

"But what is one to do?" Existentialism in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper": A Philosophical Study

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ABSTRACT

From the beginning of history till now, people have been interested in the study of philosophy. Therefore, there is common acknowledgement of the difficulty in summarizing or presenting one sufficient definition to the term. Yet, in simple clarification, philosophy can be defined as the study of general and essential questions about everything in the world such as existence, religion, literature, and other fields in life. This paper will limit the discussion to the philosophical analysis of a literary work entitled as "The Yellow Wallpaper" written by C. P. Gilman in an existential framework.

Most previous studies on this story had tackled it from the feminist standpoint because it reflects the writer's madness in rejecting the social oppression of women. This current paper fills the gap in the world of existential philosophy to show that although this story is a short one, it manages to shed light on the existential issues of individuals. To give clarity to this study, the views of a number of philosophers regarding existentialism are taken into consideration. One of them is Sartre who analyzed the story from the humanism perspective along with Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Existentialism is treated as a form of intersubjectivity according to the philosophy of Abbagnano and Merleau-Ponty. Existence is a Reason as asserted by Hegel but of which is rejected by the philosophy of Schelling. Finally, existentialism is connected to nihilism in the philosophy of Nietzsche. The study is later summed up with a conclusion that shows the findings of the research.

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الخلاصة

منذ بداية التاريخ وحتى الآن ، كان الناس مهتمين بدراسة الفلسفة. لذلك، هناك إقرار مشترك بصعوبة تلخيص أو تقديم تعريف واحد كافٍ للمصطلح. ومع ذلك، في توضيح بسيط، يمكن تعريف الفلسفة على أنها دراسة الأسئلة العامة والأساسية حول كل شيء في العالم مثل الوجود والدين والأدب ومجالات أخرى في الحياة. سيقصر هذه البحث على مناقشة التحليل الفلسفي لعمل أدبي بعنوان "ورق الحائط الأصفر" للكاتبة ش. ب. جلمان في إطار وجودي.

معظم الدراسات السابقة حول هذه القصة تناولتها من وجهة نظر نسوية لأنها تعكس جنون الكاتبة في رفض الاضطهاد الاجتماعي للمرأة. لكن يملا البحث الحالي الفجوة في عالم الفلسفة الوجودية لتظهر على أنه بالرغم من أن هذه القصة قصيرة، إلا أنها تمكنت من تسليط الضوء على القضايا الوجودية للأفراد. لتوضيح هذه الدراسة، تم أخذ آراء عدد من الفلاسفة فيما يتعلق بالوجودية في الاعتبار. أحدهم سارتر الذي حلل القصة من منظور الإنسانية جنباً إلى جنب مع هاديكرو كيركارد. حيث يتم التعامل مع الوجودية كشكل من أشكال الذاتية وفقاً لفلسفة أبانيانو وميرلو بونتي. وإن الوجود بحد ذاته هو السبب كما أكد هيجل ولكن تم رفض ذلك من قبل فلسفة شيلينج. وأخيراً، تم توضيح الوجودية تباعاً للفلسفة العدمية عند نيتشه. ثم لخصت الدراسة لاحقاً باستنتاج يوضح نتائج البحث.

Key words: *existentialism, human rights, the yellow wallpaper, humanism, nihilism*

INTRODUCTION

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian and philosopher, invented the term Existentialism (Stewart, 2021). It is delineated as a "a rejection of all purely abstract thinking, of a purely logical or scientific philosophy; in short, a rejection of the absoluteness of reason" (Roubiczek, 1966, p. 10). In truth, Existentialism was initially a protest against the folly of Pure Thought i.e. rather than being the logic of thinking, it is the immanent movement of Being. It transports the observer of all time and existence from Pure Thought speculations to the issues and likelihoods of his own conditioned

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thinking as an existing individual who seeks to understand how to live a familiar life (Hill, 2021).

This philosophy of existentialism will be the focus of this paper in analyzing the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman namely "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the existential framework. Therefore, it is important to know about the life and conditions of the writer. By doing so, the reader can grasp the lessons out of this story because after all, the existential crisis is a universal issue that affects people everywhere.

An impassioned social reformer, author, lecturer, and feminist in the United States, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was a strong supporter of women's suffrage and advocated against the societal barriers that stopped women from attaining economic independence, as well as encouraged them to engage in activities beyond the home dimension. She wrote a range of essays, articles, and poetry, but her best-known work is "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), regarded a feminist literary masterpiece by critics due to its insight into the lives of 19th century women. It addressed issues related to marriage, medical misconceptions about women's health, and patriarchal oppression via the experiences of the main heroine. This piece depicts the gradual mental decline of a young 19th century American lady, as seen through the eyes of her husband and the male medical establishment, which prescribes a debilitating therapy for female ailments.

"Yellow Wallpaper" is a story about a woman who suffers psychological, mental, and physical damage because her husband locked her in a room with yellow wallpaper. The husband is a physician who tried to cure his sick wife through rest-cure treatment. He believes that his wife's health could be better if he isolated her from the outside world and even prevented her from seeing her infant. Eventually, she became mad.

Here, women are seen as having a fragile mentality and being physically weak, while men are presented as smart doctors and sophisticated people. Yet, both the husband and wife face existential crisis based upon social and cultural traditions that determine the roles of individuals. The writer protests against society because even writing is a

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taboo for women due to the possibility of them creating an identity and becoming an independent entity. Gilman found that writing is one of the simplest rights of humans regardless of their gender and that by knowing their rights, people can understand the purpose of their existence. The end of the story is considered as a voice that leads to the reality that women's rights are human rights and that human rights are women's rights once and for all.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gilman had suffered from depression since the birth of her first child, Katharine, in 1885. A 19th century pioneer in women's nerve illnesses and neurology, Silas Weir Mitchell, diagnosed her with neurasthenia and suggested forced inactivity as a form of 'rest cure' (Gonzalez, 2019). In her masterwork "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman satirizes her "medical" experience. She composed this story in 1890 and gave it to writer William Dean Howells, who then sent it to Horace Scudder, editor of "The Atlantic Monthly". Scudder turned down the piece, claiming it was dismal and that he would not be able to live with himself for making people miserable with such a story (Manzoor, et al., 2022).

The tale was finally published in "The New England Magazine" two years later. Dr. Weir Mitchell received a copy of the short story, according to Gilman's autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1991). Despite receiving no reaction, Gilman stated that Weir Mitchell later changed his mind about the rest cure for women and his health recommendations. She also claimed to know a woman who was undergoing rest cure treatment, but stopped after her family read "The Yellow Wallpaper".

The story was regarded as a feminist story in the 1970s (Davis, 2020). It is worth noting that Gilman's physician, Silas Weir Mitchell, was not a specialist in women's mental illnesses as he also treated men with nervous disorders. He was a well-known neurologist. The rest remedies he prescribed for men and women, however, were quite different. Men were allowed to carry on with their normal activities, prescribed a scenery change, and were not put to absolute bed rest; whereas women were

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commonly put to total bed rest, depriving them of all activities that would require their intellect and are of interest to them (in Gilman's case, writing) (Ringel, 2022).

The significant influence of Silas Weir can be seen in the works of two of his most notable patients: Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Wister's "The Virginian". Gilman depicted about being constrained to her bedroom and sitting room, prevented from doing any writing or studying. Although her treatment was inconsistent, Gilman was able to make a "partial" recovery, as noted in her work *Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper* (2011). In her biography, Gilman elucidates the disparity between her real-life experience and the story's. The protagonist is thought to be ill after giving birth to her child at the start of the novel. It is easy to infer that the protagonist is experiencing postpartum depression or psychosis. Yet her doctor, who is also her husband, diagnoses the condition as a nervous disorder and subjects her to a rest cure treatment (Özyon, 2020).

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is widely regarded as one of the most celebrated and critically acclaimed literary works, as well as one of the most commonly anthologized feminist writings. The Feminist Press, a new publishing firm, reissued the story (originally published in 1892) in 1973, after being out of print for a good part of the century. Susan Lanser (2001) asserted: "The canonization of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is an obvious sign of the degree to which contemporary feminism has transformed the study of literature" (p.415). Likewise, Elaine Hedges (1992) highlighted that following the story's rediscovery and republication "...it is regularly assigned in women's studies and literature courses and is by now firmly established in the literary canon...and an array of significantly disparate array of [critical] interpretations [have ensued]" (p.141).

A number of written analysis had been conducted on Gilman's works particularly on "The Yellow Wallpaper". One such analysis is "Love and Economics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Woman Question" (2005) written by Cynthia J. Davis who dismantled Gilman's predicaments in constantly trying to balance the roles of a woman in terms of domestic and professional life. A symbolic memorialization of this internal conflict is evident in the classic story resulting from the adherence to societal

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expectations of a firmly-rooted domestic life against a more independent life economically and socially.

Raouf and Ali (2018) also brought out how "The Yellow Wallpaper" presents a dash of Gilman's autobiographical life in a brief description of her life. This, they believe, is a book that depicts the oppressive nature of life for Victorian women, as Gilman perceived it. Raouf and Ali went out to demonstrate how Gilman reveals a woman's emotional and psychological sense of rejection from a society based solely on masculine ideology. Gilman's goal in writing this story was to highlight (and obtain some personal gratification) regarding the plight of 19th century women labeled or linked with "hysteria" under Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell's infamous rest cure therapy.

Raouf and Ali discussed how Gilman incorporated into the fictional story her own true experiences and how life decisions can influence a person's emotional and mental well-being as stated in Shelley Green's writing "Women's Encounters with the Mental Health Establishment": Escaping the Yellow Wallpaper" (2003) which highlights a contemporary view of the analysis on women's mental health and how health experts should concentrate on women who have been stripped off their right to determine their treatment. Green then discussed examples of other female authors whose futures were unjustly decided by the mental health industry, including Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Virginia Woolf, who later found the strength to speak out against the humiliation of being silenced. According to Bristow, D. in his work "The Yellow Metonym: 'You and Jane' in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper" (2021), the short story symbolically captures the essence of Walter's "Cult of True Womanhood" (1966) where women are depicted as being bounded to domestic life. In this era of "True Womanhood", men had subjected women into a world of subjugation via a male-dominated ideology and political system where the former hold absolute power over the lives of women.

In the article "Imaginative Power in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'", Jamil (2021) examined the multitude of elements in the story which revealed the narrator's peculiar and deluded passage into psychological decline. Jamil eloquently depicts the narrator's disturbed emotions about the yellow

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wallpaper, which gradually threatens to overpower her judgments, as well as her feelings for her own child, whom she mentions only in passing. She also shares her impressions of the outside world and, eventually, herself. Jamil emphasizes how the narrator's condition is linked to the gender prejudices of society's demands on a woman, which are inherent in the rest cure treatment and its negative repercussions, as well as the expectations of domestic duties as both wife and mother in the American Victorian culture.

Suzanne Keen (1998) examined the way the characters in Victorian novels are typically represented in her work entitled "Victorian Renovations of the Novel". She highlighted that: "Victorian novels surround characters with spaces, places, homes, and geography in a variety of ways" (p.66). Such structure is evident in "The Yellow Wallpaper" particularly in the narrator's description of the summer home as "a colonial mansion, a hereditary estate", "the most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village...there are hedges and walls and gates that lock" ("Gilman, 1998, p.752). The houses and geographical locations reflect essential components that contribute to the fictitious novel's haunting, enigmatic, and gothic-like atmosphere. These perplexing depictions add to the impression of a woman confined to a hidden, isolated "institutional-like" edifice, yet presented as a place of beauty and comfort. Keen added: "The location of these subjects on the ground or inside walls constitutes a new field of representation" (p.67).

In her study "Evolution of Feminism in English Literature from 19th to 20th Century", Promee (2022) highlighted the need to examine the contexts of feminine literature both socially and historically to understand the themes and messages. Promee explored the feminist interpretation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" by studying the significance of its social and historical contexts to understand the inherent feminist themes. She studied how the narrator's voice depicts the silenced Victorian female voice due to the gender-based demarcation. Additionally, it depicts the society's attribution of female medical problems to biological imbalances specifically in relation to their reproductive system.

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In another work entitled "Women Entrapment and Flight in Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'", Ghandeharion (2016) highlighted the significance of imagination for both males and females. According to the author, an analogy of the roles of the 19th century men and women can be drawn by firstly focusing on how differently the two genders perceive the universe. Women are believed to see the world through an imaginative and fantastical lens, whereas males see the world through the lens of realism and factuality; they have a materialistic perspective on everything. A pattern of binary oppositions could also be detected in the story's characterization of both the main and supporting characters. The husband is a doctor who only focuses on tangible things; on the other hand, his wife is a writer who escapes her brutal reality i.e. being confined to her room and being prohibited from writing via her creative mind. So, what happens to one's imaginative abilities when they are perceived as feminine and weak by a culture that only values the real and practical? Gilman had previously encountered similar impositions that led her to use her imagination as an escape mechanism, but her mother's friend advised her that such elusive imagination was dangerous.

In this paper, the reader can grasp another angle of thinking the next time s/he is reading "The Yellow Wallpaper". The journey of reading can take the mind to think about deep and sophisticated matters about the importance of human existence. It is not merely a story of a sick woman or couples who face difficulties in their marriage; rather, it carries the message that awakens our thoughts about the reality of our existence. Simple situations can help in creating a new mindset. Gilman's story provides this advantage of linking simple words with complicated thoughts. The story reflects the hidden world behind the philosophical concepts of existentialism and nothingness.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Existentialism revolves around the concept of existence. It has a very specific meaning in this philosophy. Existence is a term used by existentialists to refer to human existence. The assumption that only a

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concrete thing can exist is widespread (Callahan, 2021). Existentialists agree with this perspective, describing man as a concrete entity capable of existing. To exist, the Existentialist states that one must be able to realize that one exists (Allen, 2019). Based on this viewpoint, only man is capable of existing. Kierkegaard became the first to use the term "existence" in a religious context (Wicks, 2019). The possibility of man's self-realization piqued his interest. How far can Man realize himself by retreating from daily life's carelessness, shallowness, and forgetfulness? Hence, Kierkegaard relates existence to the achievement of a spiritual self-possession in the individual's directed and decided life. 'Existentialism,' according to a highly popular definition, is a philosophical position that prioritizes existence over essence (Sartre, 1946). Existentialism is a 'philosophy of existence,' according to dictionary definition (Gordon, 2013). Raosaheb (2016, p. 2) defined the term as "an irrational trend in bourgeois philosophy which appeared in the 20th century in an attempt to create a new world outlook corresponding to the frame of mind of bourgeois intellectuals".

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine which states that people are free agents who make their own decisions and actions. Existentialists assert that society should not impose constraints on people's life or deeds, because such restrictions stifle their free will and potential (Webber, 2018). Wilson (2019) in his work *Introduction to the New Existentialism: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society*, defined existentialism firstly as constantly specific and individual i.e. my existence, your existence, his existence, her existence. Secondly, Existence is mainly related to the issues that come with it (i.e. its mode of being); hence, it is also the study of the definition of Being. Thirdly, such study is constantly presented with a variety of possibilities which the existent (i.e., the individual) must choose from, and subsequently commit to. Fourthly, as the said possibilities are made up of relationships whether with things or other humans, existence is constantly a being-in-the-world i.e. a concrete and factually fixed condition that restricts choice. This related to the intersubjectivity (Abbagnano and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy) integral in existence and perceived as two individuals' personal relationship (i.e., I and thou), whereby 'thou' could be another individual or God, or an impersonal relationship between a

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general public and a person who lacks real interaction (Merleau-Ponty, 1966). Martin Heidegger (1962) hence called humans as Dasein (there being) due to the fact that they exist, or those who inhabit the world.

With regards to the first point which states that existence is specific, existentialism is in direct contrast to doctrines which state that human beings are absolute manifestations of an infinite substance. Hence, it opposes a majority of idealism including those that focus on the Consciousness, Spirit, Reason, Idea, or Soul. Secondly, existentialism opposes all doctrines which assert that the given and full reality of human beings must be resolute to its elements for it to be recognized or envisaged (Allen, 2019). Hence, it opposes all forms of objectivism or scientism i.e. approaches which underline the gross reality of external fact. Thirdly, existentialism opposes all forms of necessitarianism because existence entails possibilities that one could choose from and through which one could project oneself. Lastly, existentialism opposes any form of solipsism (the belief that only I exist) or epistemological idealism (the belief of the mentality of the objects of knowledge) since existence i.e. the relationship with others constantly spreads beyond itself to cover the being of other entities or also known as transcendence (Gabriel, 2018).

Such forms of existentialism could also be differentiated based on language i.e. the indication of cultural traditions which elucidate the numerous terminologies used by different authors. Twentieth century German existentialism is mainly represented by Martin Heidegger and Nietzsche; French personalistic existentialism by Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre; French phenomenology by Maurice Merleau-Ponty; Spanish existentialism by José Ortega y Gasset; Russian idealistic existentialism by Nikolay Berdyayev (who nonetheless spent most of his adult life in France), and finally Italian existentialism by Nicola Abbagnano (Kuhn, 2019).

Some of the philosophers were highly prominent such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) who deemed existentialism as a humanistic matter; thousands of Parisians had attended his public lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, by the end of 1945 at the height of World War 2. The aforementioned lecture enabled access to his rather complicated discourse,

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Being and Nothingness (2015), first published in 1943, as a response to modern Marxist and Christian opponents of his notion of "existentialism". According to Sartre, existentialism basically drives the idea that a person's existence precedes his essence. This adage i.e. "existence precedes essence" (p. 207) as stated in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) later turned into an axiom for the existentialist movement. In short, it indicates that one's character, life goals, and others are not dictated by anything or anyone apart from the individual's own essence. Sartre went on to say: "Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards" (p. 28). In the same sense, Heidegger said that Dasein is constantly its own probability which means that humans are responsible for their existence, as stated by Sartre (2015):

"It is true that the possible is—so to speak—an option on being, and if it is true that the possible can come into the world only through a being which is its own possibility, this implies for human reality the necessity of being its being in the form of an option on its being" (p.166).

Here, Sartre is saying that existentialism occasionally leads to the perception that the coexistence of an individual with others (a human inevitability) is a form of denunciation or alienation, via the insistence of the notion of individuality and non-repeatability of existence as advocated by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Additionally, Marcel (1951) stated that all that is beyond individual existence is "expressible by a minus sign" (p.217) whilst Sartre (2015) acknowledged that "the Other is the hidden death of my possibilities" (p.102). However, with other forms of existentialism, a non-anonymous coexistence (such as a mob) but of which is based upon personal communication dictates authentic existence (Wahl, 2016).

Seifert (1997) in his work *What is life?: The Originality, Irreducibility, and Value of Life* highlights another key element of existentialism i.e. the irreducibility of existence to reason. This typical existentialist theme was also supported by F.W.J. von Schelling, a German idealist, who stated that existence is not limited to the Reason or Idea, but rather to the individual him/herself. This supports Sartre and Kierkegaard's concept of existentialism. In contrast to this, Hegel (2006) rejected this

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theme of irreducibility of existence to reason; he believes that existence is concerned with the Idea or Reason rather than the human or individual.

Another clarification to the word 'existentialism' is 'understanding' as delineated by the proponent of historical reason Wilhelm Dilthey (1957), who deemed "understanding" (Verstehen) as the proper process by which existence occurs. Dilthey asserted that "understanding" refers to experience that is relived and reproduced. It is a comprehension of others' feelings and a sympathetic emotional engagement. Hence, "understanding" unites the knowing object and the object known.

The dichotomy between the modality of existence i.e. possibility, and the modality of Being i.e. reality or facticity, is a recurring motif in all such philosophies. Due to this contrast, existence (possibility) is the nothingness of Being, negating all factual realities. Heidegger (2000) in his work *Introduction to Metaphysics*, stated that human existence and the being cannot be related except if it remains in nothingness. According to the author, Nothingness is the possibility of existence negating factual realities. This is a similar view as the philosophy of nihilism by Nietzsche (2017) who believes that life has no meaning or value – that it cannot be avoided and that we must go through it despite it being a frightening and lonely journey. According to many critics, the word 'nihilism' was not mentioned in Nietzsche's works until 1880; however, the meaning of the word was a recurrent theme in his writings such as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873), *Untimely Meditations* (1873–1876), *Human, All Too Human* (1878) and other works. According to Nietzsche, life has no inherent value or meaning (Veit, 2018). Existential nihilism holds that a human, or even the human species, is purposeless and unlikely to alter in the grand scheme of things. The theory states that each person is an isolated entity born into the cosmos who is unable to understand "why". The intrinsic meaninglessness of life is addressed extensively in existentialism, allowing one the possibility of creating their own subjective 'meaning' or 'purpose' (Storey, 2011).

The reason behind choosing these specific philosophers of existentialism is because their views will help in analyzing and determining the kinds of existentialism to the characters of Gilman's story "The Yellow

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Wallpaper". The existential concepts of those philosophers provide more insights in understanding the lives of the heroine and her husband. By understanding that aspect, one may figure out a way of living life in a better way because knowing the purpose in life will make the whole experience of living worthy regardless of all the difficulties and obstacles. Additionally, after presenting the different definitions and clarifications for the word 'existentialism', one can reach the idea that existentialism is a controversial word that can apply to any situation which is connected to the individual's sense of being. This term is understood differently from one to another because it is affected by the cultural, political, personal, psychological, environmental, and educational scoop of every individual. In other meanings, existentialism for a Western person who was raised in an open minded non-religious family will mean totally different from the perspective of an Eastern and religious person. Therefore, the meaning of existentialism varies to different individuals according to the diversity of their life experiences.

ANALYSIS

From the beginning of the story, the heroine keeps repeating the same question and idea of what to do "And what can one do?" (p.647) which reflects the uncertainty and helplessness of her importance and existence. Based on her first words, the heroine is questioning her ability of doing anything in her life. This issue is the major interest of the existentialist because if the person figures out the purpose of his/her being, then he/she will exist and therefore become significant.

According to existentialist humanism, if the heroine Jane recognizes and honors her human dignity and values, she would have understood the meaning of her existence rather than blindly following the instructions of her husbands because according to Kierkegaard, existentialist humanism can be seen in the associations that unite the person within her/himself in addition to other beings. Also, Sartre stated the idea that the existence of the person, i.e. Jane in the story, precedes her essence. By this we mean the wife's essence (her nature as a human) is determined after her existence (the simple fact of her being). In other words, the existence of Jane should be the center of her life which is the fundamental belief of Sartre's

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philosophy: the individual is the center of the world. Unfortunately, the wife does not understand that causing her to neglect her importance as an individual because she believes in her essence (responsibilities as a woman and her social interaction with her husband and child): " But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself-before him, at least, and that makes me very tired" (p.648). To existentialists such as Kierkegaard, this is not acceptable because the wife's consciousness (the reflection of her reality) should create her own principles and values which define a meaning for her life because the individual (Jane) does not have any value or identity and only creates it through her existence.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", there is another angle of establishing humanistic existentialism that is through understanding as asserted by Dilthey who believes in reproducing and reliving the conditions and situations of others. In other words, if the husband John understood the feelings and thoughts of his wife, or at least try to know the effect of his wife's condition as a sick woman in the Victorian age, perhaps the end of the story will be different. But the husband lacks any humanistic existentialism and keeps his subjective idealistic views (solipsism) of the world. Henceforth, an understanding may have been acquired if John could experience a sympathetic feeling towards his wife and her sensations, and therefore, achieve a union between the apparent object (the wife's sickness) and the object known (the wife herself).

Additionally, as explained in the conceptual framework section of this paper, the problem of existentialism is the same problem that faces the individual's way of living through diverse possibilities or alternatives. Here, Jane does not know exactly what to choose and how to choose her way of living. These possibilities overwhelmed her ability in determining her own life which is why she gave her husband the control over her life: "That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care – there is something strange about the house – I can feel it. I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window" (p.648).

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The other problem that is connected with existentialism in this story is that sometimes the individuals limit their choices of existence with the existence of others. This is what happened with Jane: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus – 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. So I will let it alone and talk about the house" (p.648). Here, according to Heidegger, the wife deprives herself from living the life she wants and even from thinking about things she wants. Her Dasein (human being or existence) should be determined by her choice. She must choose to exist; her existence depends on her choice as an individual to be a part of the universe. Yet she lives in the possibilities that her husband provides her with; her existence depends on the existence of her husband John. This way of living is in contrast to the belief of another existentialist namely Soren Kierkegaard. This philosopher preserved that the person is responsible for giving meaning to her/his own life and for living that life fervently and honestly, despite any existential complications and disruptions such as psychological illness.

On the other hand, the philosophical analysis of existentialism in this story does not limit the approach to the wife's existence only. The character of the husband John can provide another insight for the world of existentialism. For example, the theme of irreducibility of existence to Reason which was developed by the German idealist F.W.J. von Schelling debated against G.W.F. Hegel, interrupts the existence of the husband to Idea or Reason because the whole existence of John depends upon him being a husband, the person who must take care of his wife regardless of the means of treatment: "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (p. 649). In fact, this is a general phenomenon of men's position in the Victorian age. Here, the husband is expected to provide protection and control over the life of his wife. This is the purpose of Victorian male figures. They live for this reason. Therefore, without this reason they do not exist. This harmonizes with Hegel's philosophy which defines the existence of the individual to the Reason. According to Hegel,

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the husband exists because he has a reason despite the consequences of this reason.

The Reason in Hegelian philosophy reveals the truth of existence. For more clarification, the Reason should be studied, firstly, by itself; the Reason of John's existence is his position as a husband which is the subject of logic. Secondly, the nature of reason; the nature of John as a physician and a husband appears in the expectations of the responsibilities of the man of the house. He should provide medical care to his wife and this is the subject of the philosophy of nature.

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing. (p.649).

Thirdly, in and for the reason; the mind or the intention. John's intention is to take care of his wife and make her better. This is the reason why he took her to a house in the countryside to relieve her anxiety. Therefore, the intention of John determines his existence.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he," and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house. (p.650).

Both the wife and the husband reflect a doctrine of existentialism, that is of intersubjectivity as asserted by Abbagnano and Merleau-Ponty. This is shown through the relationship between "I" and "Thou". The pronoun "I" may refer to any character but "Thou" is more complicated; it may refer to other characters, to a state of living, to a problem one is facing in life, to God, to society, and others. In the "Yellow Wallpaper", the intersubjectivity explained, firstly, the relationship between Jane and John:

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And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head. He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well. (p.648).

On the surface, the relationship between this couple seems perfect whereby we have a sick wife being taken care of by her husband. She loves him and she is always trying to justify his behaviors towards her in the best intention. The reader can sense that the wife loves her husband more than herself and perhaps this is the cause of her downfall.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia. But he said I wasn't able to go, nor" able to stand it after I got there and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished. (p. 647).

Psychologically speaking, the first responsibility and the priority of anyone is taking care of one's self. The straight healthy conscious individual is the one who looks after his/herself and tries to express his/her opinions about every personal issue. The wife should say something about her condition. She must express her rejection and fears from the yellow wallpaper's room. The wife should love herself more and try to live in a place where she can really relax and enjoy.

There is an important detail in the story which is the center of interest for many researchers on Gilman namely the yellow wallpaper. Jane was almost locked in the room with the yellow wallpaper. In the beginning, she hated that wallpaper, and she was suffering because of it. It seemed to smother her:

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing. You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream (p.653).

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Here, Jane's words may seem like a cry for help; she is suffering and her life seems like a living hell. This situation can be seen in a different perspective; Nietzsche's nihilism. According to him, the existence of the individual is found through knowing that life is suffering and life is meaningless. If anyone reaches that conclusion, then s/he will establish the existence of their being. This is what happened to Jane. After her resistance and hatred towards the yellow wallpaper, she started to like it and found it as a shelter for life:

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and I am more quiet than I was. John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wall-paper -he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away. I don't want to leave now until I have found it out (p. 653).

Jane started to figure out the importance of her day, her purpose, and therefore, her being. She started to feel a sense of belonging to the wallpaper. She sees a spectrum of a woman creeping there: "The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over" (p. 654). Jane feels a connection with the woman; she wants to know her, watch her, and wait for her every night. She feels that this woman determines her life. The woman became an obsession to Jane: "Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself" (p. 654).

Later, Jane started to feel that she wishes to be like this woman because she seems to be better and freer than her: "I always see her, she may be able to creep faster than I can turn! I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind" (p. 654). This woman became a reminder to Jane of her suffering and how she is eager to be that woman, to run like her, and to go wherever like her: "It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!" (p.656).

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After all her suffering, Jane united herself with this woman. She locked the door on herself and refused to go out. She feels that she has become one with this woman. Although her husband is knocking at the door and begging for her to come out, Jane feels that she does not want to leave, and that her life is connected to the woman she found behind the yellow wallpaper. Suddenly, the husband opened the door, and what did he see? He saw his wife Jane creeping on the wall and around the room! This means that Jane is and always has been the creeping woman behind the wall.

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder. "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (p.656).

Now Jane is free at last. She found herself out of the suffering. The meaninglessness and purposelessness had led Jane to discover her reality and freedom and, therefore, her existence. The suffering creates existence to Jane; when she lost her mind, she found her reality. This supports the claims of Nietzsche. The existence of the individual cannot be found or established unless that person declares that life is nothing but pain and suffering.

CONCLUSION

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" reflects the idea that human existence can be found in the strangest and most unfamiliar situations. In other words, what seems difficult and negative may determine our existence. This story reshapes our thinking about our life. Regardless of miseries or obstacles and complications, we can really exist. This may be the goal of the philosophers who were trying to make us absorb strength and freedom out of our suffering. The heroine echoes Sartre's perspectives that our essence can come after our existence. It is true that Jane's essence did not establish her existence, but rather her humanity when she found it at last. This supports the perspectives of Kierkegaard and Heidegger who focused on the importance of human value. If the wife knows her importance as a

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human, therefore her existence will be determined. Along with Dilthey's view of understanding and Hegel's view of the Reason together with the objections of Schelling, the wife i.e. Jane could not have existed. Finally, her existence was proven and established clearly through Natchez's views namely nihilism. This means that everyone can find their existence if they try to think out of the box, and see from another perspective. Jane proved her existence although her life was meaningless and full of suffering. But in the end, what is important is the journey and not the conditions of that journey. This paper concludes with the idea that we all exist. All we can do is try to look for our existence, and we may find it in the most peculiar places such as our disease, suffering, poverty or even in madness.

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