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THE PRECOCIOUS MIND: THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman embodied the innovative spirit of her age and country. She was not content to accept the roles that society had imposed upon her sex. As a true American revolutionary, Gilman defied expectations and worked tirelessly to improve the lives of others. Although she received only four years of formal education, Gilman adopted an ambitious course of reading that was influenced by her relatives, friends, and personal goals. Gilman decided at an early age that she wanted to help humanity. In order to do so successfully, she knew that she would have to learn about human nature, relations, history, and institutions. She also believed that fiction played a crucial role in shaping public attitudes. She wrote stories and poetry in order to show what was socially possible. In her autobiography, letters, school essays, and personal journals, Gilman illumines the works that influenced her intellectual development. These texts helped her to form sophisticated theories of history, religion, and human psychology. She retreated to the comforting presence of her books

during times of stress and unhappiness. Gilman’s well-being was tied to her ability to think, write, and read freely. During her first marriage to Charles Walter Stetson, Gilman suffered a debilitating nervous breakdown. Her ability to concentrate would never be the same after this mental trauma. Gilman’s scholarly rigor as a young woman was crucial to her important work in later years. Biographers have not yet fully explored this vital part of Gilman’s early life. Without a solid intellectual foundation from which to draw, Gilman would not have taken her rightful place among the great American minds.

Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is best known as the author of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Women and Economics, and Herland. Her most famous work of short fiction, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” may strike some readers as an ordinary ghost story, but her frightening tale is the product of the most disciplined of minds. It reveals a great deal of the oppression under which women labored under during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her own life’s story, alternatively, is one of triumph over great adversity and of personal discovery in the face of ideological impediments.

While yet a young woman, Gilman[1] believed she had an obligation to use her intellectual advantages and precocious nature for the betterment of humankind and for the improvement of society. She initiated a course of reading and moral improvement that would ensure her success. She took intellectual risks few women of her day had the time, confidence, or freedom to experience. It was not an easy path that she chose. Contemporary ideology taught women to be submissive and self-sacrificing. Gilman

[1] During these early years of her life, Charlotte Perkins Gilman changed her name from Charlotte Anna Perkins to Charlotte Perkins Stetson. It is, I believe, inappropriate to refer to her as Charlotte. I also do not wish to confuse the reader; therefore, I will address her by the surname Gilman.

transcended these limitations with few role models and little external support. Her concern for reform in the face of prejudice and hostility, however, seems to have been an inherited meme.

Gilman's family tree is rooted in radical advocacy on behalf of oppressed persons and denominations. Her great-grandfather on her father's side was Lyman Beecher, an acclaimed theologian. Beecher was also the father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Gilman's great-aunt, whose influential Uncle Tom's Cabin helped to change the nation's mindset regarding the morality and permissibility of slavery. Her Aunt Catherine Beecher was known as an eloquent feminist, who asserted that "women's . . . unique moral purity was woman's claim to preeminence and power."[2] Isabella Beecher Hooker, another aunt, was nationally known as a tireless advocate on behalf of women's suffrage. Gilman's uncle, Henry Ward Beecher, also advocated women's right to vote, serving as the president of the American Women's Suffrage Association.

Gilman's relatives on her mother's side were no less radical. Stukely Westcott was one of the original thirteen inhabitants of Rhode Island, as well as a deacon under Roger Williams when the Baptist faith was actively

persecuted. Gilman's grandfather Westcott had been a Unitarian when persons of that faith were despised by mainstream society.[3] Rebellion, stubbornness, and great rhetorical skill ran in Gilman's blood, and she proudly took her place among her ancestors. Gilman had been largely self-educated; she dared to give herself the education that few women of her time had access to, and she vowed to live a fearless life.

Women had few employment options. Gilman was able to eke out a modest income for herself by giving lessons, and by painting advertisements for companies. An independent income meant autonomy from male support. She did not want to rely on male know-how either. As a young woman, Gilman read voraciously. She took an interest in a vast array of topics such as history, religion, social science, and human nature. A keen understanding of these areas of human life helped Gilman to comprehend the problems that human beings face and offer informed solutions to these difficulties. Gary Scharnhorst has observed that modern scholarly distinctions are ill suited to categorize Gilman's fiction and scholarship. Her work belongs equally to many different areas of study, including literary criticism and

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[2] Scharnhorst, Gary. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman" 16.
[3] Scharnhorst, Gary. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman" 21.

intellectual history.[4] The result of her labors was a mind that her contemporaries could barely comprehend in a woman.

Gilman betrayed her carefully established principles when, against her better judgment, she married Charles Walter Stetson. Stetson had proposed to her once, but she rejected him. In spite of her initial refusal, he pressed his suit, and she finally relented several years later. This decision would have a detrimental effect on her ability to acquire new knowledge in later years. The intellectual foundation she laid prior to her marriage would become of great importance to her during the remainder of her life.

After her marriage to Stetson ended in divorce, Gilman worked to improve the lives of women and sought to change the deplorable conditions of the modern city.[5] She came to believe that the evils of society required a social solution. To study the intellectual development of Gilman is to study the formation of a socialist conscience. In fact, Gilman was sympathetic to socialist movements such as the Fabians.[6] She cared deeply about people, and she worked tirelessly to improve the lives of men and women working <u>together</u> in society.

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[4] Scharnhorst, Gary, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman” preface.
[5] Scharnhorst, Gary, Charlotte Perkins Gilman” preface.
[6] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 284.

Gilman read so comprehensively that it would be impossible to do justice to every book that she acquired. She would also sometimes begin a tome, put it down, and take it up again at a much later date. What follows is a sketch of Gilman's influences, attitudes, and reading habits prior to and during the early stages of her marriage to Charles Walter Stetson. Carol Farley Kessler observes that, "a complex process ensues when fiction emerges from an author's life and moves into that of a reader. It includes five components: the world that the author experiences, the author, her text, the reader, and the world that the reader experiences."[7] A hitherto inadequately explored component is the world that Gilman experienced through books. This, the first study of its kind, traces Gilman's early biography primarily in terms of her intellectual development through the texts that she read. Other biographies, including those of Mary Hill, Ann Lane, and Gary Scharnhorst, focus on Gilman's feminism, social relationships, and role as littérateur respectively. This work explores, in greater depth than prior biographies, the foundation upon which Gilman based her intellectual work on behalf of humankind.

[7] Kessler, Carol Farley, "Progress Toward Utopia" 5.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Drs. Kevin J. Hayes, David Macey, and Eva Dadlez for their guidance. I also want to acknowledge the University of Central Oklahoma and the College of Liberal Arts Chairs' Council for providing financial support for this project. Because of this support, I had the ability to travel to the Schlesinger Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts and research Gilman's early writings and memorabilia. Finally, I would like to warmly thank Lynda Leahy, an Oklahoma native and reference librarian at the Schlesinger Library, for her patient assistance.

Chapter One
Earliest Lessons: 1860-1869

In her first lessons both self-directed and supplied by her mother, Gilman learned to read, and she received basic instruction on the natural world. Fiction stimulated Gilman's imagination and provided her with an important means of escape. She also gained her first insights on how to treat, and how not to treat people. The tales that she heard and read taught her the perils of lying and the importance of kindness. Gilman began to understand that authority figures were not always right, nor were they always good. The most valuable of social lessons, however, she learned from the relationship between her parents.

In her autobiography, Gilman explains that she was born on July 3, 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. Her parents named her Charlotte Anna Perkins after her father's aunts, Charlotte and Anna Perkins.[1] Gilman's mother, Mary Fitch Perkins, was "delicate and beautiful, well educated, musical, and what was then termed 'spiritual minded,' she was femininely attractive in the highest degree."[2] Her father, Frederick Beecher Perkins "took to books as a duck to water. He read them, he wrote them, he edited them, he criticized them, he became a librarian, and he classified them. Before he married, he knew nine languages."[3] Mary and Frederick were also related as second cousins.[4]

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[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[2] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 7.
[3] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 4.

According to Victorian ideology, Mary and Frederick fit their respective female-male roles perfectly. The couple should have had a long and happy union.

After Mary had borne two children, a doctor told her that if she had any more children, she would die.[5] In mid-nineteenth-century America, an instruction to have no more children meant to have no more sex for heterosexual couples. Frederick left the family, visiting and writing only occasionally. He sporadically supported his wife and children financially. Mary often sent him bills through the mail, and he would send them right back to her, unpaid.[6]

During Mary and Frederick's separation, Mary was forced to move the tiny family nineteen times in eighteen years due to debt. On frequent occasions, they existed off of the charity of relatives, and Mary did what she could in spite of the fact that she had a dearth of moneymaking skills. Early on, she sold her beautiful piano in order to pay the butcher. Gilman asserts that Frederick's neglect had a detrimental impact on her character: "that's where I get my implacable temper."[7] To understand Gilman's early development is to know the effect that her parents' relationship had on her. Gilman did not want to be the perfect housewife. These women could be deserted, and then they would be destitute.

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[4] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 8.
[5] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 5.
[6] Hill, Mary. "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 59.
[7] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 9.

To guard against suffering the hardship her mother endured, Gilman decided to take responsibility for her own intellectual growth. She essentially taught herself to read at five years old.[8] Once she mastered this skill, reading occupied much of her daily life until her early adulthood. At a young age, Gilman's taste in literature tended toward the morally improving. She loved reading the monthly periodical, Our Young Folks, which "made an indelible impression."[9] This publication ran from 1865 until 1873 and was intended as an illustrated magazine for boys and girls. Gilman learned a great deal from the story entitled, "Adam's Adventures or the World Bewitched," which convinced her to stop lying.[10] Such a series of tales appears in the first volume of Our Young Folks, beginning in January 1865.

This bad boy tale recounts the antics of Andy, a boy whose parents leave town for a little while. Andy is left to his own devices, and the imp decides to do nothing but shoot arrows at robins and woodpeckers.[11] The birds are able to outwit Andy, and when he grows tired of this exercise, he chooses an easier mark. Andy kills a chicken and resolves to blame the animal's death on a hawk. Next, Andy breaks a window with his arrow but decides to blame his neighbor

[8] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 12.
[9] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[10] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[11] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 44.

Joe Beals for it.[12] Andy even plants false evidence to support his story.[13] The miscreant, however, is not satisfied with these hijinks. He yells that there is a fire in order to scare other neighbors. Old Mother Quirk falls for the trick, but when she realizes the deception, she tells Andy that "the worst thing is lying" (48). The wicked Andy feels shame for only an instant and then resumes laughing at the old woman. At the end of this installment, Mother Quirk claps her hands, sending Andy into a whirl.

In the February installment, Andy has been transported to an enchanted world by Mother Quirk's magic. Fairy tale characters have come to life but do not respond well to the inquisitive protagonist. In one scene, Andy becomes enthralled with a tiny lady who behaves like a queen. She is extremely beautiful, and Andy, "a selfish boy who wished to possess every strange or pretty thing he saw," decides to seize her and put her in a glass cage.[14] Each of Andy's desires is frustrated, however, and one by one, his schemes fail. He loses his way, and when he asks a farmer for directions, it becomes clear that what people hear is different from what Andy intends to say.[15] As yet, the simple-minded Andy does not realize that he is in a world that is much different from his own.

[12] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 45.
[13] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 46.
[14] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 127.
[15] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 128.

In the third and final installment of this tale, Andy comes to realize that "everything was a lie" and resolves never to tell another falsehood.[16] He suffers another series of misadventures as a result of his existence in this altered version of his familiar world. Andy spies his parents as they travel on the road. They fail to recognize him, however, and his father lashes him with a whip. Andy comes upon Old Mother Quirk again, and she takes him to her house where she cleans him up and attends to his wounds. Mother Quirk then sends Andy back into the real world where he confesses his antics to his parents.[17] Gilman took this lesson to heart and tried out her new resolve to refrain from lying. She recalls "once, having done something for which whipping was due, I humbled my proud spirit and confessed, begging mother to forgive me. She said she would, but whipped me just the same. This gave me a moral 'set back' in the matter of forgiveness—I have never been good at it."[18] Moral behavior, it seemed, was not always rewarded. Slowly, Gilman was learning the hard fact that people, even ones that she loved, could be flawed. Although she experienced this setback, Gilman did not give up on moral improvement.

Gilman was constantly concerned with her own moral improvement because she wanted to help humanity, a goal she formed early in life.[19]

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[16] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 159.
[17] Towbridge, F.T., "Andy's Adventures" 163.
[18] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[19] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living"36.

Gilman describes the enormity of her feelings when she decided on her life's project of helping others: "it felt like having the whole world on my toes . . . an enormous sense of social responsibility."[20] In order to act as an authority on social matters, Gilman felt that she had to be beyond reproach both morally and intellectually.

Gilman's life, however, was far from stable and far from conducive to intellectual pursuits. From 1862 to 1869 the family repeatedly moved between Apponaug, Rhode Island; Hartford, Connecticut; and Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Each of these locations was approximately 100 miles apart. Gilman recalls, "My childish memories are thick with railroad jouneys . . . with occasional steamboats; with the smell of 'hacks' and the funny noise the wheels made when little fingers were stuck in little ears and withdrawn again, alternately. And the things we had to wear! When I protested, mother said it was the easiest way to carry them. This I long resented, not in the least realizing how many things she must have had to carry, with two small children to convoy."[21] The tiny, nomadic family stayed with impressive relatives much of the time. Gilman, however, used these experiences to her advantage and gleaned lessons wherever she could. Not only did fiction supply relevant lessons, but she also learned a great deal from her relatives.

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[20] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[21] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 9.

In 1862, the family stayed with her maternal grandfather for nine months. Her Grandfather Westcott lived in Apponaug, Rhode Island. Mary told her children stories of his kindness: "He would start for home with a well-filled market basket and give most of the contents to needy persons on the way."[22] Gilman developed a great respect for her grandfather, who was "a mild, gray man, whom I horrified by crawling downstairs face foremost at an early age."[23] Westcott's sermons were preserved in an 1884 memorial, and an admirer named John Norris wrote the biographical sketch at the beginning of the memorial. Norris states that Westcott founded a small semi-public library in Lexington.[24] He also served as president of the board of trustees and bought the books for the library.[25] Her grandfather's love of books, and his moral fortitude, made an indelible impression on young Gilman, as did several of her other family members.

In 1865, Gilman's Great-Aunt Catherine Beecher was visiting Mary and the children in Apponaug when they got word that Lincoln had been assassinated. Gilman paid close attention to people, and she recalls "Aunt Catherine, with her little gray curls, and my mother facing her, sat speechless—Lincoln was dead!"[26] Later, they took her "Providence, and the streets were hung with black."[27] The Beecher

[22] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 6.
[23] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 6.
[24] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 31.
[25] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 32.
[26] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 12.
[27] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 12.

women instilled a concern for national politics in Gilman. The scene of an entire country, men and women, united in mourning left a great impression on Gilman. The Beecher women were active in politics generally, which would have a great impact on Gilman later in life.

During these peripatetic years, Mary moved herself and her children to Hartford, Connecticut, for a six-month visit to the home of her father's aunts, Anna and Charlotte Perkins. These two ladies "used rags for handkerchiefs in order to send more to the missionaries, [and] used to pick out the best from clothing contributed to give us children."[28] They lived in an old house on the corner of what was then Main and College.[29] In 1868, while living in Hartford, Gilman's mother ran a little school and was able to earn some money for the family.[30] Gilman, her brother Thomas, and two neighboring children, Harry and Johnny Blake, attended this school.

The children explored their own literary tastes and laughed together at the expense of adults.[31] Gilman scrutinized the pretensions in the adult world. The children mocked the "fops" and "proudies" that they read about.[32] Mary was "a phenomenally good teacher for the very young."[33] She gave Gilman to read Worthington Hooker's Child's Book of Nature (1860), which contained nearly 300

[28] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[29] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13-14.
[30] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.
[31] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 15.
[32] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 15.
[33] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 13.

engravings, enough to excite the imagination of a young child. The book explained the nature of plants, animals, air, water, heat, and light. Reviews of the time were generally favorable. According to one review, Hooker's texts "present their subjects in a simplified manner, which felicitously adapts them to interest and instruct children of an early age."[34] Through Hooker's careful explanations of the natural world, Gilman became sensitive to the rich variety of life that surrounded her.

Mary also instructed Gilman to read A.S. Welsh's Object Lessons (1862). In the preface, Welsh describes the purpose of the book:

> The first instruction given to the child in school, should be based on the fact that his intellectual activity consists in seeing and hearing rather than in reasoning and reflecting . . . Any mode of teaching, therefore, which thwarts the former while it seeks to overcome the latter, is false in its philosophy and bad in its results.[35]

Welsh divided his book into two series of lessons, containing information on features of the face including hair, eyes, and mouth. Under the subcategory of the mouth, Welch explains the various sounds emitted by that orifice. In the second series, Welsh subdivided the lessons into drawing and the natural colors. He also included lessons in length, mathematical plane figures, mathematical solids, and

[34] "Notices of Books" New Englander 1117.

spelling. Gilman found much delight in the knowledge that these books imparted.[36] She was just as quick and intellectually curious as her male friends and schoolmates, but these associations were short-lived as financial difficulties dictated another move for the family.

Gilman, her mother, and her brother were staying with Harriet Beecher Stowe in Hartford, Connecticut, when Ulysses S. Grant was elected President. Stowe had bought a new house, Oalkholm, with the proceeds from Uncle Tom's Cabin.[37] Gilman recalls that "there was a two story conservatory in the rear, the great entrance hall opened on it, the back parlor, and the dining-room; upstairs a gallery on three sides allowed access from bedrooms and a hall."[38] She remembered her Aunt Harriet sitting at a small table in the back parlor, painting in water colors. In later years, Gilman would be able to support herself by means of painting, and this is where she "got her first desire to paint."[39] Stowe influenced the impressionable Gilman in other ways as well.

Harriet Beecher Stowe had read prolifically as a child. When she became an adult, she "wanted books all over the house, not confined to the library."[40] Therefore, the precocious Gilman had

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[35] Welsh, A.S., "Object Lessons" iii.
[36] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 12.
[37] Hedrick, Joan D., "A Life" 316.
[38] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 16.
[39] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 16.
[40] Wagenknecht, Edward, "Known and Unknown" 134.

plenty of reading material. Stowe also "seems never to have had much respect for non-readers or even for people who did not buy books."[41] Like her adoration of painting, Stowe communicated her love of books to those in her immediate realm of influence.

Between 1868 and 1869, while Mary and the children stayed with her, Harriet Beecher Stowe published The Chimney Corner, Men of Our Times, and Oldtown Folks.[42] These projects required Stowe to do some outside reading. Also during this year, Stowe obtained several books. She wrote, "What a wonderful fellow Hawthorne was!"[43] The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne's story of communal living gone wrong, provided much inspiration for Oldtown Folks.[44] In Oldtown Folks, Stowe explores the consequences of love out-of-bounds. She depicts Ellery Davenport, a character inspired by Aaron Burr, as having an affair with Emily Rossiter, an incident drawn from Burr's relationship with Madame de Frontignac.[45] While composing Pearl of Orr's Island, Stowe read Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre.[46] The emphasis on female resilience is clear in both Pearl of Orr's Island and in Oldtown Folks.[47] Besides books and painting, there was plenty to keep Gilman occupied at her Aunt Harriet's home.

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[41] Wagenknecht, Edward, "Known and Unknown" 134.
[42] Stowe, Harriet Beecher, "Oxford Reader" 490.
[43] Stowe, Harriet Beecher, "Oxford Reader" 317.
[44] Foster, Charles, "Rungless" 176-177.
[45] Foster, Charles, "Rungless" 111.
[46] Hedrick, Joan D., "A Life" 297.
[47] Wagenknecht, Edward, "Known and Unknown" 147.

The election of 1868 was an exciting time at the Hartford house, which was decorated with candles and glitter on the window panes. The eight-year-old Gilman was dressed as the Goddess Liberty. A torch-light procession passed by the house and included soldiers in uniform who had come out to support Grant. This scene greatly affected her: "Might not our educators consider if such a soul-expanding experience is not of lasting value to a child; and if, some day, we may not learn how to accustom our children to large feelings instead of keeping them always among little ones."[48] Gilman greedily gleaned her lessons anywhere she could. Clearly, she extrapolated from everyday experiences, storing knowledge for future use. Gilman's formal schooling began during this stay and was destined to last a mere four years.[49] This was not unusual because "only after the Civil War did more than half of the nation's children attend any school at all and in the 1870s four years total schooling was still the average."[50] While living with Stowe, Gilman attended a large public school in Hartford.

During the mid-nineteenth century, reformers worked assiduously to institutionalize free universal education regardless of a child's gender, race, social status, or economic origins.[51] When children entered the nineteenth-century American classroom, they

[48] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 17.
[49] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 17.
[50] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 41-42.
[51] Vassar, Rena, "American Education" 153.

were presented with Spellers and Arithmetics.[52] Children would be taught the alphabet first, and the Spellers would then provide them with a long list of words to be memorized.[53] The Arithmetics were "designed for a practical end."[54] They included introduction to accounting and calculating, and a section on surveying.[55] Gilman did not learn grammar at this time, but she would correct that gap in later years.[56] The readers were generally comprised of moral and religious essays, as well as various Romantic subjects.[57] Not even Gilman's teachers, however, were immune to the young girl's exacting gaze.

Gilman recounts a dispute she had with a teacher over the answer to a problem. When she learned long division, she proudly presented several answers to the teacher. The instructor disapproved, and a heated dialogue ensued: "'This one is wrong.' 'I have proved it,' I replied confidently. Then she showed me her book with the answers. 'See, here is the answer, yours is wrong.' To which I still replied, 'But I have proved it.' Then she did the example herself, and proved it, and I was right—the book was wrong!"[58] During this encounter Gilman learned that "science, law was more to be trusted than

[52] Elson, Ruth, "Guardians of Tradition" 2.
[53] Elson, Ruth, "Guardians of Tradition" 2.
[54] Elson, Ruth, "Guardians of Tradition" 3.
[55] Elson, Ruth, "Guardians of Tradition" 3.
[56] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 27.
[57] Elson, Ruth, "Guardians of Tradition" 4.
[58] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 19.

authority."[59] The ideology of established authority would prove to be no impediment to Gilman's self-expression and activism in future years.

At home, Mary frequently supplemented the children's education. Mary chose interesting tales to entertain her children, as well as to stimulate their imaginations. Gilman asserts, "exciting literature after supper is not the best digestive."[60] Mary read Oliver Twist over the course of several evenings. It was a book that Gilman owned and read again beginning in September, 1882.[61] Oliver Twist, the story of an orphan who finds love and security, would of course make an impression on Gilman, whose own father was absent most of the time. Like the hero of Dickens's novel, Gilman had an unstable childhood, and she had no reliable source of affection. In her autobiography, Gilman explains that her mother suffered greatly due to her husband's absence. In order to teach Gilman to do without expectations of returned affection, Mary denied her "all expression of affection as far as possible." She would not exchange caresses with her children while they were awake but waited until they were asleep and lavished them with hugs and kisses.[62] On several occasions, Gilman pretended to be asleep "even using pins to prevent dropping

[59] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 17.
[60] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 20.
[61] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 146.
[62] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 10.

off" so that she could enjoy Mary's hugs and kisses in the dark.[63] Gilman, however, only dreamed of experiencing the happy ending of familial acceptance destined for the fictional Oliver Twist. Like Oliver, Gilman had an inquisitive nature and curious mind.

The precocious Gilman found piles of Harper's Weekly in the attic of her Aunt Harriet's grand house. She had a fondness for the cartoons of "Nast."[64] A biographical article on Thomas Nast that appeared in Harper's Weekly describes the particular style of Nast's cartoons: "They are of an allegorico-political character, at once poems and speeches. They argue the case to the eye, and conclusively. A few lines do the work of many words, and with a force of eloquence which no words can rival."[65] The Nast drawings from the period are both scenic and intensely political. In a pair of illustrations from May 11, 1867, Nast depicts the tunnel under the Chicago river. The sketches also illumine the political climate of the era and portrayed the sentiments surrounding controversial subjects. The cartoonist illustrated his slant concerning controversial subjects. For instance, he vilified the Chicago labor leaders involved in the Haymarket incident.[66] Although Gilman respected Nast's skill, she

[63] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 10.
[64] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[65] "Thomas Nast" Harper's Weekly 293.
[66] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 140.

held her own opinions, which, in later years, included supporting labor reform.[67]

Gilman had, from an early age, a keen sense of justice. She liked the sensational stories of crime that she found in Harper's Weekly. She was intrigued by the true stories that she found there: "I browsed among them, became deeply impressed with civic crime and the difficulty of stopping it."[68] It was no wonder that Gilman was concerned about crime, as one article begins:

> Assassination is becoming as uncomfortably frequent in New York City as in Mexico. There have been four attempts since the year began, and in each case the assassin has escaped or committed suicide. In the last instance an editress named Fanny Willard was shot by a policeman named Burke, who subsequently shot himself.[69]

This must have been a particularly alarming story for a female reader with literary ambitions. More frightening news was contained in this particular issue: "Nearly one hundred thousand persons were arrested by the Metropolitan police during 1866, being an increase of twenty per cent, in seven years."[70] These stories provided fodder for Gilman's imagination. The budding author made up stories of crime

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[67] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 140.
[68] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[69] "Domestic Intelligence" Harper's Weekly 36.
[70] "Domestic Intelligence" Harper's Weekly 37.

in order to entertain her schoolmates at recess.[71] She says, "My preferred topic was the capture and punishment of Boss Tweed."[72] Oppressors were always brought to justice in Gilman's world.

During Christmas of 1870, Stowe gave Gilman a book that she authored entitled Little Pussy Willow. Stowe inscribed it, "To my little niece Charlotte Perkins a Christmas gift from Aunt Hatty."[73] It tells the tale of a spirit named Pussy Willow, who visits a baby girl shortly after her birth. Pussy Willow's gift to the child is that she will always see the bright side of everything. The book contains illustrations and is 123 pages long. The close proximity that Gilman had to Stowe came to an end. During that same year, Stowe sold her home in Hartford and moved to Florida,[74] and the Perkins family moved to Rehoboth, Massachusetts.[75] Although he had been a ghostly presence up to this point in Gilman's life, Frederick had left the family permanently in 1869. In Women and Economics, Gilman would write that "man, in supporting woman, has become her economic environment."[76] What happens when that economic environment is removed? For Gilman, it meant disruption and humiliating poverty. She began to see that there was something very wrong with a society that encouraged women to be mere ornaments, dependent on men for their

[71] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[72] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[73] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 214.
[74] Hedrick, Joan D., "A Life" 385.
[75] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[76] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 38.

existence. When a woman ceased to be of use, as in the case of her mother, she was too easily cast aside. She was then expected to feed herself and her offspring when she had no preparation for such a task. Mary's struggles proved that women were beautiful, strong, and resilient—not weak and incompetent, as they were often thought to be. As Mary proved, women had the capacity to live independent lives. This is perhaps the greatest lesson that Mary imparted to her child during these years.

Chapter Two
Development within Bounds (1870-1876)

After leaving Hartford in 1870, the small family settled in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Here they lived for three years, an eternity of stability for Gilman.[1] There was no formal schooling at this time, but Mary continued to give her children some lessons.[2] Gilman also began to express the contents of her powerful imagination in the stories she told and pictures she drew. Mary Perkins and her daughter frequently clashed during these years. Gilman began to see her mother as a repressive authority figure due to Mary's attempts to suppress her child's creativity.

Mary and the children were impoverished during their time in Massachusetts, and Gilman learned the invaluable lesson of self-sufficiency. She gleaned these lessons from her mother, who had no choice but to make due with their meager resources. Her brother Thomas also reinforced those lessons for Gilman. He kept hens, from the proceeds of which he was eventually able to afford an overcoat. Thomas did not keep all of the spoils for himself, however. He also contributed to the family economy. On occasion, they had eggs and fowl to eat.[3] Gilman, in a letter to her father, explained that "Thomas has got a nice garden and

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[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 21.
[2] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 22.

furnishes us with potatoes, tomatoes, melons, corn, beans and squashes and pumpkins . . . Thomas got his snares set again, and caught a partridge this morning."[4] Thomas's practical help allowed his sister the leisure to explore her inner life.

Gilman treasured her rich imagination: "No one had a richer, more glorious life than I had, inside."[5] She expressed her fantasy life in prose and in art. Between the ages of ten and eleven, she created an anthology of stories and poems under the title, The Literary and Artistic Vurks of Princess Charlotte. Some of the included texts were not her own, but many of them were.

"A Fairy Story" is one of Gilman's original tales. In this tale, the heroine, Araphenia, disguises herself, leads an army, and vanquishes an enemy that has been harassing her father, King Ezephon. The fictional character earns her father's respect and is rewarded with a trip to the country of her newly found friend, the Fairy Elmondine.[6] The good fairy makes a habit of rescuing women in distress, including one particular woman who is being roughly handled by ruffians. Frederick figured in many of these tales as the helpless king or romantic stranger. In many of Gilman's

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[3] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 22.
[4] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 22.
[5] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 23.

stories, women love and support each other, and they often confirm their tenderness in bed.[7] According to Mary Hill, this symbolizes the “collusive, intimate, and occult” nature of female friendship in Gilman’s stories, which allow women to reign supreme.[8]

Gilman enjoyed the company of women, and she loved two particular women during her adult life. Her first passion was for Martha Luther. After Luther’s marriage, the women remained great friends. Gilman’s passion was again stirred when she met Adeline E. Knapp. Gilman wrote her confidante letters and sonnets. She agonized when Knapp neglected to respond or failed to visit. Gilman unabashedly professed her love for Knapp in her diary. In later years, Gilman advocated on behalf of free love: “Her experiences of love in the early 1890s—experimental and nonconventional—were integrally related to her emerging theoretical conviction that unrestricted nondependent love was a fundamental human right.”[9] From an early age, Gilman preferred to imagine women as beautiful, strong agents.

In “A Fairy Story” and others, women exhibit a capacity for effective public agency.[10] In these tales,

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[6] Rudd, Jill, “Childhood Writings” 84.
[7] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 33.
[8] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 33.
[9] Hill, Mary “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 207-208.
[10] Kessler, Carol Farley, “Progress Toward Utopia” 92.

“women are not men’s helpmeet . . . but their conquerors, their leaders, their saviors. Some men are ruffians and need to be subdued. Others, like soldiers, are ‘true and loyal’ to the princess’ needs.”[11] Gilman produced other juvenilia with a clear moral message. She depicted powerful heroines, but she drew young males as pranksters, who normally met with an unhappy end.

One tale of a disobedient young male, who gets his just deserts, is “The Story of Mr. & Mrs. Rabbit.” In this narrative, of Mrs. Rabbit’s children, Nibbles, is a bane to his parents because of his disobedience. When Nibbles ignores explicit warnings, he gets into trouble. One day, Nibbles dashes through a shortcut in the forest, which he had been warned against doing. He subsequently falls into a snare.[12] The tale ends darkly. The Rabbit family looks for Nibbles with no success. When the search fails, Mrs. Rabbit has more offspring to replace the errant Nibbles. The disobedient rabbit is not entirely forgotten, but his story serves as a warning to future generations of rabbits.[13]

Gilman left “Prince Cherry” unfinished. It is the story of a good king who rescues a hunted rabbit. The rabbit turns out to be a fairy named Candide. The King is

[11] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 33.
[12] Rudd, Jill, “Childhood Writings” 86.
[13] Rudd, Jill. “Childhood Writings” 85.

granted a wish upon fulfilling his quest. He wishes that his son, Cherry, will be graced by the fairy. Candide says that she cannot make Cherry good. She can only advise him and reprove him when he errs. The fairy, however, gives Cherry a ring that will prick him if he commits a bad act. If, after the prick from the ring, Cherry continues to misbehave, the fairy threatens that she will withdraw her friendship. This guidance comes at a time when Cherry is beginning to make his own way in the world.[14]

Another unfinished story entitled, “The Story of a Bad Boy,” shows Gilman’s recognition of the “bad boy” story as a genre. Gilman’s protagonist in this tale gets up to more pranks than the Andy of “Andy’s Adventures.” James kicks his nurse when he is angry, sleeps late, throws walnuts at pedestrians, and makes ugly faces at his father.[15] Gilman clearly was not impressed with the male sex, even at this early stage. Her opinion was influenced by the pranks that her brother played on her and others. Thomas proved to be the source of much irritation for Gilman. She recalls, “my brother was really very fond of me, but his teasing hid it from me entirely.”[16] Fiction was a safe means by which Gilman could vent her frustration.

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[14]Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 86-87.
[15] “The Story of a Bad Boy” Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers.
[16]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 23.

Not only did Gilman articulate her fantasy life though writing, but she gave expression to her inner life through drawings. These sketches exhibit her taste for the macabre. Peaceful country scenes and beautiful maidens are juxtaposed with images of long-nosed demons in which "the sexual imagery is obvious—alternatingly self-affirming and masochistic."[17] Gilman stopped expressing the contents of her imagination, however, when Mary became alarmed at what she saw in these pictures and started to monitor her daughter more closely. She taught Gilman to repress and feel ashamed of her imagination.

Mary shut off her daughter's creative force when Gilman was only thirteen. Gilman lamented, "this had been my chief happiness for five years. It was by far the largest, most active part of my mind."[18] Gilman was also entering puberty, and Victorian mothers feared their daughters' childhood fantasies, which might lead to masturbation. These apprehensive mothers instilled negative attitudes about female sexuality, "warping a girl's attitude about herself, undermining her confidence, and setting the stage for lifelong fears."[19] Many times, Gilman tested the limits that her mother imposed. She recalls

[17]Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 34.
[18]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 23.
[19]Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 36.

finding a work, which she does not name, that Mary had forbidden: “I read the two volumes through, standing before the book-case and promptly looking for another book if mother came near. But I was completely disappointed in finding anything which seemed to me evil.”[20] Gilman clearly had advantages over other girls. She had learned long before not to follow those in charge blindly, and she had an insatiably curious mind. Her mother’s unreasonable restrictions only served to reinforce the lesson that authority was not to be trusted. A new adventure was about to distract Gilman from the injustice of her mother’s edicts.

In 1873, the family moved yet again, to Providence, Rhode Island, “to a little house on Vernon Street where bedridden Grandma Westcott lived with Great-Grandma Perkins.”[21] Shortly after moving to Providence, Mary joined the Swedenborgians, who organized communities to follow and teach the insights of Emanuel Swedenborg.

To Gilman, it “was a strange group.”[22] The members of this cooperative would sit after dinner and talk of religion and ethics.[23] Although she eventually developed a dislike for anything occult, Gilman did learn the

[20]Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 32.
[21]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 25.
[22]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 26.

importance of “hearing ideas discussed as the important things of life, instead of gossip and personalities.”[24] Later, Gilman learned shorthand with Mr. Hemperly, “the pale and slender young Swedenborgian minister.”[25] The Swedenborgian community indoctrinated Gilman into the world of rational discourse, for which she never gave up a taste.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was regarded as a visionary and Christian religious authority. He was interested in the relationship of matter to the seat of the soul in the human body. He also studied mathematics, physics, mechanics, astronomy, metallurgy, chemistry, geology, magnetism, and anatomy.[26] Swedenborg was influential in Sweden and abroad, including Britain and the United States.[27] His opposition to the acquisition of private property spurred a movement toward communal living. According to Swedenborg, “human life is, in its essence, service to others, not an exercise in self-advancement.”[28] He taught that in Heaven, there is a communion of all goods.[29] Also according to Swedenborgian philosophy, the rich man may enter the Kingdom of Heaven only if he “thinks

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[23] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 26.
[24] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 27.
[25] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 32.
[26] Trobridge, George, “Life and Teaching” 40.
[27] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 41.
[28] Kirvin, Robert H. and David B. Eller. “Swedenborg’s Influence” 195.
[29] Swedenborg, Emanuel, “Compendium” 644.

within himself as it behooves him about God, and acts sincerely and justly to his neighbor". Doing justly by one's neighbor includes being charitable.[30]

Followers had the means to spread Swedenborg's influence. Swedenborgians published in popular periodicals, defending their ideals. Otis Clapp defended the New Church in the Harbinger. The New Jerusalem Magazine published articles, which reviewed other publications and spoke of issues that were important to the followers of Swedenborg.[31] W.C. Howells, the father of William Dean Howells, published the Retina, a New Church periodical.[32] Swedenborgian ideas attracted notable American literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. From their writings, it is clear that "both men imported from Swedenborg's teachings on correspondences into their own vocabulary about nature, but Whitman's use of the concept was extensive and detailed."[33] This doctrine had a powerful impact on Gilman as well.

During her family's association with Swedenborgians, Gilman recalls learning the mystic doctrine of Correspondence, which she explains in the following way:

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[30] Swedenborg, Emanuel, "Compendium" 677.
[31] Kirvin and Eller, "Swedenborgian Churches" 228-231.
[32] Kirvin and Eller, "Swedenborgian Churches" 230.
[33] Kiven and Eller, "Swedenborgian Churches" 209.

"everything in the Bible means something else."[34] Swedenborg believed that "each and all things in nature correspond to spiritual things; and in like manner each and all things in the human body."[35] Correspondences, therefore, were "the living embodiment of something spiritual in something earthly."[36]

Although these discussions allowed Gilman the experience of enlightened conversation, they also permanently impacted her view of religion. The theories of Correspondence resulted in tedious discussions that involved "floating and wallowing about in endless discussion of proofless themes and theories of their own."[37] The novelty of serious, intellectual discourse soon gave way to the monotony of the subject matter. Gilman quickly became frustrated with Swedenborgian conversations, which she viewed as mystical and unverifiable. These endless discussions engendered in her a permanent distaste for mysticism.[38] The young Gilman, however, would not be subject to mystical circularity for long.

In 1873, several of Gilman's Hartford great-aunts died. One of these relatives left Gilman and Thomas a

[34] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 26.
[35] Rose, Johnathan, "Garden" 98.
[36] Rose, Johnathan, "Garden" 66.
[37] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 26.
[38] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 27.

little money.[39] With the funds, Gilman was sent to a private school run by Mrs. Fielding and Miss Chase. Gilman recalls, “So behold me at fourteen, earnest and eager, beginning again at school. It was always beginning again my bits of schooling, as I never had time to finish anywhere.”[40] While there, Gilman studied history, grammar, arithmetic, and rhyme. She was behind in grammar and had to be put in a remedial setting. At school, Gilman’s sense of injustice again made itself known. She recalls an unfairness that she suffered:

> One of the exercises I was given was to rewrite from memory a fable of Aesop’s previously read to us. This I did in verse, clearly and correctly. The paper was perfect, but I had made three little curly lines under my signature, and for that the teacher took off half a point, and I just missed the only 100 per cent I ever came so near.[41]

It makes sense that Gilman appreciated the subject of her assignment. Aesop was a slave in the sixth century B.C.E. One of his masters was so impressed with his wit and intelligence that he set Aesop free. Aesop then involved

[39] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins “Living” 27.
[40] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 27.
[41] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 27.

himself in public affairs and spoke to groups, regaling them with his entertaining and didactic stories.[42] Gilman seemed to see herself as a great intellect, who was enslaved. It is clear that she wanted to model her stories on those of Aesop. For example, she made only a 57 in grammar while at school.[43] She wrote essays in order to improve her marks. One such paper was entitled, “The Fox and the Stork” and began, “Once on a time there lived a Fox, In a wild-wood dark and grimy Who did invite a long-billed stork to come and dine with him.” The fox is sly and the stork is “a dry old chap.” The fox feeds the stork supper in a bowl, which made it impossible for him to eat due to his long bill. The stork, in turn, invites the fox to dinner. The stork feeds the fox meat that had been placed in jars. Gilman wrote, “T’was now the turn of the long-billed stork The wily Fox to teach.” [44] The events of Gilman’s story are very similar to one that Aesop told called, “The Fox and the Crane.”

The theme of enslavement resonated with Gilman. In the fall of 1886, she wrote “Allegory,” in which she describes a struggle between two brothers, one of whom is smaller and weaker than the other one. The stronger brother flaunts his

[42] “Aesop’s Fables”
[43] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 42.

strength, imprisons his smaller brother, and ridicules his ignorance. When the weaker of the two breaks free of his confinement and begins to develop, the strong brother declares war on him.[45] Gilman met many roadblocks set up by authority figures: Mary had stifled her imagination, and teachers punished Gilman's little creative flourishes. In spite of efforts by her mother to restrict her personality, Gilman attempted to achieve self-determination wherever she could.

Gilman developed a dramatic sense of ambition. She desired "to be the most beautiful, the wisest, the best person in the world; the most talented in music, painting, literature, sculpture."[46] She wanted to surround herself with beauty. Although Mary forbade romantic literary works, she could not control what Gilman read at school. In her lessons on elocution, Gilman recited "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight" written by Rosa Hartwick Thorpe. The story that this poem sets to verse concerns a woman, Bessie, who will do anything to save her lover from death. Bessie's companion is in prison, about to be executed, and when the curfew bell rings he will be put to death. Bessie sabotages the bell and sees Cromwell approach the town. She pleads

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[44] "The Fox and the Stork" The Correspondence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. I have left Gilman's text intact.
[45] Hill, Mary. "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 135-136.

Basil's case, and Cromwell allows the lovers to leave together.

Gilman also read "The Rhyme of the Duchess of May" by Elizabeth Barret Browning. In this poem, a rich orphan elopes with her true love, incurring the wrath of a relative who wanted her to marry his son in order to obtain her fortune. The Duchess's thwarted suitor tracks the couple down and desires vengeance. Her husband, Sir Guy, sees that the battle is going badly and desires to kill himself. The Duchess wants to join him in death. He refuses, but she jumps on his horse at the last minute as he plunges from the parapet of his castle, and the unhappy couple crash to their doom.

William Ware's tragic novel Zenobia appealed to Gilman. This fictional, epistolary tale concerns Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, who stands for independence against the Roman Empire. Zenobia served as a role model for Gilman. The character commanded loyalty; she was also beautiful and kind to her people. Like Zenobia, Gilman had a strong sense of independence, and she resisted the assaults of others upon her autonomy. This queen also echoes many of the heroines in Gilman's own stories.

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[46] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 23.

Gilman was taught Latin and natural philosophy at school, the latter of which she liked very much because it appealed to her desire for objective truth:

> Here was law, at last; not authority, not records of questionable truth or solemn tradition, but laws that could be counted on and Proved . . .Adhesion, cohesion, torsion, the law of the screw and lever, the pendulum, and that crowning miracle, the law of the hydraulic press, these were meat and drink to me. Presently I made the observation that these laws had parallels in psychology. Friction, i.e., hindrance interference, produces anger as naturally as heat. Action and reaction are equal, yes, and oppression produces rebellion.[47]

Psychological truths were verifiable, and hence, scientific. It was not wrong for her to feel angry when outside forces worked to repress her natural desire for free self-determination.

Her sporadic performance in school may have been a result of her frustration with the constant starts and stops of her education. Gilman wrote, “Teachers were always impressed at first . . . but later they were disappointed.

I never did very well in school studies."[48] Where she performed with mediocrity in some school subjects, she excelled in physical education.

Gilman learned calisthenics and hygiene from a female physician named Dr. Studley. This experience, Gilman says, "made an indelible impression on my mind."[49] It produced an interest in maintaining her physical health and spurred her work in dress reform. In 1887, Charlotte wrote an essay entitled "A Protest Against Petticoats."[50] Exposure to a female doctor as a model did Gilman an enormous amount of good. Professional women who were devoted to their work above any domestic obligations were few and far between.

Outside of school, Gilman took an interest in the fine arts. She enjoyed the pictures illustrated by Tony Johannot, [51] whose work depicts a wide range of subjects. Johannot preferred to portray intimate scenes of family life, troubling depictions of the Inquisition and prisons, and the excesses of royal decadence. Gilman continued to improve on her own artistic skills. In a school essay written on May 27, 1875, Gilman describes a landscape in

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[47] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 29.
[48] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Living" 27.
[49]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 28.
[50] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 371.
[51] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 32.

great detail and concludes the essay with a prancing human figure.[52]

The theater provided Gilman with a stimulating night out. She saw “The Frog Opera” at the Providence Theater.[53] Gilman loved the performance, and she “developed a grand passion for the Prince, a tall, imposing youth.”[54] Gilman also wrote her father letters, informing him that she was strongly attracted to the stage.[55] It seems as though she was also strongly attracted to beautiful men. She had a particular preference for blondes.[56]

Frederick was then the head of the Boston Public Library. Gilman wrote her father highly emotional letters. She was impressed by his “free-spirited approach to schooling” and tried to catch her father’s eye “by proving herself intellectually precocious.”[57] Gilman’s confessional notes proved an embarrassment when she visited him in February, 1876. She does not say much about the visit in her autobiography other than the following: “Father was, I think, boarding with his sister then, he was the head of the Boston Public Library and she wished to keep alive his

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[52] “An Order for a Picture” The Correspondence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
[53] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 31-32.
[54] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 30.
[55] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 39.
[56] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 17.
[57] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 41.

interest (if any) in his children."[58] She greeted her father with great enthusiasm, which he received with coolness.[59] This was disappointing to Gilman, but their relations would never be any warmer. Her ambitions for a stable and loving environment were again frustrated.

After this trip, Gilman returned home, where things seemed fall apart for the communal Swedenborg group. Gilman states that the Swedenborg cooperative endeavor was "inherently doomed to failure."[60] The particular community with which Mary and the children associated disbanded in February of 1876. The children were not told why. Gilman and her family relocated to Gano Street in Providence. Public school also permanently concluded for Gilman, but her intellectual development flourished.[61]

Gilman continued her education on her own, and Mary seems to have liberalized Gilman's reading list. The precocious Gilman read the works of Louisa Alcott and stories in the Youth's Companion in which "the heroes and heroines were almost always poor, and good, while the rich people were generally bad."[62]

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[58] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman "Living" 31.
[59] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 40.
[60] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman "Living" 26.
[61] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman "Living" 35.
[62] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman "Living" 35.

In 1876, Alcott published her famous novel, Little Women. The characters of Little Women had many characteristics that were appealing to someone in Gilman's position. Alcott's story explores the overcoming of character flaws. Each of the March girls has a particular shortcoming, and the tale recounts how the girls transcend these vices. Gilman had begun yet another project: "I was bent on doing my best, and eager for self-improvement."[63] Like Alcott's heroines, Gilman worked diligently to be the best she could be in terms of beauty, eloquence, and morality.

Gilman was also allowed to read The Youth's Companion, a weekly periodical that ran from 1827 until 1927. Her attention was drawn to stories of impoverished, yet triumphant heroes and heroines. One story entitled "Less Than Woman" appeared in February of 1875. This tale provides an account of Mrs. Biffin, who was born without arms. The feats that Mrs. Biffin can perform with her toes gains the attention of King George III, who awards her a pension.[64] In another story, entitled, "Gruppy's Heroism," a gymnasium employs Gruppy, the story's protagonist, as an attendant. Gruppy is "a hard-worked little fellow, and none

[63] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman "Living" 32.
[64] "Less Than" The Youth's Companion 34.

too well paid."[65] He is ordered around by self-important young men at the gym. One young man in particular, Salter, becomes Gruppy's enemy. Gruppy, however, is aided by the imposing Van Velt, and the two form a close friendship.[66] These stories contain themes of moral import. Characters use their intellect to transcend adversity.

Frederick paid for Thomas to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In spite of Thomas's educational advantage, Gilman again took responsibility for her own intellectual development. The lack for formal schooling would not stop her. The teenager challenged herself further. With the departure of her brother, the end of her formal schooling, and the conclusion of her mother's restrictions at seventeen, Gilman resolved to engage in her studies more intensively.[67]

[65] "Less Than" The Youth's Companion 18.
[66] "Gruppy's" The Youth's Companion 19.
[67] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Living" 37.

Chapter Three:
Finding Discipline (1876-1881)

With Thomas away at school and the family settled back in Providence, Gilman had to find new ways of keeping herself occupied.[1] The modest education she received provided her with a good starting point from which to continue her studies. She "marked out a line of work"[2] by which to improve her mind. From the time she turned sixteen, Gilman's reading, combined with her introspection, facilitated her intellectual development and enhanced her self-awareness. Her reading projects were, she says, influenced by: "My mother's profound religious tendency and implacable sense of duty; my father's intellectual appetite; a will power, well developed, from both; a passion of my own for scientific knowledge, for real laws of life; an insatiable demand for perfection in everything."[3] Gilman worked hard in order to realize her goal to help humanity, and she drew upon every resource available to her.

Gilman wanted to put her plans into action, but she hardly knew where to begin, so she wrote to the wisest person that she knew: her father. In response, Frederick suggested, "You might however try Grote's Greece and then

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[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 35.
[2] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.

Mommsen's Rome. If you find Grote too dry, you need not try Mommsen, for he is drier. And read Hildreth's United States . . .and for England, Knight's Popular (not pictorial) History."[4] Gilman's estranged father sent his daughter an additional list of works, which included George Rawlinson's The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World (1871),[5] The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy (1872), and The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy (1875).[6] Frederick further recommended William Boyd Dawkins's Cave Hunting (1874), James Fergusson's Rude Stone Monuments in All Countries (1872), John Lubbock's Prehistoric Times as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages (1869) and The Origin of Civilizations (1870), and Edward Tylor's Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization (1870) and Primitive Culture (1874).[7] It was an intimidating list, but Gilman would not be dissuaded. She obtained many of these works to include in her library and read them periodically over the next several years.

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[3] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 44.
[4] "Letter from FBP to CAP, dated October 15, 1878." Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers.
[5] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.
[6] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.
[7]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36. Gary Scharnhorst and Denise Knight include all of these works in Gilman's library.

In 1846, George Grote wrote A History of Greece. Gilman does not mention this text in her autobiography, and it has not included within her library by Scharnhorst and Knight. Therefore, it is reasonable to deduce that she did, in fact, find it very dry. In that case, she certainly would not have attempted Mommsen's History of Rome, which dives right into pedantic data about this great empire.

Richard Hildreth's History of the United States of America is a comprehensive study of the United States from the discovery of the land mass that would be named America in 1497, to the composition of the U.S. constitution in 1789. Gilman was very keen on the evolution of society and people, which may have made this work enticing. The other suggestions that her father made would have been similarly provocative.

The Popular History of England by Charles Knight was "a marvel of cheapness, and puts the best popular history of England within the reach of the most moderate purse."[8] Although affordable, this volume was also printed in good type and on good paper. It was also well-bound.[9] A contemporary review asserts, "The work treats with care and fairness of society and government from the earliest times

[8] "The Popular History of England" Christian Union 373.
[9] "The Popular History of England" Christian Union 373.

to our own."[10] Frederick was clearly in tune with contemporary tastes with his other suggestions as well.

George Rawlinson's works, including his three-volume The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World, entertained Charlotte sporadically over the ensuing years. She perused it on April 10, 1882[11] and then again on February 17, 1883.[12] It was universally loved. Rawlinson's goal was ambitious. He desired to recover "whole chapters of the history of mankind in the earliest ages"[13] by drawing upon discoveries in Asiatic archaeology. Due to its popularity, the book had become "the scarcest and most difficult to meet with of modern books."[14] The universal acclaim that this text enjoyed spurred additional works of the ilk. Gilman clearly obtained this tome, and it seems likely that she would have worked through the rest of Frederick's list.

The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy, also by George Rawlinson, was considered "the closing chapter in the history of the Ancient Eastern world." Frederick's advice to Gilman was sensible. Current reviews acclaimed the book for its display of "vast research and the finest skill in

[10] "Books—Reviews and Notices" The Baptist Review 401.
[11] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 117.
[12] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 175.
[13] "Notes" American Literary Gazette 176.
[14] "Notes' American Literary Gazette 176.

its manner of evolving ancient history out of the most complex and multifarious materials."[15] Rawlinson's texts, as well as the following works warranted special inclusion in her autobiography.[16] Gilman also says that she "read connectedly, learning the things I most wanted to know, in due order and sequence, none of them exhaustively but all in due relation"[17]

Treatments of natural history and adventure were also a part of Gilman's reading agenda. The great spelunker, W. Boyd Dawkins, describes British and European caves, cave animals, the history of cave exploration, and the physical history of caves from the Iron Age to the Pleistocene Age in Cave Hunting.[18] In his Preface, Dawkins justifies his research by asserting that cave exploration is becoming an important field of inquiry because it has contributed immensely to our knowledge of the early history of humans in Europe. Dawkins sought to present, in narrative form, the history of cave-exploration.[19] Gilman obvious believed that history was of great importance. Historical accounts would constitute the bulk of Gilman's reading list. Frederick also thought that his daughter should learn

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[15] "Literary and Art Memoranda" Potter's Monthly 226.
[16] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.
[17] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[18] "Scientific Intelligence" American Journal of Science and Arts 76.
[19] Dawkins, W. Boyd, "Cave Hunting" vii.

something of architecture and the structure of civilizations.

James Fergusson's Rude Stone Monuments was intended to provide the reader with "a number of new facts" pertaining to the stone monuments found in various countries around the world. Fergusson examines the style of architecture to which various monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury belong.[20] The text contains 234 illustrations of these wonders. At the time, it constituted the most comprehensive work of its kind.[21] A contemporary reader objected that the work's author "assumes, so far as we know without the slightest shred of evidence, that these ages are hard-and-fast chronological divisions."[22] Nevertheless, this work and others provided Gilman with a window to the larger world.

Frederick recommended John Lubbock's The Origin of Civilizations to his daughter. Gilman asserts in her autobiography that "humanity was always the major interest, the sciences held useful as they showed our origin, our lines of development, the hope and method of further progress."[23] Lubbock's illustrated volume "is a sequel to his 'Prehistoric Times'[and] gives a view of the inferior

[20] Fergusson, James, "Rude" x-xi.
[21] Fergusson, James, "Rude" vii.
[22] "Present Phase of Prehistoric Archaeology" The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature 643.
[23] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.

races now on this earth."[24] The text purported to explore "the lower races of men with respect to their religion, morals, laws, language, marriage, art and ornaments."[25] Edward Tylor's Researches into the early History of Mankind, and the Development of Civilization was also on Gilman's reading list. It is catalogued in the same genre as Lubbock's Prehistoric Times and The Origin of Civilization, as authoritative texts on the genesis of the human race.[26] Gilman also read Paul Sinding's The Scandinavian Races[27] and John Wood's The Uncivilized Races of Men in All Countries.[28] These texts seem to articulate nineteenth-century racist attitudes and may have informed Gilman's view of non-Aryans as well.

In Women and Economics, Gilman argues that disproportionate sex-distinction between males and females

> may be broadly shown in the Oriental nations, where the female in curtained harems is confined most exclusively to sex-functions and denied most fully the exercise of race-functions. In such peoples the weakness, the tendency to small bones

[24] "The Literary World" The Literary World; A Monthly Review of Current Literature 93.
[25] "The Literary World" The Literary World; A Monthly Review of Current Literature 93.
[26] VanRhyn, G.A.F., "Primitive" 236.
[27] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 210.
[28] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 182.

> and adipose tissue of the over-sexed female, is transmitted to the male, with a retarding effect on the development of the race.[29]

She contrasts the purported physical deformities of "Oriental" peoples to the physical robustness of "Germanic" nations, which she claims is due to "the comparatively free and humanly developed women—tall, strong, and brave—transmitted to their sons."[30] Gilman saw that frailty is detrimental to the development of any "race." From Gilman's perspective, which was informed by the texts to which she had access, she is simply making a sociological and physiological observation.

Clearly, Gilman was reading assiduously and thinking deeply about her studies during these early years. As a result of her careful attention, she observed, "History soon showed itself as an amusingly limited and partial account of what had happened."[31] The discipline, however, also had its uses. It appeased her "strong desire to know, and in orderly sequence and relation . . . [a] connected general outline of the story of life on earth, and of our own nature and progress, which has proved lastingly

[29] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Economics" 46.
[30] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Economics" 46.
[31] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Living" 37.

useful."[32] Gilman gained useful knowledge from her explorations of the past; she also paid close attention to the current climate of scientific curiosity. She had access to the latest advancements, which were reported in current periodicals.

Frederick sent Gilman "a large number of Popular Science Monthlies."[33] Later, she would go to the public library to read this periodical specifically.[34] Inspired by these periodicals, Gilman became immersed in the discussion concerning evolution. The magazine began in 1872 and purported "to help on the work of sound public education, by supplying instructive articles on the leading subjects of scientific inquiry. It will contain papers, original and selected, on a wide range of subjects, from the ablest scientific men of different countries, explaining their views to non-scientific people."[35] Articles on evolution during these years included Huxley's letters in America, Marinau's reflections on Herbert Spencer, and a wide range of applications of the theory of evolution. Many of these articles also grappled with the role of religion in the wake of recent scientific hypotheses and discoveries.

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[32] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[33] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.
[34] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 42.
[35] "Warfare of Science" Popular Science Monthly iii.

While perusing Popular Science Monthly, Gilman says that came read an article on Andrew White's Warfare of Science.[36] White asserts that religion has interfered with the interests of science to the detriment of both. Conversely, unrestrained scientific investigation has always resulted in the best for both subjects.[37] White's project is to support the freedom of science. Gilman was excited by "the general new urge in studies of natural law."[38] Those who worked to increase scientific knowledge faced challenges in their efforts to gain a foothold in the imagination of ordinary people. The struggle between science and religion resonated with Gilman.

Not only was Gilman keen to read about the latest scientific advancements, but she also attended public lectures on various scientific topics. On March 26, 1881, Gilman attended a lecture on Spectrology given by Dr. Hedges.[39] Spectrology, or spectrum analysis, "is the investigation of substances as to their physical composition by means of the prismatic spectrum."[40] The atmosphere of scientific advancement was very exciting, yet

[36] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 36.
[37] "The Warfare of Science" Popular Science Monthly 370.
[38] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[39] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 46.
[40] Richards, William, "Spectrum" 17.

Gilman struggled to understand the place of religion in her life.

From her early days with the Swedenborgians, Gilman had an ambivalent view of theology. Through her studies, she came to understand "the importance of religion as a cultural factor, but also the painfully conspicuous absurdities and contradictions of the world's repeated attempts in this line."[41] However, Gilman also saw that most people needed religion because it provided a bedrock on which to rely in order consistently to do the virtuous action when circumstances are not conducive to morality.[42] The anti-intellectual, authoritative nature of religion, however, repelled Gilman. She continued to read in order to understand the religions of the world and the role of spirituality in the lives of human beings.

According to Gilman, James Freeman Clarke's Ten Great Religions (1871) "was a long step in this field of study . . . with wide illustrations from both real life and fiction."[43] Clarke asserted that his aim was to "enable the reader to become acquainted with the doctrines and customs of the religions of the world, without having to consult

[41] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 38.
[42] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 38.
[43] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living"38.

numerous volumes."[44] To one in Gilman's financial circumstances, and who had her time constraints, a single volume that encompassed such a large topic would have been immensely helpful. She must have liked it because on March 7, 1882, she obtained the book from the public library to read "over again."[45] Gilman acquired and read many other works devoted to religion in order to develop a mature sense of the subject.

She acquired John Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563) on January 18, 1881.[46] The book, which she seems to have disliked, discusses martyrdom from the beginnings of Christianity to the most recent incidents of pagan and popish prosecution during Foxe's time. Over the years, editors added information. During Gilman's day, accounts of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the Gunpowder Plot, and the Irish rebellion of 1745 had been inserted. Gilman read religious texts, interspersed with religiously themed works of fiction.

Some treatments of church-going people were less than flattering. Oliver Wendell Holmes's The Guardian Angel (1867) found a place in Gilman's library on February 6,

[44] Clarke, James Freeman, "Ten" Preface.
[45] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 112.
[46] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 33.

1881.[47] In Holmes's tale, "the hero is an orthodox clergyman—Rev. Joseph Belamy Stockes, who is represented as learned and eloquent, gifted in prayer, and inspiring confidence and ingratiating himself into the affections of his flock, only to play the part of the hypocrite and seducer."[48] Gilman may have been attracted to Holmes's fiction when, upon joining The Society for the Encouragement of Studies at home, "we were addressed by Oliver Wendell Holmes, a small, delightful man."[49] She sewed while her Aunt read the book aloud. Gilman got so interested in the story that she read it herself all the way through. She did not have the heart to tell her Aunt what she had done. Gilman wrote, "let Aunt C. read it aloud because I knew she liked to, then go and read it all through today, wasting precious hours of work and now listen with hypocritical interest while that deluded lady goes all over it again."[50]

The Society for the Encouragement of Studies at Home was founded by Anna Ticknor in 1873, and Gilman joined "from a strong desire to know, and in orderly sequence . . . a clear, connected general outline of the story of life on earth, and of our own nature and progress, which has

[47] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 36.
[48] "Books of the Month" Hours at Home 189.
[49] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.

proved lastingly useful."[51] Gilman briefly mentions Miss Ticknor in her autobiography.[52] Ticknor was the daughter of George Ticknor, famous historian of Spanish literature, professor of modern languages at Harvard University, and founder and president of the Boston Public Library. Anna Ticknor "was quick of temperament, and ambitious of usefulness far more than any distinction. While appreciative of the restrictions which she wished to remove, she was desirous to gratify, if possible, the aspirations of the large number of women throughout the country who would fain obtain an education, and who had little, if any hope of obtaining it. She was very highly educated herself, and thought more and more of her responsibility to share her advantages with others not possessing them."[53] Anna Ticknor was living Gilman's dream of helping humanity, although the young student certainly did not possess Miss Ticknor's advantages of wealth.

Lessons were provided by means of correspondence. Among Miss Ticknor's assistants were "experienced teachers who were willing to give their hard-earned leisure" to the cause.[54] Gilman studied "Ancient History, a year with the

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[50] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 37.
[51] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[52] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[53] Eliot, Samuel, "Biographical" 2.
[54] Eliot, Samuel, "Biographical" 5.

Ancient Hebrews, one on Egypt, another with several early peoples, all intensely interesting."[55] The remarks that Gilman received from her instructors were very detailed. In response to her essay on Judea, the teacher remarked, "It is a capital description; 2. Here comma need; 3. Only on the coast, I think. The Cananites—the aborigines—were probably a mixed race largely Hermetic but all this is obscure—the Hebrews looked upon them as entirely another race."[56] Gilman benefited greatly from this instruction, and she was grateful for it for the rest of her life. She also continued to read prodigiously on her own while writing essays for the Society.

In her explorations into religion, Gilman also read "Mrs. Flint's Married Experience," written by Rose Terry Cooke, which Gilman called "A most edifying tale."[57] Cooke's story "laid bare one of the harsh and sordid possibilities of human nature as it existed, nay exists, in the bigotry and narrowness of church going men, 'professors,' who dream not of applying to their lives, the gentle precepts, the loving kindness, of the teachings of Christ."[58] These works helped Gilman to know her own mind when it came to her thoughts on faith.

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[55] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 37.
[56] "Remarks—Miss Perkins" Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers.
[57] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 31.

As a result of her investigations, Gilman formulated her own idiosyncratic view of religion. She believed that religious devotion should be "based on knowledge"[59] as opposed to bald authority. The trouble with organized religion as she had known it was that "understanding was never required, nor expected, in fact it was forbidden and declared impossible, quite beyond the poor human intellect."[60] This was diametrically opposed to Gilman's world-view. She wanted to know. She firmly believed that "God was real, under and in and around everything, lifting, lifting. We, conscious of that limitless power, were to find our places, or special work in the world, and when found, do it, do it at all costs."[61] Performing her special work is what she learned from the Swedenborgians, and it is exactly what she set out to accomplish.

At eighteen, propitious circumstances gave Gilman the opportunity to learn a skill that would allow her to be economically independent. A friend of her parents noticed that she had a talent for painting watercolor portraits of flowers. This acquaintance convinced Frederick to pay Gilman's tuition at the Rhode Island School of Design. Not only would this skill allow Gilman the means to make money,

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[58] McCray, Florine, "Distinguished" 3.
[59] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 38.
[60] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 38.

but it brought back the childhood memory of her Aunt Harriet painting watercolors.

The Centennial Women of Rhode Island established the Rhode Island School of Design in 1877. The goal of this institution was to cultivate the arts of design and to provide instruction "in drawing, painting, modeling, and designing, that [artisans] may successfully apply the principles of Art to the requirements of trade and manufacture."[62] The Rhode Island School of Design was committed to the education of painters and other artists and developed a distinct department for the fine arts, with a dedicated faculty.[63]

Although Gilman proclaimed that, "I was no artist, but a skilled craftsman,"[64] she excelled at the school. She says, "My flower-portraiture was perfect of its kind . . . The study in free-hand drawing I liked, the charcoal work, even the beginnings in oil, but chiefly delightful was perspective, which just fitted some corner of my mind. When the exercises were given . . . [mine] was hung on the wall as a specimen of class-work."[65] It would not be long before Gilman's education would come to bear fruit.

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[61] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 42.
[62] Laura and Fenton, "Craft in America" 146.
[63] Laura and Fenton, "Craft in America" 146.
[64] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 46.
[65] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 46.

Gilman took advantage of her newly acquired skills to help support the family. She worked in a monument shop where she learned to apply a wash "to tint evenly a large surface, and the shape of an ogee curve."[66] She also painted advertisements on cards for Kendall's Soap Company. Gilman earned a little money by selling cardboard panels with flowers painted on them. Finally, she also gave lessons in private and at schools.

Gilman earned a little money from giving drawing lessons and from a summer of governessing. To be a governess "was regarded as a perfectly appropriate way for singe middle-class young ladies to make some money."[67] It was in this position, however, that she "learned more about the servant question in that time than most of us ever find out."[68] Not only was Gilman familiar with what it was like to be poor, but she now understood the maltreatment endured by those who had to earn their bread. She came to detest "the dull monotony of the daily domestic routine, the frustration of dealing with a balking bawling child—his mother hovering, spoiling, defending on the sidelines—the relentless task of harnessing her temper, or staying tight-

[66] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 47.
[67] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 112.
[68] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 69.

lipped, cool, and calm."[69] Even though she had a difficult time in some situations, she also enjoyed privilege as a result of her associations with prominent families.

Gilman had made many advantageous connections while she worked and earned her own living. Mary Hazard, who came from an old and noble Rhode Island family, was one of Gilman's pupils. Gilman also insinuated herself into the family of Dr. William F. Channing, where she "found broad free-thinking, scientific talk, earnest promotion of great causes—life."[70] Another one of Gilman's connections, Miss Kate Bucklin, took her along to the theater and bought her books. Her prized friendship was with Martha Luther, who was "a gentle, lovely, intellectual girl."[71]

As Gilman matured, she took an interest in relationships between the sexes. During this time of general exploration, Gilman attempted to understand the nature of male-female relationships. Gilman would take vacations with her acquaintance, Kate Bucklin. One year, a Harvard boy accompanied them,[72] and he seemed to like Gilman. The boy took Gilman to sit on some rocks near the vacation home and told her that he had kissed more than one girl. Gilman disapproved, and the following evening, that

[69] Hill, Mary, "The Making of a Radical Feminist" 112.
[70] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 48.
[71] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 48.

same boy took a different girl to the rocks. Gilman concludes the story when she says, “Some months after, that fine young fellow shot himself.”[73] Gilman seemed to be heavily influenced by her mother’s conservative nature. She inveighed against “ordinary” men who responded to women who flaunted their femininity. She held that, “a girl should meet a boy with the same straightforward friendliness she would show another girl.”[74] Mary normally didn’t allow Gilman to have anything to do with college boys, probably because she didn’t want Gilman to become enthralled with male attention, as Mary had—to her misfortune.[75] Where first-hand experience was unavailable to her, Gilman again turned to literature. The conflict between the sexes seemed to be the root of many social ills.

Gilman’s reading helped her to acquire an acute understanding of and sympathy for the suffering of women. She wrote, “The world seemed to be suffering from many needless evils, evils for which some remedies seemed clear to me even then, I was deeply impressed with the injustices under which women suffered, and still more with the ill effects upon all mankind of this injustice.”[76] Great change

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[72] Gilman does not provide his name.
[73] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 50.
[74] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 52.
[75] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 51.
[76] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 61.

was in progress. Gilman observed that women were beginning to go to college "under criticism and ridicule."[77] She also took note of changes in fundamental ideas concerning the status of women and their expected roles.

Mona Caird's letters column in the English periodical, The Daily Telegraph, "Is Marriage a Failure?" spurred furious debate. The column captivated Gilman. One American reviewer of these letters wrote, "The subject of marriage, which seems to be of inexhaustible interest, is just now undergoing one of its periodic discussions on both sides of the sea . . . To the question, 'Is marriage a failure?' recently put forward in England, and to which such a multiplicity of replies has been made and are still making, here no less than there, yes and no may well be answered."[78] It seemed as though marriage was becoming one option among many for women. This would have a great impact on Gilman's happiness in the future as she was confronted with the choice as well. American society also became more frank about sex education in the schools.

The social reforms pertaining to sexuality had a direct impact on Gilman's intellectual life. Gilman saw parents teach their children about human sexuality,[79] and

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[77] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 61.
[78] Browne, Junius Henri, "To Marry" 432.
[79] Gilman is not specific about the contents of this instruction.

society came to expect chastity of men as well as of women.[80] In one of her first poem entitled, “One Girl of Many,” Gilman defends the fallen woman, citing social necessity and woman’s ignorance.[81] She wrote, “Men cannot live / Without what these disgraceful creatures give.”[82] Gilman also observed the hypocrisy of the older generation who deplored the loosening of sexual mores, noting that the previous generation indulged in the same types of behaviors, but in a more secretive manner. Gilman had difficulty relating to women like her mother. She clearly needed her own role models.

Gilman’s Aunt Catherine was one such model. Many of Gilman’s opinions were echoes of ones that her aunt had made a generation before. Both Gilman and Catherine believed that motherhood was a means by which to improve the human race.[83] Both women advocated sex education for women, and “Beecher even preached ready access to knowledge about contraception.”[84] Similarly, Gilman wrote stories, essays, and poetry “celebrating the high standards that accompany voluntary motherhood.”[85] Catherine Beecher articulated her sentiments in prose, and it is useful to

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[80] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 62.
[81] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 62.
[82] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 119.
[83] Elbert, Monica, “The Sins” 104
[84] Elbert, Monica, “The Sins” 104.

compare the titles of Catherine's works such as American Woman's Home and A Treatise on Domestic Economy with Gilman's The Home and Women and Economics.[86] Gilman clearly looked to her aunt for inspiration. She continued to contemplate the lessons of fiction as well.

Gilman loved the works of Louisa May Alcott and other women who portrayed strong female protagonists.[87] She also read Robert Grant's The Confessions of a Frivolous Girl (1880), which concerns "Miss Alice Palmer, the frivolous girl whose story is portrayed in the guise of both narrative and diary . . . who takes many captives and breaks some hearts among the young men who frequent Newport and Mt. Desert, but whose frivolity fortunately disappears before it has endangered her reputation or ceased to be amusing."[88] Gilman says of it: "I can't say I enjoyed the book much—yes, I think I did though; it seems singularly truthful and exact. Put me in a moralizing mood."[89] She also had "A pleasant evening" with "A Fair Barbarian" (1877) by Frances E. Burnett, which she read in Scribner's.[90] In this story, "Mrs. Burnett brings a typical San Francisco girl into a quiet English town where strangers are looked upon

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[85] Elbert, Monica, "The Sins" 103.
[86] Elbert, Monica, "The Sins" 105.
[87] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 64.
[88] "Confessions" The Dial 37.
[89] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 32.

with disfavor, and Americans with—well, let us call it suspicion."[91] The difficulty that intelligent women had navigating their way in society interested Gilman very much.

Gilman read Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's The Story of Avis,[92] which contends that "women of genius, who have a mission from Providence in one or another of the great lines of art, should not marry; they cannot be faithful wives and mothers without sacrificing talent that ought to be developed."[93] The men of the story are "very selfish . . . and no woman of genius can safely place herself and her possibilities in such limiting and depressing conditions as marriage involves."[94] Gilman would echo these sentiments when she received Charles Walter Stetson's first offer of marriage. Not only could women choose not to marry, but they could also choose to devote their lives to work outside of the domestic sphere. In her first act in the spirit of independence and reform, Gilman took charge of her health.

Gilman developed a keen interest in physical well-being. She relied on William Blakie's How To Get Strong and

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[90] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 33.
[91] "Literary Notes" The Critic 7.
[92] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 54.
[93] "Story of Avis" Zion's Herald 346.
[94] "Story of Avis" Zion's Herald 346.

How To Stay So (1883).[95] On September 16, 1879, she wrote in her diary: “Begin to systematize the ideas on athletics I have held for years with the assistance of Blakie’s How to get Strong.”[96] She studied anatomy, which enhanced her appreciation of the effects of exercise.[97] Gilman, however, observed that there was a dearth of gymnasiums for women. She approached her old calisthenics teacher and asked him to start one. He agreed, but only if enough women showed interest. Gilman went to every woman whom she knew and recruited enough people for a class. As a result, her old teacher “opened a high-grade woman’s gymnasium, beautifully fitted, and let me design a stencil for the wall-border!”[98] This success was exhilarating.

Gilman immersed herself in other works of literature. She had a penchant for gothic stories. In 1875, Edward Bulwer Lytton published Pausians the Spartan: An Unfinished Historical Romance, which included the “House and the Brain.” On March 8, 1789, Gilman read the story, and she and her mother “were both permeated with cold chills. I like it. The mere contact with such clear strong ideas, the even mythical possibilities of the human will, have roused me from my enervating course of novel reading . . . I long

[95]Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 64.
[96] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 15.
[97] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 17

for science again."[99] Imaginative literature heavily impacted Gilman's moods and enthusiasms.

Gilman read an eclectic assortment of literature that included Henry James's Daisy Miller, as well as The Count of Monte Cristo.[100] While reading Emily Jolly's My Son's Wife, she and her mother "make gawks of ourselves over the last of it. Weep and snivel consumedly. I break down, and mother reads and sobs while I stand by the stove drying my handkerchief."[101] Gilman seemed to be a budding philosopher. She wrote, "I don't see why it is any worse to cry over a book than to laugh over it."[102] Gilman enjoyed reading William Dean Howells's A Chance Acquaintance, which "deals with an episode in the life of Miss. Kitty Ellison, the old friend of Mr. Howells's readers, and with her companions in travel—the colonel, and that admirably—drawn picture of inconsistent and paradoxical womanhood, his wife. But into this new summer romance there has come a character that must be called perfectly unique in conception as in completeness."[103] Gilman thought that it was "a most enjoyable work, especially coming after that last one

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[98] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 66.
[99] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 10.
[100] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 12.
[101] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 19.
[102] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 19.
[103] "Literary Notes" Appleton's 765.

[Foxe's Book of Martyrs]."[104] Howells would champion Gilman's future work.

Gilman breathed a sigh of relief upon her twenty-first birthday on July 3, 1881. She had been earning her own money, "a necessary base for freedom, which the young revolters of to-day often overlook."[105] Gilman concluded that no one could ask obedience from her, and she was more determined than ever to realize her perpetual goal of helping humanity. In order to further this end, however, she realized that more study would be necessary. She therefore charted an extended plan to learn language, science, history, economics, and politics. Not only would she be economically secure, but she would also be truly independent of mind.

[104] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 33.
[105] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 70.

Chapter Four
Betrayal: 1881-1884

When Gilman came of age she wrote, “Twenty-one. My own mistress at last.”[1] She celebrated this occasion by locking her door and sitting up late into the night reading and working.[2] At last she was the mistress of her own time, and comings and goings. She made a special habit of going out at night alone. Her mother disapproved of this practice, and a male acquaintance also scolded her, assuring her that man was a woman’s natural protector. Gilman sharply responded that, “the thing a woman is most afraid to meet on a dark street is her natural protector.”[3] Gilman resolved to let no one bully her. She also sought personal connections with others on the basis of intellectual compatibility.

In April 1881, Gilman, her mother, and her Aunt Caroline “moved to a better house, on the north-west corner of Manning and Ives Street.”[4] Gilman loved her little room, a fact that she celebrated in a poem entitled, “My View,” in which she contrasts the mundane streets and the “whole wide southern sky.”[5] It seemed as though Gilman could begin

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[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins ”Living” 70.
[2] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 72.
[3] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, ”Living” 72.
[4] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 68.
[5] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “My View” Line 2.

anew, and she wanted to discover friends with whom she had an intellectual affinity.

Gilman found the type of friendship that she was looking for with Martha Luther. The inseparable pair shared an intellectual bond. They “wrote nonsense verses together in alternate lines, long ballads of adventure.”[6] They also played word games, which soothed Gilman and acted “like [a] massage to the brain.”[7] Martha Luther stimulated Gilman intellectually and also gave her the space to develop her own intellect.

The newly independent Gilman maintained her voracious appetite for reading. She asserts, “I contemplated much further study, meaning to spend time in various countries and learn each language like a native; much more in the sciences, a wide outline knowledge of history, economics, politics, there was no field of knowledge applicable to human need which was outside my purpose.”[8] She also continued to enjoy her studies in the field of religion, and she read widely on the significant social issues of her day. There were, however, some gaps in her education that she first needed to fill.

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[6] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, ”Living” 78.
[7] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, ”Living” 80.
[8] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 71.

She continued to instruct herself in arithmetic and English usage.[9] In order to improve her grammar, Gilman obtained a copy of Edward Sherman Gould's Good English (1880) from the public library.[10] This text served to "remind us of the mistakes we are liable to fall into in using our mother-tongue."[11] Gould employed an entertaining style and was unabashedly anti-Webster.[12] Although the heated debates between grammarians must have had comic value, Gilman always found the subject a tad dry. Like the gap in her knowledge of grammar, there were still significant voids in her historical knowledge.

Gilman had a particular interest in the history of ancient cultures. She read C.F. Keary's Dawn of History: An Introduction to Pre-Historic Study,[13] which was primarily intended for the student or dilettante. The object of this work was to "sift the knowledge scattered through many large and costly volumes on pre-historic archaeology and ethnology, and present some sort of a connected view of the discoveries made within the last twenty years."[14] Keary, himself, wrote: "the present volume is meant to leave the reader, so to say, at the door of history. It is not

[9] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 82.
[10] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 116.
[11] "Notices of New Books" New Englander 596.
[12] "Notices of New Books" New Englander 597.
[13] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 227.

designed to be an anthropology, or a history of the growth of faulty among mankind at large, but only a pre-historic study, an account of the ascertainable doings and thoughts on the part of the people who have gone to make up the historic races of the world."[15]

George Smith's Assyrian Discoveries, which Gilman possessed, meticulously describes the tablets "which give the history of the reigns of Assyrian kings, contemporary with Bible narratives."[16] The book also illustrates the customs of the Chaldeans and Assyrians, and apprises the reader of the political and domestic lives of those peoples. An array of maps and photographs accompanies the text.[17] On November 14, 1881, Gilman obtained a copy of Philip Smith's The Student's Ancient History (1871) from the public library.[18] This treatise is a report of the author's researches on hieroglyphics and cuneiform. Smith writes that, "a knowledge of the History of the East is indispensable to the student of classical literature."[19] It is one likely source of Gilman's familiarity with George Rawlinson's translation of Horodotus, which she possessed

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[14] "Keary's 'Dawn of History'" Scribner's Monthly 795.
[15] Keary, C.F., "Dawn" v.
[16] "Assyrian Discoveries" The New York Observer 46
[17] "Assyrian Discoveries" The New York Observer 46.
[18] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 90.
[19] Smith, George, "Assyrian" vii.

in January 1882.[20] Herodotus made an impression on Gilman, and it is a testament to her respect for her future husband that she chose Herodotus as Stetson's nickname.

Egypt held much mystery for Gilman and her contemporaries. It was a good culture to study. She obtained a copy of Samuel Sharp's History of Egypt (1846).[21] This work sought to expound upon the philosophic and scientific contributions of Egypt. She also read A History of Egypt under the Pharaohs (1881) by Heinrich Brugsch, which provided sixty centuries' history of Egyptian royalty. Gilman's reading in history eventually settled upon ancient Greece, the birthplace of Western thought.

Gilman charmingly chose A Child's History of Greece by John Bonner.[22] Bonner explains: "I have endeavored to relate the leading facts of the history of Greece, from the dawn of historical light to the present day."[23] No education about Greek life, history, and culture is complete without reading Homer. Gilman chose an unknown translation of the Odyssey in prose; she excluded the Iliad.[24] She also read Xenophon's Cyropaedia.[25] Xenophon, who was a contemporary of

[20] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 104
[21] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 113.
[22] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 254.
[23] Bonner, John, "A Child's" Author's Note.
[24] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 229. Gilman's library, as compiled by Gary Scharnhorst and Denise Knight does not mention the translation either.
[25] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 203.

Socrates and Plato, eulogizes about the excellence of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, as a ruler in Cyropaedia, as well as the effectiveness of his institutions.

Modern, historical accounts of Greece were abundantly available. On February 11, 1884, Gilman obtained a copy of John Addington Symonds's Essays on the Greek Poets.[26] The chapter on Aristophanes constitutes the most famous part out of this work, and the author's style is remarkable in that it "delights in flinging handfuls of jeweled words before his reader, wrought rather into ribbons and tapestries than into sentences. Everything that exhales, sparkles, murmurs, finds reverberation in his whispering-gallery of onomatopoeias."[27] She must have enjoyed Symonds's rhetorical flair because Essays on the Greek Poets was the second of Symonds's works that she read; the first was The Renaissance in Italy on August 25, 1883.[28]

Gilman was so interested in Greek history that she returned the novel Hannah Thurston[29] to the library in exchange for George W. Cox's Tales of Ancient Greece.[30] In this historical account, Cox attempts to discern why Greece

[26] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 257.
[27] Harrison, J.A., "Symonds's" 191.
[28] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 214.
[29] I explore this book later in this chapter.
[30] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 236.

rose to power, only to fall 300 years later. He contemplates the perfection and splendors of Greek literature, art, and architecture. Cox details Greece's military skill and power, its great generals, statesmen, orators, philosophers, and poets.[31] This optimistic view of the Greeks was offset by another, more pessimistic one.

A friend loaned Gilman a copy of Social Life in Greece by Rev. J.P. Mahaffy.[32] The book provides an analysis of the mythology of Greek supremacy. An example of such questioning is the author's rejection of traditional notions of the Homeric Greeks as models of bravery and heroism. Rev. Mahaffy describes Greek character not as courageous, but as a little cowardly. Homer's epics, as opposed to providing a description of the birth of society, depict "a decaying order of things."[33] The book so engrossed Gilman that she read it at breakfast and in the evening for two straight days. She finally finished it on February 6, 1884.[34]

C.C. Felton's Ancient and Modern Greece held a place on Gilman's shelves.[35] The two-volume work includes lectures delivered by President Felton at the Lowell Institute of

[31] "Contemporary" The Universalist 259.
[32] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 253.
[33] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 248.
[34] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 256.
[35] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 263.

Boston. There are four lectures in total, which survey Greek language, poetry, life, famous orators, and constitutional scheme.[36] Critics regarded the work as possessing an "easy, flowing rich style, perfectly adapted to the popular lecture."[37]

Not all of Gilman's reading was confined to widely acclaimed texts. One dubious work that she read was William Gladstone's Juventus Mundi.[38] Juventus Mundi documents the religion, manners, and political institutions of the early Hellenes.[39] Gladstone's research was not current. He makes large, unsupported assumptions, and "it is only too much in the spirit of insular scholarship that Mr. Gladstone remarks, in his first sentence, that 'the general opinion holds' the Iliad and the Odyssey to be the work of an individual poet."[40] The general trend in scholarship at this time, however, was the opposite; the "weight of opinion among scholars has been very heavily on the other side in this question."[41]

Gilman was naturally curious about the origins of her own country. Frederick had recommended Hildreth's United States, but it is not clear whether she ever possessed or

[36] "Notices of New Books: Ancient and Modern Greece" New Englander 386.
[37] "Notices of New Books: Ancient and Modern Greece" New Englander 389.
[38] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 230.
[39] "Juventus Mundi" Every Saturday 289.
[40] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 289.

read it. Undeniably, she obtained a copy of John D. Baldwin's Ancient America (1871) from the public library with the specific intent to read it.[42] This work provides an account of the Mound-Builders of the Mississippi valley, and the archaeological remains of Mexico and Central America, which "assumes that the civilization of America was the handiwork of Malays."[43] Baldwin's book was attempting to respond to a gap in the archaeological records of the time.[44] Societies that rebelled against tyranny, such as the United States, intrigued her.

The French Revolution captured the poetic and philosophic imagination of the greatest of minds, including Gilman's. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about it in response to Edmund Burke; William Blake and William Wordsworth both explored its implications in their poetry. Gilman was a keen reader of Romantic poetry, and therefore, the ideas and movements that consumed these men were also in the forefront of her imagination. Mary gave her a copy of The Poetical Works of Wordsworth and inscribed it: "Charlotte A. Perkins from Mother Dec. 25th 1879."[45] Gilman wrote in her diary on August 22, 1882 that she "read a bit of Coleridge

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[41] "Juventus Mundi" Every Saturday 289.
[42] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 151.
[43] "Ancient America" The Literary World 177.
[44] Baldwin, John D., "Ancient" v.
[45] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 219.

after supper."[46] She also had a great day reading Romantic poetry with a friend in October of that year, perusing the works of Wordsworth and Shelley.[47] The Poetical Works of John Keats found its way to Gilman's shelves after her first marriage, and it contains a loving inscription.[48] She also owned the first volume of Shelley's The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, which was given to her by Charles Walter Stetson on November 23, 1882.[49]

Gilman, who had a predisposition to read biographies of great historical figures, read William Henry Lytton Bulwer's Historical Characters: Tallyrand, Cobbett, Mackintosh, Channing (1868).[50] By means of a series of personal sketches, this work gives a general notion of modern history, from the period of the French Revolution in 1789 to Gilman's own times.[51] Gilman took lessons in the French language. She combined her love of history and her interest in all things French.

Thomas Carlyle wrote the History of the French Revolution (1881), which proved interesting to Gilman.[52] She said upon her first reading: "Begin Carlyle's 'French

[46] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 140.
[47] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 154.
[48] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 202. One copy reads, "To my husband Christmas 1884." Another copy that she owned reads, "To Charlotte Perkins Stetson with reverence and love Xmas 1884."
[49] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 212.
[50] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 108.
[51] Bulwer, William Henry Lytton, "Historical Characters" v.

Revolution'; A grand pleasure."[53] The work is not a connected history of the Revolution but is a picaresque.[54] Gilman also possessed a copy of Sartor Resartus.[55] Carlyle tells the tale of a young German man who has been left in the care of a poor couple. The story charts his experiences, struggles, and disappointments. He learns many important truths such as "how to distinguish the essential from the unessential, man in himself from the customs of society which envelops him; and that greatest of created things, a human spirit, from the adventitious circumstances which surround it."[56] Carlyle offers an indictment of Utilitarianism and argues that, "present institutions, and all institutions of human organization, are but shadows, symbols, clothes that may be cast aside; from the second, that there is in man something that is not a shadow, a symbol, something wonderful, something god-like."[57] Gilman was constantly trying to cast aside societal encumbrances to discern the underlying, true nature of women. She also owned a copy of Carlyle's Reminiscences[58] and was clearly an admirer.

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[52] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 185.
[53] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 185.
[54] Guernsey Alfred, "Thomas Carlyle" 757.
[55] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 132.
[56] "Carlyle's Sartor" Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of the Arts 2.
[57] "Carlyle's Sartor" Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts 8.
[58] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 266.

Some of her contemporaries did not share her great appreciation of Carlyle's work, however. A review of the History of the French Revolution appeared in The New Yorker. The author stated "Its new, strange and explosive style will frighten away many, after they glance at its first pages."[59] One gets the impression that Carlyle's manuscript had this effect but that the reviewer stayed with it and ultimately recommend the work to readers.

Some works that Gilman perused straddled the line between history and religion. Gilman continued to struggle with religious issues. She wrote in her autobiography:

> There remained to study the two main processes of religion, the Intake and the Output. The Intake, the relation of the soul to God . . . the individual can derive renewed strength, peace and power from inner contact with this central force. They do it, Christian, Hebrew, Moslem, Buddhist. It is evident that this Force does not care what you call it, but flows in, as if we had tapped the reservoir of the universe.[60]

As a result of this universalistic approach to religion, Gilman's reading on this subject was somewhat eclectic.

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[59] "Carlyle's History" The New-Yorker 813.
[60] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 41.

One religio-historic work that she read was Sinai & Palestine (1862) by Arthur P. Stanley.[61] It is a history of Palestine, and it informs the reader about topographical peculiarities, local scenery, and history that corresponds to scriptural passages and allusions. Stanley "examines the natural features of the countries and their existing remains, less with the view of identifying particular 'holy places' than with tracing the effects of the country upon the history and manners of the chosen people."[62] She also read works such as Crawford H. Toy's History of Religion of Israel (1881),[63] which desired to "present the whole History of Israel in one course of lessons." It seems to have been meant as a textbook from which students could learn Hebrew history from its beginnings through the era of Moses Mendelssonn in thirty lessons.[64]

Gilman's studies in religious doctrine were not limited to Christianity. She read Sir Edwin Arnold's Pearls of Faith (1879),[65] which was a celebration, in verse, of the Hindu theology. On May 19, 1883, Gilman obtained a copy of the Qur'an from the public library.[66] Gilman's brother, Thomas, sent Gilman and her mother two Mormon books, of

[61] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 157.
[62] "Canon Stanley's Sinai and Palestine" Littell's Living Age 159.
[63] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 153.
[64] Toy, Crawford H., "History of Religion in Israel" iii.
[65] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Diaries" 191.

which Gilman read one.[67] She was intrigued. On April 4, 1882, Gilman finished Mrs. A.G. Paddock's The Fate of Madame La Tour (1881), after which she wrote that she was "*slee*—py."[68] This tale recounts the adventures of a family and traces the development of the Mormon system."

This quest for knowledge also directed Gilman to works that question the dictates of religion. On March 5, 1884, Gilman read W.R. Greg's Enigmas of Life, which "is written by one who does not accept the revelations of the Bible on the great themes of religion,—the existence and nature of God, and the doctrine of immortality and the future retribution."[69] Greg uses reason to find solutions to these metaphysical questions. The use of critical thinking in religious matters is exactly what Gilman desired. The text even devoted space to topics in evolutionary theory.

On July 11, 1882, Gilman was given a copy of Herbert Spencer's Data of Ethics (1879)[70] in which the author seeks to establish "rules of right conduct on a scientific basis . . . Now that moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their supposed sacred origins."[71] The conflict

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[66] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Diaries" 196.
[67] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 203. Gilman does not describe these books.
[68] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 116.
[69] "New Publications" The Religious Magazine 503.
[70] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 132.
[71] Spencer, Herbert, "Data" iv.

between evolution and religion was an ever-present topic of discourse.

Religious fiction interested Gilman. Edward Everett Hale, who may have had a hand in the publication of "The Yellow Wallpaper," wrote In His Name (1873), which Gilman read.[72] Hale's book was thought to be "the best Christmas tale since the days of Dickens' Christmas Carol."[73] Critics thought that Hale "has awakened inquiry as to the real meaning of these words, which are so often used in the Bible."[74] Hale explains that the story pertains to the true-life struggle of "the little persecuted church of the Waldensians."[75] During these years, Gilman owned many of her uncle's works such as Crusoe in New York and Other Tales,[76] A Family Flight Over Egypt and Syria,[77] His Level Best and Other Stories,[78] How to Do It,[79] Seven Spanish Cities and the Way to Them,[80] and Ten Times One is Ten: The Possible Reformation.[81] Hale made gifts of these works on the occasion of Gilman's wedding. In Ten Times One is Ten, Hale wrote, "Charlotte Perkins from her uncle Look Up & not

[72] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 275.
[73] Metcalf, Richard, "In His" 346.
[74] Metchalf, Richard, "In His" 346.
[75] Hale, Edward Everett, "In His Name" viii.
[76] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 34.
[77] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 253.
[78] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 198.
[79] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 198.
[80] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 198.
[81] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 198.

Down; look forward & not back / Look out and not in / Lend a hand."[82]

Although her uncle advised Gilman not to look back, the personal biographies and intellectual lives of past, great religious men also interested the precocious Gilman. On September 2, 1881, Gilman finished Christopher Wordsworth's Lives of Eminent Men,[83] which details the histories of ecclesiastical men of England. Extraordinary Men, written by William Russell, was another such book.[84] It includes twenty-two biographies of great men such as Molière, Shakespeare, and Benjamin Franklin. It also sports beautiful wood-cut illustrations. The primary focus is on each subject's period of youth and first successes.[85]

She also obtained a copy of Isaac Taylor's Life of Loyola.[86] In the work, which is split into two parts, the author provides a critical biography of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order. Taylor writes, "In times past great minds led a host—and gave their names to the regions that had been opened, or conquered, under their guidance."[87] The second part of the book explores the Jesuit order's "principles as they are laid up in the early

[82] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 198.
[83] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 76.
[84] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 75.
[85] "Literature" The Literary World 38.
[86] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 248.

documents of the Constitutions, the Spiritual Exercises, and the famous Letter of Obedience."[88] Taylor presents this history "as a philosopher, and his philosophic meditations rise to the region of poetry."[89] Gilman also sought to be a great mind, and a leader for the betterment of humankind. She therefore had to study how these great minds worked.

Gilman read selections from the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.[90] Charles Walter Stetson gave her a copy of the Meditations at Christmas 1887.[91] Upon reading Marcus Aurelius's Thoughts, Gilman stated, "That is the kind of man I admire."[92] As a young man, Marcus Aurelius "assumed the dress of philosophers, something plain and coarse, became a hard student and lived a most laborious, abstemious life."[93] Marucs Aurelius loved his teachers and commemorated their merits.[94]

Gilman says that she read some Socrates.[95] Clearly, she did not read Socrates's original prose,[96] but she most likely read a Platonic dialogue. She does not state which dialogue it was; however, in later years she owned a copy

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[87] Taylor, Isaac, "Loyola" iii-iv.
[88] "Isaac Taylor's 'Loyola'" The Literary World 46.
[89] "Isaac Taylor's 'Loyola'" The Literary World 46.
[90] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 206.
[91] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 206.
[92] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 206.
[93] Antoninus, Marcus Aurelius, "The Thoughts" 2.
[94] Antoninus, Marcus Aurelius, "The Thoughts" 3.
[95] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 190.
[96] Socrates left no writings of his own.

of the Republic.[97] Utopias greatly interested Gilman, and she would write several of her own novels including Moving the Mountain (1911), Herland (1915), and With Her in Ourland (1916). With these works, "Gilman expected her writing to guide readers: she believed readers—when presented with alternatives—able to make intelligent choices to achieve changes they might desire."[98] The alternatives that Gilman proposes include a re-envisioning of gender.

Social change was of great interest to late nineteenth-century Americans. Hot topics, such as education, social and physical health, and the position of women in society captivated the public in general and Gilman in particular. She checked out Albion Tourgée's Bricks Without Straw (1880) from the public library.[99] In this volume, Tourgée exposes the state-of-affairs in the former slaveholding states at the close of the Civil War. The book portrays both the social conditions of those slaveholding states before and since the abolition of slavery. It also illumines the limited success of the Federal Government in changing that condition. Tourgée's books "very effectively demonstrate—that the habitual

[97] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 209.
[98] Kessler, Carol Farley, "Progress Toward Utopia" 2.
[99] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 249.

thinking and feeling of great communities and their habitual acting cannot be suddenly revolutionized by defeat in war."[100] Gilman would also have to contend with habitual thought patterns pertaining to women. The question of how individuals undertook the task of refuting established attitudes through writing would inform her approach to the challenge.

On October 13, 1883, Gilman began reading Samuel Royce's Deterioration and Race Education (1878),[101] the object of which is, according to one critic, to "disturb the indifference of the upper classes as to the condition of their lower-grade brethren."[102] Royce considers the question of education and "entreats a consideration of education as directed to the whole man—intellectual, moral and physical; he argues for an education of the race: for the promotion of the powers of the race rather than the training of a few to unpractical ends."[103] Often, in Women and Economics, Gilman refers to race-function. She says, "Human functions are race-functions, and education is one of them."[104] In this usage, the term "race" seems to have been equated with humanity. Royce uses the term in a

[100] Bacon, Leonard, "Bricks" 1
[101] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 228.
[102] "Deterioration" Christian Union 245.
[103] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 224.
[104] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Economics" 180.

similar way. In the Introduction, which he addresses to his young child, Royce states, “the perishing masses are the import of thy message; nothing can save them but an Education aiming in all its parts at the preservation of the individual and the race. Nothing but the solidarity of mankind, or in more homely phrase, the feeling of mutual responsibility, can give stability to society tottering to its very base.”[105] Gilman truly believed that not only should the mental faculties of the person be strengthened, but so should the individual’s bodily vigor.

Bodily health is the subject of Felix Oswald’s Physical Education, which Gilman owned.[106] Here, Oswald pleads for the better physical education of children and youth. The author is concerned that a lack of physical exercise will lead to the effeminacy of the nation.[107] Clearly, Oswald perceives women as undesirably physically weak and uses the term “effeminacy” as an aspersion. Gilman, however, was not weak. She had been an advocate of physical education and helped to found a gym for women. Many of her assertions in Women and Economics are reiterations of Oswald’s thesis in a sense, although she thinks that women could and should be strong in order to

[105] Royce, Samuel “Deterioration” 3-4.
[106] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 179.
[107] Oswald, Felix, “Physical” 7.

keep the nation powerful. Artificial constraints kept women weak and dependent. On April 19, 1883, Gilman bought a copy of Benjamin Ward Richardson's Diseases of Modern Life,[108] which discusses preventable disease and purports to help to those who are disposed to live as healthily as they can.[109] An important issue of health that the nation was in the midst of grappling with was the health of relations between the sexes

Gilman read John Stuart Mill's On the Subjection of Women (1869)[110] in very little time. She began reading the work on February 24, 1882, and finished it on March 6, 1882. Mill's belief in the equality of women was one of his earliest political convictions.[111] The great philosopher's thesis is that "the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power on one side, nor disability on the other."[112] Mill's position in On the Subjection of Women

[108] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 186.
[109] "Diseases of Modern Life" The Galaxy 719.
[110] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 110.
[111] Mill, J.S. "Subjection" x.
[112] Mill, J.S., "Subjection" x.

is consistent with the views that he expresses in On Liberty, which Gilman also read.[113]

In On Liberty, Mill argues for the primacy of individuality as an essential component of the well-being of civilized humans. Mill also advocates freedom of discussion as a means to improve society. The domestic enslavement of women and their exclusion from public life impedes the happiness and development of half of the human species. Mill's American audience was cautious. One reviewer recognized "Mr. Mill's high position, both as a thinker and as a representative of advanced ideas,"[114] but many Americans held on to deep religious convictions regarding women's subordinate position in society.[115] Gilman wrote that, "The more absolutely woman is segregated to sex-functions only, cut off from all economic use and made wholly dependent on the sex-relation as a means of livelihood, the more pathological does her motherhood become . . . small, weak, ill-proportioned women do not produce large, strong, sturdy, well-made men and women."[116]

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[113] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 260.
[114] "Woman Question" Appleton's 276.
[115] "Woman Question" Appleton's 377. It should also be noted that laws concerning the property of women were better in America than in England.
[116] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Economics" 182.

Gilman believed that fiction had a significant influence on the lives of readers.[117] She had several favorite authors of fiction, with whom she spent much time. George Eliot commanded the esteem of her contemporaries and the love of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. John Morley wrote that Eliot "is one of the few thinkers who can see the weakness of humanity, and the comparatively disappointing and mean nature of most objects of pursuits."[118] Gilman enjoyed George Eliot's poems,[119] but she also enthusiastically read her novels. Morley hailed Eliot's novels because "her pictures of men and women fill the foreground, while thin lines and faint color show us the portentous clouds of fortune or circumstance looming in the dim distance behind them and over their heads."[120] Eliot's novels are true-to-life portraits of ordinary human beings. She does not flatter men in their desire to believe that "scoundrels are ready-made. The troubles which beset men are mostly the fruit of their weakness, and very little the fruit of any inborn devilishness."[121] This, and other truths of human nature are revealed in Eliot's works.

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[117] Kessler, Carol Farley, "Progress Toward Utopia" 2.
[118] "George Eliot's Novels" 490.
[119] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 132.
[120] Morley, John. "George Eliot's Novels" 488.
[121] Morley, John. "George Eliot's Novels" 490.

Gilman read George Eliot's Adam Bede (1859).[122] One reviewer for the Southern Literary Messenger assumed that Eliot was a man: "We are not familiar with the name of George Eliot, but he has written in 'Adam Bede,' a story that makes us wish he will write more."[123] The story depicts English middle-class life, "the love passages being conducted between a brave-hearted carpenter and a pious young woman in humble circumstances, who have no aristocratic friends."[124] The Messenger's mistake reveals a problem that Morley observed: "in this country at least the name of George Eliot has not obtained that hold on the popular mind which by right belongs to it."[125] The Messenger assumed that an author of such genius must be male. Gilman, however, was very familiar with Eliot because Eliot had an intimate friendship with Harriet Beecher Stowe, even though Stowe "told George Eliot that Middlemarch lacked humor."[126]

On Christmas Day, 1882, Gilman received a copy of Eliot's Romola (1881), an historical novel that has original characters and shows "marvelous scholarship

[122] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 133.
[123] "Notices of New Works" The Southern Literary Messenger 319.
[124] "Notices of New Works" The Southern Literary Messenger 319.
[125] J.K.M., "Reviews" 5.
[126] Wagenknecht, Edward, "The Known and the Unknown" 77.

. . .her great moral earnestness, her unique dramatic power, and the nobility and dignity of her style."[127] On September 5, 1883, Gilman began Eliot's Felix Holt the Radical (1866). It is a love story with some elements of mystery, and although "the book presents no great novelty of plot,"[128] it has many other virtues: "There is scarcely a character introduced in 'Felix Holt' which does not admit of careful study . . . It is in thus appealing to average human sentiment that George Eliot evinces her greatest wisdom."[129] Gilman had other favorites as well.

George MacDonald was another author whose works Gilman read in abundance. Unlike Eliot's works, MacDonald's novels "are presentations of the ideal life as he conceived it, rather than a photographic description of life outside himself."[130] MacDonald included recurrent themes in his works. Critics observe that "in each book there is one simple person to whom the meaning of life, or better, the philosophy of MacDonald, has been revealed."[131] Also "his theory of evil is . . . the finite mind that cannot see the whole, and mistakes the helpful and beneficent process for

[127] J.K.M., "Reviews" 5.
[128] J.K.M., "Reviews" 7.
[129] J.K.M., "Reviews" 7-8.
[130] Willcox, Louise, "Neglected" 394-95.
[131] Willcox, Louise, "Neglected" 399.

an end in itself, instead of the soil which must be the food for flowering."[132]

During this early stage of her life, Gilman read Warlock, O' Glen Warlock (1881),[133] a beautifully illustrated romance that centers upon the fortunes of a young man who must struggle to live with a family mystery in order to gain prospects and position.[134] On November 24, 1882, Gilman lent her copy of George MacDonald's A Double Story (1871) to a friend. The story involves the adventures of a pair of naughty girls who accompany a wise woman. One reviewer who enjoyed it notes: "Here and there is a touch of quaintness which borders on poetry."[135]

Tennyson seemed to be a favorite with Gilman and her crowd of friends. She read Queen Mary in one sitting, and she shared "The Lady of Shallot" (1832) with her friend, Millie.[136] Contemporary opinions of Queen Mary were enthusiastic. One reviewer wrote that the work "takes its place among his finest productions." This critic also asserted that, "Queen Mary is written with such faithfulness to history and such apprehension of unity that it is even more unjust than usual to cull extracts from its

[132] Willcox, Louise, "Neglected" 400.
[133] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 80.
[134] "Warlock" Saturday Evening Post 14.
[135] "MacDonald's" Scribner's 590.
[136] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 73.

pages to illustrate its power."[137] Another favorite author, William Dean Howells, would also prove instrumental in Gilman's success as an author in later years.

Gilman read much of William Dean Howells's work. On August 2, 1883, Gilman obtained a copy of Howells's Sleeping Car,[138] which reviewers described as "characteristically witty, and, like much of Mr. Howells's best work, is a most effective putting of the foibles of a charming woman."[139] On October 29, 1883, she read A Woman's Reason (1883),[140] and on December 5, 1883, Gilman read "Howells's little farce of The Register to mother."[141] A review of the story asserted that it is "an adroit, clever, bright, delicate, and amusing use of boarding house life in Boston in dramatic form."[142] Gilman loved those works, which have come to be considered great classics as well.

Gilman owned a copy of Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities.[143] The story, which concerns the particular circumstances of a family caught in the turbulent times of the French Revolution, received some negative treatment in America. One critic asserted that the book "is a most

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[137] "Tennyson's Queen Mary" The Independent 9.
[138] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 213.
[139] "Literary Notes" Christian Union 279.
[140] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 231.
[141] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 238.
[142] "Fiction" The Literary World 327.
[143] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 200.

curious production, whether it is considered in a literary, in a moral, or in a historical point of view. If it had not borne Mr. Dickens' name it would in all probability have hardly met with a single reader.[144]" The book's focus on the fate of individuals in the midst of larger societal changes, however, would have appealed to the budding author.

Gilman enjoyed those classics that explored role reversals along class lines. She sought out Alexandre Dumas's The Man in the Iron Mask (1848) and Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper.[145] Twain's novel recounts the story of Tom Cany, who resembles Edward, Prince of Wales, the son of Henry VIII. The Prince invites Tom to his castle and they exchange clothes. The Prince is replaced by Tom, and the urchin redresses the unjust criminal code in England.[146] The privileged Prince is forced to live the life of a pauper. He comes to empathize with people in this position and "in the last chapter summary justice is meted out, with the villains and the virtuous receiving their due."[147] The ending found here is exactly the way Gilman liked stories to be resolved. Books of adventure were also a favorite with Gilman.

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[144] "A Tale" Littells' Living Age 366.
[145] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 218.
[146] "The Prince and the Pauper" The Critic 368.

As an adventurer herself, Gilman was attracted to well-known works such as Jules Verne's Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.[148] She also owned Robinson Crusoe, Alice Through the Looking Glass,[149] and Gulliver's Travels.[150] These novels seem appropriate since they depict solitary, curious-minded individuals, who must make their way in the world. The Arabian Nights[151] is an interesting choice as it concerns a clever woman, who tells stories in order to save her life. Not only was Gilman keen to read tales of adventure, but clearly romance interested her greatly. Gilman would experience a little romance of her own.

On January, 11 1882, fate intervened. She met Charles Walter Stetson, an aspiring professional painter.[152] Just two weeks after their initial meeting, Stetson proposed marriage. Gilman wrote, "I have this day been asked the one question in a woman's life, and have refused."[153] A few days after rejecting Stetson's proposal, Gilman composed a poem in which she documented her reasons for remaining unmarried. She writes,

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[147] "The Prince and the Pauper" The Critic 368.
[148] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 165.
[149] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 165.
[150] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 126.
[151] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 170.
[152] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "Living" 82.
[153] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 106.

That I had chosen to calmly shirk
A woman's highest, holiest, work
For pleasures I much preferred.
Of all the reasons I freely gave
You have chosen the mean and small
As though in deciding a case like this
I thought myself gaining a world of bliss
And losing nothing at all.[154]

In spite of this rejection, the two remained on friendly terms. Stetson paid visits to Gilman and wrote her letters.

Martha Luther had decided to marry. Gilman wrote in her diary: "O my little girl! My little girl!"[155] The grief caused Gilman to reflect at the year's end: "A year in which I knew the sweetness of perfect friendship, and I have lost it forever . . . I have learned what pain is."[156] Gilman turned to her work for solace. She "pushed on, working every minute of the day except for meals, and three hours in the evening mostly, and carrying this, to me so grievous pain.[157]" Still, Gilman was lonely. She wrote about her attraction to Stetson: "There was the natural force of sex-attraction between two lonely young people, the influence of propinquity. Then, on my part, periods of

[154] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 867.
[155] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 88.
[156] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 97-98.

bitter revulsion, of desperate efforts to regain the dispassionate poise, the balanced judgment I was used to. My mind was not fully clear as to whether I should or should not marry."[158] Martha's betrayal was leading Gilman down a path from which she could not easily deviate.

Gilman did not associate with Stetson purely from a sense of isolation; she clearly admired him. She says,

> he was quite the greatest man, near my own age, that I had ever known. He stood alone, true to his art, in that prosaic mercantile town, handicapped with poverty, indifference and misunderstanding. His genius was marked; although largely self-taught.[159]

Gilman's admiration for Stetson's intellect was apparently great. Her description of him seems very much like a description of herself. She, too, had been crippled by poverty. Because of her sex, she was largely ignored; however, through all of this adversity, she managed to teach herself a great deal. The attention that she received from Stetson was intoxicating. Gilman wrote, "it's a new thing to me to be admired."[160]

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[157] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 81.
[158] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 83.
[159] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 82.
[160] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 103.

The connection with Stetson caused Gilman to become more interested in art theory. On July 9, 1882, she read W.M. Hunt's Talks on Art (1871).[161] After a terse introduction, Hunt puts his reader into the classroom "with the master slashing right and left among his pupils in terse, abrupt, epigrammatic sentences. He touches upon every conceivable point in drawing and coloring; criticizing freely, instructing wisely, illustrating simply, clearly, and with wonderful readiness."[162] On October 27, 1882, she read Thomas Couture's Conversations on Art (1879), which teaches "a straightforward, manly method of painting."[163] She also read Sesame and Lilies (1865) by the great art critic, John Ruskin. Here, he criticizes Victorian notions of manhood and asserts that women are the moral guides of men.[164] Ruskin, who supported the Pre-Raphaelite movement, may have inspired Gilman's interest in William Morris's Hopes and Fears for Art[165] in which Morris defends the decorative arts.

Stetson would bring Rossetti's poems with him when he visited with Gilman.[166] The pair often shared poetry and literature with one another, solidifying their intellectual

[161] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 132.
[162] "W.M. Hunt's" Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine 395.
[163] "Couture's" Scribner's 794.
[164] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 140.
[165] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 207.

bond. Gilman read an eclectic assortment of literature in general. On February 4, 1883, she read Edwin Arnold's poem Indian Song of Songs to Stetson.[167] Here, Arnold translates poetry from the Sanskrit. He seems to have succeeded in his endeavor by adding "a delicate poetic sensibility and a facility of versification which render his interpretations of these rare Indian classics a most interesting and valuable acquisition."[168] The intimate couple shared fiction with each other as well.

On August 2, 1882, Gilman recalls having read The Well Bred Girl to Stetson.[169] Apparently, the well-bred girl

> never accepts a valuable present from a gentleman acquaintance unless engaged to him. She never takes supper or refreshments at a restaurant with a gentleman, unless accompanied by a lady older than herself. She does not permit gentlemen to join her on the street, unless they are intimate acquaintances. She never accepts a seat from a gentleman in a street car without thanking him. She never snubs other young ladies less popular or well favored than herself. She never laughs or talks loudly at public places. She never wears

[166] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 112.
[167] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 173.
[168] "The Indian" The Dial 133.

> clothing so striking as to attract particular attention in public. She never speaks slightingly of her mother."[170]

Brainwashing of this type made it into current imaginative literature, which may have had a detrimental impact on Gilman, weakening her resolve.

Such was the case with Bayard Taylor's Hannah Thurston: A Story of American Life (1863),[171] which Gilman does not have appeared to have finished. The story concerns a Quaker girl who is oppressed by the social system in which she lives. She advocates woman's rights and renounces marriage. Hannah, however, succumbs to her love for Maxwell Woodbury, and she begins to understand "the great truth that woman desires a place in the world which is not man's equal ally."[172] She recognizes "that there is a radical inherent difference in the intellect of the sexes."[173] Prior to finishing the book, Gilman exchanged it for Cox's more interesting and useful history of Greece.

On November 24, 1882, Gilman and Stetson obtained a copy of Margaret O.W. Oliphant's Little Pilgrim (1882).[174] It is the story "of an awakened soul in the blessed

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[169] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 136.
[170] "The Well-Bred Girl" Zion's Herald 382.
[171] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 235.
[172] "Hannah Thurston" Littell's Living Age 45
[173] "Hannah Thurston" Littell's Living Age 45.

immortal life, told with a warmth of feeling, a clearness of faith, and appreciation of the Divine love, and a sympathy for human life and the human heart."[175] Gilman and Stetson also enjoyed the occasional night out at the opera together.

One such opera was entitled Young Mrs. Winthrop, written by American author Bronson Howard. Gilman asserted, "Its success proves to be its truth, and its truth is its shame."[176] In effect, Gilman hated it. There were numerous weaknesses in the production, some of which Gilman articulates: "Much of its action rolls around an invisible woman of fashion, Mrs. Hepworth Dunbar: and much of it rests like a pall on the coffin of the Winthrops' dead child. Mr. Howard is not fertile in stage expedients; he is not skilled in the introduction of episodes which add to the strength of plot while they lessen the strain on the spectators."[177] The couple spent a great deal of time together, and it was hard for Gilman to envisage life apart from Stetson.

Gilman attempted to work out her own feelings on the subject of romantic relationships. She turned, once again, to literature. Gilman's choice of romance, however, is

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[174] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 160.
[175] " A Little Pilgrim" The Literary World 391.
[176] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 227.

indicative of her confused state on the subject. Gilman read Romance of the 19th Century (1881).[178] The story repeats a predictable pattern: "The characters begin by discussing life—why, whither and whence: and then the young people woo. After this the characters discuss life again—whence, whither and why; and then the young people are separated. Finally, the characters discuss life for the last time—whither, why, and whence; and then the young people either marry or die, as the case may be."[179] Certainly, Gilman had done a lot of soul-searching about the important facets of life, but unlike these characters, she seemed to make progress.

Gilman obtained Echo of Passion (1882) by George Lathrop, the husband of Rose Hawthorne.[180] The story concerns "a real echo of a woman's voice which, chancing to meet the ear of an old-time lover sojourning with his young wife among New England hills, recalls to his idle mood the memory of his earlier attachment, and presently awakens in him a responsive echo."[181]

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[177] "The Drama" The Critic 287.
[178] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 115.
[179] "A Romance" The Critic 188.
[180] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 135.
[181] "Review 3" The Dial 38.

On October 24, 1883, Gilman finished William Morris's Love is Enough (1883).[182] The poem, written in alliterative verse, concerns a king who has fallen victim to a mysterious disease. His sickness is the result of the fact that he is in love, but the object of his affections is a dream. He henceforth quests to find his true love.[183]

On February 9, 1884, Gilman records reading Altiora Peto (1881) by Laurence Oliphant, [184] yet another romance. The title is the name of to the young female heroine. The plot is a complicated one, where "everyone works to bring about or prevent a marriage; and the game of misleading, cross-purposes, and maneuvering is soon in full progress, to the end of all seeming to be hopelessly mixed up, as there are not less than seven men concerned."[185]

After she formed an attachment to Stetson, Gilman became less and less the mistress of her own intellectual development. Stetson betrayed Gilman and the sanctity of their individual intellectual identities when he began to dictate what Gilman read. On April 5, 1883, a friend desired to give a copy of Leaves of Grass to Gilman. She was, however, forced to decline it.[186] Gilman simply wrote,

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[182] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 230.
[183] "Love is Enough" Littell's Living Age 165.
[184] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 257.
[185] "Fiction" The Literary World 391.
[186] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 184.

“Mr. O’Connor had left for me a beautiful new copy of ‘Leaves of Grass.’ Walt. Whitman is an intimate friend of his. I am obliged to decline, as I promised Walter I would not read it.”[187] Stetson seems to not have trusted Gilman’s judgment. He was disturbed by Whitman’s verse, which Stetson viewed as portraying men as brutes.[188]

Stetson had persisted in his proposals of marriage, and Gilman finally betrayed herself. On May 2, 1884, Stetson and Gilman married. Her reaction to the marital home is similar to that of Dorthea Brooke in Eliot’s Middlemarch when she surveys Mr. Casaubon’s house. Eliot describes the scene in Middlemarch as follows: “this was to be the home of her wifehood, and she looked up with eyes full of confidence to Mr. Casaubon when he drew her attention specially to some actual arrangement and asked her if she would like an alteration. All appeals to her taste she met gratefully but saw nothing to alter.”[189] Gilman reiterated the deluded self-sacrifice when she told Stetson, “I have no tastes and no desires. I shall like whatever you do.”[190] This delusion of Gilman’s would cost her dearly.

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[187] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 184.
[188] Lane, Ann J. “To Herland and Beyond” 84.
[189] Eliot, George, “Middlemarch” 74.
[190] Gilman, “Living” 85.

Charlotte Anna Perkins had been independent in income and in her intellectual pursuits. She had developed close personal relationships based on intellectual affinity. As a wife and mother, Charlotte Stetson’s free time would become increasingly limited. She would no longer have the freedom to do what she was used to doing and what she dearly loved. As yet unimagined hardship and disaster loomed.

Chapter Five
Dependence and Depression: 1884-1887

Gilman was excited when Don Quixote by Cervantes's, illustrated by Tony Johannot, arrived at the house on May 13, 1884.[1] It is a picaresque novel, and a review of the book in The Southern Literary Messenger called it "an amusing satire on overheated enthusiasm, or as a corrective administered to a vitiated public taste."[2] The reviewer also asserted that Cervantes's masterpiece depicts "the noble soul thwarted in every endeavor, a man of acute sensibility exposed to ridicule at every turn, deeds of high emprise ending in absurd and whimisal sallies."[3] Gilman seemed to epitomize this sentiment. Her natural genius and prior hard work were being wasted in domestic slavery. Her life had turned into a parody of the principles that she had previously espoused.

Charles Walter Stetson's belief in the division of labor along gender lines left Gilman to manage the household. The lack of personal freedom that this great and largely dull responsibility entailed figured in much of her writing. Gilman describes the typical day of a woman who labors under such a marriage in her story, "Through This." The female protagonist details how every minute of her day is spent in slavish service

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[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 281.
[2] "Don Quixote de la Mancha" Southern Literary Messenger 190.
[3] "Don Quixote de la Mancha" Southern Literary Messenger 190.

to the household and its other inhabitants. She says, “I think housework is noble if you do it in the right spirit.”[4] If not done in such a spirit, it is objectively ignoble. Although Jane prefers to maintain her friendships, she is too exhausted by nightfall even to answer a friend’s letter. She collapses at the end of the day, and although she is hopeful that tomorrow will bring solitude, all she can do is let the dreary routine begin again.

In her poem “To the Young Wife,” Gilman warns the bride-to-be of the false pride of marriage: “paltry queenship in that narrow place / Your antique labors, your restricted space / Your working all alone . . . A life with no beyond!”[5] Gilman deeply felt her new, diminished role. In letters to Stetson, she articulates the loss of power that she immediately experienced after the wedding: “I have lost power. I do not feel myself so strong a person as I was before. I seem to have taken a lower seat, to have become less in some way, to have shrunk.”[6] Duty, the expectations of religion, strong heroines, the lessons of history, and the concerns of women took center stage in her reading habits during these years of suffering and confinement.

At first, Gilman fought for recognition and space. She was a very good cook, and recalls “a New York Clubman who told me I

[4] Knight, Denise D. “The Reincarnation of Jane” 300.
[5] Knight, Denise D. “The Reincarnation of Jane” lines 6-12.
[6] Hill, Mary, “The Making of a Radical Feminist” 149.

could command a high salary as a chef in his club."[7] On May 9, 1884, she suggested that Charles "pay me for my services; and he much dislikes the idea . . . mutual misery. Bed and cry."[8] The request caused deep contention in the house, but Gilman never abandoned her belief that economic independence for women within marriage was possible and preferable to the current state of things. Marriage humor served as a temporary outlet for Gilman.

In Women and Economics, Gilman quotes from Punch on the subject of marriage: "'Marriage is a lottery,' is a common saying among us. 'The course of true love never did run smooth.' And we quote with unction Punch's advice to those about to marry,— 'Don't!'"[9] Her journal, during her first years of marriage records her delight at reading Punch, which she obtained at the public library.[10] The publication's formula was simple and included "a mixture of text and illustrations, of humor and social criticism . . . Punch served as a weekly illustrated comic supplement to The Times, reflecting as a distorted mirror a selection of the week's news and jauntily editorializing on its significance."[11]

Stories of successful, professional women fascinated Gilman while she was attempting to adjust to married life. One story

[7] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 85.
[8] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 280.
[9] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Economics" 28.
[10] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 280
[11] Altick, Richard D., "Punch" xviii-xix.

that depicts the successful female professional is Dr. Zay by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.[12] As Phelps draws her, Dr. Zay is a female physician who continues to practice in a male-dominated profession even after she has found true love. Although many reviewers praised Phelps for her ability to tell a story, the character of Dr. Zay drew strong censure. Phelps's protagonist was thought to have "masculine qualities unusual even in men, and with an offensive display of what the author absurdly images to be 'unquestionable learning' makes her a ridiculous impossibility."[13] The character would not have appeared so outlandish to Gilman, who, in her youth, had seen such a female physician. Others acknowledged Phelps's abilities as a writer, but also made normative claims about women and society: "No woman should be prevented from adopting any profession that she may like, and it is not singular that medicine should offer great attractions to an earnest and helpful women; but that any woman should wish after marriage to continue the profession. . . is hard to understand."[14] No wonder Gilman felt as though her position in the world had diminished—that is exactly how others seemed to view it as well.

[12] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 310.
[13] "Dr. Zay" Medical News 577.
[14] "Recent Fiction" The Critic 326.

Stetson wanted to influence Gilman's perception of married life; therefore, he read Human Intercourse to her.[15] In this volume, Philip Hamerton explores passionate love and companionship in marriage. The author writes: "With her [your wife] you are free to be as much yourself as when alone; you say what you think and she understands you. Your silence does not offend her . . . you know that you can trust her love, which is as unfailing as a law of nature."[16] The pre-Stepford wife, it seems, is supposed to be more than human. She must be completely understanding and under no circumstances criticize her husband's ill-informed opinions or harmful world-views. She must patiently endure his sulky moods and may command absolutely no respect from him. A review found in The Unitarian Review and Religious Magazine considered the book "trivial," and the reviewer found that the "general tone of the book is irritating and depressing."[17] The stodgy advice book that Stetson liked contrasted strongly to the tomes concerning personal frustration under repressive regimes that Gilman chose for herself.

The portrait of the sympathetic female, trapped in a marriage with a boor during a time of social unrest, is the subject of Sir Walter Scott's novel The Fair Maid of Perth.[18] The

[15] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 309.
[16] Hamerton, Philip, "Human" 61.
[17] J.W.C. "Human Intercourse" The Unitarian Review 190.
[18] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 285.

novel is set during the last fourteen years of the reign of the Scottish monarch Robert the Third, who was also called the "gentle but weak monarch."[19] According to one review, the heroine's "piety, her love for her father, and devotion to him, and her virtues will charm every susceptible heart; but a slight regret will be felt, perhaps, by all or most of their sex, that a creature so delicate and pure, with so much more of heaven than earth in her, should become the wife of a noted brawler, who, with all his virtues, is stained with blood."[20] Scott's protagonist, Catherine, suffers because she is mindlessly obedient to her parents, which "is paramount to selfish gratification."[21] Gilman clearly thought that the recommended habit of mindless self-sacrifice that was expected of women was the cause of many personal as well as social evils.

Gilman enjoyed Guenn by Blanche Howard on July 24, 1884.[22] This story features an "admirably drawn"[23] heroine. The story drew much acclaim, as well as criticism. The Christian Union described it as "a tragedy with an imaginative motive, strongly realistic in treatment" that "exhibits a very marked power of construction."[24] Contemporary critics also thought that it was

[19] Gaz, U.S. "Literary" Philadelphia Album 24.
[20] Gaz, U.S. "Literary" Philadelphia Album 24.
[21] Gaz. U.S. "Literary" Philadelphia Album 24.
[22] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 293.
[23] "Guenn" The Critic 508.
[24] "Guenn" Christian Union 527.

over the top: “Miss Howard has . . . described, and described, and described—where one stroke of an artist’s brush would be worth all her pen-and-ink sketches.”[25] Hyperbole did not deter Gilman from enjoying stories that centered on strong female protagonists. The male authors whom she encountered, however, tended to have less sympathy for such characters.

A Perilous Secret by Charles Reade[26] was reviewed as “a fair mirror of the times, with exaggerations only of the passions, weaknesses, foibles, and misfortunes to which we are all liable.”[27] The story concerns the villain, Leonard Monckton, an explosion at a coal mine, and the mystery surrounding the true genealogy of Mary Hope. Mary is also embroiled in a complicated set of love affairs, a set of circumstances that Monckton hopes to profit from.[28] The representation of female characters is typical for the times. Reade drew Mary, along with the other female characters, as “illogical, unreasonable, not very natural but always entertaining young women.”[29] This male stereotype of women contrasts to the female view of her heroine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning drew a lively heroine who would appeal to Gilman in Aurora Leigh. On February 5, 1885, Gilman

[25] “Guenn” The Critic 509.
[26] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 301.
[27] “A Perilous Secret” The Literary World 256.
[28] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Diaries” 256.
[29] “Recent Fiction” The Critic 29.

read Aurora Leigh,[30] a work that many considered as "fully establishing its author the first poet of the Age."[31] The story concerns an orphaned girl of genius, who is educated by her aunt. The protagonist is thrown into the world when her relative dies. She rejects the advances of her cousin Romney Leigh. Aurora and Romney go their separate ways and have adventures, but they finally meet and marry in Italy.[32] The New Englander asserted that the poem "contains choice word-pictures, that Shakespeare himself might not blush to own, and sarcasm that Juvenal would have admired."[33] The status of female poets and the reception of their work was of concern to Gilman. The New Englander notes that, "It is now many years, since we were sharply criticized for asserting that Mrs. Hemans rivaled the most tuneful bards in the melodious rhythm of her verses. . . Mrs. Browning labors, as we think, under unnecessary apprehension that her poem will not be properly estimated, because she is a woman."[34]

As noted, another great author who focused on the heroine, and whose books populated Gilman's shelves, was George Eliot. Gilman read The Mill on the Floss "with much enjoyment."[35] Nineteenth-century critics praised the book: "The author of

[30] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 315.
[31] "Aurora Leigh" Saturday Evening Post 2.
[32] "Aurora Leigh" New Englander 159.
[33] "Aurora Leigh" New Englander 159.
[34] "Aurora Leigh" New Englander 159.

'Adam Bede' has little necessity to be commended to the public; yet we are of the opinion that 'The Mill on the Floss' will enhance his already enviable reputation."[36] The story, like Browning's masterpiece, concerns the fortunes of an intellectually gifted heroine.

On October 10, 1885, Gilman began reading Ramona by Helen Maria Hunt Jackson.[37] The story again centers on a powerful heroine. Ramona loves Alesandro, who is of American Indian decent. The novel reveals "the ill-treatment the Indians have received at the hands of Americans" and "It is the most philanthropic piece of fiction any writer has produced in this country since 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"[38] In her struggle to maintain some intellectual normality in spite of her new solitary, domestic routine, Gilman consistently read the great authors of her day, as well as the familiar favorites.

Gilman tried to pick up the thread of her prior, independent life. She read a treatment of Rome and Carthage, which she obtained from the public library.[39] Although Gilman is not clear which text it was, there are two contenders. The Rev. Sir G.W. Cox and C. Sankey edited a treatise on Roman Senate intrigues and the jealousies of Carthaginian judges. The text

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[35] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 337.
[36] "The Mill on the Floss" The Knickerbocker 637.
[37] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 338.
[38] "Ramona" The Nassau Literary Magazine 92.
[39] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 310.

presents a connected account of the founding and rapid growth of Carthage. There also existed a multivolume reference work published by Scribner's entitled, Epochs of Ancient History. R. Bosworth Smith pays special attention to Rome and Carthage, as well as the Punic Wars in volume two of that set. There is good reason to believe that the former volume is the one that Gilman possessed because she owned a copy of George Cox's Tales of Ancient Greece in 1883.[40] Gilman, as shown, had a history of loyalty to the authors she liked.

As in previous years, stories of revolution and revolt where highly attractive to Gilman. She began Madame Thérèse on May 29, 1884,[41] which explores the disrupted life of Dr. Jacob Wagner, an old doctor and philosopher, who lives in the midst of the French Revolution. He rescues the beautiful and charming Madame Thérèse, who has been left for dead in the streets of her village. Gilman owned William Makepeace Thackeray's Chronicle of Drum.[42] The ballad contains beautiful illustrations. The story recounts the hardships of a particular military family. Gilman also read The History of the Conscript of 1813,"[43] by Erckman-Chartrain, which is a sustained argument against war and those who wage it. The book, which is illustrated and divided into several parts, presents "a vivid and pathetic account of the

[40] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 193.
[41] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 284.
[42] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 281.

passage of the grande armée through Alsace on its way to Moscow . . . the second and major portion narrates the rude surprise of the continuation of warfare."[44] Finally, Gilman obtained Waterloo: A Sequel to the Conscript of 1813[45] by Erckmann-Chartrain, which narrates the events at Waterloo from the individual perspective of a private soldier participating in the battle and recounting only what he saw.[46] The hardships that individuals faced in the wake of repressive regimes spoke to Gilman.

Gilman continued to read loyally her favorite fiction writers, such as George MacDonald. She obtained a copies of What's Mine's Mine[47] and Phantastes.[48] Phantastes is a fairy romance, and according to Aldline, "[George MacDonald's] fairy stories are the best ever written by an English author."[49] The story takes the reader into "the homes and hearts of the Scottish people."[50] This blending of history and fantasy appealed to Gilman's adult sensibility and frustrated childhood ambitions of authorship.

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[43] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 284.
[44] Erckmann-Chartrain, "Conscript" viii.
[45] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 285.
[46] Erckmann-Chartrain, "Conscript" vii.
[47] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 350.
[48] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 285.
[49] "Literature." The Aldine 67.
[50] "Literature" The Aldine 67.

Gilman read William Dean Howells's The Mouse Trap[51], asserting that it was "rather poor for him; too exaggerated to be funny."[52] In The Mouse Trap, "the characters . . . do nothing in particular, but they talk in a most natural and amusing way, and get into moral entanglements quite as mirth-provoking, in their way, as those grosser and more physical entanglements which the farce, as properly understood, has for its object to create."[53] Gilman loved the great canonical authors of the past as well.

Gilman enjoyed the plays of William Shakespeare. Of Shakespeare's works, she enjoyed King John,[54] Titus Andronicus[55], and Two Gentlemen of Verona.[56] The choice of these relatively minor plays is a testament to Gilman's dedication to whatever reading project she settled on. Gilman was interested in origins. She obtained a copy of Plutarch's Lives from the public library, a text from which Shakespeare is known to have drawn many of his most notable characters.[57] On July 25, 1884, Stetson brought home The Inferno.[58] Like the works of Shakespeare, this classic text was essential reading material for generally well-educated individuals.

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[51] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 368.
[52] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 368.
[53] Payne, William, "Recent" The Dial 59.
[54] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 282.
[55] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 308.
[56] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 319.
[57] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 316.

Gilman also enjoyed the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's style would later prove to be a tremendous influence on Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper."[59] Gilman read "The Black Cat" to her mother.[60] The narrator of this story asserts that human beings are essentially perverse. It also includes the grisly murder of a completely self-sacrificing wife. She is the type of female spouse that Philip Hamerton would have approved of—one who never complains, nor checks her husband's behavior. As seen, some of the works that Gilman chose for herself included misfortune for a completely self-sacrificing female character. Gilman also learned from her mother's mistakes in this respect. She says that her mother was "absolutely loyal, as loving as a spaniel which no ill treatment can alienate."[61] She recalls that her mother loved her father until death: "She was with me in Oakland, California, at the time, and father was then a librarian in San Francisco, just across the bay. She longed, she asked to see him before she died. As long as she was able to be up, she sat always at the window watching for that beloved face. He never came."[62] Gilman also thought deeply about child rearing and asserts, "If love, devotion to duty, sublime self-sacrifice,

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[58] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 294.
[59] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 119.
[60] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 310.
[61] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 9.
[62] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 9.

were enough in child-culture, mothers would achieve better results."[63]

There is a long interlude in Gilman's diary due to ill-health between October 13, 1884 and January 1, 1885. On January 1, 1885, Gilman complained that she had read and written little.[64] After this period, religion and parenting occupied Gilman's intellectual life. She discovered that she was pregnant with her daughter, Katherine.

Gilman read Emerson's Compensation, which she didn't seem to like.[65] Emerson seems to advocate passive acceptance of injustice. Here, "the doctrine complained of is the belief of mankind that another world is needed to set right the inequalities of this . . . When he tells us, then the true doctrine of Omnipresence is, that God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb, we can only repeat our former query, Can the man, who gives utterance to such wholesale rubbish, place any confidence in it himself?"[66] Emerson's views are not very satisfying to a woman who desperately needed to change her circumstances.

On March 11, 1885, Gilman states that she read Babyhood,[67] "a new magazine 'devoted exclusively to the care of infants and

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[63] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 11.
[64] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 308.
[65] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 310.
[66] "The Emerson Mania" Littell's Living Age 346.
[67] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 322.

young children and the general interests of the nursery.'"[68] The purpose of this magazine was to disseminate the most current theories concerning child-raising. On March 23, 1885, Katherine Stetson was born. Gilman neglected her journal for three weeks, after which there was a considerable period during which Gilman writes sporadically, and she records ill-health. The birth of Katherine was an event that seemed to aggravate Gilman's depression.[69] When her nurse left a month after the birth, Gilman recalls, "I was left alone with the child. I broke so fast that we sent for my mother . . . I would hold her close—that lovely child!—and instead of love and happiness, feel only pain."[70] She found herself unable to do the work that she loved: "I was unable to read, and my mind was exclusively occupied with unpleasant things."[71]

Gilman tried her best with her daughter, Katherine. The new mother obtained a copy of The Quincy Method of Teaching, which advocates a method of instruction focusing not on a system but on the individual child. According to this method, "the teacher . . . may govern his pupils only to that degree which is necessary to secure individual development; all beyond is for show and for evil."[72] The use of the masculine pronoun is

[68] "Mother's Department" Arthur's Home Magazine 125.
[69] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 330.
[70] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 89-90.
[71] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 90.
[72] "The Quincy Method of Teaching" Christian Union 167.

something that Gilman was probably accustomed to reading. She had, however, much preferred the life that males lived in American society. The Quincy method also advocated increased maternal involvement: “There is no person, except the mother, who needs to be so capable, so accomplished, so consummate in methods as the teacher. These two, the mother and the teacher, make the scholar, the orator, the statesman, the theologian, the man, the woman.”[73] Quincy clearly saw the mother and teacher as having essentially separate roles. This may have been the result of Quincy’s bias that teachers were men. Charlotte clearly thought that mothers needed to have an education in order informatively to guide her child’s development. Gilman notes, “Childhood is a transient condition; what we are trying to ‘raise’ is a competent adult. Just ‘minding’ under compulsion, does not train the mind to govern conduct by principle or by consequence in later life.”[74]

As her depression worsened, Gilman restlessly sought for a new reading project, which Charles attempted to restrict. She also chose works that informed her about mental illness. One such text was William B. Carpenter’s Principles of Mental Physiology: The Training and Discipline of the Mind, and the

[73] “The Quincy Methods” Friends’ Intelligencer 764.
[74] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, “Living” 157.

Study of its Moribund Conditions.[75] Carpenter works to defend the claim that "the Automatic activity of Man is subject in proportion to the development of his Volitional power,—that is, the power exerted by the Ego not only with a distinct purpose, but with a consciousness of effort, the strength of which is the mark and measure of its exercise."[76] The role of the will to control mental illness was a touchy subject to Gilman. When she exhibited signs of depression, friends told her to use her will to force happiness into her life.[77] Not surprisingly, it did not work. Another text on the subject that Gilman obtained was Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy, which Walter read to her on September 27, 1886. She called it a "funny book."[78] Burton asserts that "There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business."[79] Gilman had business aplenty. She describes a typical day: "Breakfast, dishes, etc. Write not to Mrs. Smith. Walk over with Walter. Shop. Get a sponge for floors. Get my dollar of Mrs. Cushing and leave her receipt in full. Go see Grace Channing & stay to lunch. Nice talk. Call on Mrs. Blake. Home. Walter here. Dinner."[80] Her

[75] Scharnhorst and Knight, "Library" 191.
[76] Carpenter, Benjamin, "Principles" xxiv.
[77] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 90.
[78] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 346.
[79] Burton, Robert, "Anatomy" 7.
[80] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 287.

hectic routine could not save her from depression. Perhaps her schedule aggravated her condition.

In what seems to have been an act of defiance against her routine, Gilman was determined to learn everything that she could about women. In furtherance of her new project, Gilman read Women of France During the Eighteenth Century by Julia Kavanagh.[81] In two volumes, Kavanagh presents readers with "sketches of the most celebrated women of France. The work is written in a terse and elegant style, and must become universally popular."[82] The author wrote: "It was chiefly in the eighteenth century that women exercised, to its fullest extent, the great and remarkable influence they always possessed in France."[83]

In an attempt to insinuate himself into Gilman's intellectual life once again, Stetson read Women of the Nineteenth Century by Margaret Fuller to his ailing wife.[84] When she finished the book on January 23, she called it "Fine!"[85] Fuller's thesis is that "woman should be the friend, the companion, the real partner of man in all his pursuits, rather than the mere ornament of his parlor, or the servant of his

[81] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 368.
[82] "Editors' Book Table" Godey's Lady's Book 418.
[83] Kavanagh, Julia, "Women of France" 4.
[84] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 375.
[85] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 371.

senses."[86] The Broadway Journal's reviewer said that Fuller was "a woman of more powerful intellect, comprehensive thought, and thorough education, than any other American authoress."[87]

Stetson again attempted to impede Gilman's intellectual freedom. On February 5, 1887, Gilman explains that she has left off her course of reading on women's issues for two weeks in order to oblige her husband.[88] In what seems to have been a reward for her forbearance, Stetson brought home The History of Womankind in Western Europe by Thomas Wright.[89] Wright's project was to "give, as far as possible, a true picture of female life in each particular period."[90] Gilman says that it "is a very useful book."[91]

Gilman was unable to do housework because of the severe depressive states that she experienced. Stetson took up some of the slack, but he soon learned what happens to the intelligent human psyche when kept to a monotonous routine. In his diary, Stetson writes: "There is housework to do and though she does what she can, I find enough to tire me, and make me feel sometimes that I am wasting my energy, power that should be applied to my art. Yet it plainly is my duty and I do it as cheerfully as I can. For love's sake one must bear all things, I

[86] "Reviews" Broadway Journal 97.
[87] "Reviews" Broadway Journal 97.
[88] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 373.
[89] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 373.
[90] Wright, Thomas, "Womankind" vii.

fancy I shall be stronger for it after it is over. But I feel certain that my other work is not so well done because of it."[92] If Stetson were reflective, he might have thought that domestic work affected Gilman in the same way. Alas, no such epiphany seems to have occurred to him.

Gilman struggled to concentrate. She read some works that did not present a progressive concept of women's roles. On February 10, 1887, Gilman finished Chaplet of Pearls, written by Gilman Yonge.[93] This work is an historical romance, and "The story commences some time previous to the massacre [of St. Bartholomew], that event serving simply as the pivotal incident on which the plot hinges . . . The story concerns the fortunes of the representatives of two rival branches of noble house of Ribaumont—known respectively as the White and Black from the blonde and brunette characteristics of the families."[94] She may have liked it because she obtained another book by Yonge. Gilman read Yonge's Womankind,[95] which was reviewed as "a thoughtful discussion of . . . the status of women, her early training, social and religious, the faults of childhood, its school life, the young woman, her dress, friendship, courtship, wives,

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[91] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 373.
[92] Stetson, Charles Walter, "Endure" 276.
[93] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 374.
[94] "Reviews of New Books" The Albion 95.
[95] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 375.

servants, strong-minded woman, etc."[96] The author proclaims on the first page that woman is inferior to man due to her role in the Christian story of the Fall.[97] Charlotte detested it, calling it "a weak book."[98]

Gilman turned away from Gilman Yonge and obtained a copy of Madame D'Hericourt's, A Philosophy of Woman, which was banned in France. The author writes, "My end is to prove that woman has the same rights as man . . .to emancipate woman is to acknowledge and declare her free, the equal of man in the social and moral law, and in labor."[99] In language that Gilman echoes in Women and Economics, D'Hericourt writes that the inferiority in which women are held "enfeebles the race."[100]

In A Woman's Thoughts about Women, Dinah Maria Mulock-Craik purports to express for women "what they themselves consciously or unconsciously oftentimes thought."[101] Mulock-Craik covers subjects such as self-dependence, female friendships, and women growing old. In the chapter on self-dependence, she writes, "we women are, no less than men, each of us a distinct existence . . .we are certainly independent agents, and all our life long we are accountable only, in the highest sense, to our own souls."[102]

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[96] "Womankind." Zion's Herald 322.
[97] "Womankind" The Galaxy 358.
[98] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 375.
[99] D'Hhericourt, Madame, "Philosophy" ix.
[100] D'Hericourt, Madame, "Philosophy" x.
[101] Mulock-Craik, Dinah Maria, "A Woman's Thoughts" iv.
[102] Mulock-Craik, Dinah Maria, "A Woman's Thoughts" 26.

It seems to Mulock-Craik to be a waste of intellect for talented women to have to state, over and over again, obvious truths that sexist men and brainwashed women refuse to acknowledge. Mulock-Craik articulates the common fears of many women: "I once heard a lady say—a tenderly-reared and tender-hearted woman—that if her riches made themselves wings, as in these times riches will, she did not know anything in the world that she could turn her hand to, and keep herself from starving."[103] Such a sentiment would have resonated with Gilman, whose own mother was abandoned without skills or employment, with two small children utterly dependent upon her.

Gilman seems to have stopped reading completely while her most current reading project was yet unfinished. Her last entry in her diary was recorded on April 19, 1887. On that date she says, "Begin to write an account of myself for the doctor."[104] Her diary ceases until 1890, by which time Gilman had undergone the strictures of the rest cure. The restricted space inherent in the nineteenth-century marriage, the birth of Katherine, and her experiences under the care of Dr. Mitchell damaged Gilman's capacity for intellectual growth. In spite of the fact that Gilman could no longer engage in her beloved studies, she had a solid foundation on which to rely. This base ensured that she

[103] Mulock-Craik, Dinah Maria, "A Woman's Thoughts" 27.
[104] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Diaries" 385.

would in time become one of the greatest rhetoricians and authors that the United States has ever produced.

Postscript

By the fall of 1887, in a span of just about six months, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell managed to decimate Gilman's twenty-four years of hard intellectual work. According to Mitchell, hysteria caused Gilman to neglect her wifely responsibilities.[1] In an early consultation, Mitchell displayed his compassionate bedside manner when he announced, "'I've had two women of your blood here already.'"[2] On a previous occasion, Gilman had read Dante's Inferno. Like Dante, Gilman would have to pass through Hell before achieving redemption. Unlike Dante, however, Gilman had no philosophic guide.

Mitchell championed a rest cure in order to treat nervous disorders, or "neurasthenia." Mitchell advocated six to eight weeks of complete bed rest during which the patient could not sit up, feed herself, read, or write. She was also to be completely isolated from familiar human contact, including her family. The patient was to be fed excessively, especially on milk. Finally, she was to receive massages and electricity (i.e., electric shocks) in order to keep her muscles from atrophying. Gilman says, "I was put to bed and kept there. I was fed, bathed, rubbed,

[1] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 95.
[2] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 95.

and responded with the vigorous body of twenty-six."[3] Mitchell told this woman who, from a very early age had spent most of her days reading and writing, to "'Live as domestic a life as possible . . . Lie down an hour after each meal. Have but two hours' intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live.'"[4] Gilman followed Mitchell's directions to the letter.

The treatment caused the following results for Gilman: "The mental agony grew so unbearable that I would sit blankly moving my head from side to side—to get out from under the pain . . I made a rag baby, hung it on a doorknob and played with it. I would crawl into remote closets and under beds—to hide from the grinding pressure of that profound distress."[5] There was no way that she could have predicted this outcome.

Gilman managed to disengage herself from Mitchell's rest "cure." It took her forty more years imperfectly to recover from it. After her divorce from Stetson in 1894, Gilman was able to travel freely and to fulfill her lifelong goal of helping humanity. She eventually gave the institution of marriage another chance. On June 11, 1900, she married George Houghton Gilman, and "this marriage

[3] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 96.
[4] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 96.
[5] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 96.

created the safe place for her to do her work that Stetson had earlier wanted from her for his work."[6] The new couple's union prospered because her second husband gave Gilman "the support and collaboration of a caring companion."[7] In spite of her progress during these healing years, Stetson and Mitchell had done significant damage to Gilman's intellectual life.

In her autobiography, Gilman articulates the combined effect that Stetson and Mitchell wrought on her. She admitted that to be "forced to refuse invitations, to back out of work that seems easy, to own that I cannot read a heavy book" embarrassed her a great deal. She laments, "The powerful mind I had to begin with had broken at twenty-four."[8]

[6] Kessler, Carol Farley, "Progress Toward Utopia" 33.
[7] Kessler, Carol Farley, "Progress Toward Utopia" 33.
[8] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, "Living" 98.

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