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Cover Page Footnote

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"She Didn't Know I Was in the Room": The Effects of Hatfield's Illustrations on Readers' Interpretations of "The Yellow Wallpaper"

When Charlotte Perkins Gilman penned her intimate, personally-inspired short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," she did not imagine she would share the page with an illustrator—much less a male illustrator whose images would affect her readers' interpretations of the female experience at the heart of her story. Written in 1890, Gilman's novella features an unnamed protagonist with postpartum depression who descends into madness after her husband and physician, John, places her on "rest cure": the "treatment" for "nervous women" pioneered by physician Silas Weir Mitchell, who once used the remedy on Gilman (Stiles). The treatment included "enforced bed rest, seclusion and overfeeding" as well as "electrotherapy and massage" (Stiles). Victorians paid little attention to the mental health of women and expected them to center their lives around domesticity rather than prioritizing personal identity, employment, or fulfillment. Through the journal entries of the deteriorating protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman demonstrates that the monotony of this restrictive lifestyle can lead to paralyzing depression, which can spiral into psychosis when women are stripped of their little remaining freedom and sense of purpose during "treatments" such as rest cure. While today's readers can experience the story through a more gender-egalitarian framework with an enlightened understanding of mental health, artist Joseph Hatfield did not have such insight when he was tasked with being the first to render an interpretation of the story through illustrations in the late nineteenth century.

When the short story was first published in *New England Magazine* in 1892, Hatfield, a regular staff illustrator from 1891-1893, created three realistic-style images to accompany Gilman's text (Golden, 2005, p. 54). According to Catherine Golden—one of the few literary critics who has published substantial work on this series of images—Hatfield's illustrations were not shown to Gilman before publication (2004, p. 129). Golden (2005) writes, "[The illustrations'] inclusion reflects late-nineteenth century publishing strategies confronting, and perhaps confounding, writers of the period" (p. 53). Golden (2005) notes that despite the fact that Gilman was an accomplished artist herself, there is no record that Gilman ever publicly or even privately commented on the images (p. 61). Golden (2005) concludes that Gilman's lack of acknowledgement of the illustrations in her diary, autobiography, or letters suggests that the author had no control or influence over the images (p. 61). Nevertheless, as Golden (2004) deduces, the illustrations "seem to have influenced some of the original interpretations of the story as a horror tale" (p. 129). While Gilman intended to bring attention to the danger of the rest cure and the isolating, monotonous lifestyle of women in the Victorian Era through her text, the conditions and challenges faced by Hatfield as one of the story's first interpreters resulted in a portrayal that did not depict the external factors that drove

the narrator to madness. As a result, Hatfield's illustrations inspired readings of the story as a piece of horror fiction about a woman who failed to cure herself from "female hysteria" rather than a story of a female protagonist's "imprisonment" driving her into psychosis. In contrast to the unstable narration, the three images maintain the same, realistic style of illustration, forming a cohesive triptych that suggests reliability over the text.

In her 1913 *Forerunner* article, "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper?," Gilman explicates her intention for writing the short story: to save other women from the fate of the protagonist. She explains that she, herself, suffered from a severe nervous breakdown due to melancholia. Gilman relates that she was instructed by the physician Weir Mitchell to "live as domestic a life as far as possible," to "have but two hours' intellectual life a day," and "never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as [she] lived" (2011). She writes that after three months, she "came so near to the border line of utter mental ruin that [she] could see over," and was only saved by a friend who helped her "[recover] some measure of power" by getting back to "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." With this statement, Gilman emphasizes her perceived importance of work, intellectual activity, and independence for women's mental health. Gilman explains that after her "narrow escape," she penned the short story to save other women from undergoing rest cure. She details, "[I] sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad. He never acknowledged it." However, according to Gilman, the "best result" came years later when she learned that after reading Gilman's short story, Weir Mitchell "altered his treatment of neurasthenia." In this account, Gilman also relates, "["The Yellow Wallpaper"] has, to my knowledge, saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered." She concludes by writing that "The Yellow Wallpaper" "was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked" (Gilman, 2011). This primary account from Gilman provides valuable insight into the author's purpose behind writing her short story: to save other women from the maltreatment of rest cure.

In the text of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman (1892) incites empathy for women subjected to this cruel treatment by highlighting the prisonlike features of the "ancestral hall" through the naïve perspective of the protagonist (p. 647). Surely, the narrator initially believes, the horrid wallpaper must have been recently "ravaged" by children, who have also "scratched and gouged and splintered" the floor (p. 650). The protagonist also mentions that the walls have "rings and things" in them, the windows are barred, the "immovable" bed feels as though it is nailed down, and the head of the stairs is guarded by a gate—and she credulously believes that these are precautions meant for children who lived in the "nursery" before her (pp. 648, 650). In these ways, the text creates an unsettling gap between the

protagonist's innocent beliefs and readers' suspicions about the narrator being imprisoned by John—the man supposedly treating her as her physician while loving her as her husband. Gilman works skillfully in the text to prompt readers to question John's character and, by extension, their own ideas about rest cure and their patriarchal society that confines women inside homes.

Gilman's short story also borrows conventions of gothic horror, which are highlighted by Hatfield's illustrations. As Golden (2005) explains, "By dramatically visualizing the heroine's transformation into a madwoman in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' Hatfield's illustrations—along with the Gothic setting and references to the 'queer,' 'strange,' 'haunted house' with an air of 'ghostliness'—likely encouraged one of the original interpretations of the story as a horror tale" (p. 56). Golden (2004) states that "early critics established these Gothic references in likening 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' to a horror tale in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe," whose work Gilman read (p. 145). Golden (2005) notes that Gilman herself acknowledged her short story's elements of gothic horror, writing in a letter to a friend that Gilman's husband believed it to be a "ghastly tale" that "beats Poe" (p. 56).

However, Shumaker and Golden argue that a few original critics understood the short story as a social commentary rather than simply a piece of horror fiction. According to Golden (2005), Henry B. Blackwell, in his review of the "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the *Woman's Journal* in 1899, "recognized the politics of gender" in the story and noted the "influence of [the protagonist's] oppressive environment" on her psychological state (p. 56). Additionally, Conrad Shumaker (1985) argues that there is the same recognition of the politics of gender in *Atlantic Monthly* editor Horace Scudder's 1890 rejection letter to Gilman, in which he wrote, "Dear Madam, Mr. Howells has handed me this story. I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!" (p. 588). Furthermore, after being published in *New England Magazine,* the short story was printed in *Great Modern American Stories*, where Howells introduces it as "terrible and too wholly dire," as well as "too terribly good to be printed" (Shumaker, p. 588). Shumaker interprets Scudder's and Howells' statements as indications of original critics' understandings of "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a reflection of women's oppressed condition in the time period.

Nevertheless, upon publication, the story was "virtually ignored for over fifty years" (Shumaker, p. 588). As professor and researcher Conrad Shumaker explains, "Some of the best criticism attempts to explain this neglect as a case of misinterpretation by audiences used to 'traditional' literature," with Jean F. Kennard suggesting that twentieth-century feminism has "led us to find in the story an exploration of women's role instead of the tale of horror or depiction of mental breakdown its original audience found" (Shumaker, pp. 588-89). Golden (2005) explains that the story's publication in *New England Magazine* did not elicit a

strong response from the original general audience, who understood the story as a "Poe-esque" piece of horror fiction. (p. 56). Golden (2005) cites Gilman's biographer Gary Scharnhorst, who wrote, "[M]any early readers considered it a tale of the grotesque, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' told from the point of view of the Lady Madeline" (p. 56). Hatfield's illustrations support the interpretation of the story as horror fiction through the depiction of the protagonist descending into a stereotypical Victorian "madwoman" without including the external elements of imprisonment that Gilman emphasized led to her psychosis.

While Hatfield's visual world inspired interpretations that diverge from the intent of Gilman's verbal world, it is necessary to acknowledge the context with which the illustrator had to work. First, in the 1890s, Hatfield did not have the information about medicine and mental health that is widely known today. Instead, as *Medical News Today* journalist Maria Cohut (2020) explains, women were commonly diagnosed with "female hysteria" throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explain "numerous and widely different symptoms," including "a fondness of writing, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and even infertility." Historically, women were viewed as "predisposed" to hysteria "because of their [supposed] lazy and irritable nature" (Cohut). Twenty-first century readers, though, understand female hysteria to be an inaccurate "umbrella term" that "reinforc[es] harmful stereotypes about sex and gender" by encompassing many unrelated conditions (Cohut). However, with an increased attention to this "illness" starting in the mid-nineteenth century, even the most respected doctors and researchers of Hatfield's time, including Weir Mitchell, Sigmund Freud, and Pierre Janet, diagnosed women with female hysteria (Cohut). Due to these historical circumstances, Hatfield's context for interpreting Gilman's story included the societal belief that women were prone to psychological affliction, which was thought to be worsened by intellectual activity. With this context, Hatfield likely did not read Gilman's text as an attempt to disprove the cure itself, but as a tale of a woman failing to cure herself from hysteria.

In creating his images, Hatfield also had to navigate the challenge of interpreting the story with little context or tradition, and no assistance from the author. As PhD student and researcher Karita Kuusisto (2016) explains in her blog post on *The Victorianist,* "The relationship between author and illustrator in the Victorian era is a complicated one," with disagreements often bringing ends to attempted collaborations. Author-illustrator teams for short stories or serialized novels in periodicals were "further complicated" and "intensified" by the publication process, which included "strict deadlines and restrictions on image sizes and numbers," according to Kuusisto. It is no surprise, then, that "authors were not always pleased with the illustrations provided" (Kuusisto). While "sometimes the author and illustrator would work quite closely together" (Kuusisto), Golden's research indicates that Gilman had no voice in *New England*

Magazine's illustration process, and that Hatfield's images were not shown to her before publication (2004, p. 129). While this meant that Hatfield did not have to worry about disagreeing with Gilman, it also meant that he did not receive guidance from her when he was assigned the job of being the first person to ever create images to accompany the story. The artist was probably unsure of how much of the story he should interpret literally and how many details he should consider part of the protagonist's delusions—and unlike today's readers, Hatfield did not have 130 years of interpretations of the story available to reference. As a result, Hatfield's illustrations do not depict much of the protagonist's surroundings, leaving a sense of ambiguity about the narrator's reliability.

Additionally, Hatfield worked with the practical restrictions of illustrating for a magazine, where many decisions were out of his control. Hatfield created his illustrations under the conditions of having limited pens and paintbrushes, only being able to use the color black, and being granted limited space on the page. Furthermore, Kuusisto emphasizes that many individuals held influence in a publication like *New England Magazine*; she writes, "Usually, when fiction was published in a periodical, in addition to the author and illustrator, the editor of the periodical would have their say in what was illustrated and how, while the engraver would also leave evidence of their skill level, and sometimes their own interpretation, on the image." It is probable that the editors of *New England Magazine* decided what moments of the story their staff illustrator would render. The layout artist also made pivotal choices about each image's placement, influencing viewers' interpretations as they experienced the short story. For example, the layout artist's choice to place the third image as a tailpiece results in Hatfield "getting the last word," so to speak, over Gilman; his illustration and signature in the bottom right corner of the image are the last things readers see when they conclude the story. In addition to Hatfield's subjective perspective, the editors' and layout artists' decisions played instrumental roles in the creation and placement of the images, which in turn affected viewers' interpretations of the story.

While Hatfield's intentions are not discoverable today, the choices and details in his illustrations support interpretations of the short story as a piece of horror fiction in which the images are a more reliable source than the verbal text. In the first illustration (Fig. 1), Hatfield depicts the protagonist appearing sane, sitting in a rocking chair as she writes in her journal. The protagonist wears a long, traditional Victorian dress with her hair styled neatly in a bun. As Golden (2005) notes, the woman's coiffure, long sleeves, and high-necked dress make her appear "conservative" (p. 57). Portraying the heroine as prim and proper in this way would be necessary to garner respect and sympathy from original audiences. This first image also provides a reference for how drastically the woman's appearance and mental health will plummet by the end of the story. For this reason, Hatfield's choice to depict the narrator writing in her journal in the first image influences

viewers' interpretations; as Golden (2005) notes, in the late nineteenth century, "overindulgence in reading and writing [was] thought to predispose an individual to insanity" (p. 57). With only three images in the story, illustrating the protagonist writing and then descending into madness in the following images suggests a connection between writing and insanity for women, thereby supporting the view that the woman is culpable in some respect for her own mental deterioration.

In the second illustration (Fig. 2) accompanying "The Yellow Wallpaper," the protagonist still wears her traditional dress and her hair neatly in a bun as she looks on with paranoia toward Jennie. The ominous caption reads, "She didn't know I was in the Room" (Gilman, 1892, p. 651). The layout artist has chosen to place the image on page 651 of the original publication, where it disturbs the two-column layout of the text that has been consistent throughout the rest of the story. While this interruption forces readers to confront the foreboding image on page 651, the scene rendered in the illustration does not occur in the text until page 653. As a result, viewers are left unsettled as they read and anticipate the eerie interaction for two pages. As Golden (2004) notes, the protagonist is illustrated here with a "clouded look, suggesting the beginning stages of madness" (p. 149). At this point in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the protagonist has journaled about seeing a woman "stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (Gilman, 1892, p. 652). Notably, the image is hugged by a string of paragraphs describing the pattern of the wallpaper in vivid detail. The description, which occupies nearly the entire left column of the page, provides a juxtaposition to the lack of detail on the illustrated wallpaper. While a large portion of the wall is visible in the image, Hatfield only makes a subtle pattern discernable on a small portion next to Jennie. Although the artist may have been restricted by practical limitations, the contrast between the abundance of detail in the verbal description and the lack of detail in the image suggests that the narrator has overemphasized the intricacy of the wallpaper. For example, she describes the paper's "outside pattern" as "a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions," and states that "when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide— plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions" (Gilman, 1892, pp. 648, 653). According to the protagonist, the wallpaper also elicits strong emotional responses; to her, it "confuse[s] the eye" while it also "constantly irritate[s] and provoke[s] study" (Gilman, 1892, p. 648). For the amount of time and energy the narrator spends describing and obsessing over the walls, the pattern in Hatfield's images is unremarkable, supporting the interpretation that the narrator's fascination with the paper is excessive and unwarranted.

Hatfield's third and final illustration accompanies the protagonist's final entry in her journal, by which point she has torn down most of the wallpaper and has "freed" the woman whom she believed she saw within the walls. The

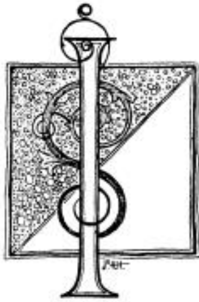
protagonist writes that she repeatedly "crawls" around the perimeter of the room, even "creeping" over the body of the fainted John (Gilman, 1982, pp. 655-56). Arguably, Gilman uses this action to denote the protagonist's triumph over her patriarchal imprisonment, from which she now feels free. Golden (2007) argues, "The narrator is moving into the mindset of a domesticated feline, acting cat-like, not merely animal-like. She is marking her territory and scenting it, gaining dominance over patriarchy by taking control of her environment" (pp. 16-17). Golden (2007) even suggests that in Hatfield's illustration, the narrator is "rubbing her scent onto John" with her hair, which drapes over him (p. 26). Some of Hatfield's choices in his tailpiece illustration strengthen the protagonist's sovereignty that is illuminated in the verbal text. First, the protagonist is drawn in a dominant position in relation to her husband—she is significantly elevated above the unconscious man, with one hand on the back of his head and one on his torso. While Hatfield empowers the protagonist by showing her face, he leaves much of John's face hidden, with his head seemingly being pushed into the ground by his wife. Hatfield reverses the power dynamic that has been in play throughout the story by drawing John with a slim frame—perhaps with an even smaller silhouette than his wife's, considering her poofy dress—and depicting him face-down as his wife mounts his limp body, suggesting she has finally conquered him. The wife's dress is dark like the exposed wall behind her, suggesting that the room she has been imprisoned in has overcome and deranged her. John's pants—which the protagonist has already crawled over— are dark as well, while his shirt—which she is yet to crawl over—is light, evoking a sense that the wife is in the process of enveloping the husband in the shadow that has overcome her mind.

In his final illustration (Fig. 3), a few of Hatfield's choices also subtly represent the oppression of women under the patriarchy, whether intentionally or coincidentally. First, the image depicts the protagonist as crawling counterclockwise around the room. This choice of direction represents a regression in the narrator's mental health due to the treatment forced upon her by her husband and physician, who falsely believed it would improve her condition. Additionally, Hatfield exposes both characters' left hands, ensuring that the wife's wedding ring is visible while the husband's ring finger is bare. The original audience likely did not pay much attention to this detail because it did not become common for men to wear wedding bands until the mid-twentieth century (Robb). However, this influences modern viewers' interpretation by symbolizing the treatment of women as male property in a patriarchal society. The wedding ring detail reminds twenty-first century viewers that while John—not tied down with a ring—was free to travel, work, and perhaps woo other women, the protagonist—displaying her marital status for the world to see—was forever bound to her husband and family by societal expectations.

"I am sitting by the Window in this Atrocious Nursery."

THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER.

By Charlotte Perkins Stetson.



T is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

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

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*— (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind—) *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

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Fig. 1. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Cornell University Library, Making of America Collection.

THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER. 651

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes — a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens* — go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all, — the interminable grotesque seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap I guess.

* * * * * *

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way — it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

"She didn't know I was in the Room."

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

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Fig. 2. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Cornell University Library, Making of America Collection.

656 *THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER.*

window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even — there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope — you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plaintain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said — very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing!"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

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Original from
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Fig. 3. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Cornell University Library, Making of America Collection.

Hatfield's depiction of the protagonist in the third image especially supports the interpretation of the story as gothic horror for original viewers. While Gilman does not mention any change of appearance in the text, Hatfield "visually projects the narrator's madness onto the text" (Golden, 2005, p. 60). In the Victorian Era, "respectable" women wore their hair in a twisted or braided updo most of the time; wearing hair down was seen as immodest and was reserved for models and actresses (Rothstein). However, in the final image, the narrator's hair is loose and unkempt, cascading over her shoulders and John's body, which would have been viewed as wild and brutish in the 1890s. Golden (2005) writes, "During an era when clothing and coiffure marked one's age, class, gender, and temperament, the narrator's hairstyle alone speaks volumes to the audience of *New England Magazine*. While her neat bun in the first image expresses her respectability, her wild hair in the third plate immediately signals her insanity" (p. 60). Golden (2005) even compares the narrator's "long and frizzled mane" to the image of *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason—another nineteenth-century woman whose mental illness causes her to be viewed as deranged (p. 60). In Hatfield's illustration, the protagonist is depicted on her hands and knees on top of another person, with her hair worn in a style typically reserved for the eyes of a woman's husband. Golden (2005) explains that "Loose hair in the Victorian period is often associated, as well, with sexual liberation and impropriety" (p. 63). Although twenty-first century viewers may understand the protagonist's loose hair as a sign of personal freedom, readers in the 1890s viewed this as a violation of social conventions and an indicator of madness in gothic horror.

Hatfield's third depiction of the protagonist is strikingly similar to *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason, who is perhaps the exemplar of an insane woman in Victorian literature. Just as Hatfield highlights the protagonist's animal-like "crawling" on all fours, Bertha's savage appearance is emphasized by author Charlotte Brontë, who writes, "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (pp. 284-85). Like Bertha, Hatfield depicts the protagonist's dark, unruly hair covering part of her face, indicating her bestial state. The second edition of *Jane Eyre* in 1848 features two illustrations of Bertha by F.H. Townsend, who depicts the insane woman in a manner similar to Hatfield's illustrations of the protagonist. Bertha's wild hair covers her face as she rips Jane's wedding veil (Fig. 4), much like Gilman's protagonist "pulled" and "shook" and "peeled off yards" of the wallpaper (Gilman, 1892, p. 655). In *Jane Eyre,* Bertha only becomes "free" once she sets the prison that is Thornfield Hall on fire and jumps from the roof, killing herself. Townsend's illustration of Bertha laying on the ground, with her long, dark hair covering her face (Fig. 5), is comparable to Hatfield's third image of Gilman's newly "free" protagonist (Fig. 6).

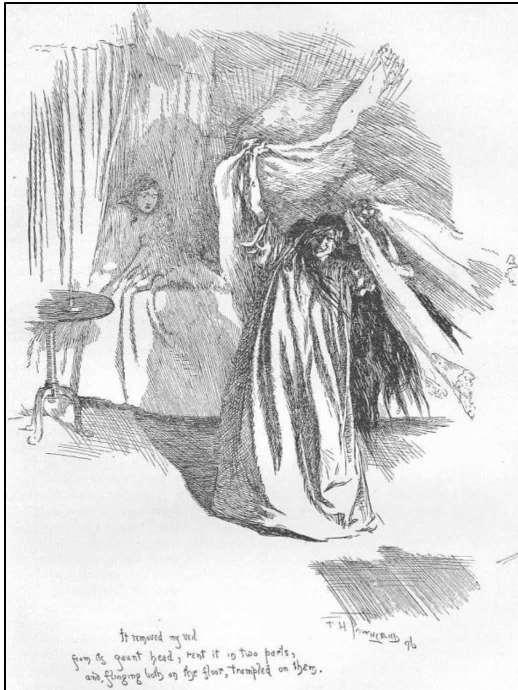

Fig. 4. F.H. Townsend, *Jane Eyre,* 1848.

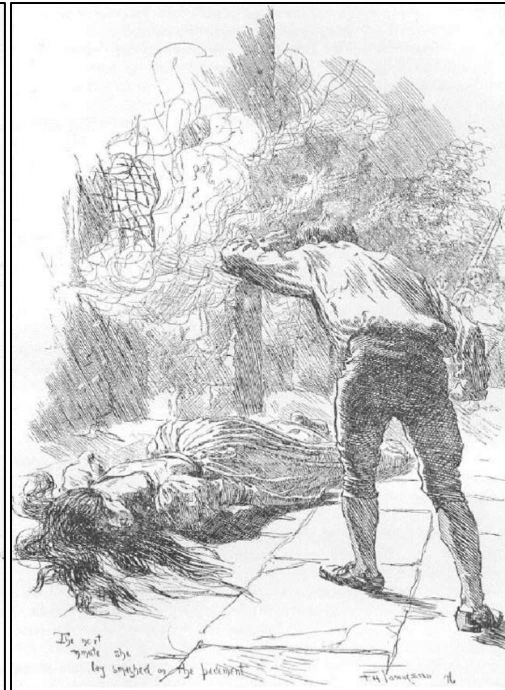

Fig. 5. F.H. Townsend, *Jane Eyre,* 1848.

Fig. 6. Joseph Hatfield, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” 1892.

As Golden (2005) writes, "In showing a marked deterioration of the narrator's mental state, Hatfield's illustrations for *New England Magazine* intensify the Poe-esque line of response and correspond to the commonly held beliefs of madness in the late-nineteenth century Britain and America" (pp. 56-57). Brontë's description and Townsend's illustration of the gothic madwoman Bertha Mason further demonstrate that Hatfield's third image supported the interpretation of the protagonist as an insane woman according to contemporary standards.

Furthermore, Hatfield does not illustrate the disturbing details about the house that are emphasized by the protagonist in her journal entries. Gilman includes elaborate textual passages describing the wallpaper; however, Hatfield does not show the wallpaper in his final image except for two inconspicuous scraps in the foreground. Throughout the textual story, readers increasingly learn more information about the prison-like house in which the protagonist is confined. To incorporate these details, Hatfield could have chosen to create a diorama-like image that included the barred windows, the rings in the wall, the "gouged" floor, the "smooch" on the wall, and the "immovable" bed. Had Hatfield included these items, his image would have corroborated the narrator's words, giving credence to her and confirming that her words are factual. If viewers interpreted the protagonist's words as factual, they would have been forced to confront the disturbing setting in which the protagonist has been kept throughout the story. However, Hatfield chooses to focus on the characters rather than their surroundings. His realistic-style illustrations suggest that the images' point of view is that of a sane, outside observer. By leaving out the details that are emphasized in the journal entries, Hatfield's illustrations support the interpretation that the protagonist—who has supposedly been describing the same setting as the one shown in his images—is an unreliable narrator with delusions leading her to exaggerate her captivity.

By extension, Hatfield's illustrations support the interpretation that the protagonist's mental illness may have resulted from her own failure to abide by her prescribed rest cure. As Golden (2005) explains, "Conventional Victorian ideology aligns hysteria with the female gender, but Gilman places the source of madness in the sacrosanct sphere for dutiful women—the home" (p. 56). Unlike the text, Hatfield's images do not include the elements of the protagonist's environment that have driven her to her breakdown. The first image does, however, depict the narrator writing. Golden (2004) notes that "serving as a headpiece to the entire story, the illustration gives prominence to the narrator's commitment to write at a time when women's intellectual pursuits were a topic of great concern and thought to sabotage women's health" (p. 146). Therefore, for original viewers who connected intellectual activity with madness in women, the image supports the interpretation that the protagonist's mental illness is caused, at least in part, by her failure of the rest cure, rather than being caused by the oppressive circumstances about which Gilman sought to warn readers.

Considering the demographic of *New England Magazine* readers also provides insight into the effects of Hatfield's illustrations for original audiences. The paper, which is now available digitally through Cornell University Library's Making of America Collection, appears to be a general interest magazine for individuals with the time and privilege to enjoy reading. Golden (2005) describes it as a "relatively conservative monthly" for its time period (p. 54). The 1891 and 1892 publications attracted a wide array of readers by including poetry and short stories in comedy, horror, and mystery, with the article preceding Gilman's being an illustrated short story about a Salem witch (Cornell, 2017, p. 638). The magazine also includes a variety of expository pieces, including a reprint of a sermon about Abraham Lincoln, as well as articles such as "The Public Libraries of Massachusetts," "The Woman's Movement in the South," and "A Future Agriculture." (Cornell, pp. 139, 249, 311, 681). With the magazine attracting both men and women of the middle- and upper-classes rather than a select group of feminist readers, much of the original audience was likely to perceive Hatfield's illustrations as a more reliable source than the verbal narration. These "relatively conservative" viewers would also be unlikely to view Gilman's text as an indictment of husbands and physicians who promoted the rest cure. Some readers who were mothers or wives, however, may have been sympathetic to the protagonist's degeneration in the journal entries because they had undergone the rest cure themselves. Similarly, some male readers may have been subjected to the "West cure": Mitchell's treatment for "nervous men" that entailed being sent to the West to experience long periods of "cattle roping, hunting, roughriding and male bonding" (Stiles). Some readers who underwent these "cures" or postpartum depression may have understood the psychological distress displayed by the protagonist in the verbal text. However, many readers of the general interest magazine would view the artist's images as a more reliable source than the female narrator, who is deeply involved in her mental decline and who, perhaps, does not see the world as accurately as a mentally stable observer uninvolved in the situation.

While the protagonist's mental stability declines in the text, Hatfield's sequence of three images looks more coherent, and therefore more reliable on the page. Changes in style, theme, plot, syntax, "paragraphing, sentence structure, word choice, pronoun usage and placement, and repetition" as noted by Golden (2004) in her *Sourcebook*, can be viewed as "outward sign[s] of the narrator's deteriorating mental condition," creating a sense of unreliability in the text (pp. 127, 130). When the text begins, it appears to be the protagonist's journal entries, written in real time from day to day. She confides in her diary, "I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper" (Gilman, 1892, p. 647). By the end of the text, however, the protagonist is almost certainly not documenting her experience in the story's real time. In the last "journal entry," there are moments in which it seems she is jotting things down as they happen, and there are moments in which she

reflects on the events she is describing in past tense. For example, early in the last entry, she states that "This is the last day, but it is enough," writing that John is "to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening" (p. 655). Later in the last entry, she even remarks, "Why there's John at the door!" as if he has just knocked while she is writing (p. 656). A few lines later, however, she recites a dialogue exchange between herself and her husband about the key under the plantain leaf, and she documents John's attempts to open the door in the past tense. Eventually, she writes, "I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder," —and after stating that John fainted, she remarks, "I had to creep over him every time!," implying that she is writing at some point after this event (p. 656). With the past tense narration, recitation of dialogue, and the impossibility of "creeping" while writing, the audience is left unsure of what, exactly, they have just read. Considering the narrator's increasing delusions, the protagonist's account of the story seems unstable and unreliable to readers.

Meanwhile, Hatfield's series of images proves consistent, with the realistic style remaining the same. His illustrations can be viewed as a triptych with the protagonist's position marking important stages in the story—in the first image, the protagonist sits demurely and appears sane; in the second image, the protagonist stands as the wallpaper becomes personified and hints of her impending psychotic break are present; and in the third image, the protagonist has "fallen," mentally and physically, as she crawls on the floor. With limited art supplies and only a single ink color, Hatfield had restricted means to portray unreliability. Consequently, his triptych of images coheres to tell the story, perhaps more so than the verbal text by the end. Both the illustrations and the text convey the protagonist's psychosis, but the images seem to be the more reliable representation of the narrator's unreliability. While the narrator's authority breaks down as readers question whether the "journal entries" they have just read are truly journal entries, Hatfield still seems reliable as an artist who remains sane while depicting an increasingly unstable subject.

Just as Gilman was unaware of what illustrations would soon accompany her short story when she submitted it to *New England Magazine,* Hatfield was likely unaware of how influential his images would be for Victorian readers' perceptions of the text. While Gilman intended to criticize the rest cure as an ineffective, imprisoning treatment that can drive women into psychosis, the illustrations created by Hatfield—who had limited context along with practical restrictions on his drawings—supported readings of the story as a piece of horror fiction about a woman who failed to cure herself from "female hysteria." Furthermore, the cohesiveness of Hatfield's triptych suggests that his images are more reliable than the protagonist's narration, which starts as a series of journal entries and ends as a text with an unidentifiable status by the time she has torn down the wallpaper. From a twenty-first century perspective, the layout artist's placement of Hatfield's first

image is fitting—the illustrator's signature and the author's byline are separated by the title, demonstrating that although there may have been a disconnect between Gilman and the illustrator she "didn't know was in the room" with her, the two share credit for readers' interpretations of "The Yellow Wallpaper" as it appeared in *New England Magazine.*

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