

Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)
Protection as Imprisonment: Male Authority and the Erosion of Female Agency in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"
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How to Cite This Article: Hassan, S., Khan, B. & Jabeen, H. (2025). Protection as Imprisonment: Male Authority and the Erosion of Female Agency in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?". *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 3 (04), 701-709.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.34.701.709>

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)

ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 3, No. 4 (2025)

Pages: 701-709

Key Words:

Patriarchal protection, female Agency, confinement, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Joyce Carol Oates, Feminist literary criticism, Masculine authority, mental Imprisonment

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Abstract: *This paper will analyze the two prominent short stories, The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? (1966) by Joyce Carol Oates. The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate the way in which male protection functions as a psychological mechanism that breaks the female protagonists down and destroy their identity. The husband's profession as a physician enables him to use his medical authority to lock the narrator up in a house, under the guise of treating and curing her in the short story The Yellow Wallpaper. This supposed protection is exactly what contributes to her insanity, even if it is not the sole cause. In Oates's text, Connie has no agency or empowerment given to her from her family or society. This lack of protection from home and society makes her susceptible to the psychological attack from the stranger. The words and actions of the stranger are attempts to grasp at power, under the guise of knowing and caring for Connie. Drawing on feminist, Michel Foucault's (1995) theory of power, and the psychoanalytic theory regarding the impact of physical constraint on the self, this paper will argue that both stories illustrate a general contradiction in patriarchal society. The institutions meant to protect women such as marriage, medicine, home, family, etc. are the very institutions that make women vulnerable. The protagonists' declines into madness or physical destruction are not the result of the protection system failing, but rather the inevitable outcome of it succeeding. This paper will also argue that both authors employ spatial imagery as well as narrative structure to represent the regression of female identity under patriarchal power. Through images of rooms, houses, and locomotion, the authors demonstrate the physical and psychological constriction of the female self.*

Introduction

The ideology of male protection maintains an interesting, complex position within the main system of patriarchy. While it is always depicted as benevolent, i. e., a husband sheltering his wife, a father sheltering his daughter, or various masculine authorities, medicine, law, social codes – sheltering the female mind and body, it has, at the same time, operated throughout history as a formidable means of

controlling women's bodies, minds, speech, and autonomy, in the guise of a concern for their well-being and security. The history of female seclusion to the home, to the asylum, to one's domesticity, is at once a history of shelter and a history of confinement. The distinction between the two has always remained ambiguous. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Joyce Carol Oates's *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* (1966) are two influential and frequently discussed works of American feminist literature. Despite the fact that these two works are separated by some seventy years and belong to different moments in literary history, Gilman's work being produced in the heyday of first-wave feminism, while Oates's was penned during the tumult of the 1960s. Both works address in powerful ways how men's protection of women has, in the past and present, become a way of mentally confining women. In both works, the female protagonists are stripped of their agency and their subjectivity. This paper suggests that both Gilman's and Oates's works expose a structural paradox at the heart of patriarchy. That is, the very institutions that shelter women, marriage, the family home, medicine, the discourse of care, are the very institutions that produce feminine fragility and vulnerability. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator's physician-husband John prescribes the infamous rest cure which confines her to a single room, disallows her from intellectual labor, and ultimately drives her into psychosis. In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, teenager Connie's family, too strict and yet too lax, fails to give her the security and empowerment she needs to navigate the outside world, leaving her vulnerable to the sinister Arnold Friend who, through words of caring and warmth, traps her. Through a comparative analysis of these two works, this paper shows that patriarchal sheltering is a totalizing system that first renders female subjects passive, dependent, and vulnerable, and then, once those conditions have been established, blames women for being passive, dependent, and vulnerable.

Theoretical Framework

The Feminist Critique of Protection

Feminist theorists have long argued that the rhetoric of protection is a key element in the enforcement of the patriarchal order. MacKinnon (1989) argues that the protection offered by the state to women through laws governing marriage, prohibitions against sexual assault, and definitions of familial relationships, accomplishes less the freeing of women than it does the further restriction and control of women, with the result being the definition of women's legal existence primarily in relation to the men who are supposed to protect them. Brown expands on this argument by asserting that, the rhetorical deployment of the claim to protection contains the necessary grounds for these restraining gendering constraints: it casts women as inherently dependent, passive, vulnerable, and subject to victimization. This victimization, in turn, authorizes their protection; protection, in turn, recreates them as subject to victimization. Thus, women are confined because they are vulnerable; but, simultaneously, they are vulnerable because they are confined (1995, 169-170). In this way, Brown argues that the discourse of protection is constitutive of a bifurcated self, one who is simultaneously in need of protection and incapable of receiving it. This is precisely the dynamic that is at work in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* While the specific contexts of the two stories differ significantly, both tales tell the same story of the destruction of the self through the relentless imposition of protection. The narrator of Gilman's story is locked into the yellow wallpaper room because she is ill; the hallucinations, obsessions, and anxiety attacks that she experiences in the yellow wallpaper room provide, for her husband, further proof of the necessity of her confinement. Similarly, in Oates's story, Connie is stifled by her home life, her own inability to differentiate the real thing from the imitation because of the discourse of protection with which she is constantly bombarded. In this way,

both tales are allegories for Brown's argument about the effects of the discourse of protection on the self: the isolation and vulnerability of the self-perpetuate themselves in a kind of symbiotic, deadly dance.

Foucault and Disciplinary Confinement

Michel Foucault's notions of disciplinary power (1975/1995) are particularly useful for understanding the two literary pieces at issue here. Foucault argues that modern power is not exercised so much through grandiose expressions of power, of a king or sovereign, but rather through small-scale, diffuse means, such as surveillance, normalization, and enclosure. Institutions like prisons, hospitals, schools, and asylums are all examples of disciplinary mechanisms wherein subjects are locked up, subjected to constant surveillance, and compelled to conform to the normal behavior defined by the authority figures within the institution. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the home becomes precisely such a disciplinary space. The narrator is locked up in a single room, subject to the constant surveillance of her husband's clinical gaze and compelled to conform to the normal behavior dictated by the rest cure. The nursery, with its barred windows, bed nailed to the floor, and yellow wallpaper, becomes a kind of prison cell for both the body and the psyche. In a more complex way, Oates's story uses Foucault's ideas about disciplinary power. In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* the familial home is not a space of strict, overt confinement. Rather, it is a space where discipline breaks down in a particular way. The home disciplines and normalizes feminine passivity and dependence but does not provide the concomitant protection which would be needed by such a passive subject when she ventures out into the world. This is precisely the kind of power vacuum in which Arnold Friend makes his move. He approaches the very limits of the home, standing on the porch, and uses the language of love and intimacy in order to breach the boundary between the home and the world.

Psychoanalytic theory provides still another way of understanding what is happening to the psyches of the two heroines, how they experience this sense of psychic enclosure. D. W. Winnicott's (1960) formulation of the false self, a self-system that is organized to meet the expectations of others rather than the needs of the self, is especially relevant here. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, for example, the narrator begins by trying to submit to John's rest cure, to play the part of the good wife and patient. This is her false self-system at work. Her true self, her artistic, intellectual, and perceptive self, is submerged, but emerges in distorted fashion when she begins to see and identify with the woman behind the wallpaper. In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* Connie has two distinct self-systems, one which she exhibits at home with her family, and another which she exhibits when she is out with her friends and boyfriends. Because she lacks an integrated sense of self, because she is divided in this way, she is unable to stand up against the insidious, seductive words of Arnold Friend. In both cases, the regime of patriarchal power that surrounds each woman results in a bifurcated sense of self, a true self which is either completely repressed, or which is broken into bits. This bifurcation leaves the woman susceptible to a profound disintegration of self.

Male Medical Authority as Domestic Imprisonment in "The Yellow Wallpaper"

The Rest Cure as Patriarchal Technology

Gilman's text takes as its inspiration a nineteenth-century treatment called the rest cure, a treatment devised by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell to cure people of Neurasthenia. Neurasthenia is a nervous disease that manifested itself in tiredness, anxiety, and all around nervousness and was thought to be primarily a woman's disease. The cure told its patients not to do anything. No exercise, no reading, no writing, and no thinking. Bed rest, lots of food, and isolation were its course of treatment. Gilman went through the rest cure herself and later testified that it nearly drove her to complete madness. This experience

lends the text much of its authority. The rest cure that Gilman writes about is not a therapeutic response to illness but a patriarchal instrument. It is a tool, backed up by the authority and language of medicine, to keep a woman in a passive, childlike, dependent state. In the text, the narrator's husband John is also her doctor. This compounding of patriarchal powers into one man means that both marital authority and medical authority are concentrated in him. His authority is shown as absolute. He decides the conditions under which the narrator will stay in the house, what she will eat, when she will sleep, and what she will be able to do. All these decisions are made not out of maliciousness but out of his benevolent certainty as a doctor that he is making the best decisions for her. He is certain that his prescription will cure her, and he speaks always with the words of concern, of worry, of logic. And it is precisely his absolute conviction of his own benevolence that makes his control so dangerous. John is so convinced of his good intent that he cannot see that what he is doing is harming his wife. And because his authority comes not just from his marriage but from his medicine as well, his wife cannot even question his decisions without appearing as both an ungrateful patient and an uncooperative wife.

The Room as Psychic Architecture

The room in which the narrator is confined serves as both the actual physical place and the psychic structure of the text. It is the physical manifestation of how a woman is infantilized through her protector's overprotectiveness. The room had been a nursery and the wallpaper was its selling point. These facts imply much about the infantilization the rest cure imposed on the patient. The windows had bars on them, the bed was immovably nailed to the floor, and the wallpaper was the most dominant aspect of the room. At first the narrator finds the wallpaper ugly, detestable, and repulsive, but as the story progresses and the narrator's mind deteriorates, the wallpaper becomes the only thing that the narrator sees. The enclosure of the room mirrors the enclosure of the narrator's mind through the rest cure. Just as the bars confine her in the room, John's prescription against intellectual or creative work confines her mind. The bars forbid her to leave the space of the room, the proscription against intellectual work prohibits the use of the creative imagination that would help her preserve her sanity. The wallpaper becomes the pre-eminent symbol of the narrator's psychic prison. The shifting, messy, labyrinthine pattern of the paper symbolizes the chaos, the disintegration of the narrator's mind that occurs as a result of a treatment that takes away any reasonable outlet for her to express herself. Later in the story, the narrator starts to see a woman, sometimes multiple women, caught behind the wallpaper. The women are creeping and struggling to free themselves from the labyrinth of the paper. Most readers interpret the woman caught in the wallpaper as the narrator's true self, the inner self that John's protective rest cure has isolated and confined. At the conclusion of the story, the narrator peels off the wallpaper and creeps around the room, stepping over the prone body of her husband who has fainted. This final act is at once liberatory (she frees the woman) and self-destructive (she completely merges with her hallucination and loses all distinction between self and madness). The Erosion of Narrative Authority Gilman's text demonstrates the erosion of the narrator's self through the development of the narrator's narrative voice. The text is comprised entirely of the narrator's secret diary entries. The early entries demonstrate a narrator who is clear, self-conscious, and even ironic. She recognizes the absurdity of her situation and comments on the illogic of John's decisions with clever, sardonic prose. But as the text progresses, the narrator's entries become shorter, repetitive, and obsessively fixated on the wallpaper. A voice that was initially sharp and witty devolves into a monomaniacal hallucination. She can no longer sustain a rational thought or distinguish between interiority and exteriority. The development of this voice is significant. The first part of the diary entries demonstrate that the narrator has the intellect and imagination to navigate her situation. What she

lacks is the liberty to exercise those faculties. John's ban on writing (which the narrator breaks with the composing of this secret diary) is the literal mechanism by which he strips her of the tools she needs to save herself. So, the diary functions in a dual manner. It documents her confinement and it is also her last valiant attempt to maintain the self that the rest cure is systematically eroding. When the diary finally breaks down into the full hallucination of the woman in the wallpaper, the reader witnesses the precise moment when the narrator can no longer represent herself. The rest cure has completely succeeded in its erosion of herself and the power to exercise her intellect and imagination.

The Predatory Rhetoric of Protection in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

The Domestic Vacuum: Family as Insufficient Protection

Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been is a semi-autobiographical short story of sorts, inspired by the author's own teenage experiences in a slightly suburbanized version of upstate New York and by a semi-factual news article. Despite the news article as a basis, Oates insists that the rest of the story is a product of her imagination, and that she has written the story and its plot at least ten times in her novels. Oates begins the story by describing the semi-confining home-life of fifteen year old Connie and how that home and the family within it aid in confining her. Connie is constantly being reprimanded and criticized by her mother; she is compared to her older sister June, her appearance and movements are monitored, and her social life is subject to scrutiny. The father is almost non-existent. He works, comes home, reads the newspaper, eats, and sleeps; he holds a father figure role in the family, but he has no real connection or authority over his daughters. The house is not a warm, comforting place; it is a place of an empty authoritative presence. For Connie, the home is a place to escape from, not a place to be safe in. The authoritative presence within the home is very important to the climax of the story. They have enough authority to make Connie feel the need to look elsewhere for her identity, but they do not have enough authority to provide Connie with the security and wherewithal to survive her encounters with predators outside of the home. Connie lives a double-life; at home she is the obedient daughter, but outside, in a place such as a drive-in restaurant, she is a flirtatious teenager who has to maintain the attention of boys. This dichotomy is a direct result of the authoritative presence of her home-life. Because she is neither nurtured nor given the authority to make decisions for herself, Connie creates another identity for herself outside of her home-life. The identity is mainly constructed around getting the attention, approbation, and affection of boys in ways that differ from how her family criticizes her. It is not agency, but a constructed identity, and it is an identity based around a compensation for the lack of approbation and affirmation she receives at home.

Arnold Friend: The Predator Disguised as the Concerned Boyfriend

One of the most terrifying and unsettling characters in all of American short stories, Arnold Friend, comes to Connie's house on a Sunday afternoon when the rest of her family is away. He comes in a gold-painted, vaguely antique car with a boy named Ellie Oscar who remains mostly silent. Arnold goes to great lengths to resemble a teenage boy. He wears boots with possible lifts in them to make him appear taller, his hair resembles a wig, and despite the sunglasses he wears, it is clear that he is much too old to have the face of the teenage boy he is disguised as. In his core, Arnold Friend is a predator masquerading as a boy around Connie's age. His sole intent is to dress himself up in the disguise of someone who is in Connie's peer-group in order to coerce her to dismantle the mental barriers she has built up. Arnold's mode of address appropriates the rhetoric of concern and protection in order to coerce Connie into dismantling her barriers. He tells Connie that he will not come into her house unless she invites him into her house. He repeatedly assures her that he will not hurt her. He addresses her as if he has known her for a long time; he uses her name, the names of her friends, and talks about

activities she engages in on a daily basis. His rhetoric is a perverse mockery of the rhetoric of those who are concerned about her well-being. Whereas a father figure should tell her I will protect you, Arnold tells her I will not hurt you. Whereas a mother figure should tell her I know you and understand you, Arnold tells her I know everything about you. In this way, Connie begins to lose her ability to distinguish between those who are concerned for her well-being and those who are concerned for their own perverse desires. She begins to lose her ability to distinguish between protection and predation. Perhaps the most perverse aspect of Arnold's rhetoric is that he repeatedly tells Connie that she will go with him because she wants to. He appropriates the rhetoric of consent and turns coercion into consent.

The Dissolution of Self at the Threshold

Perhaps the most pivotal scene in Oates's story takes place at the threshold of the house; at the screen door that separates the inside from the outside, the domestic sphere from the sphere of predation. During the duration of Arnold's visit, Connie remains inside while Arnold stands on the porch. The screen door is the last remaining boundary between the safety of the house and the danger that lurks on the outside. Arnold never forces his way through the screen door. Instead, he uses his rhetoric to break down Connie's will until she pushes open the screen door and steps outside. This use of space is integral to Oates's exploration of patriarchal protection. The house, with its doors and walls, is meant to be a source of protection, but the doors and walls are rendered useless if the will of the subject inside is broken. Connie's home-life has not provided her with the will to enforce her boundaries; instead, it has only provided her with the will to obey. In the latter part of the story, Oates describes how Connie feels as if she is observing herself push open the screen door and step outside onto the porch to walk towards Arnold's car. The narrative distances the reader from Connie's inner experience and describes her actions in a detached way that suggests that she has lost all sense of self. Of course, the self that she lost was already a fragmented and multiple self. Oates does not describe any violence or physical violation because she does not need to. The violence has already been committed on Connie's psyche and sense of self. The emptiness of her home-life, the perverse rhetoric of Arnold, and the culture that has taught her to derive her sense of self-worth from the gaze of men have all contributed to the destruction of her sense of self to such an extent that when she finally emerges from the screen door, there is hardly a sense of self to violate.

Comparative Analysis

Protection as the Production of Vulnerability

The most obvious and direct point of correspondence between the two stories is the way in which they both depict how the system of benevolent patriarchy does not protect women from becoming vulnerable and injured; rather, it engenders that vulnerability. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the authority of the doctor creates the conditions for the narrator to go mad. The rest cure, with its regimen of inactivity, no intellectual engagement, and no exercise—indeed, the conditions of the rest cure itself—fosters the very hallucinations, fixations, and disintegration of the self that are the hallmarks of her madness. Without the rest cure, she may have recovered. Because of the rest cure, recovery is impossible. In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been*, the authority of the family creates the conditions for Connie to be vulnerable to attack. The combination of too much surveillance and not enough attention, too much criticism and absent fathers produces a girl who is psychologically unprotected. She is unable to withstand the assault of Arnold Friend's discourse. In both stories, the protective order is not merely insufficient. It is directly destructive. It creates the very vulnerability it purports to safeguard. This point has broad theoretical implications. It suggests that the logic of benevolent

patriarchy is not merely a flawed version of care; it is a logic of a different sort altogether. It suggests that the point of benevolent patriarchy is not to care for the woman in its charge, but to reproduce the system of patriarchy that grants the man (or men) the power to exert authority. The rest cure reproduces John's authority as doctor and husband. The domestic regime reproduces the family as a social unit with the father as authority and the mother as surveillance. In neither story does the well-being of the woman figure as the primary aim, even when the men purport to be acting in the woman's best interests.

Spatial Dynamics: The Room and the Threshold

One of the most striking features of both stories is their use of space and place to depict the diminution of a woman's subjectivity under the authority of men. In Gilman's story, the space in which the narrator moves decreases from the large house to the single room, to the wall with the wallpaper, to the single figure trapped behind the wallpaper. This diminishing space is echoed by the diminishing space of her mind under the rest cure. As the physical space diminishes, so too does the scope of her thoughts until everything is about the wallpaper and the figure behind it. The room functions as a kind of synecdoche for her mind: it is enclosed, disordered, and from which there is no escape. In Oates's story, space functions somewhat differently but to the same effect. Connie's social geography is split between the space of the family home (which is safe but also dull and critical) and the space outside the home (which is fun and involves boys and male attention). Arnold Friend destroys this distinction. The home ceases to be a space of safety and becomes a space of attack. The screen door becomes the critical motif. It promises to protect but is flimsy and easily breached. When Connie at last crosses the threshold of the screen door, the distinction between her safe home self and her dangerous street self utterly collapses. This erasure of her subject position was already enabled by the failure of the domestic regime to consolidate either one of them.

The Rhetoric of Benevolent Authority

The final correspondence between the two stories is their interest in the rhetoric of men who wield benevolent authority. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, John's rhetoric of benevolence is paternalistic, condescending, and infantilizing. He calls his wife little girl and blessed little goose. He teases her and tells her not to think. He asserts his authority over all her judgments. His discourse is soft and loving but paternal. He does not speak to her as an adult. In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been*, the rhetoric of Arnold Friend is different but its effects are the same. His discourse is too familiar, as if he already knows Connie, perhaps intimately. He repeats her name and couches his commands in the guise of kindly invitations. Both men mask the coercive force of their discourse. John's terms of endearment mask his control of his wife in the guise of caring for her. Arnold's too-familiar rhetoric masks his predatory designs on Connie in the guise of seduction. This correspondence is important because it highlights how the discourse of benevolent patriarchy—whether it occurs within the space of marriage, where it is socially condoned, or without, where it is predatory—relies on similar rhetorical strategies to naturalize domination and mask its effects. John's discourse naturalizes his authority as care of his wife. Arnold's discourse naturalizes his predatory designs as romance. In both cases, the woman is finally unable to name her situation or to defend herself against it. The narrator in Gilman's story is unable to articulate her suffering because the medical discourse of her husband has supplanted her own. Connie is unable to recognize or articulate the danger that faces her because the pseudo-intimate discourse of Arnold has destroyed her critical faculties.

Descent and Dissolution: The Arc of Lost Selfhood

The disintegration of identity is the trajectory of both of these stories, and it is the means by which the

protagonists in both tales are destroyed. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the protagonist begins the story with an identity intact; she is clearly sane and introspective, with an eye for the absurd and the ability to at least partially critique it. As the story progresses, however, her identity begins to disintegrate; she can no longer distinguish between herself and the woman she believes she sees in the wallpaper. She confuses her own crawl with the figure's crawl. She can no longer distinguish between the reality of her own delusion and the external reality of her room. Finally, she is crawling, and crawling, and crawling, and does not recognize even her own husband anymore. She refers to herself in the third person, as the woman and she. This is the complete destruction of her identity. Again, the rest cure was meant to restore her to health; instead, it brought about her complete disintegration. In Oates's story, Connie also disintegrates to nearly the same extent, but she follows a slightly different trajectory to get there. Connie is already an identity divided in two, a split of home Constance and the Connie who dates and hangs out with her friends. The reader can already see from the beginning that her identity is not strong and whole, but fragmented and fragile. When Arnold Friend comes to call, he seizes immediately on that fragility. He dismantles piece by piece the slight protection that her double life has given her. By the final scenes, Connie is distanced from herself, watching herself as if from outside, as if watching her body give in of its own violation. The girl who opens the screen door and steps out to the car is not an identity at all, but merely an empty body that can no longer resist the power exerted over it.

Historical and Cultural Contexts

Gilman wrote in a time when medicine was a male enterprise, and male doctors understood women's bodies and minds through their own lens. They labeled normal, even healthy behaviors such as creativity, ambition, and assertiveness as pathologies to be cured. The rest cure was part of that male medical ownership of women's bodies. Oates wrote in 1966, in the midst of the sexual revolution, social upheaval, and social reconstruction of American society. Liberation was a buzzword; freedom was on everybody's lips. But for many girls, the sexual freedom and social freedom that was supposed to liberate them did exactly the opposite. The strict rules that had kept them safe were loosening, but no one was giving them the tools of agency or empowerment to fill the vacuum left by the absence of the old rules. Even though the times are so different, these two stories about the failure of men to keep women safe depict essentially the same thing. Again, it seems, men's protection of women has become their enslavement. That this appears so unchanged, despite the vastly different time periods, suggests that it is not merely a historically and culturally bound phenomenon, but is rather an enduring element of the patriarchal relationship between men and women.

Conclusion

"*The Yellow Wallpaper*" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "*Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*" by Joyce Carol Oates is vastly different stories. They were written in different eras, in different styles, and in different contexts. Yet both reach the same imperative and violent conclusion about the institution of patriarchal protection: both stories demonstrate that the institutions designed to protect women the marriage, the rest cure, the doctors, the house do not serve to keep women out of harm's way, but instead serve to confine women to places where they are subjected to the very dangers and weaknesses that the institutions purport to prevent. John's rest cure does not cure the narrator; it pushes her into insanity. Connie's family does not protect her; it renders her so vulnerable that Arnold Friend can invade her psyche and capture her body. In both stories, the men who purport to take care of the women are part of a larger system that requires women's dependence in order to maintain the men's power. The self-erasure that the protagonists experience, the narrator peeling away the wallpaper to find the woman underneath, or Connie watching herself walk out the door without any

feeling as if she were living it or it were real — did not result from the individual failures of the female protagonists, but resulted from the systemic failure of a society which encourages the dependence, surveillance, and ultimate irrelevance of women. Both Gilman and Oates deploy narrative style and spatial imagery, of the room, the door, the wallpaper, the porch, to evoke a sense of claustrophobia for the reader. Reading these stories, we feel the suffocating presence of patriarchal power. Seventy-four years apart, the two stories nonetheless describe an ongoing problem. The particular forms of protection have changed — the rest cure is no longer administered, the structure of families has shifted, feminists have challenged the ideology of women's natural feebleness — but the logic of protection as control remains, adapted to the new conditions. Reading Gilman and Oates together, despite the span of years between them, we see how long and deep this logic is. We see how powerful it is — how it adapts and continues to function. One of the functions of feminist literary criticism, as these two stories demonstrate, is to continue to point this out. We must attend to the language, the spaces, and the systems which allow patriarchal protection to masquerade as care. We must continue to argue that any protection which does not offer women freedom and autonomy is not protection, but merely a more insidious means of incarceration.

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