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**"Intersubjective Experiences in Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Susan Gibb's 'Blueberries'"**

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**Abstract:** *Blueberries* is an intriguing hypertext by artist Susan Gibb. The reader tries to unveil the narrator's secret moving through the hyperlinks of the narrative. In the story, links provide additional information to the narrative as they pull the threads of the major themes of the plot -blame, love, sexuality. The tale shows great parallels with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Both narratives explore women's struggle for empowerment. They do these by means of powerful real and supernatural imagery which involves the presence of ghosts, obsessions, such as the color white in *Blueberries* and the yellow in Gilman's story, or the little man in the hypertext and the strange woman in the wallpaper. In both stories the narrator is an artist (in Susan Gibb's story it is a visual artist; in Gilman we encounter a writer). In her blog, Susan Gibb discusses the process of writing in *Blueberries*:

"So what is the impetus for selection [of which link to follow]? Does it depend upon the individual as far as style (first, second, third link in order) or experience either of reading hypertext or of knowledge of the author's style? Is it the text itself that creates desire to go further in that direction, whether it be the single word (or phrase) that is obviously the link, or the context in which the link resides?"

This paper explores the conditions of production of Susan Gibb's *Blueberries* by providing a close reading of the online para-textual elements and their role in creating suspense and empathic engagement with the readers. It also positions interpretation in a wider discussion about media, genre and psychoanalysis by means of the material conditions of the links, seeking to integrate it into the vision of semiotic engagement described by Bourchardon and López-Varela in "Making Sense of the Digital as Embodied Experience." I also use Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper* to draw the distinct forms of empathic engagement encouraged by online writing and the printed text.

**Keywords:** Multimedia, Digital Fiction, Interactive Texts, Empathy, Semiotics.

**Hasnaa EL HANNACH BEN HAMMOU**

**Intersubjective Experiences in Gilman's 'Yellow Wallpaper' and Susan Gibb's 'Blueberries'.**

## **O. Introduction**

This paper explores the role of psychoanalytic readings of feminist texts. In this paper we suggest a comparison between an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century narrative, (1892) "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and a contemporary piece of electronic literature, *Blueberries* (2009) by Susan Gibb. The aim of the paper is to explore the differences between the textual and the hypertextual format, in order to see how these variations might affect the presentation of psychological conflicts in these stories.

The stories under study, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Blueberries" attempt to transform discourse and language in order to modify patterns of behavior. "Blueberries" is an intriguing hypertext written in 2009 by Susan Gibb, who won the Eight Glass Woman Prize in 2010. This short novel was published in the Electronic Literature Organization and in *The New River Journal*. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, first published in the *New England Magazine* in January 1892. Both stories are about two women who are going through emotional and psychological traumas.

## **1. Methodology**

The methodological basis for this paper is grounded on the turn inflicted on feminist approaches by Judith Butler's classics and *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Particularly, on her concept of 'performativity', which also impacts on the development of the notion of the 'cyborg', a blend from "cybernetics" and "organism" which refers to humanoid forms of life, coined by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960s (see Clynes and Kline 26). The concept was later used by Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), a fundamental text in the critical trend later identified as Cyberfeminism.

The psychoanalytic reading will unveil the inner workings of interpersonal relations in both works: a multi-linear hypertext fiction, *Blueberries*, and a linear printed narrative, "The Yellow Wallpaper", in order to see how they generate empathetic reactions in the reading public. I will try to show how these relations work differently in the textual and hypertextual formats.

## **2. Women and the Internet**

George Eliot, George Sand, the Bell Brothers, Isak Dinesen, what all these men had in common was that they were not men at all. Behind those masculine pseudonyms were hidden women who, despite their love for writing, were realistically concerned about their feminine role in society, and devoted themselves to the liberal arts.

One does not need to go far in time in order to find examples of how being a woman had influenced the name that finally appears on the cover. In 1997, a new published author

was advised by her editor to sign with her surname preceded by her initials, since by doing that, readers would not be prejudiced against her tales because of her gender. Although the editor could have been following his own prejudices on the subject time demonstrated that the stories were good independently of the person who had written them, and they quickly become the fantasy best sellers of the '*Harry Potter*' series. In this particular case, the motivation behind the decision to hide the name was the fact that fantasy is a genre traditionally associated to the masculine. Another recent victim of this prejudice was J.L Smith, author of the '*Vampire Diaries*' series, also in the 90's.

The normalization of the use of the internet is turning these situations into examples of a time when not showing herself, physically or otherwise, was the only way to present a work to an editor and, ultimately, to the public, and changing names was a play that should be approved by those same editors who were, mainly, men.

It was precisely the Harry Potter series the one that popularized a particular literary subgenre, already existing, but obscure and underground: fanfiction<sup>1</sup>. In his article 'What is fanfiction and why are people saying such things about it?', Browen Thomas points out how this genre opened the door to a community in which, in an anonymous way, fans could create their own stories about their beloved characters, avoiding the otherwise possible punishment for the use of copyrighted material. (1) Although Browen's analysis comes from a Marxist point of view, one can perfectly apply the same premise to feminism, since the community of female writers does not need to expose themselves to the public, and women are able to share their works, receive feedback and develop their art without exposure or embarrassment.

This anonymity allows women to explore their own feelings, worries and ideas more deeply and freely, since the patriarchal social chains do not have the same power in the cyberspace, for none knows who is typewriting at the other side of the screen. One can check this phenomenon in the increasing creation of communities of writers of blognovels<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Psychoanalytic Criticism

The first story, *Blueberries*, is about Laura, a painter and a fragile girl abused by her maternal grandfather who lives in the rural state of Indiana in the United States of America. Although her parents were aware of her suffering, they kept silent. Later her father committed suicide, perhaps out of guilt. Laura is on Prozac because she suffers from a post-traumatic mental disorder. In the second story, "The Yellow Wallpapers", a woman suffers from postnatal depression. In both stories, artistic activities -painting and writing- fill up the lives of both protagonists, almost as a form of therapy that helps them verbalize their traumas. This is how they liberate what is in their unconscious. The narratives are told in first person and this helps the audience to empathize more.

While "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a linear story, in *Blueberries* the reader can choose the path to follow. Purple words turn grey after being clicked. The hypertextual structure is perfect to create intrigue and suspense so that the reader takes on the role of protagonist in order to find out about what happened to Laura. The hypertextual narrative can move back and forth while exploring her past and her present, relating dreams and memories, almost as if navigating through her mind.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Browen Thomas, 'The term fanfiction (sometimes abbreviated as fanfic) refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a "canon" of works' (What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?)

<sup>2</sup> A perfect example of this is the Spanish community 'El club de las Escritoras' <http://elclubdelasescritoras.blogspot.com/>

**Someone is watching me, has been since I was about eight. It's a man around forty--he's always been around forty--and he's quick and short. I've only seen him a few times from a distance and he blends with the light. It's not my dead father. I wish that it was.**

**Mostly though, since Jon left me, I'm alone, as if the bubble I live in were unbreakable.**

"Why did your father hang himself?"  
Jon asked me once.

"It was an accident," I said, not knowing what else my mother had told him. She was bitter and hateful and lied.

Jon never asked about the stories my father would tell me, or the boys I dated in high school, or who popped my cherry. Of course I wouldn't have told him. Nor did I tell him about the man who still watches me.

Oddly enough, the man who probably loved me the most was my grandfather.

In psychoanalytical terms, the id (in Freud's terminology) or the imaginary (in Lacan's) refer to the 'Mirror Stage' during which a baby becomes aware of the separation from its mother, becoming a distinct person. There are many instances in both narratives that show how the protagonists do not see themselves as individuals. For instance, Laura says that, "something of mine is gone with the loss of the men in my life" (*Blueberries* n/p), and Gilman expects John, her husband, to decide for her, "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 650). Later in the stories, both women start to look for their own identities as individuals different from the world of men and patriarchal society. At this stage, in the psychoanalytic account the baby acquires mobility and autonomous existence. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the woman emerges from the wallpaper "stooping down and creeping about behind the pattern" (656), almost as child becoming mobile and independent.

In psychoanalysis, this first reflection on the mirror shows an alien being in whom the baby cannot recognize herself. Julia Kristeva uses the term 'abjection'<sup>3</sup> to refer to this moment of misrecognition. There are several examples of alienation in both narratives. Strangeness in the stories is related to patterns. For instance, the wallpaper which Gilman hates makes her feel uncomfortable while watching it: "I can see a strange provoking

<sup>3</sup> "Our reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The primary example is the corpse (which traumatically reminds us of our own materiality); however, other items can elicit the same reaction: the open wound, shit, sewage, even a particularly immoral crime (e.g. Auschwitz). Kristeva posits that abjection is something that we must experience in our psychosexual development before entering into the mirror stage, that is, the establishment of such boundaries as self and other or human and animal. Kristeva also associates the abject with the maternal since the establishment of the boundary between self and other marks our movement out of the chora."

<<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/termsmainframe.html>>

formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design." ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 650) In *Blueberries*: "Sometimes, when the moon is strong enough to make me weep, I take a stranger into my bed" (n/p), writes Laura, while struggling to finish her paintings. The fear of dissolving herself into someone else in the wall pattern in particular is constant in Gilman. In Laura's case, her fear of washing seems to be related to her apprehension that "I will disappear into the clearness of the water. That place where all the men in my life have evaporated." (*Blueberries* n/p)

In Lacan's theory, the imaginary<sup>4</sup> is connected to the unconscious, which holds desires and feelings that cannot be controlled. These desires are related to ideas of personal freedom and to fear of anything that might mean assimilation into someone else, in this case patriarchal society. Both protagonists try to set themselves free by means of their art, writing in the first example, and painting in the second: "Instincts is what makes my paintings what they are". (*Blueberries* n/p) she adds. The protagonist in Gilman's story and Laura solve their dream of reaching freedom at night, while the unconscious emerges:

It was moonlight [...] The figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out. I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 652);

"I would fall asleep and dream that I was Jake" writes Laura (*Blueberries* n/p)

For Freud, societal rules are present in the superego<sup>5</sup>, which in both stories is represented by the families of the protagonists, particularly the mothers for "Mothers teach their daughters to become women" (*Blueberries* n/p). Laura had always wanted to be a painter but her "mother bought [her] ballet slippers and a tuba" (*Blueberries* n/p). In Gilman's case, the figure who represents the rules of society is embodied in her sister-in-law: "Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! She is perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 652)

The ego emerges as a kind of negotiation between the superego and the id and come to the fore in these stories by means of the dialogue between the life and the dreams of the protagonists. The ego must feed the needs of the id but also take into account the real life circumstances. Both women express their inclinations, but they are not aware that their reality is different: "Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648); "I laugh because I can't cry" (*Blueberries* n/p). Traumatic events are the cause of their split personalities. In the case of Gilman's protagonist, trauma refers to her incapacity to be what society desires of her, that is, a good mother. Laura's internal conflict is due to her suffering sexual abuse in infancy.

Trauma<sup>6</sup> can cause emotions to become restricted in order to protect against distressing thoughts or reminders of what happened. The unconscious mind silences trauma, which can only be remembered when spoken aloud. The way Laura covers up her trauma is evident in the complex structure of the hypertext. The talking cure is a therapy that only became popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before, patients were recommended isolation in the 'rest-cure'. Trauma is disclosed in verbalization. But until speech is possible, trauma

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<sup>4</sup> "The fundamental narcissism by which the human subject creates fantasy of both himself and his ideal object of desire. The imaginary order is closely tied to Lacan's theorization of mirror stage. For Lacan this imaginary realm continues to exert its influence throughout the life of the adult and is not merely superceded in the child's movement into the symbolic order. Indeed, the imaginary and the symbolic are inextricably intertwined and work in tension with the Real." <<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/termsmainframe.html>>

<sup>5</sup> See Freud, *The Ego and The Id* (1923)

<sup>6</sup> A working definition of trauma could be an "intense mental, emotional, or physical disturbance resulting from stress." (Merriam Collegiate Thesaurus Dictionary 1988: 778)

might emerge into other types of languages, for example by means of creativity. "When I paint I feel as if the paint comes from the brush from my fingers from the veins flowing blood that changes color as it hits the canvas" writes Laura (*Blueberries* n/p) Art is a way to express fears, emotions and other psychological concerns: "The day of the opening I skitter around the gallery moving canvases from one place to another, deciding how they need to be hung" (*Blueberries* n/p).

Alongside silence, traumatic events are often displaced in the unconscious mind. Displacement<sup>7</sup> often emerges as a series of associated symptoms and phobias. The trauma victim tries to forget about the event, to put it in the back of her mind and pretend it never happened. But all kind of smells, sounds or other types of memory associations are built around the event, making it impossible to completely block it. Gilman's protagonist shows a phobia to the yellow color: "The paint and paper look as if a boy's school had used it" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648). In the case of Laura, blueberries are associated to sex: "Blueberries smell of morning breeze and sex" (n/p). There is also a relationship between the white color and the loss of her childhood. White symbolizes purity and virginity. But it is not so much the physical idea of virginity that may sometimes be traumatic for a rape-victim. The real trauma comes from the feeling of the loss of innocence at a very young age; the innocence that her grandfather shattered.

The development of both stories reflects the regression that Laura and Gilman's protagonists are going through. According to Freud's *Mourning & Melancholia* (1917), the person who suffers a trauma cuts himself or herself off from social reality: "and sent me home with solemn advice to "live as domestic as possible ("Why I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*" line 5); "I felt myself pulling against being pulled into it" (*Blueberries* n/p). The person also experiences a regression into narcissistic identification, in order to protect herself, or a retreat into an earlier stage of development (narcissism), when she felt safer and protected by a care-taker figure (normally the mother or father). The woman in the wallpaper is nothing less than Gilman's reflection. As in the Narcissus myth she "falls in love" with her reflected image, she is constantly watching the wallpaper and trying to find out what the woman is going to do: " This paper looks at me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had." ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 649) In the case of rape victims, they may spend their lives searching for such a protecting figure, or may employ masks, frequently unconsciously, in order to appear unworried about the traumatic event.

Gilman and Laura are suffering from the Oedipus complex — childhood desire of killing the father and sleeping with the mother. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman wants to meet the woman who eventually emerges from the wallpaper: "But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me, -- not alive!" (655) On the other hand, she wants to "kill" her husband, who represents patriarchy: "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!" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 656) In Laura's case apart from the Oedipus complex, with the death of her father and grandfather. We can also hold that she suffers from the Electra complex too. Laura tells her audience about the death of her mother in her childhood and we find a sexual reference to her father: "my father's voice telling stories goes through my head while I paint. I masturbate onto the canvas with colors that follow the narrative arc." (*Blueberries* n/p)

Both *Blueberries* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" are good examples of how people, whether fictional characters or real persons, can cope with traumatic events by means of 'telling'. Writing and painting are two ways by means of which trauma is voiced or disclosed. Artistic representations contribute to let out the emotional power that these events have left

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<sup>7</sup> Displacement has a special position among the defense mechanisms. It belongs to those few defenses that have been described as "archaic" and it also leads to a resolution different from the others. Freud mentions displacement in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), assuming that dream formation uses displacement under the influence of censorship as an endopsychic defense. (The repressed returns in hidden ways)

on the person. Sharing them with a friendly listening audience who might empathize helps trauma victims to come to terms with the event.

The hypertextual structure is particularly powerful for staging and negotiating the workings of a confused traumatized mind. The regression and the fragmentation can be perfectly embedded in this kind of structure. The breaking of the sequence creates suspense and shows the psychological dysfunction in a temporal and spatial sense. The networking pattern helps the victim to exemplify the confusing aspects and symptoms of the traumatic experience, and it allows for the emergence of the new self: "I wonder if they all (women) come out of that wall-paper as I did?", writes de protagonists of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (653). The protagonists are trying to regain their self-reliance because their identity is threatened due to their respective traumas. In *Blueberries*, Laura writes "how I'd wanted this gallery showing to be my transcendence to freedom. To be a metaphorical doorway to an identity stripped of its influence by men" (*Blueberries* n/p). It is in this sense that hypertext can be used as a liberating power, as the activists who wrote the *Cyberfeminist Manifesto* back in 1991 claimed.

#### 4. Feminist Criticism

The two main themes in "The Yellow Wallpaper" are the criticism of the "rest cure" and the oppression that women suffer in the nineteenth century. Gilman based the story on her own experiences. She suffered from a post-partum depression and Dr. S. Weir Mitchell prescribed her the "rest cure" which consists of four steps: extended and total bed rest, isolation from family, overfeeding (increased body volume creates new energy) and massages. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the author makes a reference to the Doctor: "he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall" (650). As she claims in "Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*", "For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown..." (line 5). "The Yellow Wallpaper" reflects the emotional and mental result of her "rest cure", and she expresses her negative feeling about such treatment: "It has, to my knowledge, saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into a normal activity and she recovered" ("Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*" line 13). She also states that "It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked" ("Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*" line 15). Her major success is that "the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" ("Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*" line 14).

Related to the theme of patriarchal oppression, both Gilman and Gibb explore how societies, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century respectively, define and designate women's roles toward the family and the home: "She is perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 650), "Mothers teach their daughters to become women" (*Blueberries* n/p) and subsequently fulfill that given role in society: "I remember drawing lips red and pouty on a preteen mouth. It was just the first effort in a lifelong pursuit of being my mother." (*Blueberries* n/p)

In "The Yellow Wallpaper" there is a submission of women through marriage: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage." (647). In the case of Laura and her mother this submission is carried out through her sexual abuse, which involves not the physical trauma but rather the psychological one. One might even suspect that Laura's mother suffered from her father's abuse too: "My mother sobbed at the funeral. It made me wonder if she didn't know of the slow summer nights in my bedroom. What we'd done and what kind of man he was. Maybe she did understand and loved him more than she ever had loved my father. I know she didn't cry that much at his funeral." (*Blueberries* n/p)

Institutionalized forms of power are also portrayed supporting the patriarchal system. Religion plays an important role in the submission of women in *Blueberries*. Laura tells a priest what her grandfather is doing to her, and the priest tells Laura's mother, probably casting doubt on her: "The priest told my mother what I'd told him. I didn't realize that the seal of confession only exists in the formality of ritual; the "Bless me Father, for I have sinned... She called me perverted. Screamed and denied her father would ever have

touched me." (*Blueberries* n/p) The priest breaks the seal of confession but he does not try to solve the problem at all, he does not go any further. Many of the religious references are related to Laura's grandfather: "He smelled on Sundays (Holy Day) of cigars that Grandma let him smoke that one day of the week." (*Blueberries* n/p)

Women are imprisoned in the home or private sphere while men enjoy mobility in all domains: "John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 649), "John to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 655). Men's responsibility is to lead, protect and provide for his family, thus only men can have a career: "John is a physician" and "my brother is also a physician", "I am a doctor, dear, and I know" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 652). Women are housewives, while men are successful in their jobs, Jon is a lawyer and a businessman who owns a bar: "I think it was the years he went to Harvard Law where he learned a language different than mine. But he did let me paint." (*Blueberries* n/p) In a world dominated by men, the feminine "lack" of visibility is shown every time the protagonists use the pronoun "I" or "myself" instead of their proper names. In the stories, their names are heard just once, an many of the other female characters are not mentioned by their name, as in the case of Laura's mother and grandmother.

The male characters of both stories are clear examples of patriarchal power. This is shown in several ways. For example, they have the physical and mental control of women. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" what John says is almost and order. If she wants to do something she must ask him first because she cannot take her own decisions: "but John would not hear of it" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648), "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall" (650), "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" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 651), "I painted with three people watching. They sat quietly behind me. My grandfather, my father, and the strange little man who I now think is Jesus. They didn't like my green leaves so I painted them black." (*Blueberries* n/p)

Women's sense of annihilation is such, that they even agree with their men "but he is right enough about the beds and windows and things" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 649), "I never hated him. Even when I understood what he'd done" (*Blueberries* n/p) and they also try to justify their behavior: "it is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" p.652), "Oddly enough, the man who probably loved me the most was my grandfather" (*Blueberries* n/p)

Mental manipulation is present when Gilman writes "but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648). As Laura is young it is easier for her grandfather to manipulate her: "'Dolly, don't tell your mother," he'd whisper. "Don't tell any one." "No, Grandpa," I'd say. "It's just that I love you so much." Sometimes he'd give me a special treat like a green hard candy that he'd plucked from the bowl and saved for me because he knew I liked lime." (*Blueberries* n/p)

The character of John, in Gilman's story and of Laura's mother and grandfather in Gibb's reflect that society wants women to accept their submission, with sentences such as, they "never spoke of it again" (*Blueberries* n/p), after Laura's confession to the priest, or expression of conformity: "And what can one do?" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648)

Writing and painting is an escape that keeps them more or less sane, but even this they cannot do freely: "he hates to have me write a word" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 649), "There comes John's sister. [...] I must not let her find me writing" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 650), "I painted with three people watching. They sat quietly behind me. My grandfather, my father, and the strange little man who I now think is Jesus. They didn't like my green leaves so I painted them black. And in the center of the canvas I painted a sack of white blueberries" (*Blueberries* n/p).

The "rest cure" might have just been another device to control women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gilman was advised by her doctor to "live as a domestic live as far as possible" and "never touch a pen, brush, or pencil again" ("Why I Wrote *the Yellow Wallpaper*" line 7).



Both Gilman's protagonist, identified with the author or not, and Laura, the heroine of *Blueberries*, want to challenge the patriarchal values; they disagree with these ideas and they want to have her own voice: "But I must say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 651) and "I'd wanted this gallery showing to be my transcendence to freedom. To be a metaphorical doorway to an identity stripped of its influence by men. Or I should say, by men and my mother. They all had to be left behind the curtain" (*Blueberries* n/p)

As a consequence of not fulfilling men's expectations, both women are punished, so as to train them back into the patriarchal system, as Foucault would say. Gilman is separated from her baby and John and she does not share the same bed: "He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648). Laura's dreams are also rejected, even by her own mother: "When I was eight I wanted to be an explorer. It might have been the influence of my father's stories about the amazing Jake, though he'd stopped telling me bedtime stories when I was about six. [...] My first adventure was leaving home to find him. My mother hated that" (*Blueberries* n/p) Expressions of their desire to escape appear in many ways: "I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 654), "I'd wanted this gallery showing to be my transcendence to freedom" (*Blueberries* n/p). Jennie and Laura's mother also want to be free but they are not as strong as Gilman and Laura to fight for their rights: "But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it put but myself!" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 653), "My mother still blames me in subtle meaning hidden within her conversations. That's lovely dear, but it's so depressing, no?" (*Blueberries* n/p)

In both stories, the materiality of women's bodies, as expressed in the wallpaper and in the painting of blueberries, is presented as a trap. Color associations are also involved in the negative memories that incarcerate both women: "I never saw a worse paper in my life" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648), "the color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow" (649), "I remember the smell of the ripe fruit from the bushes beneath the room where you slept" said my grandfather". (*Blueberries* n/p) Even the gallery where Laura displays her work is associated to her grandfather and patriarchal society: "The gallery where I'm showing is huge. [...] Blank white walls that I imagine spotted with blood red" (*Blueberries* n/p)

Patriarchal society allows no freedom to them: "That's a shitty collection to put together for one-woman show" said the short man. You have to paint them all over" (*Blueberries* n/p) In "The Yellow Wallpaper", "the windows are barred for little children" (648), while the protagonist would like "roses all over the window" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 648). In *Blueberries* "ceilings are white as are clouds which [she's] come to believe are really holes in the sky", and Laura would like to cross these holes in order to be free. Images related to the theme of escape are constant in both stories: "As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and run to help her" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 655); or "Sometimes the Prozac doesn't work on the days of intense creativity. It hides in the colors that flow from my veins through my fingers." (*Blueberries* n/p) In both stories, the connection to childhood and Narcissism appears in relation to the patterns and colors of the wallpaper and the white canvas: "It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 656); "Angels are white. Little girls in First Holy Communion white dresses" (*Blueberries* n/p)

The protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" imagines a world where all women challenge this patriarchal society: "I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?" (656). The feeling of freedom comes when she tears all the wallpaper off the walls, her life is on her own hands and she no longer worries about what her husband thinks. She changes his role as the dominant one and ridicules him: "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!" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 656), now she is over him, she plays the dominant role.

In Laura's case this feeling of freedom appears when she is going to show her work: "The day of the opening I skitter around the gallery moving canvases from one place to another, deciding how they need to be hung" (*Blueberries* n/p). She is free to decide the order of her canvases so as to feel better; she is in total control of her life.

Both stories show many examples of the binary oppositions through which men and women are culturally constructed, according to Simone Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*) (1949). Men are independent while women depend on them. Women are weak and emotional: "It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 652), "I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time. Of course I don't when John is here" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" p.650) but men are strong and rational: "I suppose John never was nervous in his life" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 649). In "Blueberries," Jake "went to the circus and got inside the lion's cage" while Laura "would fall asleep and dream that [she] was with Jake. Jake is also able to take crucial decisions in his life: "Jake had to decide whether to go to Los Angeles and find the golden cherry or help his dad get ready for the state fair, he said. His stories always had an important decision for Jake to make that would change his whole life." (*Blueberries* n/p)

Many Gothic elements are associated to imprisonment and alienation. Gilman states: "Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 647), "That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid [...] there is something strange about the house, I can feel it" (648). The night is also another element present in both stories. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the woman comes to live at night: "Trough watching so much at night, when it changes so, I finally found out. The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 654), "Sometimes, when the moon is strong enough to make me weep, I take a stranger into my bed." (*Blueberries* n/p)

In *Blueberries* there is the mysterious death of Laura's father, who has committed suicide: "My mother blamed me and my brother for my father's death. She wouldn't let us see him in the coffin. I never believed her that he was dead." (*Blueberries* n/p) There is also a strange man that follows Laura: "Someone is watching me, has been since I was about eight. It's a man around forty--he's always been around forty--and he's quick and short. I've only seen him a few times from a distance and he blends with the light. It's not my dead father. I wish that it was." (*Blueberries* n/p) We can even find ghosts: "The ghosts all came with me. They're hiding in the brushstrokes." (*Blueberries* n/p), "Someone was talking loudly and I couldn't understand what he was saying. There was no one in the room to tell me that they heard it too.

## 5. Conclusion

During centuries women have been suffering from patriarchal oppression under the psychological and physical control of men. Signs and consequences of this oppression can be found in the history of sexual abuse, religious dogmas, inequalities in marriage laws, and literary fiction, which captures not just the history of a particular time but also its ethos. In the medical profession, a story such as "The Yellow Wallpaper" shows, as Elaine Showalter does in *The Female Malady*, that medicines were used to restrain women's movement. The prescribing of the rest cure followed the same aim.

Physical violence is another way to keep women under control. In *Blueberries*, Laura's grandfather rapes her he uses all his strength to force her. Women are generally weaker than men.

Institutionalized powers, such as politics and religion, have worked at the level of culture to oppress women. Inequalities in marriage legal status can be seen in the way men take the leading role in all important decisions, while women are refrain from public life, and kept in a domestic environment taking care of the family and fulfilling the role of exemplary mothers and an obedient wives that society demanded and continuous to demand in many ways.

There are many more examples, too long to summarize in this brief paper that has sought to offer a glimpse of the patriarchal domination women have suffered, and the effects

upon their minds and their psyche. Under such conditions, women have not been able to grow as independent beings and free persons, being constantly limited by their fathers, their partners, their doctors, and men in society in general.

My aim in bringing together a print edition of an autobiographical short story and another tale in hypertext format has been to reflect how the telling of the narratives might be affected by the material format in which they are unveiled. It has also allowed me to bring to distinct, and simultaneously alike, testimonies of women's oppression. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" to criticize the "rest cure" and she achieved what she set out to do:

But the best result is this. Many years later I was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked. ("Why I wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*" lines 14-15).

In the contemporary tale of *Blueberries*, Laura, the protagonist, also succeeds in her freedom quest, and is able to present her pictures in an art gallery: "The day of the opening I skitter around the gallery moving canvases from one place to another, deciding how they need to be hung" (*Blueberries* n/p)

Telling is an important aspect of the psychoanalytic cure. At a time when doctors refused to listen to women by locking them up in a room with the excuse of the rest cure, women found a way to speak about their traumas, like Gilman. And if not to speak about them, to put them on display for everyone to see, as Laura in *Blueberries*. The impact of the hypertext format, breaking the narrative in apparently disconnected episodes that the reader must put in mental order if she wants to get to the end of the tale in *Blueberries*, or the blurring of generic lines between fiction and autobiography in Gilman's case, are also ways of appropriating and subverting traditional male memory formats such as the book or the technology based hypertext. The internet also allows women to connect across space and tell their stories to others, like Gilman and of Laura, offering psychological release to women who are going through similar situations.

Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century push their way into technology to pursue a struggle for equality that continues to be a pending subject. The fight against patriarchy is reflected, for instance, in the media debate on violence against women across the world, a debate that shows that stories such as Gilman's and Laura's may hide under the umbrella of fiction to reveal the trauma of things too hard to tell.

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