A Queer Eye for Gilman's Text: *The Yellow Wallpaper*, A Film by PBS

This paper puts forward a queer interpretation of PBS's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, adapted from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's canonical story. It is structured into three parts: an approach to the term "queer" (Butler 2004; Hall and Jagose 2013), a reading of the queerness (and feminism) of Gilman's text (Crewe 1995; Sedgwick 1993) and an analysis of the queer (and feminist) aspects of the film. The third part also responds to the only academic essay about PBS's production (Beer 1997), since it omits the movie's queer character. This section mostly discusses the queer treatment of topics—the instability of identity, auto-eroticism, lesbian tendencies, mental illnesses, women's solidarity and gender and class inequalities—while dialoguing with film critics (Hutcheon 2013; Mulvey [1976] 2010; Thomas 2001). The queer use of formal resources—light, shots, sound, music, symbolism and scene-motifs—is pointed out too. My ultimate aim is to demonstrate that *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an innovative queer adaptation of Gilman's piece for today's viewers.

Keywords: queer theory; film studies; feminist literary criticism; Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Este artículo propone una interpretación *queer* de *The Yellow Wallpaper*, una adaptación de PBS del relato canónico de Gilman. Consta de tres partes: una aproximación al término "*queer*" (Butler 2004; Hall y Jagose 2013), una lectura *queer* (y feminista) del texto de Gilman (Crewe 1995; Sedgwick 1993) y un análisis de los aspectos *queer* (y feministas) del film. La tercera parte también responde al único ensayo académico sobre dicha producción (Beer 1997), ya que omite el carácter *queer* de la misma. Esta sección explora el tratamiento *queer* de los temas—identidad inestable, auto-erotismo, tendencias lésbicas, enfermedades mentales, solidaridad entre mujeres y desigualdades de género y clase—a la vez que dialoga con críticas de cine (Hutcheon 2013; Mulvey [1976] 2010; Thomas 2001). Se señala además el uso *queer* de los recursos formales—luz, planos, sonido, música, simbolismo y *motifs* escénicos. Mi objetivo principal es demostrar que *The Yellow Wallpaper* es una innovadora adaptación *queer* de la obra de Gilman para el público actual.

Palabras clave: teoría *queer*; estudios de cine; crítica literaria feminista; Charlotte Perkins Gilman

1. WHAT IS "QUEER"? FROM SEXUALITY AND GENDER TO RACE AND CLASS[1]

An adjective, a noun and a verb, the word "queer" has become remarkably pervasive in academia in recent years. "Perhaps a borrowing from German […] *quer*" (*OED*), the adjective "queer" has several meanings such as "[s]trange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" and even "suspicious, dubious." As a noun, the sense of "homosexual man" dates from the late nineteenth century. The verb "to queer" chiefly means "[t]o ask, inquire; to question." The senses mentioned are still relevant for queer theory, which dates from the 1990s (*OED*), among whose goals are to be suspicious about and question our most usual and apparently natural ways of thinking; nonetheless, it must be

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clarified that "queer" and "homosexual" are not synonyms. In their introduction to *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, Donald Hall and Annamarie Jagose pose that

> queer speaks to the […] naturalization of the […] system of sexual classification effected by the […] lesbian and gay movements, staking an alternate claim […] While arguing for the validity […] of […] marginalized sexual […] practices—such as […] bisexuality […] and sadomasochism—queer studies attempts to clear a space for thinking differently about the relations […] between sex/gender and sex/sexuality[…] [Besides, r]ather than separating sexuality from other axes of social difference—race, ethnicity, […] and so on—queer studies has [*sic.*] increasingly attended to the ways in which […] categories […] inflect and transform each other. (2013, xvi)

To develop these ideas, I will refer to the work of some of the principal experts in queer theory today. Readers must be alerted that there is neither a unique nor a fixed definition of the term queer, which is marked by indeterminacy and challenges our willingness to tolerate the overlapping of supposedly contrary concepts (e.g. normal/abnormal).

For Annamarie Jagose, queer is "a category in the process of formation" (1), whose "political efficacy […] depends on its resistance to definition." Jagose adds that "queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire" (1997, 3) and on calling into question "any 'natural' sexuality […] [including] terms such as 'man' and 'woman'." This leads to queer theory's utter rejection of binary oppositions (e.g. masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual), putting forth an identity which is "always ambiguous, always relational" (1997, 96). From here we can argue that denaturalizing and destabilizing normativity are the core aims of queer research. Judith Butler's attempt to denaturalize gender and sexuality is famous: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] [Since] identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990, 25). Regarding sexuality, Butler contends that "gender does not necessarily follow from sex and […] sexuality […] does not seem to follow from gender" (1990, 135-136). In fact, the illusion of a "gender core […] [is just] maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality […] [and] reproductive heterosexuality" (1990, 136). To challenge normative beliefs and provoke social change, she urges subversion through queer performance leading to the confusion and proliferation of both genders and sexualities. In a later text, Butler elaborates on performativity to posit that "gender is a kind of a doing […] with or for another" (2004, 1). To the nominally gender-deviants, whose lives are qualified as less than human, she points out ways of undoing gender through "speech" and "language" as favorite means to pursue society's transformation (199) —a linguistic emphasis which will be questioned below.

A major exponent of queer thought is Eve Sedgwick, for whom queer "can refer to the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances […] of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality [that] aren't made […] to signify monolithically" (1993, 5-9). Her words join Jagose's and Butler's calls to defy imposed definitions by taking into account the aspects that do not fit into established parameters. From here, Sedgwick proposes that we extend the notion of queer beyond sexuality to other fields in "the ways that race, ethnicity, [and] postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity fracturing discourses"

(1993, 9). Both she and Butler (2004) praise Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the "*mestiza* consciousness" ([1987] 2012) for its intersectional approach to the subject. I would add that Anzaldúa's oeuvre enlightens a queer scholarship that is willing to explore people's material conditions in the way to change the white-hegemonic heteropatriarchal liberal-capitalist system. Considering this, an up-to-date queer analysis of literature or film would be the one that focuses on issues lacking in scholarly studies—from masturbation and fetishism to mixed-raced individuals and socioeconomic class—and which aims at an ideological-material rebuilding of the world. Most of these questions will be treated in the next sections.

As expected, queer researchers have been the target of criticism, mainly due to the radicalism of some of their arguments. For example, Tim Dean and Christopher Lane argue that queer thought "advocates a politics based on resistance to all norms" (qtd. in Ahmed 2013, 426). On his part, Gerard Coll-Planas (2013) suggests the need for a minimum set of norms in the realm of sexuality that protect people from harassment, rape, pedophilia and necrophilia. From my point of view, one of the most insightful contributions of queer theory is to make academics realize how little we actually know about sexuality, which is mysterious, elusive, chaotic, unclassifiable and far more flexible than we had thought. Sedgwick's opening of "queer" as an analytical tool from sexuality to other areas is also commendable, given its rejection of rigid definitions, its emphasis on the relational character of identity and its enormous value for literary and film studies. As Michael Warner, writes:

> Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows […] that her [*sic.*] stigmatization is intricated with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time… (1993, xiii)

Given the wide range of possibilities of "queer," it is not surprising that many researchers are now working on and with queer theory, in sexuality studies and adjacent disciplines. It must be emphasized that this article relies precisely on the critical meaning of queer that goes across boundaries, from desire and language to sexuality and socio-economic class. Contrary to other scholars (e.g. Lauretis 1994), some of us believe that the political content and revolutionary potential of the category has exponentially increased over time.

Notwithstanding, due to its predilection for ambiguity, queer rebellion might have vague if not vain results. For instance, how revolutionary is it to hold a massive queer-kissing session in a shopping mall? How many people and of what economic status shop in malls? Would more of them go there, and presumably shop, if they knew about such an event? Would most of them be altered by the queer kissing and consequently reevaluate their own beliefs about sexuality? How many would take photos and post them on social media with hateful comments about the kissers? Finally, in what ways would such a queer meeting contribute to the success of heterosexism and consumer culture? I firmly advocate the transformative power of loving gestures but, to be efficient on the long run, they must be at least context-conscious. With Donald Morton (1996), I

will put forth that it is vital not to neglect the material dimensions of queer thoughts and actions so that going queer does not paradoxically reinforce the established order. Hence, the below analyses both celebrate and rarefy queer revolution.

2. QUEERNESS IN GILMAN'S "THE YELLOW WALLPAPER"

In its 126 year history, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has posed innumerable questions to literary criticism, some of which have received multiple answers. In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin:

> Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological formation […] [S]uch works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogising backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning [for literary scholarship]; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself. Likewise their influence on subsequent creative works [such as film adaptations] inevitably includes re-accentuation. ([1981] 2000, 421)

Great pieces of art live throughout history, allowing a multitude of readers to recreate the plurality of significations lying within them. As implied in the previous section, queer research is precisely concerned with opening up these interpretative possibilities *à la* Bakhtin and making readers think outside the box. Therefore, I will examine aspects of Gilman's story that can fruitfully be read from a queer perspective, such as genre, socio-economic class, the self, gender roles, sexuality, symbolism and style, among others.

To begin with, the difficulties faced in classifying the genre of "The Yellow Wallpaper" suggest its queer character: diary (Michaels 1987), autobiography (Rogers 1988) and "'literature of hysteria'" (Diamond 1990, 59). Specialists are further divided when it comes to determining whether the story is realist (MacPike 1992), gothic (Becker 1999), or both (Núñez-Puente 2006). In fact, Gilman parodies both realist and gothic conventions (Núñez-Puente 2006), which again subscribes to the queerness of the text—as in Butler's conception of gender as parody.

Gilman's unnamed leading character can be said to have queer features too. Living in the Victorian Age, the protagonist is required to stop her work as a writer after becoming an upper-middle-class wife and mother. She is told that she has a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 25), which is why her doctor orders her to rest. Nowadays, we would suspect she has postpartum depression, which was also suffered by the author (Gilman [1913] 2009), although this disease was unknown at the time. Then, her condition was labelled hysteria, an illness which women, especially intellectual and upper-to-middle-class ones, were said to be prone to. Diagnosing female patients as mentally ill is rewarding for patriarchy because it reinforces the gender standard into the sane man/insane woman hierarchy (Felman 1997; Showalter 1985). From an alternative point of view, Elin Diamond has suggested that hysteria is dangerous for patriarchy, since a self which is unstable cannot be pinned down to any fixed definition, thus offering what I would qualify as a queer "disruption of categories and systems of meaning" (Diamond 1990, 61). In addition, the hysteric is supposed to have more than one voice (1990, 70-73), which allows some room for queerly dissenting with the *status quo*, a dissidence which is present in "The Yellow Wallpaper." This controversial issue (hysteria as

either mortifying or liberating) will reconsidered in the next section, especially whether the protagonist's supposed hysterical fit at the end is productive regarding social change; nevertheless, through the manifestation of her apparent madness, Gilman makes a feminist criticism of the Victorian treatment of upper- and middle-class women by both their husbands and the medical institutions.

Socio-economic class, whose study has been requested by queer theory, is a crucial topic in this tale from its very first lines: "It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 24). It must be noted that, given the couple's social status, they cannot be deemed just "ordinary," a qualification that has been attributed to an unreliable narration (Núñez-Puente 31). Later on, the character-narrator describes the state's "lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 25), an affirmation that glimpses her classism (Núñez-Puente 31). As for the other female personae, Mary (the baby's caretaker) is presumed to be working-class and the character-narrator describes Jennie (John's sister) as a "housekeeper" that "hopes for no better profession" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 24).[2] It is lucky of John's wife to count on other people to do the motherly and home duties that would otherwise be expected of her, and it is unethical of her to regard them as inferior. An updated queer reading of Gilman makes us reflect on the artificial ranking, not only of genders and sexualities, but also of jobs and salaries, which entail the formation of unequal classes and oppositions such as respectful/disrespectful people.

On another note, the heroine embodies a queer self, who has severe problems living with her contradictions and adjusting to Victorian parameters. She fights against the two main voices informing her knowledge of the world: her husband's, which stands for patriarchal authority and what she "[p]ersonally" believes and disagrees with (Gilman [1892] 1992, 25) while attempting to rebel. John, her husband, is a medical doctor who orders her around and "scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" ([1892] 1992, 24); his embodiment of masculinist rationality crumbles in the end when his spouse goes out of control, looks him in the eye and he just faints displaying the weakness of traditional femininity. In a Butlerian fashion, this role reversal queerly troubles the Victorian gender pattern, which fostered the Cult of True Womanhood and reserved the place of the Angel in the House for upper- and middle-class women.

Because of the lack of ethical-affective dialogue between her and her partner, their sexual life is not intersubjective enough. For instance, when she asks him to have their cousins for a visit, he forbids it saying that it would be like "put[ting] fireworks in [her] pillow-case" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 29), a metaphorical expression which suggests his refusal to have sex with her. William Veeder (1988) argues that the couple has no sexual relations during the whole summer and that John pretends to work overnight because he has a lover. Towards the end, it is striking that John's spouse hides her bedroom key "under a plantain leaf!" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 42). Among all plants, the author's choice of a plantain gives readers a clue about the wife's lack of sexual satisfaction. Questioning whether heterosexuality is the norm that satisfies everybody is within the goals of queer theory.

[2] Joining class and race, Susan Lanser's post-colonial proposal is that the female figure behind the yellow wallpaper epitomizes an Asian lower-class immigrant.

To continue with the main character's family, her relationship with her sister-in-law is not affective either, since Jennie simply acts a guardian when her brother is out; furthermore, both women follow John's commands without discussing them, a lack of dialogical interaction that prevents ethics. This provokes a breach in the gender hierarchy, as patriarchal women become other women's enemies. Although this should be a well-known fact, it must be emphasized so that women are alert not to fall into the trap—as shown later, the film hints at the feminist potential of female alliances. The heroine's cold relationships with her in-laws, her inability to look after her baby due to her illness and the lack of the interaction she used to have as a writer make her anxious to contact affectively with someone (who might be hiding in the yellow wallpaper of her bedroom). As we saw in the first section, this anxiety for personal intercourse can be explained through queer studies' conception of a self that can only be as a self-in-relations.

Given the text's stated questioning of heterosexuality, some scholars deem it the product of Gilman's little affective relationship with her husband (Allen 2009; Horowitz [2010] 2012), while others claim it as lesbian (Allen 1999; White 1997) and even queer (Crewe 1995) literature; therein, the woman's figure that the heroine finds in the wallpaper could be the female lover she craves for. Jonathan Crewe identifies a "chiastic exchange" between the leading character and the imprisoned figure—"I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 39)—, who at once becomes "her own same-sex partner […] and her own 'liberator'" (Crewe 1995, 281). He goes further to assert that, in the 1890s, there is a necessary "lesbian implication" (1995, 280) in the sentence "Jennie [sister-in-law] wanted to sleep with me" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 39) stated by the protagonist-narrator and in "she wouldn't mind doing it herself" ([1892] 1992, 40). As we will see, the lesbian inclinations of this Victorian wife will complicate with auto-eroticism; this means she cannot be identified simply as lesbian, but perhaps bisexual and definitively queer.

Sexuality is also represented in the text by means of the imagery used to describe the wallpaper. It has "smooch[es]" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 35; 40), one of which "runs round the room [...] a long, straight, even smooch, as if it had been rubbed over [...] Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!" ([1892] 1992, 37). Critics have been puzzled by these "smooches." Apart from their literal meaning, some have decided they imply onanism (Allen 1999; Núñez-Puente 2006), which used to be considered a symptom of the hysteric. That is, at the turn of the nineteenth century, medical authorities still think that the "habits of the problem homosexual or intersexual woman might take the form merely of masturbation" (Jeffreys [1986] 1997, 170). In those days too, lesbianism and onanism are rated within the same category as the result of a frigidity understood as "dislike" or "failure to respond with enthusiasm to […] sexual intercourse" (1997, 171-172). In line with this, Eve Sedgwick has found connections between lesbianism and masturbation in the works of some nineteenth-century women writers. Therefore, I propose that the name Charlotte Perkins Gilman be added to Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson and the Brontës, whose queer writing has been studied by Sedgwick.

The textual gaps, intricate expressions and leaps in time can also be called queer, given their attempt to queer masculinist discourse. This style is again reflected on the wallpaper, which seems to have a queer (unconventional, non-linear, incomprehensible) design too: "One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 37); as its lines "plunge off at outrageous angles," it becomes an uncontrollable "kind of 'debased

Romanesque' with *delirium tremens*" ([1892] 1992, 31); and its "defiance of law […] is a constant irritant to a normal mind" ([1892] 1992, 34). The main character comes to admit that it "is getting to be a great effort [for her] to think straight" (1992, 32) and the word "queer" appears three times starting with the third line: "there is something queer" ([1892] 1992, 24). Although the straight/queer binary was not familiar in the late nineteenth century—"straight" was first recorded as "heterosexual" in 1941 (*OED*)—, its presence certainly enriches a queer interpretation of the story by today's readers.

Last but not least, an issue that has occupied more academics is that of the narrative voice, especially in relation to the ending: if the story is narrated in a homodiegetic fashion, when the protagonist apparently goes insane, we should ask ourselves who is narrating. This has led to the hypothesis of a second narrative voice apart from the leading character's (Feldstein 1992; Núñez-Puente 2006; Rogers 1988). Her words, "I've got out at last [...] in spite of you and Jane" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 42), are equally cryptic since "Jane" could refer to John's sister (Jennie) or to the heroine's patriarchal self—the one who would remain under her husband's yoke. A personality that unfolds into two and an inconclusive dénouement (e.g. we do not know whether she will recover) are also marks of the queerness Gilman confers onto the identity of both the character and the writing.

3. *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER*: A QUEER FILM ADAPTATION

In 1989, PBS launched *The Yellow Wallpaper* as a television production. According to Janet Beer, although the adaptation "was almost entirely the work of [the scriptwriter,] Maggie Wadey," some decisions were made with the producer, Sarah Curtis and the director, John Clive (1997, 197). Beer's essay concentrates mostly on the screenplay and omits any reference to its notoriously queer singularity. My analysis both differs from and responds to hers by carrying out a queer discussion of the motion picture. It stems from two premises: first, the literary piece and the movie are different cultural products that must be examined dialogically (Bakhtin [1981] 2000), without privileging the so-called original text, in this case Gilman's; second, the technique of close-reading can be very fruitful when applied to cinema and TV (McFarlane 1996; Monaco 2000; Thomas 2001).

As stated above, queer scholars are interested in questions that are marginalized by mainstream criticism, encouraging us to be less prejudiced and more receptive to them. I thus explore the adaptation's queer treatment of topics such as the instability of identity, auto-eroticism, lesbian tendencies, mental illnesses, women's solidarity and gender and class inequalities. I also point out how the film's use of formal resources—light, shots, sound, symbolism, scene-motifs and Carl Davis' soundtrack—contributes to representing the aforementioned issues. It must be added that my analysis is both critical and speculative; speculation is at the heart of queer thought, which favors open and free questioning as well as multiple and inconclusive results. What is more, *The Yellow Wallpaper*'s evocative form and content demands this queer kind of reflection. Finally, the ultimate aim of this section is to

demonstrate that PBS recreates Gilman's piece as a queer version for a twenty-first-century audience.[3]

3.1. OPENING CREDITS AND SCENES: THE INSTABILITY OF IDENTITY. As the movie starts, we see of the stout façade of a mansion, whose garden is full of weeds and withered flowers. The gothic appearance of the house could symbolize the enduring resistance of the masculinist order. Inside, the furniture is covered by innumerable white sheets and there are flies buzzing against the window panes. Both shots can be deemed synecdoches of the agonizing Victorians and their ghostly legacy. The protagonist is next shown travelling by carriage while we hear the voice-over of her doctor describing her illness to her husband and prescribing "a period of complete rest" to her (01:29). As the opening credits roll, the authority of the male word is reinforced, with the discontinuous shots in slow motion of the actress's profile. Displaying half of her face in a fragmentary manner underscores the instability of her situation: before she was a healthy independent writer; now she is an ill mother, who depends on her husband and has to obey her physician. Uncertainty and change are marks of a queer identity, although they only provoke negative effects in her case.

It must be advanced that the gloomy light and colors used at the beginning are maintained throughout the film, as even the yellow wallpaper and dress that appear later are dim. This initial atmosphere places the viewers in the Victorian Age's austerity and ideological darkness with regard to women; moreover, it contributes to obscuring any type of categorical truth, facilitating the emergence of the kind of alternative ideas preferred by queer theory. I agree with Linda Hutcheon that, together with the scriptwriter and the director, the soundtrack composer can also be considered an adapter since music "reinforces emotions or provokes reactions and directs our interpretation of different characters" (Hutcheon 2013, 81). Filmmakers themselves are very aware of music's power over the emotions, something which has led to strategically composed soundtracks. The first composition we hear, a slow tune played by wind instruments, causes the audience to feel worried as well as curious to find out more about this woman.

3.2. SELF-EROTICISM. The main character is here named Charlotte (Julia Watson); her husband John (Stephen Dillane) likes calling her Lotta, we presume as a term of endearment. Having two names is important considering how she unfolds into more than one self throughout the movie. This unfolding partly manifests in her self-eroticism, a side of the personality which has not been much studied by critical theory and which concerns queer scholarship.

[3] From amateur videos and animations to stage plays and ballets, the audiovisual recreations of "The Yellow Wallpaper" seem countless, proving its continuous appeal in the last few decades. Among the film versions, Marie Ashton's short (1977) stands out for its queer features. The way that Elizabeth (Sigrid Wurschmidt), the protagonist, stares at Jennie (Susan Lynch) is noteworthy throughout. Once she touches Jennie's arm and back making her feel uncomfortable. Another time, Elizabeth is giggling as she lies on the bed with her dress and legs lifted up, which lets us speculate about solitary sex—in fact, she sits up straight and covers her legs after hearing a knock on the door. Contemporary adaptations, however, prefer to draw inspiration from the horror aspects of Gilman's work—e.g. in Logan Thomas's film (2012), the main character is tortured by visions of her dead daughter.

For some literary critics, as previously remarked, the wallpaper's smooches—together with its circling and stunning pattern—connote masturbation and PBS's adaptation could support this idea. Charlotte goes to bed during the day, in her nightgown and with her hair loose, supposedly to take a nap. The camera focuses how her hand grabs a bar of the bedhead; then, we only see a close-up of the wallpaper as if it were expanding, while we hear a panting that rises in crescendo, letting us speculate about a female orgasm (29:12). Lotta opens her eyes and shouts as two eyes come out of the wallpaper and stare at her—the wallpaper's eyes are repeatedly mentioned in Gilman's story. These eyes could be symbolic of the multiple "I-s" (i.e. aspects) of her personality, as well as of her repulsion at acknowledging the Kristevian abject (1992): the queer masturbating "other" within her "I."

As described above, the concept "queer" encompasses non-heteronormative practices (Grosz 2013). In the light of this, the possibility of a Victorian wife-and-mother who masturbates is queer, not only in that period but even today, since female self-stimulation still is a taboo topic. Putting together mothers and sexual pleasure can still shock Western people, whose ideal of femininity is the Virgin Mary: someone who became pregnant supposedly without having sex. Accordingly, westerners have been internalizing the mother/whore binary, which is at the foundations of patriarchy (Young 1990). In the case of this character, auto-eroticism is even justified: on the one hand, it does not entail the risk of an unwanted pregnancy, as she probably does not want to get pregnant again right now; on the other, from a previous bed scene with her husband the viewers understand her sexual life with him is unsatisfactory; furthermore, opting for portraying solitary sex grants the heroine the right to enjoy herself despite her situation. Seen in this light, female self-stimulation is an act of rebellion against patriarchy, although a minor and unconscious gesture in this case, which explains why it was attributed to lesbianism in the past. During the orgasm, the audience is shown the wallpaper instead of the actress's face. Consequently, the scene is not intended for the gaze of a heterosexual male who could attempt to possess the female. Laura Mulvey's protest is well-known: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female […] Woman [is placed] as image, man as the bearer of the look" ([1976] 2010, 2186). Mulvey thus encourages filmmakers to destabilize the link between the objectifying male gaze and the observed female. As I will continue to discuss, PBS's production of *The Yellow Wallpaper* follows her argument, by putting forth an alternative feminist view of a woman's body and pleasure. It must be added that contemporary film studies have turned to women directors in search of alternative non-sexist cinema (Kuhn 1994); nonetheless, this move could be an essentialist assumption: there also are patriarchal women and feminist men and John Clive could be an example of the latter.

It is vital that the eyes coming out of the wall actually belong to the protagonist, as if she were looking at herself in a mirror. This is easy to notice because the actress has quite unique eyes: big, dark and roundish. The triad of voyeurism, narcissism and fetishism, which according to classic psychoanalysis forms the cornerstone of the individual's identity (Freud 1996), manifests all at once: she is the one that looks, the one that is looked at and her own fetish since she will keep on watching the woman's figure throughout—this obsession with the female also supports the lesbian interpretation that will be put forward. Therefore, if scopophilia really matters for the subject's formation, there is hope that Charlotte will regain consciousness of her

identity at some point. Moreover, the public's experience of pleasure comes from hearing a gasping sound. The choice of a different sense, hearing instead of seeing, also breaks the masculinist custom attacked by Mulvey. As explained above, the auto-erotic moment reveals Lotta's sexuality as queer, which is to say unexpected (like a Victorian wife's onanism) and ambiguous (given her latent bisexuality).

The other most erotic scene of the movie happens again when Charlotte is alone. By chance, she finds the mansion's secret library, goes in, caresses the books and tries to embrace the shelves (13:23). She then appears lying on her bed, reading and surrounded by several books. The shot of her whole body in a relaxed, happy and pleasurable attitude invites us to identify the links between female sensuality and intellect, since they are not split in a hierarchy but queerly connected—a connection which had already been advocated by French feminism (Cixous 1976). When John finds out, he persuades her not to go there again because reading is too exhausting and she must proceed with the rest cure. By putting the two scenes together, we can infer that Victorian women are forbidden to gain any kind of knowledge, either bodily or intellectual.

3.3. THE TREATMENT OF HYSTERIA. Like self-erotics, mental illnesses constitute another taboo area that queer researchers care about.

One day Lotta faints,[4] prompting John to call her physician. Dr. Stark (James Faulkner) debases his patient in multiple ways: tearing off the blank pages left in the diary she was writing in secret and so silencing her literary voice; saying that, as a married woman and a mother, her only responsibilities are "[her] child, [her] husband, [her] home" (48:24); and grabbing one of her earrings in a bluntly objectifying manner. Afterwards, the doctor shares with John the photographs of "a very extreme form of cure" (53:46) that appeals to the patients' "feminine vanity," a statement which exposes the former's male chauvinism. Although untold, those are the famous photographs of Dr. Charcot's female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital between 1876 and 1880 (Didi-Huberman 2007). Based on these images, feminists have questioned the degree of dramatization and even pornographic exposure, which the supposedly sick women were subjected to, as they became models following the instructions of their cameramen (Showalter 1985). PBS's film condemns this medical treatment too in the manner that both men leer at the women in the photos. The explicit criticism of some men's gazes continues to pay tribute to Mulvey's study on the reification of women in (moving) pictures.

Before the doctor's visit, John scolds Charlotte for alluding to her feelings, to which she retorts: "my feelings are the only things left to my life" (46:23). Her reply evidences that if, historically, women were attributed to be irrational and so inferior, it was only because they were forbidden to work professionally by being confined to the realm of the family and so of feelings. Contemporary specialists, however, are turning to affect and the body as valid sources of knowledge (e.g. Braidotti 2002). When the two men are alone, Dr. Stark argues about women's denial of sexual feelings. When John says that his spouse "doesn't seem to deny them" (53:15), His colleague replies that he should not judge based on his "own personal experience" although he is the one who started generalizing about women. Generalizations have been the target of queer academics, who avoid systematizing individuals, while focusing on the particulars of every

[4] Her faint is due to the stress provoked by her mother-in-law's visit. Unpleasant and narrow-minded, Mrs. Stamford (Dorothy Tutin) proves to be the kind of patriarchal woman described above.

case. PBS's production thus attacks the Victorian belief that all women have a propensity for hysteria and must be medicated for it. It is convenient for patriarchy to diagnose women, especially intellectual ones, as being ill or even mad so as to keep them under its rule. Then as now, the medical institution often treats women (more than men) with the intention of making them manageable by means of tranquilizers, sleeping pills, slimming tablets and so forth. Towards the end of the film, Charlotte puts her fingers down her throat and vomits the medicine given to her (01:06:25), a symbolic act of not adjusting to the *status quo* but rejecting it *à la* queer.

Portraying the pathologization of women as hysterical invites the viewers who know Gilman's piece to reconsider the cited "smooches" yet again. In the nineteenth century, the "smooches" could be a reference to the pelvic massages and vibrators that were applied to allegedly hysterical women, as portrayed in two recent productions: *In the Next Room* (a play) and *Hysteria* (a movie). Charlotte's female erogenous zones could have been manipulated like this by her physician. Therefore, Lotta, whose eyes are closed during most of the scene, could be recreating or even dreaming about this medical procedure, which would cause both pleasure and disgust to her.

3.4. FEMINIST SOLIDARITY. In Gilman's narrative, the heroine and Jennie never join against John's authority. Throughout history women have neither been sufficiently united in order to pull down patriarchy, by which women's solidarity seems a queer topic due to its strangeness and revolutionary potential.

Queer studies are also concerned with neglected areas of study like socio-economic class and how it intertwines with factors like gender. We may wonder why Jennie decides to spend the summer with her brother and his spouse. Apparently she has neither a husband nor children; perhaps she needs money and is happy to have a place in which to live for free. This conveys a criticism of the economic difficulties suffered by unmarried women in those days. Since she has not succumbed to compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), we may speculate about her sexual orientation and the problematics of lesbians in and out of the workplace both then and today.[5] In this TV adaptation, Jennie (Carolyn Pickles) appears holding her baby nephew, brushing Charlotte's hair and helping her dress, supervising meals, folding linens, as well as doing other house chores. She plays the piano so that her brother and sister-in-law dance together, and plays and sings for John and Dr. Stark although they keep talking without paying attention to her. A caretaker, a homemaker and an entertainer, if John had to pay Jennie for her work, she would cost him a lot of money. Her character reminds us of the kind of multitasking that working-class

[5] John McCarty's filmic re-telling (*Confinement* 2009) is set in contemporary times. The couple rents a house so that Kathy (Colleen Lovett) can recover from post-natal depression, while her sister-in-law Mary (Nina Lorcini) looks after their baby elsewhere. She visits her brother and complains that something must be done about Kathy, as she cannot take care of the baby forever; John (Tony Pallone) replies: "what would you be doing if you weren't looking after him? Sitting around swapping fantasies with your looser girlfriends?" (24: 52). Does he mean they are unemployed, childless, single or lesbian? In this case, she could be all of them, especially taking into account the actress's subtle butch look—e.g. first wearing a simple shirt and later with a sweater placed on her shoulders and tied at the front.

housewives have been doing throughout history without perceiving a salary, a fact condemned by Gilman ([1898] 1994).

PBS's Jennie retorts to John only once. Despite that, her words and the accusatory tone of her voice question male despotism quite literally: "And do you always know what's right for Charlotte? Has it occurred to you that even Dr. Stark may sometimes make mistakes?" (01:02:09). The use of a mirror shot duplicates her image, by which she appears more powerful than her brother. His reflection is shown too, but distorted and in the distance, making him more insignificant. At a symbolic level, patriarchal men are being asked to look at themselves in the mirror and reevaluate their behavior with mothers who are professionals as well. After hearing his sister, John is left speechless and just leaves the house as usual, by going across the garden and shutting the gate after him. This is one of the "scene-motifs" (my own compound to name motifs shaped as scenes) that evidences his belonging to the public realm.[6]

In the movie, Jennie is always nice and understanding with her sister-in-law. She is deeply affected by witnessing an argument between the couple and cries about what might be going on in the yellow-wallpapered room at the end. Thanks to her confrontation with the master, viewers can speculate about how different the story would be if the two female relatives joined forces against patriarchal law. Hence, PBS's version adds a crucial detail for today's women: solidarity. By allying with her sister-in-law and rebelling against her brother, Jennie makes a gesture of solidarity that teaches a lesson to the current world in need of more feminist coalitions.

3.5. COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND QUEER EXISTENCE.[7] There is another scene-motif featuring the gardener's daughter riding a bicycle, until it is decided she is a lady and no longer allowed to do that. The girl reminds us of the way in which the so-called suffragettes rode bikes at the time while claiming their right to lead their own lives, including their sexuality. The child is usually dressed in a white Victorian dress; however, just before Lotta's orgasm, she is clad as an acrobat in red and white, balancing on the bicycle next to an also red and white rosebush—a sequence which clearly symbolizes her menstruation and adult sexuality. The gardener's daughter showcases the relative freedom then offered to girls until they became women, whose (sexual) lives was to be determined by their husbands. Charlotte is fascinated by her seriousness and determination, which remind her of herself and make her recall the time when she contemplated editing a journal. As she finally admits, her fertile plans about her career were aborted when she "met John" (23:37), whose career is prosperous and whose professional trip to London brings about the film's climax.

John travels to the Royal Academy of Medicine to deliver a paper on how to improve the health of the poor by means of the "restorative qualities of pleasure" (01:07:94), including "books and pictures freely shown" to them. This is highly ironic because he does not allow his wife to read and seems unconcerned with her pleasure; besides, his contempt for the lower classes is made evident from the beginning—he says: "superstition is for servant girls" as if they were incapable of rational thought (08:14). While he is lecturing, Charlotte locks herself up in the

[6] John's continual winding of the clock is another scene-motif that defines him, revealing his obsession with control, apart from his too predictable anti-queer life.

[7] The title of this subsection is based on Adrienne Rich's (1980) foundational essay for queer theory; the next one, on Carol Hanisch's popular slogan for second-wave feminism.

yellow room, blocks the door and spends the night pulling off the wallpaper. He returns next morning, runs upstairs and breaks forcefully into the room. When he finds his partner crawling around, there are no words but only a terrifying close-up of her face that looks strange, ghostly and powerful (01:12:16). Her Medusian look is so mighty that he faints as if struck by "the deadly *femme castratrice*" (Creed 1993, 127). Their gender roles are thus reversed not only in the symbolic order, she being the looking "male" and he the fainting "female," but also in the physical one, as she climbs over his body lying on the floor. Although the situation cannot be interpreted as a triumph for the protagonist, whose mental condition is deeply affected, it blames patriarchy's negligence for her current situation: at the beginning of the movie, Charlotte was actually healthier. It is due to a wrong medical diagnosis and treatment that she is having a psychotic breakdown, if she has not completely fallen into madness.

When John is in London, there are juxtaposed scenes of him delivering his paper and Charlotte tearing the wallpaper (01:08:06): a perfect contrast of the Victorian separation of the spheres. Every time she strips a bit of wallpaper, there is a sharp metallic creak that sounds like a knife. At the symbolic level, this knife-like sound indicates that she has the phallus understood as power, though only temporarily. When she finishes, there is silence while the main character is shot from below suggesting she has now gained a sense of self. Her fingertips are stained in an ink-like color as a metaphor for her writing self. We are given more contrasting shots regarding gender roles: he faces his public and she a blank wall; as he shakes hands with his medical audience, a woman's hand emerges mysteriously from the wallpaper.

Performed by the same actress, the wallpaper figure is dressed in yellow and has gray hair. Since the heroine finds a yellow dress in a trunk earlier in the film, we could think that she stands for a projection of Charlotte in the future as a healthy old woman. This explanation would suffice if it were not for another scene, in which both women join their lips, close their eyes and the wallpaper woman caresses her partner's face (01:10:40), which invites speculation *à la* queer. Their passionate meeting complicates the already multiple sexuality of a fin-de-siècle masturbating wife-and-mother, who could be called bisexual and is definitively queer. To give more impact to their kiss, their faces are artistically trimmed and the image is frozen for a few seconds.[8] With this act, the heroine is "undoing" (Butler 2004) both the pattern of the wallpaper and that of her sexuality and gender, although not through language but through affect: "the body's capacity to enter relations" (Braidotti 2002, 104).[9] In so "undoing," the TV adaptation grants her with the affective other longed for in Gilman's tale. The music being played is completely new; when the couple is face to face, it becomes very soothing due to an organ playing and, as they approach each other, we hear the swaying jingle of a bell. The religious-

[8] In Ashton's adaptation, the shot of Elizabeth and Jennie in profile looking at each other (07:47) lasts for several seconds. Clive could have inspired himself in this intimate shot, or even in Ashton's whole movie, to direct his own; curiously enough, the actresses in the leading roles look really alike—e.g. both have dark eyes that are exceptionally rounded and separated.

[9] There is an affective impulse in queer theory's attempt to disarm the Hegelian violence of recognition (of the other). Therein, I suggest that queer researchers pursue an in-between Braidottian-Butlerian method—the loving argument that both women philosophers have been holding for years (e.g. Braidotti 2002; Butler 2004) proves the fecundity of this synergy.

sounding tune grants the scene a special halo, as if the pair were joined in body and soul and reinforces the idea of women's solidarity expressed above. By portraying several forms of sexuality, or in other words our queer existence, the movie criticizes the heterosexual model that is institutionalized by cultural regimes in the Victorian and other ages.

3.6. THE POST-ENDING: THE POLITICAL IS THE PERSONAL. To Gilman's denouement, the film adds a puzzling extra scene that shows our heroine wearing a yellow dress and crawling in circles on a bed of dry leaves (01:13:45). I propose the term "post-ending" instead of epilogue, used in writing, for the audiovisual texts which revisit their endings by providing alternatives to actively involve the viewers, for instance, in a post-film discussion. In this case, the post-ending is deeply allegorical and invites the kind of speculative inquiry that queer thought expects from us.

Displaying Charlotte in an animal-like position crawling on the fallen leaves underscores her convergence with so-called nature, the ultimate other, whose situation concerns queer studies (e.g. Gaard 1997; Azzarello 2012); in fact, at the very end the female figure slides away from the shot and we can only see leaves, which seems to be an ecological statement. From a symbolic point-of-view, the scene suggests that humans must come in deep contact with nature (body, leaf, etc.) to queer our conception of it, comprehend it and eventually stop its maltreatment. More literally, the post-ending exposes the fragile materiality of her body and of nature, both of which must be handled with respect and affection. To be happy again and retake her activities, Charlotte is going to require not only an alternative treatment but also an "other" that can establish a equitable affective relationship with her, since "affects" and "connections" are crucial for the life of "embodied subject" (Braidotti 2002, 125). Even Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," successful as it was in her lifetime, had to be rescued from oblivion in the 1970s by some scholars' alternative ways of reading and their love of women's literature. The actress's circular movement thus reveals the need of a guiding hand, a friendly other, implying the futility of lonely rebellion. Stemming from Marxism, Donald Morton challenges the apparently "liberating" moments of queer self-invention that do not produce "a structural change in society" (1996, 273-274).[10] The above lesbian and auto-erotic moments could be criticized on the same grounds: rebelling in private is not enough to pull down patriarchy, though it can be transformative for the self and lead to greater alterations. Notwithstanding, as can be learnt from the protagonist's trajectory, women and men must join *à la* queer in solidarity with each other and fight together to achieve real change both in and out of the home. Regarding the soundtrack, the slow music played during the post-ending is exactly like the piece at the beginning. Using the same composition replicates the circular structure of the adapted text, which opens and closes with a temporal reference: "It is

[10] As for queer liberation, it seems important to ponder over treatments like sex-reassignment surgery and hormone therapy, among others, which are being offered especially in the West, as if welcoming the proliferations of sexualities. Being partly satisfactory and partly risky to the patients, these practices provide medical clinics and pharmaceutical companies with great sums of money, which makes it essential not to overlook the socio-economic framework when performing queer criticism.

very seldom" (Gilman [1892] 1992, 24) and "every time!" ([1892] 1992, 42). Both the story and the motion picture disclose that women's history tends to repeat itself, urging the public to come together and demand solutions. It is about "time" that social transformations are implemented so that mothers that are professionals can carry out their occupations, as well as their hobbies, without being stigmatized (sometimes by other women). It is about "time" too that people who do not identify as heterosexual are not termed ill, unless everybody is, as most of our (sexual) potential cannot be foreseen, which means all of us are queer.

Both Gilman's and PBS's creations portray a self who feels confined by the situation she has been put into by society and who tries to free herself. Queer thought and action also intend to radically alter the *status quo*, for instance, to avoid ranking people as either "normal" or "abnormal," while searching for a dialogue among categories. The desire for a radical transformation makes queer advocates quite different from the lesbians and gays who just claim to be allowed to enter the system (e.g. by getting married). As implied throughout the paper, queer studies are interested in the in-between aspects of identity, the ambiguity and instability which do not fit into naturalized classifications. The TV production is explicit in its depiction of a Victorian wife-and-mother who masturbates, has lesbian tendencies and finally revolts against her domineering husband; hence, she is presented as a queer subject who neither adjusts nor subscribes to the established gender and sexual patterns. The movie also alludes to the possibility of a feminist alliance that could overthrow an unjust patriarchal regime. By means of an extra scene after the end, it encourages the audience to ponder over the protagonist's lonely revolution. Initiatives like this can attract some people's attention, maybe reaching temporary outcomes; nonetheless, it is imperative to add a material dimension to queer desire if we want to remodel our socio-economic framework and achieve a real transformation leading towards a more isonomic world. This includes women's, workers' and other people's treatment in the domestic, medical and work spheres. In addition, the textual and the televised heroines long for contacting an affective "other," who materializes on the screen, and whose affection will be vital for their recovery; therein, affective relationships, which celebrate the continuum among beings, are the cornerstone to the kind of (queer) revolutions that seek to pull down hierarchies.

In its urge to free the queer "I," rebel through feminist solidarity and protest against inequalities of sex, gender, class, etc., PBS's *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an innovative queer response to Gilman's piece that still manages to stir the viewers of today. As implicit in the post-ending, the audience is expected to engage critically and creatively with the movie's queer proposals, reflect on the injustices caused by a white-supremacist heteropatriarchal liberal-capitalist system and demand changes. A queer revolution should start by building a non-dualistic link with the other—be it a sexual fantasy or a film adaptation—and the others—e.g. people whose sexual orientation or economic means are different from ours—in order to live as ethically as possible; this would entail a blurring of categories through intersubjective relationships, in other words, the achievement of the first affective queer goal.

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