

is both fundamental to Smith's argument and distressingly misguided. I regret that she denies having written what is plain on the page.

Lamentably, my esteemed colleague does not stop there. Having misused the evidence of her own text, she concludes with assertions for which there is no evidence whatsoever. At no point in my published remarks do I say or even remotely imply that I see "the hermeneutic circle as a positive phenomenon, a methodological route to possibly or ultimately valid interpretation."

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman

To the Editor:

In "'But One Expects That': Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and the Shifting Light of Scholarship" (111 [1996]: 52–65), Julie Bates Dock reveals errors that have crept into printings of the text of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" during the twenty-three years since the Feminist Press first published it.

Unfortunately, no one currently at the Feminist Press was involved in the 1973 publication of the work, so it is impossible to reconstruct the original production history in order to discover how the 1892 version was mislabeled as the 1899 version. In 1972–73 the young Feminist Press, staffed only by part-time volunteers, was primarily interested in getting an important work into print and making it available at low cost to teachers and students. In 1992 Catherine Golden was asked to use the same text for her book *The Captive Imagination*.

We regret that Dock didn't inform the Feminist Press or us of her "discoveries." Had she done so, she could have reported in her article that the press has a new edition of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" forthcoming in August 1996. This edition emends the printer's errors in the 1973 publication and makes the section breaks clearer. When *The Captive Imagination* goes into a second printing, the corrected text will appear there also, as will the correct view of an illustration that the printer reversed.

The new edition will also reproduce the variant spellings of *wallpaper* as they appear in the 1892 edition, including the hyphenated version in the title. Dock herself asserts that the 1892 version should be considered the "most authoritative" and that "even a minor textual variant has potential consequences for literary interpretation" (55, 54). It seems odd, therefore, that she doesn't use the hyphenated version of *wallpaper* in her article

when referring to the work's title. But such an inconsistency underscores the complexities involved in producing an accurate version of Gilman's text; the manuscript and the 1892 version are internally inconsistent and inconsistent with each other in their spellings of the word.

While Dock describes problems in the publication history of the work, she does not mention certain additions and corrections to that history. The manuscript version is now available in *"The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, edited by Denise D. Knight (U of Delaware P, 1994). In *The Captive Imagination* Golden has correctly identified the date of the work's original publication in *New England Magazine* as January and not May 1892.

The 1899 reviews that Dock and her associates have discovered add to knowledge of the work's reception in its own time. We would, however, note that it is far from ironic, as Dock states, that Henry B. Blackwell read the work "most forcefully" and sympathetically in that year (60). Blackwell was a founder, with his wife, Lucy Stone, of the suffragist periodical the *Woman's Journal*. He, his wife, and their daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, were close friends of Gilman, who stayed in their home in 1896, 1897, and 1898, as well as in 1899—the year he reviewed "The Yellow Wall-Paper" for the *Woman's Journal*. Through his friendship with Gilman he was undoubtedly aware of the story behind her story and of how suffocated she felt during her marriage to Walter Stetson.

Finally, we must comment on Dock's reassessment of early feminist readings of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," especially since Elaine Hedges has already made a reevaluation of those readings (see her essay "'Out at Last'? 'The Yellow Wallpaper' after Two Decades of Feminist Criticism," in *The Captive Imagination*). We are dismayed by Dock's unnecessarily adversarial tone. Moreover, she does not always accurately represent the positions of those "[p]ioneering feminist critics" she disputes (59). One of Dock's major charges is that early feminist critics wrongfully claimed that the work was initially received as a ghost story. Yet Dock does not cite a single early critic who made this claim. The earliest references to critics who do make such a claim are to anthologies that appeared in 1992 and 1993. Furthermore, because the charge is embedded in a long paragraph discussing Hedges's reading of the work in her afterword to the 1973 Feminist Press edition, a reader might well conclude that Hedges's afterword makes such a claim, though it does not.

Less serious but also distorted is Dock's statement that Hedges criticizes William Dean Howells's "limitations" as a critic (57). Although Dock puts the word in quotation marks, it appears nowhere in the afterword,

which says, rather, that in reprinting the story in 1920 in *The Great Modern American Stories*, Howells “limited” his discussion of it to admiring its “chilling” quality. That he may have responded to the story in other ways as well is quite possible, and the afterword does not deny that possibility.

Dock also distorts a statement she quotes from Ann Lane, who, she implies, incorrectly describes Howells’s 1920 publication as a “collection of horror stories” (59). What Lane in fact says is that Howells reprinted Gilman’s story “as a horror story” (*Gilman Reader* xvii); she makes no comment on the nature of the collection as a whole.

These few examples suggest how easy it is for any critic to err or to overstate to make a case. Dock notes in her article that “[c]ritics must differentiate themselves from earlier readers, not just for self-gratification but also to validate the importance of the find” (60). She herself has not always been immune to this temptation.

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Reply:

I appreciate Catherine Golden and Elaine Hedges’s careful attention to my article and their clarification of several small matters. They seem, unfortunately, to have misread my argument about critical characterizations of the story’s early reception. If they review the essay, they will see that I quote Hedges’s afterword to align Hedges with Gilman’s contemporaries, who point to the “horror” of the story. The “[p]ioneering feminist critics” whom I introduce in my next paragraph are those who blur the distinction between horror and ghosts by taking on board language that suggests a supernatural reading of the story; there I discuss Ann Lane’s reference to “spectral tales” and Golden’s citation of Lovecraft’s book on the “supernatural” (59). My inference regarding Lane’s characterization of Howells’s 1920 anthology as “a collection of horror stories” arises from Lane’s own text: immediately after remarking that “‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ has often been reprinted as a horror story,” Lane asserts that “its most famous appearance in that genre is in William Dean Howells’s *Great Modern American Stories*” (xvii). I nowhere “charge” Lane, Golden, or Hedges with “wrongfully claim[ing] that the work was initially received as a ghost story.” Rather, I point to how their criticism engenders much cruder interpretations when it is taken up in college anthologies, such as the two I cite

from 1992 and 1993. I do not argue, then, that early feminist critics espoused the ghost-story reading; I offer instead a cautionary example of how the work of critics can be skewed over time until an erroneous reception history becomes enshrined as “fact” and is then handed on to students without question or qualification.

I am pleased to learn that the Feminist Press will issue corrected versions of Hedges’s and Golden’s books, and I am gratified if my article assisted them in rectifying errors. Despite their perception of an “adversarial tone” in the essay, we all seem to agree with my fundamental argument: scholarship on any author must be continually reevaluated as critical trends and interests shift. I am certain—indeed, I hope—that my own research and conclusions will be revisited and challenged; I would like to believe that others are similarly receptive to reexamination of their published work.

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Milton’s Chaos

To the Editor:

It was with considerable interest that I turned to John Rumrich’s defense of Milton’s indeterminate “power of matter” (to recall William Hunter’s early entry in this ongoing debate) in last October’s *PMLA* (110 [1995]: 1035–46). One cannot but agree that lately there has been a curious silence on the topic of Rumrich’s essay “Milton’s God and the Matter of Chaos,” a contribution that promises to reopen a discussion prematurely foreclosed by Regina Schwartz’s influential treatment of chaos as a region unambiguously “hostile to God.” Because her thesis largely readapts a position more tentatively held by a large number of earlier critics—Chambers, Woodhouse, Curry, and so on—its reexamination has become more urgent given two related recent developments. The first and more general involves a renewed understanding (renewed, since it was already present in the seventeenth-century context) that as a physical aspect of universal dynamics, chaos is not necessarily opposed to order (as N. Katherine Hayles, Ilya Prigogine, and Isabelle Stengers variously demonstrate). The second is the growing awareness within Milton studies that the theodicy of *Paradise Lost* rests on a monistically conceived universal continuum—one that the dualistic intrusion of a “hostile” chaos would inevitably disrupt.

The second development makes the long-standing critical objections to Milton’s chaos recapitulated by