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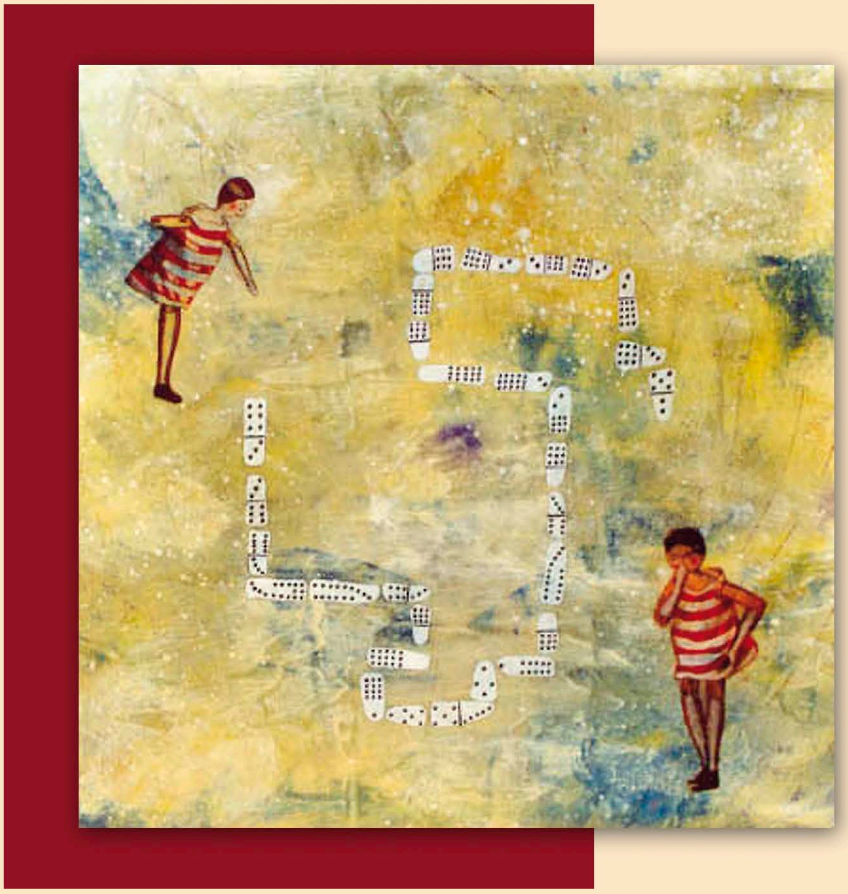
Carolina Núñez Puente



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Universitat de València

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for my family,
especially for my Mother, my Father and my Sister,
who believed in me even when I myself didn't

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Introduction

> Now let us shake ourselves free, if only for a moment, from the androcentric habit of mind.
>
> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World*

What is (so Interesting about) Feminist Dialogics?

I would like to start by saying that, succinctly expressed, I see feminism as a *form of thought* that intends to do away with the subordination of women in multiple ways, one of them being the examination of women's creative potential in literature. Feminism's resourcefulness lies (partly) in its capacity to shelter different feminist perspectives or feminisms, one of which is 'feminist dialogics.' In 1994, Lynne Pearce defined feminist dialogics as a "new *school* of criticism" (102). Even though it was Pearce who identified the school, she named Dale M. Bauer as its founder.[1] Quoting from D. M. Bauer's and Jaret McKinstry's introduction to *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*, Pearce summarizes feminist dialogics as

> a way of thinking that 'challenges the assumption... of a monolithic or universal feminism'... a way of living that 'overcomes the public-private split'... an epistemology which, like 'standpoint theory,' believes that context and positionality are all... a new model of pedagogy which shows 'genders, classes and races in dialogue rather than in opposition'... and most importantly, it is *the latest... form of feminist political resistance*. (103, my italics)

Thus, feminist dialogics itself has multiple meanings, which feminist dialogicians have in fact deployed and expanded. This is coherent with a definition of dialogism that stems from the belief in the enriching potential of language/dialogue.

I would argue that the literary branch of this new "*school* of criticism" is above all interested in the connections between 'gender' and 'genre,' which are also connected etymologically—from Latin *genus*, meaning "kind" or "class." The representatives of feminist dialogics corroborate the links between gender and genre. Patricia Yaeger contends that women writers have (always) been able to find emancipatory ways through language, by "call[ing] upon verbal resources that are unavailable to their male contemporaries" (28). Jacqueline Howard brings back authorial intentions mainly because "it is difficult to examine how particular discourses have been appropriated... and transformed... without hypothesizing... about the author's intention"—hypotheses that may

[1] A curious coincidence, Mikhail M. Bakhtin also said that Dostoevsky invented the polyphonic novel, a term designed by Bakhtin himself.

be useful when trying to reconstruct a feminist literary history (10). Anne Herrmann also claims that the 'feminine' must not remain undecidable when dealing with the gender of an author as a historical subject "if we retain an interest in the production and reception of texts" (19). According to Lynne Pearce, "what genders a text is... its *potential readership*—the way the readers are positioned as female or, indeed, feminist" (106). These studies have been very enlightening, encouraging the researcher's desire to continue exploring the link 'gender-genre,' among other matters.

I confess that I came to the feminist branch of dialogics before dealing in depth with Bakhtin himself, the nominally father of "dialogics."[2] Apart from reading the work of his followers, I re-read Bakhtin's own essays in a modest attempt to articulate my own feminist dialogical perspective and method. The rich and complex career of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), developed over approximately sixty years, has been divided into four periods (Morson & Emerson 66). The present work is based on his studies of genre or on period III-a. More specifically, I concentrate on the essays: "Discourse in the Novel" (DIN), "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (FTC), and "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism" (BHR).[3] I need to stress that the insights of feminist dialogicians are vital for my interpretations, given that gender can be considered Bakhtin's blind spot (cf. Bauer 1988). In this way, I will try to assess how useful his thought is in a feminist evaluation of literature, through the notions of dialogics, genre, the chronotope, heteroglossia, the novel, the *Bildungsroman*, centripetal and centrifugal forces, 'authoritative' and 'inner' words, and so forth. Continuing with the gender-genre dichotomy, I will suggest *new* conceptualizations of the cited terminology, such as: the 'dialogic' man, the chronotope as a dialogical 'pause,' the 'pregnancy chronotope,' the *other* hetero(-)glossia of a woman's voice(s), the patriarchal 'authoritative' word and the feminist 'inner' voice, and so on.

In Part Three I defend the proposal that there should be a move from (the practice of) 'feminist dialogics' to (a) 'dialogical feminism'—in fact, we might be witnessing this development today. I came to theorize on this move by chance since *Herland-Ourland* and *The Girl*, which correspond respectively to novels by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Meridel Le Sueur, fictionalize communities of women. This involved reassessing the concept of 'sisterhood.' Even if proposing explicit feminist alternatives, Gilman's and Le Sueur's fictionalized communities produce new binary oppositions—white women/other women, middle-class women/working-class women. Dialogics requires the ability to see (and celebrate) connections, such as the ability to reject the 'either/or' opposition in favour of a 'both-and' continuum, which I have called *both-andism*. I will provide an example of my usage of this compound before moving forward. Among other things, I contend that both Gilman and Le Sueur write hybrid genres. Depending on their usage of language, women writers have been classified within feminist criticism according to the tenets of either French or American feminism (Walker, Yaeger). In the present work, I lean most often on both feminist currents to account for the hybridity of the literary pieces, which can be *both* fantastic *and* ironic, *both* experimental *and* historical. In this same line, 'dialogical

[2] Although the theoretical germ of "dialogics" belongs to the German phenomenological tradition (cf. Brandist 2002), the concept has come into literary scholarship primarily through Bakhtin's writings.

[3] I will rely on other of his essays to a lesser extent. The three-character abbreviations of the titles correspond with the first letter of their main words—i.e. "Epic and the Novel" (E&N). Gilman's and Le Sueur's titles appear abbreviated with their first 'key' word—i.e. "The Yellow Wall-Paper" ("Yellow").

feminism' implies a self-consciousness and tolerance of the plural feminist communities/feminisms existing nowadays. Therefore, a dialogue amongst all the feminist perspectives might emerge with new, enriching, and surprising consequences.

Why Study Genre, Gender, and Other Female(-related) Subjects in Gilman, Le Sueur, and Bakhtin?

Many of the reasons for which we choose to do something are unknown to us. The reasons we know are sometimes hard to explain, especially in the condensed form of an introduction. Even so, I will start by saying that for Bakhtin genres are epistemologies, ways of seeing, and "*form*[*s*] *of thought*" (DIN 367, italics mine). A consciousness of linguistic usage as *point of view* does away with the equation "(patriarchal) word=world," opening up possibilities for (re)describing and criticizing society. In other words, 'the world' has been told to us from *a* masculine perspective but there are also other voices to be listened to, such as (in) women's literature. Therefore, employing *new* (literary) genres will lead us to see *new* aspects of Reality. Hence also my attempts to expand and exploit evaluative methods in order to interpret *new* genres. For Bakhtin the novel is the genre par excellence that "begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world" (DIN 367), hence being extremely useful for feminists. Unlike Bakhtin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) and Meridel Le Sueur (1900-1996) are widely known as feminist thinkers. Like him, both authors were deeply concerned with the most social aspects of the world.[4]

I chose to deal mainly with "The Yellow Wall-Paper," "Annunciation," and the two novels mentioned above because they gave me the opportunity to explore different genres. Since each chapter counts with an 'introduction' and a 'conclusion' of the themes discussed in it, I will *not* repeat them here. In summary, I may say that Part Two shows how Gilman and Le Sueur have re-appropriated novelistic resources in order to invent feminist genres: for instance, a feminist *Bildungsroman*. Since Bakhtin's privileged narrative form is the novel, Part One is intentionally dedicated to the short-story so as to deal with the question of how dialogism/novelization can enter and relate to other genres. I will also interrogate the boundary between style and genre—the realist-Gothic. Among other things, I will abandon the hierarchy high/low genres in favour of a proliferation of styles/*genres*: feminine *écriture*, a text that is *both* a novel *and* not a novel, and so forth.

From the above, it may be deduced that I do not intend to clarify (the issues related to) gender(s) and genre(s)in a simplistic manner, but to complicate them.[5] Paraphrasing Barbara Johnson, a law of Genre "is also, of course, a law of Gender" (1989, 33), which is another *form of thought*/*way of seeing*.[6] In consequence, apart from relying on 'gender' as

[4] There are really few studies on Gilman or Le Sueur that lean on Bakhtin. Laura E. Donaldson's article on Gilman's 'dialogical utopia' will be criticized in the first section of Part Two, "Deconstructing Dialogics: Gender and Genre in *Herland*-*Ourland*." As for Le Sueur, Susan Sipple reads her stories through Bakhtin's 'carnival'—such a conceptualization (period IIIb) lies outside the main focus of my research. On the contrary, James M. Boehnlein's piece on *The Girl* will be useful to an extent.

[5] Related with this, my refusal to define/confine certain terms will be expressed occasionally by my use of the mark of interrogation (?), as I explain in the first chapter.

[6] Like genre, gender is in fact a complicated issue, which can be simplified only with reservations. Gender has been defined as a "culturally shaped group of attributes and behaviours given to the female or to the male... [in

an analytical tool, I also interpret it as perspective. Vision is chronotopic or dependent on time-space, which is to say vision is shaped by the viewer's position, which is always gendered. Fortunately, the chronotopic quality of gender will appear as leading us to realize the very existence of *genders* (within gender). That is, the study of *a* woman must always be contextualized within the chronotope in which she lives. This results in portraying the differences amongst women: in race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical-mental (dis)abilities, religion, nationality, education, profession, political ideology, family status, and so on and so forth. Conceiving gender(s) in this way implies having an intersectional approach that takes into account all the variants influencing/shaping gender. The paradigm of intersectionality, required especially by (the nominally) feminists of colour—Lugones 1987 & 1998, Mani, Moraga & Anzaldúa, Morrison and Spivak to name a few—, is deployed by myself in this work.

Furthermore, since genres are "form-shaping ideolog[ies]" (Morson & Emerson 282), changes to particular genres challenge the ideologies transmitted by them. One of my uses of gender attempts to determine the changes effected in genre conventions in Le Sueur's and Gilman's writings. I also try to listen to and interpret the voices of gender(s) represented in them. Since I am particularly interested in dialogue, the speech hierarchy man/woman will be dealt with. I will also evaluate other aspects of gender such as forms of creation, subordination, difference and resistance; sexual roles and stereotypes (the 'reproduction of heterosexuality'); relational abilities (the ethics of care); internalized traits; and others.

Along with many other feminist critics, I vindicate (the revision of) certain traditional concepts for women—namely 'subject,' 'authorship,' 'identity.' Employing these terms entails not few problems, as it could be argued that the "*master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde "Master's," 99). It is true that the cited categories ("tools") are charged with the others' (patriarchal) intentions. It is also true that reusing them involves the risk of whether they can be used or not to 'dismantle' patriarchal society (the "house"). However, why should we believe that these 'tools' belong to the master (alone)? And why should we consider that this (society) is his 'house' only? Certainly, I do not wish to utilize the *same* (patriarchal) categories, in the *same* manner, and with the *same* aims. From a dialogical optic, my very usage of these categories will transform their meanings/ways/ends. From a dialogical optic too, genre, gender and the subject are historically inscribed. Therefore their definitions(?) are contextual, relational, and in process—which contradicts the idea that they could be "defined" at all, if only temporarily. Bakhtin points out that one becomes a subject through a process of assimilating and rejecting other people's voices—the famous fight between the '(internally) persuasive voice' and the 'authoritative word.' And from a feminist dialogical perspective, the female

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order] to distinguish between sex and gender" (Humm 1999, 106). When the feminist movement first came to examine gender, many of the supposed gender 'differences' revealed themselves as 'inequalities,' that is, as products of women's subordination in patriarchy. Therefore studying 'gender (questions)' meant dealing with sexism in all its representations. Later on there emerged a *new* concept of '(gender) difference,' which pointed out and celebrated women's different way(s) of relating to life/literature/etc. My uses of the term gender involve these two perspectives together, seeking as well to enlarge them—for example, "genders." Mary E. Hawkesworth has provided a comprehensive summary of the many deployments of 'gender' in feminist criticism so far: "to repudiate biological determinism... to analyze the social organization of relationships between men and women... to conceptualize the semiotics of the body... to illustrate the microtechniques of power... as triangulated psyche... as difference... as a process of creating interdependence... as embraced and inherently liberating..." (650-651).

subject emerges by disidentifying herself with patriarchal discourse. The complexities of this ideological becoming will be studied—the suffering of the protagonist of "The Yellow Wall(-)Paper," the wonder of the narrator-character of "Annunciation."

To comprehend this female subject, I will also rely on theories of relational identity, namely those developed by Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and their followers. Thus, the theory of intersubjectivity of the 1990s will appear as having many points in common with dialogism (especially in section 3). My own compounds *identity-alterity* and *both-andism* address the question of the dialogic interdependence of individuals, areas of thought, and so on. In addition, the compound 'female subject' is also employed with the meaning of female subject matter, including the female body, sexuality, and maternity. Following Rita Felski, I wish to advance from a mere reading of (female) 'form' to questions of 'subject matter' that, apart from being crucial for (certain) genres, might be a fertile ground for feminist criticism. In this sense, also for the Bakhtin Circle, a poetics of genre should always be a sociological poetics.

The previous sections trace implicitly the principal aims of my research, which can be sketched out as follows: I will try to reveal the active presence of feminist dialogics in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's and Meridel Le Sueur's writings. Thus, Le Sueur's and Gilman's proposals will appear to expand upon and delimit Bakhtinian theory. At the same time, I will consider the extent to which the (feminist) dialogics practised by the three thinkers is indeed *dialogic* enough. Finally, I hope to show feminism and dialogics *in* dialogue, producing fruitful hybrid results.

PART ONE

THE SHORT-STORY

The Realist-Gothic. Dialogics and Subjectivity in "The Yellow Wall(-)Paper"

> One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted—
> One need not be a House—
> The Brain has Corridors—surpassing
> Material Place—
>
> Emily Dickinson, No. 670

In the prolific secondary literature on "The Yellow Wall(-)Paper," most critics disagree on its stylistic-generic status (i.e. realist or gothic?) and the interpretations called forth by the possibly feminist ending (i.e. is the protagonist sane or mad?) Richard Feldstein has suggested "an ironic reading of the wall(-)paper," in which he comes to question "the narrator's madness" and "the question of madness itself" (311). His main reasons for arguing in favour of such a reading are two-fold: the multiple spellings of "wall(-)paper," which shift arbitrarily in the original manuscript: "*wallpaper, wall paper, wall-paper...*" (308) and the doubt that "the protagonist and the narrator are one character" (314). Though enlightening, Feldstein's is a short and condensed article, whose format does not allow him to give many examples. Perhaps, I could provide the following one: "I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me... But I find I get pretty tired when I try" ("Yellow" 29)—so we may wonder, is the protagonist writing at all?[1] In this chapter, I will examine in depth the notion of a hybrid narrator-character, which is also susceptible of other (sub)divisions. Mikhail M. Bakhtin defined a hybrid construction as

> a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter... between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by... social differentiation or by some other factor... [A]n intentional... hybrid is... a mixture of two... *individualized* language consciousnesses... and two individual language-intentions as well: the individual, representing authorial consciousness and will, on the one hand, and the individualized linguistic consciousness and will of the character, on the other... (DIN 358-359)

Therefore, a different narrator('s voice), which might coincide with Gilman, will also be identified. This hybridity is to be understood as an exploration of (the possibilities of dialogic) subjectivity. I will also explore the *either* realist *or* gothic interpretations of the

[1] A few comments should be added here. Paula Treichler has also questioned the idea that the main character may be keeping a journal. Both Denise D. Knight (1997) and Robert Shulman (1995) decided on a hyphenated Wall-Paper in their editions. The short-story(?) in question, which its author calls "little book" ("Why" 53), was written in 1890. Finally, a very much reduced version of this chapter is in Núñez Puente 2002.

text in order to suggest that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short-story(?) is *both* realist *and* gothic. In saying this, I pretend to demonstrate the dialogic novelistic features of other genres, such as the short-story. Therein I hope to add another perspective to Bakhtin's almost exclusive focus on the novel.

Among all the interesting problems already identified in "The Yellow Wall(-)Paper," scholars disagree on its generic status: diary (Michaels), autobiography (Rogers), it might also belong to the "'literature of hysteria'" that is as well a "genre" (Diamond 59), and so on. If we take into account all these views, "Yellow" shares the generic 'cannibalism' of the novel. Its classification as "diary" enhances even more its 'prosaic' and novelistic features, as one of the "units into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down... [such as] everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc)" (DIN 262). Moreover, this kind of 'prosaic' writing can be considered as the starting point of 'women's literature' (Donovan 2000). My use of a bracketed question mark here—"short-story(?)"—, as well as in other places—e.g. Jane(?)—, is intended to emphasize the problematic of definition and the (sometimes preferred) ambiguity of certain situations/terms. Shortly, I will discuss the author's alteration of realism in this story(?) First, I will clarify my position with respect to the way of identifying "Yellow"'s realism(?) As we will see, realism has been generally acknowledged as a style with (apparently) no political function. This is completely at odds with Gilman's (and Bakhtin's) sociological understanding of literature. Thereby, if I had to decide whether Gilman's blend of realism(?) is a style or a genre, I would prefer to understand it as the latter. From the perspective of Bakhtin's conception of genre as a *way of thinking*, Gilman's *genre* is feminist in this (and other) text(s). Consequently, among other things, the author's perspective of gender destabilizes canonical *forms of thought* already existent. The writer's feminism will be thoroughly evaluated too.[2]

Beate Schöpp-Schilling and Loralee MacPike read "The Yellow Wall(-)Paper" as psychological realism. For the former, the story is "a psychologically realistic account of the causes and the progressive stages of [the protagonist's] mental illness" (141), that is: a prior "depression, then develops into increasing withdrawal from reality, a persecution complex, odor hallucinations, synaesthesia, and ends in the complete breakdown of her ego" (143). According to the latter: "If realism is to be defined, as... 'the objective representation of contemporary social reality,' Gilman's story is indeed realism; but her realism, like Henry James, is a representation of what is real *to the author*..." (139). However, Gilman considered herself a sociologist and argued about the (feminist) social matters/purposes of *all* her writings. In the "Summary of Purpose" written at the closing of her own periodical, she stated that "[t]he subject matter [of *The Forerunner*]... is not to be regarded as 'literature,' but as an attempt to set forth certain views of life which seemed to the author of real importance to human welfare" (286). Bakhtin would expand the definition of literature, given his view on the socio-ideological impulse of certain genres, such as the novel.[3]

[2] Thus, throughout this study on Gilman, I will suggest that realism can be defined as a genre. In fact, realism could even be classified as a movement, since it was born as such for the French painters of the mid-nineteenth century. Coinciding with Gary Saul Morson (1991), I would just add that Bakhtin's greatest generic hero was *not* the novel, as most critics agree, but the *realist novel*.

[3] Above all, Gilman would criticize the fact that literature had been turned into a "'business'" ("Apropos" 105) and that her "[s]ocial philosophy," would sell little in such a market (*Living* 303-304).

From a (feminist) dialogic perspective, the dichotomy between the "social" and the "psychological" is easy to deconstruct: "Feminists turn to Bakhtin's notion of the word and dialogue in order to break down this separation of public rationality and private intersubjectivity" (Bauer 1991, 1). Besides, it seems that (most) realist writers saw themselves as reformers (Kaplan). Nevertheless Conrad Shumaker explains the problematic of the writer-reformer as follows:

> There is a tension between the feminist writer's role as realist and her role as reformer. As a practitioner of realism as defined by [William Dean] Howells (that is, someone who proposes to show us 'life as it is' in order to show why it must be changed), the writer must respect the conventions that make up a large part of what the audience will accept as 'reality.' Yet if women's role is what the writer wants to reform, then those very conventions must be attacked. (1991, 87)

I will try to prove that Gilman is *both* using established conventions (e.g. realism, the gothic) *and* parodying them. I consider this play with genres an intentional attack on patriarchal norms of gender.

As she explains in her autobiography, it was precisely Howells who "tried the *Atlantic Monthly* print ["Yellow"], but Mr. Scudder, then the editor, sent it back with this brief card:... 'I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!'" (*Living* 119) Later, she was asked by Howells to include her short-story(?) in his own collection: "I was more than willing, but assured him that it was no more 'literature' than my other stuff, being definitively written 'with a purpose'" (65). In "Why I wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" Gilman posits the connections between its plot and her own life and asserts that its purpose "was not... to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy" (53). Part of "Yellow"'s autobiographical data is that the woman writer herself had a postpartum depression and was prescribed a 'rest cure,' which turned out to be even more dangerous than the (supposed) illness—like her protagonist, she would even crawl around the room. With "Yellow" she intended that her doctor, the popular Silas Weir Mitchell, change his treatment. Published in *The Forerunner*, in 1913, Gilman's review article was a response to a Boston reader who protested that "[s]uch a story ought not to be written... it was enough to drive mad anyone who read it" (52). In the words of Shumaker, if "Yellow" is to be considered 'realistic' in the Howellsian manner, one must read the protagonist as a "type," which would imply "seeing creeping women everywhere" (1991, 91). It seems that both the editor of the *Atlantic* and the Bostonian reader interpret it 'realistically,' otherwise, why should they have been so bothered by it? Gilman wanted to make a social critique of her time—e.g. to expose the masculinism of the (medical) institution(s)—and she succeeded. Another of her purposes, that it appear "dreadful," succeeded too (*Living* 119).[4] That is probably why, in the introduction to his own edition, Howells stated that, "["Yellow"] was too terribly good to be printed" (55). Thus, if Annette Kolodny thinks that "Yellow" contains certain feminist insights not possibly grasped by its contemporaries, Conrad Shumaker believes that they understood it too well (1992). In a patriarchal society, it is not surprising that many future printers and readers preferred to

[4] Gilman recalled the first editor's refusal with irony: "This was funny. The story was meant to be dreadful and succeeded. I suppose he would have sent back one of Poe's on the same ground" (*Living* 119). Critics are divided as to whether the author's purpose to make doctor Mitchell change his 'cure' was or not fruitful: Gilman herself affirmed "Yellow"'s success in this respect–"Why," *Living*—and so did her contemporaries—e.g. Wellington. Nowadays, however, critics consider such an affirmation to be exaggerated (see Golden 1992).

consider it as a "ghost/horror story" (King 24), since this kind of literature has been criticized as escapist.[5]

Nowadays, however, most writers and critics see Realism as conservative' and find (more) 'emancipatory' possibilities in the Gothic: "Because it naturalizes the relation between character and [person], setting and world, realism operates in concert with ideology. And because it depends on, insists on, a stability of reference, an objective world that is the source and guarantor of knowledge, realism surreptitiously reinforces (even if it argues with) the arrangements of that world" (Diamond 61). Leo Bersani has identified *desire* as "a threat to the form of realistic fiction" (66). Thus, as "desire becomes more radically disruptive of established [social and literary] orders, the novel tends to become less realistic and more allegorical" (67). Widely identified as a radical feminist, Gilman's 'desire' to disrupt patriarchy (e.g. gender) would lead her to disrupt realistic conventions (e.g. genre). If realism is interested in maintaining the boundary between the *real* and the *imagined* (68), a neat division is complicated by an ill character, who tries to distinguish between the two.

In "Yellow," the arrangement of time coincides (in principle) with the expected temporal sequence of the classic realist story: beginning-middle-end (54-55). The story(-time) covers three months ("Yellow" 33), from the beginning till the end of the summer. However, the text refers to a time beyond itself too: John and his wife hire "a hereditary estate" (24). This can be connected to the fact that the protagonist has a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (25), which was suffered by other women before her. "Yellow"'s allusion to 'other times' and its prevalence in time situate it in what Bakhtin called the Great Time (e.g. MHS 169). First, Gilman would write through the tradition of her great aunts—Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher and Isabel Beecher (Shulman 1995, xxvii). Second, she would remind us that two Beecher women had also been in Silas Weir Mitchell's hands (*Living* 95). Thus, hysteria recognizes a "'woman with a [patriarchal] past'" (Diamond 59), which Gilman would attack as the main reason for women's (psychological) problems. And, according to Elin Diamond, hysteria is precisely what Realism tries to suppress (76): a hysteria that is "meaningful" for (some) feminists "as a disruption of categories and systems of meaning" (61). These arguments seem reason enough for Gilman to attack certain genre conventions in order to portray her-story/the voice(s) of *a* gender. As she repeatedly complained, "[a]ll previous literature ha[d] been androcentric" ("Coming" 125).

The hysteric is supposed to have more than one voice (Diamond 70-73), which goes against the "unity of personal voice characteristic of realistic fiction" (Bersani 86). This 'doubleness' will also destabilize the possibility of a "conclusive ending" (87). Bersani dismantles the flat dichotomy of 'psychological-social' (realism) mentioned above by stating that any proposition intended to change *society* includes questions about the *self* (57, 62). Further, Gilman's use of the Gothic might convey a sense of the fragmented self (58), which goes against the "order, control and powers of a restrictive ideology" (Becker 4).

> [The Gothic] indicates a potential liberation from constraining—both cultural and narrative—structures. The idea of a secret plot from the past that structures a contemporary narrative... suggests an *excess* in narrative, a level of narration that doubles or contests... the conventions of a surface narrative pattern: for example, the pattern of the traditional 'heroine's text'—the text that ends in marriage or death. (Becker 11, italics mine)

[5] Till today, "Yellow" has appeared in several collections of 'supernatural' stories, for instance, in Dowrick 1978.