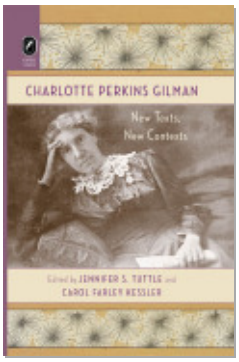
Introduction



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Introduction

JENNIFER S. TUTTLE AND CAROL FARLEY KES

A central concern for scholars of U.S. women's writing has been th[e recov-] ery of lost or unread texts, a process well exemplified by recent [...] Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of [Legacy:] *A Journal of American Women Writers* (26.2 [2009]), critics pa[rticipat-] ing in a roundtable discussion assess the successes and failures of [...] during the past three decades or so. Engaged in the recovery of [...] through scholarship and through modern editions, has been a central, cre[...] generative, component of many academic areas that have predominated since the 1970s, not only literary criticism and women's history but also women's studies, cultural studies, and other cross-disciplinary areas of investigation. While a need for unearthing unknown authors and their texts remains, however, in the *Legacy* roundtable Sharon M. Harris suggests that today scholars are "in need of new recovery that asks us to interrogate our long-held (or even newly embraced) ideas about women writers in continually expanding ways" (Tuttle, "*Legacy* Roundtable" 229). Or, in the words of Lisa A. Long, "while the project [of recovery] remains the same, the terms of the conversation have changed dramatically in the past twenty-five years": we need to "trouble," rather than to "reify," our categories and objects of study (Tuttle, "*Legacy*" 230).

The field of Charlotte Perkins Gilman studies mirrors these larger trends. Indeed, more than ten years ago, at the Second International Charlotte Perkins Gilman Conference in 1997, Gary Scharnhorst issued a call for scholars to think differently about Gilman—to look beyond her most acces-

sible works and genres to recover her entire body of work, and to resist the temptation to idealize or sanitize it to fit their own agendas. "[A]s scholars," he urged, "we should read all of her work we can find but read it critically, measuring her achievement on a historical template, situating her not only in our time but in her own" ("Historicizing" 72).

This volume takes up that challenge, representing a new groundswell of work in Gilman studies. During her lifetime, Gilman (1860–1935) was a world-famous writer, lecturer, and reformer, whose work was influential and widely celebrated; she has been called the "leading intellectual in the women's movement in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century" (Degler xiii). At her core a social philosopher, Gilman practiced her art and activism in an array of venues, and her interests were numerous, including women's issues, labor, human rights, ethics, and social reform. As this volume's second essay demonstrates, criticism on Gilman has undergone a number of transformations since Carl N. Degler and Elaine R. Hedges first began recovering Gilman's work in 1966 and 1973, respectively. The initial celebration of the rich vein of writing and artwork left to us by this prolific woman was followed by more critical reconsiderations of her life and accomplishments, ultimately leaving scholars in the ambivalent position of documenting Gilman's "mixed legacy" of ideas both abhorrent and visionary (Golden and Zangrando). And contending with this legacy has sparked a new phase of recovery work, which aims both to "read all of her work we can find" (as Scharnhorst put it) and to understand this work in new, more accurately historicized ways.

Certainly, we still need to recover previously unknown documents and information about Gilman. Such work brings recently discovered, unfamiliar, or otherwise obscure sources to the attention of Gilman scholars.[1] But beyond filling such obvious gaps, we need to attend to neglected parts of her oeuvre, to other "new texts"—works that we know exist, and are even in print, but that have not yet received adequate critical scrutiny. While a profusion of scholarship on Gilman has been published, until recently much of it has concerned a small number of her most popular prose works, such as "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892), *Women and Economics* (1898), and *Herland* (1915). These were among the first of Gilman's works to be recovered in the present era. This may be due in part simply to their effectiveness as texts: Gilman, writing always "with a purpose," had mixed success as a rhetorician whose creative work was invariably didactic (*Living* 121). Yet such evaluative arguments having to do with aesthetic appeal are largely subjective, and they unfairly obscure the skill and subtlety with which much of her work was crafted: it may be neither accurate nor fair to say that these texts have been

studied most thoroughly because they are her best work. Another factor that obscured much of Gilman's other work for so long was its lack of availability. For example, most of her fiction appeared in *The Forerunner,* which had a very limited circulation, and her unpublished work remained in private hands and institutional repositories. Only *Herland* fortuitously caught the eye of a perceptive scholar working in an archival setting that happened to hold *The Forerunner.*

Beyond the issues of taste and availability, these works may have been the first to capture present-day critics' attention because they spoke directly and accessibly to some of the central issues of the U.S. women's movement's second wave. Though much of the theory espoused in *Women and Economics* was unquestionably dated in 1966 when Carl N. Degler issued a new edition, the volume's central argument about gender—that inequality between the sexes is due in large part to women's economic dependence upon men—still held true, and was a major problem concerning advocates for women's equality in the 1960s.[2] "The question that engaged the interest of Charlotte Gilman was how to achieve full equality for women in an industrial society. Today this concept is once again a live one," wrote Degler (vii). He further argued that *Women and Economics* ought to be republished because it addressed issues central to such landmark works as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1951) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Gilman's text was important in its own time, Degler suggested, but it is also of value "for what it says . . . about and to women today" (vii–viii).

By the time "The Yellow Wall-Paper" was reissued by Elaine R. Hedges and the Feminist Press in 1973, the women's movement was gaining momentum. Gilman's story of a woman objectified by both marriage and medical science, and denied full bodily autonomy, spoke to many of feminists' immediate concerns, appearing, for example, the same year as the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision.[3] "[W]ith the new growth of the feminist movement," pronounced Hedges in her afterword to the volume, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman is being rediscovered": here was a model of a woman's resilience in "one of America's foremost feminists" as well as a text "directly confront[ing] the sexual politics of the male-female, husband-wife relationship" that so vexed women's rights advocates in the 1970s (37, 39).

Similarly, *Herland*—a utopian novel portraying an idealized all-woman society visited by three U.S. men, who learn to perceive women as equals—espoused sentiments popular with Second Wave activists.[4] Published for the first time as a book in 1979 (having previously appeared serially in *The Forerunner*), and billed on its book jacket as "A Lost Feminist Utopian Novel" that is "as on target today as when it was written sixty-five years ago," *Her-*

land emphasizes the "common humanity" of the sexes and critiques women's lack of autonomy, which, Gilman argued, denied them the ability to reach their full potential (Lane, "Introduction" xi). Further summarizing Gilman's argument, Ann J. Lane explains in her introduction to the novel, "Men, too, suffer from personalities distorted by their habits of dominance and power. A healthy social organism . . . therefore . . . requires the autonomy of women. That autonomy can be achieved only by women's collective action" (xi). All of these are ideas that would have been compelling to readers riding the crest of the women's movement, seeking empowering role models as well as validation from an earlier era of their still-pressing concerns.

Because these three works were some of the first to be brought to the attention of (and to be made available to) present-day scholars, they have had many decades in which to accumulate a large body of interpretation. In her essay in this volume (discussed in more detail below), Catherine J. Golden explores at greater length the appeal Gilman's work held for this early generation of Second Wave feminist scholars. She also traces later phases of Gilman's recovery by critics, explaining that it is only recently—and for reasons similarly tied to the social and intellectual currents that often dictate scholarly choices and preferences—that scholars have been prepared to look beyond what now seems to be a somewhat idealized and reductive vision of Gilman and her work. And the time is ripe for such further research, for critics to attend to "new texts" in Gilman studies—texts of which scholars may be aware but that have not yet fully captured their attention. At the time of this writing, a significant portion of Gilman's work has been republished (or published posthumously for the first time), and the explosion of scholarly interest in her life and writing shows no sign of abating.[5] All of Gilman's novels and nearly all of her long nonfiction works have seen print in recent editions, some more than once.[6] Numerous paperbound editions of Gilman's short stories are now available.[7] Gilman wrote in an impressive array of genres, producing eleven long nonfiction works,[8] an autobiography, nine novels,[9] nearly two hundred short stories, close to five hundred poems,[10] seven years of her monthly magazine *The Forerunner,*[11] several plays and dialogues, as well as innumerable articles, lectures, suffrage songs, and other short pieces.[12] Critics have demonstrated their commitment to recovering—and republishing—Gilman's lesser-known work, but they have only recently begun to focus on that work in their scholarship.

Equally important is the need to recover new *contexts* for Gilman: scholars doing archival and historical research have begun to answer the call for more nuanced and accurate understandings of her work and life. Drawing upon both biographical and textual evidence, for example, Barbara A. White

has called critics' attention to the largely overlooked "lesbian sensibility" in Gilman's work (205). Similarly fusing biographical and textual criticism, the 2004 volume *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts* (Cynthia J. Davis and Denise D. Knight, eds.) has undertaken this project specifically in terms of juxtaposing Gilman with other intellectuals of her time. Other recent research has considered Gilman's well-known work in new ways. For instance, Peter Betjemann has reconceived "The Yellow Wall-Paper" through the lens of visual culture, while Catherine J. Golden has interpreted the story within the mind travel tradition of Lewis Carroll.[13] Some scholars have situated Gilman's work within broader social trends in ways that are newly illuminating, such as Michelle Ann Abate's analysis of *Herland* within a cultural history of tomboys and Michael A. Bryson's reading of the novel through the lens of ecological discourse.[14] A significant extension of her humanist and social theory, Gilman's utopianism (most centrally, *Herland* with its sequel *With Her in Ourland*) has received considerable scholarly attention. While some critics contextualize her utopianism through new thematic lenses (as above), such others as Darby Lewes, Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten, Carol Farley Kessler, and Jean Jacques Weber illustrate how it overlaps with writing by utopian writers of her time, emerges from her lived experience, or includes readers within her utopian goals.[15] Also illuminating Gilman's social philosophy are Beth Sutton-Ramspeck and Dana Seitler, among others, who have situated Gilman's work within her involvement with the eugenics movement.[16] Gilman's activism has similarly been garnering more attention now than in the past, from more general readings that place her firmly in the tradition of American protest literature to long-overdue acknowledgment of her concern for international affairs, such as the Armenian genocide.[17]

One occasion for sharing and showcasing new work was the Fourth International Conference on Charlotte Perkins Gilman, held in 2006 at the University of New England in Maine. Titled "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Then and Now," the conference's stated aim was "to situate Gilman in her own time as well as to explore how she and her work are being recovered, assessed, and reassessed in ours."[18] This focus elicited consideration of texts and contexts that were new to the field. The essays in this volume were originally presented as conference papers at this gathering in 2006. Since that time, the authors have developed and amplified their arguments, which situate Gilman historically and assess her mixed legacy; recover and focus needed attention on a richer variety of Gilman's writings; and reflect upon the ways her work is still relevant today. Several of the scholars included here attend to Gilman's less-studied novels and short works. Others consider

her use of drama and journalism, genres underrepresented in Gilman studies. Some revisit one of Gilman's best-known works of fiction—"The Yellow Wall-Paper"—bringing new contextual information and new ways of reading to bear on this familiar story. Still others read her work within a longer trajectory of women's writing, charting her influence and her significance within broad literary, feminist, and rhetorical traditions. The essays cover the entire span of Gilman's career, from her very first published stories, through the productive *Forerunner* period, to her last years of published and private writing.

The volume opens with two essays in which senior Gilman scholars assess, in quite different ways, the state of our knowledge about Gilman and her work, offering biographical and critical overviews. Bringing Gilman's public and private writing into conversation, Denise D. Knight uses a biographical approach to understand Gilman's sense of self in relation to the world around her, particularly with respect to Gilman's views of nonwhites and immigrants. In "'that pure New England stock': Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Construction of Identity," Knight reads Gilman's life-long allegiance to New England as a form of cultural imperialism. Gilman's belief in—and association with—Anglo hegemony in New England manifested itself in a variety of ways mentioned in this essay. She aligned herself with the Puritan work ethic, showed a preference for the New England literary tradition, and, in correspondence, emphasized her affinity with the region, whose people she deemed superior to those from other geographic locales. Over her long career, Gilman frequently complained that the influx of immigrants to the U.S. had caused what she called the "native [read: Anglo, New England] stock" to become endangered. In her autobiography she lamented the loss of the quintessential New England town, which she felt was undergoing gradual extinction as the result of an invasion by "foreigners." Over her long career, Gilman's xenophobia also surfaced in letters and in essays, where she pitted "aliens" against those born in the U.S. Through careful examination of Gilman's private correspondence, Knight traces the various sources of Gilman's nativism, including the role that Gilman's Beecher heritage played in her belief that New Englanders were superior both to immigrants and even to other American-born inhabitants. By citing Gilman's letters in conversation with an array of her other writings, Knight is able to situate Gilman more precisely for readers.

Complementing Knight's biographical analysis is Catherine J. Golden's "Looking Backward: Rereading Gilman in the Early Twenty-First Century." Golden reviews how critics over the past four decades have reassessed and reevaluated Gilman's body of work. Golden argues that critics seem to have

taken one of three stances toward her writing, each in keeping with its social and critical moment: the earliest treats her work almost completely positively; the next, more negatively; and the last with a mixed or more balanced perspective. The first group praises Gilman's vision for its support of gender equality, universal suffrage, professionalized housekeeping services, and community child care. The second group, discontented with Gilman, stresses problematic elements in Gilman's thought, such as her racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia. The final group, benefiting from the work of previous scholars, attempts to balance Gilman's positive and negative features, assessing simultaneously both the prejudice and the promise of her body of work. Although scholars who unreservedly admired Gilman dominated the 1970s and 80s, she still received praise after the second group of the mid-to-late 1980s challenged this celebratory evaluation. The final group of scholars, emerging in the mid-1990s and still increasing in number, responds to and balances views of critics who are either discontented with or enamored of her work. To illustrate how Gilman's reactionary insensitivity becomes entangled with her forward-thinking feminism, both being part of her "mixed legacy," Golden concludes with a case study of Gilman's recently published 1929 manuscript novel *Unpunished,* a detective tale with a focus on violence against women.

Building on the groundwork laid by Knight and Golden in their critical assessments of Gilman studies today, the remaining essays push the boundaries of current knowledge about Gilman and her work. The section of the volume titled "New Texts" features essays that explore some of Gilman's little-known writing, including short and long fiction, drama, and journalism. As scholars in Gilman studies move beyond "The Yellow Wall-Paper," they are delineating Gilman's aesthetic in their explorations of her other, lesser-known work, worthy of study but as yet still in need of further critical attention. Such writings need to be recovered because they expand and complicate our understanding of Gilman as a thinker and writer and they allow us to bring new combinations of texts into conversation with one another. For example, Gilman's essay "Masculine Literature" decries the androcentric tendency of literature in general in her time and calls for "fresh fields of fiction" (Knight, *A Study* 123), while "Coming Changes in Literature" sets out a range of new plots and themes for authors to attempt. She then proceeds in *The Forerunner* to follow her own advice as she offers innovations in plot structure and characterization and tries her hand at a dizzying array of genres. Reading more of what Gilman wrote also, quite simply, helps scholars to articulate more accurately her social philosophy, illuminating its applications, contradictions, and shortcomings. Exploring a wide range of

her work similarly enhances our understanding of her skill as a rhetorician. And it more thoroughly illustrates her contention that writing in all of its forms was a persuasive means of opening people's minds and effecting social change.

Giving overdue attention to Gilman's stylistics and short fiction, the first essay in this section, "The Torn Voice in 'The Giant Wistaria' and 'The Unnatural Mother,'" offers analysis of the complex literary voice that Gilman achieves in these two short stories. Author Jill Rudd focuses on the interplay between the narrative and character voices within these texts, a strategy that, she argues, leads to a more complicated, even contradictory, evaluation of their protagonists than readers might expect from Gilman. In "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) Gilman embeds a historical mystery tale within a contemporary narrative. Rudd explicates the ambivalence of Gilman's narrative voice in this violent early story of infanticide and a mother's death. In her reading of "An Unnatural Mother" (1895), Rudd contrasts Gilman's torn-voiced narrative with a less complex, contemporary story, "The Chief Operator" (1909) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps—both works concerning a mother-child relationship in which the mother risks and loses her life while her child survives, an orphan. Rudd's analysis of these short stories sheds new light on Gilman's use of the short story genre to accomplish her reformist goals, while also illuminating her rhetorical and personal ambivalence about those goals.

Though "The Giant Wistaria" and "An Unnatural Mother" were published in the 1890s when Gilman's star was rising, the majority of her short fiction, and of her novels, were published first in *The Forerunner* between 1909 and 1916. In 1909 Gilman still enjoyed the international renown she had earned upon the publication of *Women and Economics* over a decade before, and she was still in demand as a lecturer. Nonetheless, she was beginning to tire of editorial intrusions and to find it more difficult to place her work. "[I]f one writes to express important truths, needed yet unpopular, the market is necessarily limited," she explained—and so she launched her own journal, where she published her novels serially (Gilman, *Living* 304). Among those novels less considered by scholars is *Mag—Marjorie* (1912).[19] In "An 'Absent Mother': Gilman, *Mag—Marjorie,* and the Politics of Maternal Responsibility," Charlotte J. Rich begins to rectify the neglect of this work. In it, Rich attests, Gilman grapples with the controversial issue of long-term maternal separation from a child for the purpose of "world work." The topic is relevant not only to Gilman's life but also to much of her other writing—from nonfiction such as *Concerning Children* to her idealization of an Over Mother in utopian *Herland,* as well as to much of her poetry. The

novel thus merits further consideration within her canon, especially in its dialogue with her more unequivocal praises of what she termed "the New Motherhood." Furthermore, this novel has continued relevance in dramatizing both the premise of her approach to childcare—that a good mother is, in fact, one who must often be absent in the service of "world work"—and the often-negative popular response to it in her own era. In introducing complicated choices about mothering in *Mag—Marjorie,* if not fully exploring their consequences, Gilman raises questions about the politics of maternal responsibility that are still being debated today.

Also considering *Mag—Marjorie,* Frederick Wegener explicates Gilman's skill in manipulating genre in "Turning 'The Balsam Fir' into *Mag—Marjorie:* Generic Transposition in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Imaginative Economy." Although Gilman's short stories, novels, and verse continue to be reconsidered, her imaginative writings have seldom received the kind of aesthetically oriented critical attention that focuses in a sustained way on properties like style, form, and technique. Wegener's essay initiates a new direction in Gilman studies by exploring one of the occasions on which she moved between genres when re-conceptualizing her unpublished play, "The Balsam Fir," as her 1912 *Bildungsroman, Mag—Marjorie*. In *A Theory of Adaptation,* Linda Hutcheon has considered why an author might adapt work into an alternate genre: to reach a wider audience, to provide a more complex social or political critique, and to achieve a different aesthetic goal (see chapter 3). Charting the evolution of play into novel, Wegener's essay demonstrates how a full-fledged coming-of-age story came to replace an episodic drama whose title, naming the play's evocative central image, is changed to one that names the heroine and thereby calls attention to the transformation she undergoes. At the same time, the image of the balsam fir, elaborated much more fully in *Mag—Marjorie* as the novel's chief recurring motif, ultimately serves as an objective correlative for its heroine's tormented emotions. Such a motif constitutes an overlooked aspect of Gilman's skills as an imaginative writer, while an examination of the process by which "The Balsam Fir" became a novel reveals a craftsmanship and formal awareness not often associated with Gilman's work.

The year that Gilman serialized *Mag—Marjorie* in *The Forerunner,* she also engaged in an essay debate with Ida Tarbell (1857–1944) over women's status: while Gilman was committed to pursuing reform through fiction, as a journalist she was similarly outspoken and prolific.[20] In "'The Same Revulsion Against Them All': Ida Tarbell and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Suffrage Dialogue," Aleta Feinsod Cane discusses how two pro-women's rights journalists represented opposite sides of the women's suffrage debate

during the Progressive Era. Gilman, editor and publisher of *The Forerunner,* represented the pro-suffrage viewpoint, while Ida Tarbell, an editor of *The American Magazine,* took the opposite position. Tarbell, a quintessential "New Woman" herself, relied on the nineteenth century's "True Womanhood" paradigm as a basis for her anti-suffrage articles. Gilman countered Tarbell's six articles with three responses in *The Forerunner,* thereby creating a magazine-based conversation. Cane examines the magazine text content surrounding Tarbell's and Gilman's articles written during 1912 and reads the magazines as unified texts within the larger context of their historical moment. The essay situates the struggle over suffrage and highlights the diminution of Progressive Era vitality that made the anti-suffragists still more powerful.

Gilman's commitment to reform continued throughout the remainder of her life, and her later writing reflects this sustained engagement with societal affairs. By the 1920s, however, her output as both a writer and a lecturer had slowed: she had difficulty finding the audience that had been so hungry for her work twenty years before. In part, she simply faced a generation gap, complaining to Alice Stone Blackwell in a 1930 letter, "These very young readers editors & critics have no use for minds over thirty!" (Gilman, *Selected Letters* 278). Beyond this, her Progressive Era social philosophy that had so moved readers and intellectuals in earlier years became less compelling near the end of the twentieth century's second decade. It may also be that her pragmatic aesthetic paled in comparison with more stylistically adept contemporaries such as Edith Wharton.[21] Though she incurred a number of disappointments during the 1920s, working in vain, for example, to publish both her autobiography and what she considered her masterpiece, *Social Ethics,* she did complete the occasional lecture tour, publish *His Religion and Hers* (1923) as well as many shorter works, and receive recognition for her accomplishments. Frustrated at the continued subordination of women despite working her entire life to alleviate it, and needing desperately to write something that would sell, Gilman lashed out at patriarchy in perhaps one of the few genres she had not yet tried: the murder mystery.

In "Doing It 'man-fashion': Gender Performance in Gilman's *Unpunished,*" Jill Bergman examines Gilman's little-discussed detective novel, which was completed in 1929 but not published until 1997.[22] Through the lens of Judith Butler's poststructuralist model of gender performance, Bergman argues that a substantial change occurred in Gilman's perspective by 1929: the novel figures as a departure from Gilman's oeuvre in that she resolves conflict not through social reform at the hands of an "überwoman," as seen in her previous novels, but through the violent death of a patriarch.

In what could be seen as either a disappointing or a strategic compromise with her woman-centered life's work, Bergman argues, Gilman invokes a performative definition of gender, creating a character whose ability to inhabit both femininity and masculinity allows her to defeat the novel's antagonist. Even in her last novel, Gilman was constructing new ways to be human as she imagined potential efficacy in moving beyond stereotypical gender roles. In other ways, however, *Unpunished* is classic Gilman in its attention to the damaging effects of patriarchy on women and, by extension, society more generally.

Beyond attending to new texts to better flesh out our understanding of what Gilman actually wrote, authors in this volume also bring new contexts to bear on Gilman's best-known work of fiction: "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892). As Catherine Golden has noted in her recent sourcebook on the story, the "extensive critical discourse" on "The Yellow Wall-Paper" includes work from a wide range of critical angles, including "feminist, psychoanalytical, queer theory, Marxist, Derridean, Lacanian, new historicist, and sociological approaches as well as a combination of these" (*Yellow* 4).[23] Golden explains, "Critics have examined the diary format; first-person narration; discourse of diagnosis; themes of madness and regression versus emancipation and empowerment; word choice; symbolism; and the ambiguous ending" (2–3). Indeed, readers "may be as engaged in reading the wide-ranging criticism about the tale as the story itself" (3). Though the seemingly exhaustive critical treatment of the story leaves many readers with the impression that nothing new can be said about Gilman's masterpiece, the three essays included here provide fresh insights through situating "The Yellow Wall-Paper" in new and compelling contexts, interrogating some of the old frameworks for understanding the story by historicizing it differently.

In "'there are things in that paper that nobody knows but me': An Alternative Reading of Neurasthenia," Jennifer Lunden begins by reminding readers of the well-worn premise that Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wall-Paper" in semi-autobiographical protest against the paternalistic rest cure she had experienced under the care of the eminent neurologist, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell. After his "cure," Gilman, determining that her own neurasthenia was a reaction to the patriarchal constrictions of domesticity, left her husband and young daughter behind in Rhode Island so that she might forge a life of her own choosing in California. Contemporary scholarship often supports Gilman's explanation for her illness, interpreting neurasthenia as a form of psychological resistance to gender roles and modernity. This essay asserts that early industry exacted also a biological toll on neurasthenics. Lunden explores subtle allusions in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" to a prevailing concern

of the era: arsenical wallpapers. By revealing the connections between arsenical wallpapers and neurasthenia, this paper challenges its audience to reconsider neurasthenia as not just a psychosocial malaise, but a *bio*psychosocial response to industrialization; it therefore provides a new reading of Gilman's gothic story as a critique of industrial capitalism and its by-products. The essay also links neurasthenia to its two contemporary corollaries, chronic fatigue syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivity. Lunden thereby expands our understanding of Gilman's activism to include the chemical environment, not heretofore considered to be among her concerns.

Sari Edelstein provides another fresh context for "The Yellow Wall-Paper" in "The Yellow Newspaper: Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' and Sensational Journalism." Her essay extends the work of Lawrence J. Oliver and Gary Scharnhorst, who examine the impact of yellow journalism on Gilman by focusing on Ambrose Bierce's verbal abuse of Gilman in the 1890s. Edelstein situates Gilman's canonical story within the context of her contemporary print marketplace. As a novelist, and as a magazine editor and contributor, Gilman certainly felt the impact of "yellow journalism." As Edelstein shows, the newly commercialized, exploitative press was already exerting a profound influence over Gilman and the reading public in the early 1890s when the story was written. In locating Gilman's story within this newspaper culture, Edelstein offers a new understanding of the material history of the feminist and racial discourses that have dominated Gilman scholarship. As Edelstein demonstrates, turn-of-the century tabloids created and circulated racial stereotypes just as they reduced women, including Gilman herself, to objects of scandal. While in 1909 Gilman founded *The Forerunner* as a direct response to the salaciousness of the yellow press, this essay argues that "The Yellow Wall-Paper" is her first, and most complex, indictment of the journalism that vexed and misrepresented her throughout her career.

While Lunden and Edelstein historicize Gilman in new ways, Caroline Brown reads "The Yellow Wall-Paper" within a longer historical trajectory. In "The Madwoman's Other Sisters: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gloria Naylor, and the Re-inscription of Loss," Brown interprets Gloria Naylor's 1985 novel, *Linden Hills,* as revisioning "The Yellow Wall-Paper." While separated by time and the racial identities of their authors (identities that inform each woman's larger agenda) as well as by almost a century of elapsed time, both works examine middle-class heroines driven to madness by social systems and husbands unprepared to acknowledge either their emotional and intellectual complexity or their need for greater autonomy. However, rather than simply presenting passive victims, both Gilman and Naylor create vivid portraits of women complicit in their own marginalization, yet who

nonetheless manage figuratively to some extent to blank out patriarchal texts with their own. Brown illustrates how Naylor reverses Gilman's paradigm of the "madwoman in the attic," a white, nineteenth-century, Anglo-American model, by shifting her position to the basement, the figurative space assigned to African Americans in the larger American landscape and the literal space in which the novel's antagonist, Luther Nedeed, imprisons his wife. Brown then shows that these Anglo- and African American husbands hold similar attitudes toward their wives. In performing originally feminine rituals—maintaining private journals, cookbooks, and family albums—generations of women in the privileged black Nedeed family attempt to assert their individuality. Instead, these texts become, like that of the protagonist of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," a feminist record of growing disillusionment, madness, and eventual self-annihilation. Through these portrayals, Gilman and Naylor identify and theorize the traditional erasure that women have faced in history and literature as a result of their socioeconomic and emotional dependence, and thereby create powerful oppositional discourses that emerge from women's lived experience.

The final essay in this collection similarly situates Gilman within a broad historical frame and a long rhetorical tradition, simultaneously highlighting an important and little-recognized side of her. In "Feminist Humor and Charlotte Perkins Gilman," a later version of her keynote address at the Fourth International Gilman Conference (2006), Shelley Fisher Fishkin discusses an important aspect of Gilman's work very seldom acknowledged by critics: her use of humor as a rhetorical tool, humor often exemplified by her verse. Placing Gilman within an historical context of feminist humorists before, during, and after Gilman's time, Fishkin identifies three particular strategies apparent throughout Gilman's body of work as well as that of her contemporaries: illumination, impersonation, and inversion. Illumination "involves shining a light on women's lives, making the invisible more visible, breaking through myths and lies that are accepted as truths, and giving voice to truths that are not usually articulated" (Fishkin, "Feminist Humor" 224). Impersonation consists of ventriloquizing "the voice of the person who holds attitudes that you want your reader to reject" (234). And inversion is accomplished through imagining how men and women would feel if they found themselves in one another's "bodies and clothes and roles" (239). Through her ability not only to inject humor into her discussion of serious social issues but also to laugh at herself, Gilman was often able to change minds and thereby effect social change.

Aware of her own shortcomings—if not her blind spots—Gilman nevertheless believed, to her dying day, that she had something important to

say. Her career on the wane in the last years of her life, Gilman sought a biographer who would tell the story of what she called her "living," in part to keep alive the ideals that she had advocated. She appealed to friend and playwright Zona Gale (1874–1938) to write the volume, which would be informed by Gilman's incomplete autobiography written a decade before: "for the sake of the work, the scrappy, imperfect, desperately earnest work I have done," she wrote to Gale in 1934, "I hope you'll do this for me." Gilman explained, "I feel that it would stir an interest in my other books, now all out of print" (*Selected Letters* 293). She wanted her work remembered: more than that, she felt it could still change the world for the better. While Gale did not ultimately write Gilman's biography, she did write a foreword to Gilman's autobiography, published posthumously in 1935. She began by noting that Gilman "has flamed like a torch, . . . her one message blazing from her spoken and written words, and from her living: 'Life is growth'" (xxvii). But contrary to Gilman's hopes, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* did not "stir an interest" in her previously published writings. Instead, she fell into obscurity for the next thirty-five years, her "desperately earnest work" languishing and remaining largely unrecognized through two-thirds of the twentieth century.

Though much of that work has now been recovered, this volume is designed, in part, "to stir [more] interest" in Gilman's life and writing by giving due scholarly attention to some of the texts and contexts that have been neglected in Gilman studies. To return to Lisa A. Long and Sharon M. Harris, "the terms of the conversation have changed" since Gilman was first rediscovered in the 1960s; scholars are now more committed than ever to "interrogat[ing]" and "troubl[ing]" what we thought we knew about Gilman. The essays presented here offer readers, students, and scholars an increasingly accurate picture of what exactly Gilman thought and wrote—bringing new texts to their attention. Similarly, incorporating careful archival, biographical, and historical research, the authors represented in the present volume provide new contexts for understanding Gilman's life and writings, situating her more precisely in her own time. Finally, this volume assesses Gilman's place in a longer historical trajectory and within multiple rhetorical traditions, allowing a more textured and nuanced portrait of her work and its continued significance to us today. In a 1992 essay on "The Yellow Wall-Paper," Jean Kennard called for interpretive work that would illuminate the story's meaning in terms that would "enrich our present" (qtd. in Thrailkill 154): Jane F. Thrailkill reads this as a call for scholarship that is "affectively attuned, as well as theoretically sound, and that is aesthetically oriented as well as historically situated" (154). Such is the body of critical

work we aim to present here. In publishing some of the new trends in Gilman scholarship, we also illustrate how Gilman has clearly reclaimed the audience she craved. Five years before her death, she revealingly summed up her own aims in a brief memo to herself, a note that speaks volumes (for better and for worse) about her driving philosophy, as well as her hope that her work would be remembered and have a lasting impact. Her ultimate goal, in short, was "The 'landscape gardening' of the world; conquest of vermin, conservation of resources, endless improvements. New energy & joy with each generation" (*Diaries* 2: 854).

NOTES

1. A striking case in point is Cynthia J. Davis's recent rediscovery of the elusive letter Gilman sent to S. Weir Mitchell before taking his rest cure for her first nervous breakdown in 1887, in which she outlined "all the facts of the case" to aid him in his diagnosis (*Selected Letters* 45). See Davis's biography, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* and Denise D. Knight, "'All the Facts of the Case': Gilman's Lost Letter to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell," *American Literary Realism* 37.3 (2005): 259–77.

2. Economic concerns related to gender equality were on many people's minds in the early 1960s. Just three years before Degler's new edition of *Women and Economics* was published, for instance, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) issued a report advocating equal pay for comparable work, and Congress subsequently passed the Equal Pay Act (though it was woefully incomplete at the time). In frustration with the PCSW's unwillingness to go far enough, some members of the Commission went on to found the National Organization for Women in 1966. For more discussion of the dynamic relationship between reissues of *Women and Economics* and the historical moments in which they have appeared, see Kimmel and Aronson vii–xiv and Tuttle, "*Women and Economics*."

3. Elaine R. Hedges also notes this confluence of events in " 'Out at Last'?" 327-28. Tellingly, 1973 was also the year the Boston Women's Health Book Collective published the first edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. In academia, the urgency to explore issues of women's bodily self-determination in historical perspective similarly led scholars to break new ground during this time. In 1972 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg published her foundational essay "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America," and 1973 saw the appearance of both Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* and Ann Douglas Wood's "'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America."

4. 1979 was a watershed year for the women's movement, in which the Equal Rights Amendment failed to garner support in the requisite thirty-eight states and therefore was not ratified. The crisis of gender inequality loomed large: though legislation at the state level was beginning to change with respect to issues such as marital rape and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, Gilman's utopia—in which self-sufficient women,

free of patriarchal oppression, governed themselves—offered a liberating yet tantalizing fantasy, still far beyond the reach of readers. The same year in which Lane republished *Herland*, feminist literary theorists were working to articulate the predicament of women writers in patriarchy. Perhaps one of the most influential studies published that year was Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.*

5. Like her published work (more of which is listed below), Gilman's private writing has been similarly resuscitated: Knight has edited her diaries; Mary A. Hill has brought out both the diaries of Gilman's first husband, Charles Walter Stetson, and Gilman's letters to her second husband, George Houghton Gilman; and Knight and Jennifer S. Tuttle have edited a volume of Gilman's selected letters.

Complementing such publication of Gilman's public and private writing are four biographies, by Cynthia J. Davis, Hill, Ann J. Lane, and Gary Scharnhorst. Beyond his biography, Scharnhorst has provided scholars with an invaluable and nearly exhaustive bibliography.

Aside from the several book-length studies incorporating analysis of Gilman's work, and a substantial record of journal articles from many disciplinary perspectives, a number of edited collections exist: Meyering's volume was the first; those edited by Davis and Knight, Knight and Davis, Catherine J. Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando, Jill Rudd and Val Gough, and Gough and Rudd are the most recent. Several other collections concern "The Yellow Wall-Paper" alone (for mention of some of these, see note 23 below).

6. Even when a recent edition goes out of print, scholars often ensure that it is republished, and this is the case even for Gilman's lesser-known works, such as *His Religion and Hers* (1923), republished originally by Hyperion in 1976 (reissued in 1994), then again by AltaMira Press (with an introduction by Michael S. Kimmel) in 2003. There are also in print two Gilman readers, one on fiction edited by Ann J. Lane and the other on nonfiction by Larry Ceplair. In addition, several editions of Gilman's autobiography are available.

7. Knight's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* provides an extended analysis of Gilman's short stories—ninety-seven pages—as well as about forty pages of Gilman's pronouncements on writing and stories, seven diverse critical essays, and a bibliography. Generally, however, beyond "The Yellow Wall-Paper," while a few of Gilman's short stories have begun to appear in scholarly analyses of her work, the greater part of her short fiction has received scant critical attention. Beer's volume, *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Studies in Short Fiction* is a welcome exception. Though no complete published collection of Gilman's short stories exists, *"The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* edited by Denise D. Knight, and *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories*, edited by Robert Shulman, are the most inclusive.

8. The nonfiction titles include both freestanding books and lengthy works serialized in *The Forerunner* but never published independently. In order of Gilman's writing them, they are the following: the early books, *Women and Economics* (1898) (Carl N. Degler [1966]); *Concerning Children* (1900) (Michael S. Kimmel [2002]); *The Home* (1903) (Michael S. Kimmel [2002]); and *Human Work* (1904) (Michael S. Kimmel and Mary M. Moynihan [2005]). *The Forerunner* serializations: "Our Androcentric Culture"

(1910), published as *The Man-Made World* (1911) (Mary A. Hill [2002]); "Our Brains and What Ails Them" (1912); "Humanness" (1913); *Social Ethics* (1914) (Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan [2004]); *The Dress of Women* (1915) (Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan [2002]); and "Growth and Combat" (1916). Finally is her last book, *His Religion and Hers* (1923) (Michael S. Kimmel [2003]).

9. These nine novels, listed in the order of Gilman's writing them, include *What Diantha Did* (1910) (Charlotte J. Rich [2005]); *The Crux* (1911) (Jennifer S. Tuttle [2002] and Dana Seitler [2003]); *Moving the Mountain* (1911) (Minna Doskow [1999]); *Mag—Marjorie* (1912) and *Won Over* (1913) (Denise D. Knight [1999]); *Benigna Machiavelli* (1914) (Joan Drake [1994]); *Herland* (1915) (Ann J. Lane [1979] and Minna Doskow [1999]); *With Her in Ourland* (1916) (Mary Jo Deegan and Michael R. Hill [1997] and Minna Doskow [1999]); and *Unpunished* (1929) (Catherine J. Golden and Denise D. Knight [1997]).

10. A facsimile edition of her early poetry volume, *In This Our World* (1893), was published in 1974. Her later poetry has been published as well, and her poems appear in other multi-genre anthologies; nonetheless, Gilman's substantial body of poetry remains a largely untapped vein of material for scholars. Exceptions include Catherine J. Golden's "'Written to Drive Nails With': Recalling the Early Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in Rudd and Gough 243–66; Carol Farley Kessler's "Brittle Jars and Bitter Jangles: Light Verse by Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in Meyering 133–43; Denise D. Knight's "'But O My Heart': The Private Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in Rudd and Gough 267–84; and Gary Scharnhorst's "Reconstructing *Here Also:* On the Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* edited by Joanne B. Karpinski (New York: Hall, 1992): 249–68. The Arno Press edition of *In This Our World* reprints the 1898 edition of the volume. Gilman's later poetry is collected in *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* edited by Denise D. Knight. And Scharnhorst and Knight are currently preparing a new volume including *In This Our World* and Gilman's uncollected poems.

11. Gilman published *The Forerunner* from November 1909 through December 1916. Though the periodical was republished by Greenwood Press in 1968, it is now again out of print. (The Greenwood Press reprint is, however, now available online through the Hathi Trust Digital Library at http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000544186.) Janice J. Kirkland's exhaustive *Forerunner* index, published in 1999, thus continues to be valuable to those interested in recovering work published in Gilman's magazine.

12. Though various reports of Gilman's lectures were published during her lifetime, a collection of her lectures themselves has yet to be published. Gilman did publish some of her suffrage songs in *Suffrage Songs and Verses* (New York: Charlton, 1911).

13. See Peter Betjemann's "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Grammar of Ornament: Stylistic Tagging and the Politics of Figuration in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Unexpected,'" *Word and Image* 24.4 (2008): 393–402, and Catherine J. Golden's *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

14. See Michelle Ann Abate's *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008) and Michael A. Bryson's *Visions of the Land: Science, Literature, and the American Environment from the Era of Exploration to the Age of Ecology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

15. See Lewes for a general overview, and Donawerth and Kolmerten for articles on individual authors. Kessler's *Daring to Dream* includes Gilman's 1907 "A Woman's Utopia" and historicizes her three utopian novels by reprinting titles by suffragist Lillie Devereux Blake (1833–1913), author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844–1911), and *The Masses* contributor Martha S. Bensley Bruère (1879–1953). Gilman's utopian writing, including novels, short fiction, and essays, is contextualized within her life in Kessler, *Charlotte*. How Gilman's utopian "text encourages the reader to be drawn into a particular ideology and perspective," which she "accomplishes very subtly, leaving the stylistic technique mostly below the level of readerly consciousness" (177), is analyzed in Weber. Gilman's utopian writing is compelling as a possible fictional obverse to her expository *Women and Economics:* the fiction thus functions as a thought experiment in the practice of her theories regarding gender and society.

16. See Beth Sutton-Ramspeck's *Raising the Dust: Literary Housekeeping in the Writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Grand, and Mary Ward* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004) and Dana Seitler's "Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives," *American Quarterly* 55.1 (2003): 61–88.

17. See Zoe Trodd's *American Protest Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006) and Peter Balakian's *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). The latter cites Gilman's little-known article "International Duties" (*Armenia* 1.1 [Oct. 1904]: 10–14).

18. See Maine Women Writers Collection, "Past Academic Conferences," at http://www.une. edu/mwwc/conferences/pastconferences.asp (accessed 30 June 2009).

19. Though *Mag—Marjorie* has been described by one critic as "utterly banal" (Scharnhorst, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 99), others, such as Rich and Wegener in this volume, have found it more compelling, despite its improbable, didactic plot. Thus far, other than a brief mention by Wegener in an earlier essay ("What a Comfort" 65–68), the only serious consideration it has received has been by Knight in her introduction to the 1999 reprint of the novel.

20. One of the most neglected areas in Gilman scholarship is her nonfiction writing for newspapers and magazines. While Gilman's journalism is sometimes cited in studies with other foci, the work rarely receives scholarly notice for its own sake. Exceptions include Baldwin; Cane's "Charlotte," "Heroine," and her essay in this volume; Fishkin; Ganobcsik-Williams; Heilmann; and Knight's "Charlotte Perkins Gilman." Though Gilman's own magazine, *The Forerunner,* is familiar to scholars and often cited, "her writings for *The Impress* and . . . the hundreds of daily columns she contributed to the *New York Tribune* syndicate" are little known and rarely discussed (Scharnhorst, "Historicizing" 66).

21. For a discussion of Gilman's work alongside that of Wharton, see Beer.

22. Because *Unpunished* remained unpublished for so long, the scholarship on this novel is minimal, though critical interest in it seems slowly to be increasing. Aside from Golden and Knight's thorough analysis in their afterword to the novel's first published edition in 1997 and their article appearing in the journal *Clues* ("No Good"), Lane briefly discusses *Unpunished* in her introduction to *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader* (xxx–xxxiv), in which she excerpts the novel (169–77); see also Lillian S. Robinson's "Killing Patriarchy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Murder Mystery, and Post-Feminist

Propaganda," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 10.2 (1991): 273–85.

23. Golden's sourcebook offers the most recent overview of scholarship on the story: the volume's many excerpted secondary sources provide a critical history that is complemented by a section recommending further reading (157–62). For earlier reviews of scholarship on "The Yellow Wall-Paper," see, for example, Bauer 26–27; Erskine and Richards 7–23; Golden's "One Hundred Years"; and Hedges's "'Out at Last?'" In *Approaches to Teaching "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and* Herland, Knight and Davis also discuss critical studies most often recommended by contributors to that volume (see "Critical Studies" 10–11). Two textual studies by Dock and St. Jean have also appeared.

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