *can* be disputed as well as affirming the validity of alternative interpretations. Accordingly, Reifenhiser develops in “Interpretive Bondage: Reader Response, Authorial Intention, and Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’” an approach to Gilman’s narrative that, through journal assignments, paper assignments, and class discussion, complicates the issue of authorial intent and stresses student engagement with the text. Whereas O’Loughlin’s essay emphasizes the social nature of the act of reading and the ways in which interpretation is constrained by one’s reading history in order to demonstrate the power of generic conventions, Reifenhiser affirms that the differing interpretations generated by diverse social backgrounds and reading histories are not necessarily incorrect. While not dismissing the value of stated authorial intentions and published interpretations, Reifenhiser’s approach to the text is designed to allow students to generate their own responses to the text and to understand that their opinions and insights are not just valid but important.

Working in concert with Reifenhiser, Janet Gebhart Auten in “Helping Students Decode the Difficult Text: ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’ and the Sequential Response” literally asks her students to “write their way through” “The Yellow Wall-paper.” Her approach to teaching Gilman’s text centers on

student responses and asks students to participate in the narrator's process of discovery by observing their own reactions to the complexities of Gilman's narrative. Her sequential-response journal assignment thereby seeks to engage students in tracking their own process of sense-making and to make them more conscious of and deliberate in their effort at meaning-making. Through this process, Auten asks students to become aware of the ways in which they arrive at their varying interpretations of Gilman's text. Auten's essay is also notable because, in addition to focusing on methods of teaching Gilman to students, Auten chronicles her own process of learning how to teach Gilman effectively. She discusses both her successes and her failures and thereby literalizes Freire's notion of the classroom as a community of student-teachers and teacher-students.

Rounding out the volume is Gina Wisker's "Breakdown, Breakthrough, or Brainwash? A Dialogic Approach to 'The Yellow Wall-paper'" in which Wisker describes her experience in introducing Gilman's narrative to students who have worked as nurses or who themselves have experienced depression. These students, according to Wisker, have difficulty with interpretations of the text that privilege the conclusion as positive or empowering. This attentiveness to the ambiguity of the conclusion to Gilman's text leads Wisker to develop a "dialogic" approach to the narrative focused on depression and treatment in which students are asked to hold divergent interpretations of the text in productive tension rather than to privilege a singular interpretation. Wisker's essay is especially important because it reminds us that students can have powerful affective responses to Gilman's story—or to any story. As instructors, we need to remember that the diverse backgrounds and histories our students bring with them may allow them to identify or connect with the texts we teach in ways that, in fact, are not available to us as pedagogues. Gilman's text is one that raises disturbing issues and has the power to frustrate and unsettle. Part of teaching such a text is recognizing the power the text has to impact on the lives of its readers.

The Pedagogical Imperative

The essays in this volume all seek to develop the pedagogical possibilities of "The Yellow Wall-paper" and to provide models for others to consider, borrow from, manipulate, and appropriate. However, they are additionally connected through their attentiveness to student insights and the possibilities of "problem-posing pedagogy." What they all respond to on a certain level is what I consider to be the "pedagogical imperative" built into Gilman's now-famous text. I would like now to suggest briefly in conclusion one possible

explanation for the contemporary academic reappraisal of “The Yellow Wall-paper.”

From a certain perspective, what “The Yellow Wall-paper” can be said to dramatize is a failed pedagogical event. The character John within Gilman’s narrative serves not only as husband, doctor, and, as critics have often observed, father, to the narrator but, as has often been implicit in critical discussions of the text, *teacher* as well; part of the infantilization of the narrator is the disabusement and dismissal of her ideas and instruction in John’s way of thinking. John takes pains to teach her the “correct” way to appreciate her situation and manifests concern particularly when his wife ventures an opinion that does not coincide with his own. A priority of John’s is that the narrator not think for herself but rather accept his interpretation of her symptoms and the course of treatment he prescribes.

What the reader discovers, however, is that John is a very bad teacher. His banking model of pedagogy in which he construes the narrator as an empty vessel and attempts to “fill” her with his interpretation of her condition not only devalues his pupil’s intelligence and deflates her self-esteem but also engenders resentment and ultimately facilitates a psychotic break. The narrator does not learn the lesson she is supposed to learn; the disciplining of her body does not produce a concomitant subordination of mind. Rather, deprived of the opportunity to express herself and to engage in meaningful dialogue about her thoughts and feelings, the narrator develops her own discordant interpretation of her condition in secret. The revelation to John of the incongruity between his confident assertion of the narrator’s fitness and the “reality” of her mental state constitutes the dramatic irony of the narrative’s conclusion. “The Yellow Wall-paper” thereby stages what I consider to be a failed pedagogical encounter. John, through the arrogant foreclosure of productive dialogue and the dismissal of his wife/pupil’s interpretations which lead to her mental breakdown, demonstrates the detrimental effects of a pedagogy that disregards the critical faculties of the student and treats him or her as a “container” without positive content to be filled by the teacher.

Through the dramatization of this failure of learning, Gilman thereby provides a model for both conjugal felicity and productive pedagogy. Implicit in Gilman’s representation of the stifling effects of marriage on nineteenth-century white middle-class women is the two-fold message that women do indeed have their own thoughts and ideas and that, beyond simply possessing them, these thoughts and ideas need to be expressed, communicated, and validated. John, in attempting to teach his wife about herself, fails to listen to her and indeed actively dissuades her from developing her own ideas. In the end, he learns a dramatic lesson about the ignorance underlying his arrogance and its consequences. Through this representation, what Gilman provides is a dia-

logic model applicable not only to marriage and medicine but to the classroom as well. One may propose that had John brought his medical knowledge to bear upon the narrator's situation in such a way that took seriously her assessments of her situation and her personal desires—one that allowed her to express her interpretation of her symptoms and that validated that interpretation as significant—the dramatic breakdown at the end of the narrative might have been averted and John might have learned something about both his wife's and his own needs and desires in the process. "The Yellow Wall-paper" is thus designed to teach a lesson to the reader about the destructive effects of gender inequality and communications breakdown through the fictive representation of mental derangement and psychic crisis resulting from infelicitous pedagogical encounters. In other words, I suggest that Gilman's narrative attempts to teach a lesson by depicting for the reader failures of effective teaching and learning. Part of the appeal of "The Yellow Wall-paper" to contemporary scholars may then be that the text teaches about learning and, through negotiating the text, one can learn about effective and ineffective teaching.

Richard Shaull writes in his introduction to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (15). If ever there was a story concerned with the necessity of transforming the world, it is "The Yellow Wall-paper." The essays in this collection are offered with the hope that, through developing various ways to introduce the story in academic settings, they may participate in this task.

A Note on the Text

As the overview of the popularity of "The Yellow Wall-paper" presented above suggests, the text is readily available in various anthologies and critical editions.⁸ I have asked contributors to this volume to standardize references to the text by making use of the 1892 *New England Magazine* version in Julie Bates Dock's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook*. I am aware that Dock's commentary on the critical history of Gilman's narrative is disputed and, as Jim O'Loughlin observes, can be seen as downplaying or discrediting feminist involvement in the reemergence of the narrative. However, Dock's preparation of the text is scrupulous, and her explanation of her editorial methodology is exceptionally thorough. In keeping with the decision to

make use of this edition of Gilman's text, I have asked contributors to standardize spelling of the title of the story as "The Yellow Wall-paper."

Notes

1. The publication date for the story has caused a certain amount of confusion. As Golden notes in an endnote, "The Yellow Wall-paper" first appeared in vol. 5, no. 5 (January 1892) of *The New England Magazine*, and authorship was attributed to Charlotte Perkins Stetson. Golden observes that critics have variously listed the story's original date of publication as May 1891, January 1892, and May 1892 and speculates that "The confusion surrounding the date no doubt stems from the way in which journals were bound at the time. While today we bind volumes by year, *The New England Magazine* at the turn of the century did not. Volume 5 contains six volumes, beginning with September 1891 through February 1892." Golden also notes that Gilman, in her autobiography *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, reprints a letter that suggests the story was published in May 1891 (19, endnote 1).
2. Dock's survey of the publication history of the story refutes the critical-commonplace "legend" that the text was out of print for half a century.
3. It should be noted that both Haney-Peritz and Lanser raise the issue of the text's canonization in order to critique unqualified approval of the text's narrator (Haney-Peritz) and the status of the text as representative of female disempowerment in general (Lanser).
4. There is a certain irony in Dock's invocation of Poe and Thoreau at the beginning of her chapter entitled "The Legend of 'The Yellow Wall-paper.'" As Dock observes, one of the unfounded publication "legends" surrounding the text is that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century readers failed to appreciate it as political commentary and, instead, received it "as a ghost story written in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe" (Dock 18, citing 1993 Macmillan text *Worlds of Fiction*). According to Dock, "By dint of repetition and oversimplification, the legend [of the reception of the tale as a simple ghost story] has become firmly entrenched in Gilman studies, despite the lack of evidence to support it" (18). Her reference to Poe on the first page of her careful critique of Gilman "mythology" (16) implicitly forges an association between Poe and Gilman that Dock will later dispute.

It is also worth noting that, in her chapter on legends and mythologies that takes certain academics to task for scholastic errors, Dock replicates a myth concerning Thoreau. As the editors of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* observe, Thoreau's essay which is commonly referred to as "Civil Disobedience" was actually titled "Resistance to Civil Government" when it was first published in 1849 and note, "Diligent search has unearthed no evidence that the often used title, 'Civil Disobedience,' was Thoreau's" (*Heath* 2093).

5. The inclusion of Gilman's 1892 narrative in the latter testifies to a rather loose interpretation of "20th century"!
6. In Shelley Fisher Fishkin's "Reading Gilman in the Twenty-First Century," Fishkin speculates on what aspects of Gilman's writing in general will remain compelling to twenty-first century undergraduates. In "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," Annette Kolodny suggests that study of "The Yellow Wall-paper" can assist men in learning to "apprehend the meanings encoded in

texts by and about women” in the same way that “women have learned to be sensitive readers of Shakespeare and Milton, Hemingway and Mailer” (163).

7. See Hedges, 1992, p. 319.

8. Critical editions of the text include Catherine Golden’s *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on The Yellow Wallpaper* (1992); Thomas L. Erskine and Connie L. Richard’s Rutgers University Women Writers: Texts and Contexts edition (1993); Dale Bauer’s Bedford Cultural edition (1998); and Julie Bates Dock’s *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper” and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook* (1998). Other notable editions of the text include, of course, the Elaine Hedges 1973 Feminist Press version, as well as Ann Lane’s *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader* (1980) and Denise Knight’s *“The Yellow Wall-paper” and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1994).

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