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**Reversing Gender Roles in  
Female Gothic Fiction: The Cases  
of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and  
Shirley Jackson**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence and development of the so-called Female Gothic genre within the Gothic mode as its conventions and tropes gave platform for female-oriented texts. Women started to fictionalize their unique and usually negative experience of living in a patriarchal world, and thus, to criticise the prescribed gender roles. However, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the American writer, wife and mother of four Shirley Jackson presented her story “The Lottery”. Its content and message caused a controversial reaction as it seems to be non/antifeminist for perpetuating and justifying female oppression. However, the close reading of the story allows to realign it and place it in contact with its precursors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Keywords: Gender roles, Female Gothic, “The Yellow Wallpaper”, “The Lottery”, Shirley Jackson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

## **RESUMEN**

El siglo XIX fue testigo de la aparición y el desarrollo del género llamado gótico femenino dentro de la modalidad gótica, ya que sus convenciones y tropos sirvieron de plataforma para textos orientados a la mujer. Las mujeres empezaron a ficcionar su experiencia única y generalmente negativa de vivir en un mundo patriarcal, criticando así los roles de género prescritos. Aunque a mediados del siglo XX, la escritora estadounidense, esposa y madre de cuatro hijos Shirley Jackson presentó su cuento “La lotería”. Su contenido y mensaje suscitaron una reacción controvertida por parecer no/antifeminista, al perpetuar y justificar la opresión femenina. Sin embargo, la lectura atenta del texto permite resituarlo en relación con sus precursores del siglo XIX.

Palabras clave: Roles de género, gótico femenino, “El papel amarillo”, “La lotería”, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Shirley Jackson.



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## INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe once said: “[...] the death [...] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (122) probably echoing the idea of Burke: “Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty” (204). Indeed, following their taste, numerous male Gothic authors have included this trope in their works, primarily for aesthetic reasons, ignoring its lack of sympathy for the plight of women. Nevertheless, soon after Poe’s death, a separate branch of the Gothic emerges which later would be named as the Female Gothic. It could be defined as the Gothic written by women and about women dealing with a unique female experience. This experience was often linked to the restrictions and discriminations that women have had to face throughout history. Traditionally, it portrays a young imprisoned heroine who manages to defeat a villain (De Ridder). Thus, it may be seen as a critical response to the male approach as it sympathised with women.

Despite the rise of the Female Gothic in the pre-feminist period when women hardly had a voice, it still pictures courageous female figures that often went out of the prescribed role of mother and wife. As Eva De Ridder argues, the Female Gothic may be seen “as a way of covertly expressing women’s desire to undermine the patriarch, as the actual source of danger threatening the heroine is the eighteen-century patriarchal society” (7). This can be proven by examining the works of Anne Radcliffe, Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen in Britain, and Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Kate Chopin in America.

A striking example of the female-oriented Gothic prose is the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) written by Gilman. While capturing a woman gradually falling into madness, the author plays around with the archetype of Madwoman existing in the male Gothic genre. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest, the madwoman “is a haunting figure who blends angel and monster” (qtd. in Auerbach 505). Angel and monster stand for the duality of female representation: either a woman fits in the patriarchal role of being a submissive mother and wife and, thus, is an angel (a concept that comes from a Victorian poem by Coventry Patmore “The Angel in the House”

(1854)) or she does not coincide with what a male image of her is – and therefore, she is a monster. Gilman makes her heroine strong and free while her husband – is portrayed as weak, and in the end he “fainted”, reversing the traditional gender roles.

In a way, the 19th century sees a tendency towards feminism not only in real life but in literature as well, especially within the Gothic genre as its tropes and conventions such as confinement, isolation, madness and anxiety helped to illustrate the dramatic experience women of the time faced as well as to challenge the traditional views of femininity.

Nevertheless, in the mid-20th century, Shirley Jackson writes her short story “The Lottery” (1948) which tells about an annual sacrifice ritual. As one may have expected, the story should continue the line of the rising feminist tendency seen in the Victorian era. However, there are loads of controversial opinions on Jackson’s fiction and her level of feminism. According to Heather D. Stempke-Durgin, the writer never openly identified herself as a feminist (13). Cohen adds that Jackson does not “actively advocate that the existing inequalities between the dominant and the oppressed can and should be removed” and concludes “her texts can be regarded even as nonfeminist [...] preliminary or incomplete” (59). Indeed, the first reading of “The Lottery” leaves rather a pessimistic misogynistic aftertaste. The clear division between public and private sphere in the community, the adherence to the traditional gender roles and the final choice of a woman as a scapegoat might seem to suggest the writer's anti-feminist inclination; however, this is an initial impression. Despite the critical voices and supposition on Shirley Jackson’s returning to a pre-feminist outlook in her short story “The Lottery”, she actually progresses and strengthens the struggle for women's rights just as her predecessors in the Victorian period. This paper aims to analyse two prominent works of the Female Gothic from the different historical periods: “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Gilman and “The Lottery” by Jackson in order to compare them in terms of dealing with the concept of gender roles and its reversal and to find a common vector in the exposing and criticizing of a male chauvinist society.

The study will rely on the methods of close-reading and case studies as well as the comparative Feminist Literary Criticism. The choice of the works is determined by their context of writing and the prominent place that both occupy in the Female Gothic



literary discourse as well as covert (but present) adherence to reversal of traditional male Gothic approach in general and the trope proposed by Poe in particular. The lack of analytical comparison of these two texts together in the literary community is an additional factor.

The criteria developed for comparison include context of writing, the narrator's importance, the gender roles exposition, the linguistic and stylistic features and, finally, the relevant symbolic meaning. Analysing the texts according to the listed points makes it possible to draw a conclusion on the level of feminist orientation of the given literary works.

The thesis is divided into the introduction, the theoretical framework, the chapter on "The Yellow Wallpaper", the chapter on "The Lottery" and the conclusion. The introduction indicates the emerging feministic tendency in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic literature and poses the research aim of finding out the direction of this tendency in a half a century. The theoretical framework will provide the historical look onto the nature of female oppression, the general information on the gender roles and their reflections in the Gothic literature. The central two chapters will analyse "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Lottery" as fundamental pieces of the Female Gothic writing. The conclusion will draw the final considerations on the results of the study seeing the two narratives in relation.

The thesis may be seen as a part of feminist revival movement since its global goal is to trace the feminist formation within the Gothic literary mode.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Gothic mode in literature appeared as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Gothic authors wanted to explore the dark side of human nature, the irrational and supernatural. The defining features of the Gothic are considered to be the remoteness of the scene – “be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard ...” (Hogle 2), and the secrets of the past which haunt heroes and may take different forms – “ghosts, specters, or monsters” (Hogle 2). The secrets usually deal with “unspeakable” or something “naturalistically difficult to talk about, like guilt” (Sedgwick 14). Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is traditionally named as the first Gothic novel. Since the 1790s when Gothic fiction “exploded [...] throughout the British Isles, on the continent of Europe, and briefly in the new United States, particularly for a female readership” (Hogle 2), it stayed in favour throughout the Romantic period and still excites readers and critics nowadays.

The literary canon prevailing at the time consisted of men mostly since “women were largely excluded from the academy and from intellectual and public life” (Riley and Pearce 24). However, there were a few exceptions and such female figures as Anne Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, and the Brontë sisters stood out among the Gothic writers. They can be regarded as the pioneers of the so-called Female Gothic. To define this concept, nevertheless, seems quite problematic. As Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith notice, it may be treated as “a literary form, genre or sub-genre, a mode of writing, a set of conventions or a historical period” (27). The term itself was coined by Ellen Moers in her text *Literary Women* (1976) where she refers to it as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). That is, for Moers, the crucial component is a female authorship and the genre adherence. As Peggy Dunn Bailey argues, Moers’s original premise was gendering the Gothic, or “that gender may be a crucial element involved in the generation, recognition, and reception of Gothic literature” (273). At the same time, there are some other interpretations such as the one by the female readership: “Satires and critiques from the early nineteenth-century frame the readers as girls and women” (Ledoux 3). Lauren Fitzgerald in turn explains the Female Gothic as the result of the

emphasis on feminism during the 1960s, or the second wave of feminism, “which focused on uncovering the lost tradition of women’s literature” (9). She considers David Richter’s, David Punter’s, Victor Sage’s and Coral Ann Howells’s researches to conclude that it was Feminism that institutionalized Gothic studies (14).

Among the features typical for Female Gothic the primary one is the use of dark settings as a symbol of patriarchal culture where “a virginal heroine attempts to overcome an exaggerated version of the subjugation women face in everyday life” (Ledoux 3). Another common element is “an ‘explained supernatural style’ [...] in which supernatural events are threatened but later rationalized” (Ledoux 3) as an opposition to male style of non-explained supernatural phenomena. The female terror-centrism which “holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity” (Hogle 3) rather than male horror-based style which “confronts the main characters with the gross violence or physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms” (Hogle 3) is another feature. Among typical themes “central to Gothic mode” Ledoux lists “a distressed heroine, women's domestic incarceration threats of sexual violence” as well as “economic disenfranchisement and spectral maternity” (2). Providing additions and explanations to the original interpretation of the Female Gothic by Moers has become a central research idea for many critics so far. Ledoux names the following works among others: “Donna Heiland's *Gothic and Gender* (2004), Andrew Smith's and Diana Wallace's collection *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), and Avril Horner's and Sue Zlosnik's recent *Edinburgh Companion on Women and the Gothic* (2016)” (2).

Each notion interpretation, however, identifies writings that do not fully fit into it, making it impossible to accept any definition as the only one. This paper will use the term “the Female Gothic” for compositions in the Gothic genre written by women and having at their core the female experience of existence in the patriarchal world. This experience was often linked to constraints and confinement, both physical and moral, that women faced. The restrictions were especially relevant in a deeply religious Victorian society. Perpetuating ideas of the Book of Genesis, where from “the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the

man” (*King James Version*, Gen. 2.22), society treated women as secondary and inferior to men, passive and weak objects, “the Other” as Simone de Beauvoir identifies it (20).

However, not only religion could justify misogyny but science as well. Thus, philosopher Edmund Burke in his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1767) developed a duality of the Beautiful and the Sublime similar to the duality of a woman and a man, correspondingly. As Paul Mattick, Jr. notes analysing gender in Burke’s work, the traits of the Beautiful-feminine include “smallness, smoothness, curviness, delicacy, cleanliness, soft colouration, lack of resistance, quietness” (294) while the traits of the Sublime-masculine are all the opposite. Additionally, the Beautiful “almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection” (Burke 203-204). Other philosophers such as Immanuel Kant or Jean-Jacques Rousseau also harboured similar ideas and objectified women.

One way or another, a Victorian woman always stood behind a man – firstly a father, then a husband. It was a man who determined her status – whether married, a spinster or a widow. Women could not support themselves and their lives were centred around the household and children, that is, around the so-called private sphere, unlike men who occupied a significant place in the public sphere. Among the few jobs that were available to women one could name a governess, a maid or a needlewoman, but even here the income usually belonged to a woman's husband. A striking example described by Ledoux is the case of Ann Radcliffe. When Radcliff earned £500 for her manuscripts *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) – it was a record for a woman of that time and twice as much as her husband William’s income. The contract, however, was signed by the husband and not by her since as a woman she could not possess any property or sign papers. Legally, the money belonged to William Radcliffe (4).

A woman as an object within a patriarchal culture did not have the opportunity to express herself. In the essay “A Room of One’s Own” (1929), Virginia Woolf declares how a woman's creativity was limited due to the lack of the minimum necessities – one’s own money and private safe space to write (3). In the same essay, she reveals how the world never found out female geniuses, such as Shakespeare's hypothetical sister and thousands of other potentially undiscovered talents, simply

because society defined women as “wholly passive, completely void of generative power” (Gilbert and Gubar 21). Those who did decide to write “in a culture where creativity is defined purely in male terms” (66) enjoyed few options only. Namely, they could write in more feminine (equal to “simple”) genres as “children's books, letters, diaries” (72) or they could adopt a male pseudonym – that is, hide themselves under the “cloak of maleness” (65) by wearing metaphorical “trousers” (65). Among female writers who chose the second option were the Brontë sisters, Mary Ann Evans, and Violet Paget. As American editor Margaret Fuller wrote in her diary, she was forced to change her identity “to play the artist” because “womanhood is at present too straitly-bounded to give me a scope” (71). The replacement of one’s identity in an attempt to “achieve patriarchal authority through metaphorical transvestism” could not but cause an internal conflict or “a radical psychic confusion” for a writer (66). To avoid the confusion or “schizophrenia of authorship” (69), some women tried to unsex themselves, so to remove their gender from writing (66). Others left their work anonymous (Woolf 37).

Thus, literature was mostly written by men, for men and about men. “Most Western literary genres are, after all, essentially male – devised by male authors to tell male stories about the world” (Gilbert and Gubar 67). In any genre, it concentrated on men occupying “powerful public roles from which women have almost always been excluded” (68). In the few works aimed at female audience, writers portrayed female characters in the angel/monster polarity. That is, there was no complex female character but the stereotypical division between a moralising example of the domesticity referred to as an Angel in the House or its opposite – the monstrous dangerous and destructive woman who had lost her pious self. Just as men locked women in the houses, they also locked them in the texts (83).

In spite of this, by the 19th century a certain literary tradition of women's writing had developed thanks to authors who were able to find “viable ways of circumventing the problematic strategies” (72) described before. Above all, these are Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson who dealt with “central female experiences from a specifically female perspective” (72), although they were forced to disguise their intentions under the mask of the visible and to direct “their female concerns into secret or at least obscure corners”

(72). One way or another they were still often labelled “odd” and “isolated eccentric” by literary critics (72).

In the middle of the 19th century, the consolidation of women against male pressure culminated in the feminist movement and the emergence of the concept of the New Woman later, which was reflected in literature as well. The primary genre that gave platform for feminists was the Gothic. Its features such as disturbing setting, themes, and motifs allowed feminist authors to promote their positions and portray women's anxiety and fears. The imagery of “spatial constrictions” (83) used in the Gothic Mood, where “heroines who characteristically inhabit mysteriously intricate or uncomfortably stifling houses are often seen as captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive” (83) helped to reflect the limitations for women in the real world. One of the ways to reflect female anxieties was with the help of the trope of the Gothic doubles. Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, for instance, revealed in her poem “The Other Side of the Mirror” how a woman's true nature – a Madwoman – is awakening (77). Unlike the male-written works where a Madwoman trope is given a negative role, here it rather presents “the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage” (78). The double is voiceless since a woman is muted, desperate and wild but the speaker admits “I am she!” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 16) so she embraces her repressed. The Madwoman double can be traced further back in 20th century literature in the works by Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, and Sylvia Plath (78).

The New Woman is anticipated by Charlotte Brontë in her “pivotal text for feminists” (Griesinger 29) *Jane Eyre* (1847). The protagonist is portrayed as active and showing “anger at being treated as sexual objects in the marriage market” (29). Jane Eyre has the courage to refuse Rochester to become his mistress, and embarks on an independent, albeit challenging, journey. In the final novel *Villette* (1853), Charlotte Brontë presents the protagonist Lucy Snowe as a girl seeking independence and willing to be different from the Angel in the House: “Lucy herself falls outside the socially accepted norm set up for women” (Fimland 156). In that way, Brontë portrays early feminist heroines in her Gothic fiction.

Written at the end of the 19th century, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) – though not a traditionally Gothic novel – “uses specific elements from this literary

tradition to address issues of women's experience in society" (Rossi 66). Particularly, it also depicts an entrapped woman striving for autonomy and not fitting into the framework of canonical femininity. Although the protagonist Edna Pontellier commits suicide at the end of the story, her actions are regarded by many critics as "the best possible achievement of independence and agency under the circumstances" (Ramos 145). As William Bartley remarks, there is a "family of responses" claiming that "Edna's suicidal swim is a heroic moment of self-creation and self-possession" (724). He also provides a list of critics sharing this "family of responses", namely, Christ, DuPlessis, Ewell, Levine, Helen Taylor, and Seyersted (743).

The heroine of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) shares a similar fate to Edna's. As Peter Ramos notes "both texts repeatedly establish the extent to which the patriarchal pressures of that period posed severe obstacles for even the most privileged women" (145). With the Gothic doppelgänger trope, Gilman personifies a woman repressed and shackled by chauvinistic society as she herself and other female writers were. As with *The Awakening*, the story's ending is ambiguous and can be interpreted as either defeat or victory. In any case, such self-destructive behaviour requires the courage "to make the ultimate stand of killing themselves or going mad to elude the patriarchal society they faced" (Ramos 147) and an irresistible desire for autonomy. The next chapter will analyse in detail the Gilman's approach to the canonical gender roles and the female position in the 19<sup>th</sup> century American society.

## 2. THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

In her short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” Charlotte Perkins Gilman vividly demonstrates the development of postpartum depression and psychosis of a new mother. The plot of the story is both simple and complex. An unnamed woman arrives at an empty house with her husband John in an attempt to regain her mental health with the help of the so-called “rest cure”. She is put into a room with the yellow wallpaper, despite her negative attitude towards this space. Simple discomfort worsens to anxiety and paranoia – the woman feels that the wallpaper is alive and watching her. As a culmination, she rips the paper off and starts to crawl around. Once in the room and seeing his wife in a seizure – her husband faints. She creeps over his body.

Despite its small length the story has provoked a wide range of interpretations: from the horror story to the “case study of neurasthenia” (Treicher 64). Mostly, however, it has been read from a feminist perspective. This chapter aims to show how the feminist approach of the Gothic genre in “The Yellow Wallpaper” helps to expose the traditional gender roles and develop early feminism.

Though written within the period normally associated with realist fiction, “The Yellow Wallpaper” clearly shows some popular tropes of the gothic genre. The plot starts when the couple arrives at a typically haunted house – “A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate” (Gilman 3). Although some of the rooms are spacious and bright, the former nursery “at the top of the house” (5) – a place with the stripped off wallpaper and bars on the windows – is definitely suspicious. Setting in a remote location adds to the isolation of the characters and helps to create the necessary eerie atmosphere of impending danger. The tragic ending is also foreshadowed by the protagonist. From the very beginning she feels “something queer” about the place: “...there is something strange about the house—I can feel it” (4).

More precisely, “The Yellow Wallpaper” falls within the American subgenre of the Gothic, where the focus “shifts away from the outward appearances of haunted landscapes and buildings, as well as outward signs of the supernatural, to the inward terrors of one’s own mind” (Johnson). In other words – the characters’ inner world is



crucial. The reader witnesses how the protagonist falls deeper into her insanity and ruins her psyche, where a presumably “haunted” house is just a decorative trigger. At the same time, the story discusses everyday life, and hardly may be considered a piece of “escapist literature” (Johnson). It shows the situation, common for the time of writing of a woman being prescribed the senseless cure while her true mental problems and needs stay ignored and that is what creates terror out of everyday life. When criticizing this state of affairs, the American Gothic “brings a new light to social issues that may be at first too ‘ordinary’ to notice” (Johnson).

Another common Gothic cliché is the presence of the supernatural. In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, despite the fact that all the irrational elements may be rationally explained – nevertheless they contribute to the general supernatural atmosphere of the short story. As it is noted by Tryphena Y. Liu, American Gothic writers often chose precisely female figures for transmitting supernatural phenomena showing by this a close connection between women and the irrational. It was believed that “the supernatural often manifests within a female figure, rendering the female body an object of anxiety and fear” (Liu 27). By this the desire to control women (just as the desire to control the supernatural) is also revealed. (68). As an American Gothic author, Gilman also chose a female protagonist who sees the supernatural around as well as it is a female figure exactly that appears behind the wallpaper.

Finally, “The Yellow Wallpaper” may be read as a story of a *doppelgänger* – a popular motif in 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic literature. The reader witnesses how the protagonist projects her repressed self onto the wallpaper woman who “rebels against her submissive position” (Krehl 2).

Thus, the story is justifiably put into the Gothic (or more specifically American Gothic) genre of literature. It uses popular gothic clichés, creates a supernatural atmosphere and explores the repressed while showing the terrors of every-day situations.

## 2.1 Context

“The Yellow Wallpaper” was written in 1890 and published in 1892 in *The New England Magazine*. It is one of Gilman's best known works which places her among the prominent early feminists of the time when women were “restrained by ‘proper’ gender ideals from living out their desires and deprived of a voice to utter them” (Krehl 2). Being an activist, Gilman promoted her values of women’s liberation not only in writing. She was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century lecturer, philosopher, “a mostly self-educated artist, [...] reformer who championed the rights of women to intellectual and economic equality” (Martin). As her biographer Cynthia J. Davis notes “She was hailed as the ‘brains’ of the woman's movement” (202).

However, after giving birth to her daughter Katherine, Gilman suffered from postnatal depression diagnosed as “hysteria” – “a woman’s disease, a catchall malady for women who exhibited any of a multitude of symptoms, including paralysis, convulsions, and suffocation” (Shreve). The solution to it was the “rest cure”– “regimen of enforced bed rest, isolation, force-feeding, and massage” (Stiles) designed by famous 19<sup>th</sup> century neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell – “the greatest nerve specialist in the country” (*The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 95). Weir Mitchell is even mentioned in the text by the narrator, so Gilman openly refers to him. The prohibition of work during the rest cure aimed to retrain the body and mind of a woman to “more efficiently bear the burden of her domestic functions” (Thraillkill 539). As expected, the cure did not help, but worsened the situation. That is what Gilman wrote about the therapy in her reflection on “The Yellow Wallpaper”: “I came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over” (“Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper”). Fortunately, she managed to stop the “therapy” after three months, come back to writing and divorce her first husband leaving him the child as she understood her marital and maternal duties to be the cause of her fatal state.

This episode from her life inspired the famous story. With it, Gilman illustrated how a woman feels in the shackles of motherhood and marriage. The controversial ending of the story is interpreted by many as a symbolic victory of a woman in the equality war. So just as Gilman, her heroine, was liberated. Thus, “The Yellow

Wallpaper” is in many ways an autobiographical work and the author's presence in the story is hard to deny.

## 2.2 Narration

Since the story is built as a collection of personal journal entries, the protagonist is the one who narrates the events. It is through her eyes that the reader learns about what is happening in the “colonial mansion” – “the most beautiful place” (Gilman 4). By using the form of a diary-like narration, Gilman deeply conveyed the feelings of the protagonist and personalised her experience. When reading the thoughts of the narrator, one witnesses the process of breaking out from the patriarchal world. A female narration is also crucial since it is a way to give voice to a woman and manifest *her* perspective. While most of authors within the canon preferred the male narration, Gilman utilizes “a strategy that makes women speakers, agents, and story-tellers, while men become silenced, the object of stories” (Cutter 50).

The choice of the first-person narration helps to communicate the narrator’s experience onto readers which influenced not only the success of the story (though much later than the publication – only in the 1960s), but also the advancement of early feminism in the 19th century America. Another technique that contributed to this was not giving a name to the woman. It was easier for the female audience to imagine themselves in this situation when reading the first-person narration from the nameless heroine – any of them might undergo or did undergo similar experiences. They might find support in the fact that they are not the only women questioning their status. It was normal (though not accepted by the society of the time) to feel mood swings after giving birth as well as to want to build a career and fulfil creativity potential. Therefore, women were shown an alternative way to live, distant from chauvinistic propaganda. In that way, the narrator appears sympathising with female problems when shifting away from her initially Victorian views. At the same time, the protagonist may be left unnamed as a way of contributing to her lack of agency in the male world. While other female characters (Jennie, Nellie, etc.) carry on the imposed angelic role, the protagonist

as a madwoman does not fit into the patriarchal structure due to her resistance and desire for self-empowerment.

However, it is important to keep in mind the progressive insanity of the narrator, so it is impossible to say how reliable the story of the presented events is and to assess the characters' behaviour objectively. Instead of observing factual reality the readers rather wander around the imagination and rely upon the vague descriptions. Thus, the story is told by the unreliable first-person narrator.

### **2.3 Gender roles**

“The Yellow Wallpaper” depicts the relationships of a married couple in a relatively short period of time. The reader is not given much context and background to learn more about the characters. It is known nonetheless that they are “mere ordinary people” (3) who rarely get the chance to “secure ancestral halls for the summer” (3).

John, the husband, is the head of the family. He is the one who makes the decision to come and stay in the house. John is also a physician who treats his wife for “temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency” (3). John does not consider his wife's illness to be serious, prescribing her “tonics, and journeys, and air” (3) as well as a rest cure – complete prohibition to do any kind of work, whether physical or intellectual. The woman's brother – also a physician – has the same opinion. Already from the first paragraphs the story presents two men with a respected profession – a doctor. The profession that requires typically “masculine” qualities – logic, rationality, patience. According to the traditional roles model, women cannot engage in this kind of activity – they are too emotional, soft, passive and certainly not intelligent enough to differentiate “phosphates” from “phosphites”. They are supposed to “dress and entertain” (6) – so basically to stay in the private sphere. Indeed, in “The Yellow Wallpaper” the protagonist, although shown working as she is writing her journal – is forced to hide it from her husband, as he calls it “absurd” and expresses her “heavy opposition”. It was not acceptable for a woman to leave the private sphere and occupy oneself with something more significant than childcare and housekeeping as any job and income makes a person less dependent. The reasons for the prohibition may also

be the husband's fear of giving a voice to the woman as she may write in the journal in a revealing way. In fact, already in the first entry the woman writes that her husband “of course” laughed at her for her concerns, and notes that “one expects that in marriage” (3). Almost immediately afterwards, she doubts the treatment she receives. She can talk to the “dead paper” only while not being able to admit it to “a living soul”. Not only because by this she could undermine male authority but also because hardly anyone would listen to her. The other women mentioned in the story – Jennie the housekeeper and John’s sister, Mary the nanny – conform to the typical female model of not occupying significant positions in the hierarchy. Additionally, they broadcast the values of domesticity: “She is a perfect, and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession”, says the narrator about Jennie (8).

John is clearly a restrictive husband, controlling his wife's behaviour – sometimes forbidding her even to think. He isolates his wife from the communication she needs. The woman, in turn, although she does not openly oppose it at the beginning – internally sometimes questions his actions. Even the fact that she dares to write it matters. The narrator is aware of her position: her opinion is not considered, she has no influence on decision-making, she is subordinate (“Personally, I disagree with their ideas” (3)). Nevertheless, it is too early to speak about conscious feminism. The woman praises John repeatedly and belittles herself (“He is very careful and loving” (4), “he is so wise” (11)). She feels guilt for tiring her husband with her concerns, for being a “comparative burden”, for crying too much “at nothing”, being “so silly as to make him uncomfortable”. She echoes his words here and there since John is a skilful manipulator. He blames her lack of self-control, forcing her to hide her feelings. She reflects the patriarchal neglect of female agency that John, her brother and other men of the Victorian society imposed on her. A good illustration of it may be an episode when the woman belittles her knowledge on design while naming specific design terms such as “laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry”, “debased Romanesque”, “a horizontal breadth for a frieze” (9), etc. Her low self-esteem may be a result of John’s manipulations. He devalues her experiences, downplaying her knowledge and successes. The fact that John uses a condescending and patronizing tone and expressions such as “a blessed little goose”, “little girl” (6), “Bless her little heart!” (12) contributes to it. Other manipulations include exaggeration (“nothing was worse

for a nervous patient” (6) as well as victim blaming (“He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies” (7)). Additionally, he inspires that the house influences his wife well (“you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know” (11)) while in reality it accelerates her insanity. Being “practical in the extreme” (3) he ridicules his wife's anxieties. Here, Gilman skilfully captures the opposition of the stereotypically feminine emotional and the masculine rational. Until the final episodes, the woman is always nervous, weak, superstitious while John is practical, strong, and “never was nervous in his life” (6).

John, whether deliberately or not, underestimates the seriousness of his wife's state and misdiagnosing makes matters worse. Hysteria was commonly referred to as female disease: it “has a long history of undercutting women’s aspirations toward autonomy” (Shreve). It is an oppressive tool of making women vulnerable and dependent. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, according to researchers like Kohl (193) and Oakley (31) was suffering from a kind of postpartum psychosis or depression developed from the baby blues. Among the symptoms typical for this disorder Amy Perry et al. mention “mania or a mixed mood episode, [...] depression, lability of mood, perplexity (extreme confusion) and anxiety [...] hallucinations and delusions” (Perry et al.). The National Health Service of the UK also names “trouble sleeping at night”, “loss of appetite”, “feelings of guilt, hopelessness and self-blame” to the list (“Symptoms – Postnatal Depression.”). The American Journal of Psychiatry additionally includes “paranoid ideas, thoughts others might consider unusual [...] suicidal [...] thoughts” (Bergink et al.). All the symptoms mentioned may be traced in the protagonist’s behaviour. Thus, it may be concluded that she does suffer from a form of postnatal depression/psychosis.

The depression combined with the pressure of patriarchal restrictions lead the heroine to the fixation on the wallpaper as she is put up in the yellow wallpaper room. From the very beginning, she dislikes this place and asks John for changing the room or repapering. However, he ignores her requests, giving odd excuses. The husband's indifference to his wife's feelings and desires is evident.

Thus, the heroine remains in the room. With the lack of social relations and creative work, she starts to focus on the wallpaper patterns. Its chaos aligns into specific outlines until it appears as a female figure. From this point on, the protagonist develops a stalking mania and obsession. She is fixed on uncovering the secret of the figure. The progression of the disease is displayed through the addition of olfactory hallucinations to visual ones as the wallpaper starts to smell. It is possible also that the woman has memory lapses or tells the story deliberately confusing as an unreliable narrator. It is evident when seeing the nature of “smooches” found by the heroine on the wallpaper “as if it had been rubbed over and over” (15), while at the same time there are some yellow stains on her clothes. It may be implied that she herself left these signs while crawling around. Moreover, later the reader finds out that the woman’s shoulder fits right in the smooch. Another evidence opens closer to the end: the woman notices how the bedstead is “fairly gnawed” (17) thinking that the children who dwelled in the nursery did it. However later she writes “I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner [of the bed]” (18) so most probably it was also she who “gnawed” the bed when being under the wallpaper’s influence.

Over time, due to the wallpaper projection, the woman grows capable of showing her repressed self: she protests against the norms, she expresses her emotions, stops praising her husband, etc. At the same time, John loses his authority in her eyes. His restrictions and patronization are not relevant anymore. By the end of the story, the traditional gender roles are reversed as the woman is strong and powerful and the man is weak and fainted.

## **2.4 Language and style**

The fragmentary and sketchy nature of the narration manifests the beginning of stream of consciousness, a technique that another celebrated feminist Virginia Woolf would later actively use in her work. With it, Gilman managed to further enhance the effect of immersion in the protagonist’s head, as well as to underline the confused nature of her thoughts, caused by the progression into insanity.

The diary style implies the writer’s awareness of narration which is a part of another stylistic technique – metafiction. As the story progresses, the border between

the events described and awareness of writing gets more blurred. As Cutter notes, Gilman often turned to metatexts in order to “foreground the literate, linguistic processes of reading, writing, and story-telling that produce and reproduce repressive patriarchal ideologies” as well as to “undermine ideologies that have limited women’s potential” (43). Gilman believed that language (and literature as its form) put women inside the “repressive linguistic structures” so it is crucial to reverse it (41). Additionally, there is a deeper layer of metaphors inside the story connected to the “dead paper”. Just as the wallpaper becomes alive as the madness of the heroine and the release of her repressed self progresses, the “dead paper” she is writing on her entries becomes alive as well. The wallpaper woman firstly silenced and trapped by the years of suppression gains her power to create with the help of the narrator just in the same way as Gilman gives power to the female writers to oppose the repression of the male dominance in literature and reinforce the Female Gothic genre. Thus, the wallpaper with its complex patterns and hidden layers may symbolize the female writing in general and the text in particular. Metafictionally, it may be seen as a significant step forward for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century female writers leaving the literal confinement of male houses and metaphorical confinement of male texts. As Gilbert and Gubar stated, “an escape from the numb world behind the patterned walls of the text was a flight from disease into health” (91). It is evident how the female freedom to write is treated like a healthy state of society – the one people should strive for.

Another linguistic technique presented is the use of literary allusions which makes the story even more true-to-life. As Treicher notes, the narrator’s reference to Weir Mitchell focuses readers’ attention “to the world outside the text” (68). The journal style also contributed to it, since it was possible for the audience to accidentally confuse the fiction with a real account of madness (though taking into account the episode from Gilman’s life that inspired “The Yellow Wallpaper” – it was not so far from the truth). Though expressing herself on the “dead paper” – the narrator addresses the reader from time to time as if she knew that the story is going to be read.

As Treicher contends, the language of the text is rather oppressive and despite the female point of view, it gives the reflection of the patriarchal beliefs. Starting from the diagnosing of the woman with “a slight hysterical tendency” (while “hysteria” has a clear negative connotation) the narrator has to restrain her speech and hide her feelings



in order to please men and fit in the structure. Her language is controlled just as her life is. The result is seen in the journals – “Woman is represented as childlike and dysfunctional. Her complaints are wholly circular, merely confirming the already-spoken patriarchal diagnosis” (Treicher 71). Due to the patriarchal control and abuse she writes in an infantile manner: with short paragraphs, complaints and constant change of topic. She is treated like a child (put in the nursery room, carried in male arms, read the stories) – so she adapts to it, when being a victim of the system. At the same time when describing the wallpaper, her language evolves: she uses more complex linguistic structures, lots of epithets, similes and metaphors (e.g. “[...] when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions” (5); “The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight” (5)). One may conclude that the wallpaper frees her language making her adult again as well as later it will free her repressed self.

## 2.5 Symbolism

Gilman played around with symbolism throughout the story. The “haunted” house, first of all, may have been used as a kind of asylum for women in “hysteria” (as the nailed and bitten bed, the barred window, the torn off wallpaper suggest). It displays society's attitude to women's health problems. They are neglected just as the room and misdiagnosed in an attempt to enforce the control over them.

The room where the woman is placed is in the attic, which makes her even closer to the Gothic female archetype “Madwoman in the attic”, developed by Gilbert and Gubar. Being a former nursery from the narrator's words and the fact that she decides that such a ruined and unpleasant room was a nursery – may symbolise that the woman perceives motherhood as hard and devastating. Like children, bound to their mother for life, limiting her in some way and requiring sacrifice – the room locks a woman in with the bars on the windows and in the wallpaper patterns. It drives her mad, physically and mentally limiting her. And at one point the heroine accepts this – she is happy that it is she and not her child who has to occupy the room. (“...it is lucky that John kept me here after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby” (10)). In a way,

she may represent a mother's sacrifice for a child. Moreover, it is John as a representative of manhood who places the woman in the shackles of motherhood, giving her no choice, which may be a symbol of reproductive violence. At the same time the heroine's staying in the nursery may symbolize how people perceive women infantilized – not responsible, and weak. John's paternalistic treatment of his wife supports it.

The wallpaper is another major symbol of oppression which surrounds the woman. Its yellow colour which should treat bad mood and depression, since it is associated with "sunshine", "warmth", "cheer", "happiness" (Emanuel) ironically mocks the inhabitant of the room as she is locked in and cannot enjoy sunlight, warmth, and happiness. The dirty "unclean" shade of the yellow is closer to the true mood of the woman and reflects that her sanity is stained. The pattern of the wallpaper contributes to its imprisoning effect since it is seen as the bars. The female figure behind the bars may symbolize the protagonist herself (as well as most other women of the period, since at times there are many figures behind the bars), as she sees herself trapped, but striving to get out. Like the woman behind the wallpaper, the heroine crawls during the day. As if in protest ("most women do not creep by daylight." (15)), she shows that she is no longer subject to the rules of the patriarchal system. The yellow stains on her clothes symbolically may show how the wallpaper is absorbing her. The protagonist projects her desires of freedom onto her doppelgänger. According to Krehl, it may be an "attempt at self-therapy and a strategy for self-empowerment" (3). Since the rest cure therapy was rather destructive and no other way of getting treatment was feasible – the self-therapy of creating a free rebellious double seems quite justified. The obsession reaches its climax as the heroine breaks the cage of oppression so that neither she nor the wallpaper woman (or also she) can be put back again ("I've got out at last [...] you can't put me back!" (19)). The shackles of patriarchy are broken, and her feminist self is now fully developed.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The ending of the story may proclaim a triumphant victory of the woman over the man: "I had to creep over him [her husband's body] every time!" (19). She is above

her fainted husband. It is notable that according to the Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, an archaic meaning of “to faint” is “to lose courage or spirit” as well as “to become weak” (“Faint”). She is strong and fearless now as she has the last word. Now it is John who loses his name and is patronised as he is referred to as “young man” (18). The gender roles have reversed. However, at the cost of madness.

It is arguable whether or not one can consider “The Yellow Wallpaper” a true feminist story since its ending is rather complex. Treicher, for instance, calls it ambiguous, since “On the one hand, it testifies to an alternative reality and challenges patriarchy head on” (67) – so she sees madness “as a kind of transcendent sanity” (67). On the other hand, her husband may “deal with her” (67) after the recovery since he has only fainted, not died. At this point, “Her individual escape is temporary and compromised” (67). She concludes that “the story only hints at possibilities for change. Woman is both passive and active, subject and object, sane and mad” (74). The reader sees how stepping away from traditional gender roles – where a woman who is no longer ready to be “the angel in the house” – is punished with becoming a Madwoman as only a madwoman does not agree to live in patriarchy.

However, it is possible to claim that the ending is rather victorious since the protagonist overcomes the limits imposed on her and she never would agree to go back after feeling freedom, to be her past self. It may be proved when paying attention to the phrase at the end “‘I’ve got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane’” (19) – “you” is the husband, but mysterious “Jane” is mentioned for the first time. While some scholars interpret “Jane” as a typo of “Jennie” – the housekeeper, it could also refer to the protagonist’s oppressed self. If it were the typo, Gilman could have corrected it later, for example in the response to critics “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper” but she never did. Such a dramatic moment may provoke the protagonist to speak about herself finally, to name herself so to admit her nature. She equals “Jane” with John and proclaims her freedom from both: “Jane” – her past Victorian self that the reader could see in the beginning and her abusive husband.

To conclude, the open ending leaves the reader pondering – who is the true winner in the story in the end? How feminist is Gilman in her writing? With the help of Gothic tropes, she effectively exposes unequal and misbalanced relationships in the

marriage – either with male or female dominance. In a way, the story is moralizing and seems to suppress the feminist ideas. However, the close reading opens its underlying layers – just as the sub-pattern of the wallpaper. They uncover the reversal of traditional gender roles and the need of reformation not only in the fiction but in the reality as well. In that way, Gilman proclaims the female power and the right for authorship.

### 3. THE LOTTERY

“The Lottery” is regarded as a classic of 20<sup>th</sup> century American Gothic literature and one of the “most anthologized in American literary history” (Cohen 50). Describing just one day in the life of an unnamed village, Jackson addresses many themes: conformity and individuality, tradition and values, irrationality and cruelty. The narration starts with the description of a peaceful ordinary morning of June 27<sup>th</sup>, when “the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green” (Jackson 227) in a village of about three hundred people. The peace is only to be interrupted with a quick procedure on the main square – the lottery.

The procedure consists of two stages: firstly, the head of each family draws a slip of paper from a black box – all blank and one marked with a black dot. One of the villagers – Mr Hutchinson – takes the marked slip. Secondly, Mr Hutchinson’s family only draw again. Now, it is his wife Tessie who gets the marked paper. She asks for a revision of the results but in vain. The villagers pick up stones prepared in advance to kill her as it is revealed that she is the victim required for good harvest.

The short story along with the novels *The Haunting of the Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, made Shirley Jackson a true master of the Gothic and “one of the most popular writers working in America from the 1940s to the 1960s” (Smith 152). The decade of the 1950s was even called “the decade of Jackson” by Linda Wagner-Martin since she believed that Jackson’s themes “were so central to the preoccupations of American women” (Franklin 1662).

However, due to “its central interest in women’s lives” – critics tended to underestimate Jackson’s work (Franklin 1662). It is “only since the 1990s that critical interest in her work has flourished” (Smith 152). The boost of interest has resulted in loads of analyses on Jackson’s life and career – primarily on “The Lottery” as her most shocking and controversial work.

This chapter seeks to examine the short story “The Lottery” from a feminist perspective in order to determine the author's personal attitude to the “female question” and seeing it as standing in a line with the Female Gothic works from the Victorian era such as Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

### 3.1 Context

Written three years after the end of the Second World War, “The Lottery” indirectly reflects societal demands for peace and stability, a revival of the pre-war status quo. The war vacated workplace for women as men joined the army. Later, however, women were brought back into the home, but their self-perception had already changed. Entering the public sphere played an important role since it made women realise that they were not just fragile angels whose aim was to please their husbands and run the household. They have the strength to fulfil their working potential and to support themselves. “The image of woman as the guardian of the domestic comfort and tranquility” was what “Americans sought after the horrors of international conflict” (Walker 99). The confinement of women was easy and familiar, it was those very components that returned society to its pre-war state of tranquility. That lies in the nature of the “contradiction between the reality of working women and the domestic ideal” which “resulted in convoluted notions about women's roles in society” (Strempeke-Durgin 5).

Female striving to self-realisation undermined stability and threatened male hegemony. Through active propaganda and glorification of domesticity, women were tried to be put back. The role of a happy housewife was cultivated, while the role of a career woman was condemned. Women who refused to return to homes were discredited in the workplace. It was in this historical context that Jackson wrote her fiction.

Despite working from home, Jackson also personally experienced this kind of discrimination and denial of women's potential. Her biographer Ruth Franklin describes a relevant case on it. While in hospital, Jackson tried to convince a clerk that her occupation was a writer, but the clerk agreed to put down only “a housewife” (1791). As a wife and “a mother of four who tried to keep up the appearance of running a conventional American household” (Franklin 1660) she managed to combine it with writing “in a bold unique way” (Cohen 49). She wrote every spare minute “amid milk bottles and dirty diapers” (49). In such circumstances, during another grocery shopping with her children, the idea for the story about the annual sacrifice ritual came to Jackson’s mind.

### **3.2 Narration**

Unlike in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, “The Lottery” utilizes the third-person omniscient narration. The narrator does not participate in the events being described, but as if a camera, provides an objective recording of what is happening. Such narration helps to distance the reader from the characters and to avoid the imposition of one point of view since it does not express any judgements, maintaining a “completely unobtrusive tone” (Breitsprecher 5). Thus, it is hard to say how sympathising with the protagonist or the villagers the narrator is.

The narration is mostly chronological, “rather traditional and straight” (Breitsprecher 5), but limited as the key aspects (such as the reason for the children collecting stones, the gathering of people in the square, and eventually winning the lottery) are not revealed until the climax. That is, the narrator selectively describes the action, covering it only partially for the sake of maintaining intrigue and achieving a shocking denouement. However, there is a certain incorporation of foreshadowing elements throughout the story which helps to build up the suspense.

### **3.3 Gender Roles**

Among the many interpretations of the story and its readings as anticipation of postmodernism (Hattenhauer), a psychoanalytical (Sekartaji) or a Marxist (Suwardi) tale – it is its feminist reading that occupies a significant place, and this is not surprising. The narrative captures a deeply traditional and patriarchal society, as evidenced by the clear division between the private and public spheres existing in the village. Men discuss “tractors and taxes” (Jackson 227), women exchange “bits of gossip” (227). Men organise the lottery, women obediently participate in it. Moreover, it is a man, as head of the family, who draws the first, bringing the risk of death into his family. Only in the absence of a husband and sons over 16, the woman gets the right to substitute the man. Thus, the woman is not the first nor even the second in the family hierarchy, as husbands and adult sons are considered more important. Married daughters, on the other hand, draw with their spouses.

When making the lottery two-staged, Jackson not only reflects the male dominance, but also covertly shows the advantage of having more children in a family as it reduces the risk of being selected. Thus, the narrative may reflect the indirect reproductive violence of the patriarchal community. Moreover, when Tessie's daughter pulls her ticket, everyone is quiet, a whisper is heard "I hope it's not Nancy" (234). As the girl of twelve, Nancy receives more value than the adult Tessie, as Nancy is a future mother, who can bring new members into the community. Thus, the woman shifts to the fourth place in the family hierarchy, right after husbands, sons and daughters.

The commitment to gender roles is also manifested in details, such as the characters' clothes. Women wear "faded house dresses and sweaters" (227) and "aprons" (229) – comfortable household clothes, while men, such as Mr Summers is "in his clean white shirt and blue jeans" (229). The women come into the square "after their menfolk" (227), they are literally behind them, i.e. secondary, same as in the drawing procedure. They are not even respected by their children who "reluctantly, having to be called four or five times" (227) follow their mothers. At the same time, once Bobby's father "spoke up sharply" (228) – Bobby "came quickly and took his place" (228). This again shows that the woman is not an authoritative figure in the family. Thus, "the societal values of the community portrayed are inherently and manifestedly patriarchal in nature" (Cohen 57).

At the same time, it is highly debatable and "a matter for careful scrutiny" (Cohen 49) – how much of a feminist Jackson was. Her biography shows that she voluntarily had a rather abusive relationship with her husband – "a man who was her ideal counterpart in so many ways, but who tormented her with his criticism and unfaithfulness" (Franklin 1719), which may be a consequence of her complex relationship with her mother, as well as mental disorders, e.g. agoraphobia. From the age of 16 she had suicidal thoughts (1695). All this could not but affect not only her lifestyle but also her writing.

It is possible to see the nonfeminist sentiments in "The Lottery" if to consider the work as one that proclaims and reaffirms the gender roles described above. Women are shown as weak, disrespected, passive and nosy (as if when they exchange "bits of gossip..." (227) or when they all "began to speak at once, saying 'Who is it?', 'Who's



got it?' (233)). Women have no real friends, which can be seen in the relationship between Mrs Hutchinson and Mrs Delacroix. Once Tessie Hutchinson is declared the winner, Mrs Delacroix picks a stone "so large she had to pick it up with both hands" (235) to throw at the person with whom she gossiped recently and "laughed softly" (229).

Although "the lottery is an equal-opportunity selection process – as likely to pick a man as a woman" (Heller), it nevertheless seems significant that Jackson chooses a specifically female character for such a fate. Presumably it may be seen as a way to punish a woman for being a woman. For being a woman who stood out with not respecting the traditions as she "clean forgot what day it was" (229) and was late for the lottery. She also could answer Mr Summers – the ritual conductor – in a rhetorical and possibly sarcastic manner with calling him by his first name and "grinning": "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you, Joe?" (230). Undoubtedly, she did not accept her fate properly as it was expected. At the same time, as Tessie was late due to household chores, one may conclude that Jackson shows the difficulty of combining all the requirements for women – simultaneously they have to keep their houses in order and be available for men all the time. As Kosenko argues, Tessie's "final faux pas is to question the rules of the lottery which relegate women to inferior status as the property of their husbands" (31).

Tessie is also seen as far from ideal due to the fact that she is not a good mother as a woman is supposed to be. It is evident when she enquires about her elder daughter Eva on her possibility to draw with the family (and reduce a personal chance to become a "winner" in that way). Thus, Tessie may be seen less as a mother and more as an egoistic woman who puts herself on the first place. When not trying to challenge the sadistic ritual until it affects her personally, she is again shown as egoistic. With such a reading, it is Tessie's behaviour that killed her, and Jackson, thus, is seen as criticising women.

On the other hand, Tessie's situation as well as other women's is important to consider in the context of the presented community. Patriarchal patterns and traditions, strong enough to erase the limits of not only critical thinking but also common sense, leave little room for women to assert their rights. Any attempt to stop the lottery would

cause the rise of social tension as those who in power are men. Tessie's lack of revolutionary sentiment may be explained not by her egoism but by her confined position in the community. Thus, Jackson criticises and exposes rather than defends the traditional patriarchy.

Moreover, at some points she reverses the roles. For example, when showing that men can be nervous and feel afraid: they may blink their eyes nervously (230), grin nervously (231), turn the slips "over and over nervously" (231-232). They duck their heads (231), their jokes are quiet, and they smile rather than laugh (227). Women, on the other hand, can take an active masculine role and be rational. For example, when Tessie's husband draws a marked paper, it is Tessie who rushes to defend her family and asks for a review of the results. Although no one listens to her, Tessie is still determined to survive and save her family. As she realises that screaming does not make sense (after all women were seen as "hysterical") Tessie is rational enough to change her strategy and speaks "as quietly as she could" (234). Additionally, it is Tessie who says to her husband "Get up there, Bill" (232), daring to direct. "In doing so, she inverts the power relation that holds in the village between husbands and wives" (Kosenko 31) Thus, Jackson attempts to expose and reverse the traditional gender model. Like Gilman, through gothic tropes such as cruelty, madness, anxiety and threat – she reflects the fears of women, albeit now in the post-war era. Over the time, women were still just as psychologically, physically, and reproductively abused, with their rights violated. Jackson masterfully portrays the ruthlessness of patriarchal society and the need for a reform vindicating in this way women's rights.

### **3.4 Language and style**

When reading "The Lottery", the first thing that strikes one is the irony, if not sarcasm, of the author. First of all, it is the ironic title since the meaning of the word "lottery" implies a pleasant and fun raffle game, the winner of which receives a valuable prize though Jackson uses the concept of lottery in a reversed way. Not only the title of the piece, but also the peaceful tone of the narrative, as well as the emphasis on the "clear and sunny" (227) morning affect the mood of the reader. The idyllic image of a

small village – a projection of a prosperous and secure world with “heavy corn”, traditional values of family and domesticity – evokes a desire to appear in this world until the climax, when the reader learns the cost of it. Jackson tries to recreate the atmosphere that people lack in real life and then coldly interrupts it, thus illustrating the dystopian nature of having a stable world without violating anyone's rights.

It is ironic also how the lottery is treated by the villagers: it is important (as they conduct it) and unimportant (as they simplify it) at the same time. Nobody remembers the origin of the ritual, nobody cares if the tickets are wooden or paper. However, people do remember to use stones. The focus on it may be of great significance as stones are one of the ancient and cruellest ways to murder which has been practiced to punish women especially. Even nowadays, as the Guardian reports: “that such harsh, archaic punishments are still officially on the books” and they are “predominantly against women” (Salih).

Irony is also evident in the portrayal of family. As the nearest and dearest people family are expected to protect and care for their members. However, it is the family, and more specifically Tessie's husband, who “forced the slip of paper out of her hand” (235) and “held it up” (235), thus, removing the last obstacle that was stopping the crowd from brutality. Neither are Tessie's children more sympathetic towards their mother. Nancy and Bill Jr “both beamed and laughed” as they saw their papers being blank though they understood that someone in their family was to die that day. With or without realising it, even little Dave, Tessie's youngest son, also throws some pebbles at his mother. The reader witnesses how the family, as a model of domesticity and kinship, is transformed into brutal killers in a matter of minutes. That is what may be called the Uncanny (Unheimlich, Unhomely) – a popular motif in Jackson's work when “what is familiar [...] can return to haunt the individual in the form of bizarre” (Freud qtd. in Akcil). Unlike male Gothic writers who concentrated on the “naturally” evil places where one expects to encounter something eerie, Jackson as well as Gilman, exposes the dark face of the home, a place supposed to be safe but actually offering “Possession, confinement, penetration, loss of identity” (Wallace 75).

### **3.5 Symbolism**

The main symbolism of the story may lie in the allegorical representation of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American society by the village. The residents share a great appreciation for savage and barbaric traditions which comes to the point of absurdity in the form of annual murders. In reality, people were also keen to continue the traditions, primarily in the form of preserving and reinforcing gender roles, despite their oppressive nature for women.

Franklin points out another symbol which is the so-called “demon in the mind” – Jackson's “fundamental obsession, throughout her life” (1692). Usually, it is represented by a seductive male figure which drives women into madness. In “The Lottery”, the figure is not literally framed but it appears rather “metaphorically as the source of the evil deeds people commit” (1692).

Definitely, the black box plays a significant role. According to Freudian Dream Symbols, boxes or other type of containers may symbolise female genitals, thus the reproductive function (qtd in McAndrew). In “The Lottery”, the box is controlled by men and looks shabby and neglected, “in some places faded or stained” (228) which may refer to “faded house dresses and sweaters” of women. However, there is a paradox as the box carrying death symbolises the woman carrying life. Such a meaning may be implied to emphasise that a woman in a patriarchal world under reproductive violence is only physically able to give new life, but in reality, it is an act of her own sacrifice.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Thus, in her narrative, Jackson, although not overtly, criticised the suppressed position of the 20th century woman. The lottery can be seen as a strong metaphor for “unhappiness within the vaunted ‘women's sphere’” (Nickerson 2). Through Mrs Hutchinson, Jackson portrays how as a woman one cannot trust even the closest people and domestic environment. A female desire to see herself not only in the private sphere as mother and wife (what Betty Friedman would later call “Feminine Mystique”) could be severely punished. It could be that Jackson saw herself in Tessie’s figure as both

were marginalised and “frozen out” (Heller) by the society. Jackson experienced it harshly during her stay in North Bennington – a place that became a prototype of “The Lottery” village (Heller). Her dissatisfaction in the marriage and close-knit community, feeling unhomely at home as well as “the tension she felt between her socially sanctioned role as a happy homemaker and her vocation as a writer” (Heller) lead to the birth of Tessie. As Stephanie Bowers notices, Jackson was “struggling to fit in socially” thus her themes of writing are “deeply personal in that they imaginatively engage with essentially feminine conflicts to which she was particularly sensitive” (qtd. in Sanko). Tessie's death on the one hand can be read as a moral tale to rebellious women (with a superficial reading), and on the other hand as a sacrifice to be paid in order to expose the savage and cruel world of patriarchal values.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Women's rights violation as a complex topic has a rich history which got its reflection in literature. The Gothic was one of the few genres where women writers managed to occupy a significant position, in spite of the male dominance in the existing literary canon. It was not an easy task since female writers had to adjust themselves in order to fit into the frames, be published, appeal to the critics (male ones), get the audience and, finally, support themselves and be independent. Nevertheless, with the help of the Gothic mode, they managed to include their often negative experience of existing within the patriarchal culture and promote in this way ideas for female emancipation.

As the analyses demonstrate, though written in different contexts, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Lottery" have lots in common. They share the gothicised domesticity as both show the uncanny of domestic places and close people – those expected to be protective. Both undermine and question the prescribed patriarchal values, as well as traditional family structure. Both reflect the negative female experience and struggles connected to violence, lack of sympathy and neglect. Both portray a strong female figure that comes to the point of making alive her repressed nature as she realises her subjugated position. Finally, both demonstrate female punishment.

One way or another, "The Lottery" faced controversial reception regarding its (non)feministic message and it may seem like the author rather proclaims the necessity for females to stay inside the prescribed role. However, the close reading and case studies demonstrate the presence though not always overt of feministic orientation in both short stories. The female punishment via the death (either physical or moral) of a beautiful woman, as Poe put it, is played around by both Gilman and Jackson. They use this trope to the opposite effect as it does not add to the aesthetics but draws attention to the inability for a woman to exist in a world of patriarchal constraints.

“The Lottery”, thus, as well as the “Yellow Wallpaper”, both strive for female emancipation as they both reverse traditional gender roles, question the male approach and reinforce female writing. In that way, both may be put in a line of the progressive feminist tendency existing in the Female Gothic genre.

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