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# Charlotte Perkins Gilman's grammar of ornament: stylistic tagging and the politics of figuration in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Unexpected'

PETER BETJEMANN

Formally, the staccato prose of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) and the slow unfolding of Henry James's 'The Figure in the Carpet' (1896) represent polar extremes of fin-de-siècle fiction. But the protagonists of both works are engaged in strikingly similar projects: to work out — and, more particularly, to name — the 'figure' of a design that appears both literary and decorative. James's narrator, a critic, works obsessively but fruitlessly to trace the 'primal plan', the thematic 'Persian carpet', of a novelist's oeuvre; convinced that there is an essential figure to be taxonomized, the critic nonetheless fails to 'name it, phrase it, formulate it' in the few words he imagines.<sup>1</sup> Gilman's narrator also experiences the limits of language as an obscure decor. A patient forbidden to write by her husband-doctor and frustrated when she tries to compose in secret, the narrator understands her situation as an inability to transcribe the wallpaper's 'principle of design', to classify and record any decorative 'laws' in the paper's endlessly refractory surface.<sup>2</sup> Both stories thus analogize the frustration of writing to the inexpressibility of visual pattern. Literary and decorative motifs are part and parcel of the same maddening epistemological effort.

Founded on taxonomic efforts to describe a pattern in words, to transliterate, 'The Figure in the Carpet' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' contend with a major cultural innovation in the relation of language and visual culture. Eighteenth-century pattern books (Thomas Chippendale's *Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director*, for instance) were primarily pictorial, depicting furnishings with only a few stylistic tags and little discussion. But standard nineteenth-century reference works with titles like *Grammar of Ornament* (Owen Jones, 1856) and *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* (Charles Blanc, 1886) promoted decor as a syntax — a syntax understood not just metaphorically, as a language of the eye, but literally. The subtitle of the English edition of Alexander Speltz's *Styles of Ornament: Exhibited in Designs and Arranged in Historical Order, With Descriptive Text* (1906) characterizes an industrially motivated habit of linking pattern and prose, design and description; texts like Speltz's transformed decor into a narrative subject. Mass-market culture indeed depended on the rapid growth of stylistic language to authenticate reproduction. In a word, 'Chippendale',

'Moorish', or 'Louis XIV' gave instant history to brand-new furnishings. A new genre of periodical, the decorative magazine, organized this array of consumer goods via articles, essays, and advice columns on good taste and the clever combination of diverse styles. These magazines, of course, contained many drawings and some photographs. But the era also generated a model of art and design that operated textually — as narrative relations described in a book between, for instance, 'Venetian mosaic' and 'Roman mosaic', whether the latter design was 'fictile and vermiculated or pictorial'.<sup>3</sup>

For writers of fiction, such relations of narrative and pattern opened up new possibilities — and new problems — in thinking about the literary depiction of décor (as in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'), the decorative depiction of literature (as in 'The Figure in the Carpet'), and the broader correlation of words to visual forms. While I will expand on how 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Figure in the Carpet' similarly engage these questions, the interpretive stakes of the comparison have to do with my larger concern in this essay: to propose that Gilman, in particular, approached the cultural dynamics of the grammar of ornament with an urgency born of her training in the visual arts (Gilman was one of the first students at the Rhode Island School of Design) and, more importantly, of her social commitment to the relations of text and the world's 'patterns'. Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Unexpected', I will suggest, drew on emerging decorative models to test her fundamental political belief in the efficacy of language to expose designs, arrangements, and, ultimately, social relations.

In reading visual style as a lexical practice and arguing that design for Gilman is political in the sense that it involves relations between world and word, I hope to offer a view of the author *as* an author; her concern, even when engaging visual media, has to do with testing the efficacy and capacity of language. Perhaps because Gilman herself was so confident that her work was *not* 'literature' but functionalist social critique, this perspective is only recently beginning to emerge. Barbara Hochman's article on wallpaper in Gilman's story as a novelistic pattern — a sensational design that shares conventions with popular turn-of-the-century 'women's fiction' — opens up one way of thinking about Gilman's visual universe as

her medium for engaging, probing, and testing her literary world. Scholars, however, have instead tended to stress how she depicted art, architecture, decor, and design as material — not linguistic — representations of social structures.<sup>4</sup> Design, for instance, commonly appears as a medium of ideological inscription: the yellow wallpaper has been discussed as a patriarchal text in terms that highlight its metaphorical or representational content (Gilbert and Gubar, Fetterley); as a pattern that typifies the ornamental conventions of William Morris and of Aestheticism, conventions of ‘male thought and cultural production’ (Heilman, Thomas); and as a palimpsest of the ‘symbolic order’ that, in Lacanian psychology, marks the entry of the subject into the patterns of social ‘normalcy’ (Seuss, King and Morris).<sup>5</sup> Design may also appear as a mode of ideological transformation, whether through the utopian architectural projects that Gilman imagined in her fiction and non-fiction (Wynn Allen) or through the literary representation of how oppressive spaces and patterns might be imaginatively renovated (Johnson).<sup>6</sup>

In these approaches, design is literary to the degree that it is a literary subject. As a material representation of social relations, design enters Gilman’s fiction as a bone of contention, an aesthetic practice that is conservative or transformative or the field on which those impulses clash. But in the context of Victorian grammars of ornament, design and visual style are subjects not just of literature but about literature; more than socially determined practices that literature comments upon, they form the axis of pressing literary questions concerning the relationship of words to the material world. It is in that sense, which places design at the epicenter of Gilman’s fictional practice, that I wish to discuss Victorian paradigms of decorative lexicography. To be plausibly construed as constituting part of Gilman’s theory of literature itself, these decorative paradigms must necessarily inform more than her most obviously decorative work, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’; I will offer one of her early works, ‘The Unexpected’, as a test case. But I wish to begin with a detailed comparison of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and James’s ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ because these works, depicting such futile efforts to name, are so skeptical of the design lexicon. While ‘The Unexpected’ is not so mistrustful, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ take us at once to the farthest edge of the subject. The terms of their skepticism, moreover, are remarkably similar.

### Faint figures

Consider first James’s description of the critic’s labors as a chess match played against the novelist whose thematic pattern is the prize:

On the other side of the table was a ghostlier form, the faint figure of an antagonist good-humouredly but a little wearily secure — an antagonist who leaned back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his fine clear face.<sup>7</sup>

And now Gilman’s description of her narrator’s scrutiny of the wallpaper, at the moment its surface is beginning to seem less like a ‘Romanesque’ than like a woman behind bars:

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.<sup>8</sup>

The thematic importance of these passages, within their respective stories, is marked by the phrase they share: in both excerpts, the ‘figure’ of the elusive pattern has become the equally elusive ‘faint figure’ of the novelist or the trapped woman. What was a ‘strange, provoking, formless’ model of *decorative* ‘figure’ is reconceived as a ghostly human one; the aesthetic object of the quest is embodied as a person behind the pattern.<sup>9</sup> In James’s story, indeed, a persistent metonymy conflates the novels and their design with the physical man — Hugh Vereker — who wrote them. The critic, ransacking a country house where he is staying for any novel of Vereker’s, allows that he ‘would have spent half the night with him’; to work out Vereker’s design is to ‘get *at* him’, and in abandoning Vereker’s novels after many months of effort the critic laments that ‘not only had I lost the books, but I had lost the man himself’.<sup>10</sup> James’s story, moreover, leads us to understand that Vereker is not the only compelling figure behind the figure in the carpet. The ‘fine clear face’ imagined in the above passage is the first in a string of attractive faces the critic encounters in the course of his figural mission. At the outset, Vereker mockingly refers to the ‘great blank face’ of readers who misunderstand him, but the effort to discover his pattern — an effort pursued in tense collaboration with two other readers — produces a string of powerful emotions that transform faces into anything but blank surfaces.<sup>11</sup> The face of Gwendolyn Erme, one of the triad of individuals seeking Vereker’s pattern, is normally thought plain. But thinking about the figure, ‘like one inspired’, her face becomes interesting; ‘she positively struck light herself — she was literally, facially, luminous’.<sup>12</sup> Charged with the intrigue of the pursuit, faces are the major register of feeling in the tale. They are ‘lighted’, ‘all bright’, ‘puzzled’, ‘peeping’, or, in a climactic scene, stung by rejection — a rejection experienced as the ‘largest finest coldest “Never!” I had yet, in the course of a life that had known denials, had to take full in the face’.<sup>13</sup>

As a nameable design, then, the figure is annoyingly untraceable. But the real drama of this story involves the bodies and faces that are imagined, revealed, illuminated, and suddenly made interesting by the endless effort. The ‘fidgety habit’ of the narrator is to ‘take ... measure’ of careers, and in the opening paragraph we find the young man naively measuring his own — projecting its patterns and designs before he has done the actual work that will constitute his life.<sup>14</sup> It is, of course, reassuring and useful to tag style: Robert Herrick becomes a more interesting writer when we read him

in the context of Cavalier poetry, in the same sense that slipper-feet table legs are notable as Queen Anne details or particular patterns of rotating trefoils become legible in the context of Persian design. But ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ addresses the limits of taxonomy, imagined decoratively as well as literarily, as a *too-fidgety* habit that threatens (as in the narrator’s anticipatory summing-up of his career) to blot out lived experiences and living people. The faces and bodies that become the true center of interest of the story — without the narrator himself realizing it — reorient the interest of style to individuals rather than names.

When one of the triad of interpreters in ‘The Figure in Carpet’ withholds an apparently crucial piece of information, the effort to taxonomize design appears like a coy flirtation, again centered on the face. ‘Have patience,’ the character with the information is imagined by the narrator as thinking; ‘I want to see, as it breaks on you, the face you’ll make!’<sup>15</sup> ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is never this lighthearted, and the faint figure that appears within the design never does so as ‘good-humouredly’ as the form of Vereker. But the lexicographical effort to trace the threads of the carpet ‘through every convolution [and] every tint’ links the drama of James’s tale to the determination of the narrator in Gilman’s story to ‘follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion’.<sup>16</sup> Conclusion, of course, is impossible. What matters here is that the impossibility is located at the limits of the grammar of ornament. If the pattern seems for a moment to be a “debased Romanesque” (with the phrase in quotes to signify its classificatory aspiration), it appears in the next sentence to be oriented diagonally and to ‘run off in great slanting waves’ — nothing, that is, like the columnar Romanesque.<sup>17</sup> The narrator’s ever-vanishing desire to put words on writing paper (‘I don’t know why I should write this. I don’t want to. I don’t feel able’) correlates to the increasing impossibility of transliterating the wallpaper in relation to similar surfaces.<sup>18</sup> The paper follows none of the ‘laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry’ that were codified in the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> It is ‘not like anything else’; its curves ‘destroy themselves in *unheard of* contradictions’ (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> The major convention of relational aesthetics in Victorian wallpaper design, in fact, is violated by the yellow wallpaper. As depicted in Figure 1, most Victorian wallpapers were sold in sets of three: a frieze, typically geometrical, for the top of the wall; a filling, typically pictorial, for the middle; and a dado, typically of heavy textured stock, to run halfway up the wall from the floor. These integrated components were meant to mimic the tripartite nature of classic architectural orders (represented archetypically by capital, column, and base), but in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ the house’s owners have simply cut ‘a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion’.<sup>21</sup> A mockery of the break between dado and filling is made by the infamous ‘streak that runs round the room’, a ‘long, straight, [and] even’ divot in which the narrator’s



Figure 1. Tripartite design, Arthur Silver, c. 1885. Silver Studio Collection, Middlesex University.

shoulder will ride when, in the grotesque conclusion to the story, she is found slinking around the room’s perimeter.<sup>22</sup>

The slipping away of the wallpaper from relatedness — of its parts to each other and of its design to other designs — is inversely related, across the story’s trajectory, to the physical incarnation of the wallpaper’s figure. Even before the figure of the trapped woman emerges, the design that cannot be named seems to develop ‘bulbous eyes’, a ‘broken neck’, and elements that ‘crawl’.<sup>23</sup> The ‘faint figure’ of the trapped women is thus

*pre*-figured, as it were, as an anthropomorphic visual pattern. The story, moreover, describes an arc of more and more definite embodiment, culminating in the transformation of the wallpaper's figure into a pair of actual bodies. The narrator herself is the first of these: her movements at the very end of the story (creeping and crawling around the room with her shoulder in the divot) reproduce the movements of the pattern itself (which has been described as creeping and crawling 'up and down the line' of the paper's horizontal and vertical seams).<sup>24</sup> This trajectory is anticipated in the passage, quoted above, that shares its depiction of the 'faint figure' with James's story. In that passage, looking at the pattern's decorative motion makes the narrator herself 'feel creepy'. Via that pun alone, conflating the creeping design and a creepy feeling, the narrator begins to incarnate the paper. But the final paragraph drives the point home, for the word 'creep', now fully transformed into a *bodily* verb, appears over and over again in the story's final paragraphs: the narrator ends the story creeping about the room just as the wallpaper, now torn down, once did. And then Gilman — again breathing life into language originally used in a decorative context — presents us with another bodily incarnation of the 'faint figure'. For the narrator's husband literally faints when he sees her creeping around the room. In an inventive symbolic inversion, John appears as a faint figure while the narrator, creeping about precisely like the yellow wallpaper, kinetically embodies the pattern that contains, entraps, and asserts its authority over the now fainter form of the man. The wallpaper does not vanish from the story even as it is peeled away. Instead, its patterns and principles are refigured in the narrator as well as her husband.

The literary processes by which decorative figures become living ones are central to the story's politics. 'The Yellow Wallpaper', Gilman claimed in her autobiography, exemplified her commitment to fiction 'definitely written "with a purpose"', and this commitment is manifest as the story's persistent effort to make its metaphors — most obviously, the wallpaper's strangling pattern as a representation of the oppression of women — as unmetaphorical, as actual, as possible.<sup>25</sup> I will return to this aspect of Gilman's philosophy of design, but my point for the moment involves the terms in which both 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Figure in the Carpet' present the insufficiency of decorative language. Via a series of narrative and literary strategies, the stories depict transliterating efforts as futile or naive, and produce spectral human bodies in their stead. The 'faint figure' or 'ghostlier form' — depicted variously as an imagined adversary in a game of naming, a hallucinated woman, faces that are the objects of unacknowledged desire, physical bodies lurking in literary double meanings — occupies each text behind the overtly taxonomic idea of decorative figure. In the sense that bodies haunt a language of decor fundamentally predicated on consumerist epistemologies (born of a market for decorative periodicals, stylistic tags, and classificatory groupings), Gilman

and James might be said to address a version of the commodity fetish. Both stories appear dubious of a language of visual style that understands objects in terms of other objects, and the trajectory of both stories also appears at least to *remind* readers of the human relations potentially obscured in the grammar of ornament. (I emphasize *remind* because I do not wish to assert that these stories programmatically resist the commodity fetish, or even that the precise Marxist definition of the term is operable here. I cannot see, for instance, how one might read the hallucinated woman in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' as a representation of the laborer whose work is obscured by the modern decorative marketplace — and her embodiment, like the embodiment of John as a faint figure, is only redemptive in a bitterly ironic way.) 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Figure in the Carpet', I would suggest, may be usefully discussed together for the inverse relations governing each narrative. Incarnation appears as the antinomy of a marketplace coherence defined by its predication on material relationships of objects with one another (a cogently or characteristically 'Hepplewhite' room, say).

### Diagnosing decor

Interpreting the stories in this way defines what we might call their politics of figuration, understood as a decorative matter focusing tensions of text and design, word and world. The overlapping patterns of the stories also link them with wider cultural anxieties involving the relations of ornamental lexicons and human bodies. The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and the United States, for instance, attacked prevailing taste on the grounds that the rage for 'Etruscan necklaces ... Persian rugs, Greek vases, and Roman lamps' subsumed the tactile dimensions of furnishings into merely visual standards.<sup>26</sup> The movement attempted to reincarnate those tactile dimensions both by stressing the handicraft origins of Arts and Crafts furnishings and — appealing to the body across a wider stretch of time — by highlighting the usefulness of its pieces. The career of the US designer Gustav Stickley typifies the movement's principles. In 1900, he abandoned a successful business making reproduction furnishings in order to make furniture that, in his tongue-in-cheek formulation, had no style.<sup>27</sup> Instead, physical function and bodily comfort were the only arbiters of design.

For Stickley, spare objects without applied ornament would be specifically 'healthful', an idea that the Arts and Crafts Movement imagined not just in terms of the salubrious process of making furniture but in terms of domestic economy.<sup>28</sup> The outcome of choosing a 'Turkey carpet' over a 'wholesome tile or stone floor' would be an increase of dust and a consequent need for more and more products, and thus more and more production, to limit the dust: chintz covers, for instance, 'call for antimacassars to keep them clean, [and] antimacassars require wool, and the wool requires knitting-needles, and the knitting-needles require a box, the box demands a side table to

stand on and the side table involves more covers'.<sup>29</sup> The result of such exponential growth — all originating with a 'Turkey carpet' — is a 'smoke pall' over the industrial city, and thereafter people's 'lungs straightened down to mere sighs and conventional disconsolate sounds beneath their cerements'.<sup>30</sup> The apocalyptic sequence is absurd. But it dramatizes the link presumed by the Arts and Crafts Movement, the link between Victorian passion for the figure in the carpet (characteristically expressed via the stylistic tagging of the design as Turkish) and a threat to physicality. *Mutatis mutandis*, the idea that the rush for Turkish carpets ultimately makes the world smoggier and the lungs sickly parallels a range of efforts, including those by Gilman and James, focused on distinguishing the body from excesses of pattern and the intricacies of decorative lexicography. A peculiar branch of medical science had indeed supported such thinking since the 1870s, when wallpaper in particular — as a decorative item particularly suited to discourses of pattern — came under attack. As the major pathogen in question was, in fact, unique to yellow and green designs, I want to consider how Victorian ideas about it inform 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Gilman's story is famously avant-garde, politically and formally. Decoratively speaking, however, it draws on mainstream anxieties and (unlike some of Gilman's other stories) surprisingly conventional strategies as the terms of its critique.

Anti-wallpaper tracts in periodicals and books stressed a number of threats: wheat-based glues as a source of mold; heavy textures, and particularly flock, as traps for dust and dirt; and arsenic pigments, used in yellow and green designs, as vectors for heavy metal poisoning.<sup>31</sup> That Gilman's wallpaper is understood to harbor such microbes is clear. The appearance of its motifs like a 'fungus' conflates the ornament with the bacterial dangers of wheat-based wallpaper glues. Its 'unclean yellow' suggests the specific colorants of the arsenic scare.<sup>32</sup> The specter of arsenic pigments lurks in the design that crawls and the pigments that rub off on everything they touch, eventually covering 'all my clothes and John's' in 'yellow smooches'; the route of arsenical poisoning, in fact, was through the transfer of weakly bonded arsenic molecules to the skin.<sup>33</sup> And the medical maladies attributed to wallpaper are represented as corollaries of style via the peculiar description associated with the 'debased Romanesque' — which famously appears to the narrator to suffer from the *bodily* affliction of 'delirium tremens'.

My interest here, however, is less with all the details of the wallpaper's pathogenesis than with how medical concerns about wallpaper become shorthand, within and without 'The Yellow Wallpaper', for the threat of stylistic lexicography to physiology. As a context for 'The Yellow Wallpaper', moreover, the medical debate over wallpaper teases out an important new element of the politics of figuration in that story and in Gilman's wider corpus: the relationship between visual lexicographies and the *national* as well as the individual body. Consider first a scientific book that is every bit as

dramatic as 'The Yellow Wallpaper', R.C. Kedzie's sensation-ally titled *Shadows From the Walls of Death* (1872). Kedzie worked as a health inspector for the State of New York, and his book is meant to expose how expensive wallpapers use arsenic pigments, rather than vegetable, to produce subtle blue and green backgrounds. Such patterns, Kedzie claims, are beguiling. Whereas arsenic green is 'readily detected by the eye' in cheaper papers of 'strongly marked colors and sprawling bouquets', more artistically rendered designs, in which pigments were blended for subtle effect, do not display their poisons so boisterously.<sup>34</sup> Thus the threat addressed by Kedzie has to do mostly with the recognition of devious *styles* of designs, and these styles happen to be associated with exotic papers preferred by the upper classes.

The format of *Shadows From the Walls of Death* is even more telling. The bulk of the book comprises a binding of actual arsenical wallpapers meant to educate readers on the sorts of papers that can kill. This is strange, because Kedzie's stated anxiety about bushing up against an arsenical wall squares poorly with his decision to provide dozens of arsenical papers for readers to page through. Kedzie further insists that every wallpaper should be tested for arsenic using a chemical process that he explains. The curiosity is that Kedzie feels compelled to sample patterns despite the obvious dangers of using actual wallpapers in that format (research libraries now affix warnings to the book and provide protective gloves to its readers), and despite the fact that the real test of arsenical content is something else altogether.

All of this — the worry about exotic and expensive papers in particular, the decision to create a pattern book despite the obvious contradictions, the emphasis on the visual recognition of arsenical forms — suggests how Kedzie elides matters of public health and concerns about decorative taxonomies. In its presentation of dozens of styles that Victorians are supposed to avoid, *Shadows from the Walls of Death* is a kind of doppelgänger of Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament*. Wallpapers were in fact the subject of an especially vigorous lexicographical effort. *Decorator and Furnisher*, for instance, ran a regular column reviewing new wallpapers, and a single issue of that periodical from 1894 names wallpaper designs in styles ranging from the 'Louis XV', 'Louis XVI', 'French Rococo', 'French Renaissance', and 'Empire' to the 'Prince of Wales', 'Venetian', 'Heraldic', 'Adam', and 'Colonial'.<sup>35</sup> The anxiety addressed by Kedzie, however, eventually settled around a specific pigment, Paris Green, used in a range of designs. Paris Green was only one of many yellow or green colorants to contain arsenic. But as suggested by the first five styles on the above list from *The Decorator and Furnisher*, some of the most popular wallpaper of the Victorian period were French in general and Parisian in particular. The Faubourg St-Antoine was to nineteenth-century wallpaper what Sevres is to porcelain or Sheffield to cutlery. Thus the dangers of a particular bourgeois fashion — expressed in 'Paris Green' via the quintessential Victorian formula equating decor with a

geographic or historical tag — came to stand for the bodily pathologies associated in more general terms with the exoticism of wallpaper and its lexicon. The medical dangers, in short, focused the visual ones.

Arsenic poisoning would produce the psychological symptoms depicted in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ only in the context of obvious, late-stage physiological disease. For this reason, the critical literature on the story has mentioned its dangers only in passing. Heather Kirk Thomas names the possibility that ‘Gilman’s narrator absorbed or ingested hazardous levels of arsenic from the wallpaper’ but quickly turns back to psychology by suggesting that it is ‘more likely [that] its distasteful design and color affronted her postpartum despondency’.<sup>36</sup> But the terms of the case are different if we think in relation to the contemporary discussions surrounding Paris Green and the ‘walls of death’ — and in relation to the faint figures embedded in the story and understood as a consequence of a disembodying habit of tagging or objectifying style. Arsenic may not be the culprit, but it is, I propose, the context of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’

What I mean by this is that ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ reflects Victorian concerns about arsenic to the degree that it too draws together the experience of stylistic excess and, as I have argued, the image of a weakened body or faint figure; as revealed in the arsenic debate, these are the poles of a contemporary reaction against the abstracting, fetishizing effects of a decorative lexicography. In ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, moreover, the physiopathology of pattern appears as a design reminiscent of arsenical papers and — drawing on an established discourse associated with those papers — rendered *so* exotic that it is entirely indescribable. That elusiveness, a version of R.C. Kedzie’s assumption that arsenic patterns trick the eye, contrasts with what we might describe as the allusiveness of the rest of the house. An ‘ancestral hall’, a ‘hereditary estate’, the mansion is the autochthonous obverse of the wallpaper; where the wallpaper is evacuated of relatedness and meaningful referentiality, the house has material history and identifiable provenance.<sup>37</sup> Its grounds are planted with ‘old-fashioned flowers’.<sup>38</sup> Their order suggests traditional styles like those ‘you read about’.<sup>39</sup> The Fourth of July — ironically, for the narrator, Independence Day — is celebrated downstairs, marking the rehearsal of familiar traditions associated with the estate. While several scholars have read the narrator’s initial fantasy that the place is a ‘haunted house’ as one of the story’s most explicitly Gothic conventions, it is as important that this taxonomic hint is instantly overturned as an excess of ‘romantic felicity’: there may be something unusual about the place, but its identification with a haunted house appears to the reader, in the opening lines, excessively stylized.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the energy of haunting, as I have suggested, is firmly identified with the upper room. The house downstairs and outside has no faint bodies — its rooms and gardeners’ houses and box-bordered hedges are dazzlingly clear and geometrically separate — because it is not

mired in problems of identifiability. Put the other way around, the stylistic confusion that is the grounds of ghostliness, of figural reappearance, does not apply to a space in which ‘old-fashioned chintz hangings’, ‘colonial’ architecture, and an ‘English’ garden are easily recognized.<sup>41</sup>

### **Nativism and the politics of design: Gilman’s ‘The Unexpected’**

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, I have been arguing, makes fictional use of the Victorian tendency to understand decorative lexicography in terms of its relation to physical immediacy — a tendency represented in the story by the dual meaning of ‘figure’, by the architectural comparison of upstairs and downstairs, and by the cultural comparison of the elusive and the allusive, the exotic and the autochthonous. By producing its founding drama in all these registers (as a matter, that is, of bodies and architecture and culture), the story further embeds its concerns in associations that would have been familiar, at least ideologically, to Victorian readers. From several perspectives, scholarship in the past two decades has articulated how the turn of the century conflated perceived threats to an original, identifiable US culture (understood materially, as a matter of architecture or decor or geography) and the enervation of the natural body. The complement of this threat, also established as a Victorian ideology, is the notion that strengthening the individual body correlates to strengthening the national one. These paradigms, predicated on what Mark Seltzer describes as ‘relays’ between physical space and ‘individual physiology’, are often historicized as a ‘topography of masculinity’.<sup>42</sup> They are represented, for instance, by the manly outdoor nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt, by the Boy Scouts (‘modeling ... the nation on the male natural body’), or in the muscular style of autochthonous decor marketed by the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>43</sup>

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, however, may plausibly be read as a re-writing, from the standpoint of women’s rights, of similar standards and similar worries. Jackson Lears has argued that the idioms of late Victorian ‘nervous illness’ telegraphed cultural anxieties about the slipping of rustic production, vigorous bodies, national self-making, and ‘preindustrial craftsmanship’: neurasthenic patients, like the US more broadly, were described as feeling disembodied, enfeebled, vaporous.<sup>44</sup> In what has become the most famous depiction of this malady, Gilman’s story — depicting the merely ‘faint figure’ of the real in a decorative culture of excessively obscure style, and contrasting that culture with an identifiably autochthonous house — plays into the xenophobic aspects of the diagnosis even as it aggressively critiques the rest cure offered by S. Weir Mitchell. Indeed, it may have been *because* Gilman experienced decorative and cultural dangers as an enervated national body that the rest cure, prohibiting work, was so particularly horrific. For Gilman tied her belief in the virtues of hard work to a number of transparently nativist and

racist positions. Defining an ‘American’ in her autobiography as ‘the sort of person who *builds* a place like this for you [the German, Italian, Jew, and “Jewish-Russian”] to enjoy’, Gilman lamented that only 7% of New Yorkers were native-born and delighted in visiting New England for the opportunity to interact with sturdy ‘workmen’ of ‘native stock’ and to see old houses or graveyards that bespoke ‘ancestor worship’.<sup>45</sup> On such visits, however, Gilman also lamented the ‘gradual extinction’ of traditional towns and their hard-working people.<sup>46</sup> ‘Conglomerate races’ threatened the national body, understood biologically as well as socially.<sup>47</sup> Late in life Gilman moved from New York to a Connecticut farm (a move described as reaching ‘home’) expressly to perform that ‘honest-to-goodness physical labor’ differentiating native citizens ‘who have made the country’ from their ‘supplanters’.<sup>48</sup>

To be sure, the ancestral house in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, downstairs and outside, cannot be imagined as the ideal home to which Gilman returned; the hereditary estate appears horrifically oppressive as the material embodiment of patriarchal lineage. But it also suggests certain qualities — a built environment that is rational and ordered, as well as an autochthonous provenance — to which Gilman did return in her later life and that she specifically named as utopian sites (when *reclaimed* by women or on terms of gender equality) in fictions like *Herland* and ‘Bee Wise’. ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, we might say, turns on a paradox: the ancestral estate looks like the embodiment of patriarchal history from the perspective of the narrator’s isolation in the upper room, but it also has certain virtues that (in this text and others) configure an alternative to the riot of unreadability and cultural indistinguishability in the wallpaper. Denied access to that alternative, the narrator in the story has no place of escape.

Interpreted decoratively, as a study of a national socio-physiology enfeebled and (most importantly) threatened by lexical unidentifiability, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ thus critiques the rest cure on terms that it shares with a host of other turn-of-the-century discourses about bodies, nationalism, authentic design, and exotic pathogens. The story’s feminist argument is predicated not just on the fact that S. Weir Mitchell’s ideas categorically denigrated women’s capacity as agents, but also on the fundamental incompatibility of the very ideas of rest and withdrawal with other threats that Gilman, like others, perceived to US culture. Physical vigor, ‘American’ essence, and autochthony were packaged together as the embattled physical and material culture of a nation whose identity seemed overwhelmed by the lexicography of representation — a lexicography that is doubly problematic in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ because it appears to be *failing*, as unable to differentiate between conglomerate patterns as Gilman herself was unable to distinguish between ‘conglomerate races’ in New York. In these terms, scholarly efforts to name the wallpaper’s style do for the story what the narrator herself cannot. For while critics have variously proposed that the paper is ‘Morris-inspired’, ‘Aesthetic’, ‘Arabesque’, ‘Gothic’, ‘Female Gothic’,

or ‘Comic Grotesque’, the politics of the story — its cultural and national drama as well as the terms of its feminist argument — must not be dissociated from the futility of words to differentiate and set apart.<sup>49</sup> To perform such dissociation is to obscure the major logic of the story’s political texture.

Being unable to name the difference between decorative styles, in other words, is a political point that yokes anxieties about nations, bodies, and origins to Gilman’s better-known project of exposing the limits of the rest cure. For Gilman, words *were* politics (‘in my judgment’, she wrote, ‘it is a pretty poor thing to write, to talk, without a purpose’), and in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ she dramatizes the consequences of failing to find the words to definitively name a pattern understood decoratively, figuratively, nationally, and (in the context of her nativist beliefs) racially.<sup>50</sup> The polyglot language of decor, like the polyglot city from which Gilman ultimately fled, is incomprehensibly alien to the narrator and opposed to the identifiable provenance of the autochthonous home. Of course, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ became Gilman’s most effective political statement; the words that fail the narrator do not fail the author. But however successful as a literary exposé of women’s condition under Mitchell’s rest cure, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is also predicated on conventional anxieties about decorative representation and national fragility shared with figures like Gustav Stickley and the health inspector R.C. Kedzie. Paradoxically, some of Gilman’s lesser-known stories are more assertive when it comes to the protagonist’s ability to wield words effectively. These stories are important testing grounds, in Gilman’s way of thinking, for a political model that — variously taking up decor as a fictional subject — presents less futile relationships between language and the world’s patterns. This model, striking its feminist ideals against the flinty surface of invidious nativism, is not uniformly sympathetic; but the two motives are part and parcel of Gilman’s extended investigation into the designs that words might or might not express.

Consider ‘The Unexpected’ (1890), a story about a painter that nonetheless bears directly on Gilman’s ideas about design, decor, and lexicography. Gilman’s nativist fear that the American would succumb to an international visual lexicon is personified in the story’s narrator, Edouard Charpentier, a US citizen by birth whose devotion to French aesthetics is categorical in the extreme. Charpentier is always labeling — taxonomizing ‘German fantasy’, ‘English domesticity’, the habits of the ‘New England girl’ — and nothing is more imminently legible, as he presents it, than the ‘modern French’ style of his work.<sup>51</sup> He tests the reader’s patience by demonstrating again and again that he ‘paints from the model’, by which he evidently means not just a succession of French women who pose in his studio (Emilie, Pauline, Georgette) but also the stylistic and methodological models he esteems.<sup>52</sup> For one, Charpentier defends his erotic relations with Georgette and his hostility to marriage on the authority of ‘M. Daudet’ — a clear allusion to Alphonse Daudet, whose



collection of 12 short stories *Les Femmes d'Artistes* (1874) insists that matrimony kills art.<sup>53</sup> Charpentier's prime artistic passion, in addition, is to do something in the style of a fictional painter called M. Duchesne. The wholly reclusive Duchesne has never been glimpsed by Charpentier but, his admirer claims to know, also paints from the model — a claim that fortifies the stylistic taxonomy of Charpentier's Francophiliac universe by insisting on the multiple relationships of modeling and replication among its subjects.

The primary drama of the story involves the expatriate's passion for a woman from his homeland — his 'forty-seventh cousin' — whose beauty puts his opposition to marriage, inherited from Daudet, to the test.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Mary D. Greenleaf unlinks the entire chain of replication on which Charpentier's artistic claim to exemplify French modernism is based. This process has a great deal to do with resisting her suitor's semiotics of inclusion, his language of taxonomy and genealogy, as in this exchange:

'Cousin Marie', say I, 'come, let me teach you to paint!  
'It would be too difficult for you, Mr. Carpenter — it would take too long!  
'Call me Edouard!' I cry. 'Are we not cousins? Cousin Edouard, I beg of you! And nothing is difficult when you are with me, Marie — nothing can be too long at your side!  
'Thanks, cousin Edward, but I think I will not impose on your good nature.'<sup>55</sup>

Charpentier's rhetorical strategies in this exchange are triple. He begs that he might instruct Mary in painting, effectively becoming to her what Duchesne and the others are to him. He invokes their familial relationship, however distant, to prove their essential compatibility. And he represents the cultural absorption he promises by renaming her 'Marie' and insisting that he be called 'Edouard'.

Mary's deadpan termination of the interview is one of the only bits of dialogue in the story without an exclamation point; she stops Charpentier's rhetorical enthusiasm in its tracks. Here and throughout 'The Unexpected', moreover, she calls him only by his anglicized name: Edward Carpenter. Mary's motives, on one level, are clear. In denying Edward the signs of his inclusion in his artistic circle (a circle he would have her join as a 'shy young soul' ripe for instruction), she refuses to submit to its terms; Daudet's model is particularly offensive to a woman being courted.<sup>56</sup> In a world dominated by models and figures, Mary rejects figuration. Disallowing Charpentier's stylistic affectations at every turn, she also disappoints as an artistic subject — turning out, for instance, to be an unsuitable representation of the 'young Diana' his artistic eye imagines. Mary's refusal to become Marie — to put the finest point on her more general resistance to Edouard's classificatory aspirations — simultaneously maintains her autonomy as a woman and as 'New England girl.' Gilman's nativist sensibilities seem again to be joined to her assertion of women's independence.<sup>57</sup>

But what matters for my purposes is that both of these motives are predicated on a drama of visual style. Charpentier defends his artistic terrain as a unitary intention, shared with others; Mary holds herself outside the centripetal forces of that effort, refusing, in effect, to become yet another confirmation of his stylistic taxonomy. In general terms, then, this story is a kind of mirror for 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Where 'The Yellow Wallpaper' makes its argument negatively, depicting a woman overwhelmed by the discourses of pattern that she cannot master, 'The Unexpected' makes its argument positively, depicting a woman whose control over those discourses is absolute. But the thematic continuity of these stories is even more specifically focused by the language of 'figure' they share. Here is how Charpentier himself understands Mary's resistance to the rounds of mimesis that define his stylistic world:

I have never seen anything to equal this country girl! What a figure! ... No, not a 'figure' — the word shames her. She has a body ... and a body and a figure are two very different things.<sup>58</sup>

This passage appears to confirm what I have been arguing is the central point of 'The Unexpected': Mary's existence outside the language of figuration, a difference represented explicitly here in the terms by which a real body is opposed to a representational practice. And yet the passage also raises a serious problem with that model, for in distinguishing between a figural model and an actual body — between, in other words, the art and the woman he admires — Charpentier reinforces the distinction presumed by Alphonse Daudet. Indeed, Charpentier (who gives a copy of *Les Femmes d'Artistes* to Mary) instantiates Daudet's opposition of matrimony and art by asserting that the body he desires erotically bears no relation to the visual models he pursues in his work. At the moment we appear to leave off figures for bodies — at the moment, that is, that the story seems to triumph over the anxieties patent in turn-of-the-century culture and represented in texts like 'The Yellow Wallpaper' — a nasty implication appears for Mary Greenleaf. Her opposition to affected 'style' comes to naught when Charpentier simply distinguishes between the artistic realm and a physicality that is sexual and objectifying.

Gilman, in fact, always raised bulwarks against the possibility that her attraction to vigorous and strong bodies would be construed erotically. Despite enjoying what appears to have been a varied sex life, Gilman worried that the contraceptive revolution would refigure women's rights around sexuality — rather than around the economic self-sufficiency born of women's professional labor.<sup>59</sup> In 'The Unexpected', however, she resolves what we might call the problem of Daudet (a problem, I hope to have suggested, addressed not just to gender relations but also to her ability to reject the figural practices of a classificatory culture) in a dramatic twist that is the unexpected occurrence promised in the story's title. Mary D. Greenleaf turns out to be Mary Duchesne Greenleaf, the unknown artist whose work Charpentier has forever

emulated. The revelation does not come easily. Before he knows her real name, Charpentier stalks her to her studio and (assuming that she is the model rather than the artist) attempts to shoot her male model (assuming, correlatively, that he is an artist who erotically ensnares her). These developments operate, once Mary's real identity as M. Duchesne is exposed, to undo the invidious antinomy of women and art. The governing model provided by Daudet collapses when it turns out that the woman Charpentier loves and the art he loves are, in fact, identical.

The unexpected twist also operates in the specific terms of Gilman's attitudes towards visual style. For it gives real human life to a figural model (the modern archetype of 'M. Duchesne') that Charpentier had understood in categorical terms. In 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the bodies that emerge from behind an unmanageable figural practice represent, I have argued, the ghostly specters of a disembodied relation to various aspects of the real. In 'The Unexpected', the same narrative scenario — a story that incarnates a human body in place of a figure — describes not a psychopathological problem or a projection, but a triumph. Rejecting the stylized (and stylistically coding) appellation 'Marie' but turning out to be the actual 'M. Duchesne', Mary is not really against the practices of modern French art; indeed, she is the paragon and source of those practices, now, remarkably, appearing original to a citizen of the United States. What Mary does oppose is the culture of taxonomic affection that understands style as an abstract set of codes, models, and imitable foreign figures. To put it another way, Mary's triumph is to transform style from representation to phenomenology, from an ideal model of cogency to a human experience. Indeed, some of the most important ideal models in the text are not rejected but incarnated. M. Duchesne is the most obviously embodied figure. But the story also, for instance, opens with a proverb ('It is the unexpected which happens') categorically admired by Charpentier 'because it is French' — and which turns out to be applicable not on those grounds but because the unexpected actually *does* happen.<sup>60</sup> Mary's proper name, within the courtship plot of 'The Unexpected', also becomes an action rather than just a sign: the punning ways in which 'The Yellow Wallpaper' incarnates its 'faint figure' are mirrored when Edward and Mary (as 'M. Duchesne', this text's faint figure) do, in the end, marry. The newly married artists do not practice art without knowing it to be dependent on certain relations of emulation or mimicry. Charpentier tells us in the penultimate line that 'we sometimes share our models'.<sup>61</sup>

But the definition of style he originally presumes — wherein style is a semiotic modeling that turns everything into confirmation and classification — is evacuated. The final line links the story's rejection of an odious attitude towards women and art with its rejection of one of Charpentier's major signs of his taxonomic Francophilia: 'we laugh at M. Daudet'.<sup>62</sup> Laughing at M. Daudet while feeling 'very happy' is affectively different than the ironic last laugh of 'The Yellow Wallpaper',

when the narrator creeps over the literally faint figure of John. But the two laughs are correlative versions — one explicitly triumphal, one only momentarily and bitterly so — of a similar narrative trajectory and a similar politics. In a body prostrate on the floor or in the bodies locked in erotic happiness, the faint figures of the grammar of ornament become the real ones, the actual bodies, for which Gilman — one of the turn of the century's most unapologetically political authors — wrote her works in the first place.

#### NOTES

- 1 – Henry James, 'The Figure in the Carpet', in James, *Major Stories and Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1984), pp. 290 and 286.
- 2 – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', in Gilman, *Herland, The Yellow Wallpaper, and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. 172.
- 3 – Henri Mayeux, *A Manual of Decorative Composition*, trans. J. Gonino (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1888), pp. 232–3. The emergence of pattern as a narrative subject is exemplified by the rise of professional decorative advisors who worked by correspondence. For a fee, these experts, generally affiliated with a periodical, would privately answer letters on some specific decorative situation, dispensing advice without actually viewing the space. See Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: Architectural Press, 1976), pp. 8–9.
- 4 – On Gilman's refusal to imagine her work as 'literature' — a point she made to William Dean Howells when he wished to include 'The Yellow Wallpaper' in *Masterpieces of American Fiction* — see Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 121.
- 5 – Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Judith Fetterley, 'Reading about Reading: "A Jury of Her Peers," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Yellow Wallpaper"', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, eds Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 147–67; Ann Heilman, 'Overwriting Decadence: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Oscar Wilde, and the Feminization of Art in "The Yellow Wallpaper"', in *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, eds Catherine Golden and Joanna Zangrando (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 175–205; Heather Kirk Thomas, '[A] Kind of "Debased Romanesque with *Delirium Tremens*": Late Victorian Wall Coverings and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"', in Golden and Zangrando, *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, pp. 189–203; Barbara Suess, 'The Writing's on the Wall: Symbolic Orders in "The Yellow Wallpaper"', *Women's Studies*, 32 (2003), pp. 79–97; Jeannette King and Pam Morris, 'On Not Reading Between the Lines: Models of Reading in "The Yellow Wallpaper"', *Studies in Short Fiction* 26 (1989), pp. 23–32.
- 6 – Polly Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Greg Johnson, 'Gilman's Gothic Allegory: Rage and Redemption in "The Yellow Wallpaper"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 26 (1989), pp. 521–30.
- 7 – Henry James, 'The Figure in the Carpet', p. 292.
- 8 – Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', p. 174.
- 9 – *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 10 – Henry James, 'The Figure in the Carpet', pp. 286, 277, 294.
- 11 – *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- 12 – *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- 13 – *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 282, 286, 306, 305.
- 14 – *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- 15 – *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- 16 – *Ibid.*, p. 301. Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', p. 172.
- 17 – Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', p. 172.

- 18 – Ibid., p. 173.
- 19 – Ibid., p. 172.
- 20 – Ibid., pp. 172, 168.
- 21 – Ibid., p. 172.
- 22 – Ibid., p. 178.
- 23 – Ibid., p. 170.
- 24 – Ibid., p. 170.
- 25 – The story is certainly successful on these grounds. Every reader knows that ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ exemplifies fiction’s social purpose; indeed, Gilman claimed that the story prompted S. Weir Mitchell to rethink the principles of the rest cure. The story’s reminder that decor is, as it were, a ‘real’ modality of oppression — a matter of actual human bodies — suggests Gilman’s lifelong interest in the influence of architecture and design on social conditions. That interest is discussed at length in Polly Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Architectural Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).
- 26 – Charles Locke Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste* (American Edition, 1878; reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 6.
- 27 – See Stickley’s introduction to his 1909 *Catalogue of Craftsman Furnishings* (reprint New York: Turn of the Century Editions, 1990), p. 11.
- 28 – Stickley’s 1909 catalog opens with a promise that the contents are conducive to ‘more reasonable and healthful standards of life and work’. Ibid., p. 10.
- 29 – Edward Carpenter, ‘The Simplification of Life’, in *Craftsman Homes*, ed. Gustav Stickley (New York: Craftsman Publishing Company, 1909), p. 3.
- 30 – Ibid., p. 5.
- 31 – For a brief overview of Victorian discussions about wallpaper, see Jan Jennings, ‘Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 31 (1996), pp. 243–64.
- 32 – Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, p. 168.
- 33 – Ibid., p. 177.
- 34 – R.C. Kedzie, *Shadows From the Walls of Death* (1872), ‘Introduction’, unpaginated.
- 35 – *The Decorator and Furnisher*, 15:1 (1894), pp. 21–4, 64.
- 36 – Heather Kirk Thomas, ‘[A] Kind of ‘Debased Romanesque with *Delirium Tremens*’, p. 196.
- 37 – Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, p. 166.
- 38 – Ibid., p. 169.
- 39 – Ibid., p. 167.
- 40 – Ibid., p. 166.
- 41 – Ibid., pp. 166, 167.
- 42 – Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 150. See also Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), passim.
- 43 – Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 152.
- 44 – Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 57.
- 45 – Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, pp. 316, 324–5.
- 46 – Ibid., p. 327.
- 47 – Ibid., p. 316.
- 48 – Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, p. 327.
- 49 – For Rune Graulund, who mentions ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ in the course of discussing Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000), Gilman’s story exemplifies how certain fictions present a lack of visual sequence that nonetheless has a leading or guiding function. See Rune Graulund, ‘Text and paratext in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*’, *Word and Image*, 22 (2006), 379–88. The classifications I have named in the main text are proposed, in the order I have cited them, by Thomas, p. 197; Heilman, passim; Marty Roth, ‘Gilman’s Arabesque Wallpaper’, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 34 (2001), pp. 145–62; Johnson, passim; Carol Margaret Davison, ‘Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in “The Yellow Wallpaper”’, *Women’s Studies*, 33 (2004), pp. 47–75; Beverley A. Hume, ‘Gilman’s “Interminable Grotesque”’: The Narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 28 (1991), p. 480.
- 50 – Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, p. 121.
- 51 – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Unexpected’, in Gilman, *Herland, The Yellow Wallpaper, and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 147, 150.
- 52 – Ibid., p. 147.
- 53 – There is an error in the notes associated with ‘The Unexpected’ in the Knight edition of Gilman’s stories, from which I have been working. The notes name Léon Daudet, not his son Alphonse, as the author of *Les Femmes d’Artistes* (1874). As I will suggest, *Les Femmes d’Artistes* is a work of great importance in ‘The Unexpected.’
- 54 – Gilman, ‘The Unexpected’, p. 148.
- 55 – Ibid., pp. 148–9.
- 56 – Ibid., p. 148.
- 57 – Ibid.
- 58 – Ibid.
- 59 – See Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty*, p. 50.
- 60 – Gilman, ‘The Unexpected’, p. 147.
- 61 – Ibid., p. 153.
- 62 – Ibid.