

REPRESENTATION OF HEGEMONY IN THE SHORT STORY "THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER": A BRIEF INVESTIGATION UNDER FAIRCLOUGH'S CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS THEORY

Thaina Caroline Frankiw¹

Abstract: In this paper we analyse the 1892 short story *The Yellow Wall-Paper* written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman under Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis approach, specifically under the three-dimensional model he proposes. The choice of such theory is justified by the story's autobiographical trace, which creates a parallel with the historic context of production of such short story, elucidating social problems that Gilman used to fight against. The conclusion is that with this story Gilman could achieve the critical discourse analysis main goal: to cause some change in society. Throughout this article we will see how she did it.

Keywords: *The Yellow Wall-Paper*; critical discourse analysis; Fairclough.

Resumo: Neste artigo, o conto *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, escrito por Charlotte Perkins Gilman em 1892, foi analisado através da abordagem de análise do discurso crítica de Fairclough (1992), especificamente, através do modelo tridimensional que ele propõe. A escolha da teoria foi feita em razão do caráter autobiográfico da história, o qual cria um paralelo com o contexto histórico de produção do conto, elucidando as problemáticas sociais contra as quais Gilman costumava lutar. A conclusão feita foi que Gilman atingiu o principal objetivo da análise do discurso crítica: causar mudança na sociedade. Ao longo desse estudo será possível observar como a escritora conseguiu tal façanha.

Palavras-chave: *The Yellow Wall-Paper*; análise do discurso crítica; Fairclough.

¹ Undergraduate student of Letras at UFPR. This paper was written in the subject Escrita em Língua Inglesa 3 at UFPR under the supervision of Msc. Janice Inês Nodari.

1. Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a woman ahead of her time. The domestic life – that the society from the 19th century imposed on women – did not satisfy her. In fact, she was aware that the women's role is not restricted to only one function. In this article her short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper", which brings out exactly these problematics, was analysed by the light of a linguistic theory, aiming at exposing social issues in the same way Gilman did.

Anchored in Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory (1992) – that correlates linguistics with social aspects – it was possible to see and emphasize the power of language. On the one hand, language can be used as a tool to oppress and dominate people. On the other hand, it can be used to help people and change society. In the short story, as well as in the analysis that follows, we will observe both facets of language in the context of the aforementioned short story.

For this reason, this paper provides Gilman's social background, followed by a summary of her short story: "The Yellow Wall-Paper", an introduction to Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the analysis of the short story, and it is finished with a conclusion that summarizes the thesis defended here.

2. Social background: the author and her journey

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 – 1935) was born in Connecticut, USA. Daughter of Frederick Beecher Perkins and Mary Ann Fitch, she was abandoned by her father and raised by her mother, who had to move to Rhode Island, USA, owing to financial issues. Because of this, Ms. Fitch apparently became a cold woman believing that, to protect her child from others, she had to ban affection from the raising process in order to make Gilman an independent woman. In her autobiography, that was published posthumously, Gilman claims that:

having suffered so deeply in her own list of early love affairs, and still suffering for lack of a husband's love, she heroically determined that her baby daughter should not suffer if she could help it. Her method was to deny the child all expression of affection as far as possible, so that she should not be used to it or long for it. [...] She would not let me caress her, and would not caress me, unless I was asleep. (GILMAN, 1990, p. 10)

The non-emotional relationship with her mother compiled with the neglect feeling stemming from her father's absence played a huge effect on Gilman's personality, a trace which appears in her writings. In addition, as a consequence of the financial issues, Ms. Fitch moved a lot from city to city. As a result, Gilman attended various public schools during her childhood. Nevertheless, she used to do autonomous readings, which helped her balance the irregular education she experienced. The children's magazine *Our Young Folks*, the novels of Adeline Dutton Train Whitney and Louisa May Alcott are some examples of what Gilman used to read; she considered these readings extremely powerful in the creation of moral values as well (KESSLER, 1995).

As a young lady, Gilman worked as a governess, art teacher, and trade cards designer (WARD, 1996). In 1878 she entered the Rhode Island School of Design and in 1883, when she finished her design degree, she had her first works, such as poems and articles, published in journals (KESSLER, 1995). In the following year, she married the artist Charles Stetson and some months later gave birth to their daughter Katherine. Right after Katherine's birth, Gilman went through postpartum depression. Persuaded by her husband, she started the Rest Cure treatment with its creator, the well-known physician S. Weir Mitchel. According to Mitchel's prescription, Gilman should have a domestic life and stay with her child constantly, while abolishing any mental or rational stimulation (WARD, 1996). However, it did not take much time until she realized the treatment's inefficiency; in fact, it was making her situation even worse instead of making it better.

In the year of 1892, Gilman divorced Stetson – in a time that divorce was not well seen in society –, moved to California, USA, with Katherine and published the semi-autobiographical short story called *The Yellow Wall-Paper* (KESSLER, 1995), in which she tells, through a fictional voice, the harmful and catastrophic Rest Cure treatment which results in a woman, ironically, going crazy by the care of her loving husband.

In order to dedicate more time to her writing career, Gilman, in the end, sent Katherine to be raised by Stetson. As a result, she became very famous in her time, being a social theorist and defending women's rights². Eventually, she married again. Her second marriage was to her

² I chose not to describe Gilman as a feminist, because she did not use this term to describe herself.

cousin George Houghton Gilman and starkly different from her first one. Although it was like a dream, depression always followed her in her life. In 1934 her husband died and she discovered she was in terminal state of breast cancer, leading her to commit suicide in 1935 (BEEKMAN, s.d.). She wrote a suicide note that said: "When all usefulness is over, when one is assured of unavoidable and imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one" (HARRISON, s.d.). In short, Gilman's productions reflect some of the main events and issues in her life.

3. *The Yellow Wall-Paper*: the story plot

The 1892 "The Yellow Wall-Paper", a semi-autobiographical short story written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, is divided in twelve parts. The narrator, a woman whose name is not revealed until the last lines of the narrative, used to write a sort of diary in secret; for this reason, each segment of the story corresponds to a moment when she could write. The narrator was experiencing depression and this issue increases throughout the story. Moreover, the story takes place inside a house focusing on a specific room with yellow wallpaper covering its walls, which later on is proven to have a connection with the narrator's situation, as will be pointed out in the analysis that follows.

In the very first part of the story, the narrator and her husband, John, had just arrived in the house they had rented for the summer. She alleged that there was something "queer"³ (p. 74) about the house. Her husband, however, thought it was a foolishness of hers. He was a sceptical physician and this, as reported by the narrator, was probably the problem.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing. (p. 74)

³ The quotes followed only by a page number refer to GILMAN, 1892.

In order to follow her husband's treatment and get better, the narrator was supposed to eat and do certain things, and one of those was not to work until she was well again. She strongly disagreed with the situation. By contrast, she thought that real work would help her. John, on the other hand, believed that the narrator should not think about what was happening to her. In the text, we find: "[...] but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. So I will let it alone and talk about the house." (p. 75)

The house was described as a wonderful place with a paradisiacal garden. Although it was an incredible place, the narrator still felt it had a peculiar aspect. This can be seen in the following excerpts: "I am afraid, but I don't care – there is something strange about the house – I can feel it. I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window." (p. 75)

The room she had to stay in – John's choice –, on the other hand, was described as a horrible place with a "repellant, almost revolting" (p. 76) yellow wallpaper. The narrator hated it.

The second part was written two weeks after the couple arrived in the house. Here, the narrator presents a more detailed description of the room she was staying in and introduced three new characters: a baby, Mary, and Jennie, John's sister. The only thing in the room was an old bed; the floor was "scratched and gouged and splintered" (p. 78); and the wallpaper seemed to have staring "bulbous eyes" (p. 78) all over it. Yet, it seemed to have a subpattern, which allowed the observer to see a weird figure that the narrator believed to skulk behind the front wallpaper.

Then, in the third section, the narrator presents John's plan in case she did not get better. The part is: "[...] he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (p. 79). Right after, she mentions the yellow wallpaper again, because she could not avoid it; it was living in her mind, and she declared that at some point she was going to arrive at a conclusion for its pattern.

In the next section, the narrator gives more details about her situation – that was getting worse – and John's thoughts regarding it. "He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well. He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any

silly fancies run away with me.” (p. 81) Moreover, she added information about the wallpaper; something nobody knew or would know about it, except her: a woman seemed to be behind it.

It was night in the fifth part. John was sleeping and the narrator was observing the moonlight. Meanwhile, that figure behind the wallpaper was apparently shaking it in a way as if she was trying to get out of it. The narrator got up from her bed to see if that was really happening and, as a result, John woke up. Since he was awake, she thought it would be a good chance for talking. She was not happy at that place, it was not helping her and she wished they could leave. John, however, did not see a reason for them to leave; he actually thought she was getting better while she completely disagreed with him.

“Better in body perhaps –” I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word. “My darling”, said he, “I beg of you, for my sake and our child’s sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?” So of course I said no more on that score. (p. 82)

In the sixth section, the narrator exposed some of the reasons why she observed the wallpaper so much: it changed with the lights and, although it took a long time, she discovered that the figure behind it was a woman. In addition, she was suspecting that John and Jennie were interested in the wallpaper too, but she was determined to be the only one to solve its mystery. Due to it, the seventh part was a little note of how she was feeling better because of the wallpaper, since now she had motivation: to investigate its enigma.

Over a week of bad weather, in the eighth part, the narrator reports that, because of the closed windows, it was possible to smell an odour coming out of the wallpaper. A weird smell that followed her everywhere, even when she was not in the house. As described by her, it was a “yellow smell” (p. 85).

The ninth section was an announcement that the wallpaper really moved. This was caused by the woman behind it; she crawled creating its movements. After that, in the tenth part of the story, the narrator alleged that the wallpaper woman used to get out during the day, because she could

see that woman through every window of her room and she knew that it was her, that it was the same woman. However, according to the eleventh part, they were going to stay in the house for only two more days; therefore, the narrator had only two days to get the wallpaper off. At this point, John was starting to distrust the narrator, questioning her and Jennie.

The story ended in the last day they were staying in the rented house. John was going to spend the day out and Jennie even suggested that the two – the narrator and her – slept together, but the narrator refused with the excuse she would rest better alone. When the moonlight arrived, the wallpaper woman started shaking it again and the narrator immediately went to help her peel the wallpaper off. She narrated that as the sunlight appeared, the wallpaper started laughing at her; nevertheless, she was decided to have it finished by dawn. Then, Jennie showed up and stared, shocked, at what the narrator was doing and she, in turn, said that she “did it up of pure spite at the vicious thing” (p. 87) and that she was going to sleep for the rest of the day and Jennie should not even call her for dinner. After that, the narrator locked herself in the room and threw the key out of the window. Incidentally, she started to act and speak as if she were the wallpaper woman. Some time later, John arrived and asked her to open the door, but she had thrown the key away and he went to pick it up. When he finally managed to open the door, he got startled and blacked out. The last lines are:

“What is the matter?” he cried. “For God’s sake, what are you doing!” I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder. “I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (p. 88)

As the short story has its autobiographical aspect, which can be elucidated by the crossing of the author’s social background and the plot of *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, we can see that Gilman had also experienced postpartum depression and had gone through the Rest Cure treatment like her main character in the short story. This correlation can be contemplated by Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis in the section that follows.

4. An overlook through critical discourse analysis: Fairclough's three-dimensional model

Critical discourse analysis consists of a transdisciplinary project with two connected faces: a linguistic and a social one. It puts certain concepts in evidence; some of these concepts are also approached in *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, being a few examples: hegemony, ideology, social practice, and stratified social world. Yet, according to Fairclough's transdisciplinary framework, this theory studies the relation between discourse and society aiming at discussing the role of discourse in the conservation and transformation of power relations (FERNANDES, 2014). However, there are many critical discourse analysis approaches and the one used in this article is just one of them.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) has a dialectical/relational approach, which can also be characterized as a "textually oriented discourse analysis"⁴. However, to understand his theory, it is necessary, firstly, to understand his notion of "discourse". Fairclough refers to discourse as considering language as a social practice, in opposition to the idea of language as an individual activity. Therefore, when he mentions discourse, he can be citing writing, oral and multimodal texts. Moreover, Fairclough uses systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) as the analytical instrument to CDA.

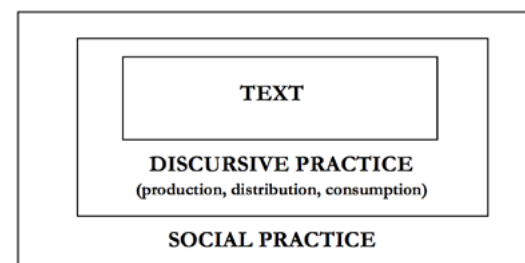
Thus, the SFL has a self-explanatory name; it is called 'systemic', because the language is seen as a potential resource arranged in systems, and it is 'functional', because the language is also seen as an action in context, since it is the language that enables people to act in daily social contexts. Nevertheless, when people use the language, either in writing or speaking, they simultaneously perform three phenomena: i) they portray the world, other people, events, objects; ii) they relate to other people; and iii) they organize the discourse in order to make it coherent. For this reason, Michael Halliday, one of the main forerunners of systemic-functional linguistics, developed three language metafunctions, which are: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual.

The ideational function symbolizes and expresses both the concrete and the abstract as well as people's thoughts, beliefs and values.

⁴ In the original: "(...) uma análise de discurso textualmente orientada." (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 42).

The interpersonal function assigns social roles to people in interaction (for instance, as we will see in the short story: husband x wife, doctor x patient) and allows comprehension and articulations of feelings, actions and judgments. The textual function refers, basically, to the language importance in specific situational contexts.

Hence, Fairclough's first theoretical-methodological mechanism to the CDA was the so called three-dimensional model (FERNANDES, 2014). He argues that his method's goal is "to bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language, in the form of a framework which will be suitable for use in social scientific research, and specifically in the study of social change" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 62 *apud* Fernandes, 2014). The three dimensions that the model consists of are: the textual, the discursive practice, and the social practice. In addition, it is possible to say that the dimensions work as three layers; in other words, the textual dimension would be the internal layer, followed by the middle one: the discursive practice, and the social practice, by its turn, would be the external layer, which embraces the other two. Fairclough (1992, p. 73) represented it in a figure (this figure is present in Fernandes, 2014 as well):



5. An applied analysis: *The Yellow Wall-Paper* and critical discourse analysis

The textual dimension is constituted by two metafunctions: the interpersonal and the ideational, where they, respectively, illustrate "social construction of relationships and entities"⁵ and "social construction

⁵ In the original: "[...] construção social das relações e das identidades" (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 95)

of reality”⁶. Moreover, according to the CDA, there are categories to be applied in the analytical process of each metafunction, given the interpersonal ones: interactive control, modalization, politeness, and ethos. And the ideational one: the use of transitional words, transitivity and theme, words meaning, and lexicalization (FERNANDES, 2014). I will not explain each category; instead I will explain the ones relevant to my analysis of the short story while I carry it out.

The interactive control is related to communicative interaction elements. These elements (shift take, topic control, agenda-setting) can elucidate asymmetric power relations through guiding questions, such as “which participant seems to have more power?”⁷ and “on this specific interaction, is the shift take control being challenged? By who? How?”⁸. *The Yellow Wall-Paper* seems to be, superficially, a common narrative that follows a diary form. However, most of the times, when there was a dialogue between the narrator and her husband or when she described things John said, it is possible to observe the power relation that he exerted over her. The strongest example of it – in my opinion – happens in the fifth part of the short story, in which, despite of the power relation, the shift take control is also challenged, since the narrator is interrupted when she started talking. John’s position exercises such a powerful domain that just a look made the narrator feel insecure and oppressed:

“Better in body perhaps –” *I began, and stopped short*, for he sat up straight and *looked* at me with such a *stern, reproachful look* that *I could not say another word*. “*My darling*”, said he, “I beg of you, for my sake and our child’s sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. *It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?*”

So of course *I said no more on that score*. (p. 82, emphasis added)

6 In the original: “[...] construção social da realidade” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 95)

7 In the original: “Qual participante parece ter mais poder?” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 97)

8 In the original: “Nessa interação específica, o controle da tomada de turno está sendo desafiada de alguma forma? Por quem? Como?” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 97)

In CDA, the use of transitional words consists of examining how meaning is created according to the semantic relations that are produced by transitional expressions (FERNANDES, 2014). Then, what called my attention in Gilman’s short story is the fact that “but” is used sixty-two times in the composition. The Cambridge dictionary (2011, p. 52) defines “but” as a conjunction “used to introduce something new, especially something that is different from what you have just said”. The narrator frequently used this transitional word to point out how John always had an opinion contrary to hers or to show that she disagreed with him. She did not have the right to think properly or have an opinion because John had authority over her, oppressing her and relativizing her situation. Let us consider the three following excerpts: 1. “[...] *but* John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. So I will let it alone and talk about the house.” (p. 75, emphasis added); 2. “I am afraid, *but* I don’t care – there is something strange about the house – I can feel it. I even said so to John one moonlight evening, *but* he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.” (p. 75, emphasis added); and 3. “[...] he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. *But* I don’t want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (p. 79, emphasis added)

Transitivity and theme are associated with grammar. Transitivity resides in the inspection of which processes are used in the composition visualizing how people and events are represented. Theme contemplates how the sentences start, because it usually shows how people manipulate the discourse (FERNANDES, 2014). Following this assumption, it is possible to observe the excessive use of the verb “say” in the story. It illustrates the power of discourse, since dialogue reports predominate and there are not many actions. Also, the narrator was, frequently, persuaded by John’s speech, revealing once again the power relation between the two characters. The fragment that best represents this assumption is found in the fourth part: “He *said* I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well. He *says* no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.” (p. 81, emphasis added)

Discursive practice discusses the production, distribution and consumption of texts. The production of *The Yellow Wall-Paper* was in

a predominantly misogynistic historic time. Nevertheless, Gilman was a social theorist who defended women's rights; her intention, probably, was to cause an impact on society and delegitimize the regent hegemony. Additionally, it was distributed in a book, therefore, it stayed at people's disposal for a longer period, allowing more time for reflections around it as well. In regards to the consumption of a text, Fernandes (2014) highlights that several actions can result from it. The consumption of this short story by the physician S. Weir Mitchel, who treated Gilman, made him change his mind and, as a consequence, change his treatment methodology (KESSLER, 1995). For this reason, in some way Gilman's and the CDA purposes were achieved, because the author could cause some changes in the social background of her time.

The social practice represents how hegemony and ideology are created and developed in discourse. Fairclough defined hegemony as:

[...] leadership as much as domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society. Hegemony is the power over society as a whole of one of the fundamental economically-defined classes in alliance with other social forces, but it is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, as an 'unstable equilibrium'. (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 92 *apud* Fernandes, 2014).

In short, hegemony is the domination of society by a group that defends certain ideas – ideologies, however it never stays on power forever; in different periods of time, different groups will hold the regent hegemony. Thus, discourse, as emphasized by Fernandes (2014), is the vehicle to maintain or achieve hegemony, because it is through discourse that power relations are “reinforced and naturalized, becoming part of the common sense; and becoming, therefore, supposedly, incontestable” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 141)⁹.

By ideology, Fairclough follows John Thompson's approach line, which is committed with the investigation of symbolic forms in social uses; i.e. Thompson studies if, to what extent and how these forms are used to

9 In the original: “[...] reforçadas e naturalizadas, passando a fazer parte do senso comum; e tornando-se, assim, supostamente, incontestáveis.”

establish and support power relations in the contexts they are produced, transmitted and received. For this reason, Thompson elaborated five modes of operation of ideology – legitimization, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification. Moreover, each mode is composed of some symbolic strategies (FERNANDES, 2014).

The legitimization mode tries to legitimize power relations. One of its strategies is the rationalization that consists of the development of a train of thought that “defends or justifies certain actions, people or institutions”¹⁰. That is what John did over the story. He tried to justify his oppressive conduct by his status of a high standing physician, claming that because of it, he knew what was right and what was wrong, leaving the narrator with no options. This can be seen in excerpts taken from the first and fifth part of the short story:

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a *physician of high standing*, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that *there is really nothing the matter with one* but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – *what is one to do?*

My brother is also a *physician*, and also of *high standing*, and he says the same thing. (p. 74, emphasis added)

“[...] *It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?*”

So of course I said no more on that score. (p. 82, emphasis added)

Unification, by its turn, refers to power relations that can be sustained through the development of a unity that connects individuals in an entity. In its strategy named ‘standardization’, standards are produced in order to create, by reuniting individuals, a sense of collectivity (FERNANDES, 2014). In this way, in *The Yellow Wall-Paper* the category “physicians”, constituted by John and the narrator's brother besides the physician who had suggested the Rest Cure to the narrator – Weir Mitchell, is a form of standardization

10 In the original: “[...] defender ou justificar determinadas ações, pessoas ou instituições.” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 125)

that structures a unified identity to people in power – wealthy physician men – also categorizing the others as inferior and, somehow, ignorant, at least of very specific knowledge. The fragments that exemplify this are in the first and fifth parts of the story, the ones also cited above in rationalization. Thus, rationalization and standardization happened simultaneously and they mutually reinforced each other in the composition showing the abusive relation maintained among the characters.

The dissimulation mode is used to “dissimulate, obscure, occult and negate relations of domination”¹¹. In the strategy called ‘euphemization’, actions, institutions, and social relations are reported positively, aiming to obscure their problematic aspects (RAMALHO & RESENDE, 2011). In the short story, what is represented positively by John is the Rest Cure treatment, because if the narrator did not get well “faster” (p. 79), he would send her – against her will – to do this treatment. Additionally, this worked as blackmail, and intimidated and oppressed the narrator even more, also showing John’s power. Along with it, the narrator was aware of the problematic, as can be observed in the third section of the narrative: “[...] he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don’t want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (p. 79)

The trope is another dissimulation strategy. It consists of using figures of speech in order to occult, neglect or obscure power relations (RAMALHO & RESENDE, 2011). In the ending of *The Yellow Wallpaper* we find the use of metaphor; however, Gilman used this figure of speech in a very elaborated way, because to comprehend it, one has to resort to information beyond what is explicitly said. In the text, we see:

“What is the matter?” he cried. “For God’s sake, what are you doing!” I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder. “I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (p. 88)

11 In the original: “[...] dissimilar, obscurecer, ocultar e negar relações de dominação.” (FERNANDES, 2014, p. 127)

Knowing what Gilman had gone through her life, the issues, the frustrations, and mainly, the psychological problems created owing to her childhood experiences, the interpretation of *The Yellow Wallpaper* ending can be seen as a metaphor, in which the compilation of the composition and Gilman’s social background are required, otherwise the ending can be turned into a superficial and meaningless subject. Since the short story is semi-autobiographical, it has real life experiences mixed with fiction. Thus, it is possible to contrast and compare the author’s life with the narrator’s point of view.

Unravelling the metaphor, we can build a connection between space and character, where the yellow wallpaper represents the house as a prison, the woman behind the wallpaper as the narrator that was locked as a prisoner, and everything as a consequence of John’s behaviour: the Rest Cure treatment in Gilman’s life and its environment. Additionally, when the narrator turned, ironically, into the wallpaper woman, she revealed the name that was unknown until that moment: Jane. The lines “in spite of you and Jane” (p. 88) and “now why should that man have fainted?” (p. 88) show that, at this point, the narrator was not herself anymore and neither was John, because he is not treated as John, or the husband, but as “that man” (emphasis added). Hence, Gilman was not herself anymore either.

It is possible to assume that when she was under the Rest Cure treatment, she did not feel like herself, she felt she was a prisoner with no will, with no voice being constantly oppressed by the treatment, by the society that thought that a woman’s role was to lead a domestic life and nothing else. This, in the short story, can be represented by the character Jennie, who was introduced in the second part and described as “a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and [that] hopes for no better profession” (p. 78), which can also be classified as a metaphor to what society expected from a woman. The content of concealing, neglecting or obscuring power relations is given through the implicit meaning of the metaphors, which are only understood if the author’s life and the historic moment she lived in are taken into consideration.

6. Conclusion

In summary, Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis is a theory and, simultaneously, a method of discourse analysis, which explains that

discourse is a social production. For this reason, in a critical analysis, the analyst is not interested in the text itself only, but on the social content around identity manifestations, ways in which reality is portrayed, and power relations, and for that, the systemic-functional linguistics can be used as the analytical apparatus. This is so because the CDA is descriptive, interpretative and, also, explanatory.

Since *The Yellow Wall-Paper* is a semi-autobiographical short story, it means that it has a strong correlation with the real world and its social context around the time it was written, being possible, hence, to be more thoroughly understood when notions from the CDA are applied. Knowing that the author was a social theorist and defended women's rights makes it clear that the story's social context involves power relations, which Gilman denounced through the relationships between the narrator and John, her husband, achieving one of the biggest goals of CDA: social change.

Social change takes places after the oppressive relation that John exerted over the narrator. This works as a personification of the oppressive relation that men exerted over women in the 19th century; because of this exposition, Gilman was able to challenge the *status quo*/regent hegemony and open some eyes. As the short story is a fictionalization of an experience lived by the author, people around her were influenced as a result of her writing. The main example of such influence is the physician S. Weir Mitchel, who had misogynist thoughts and developed a treatment to depression anchored on such assumptions. He reported that after he had read *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, he observed and understood that his treatment was inappropriate and, consequently, modified it. This is the power of language exercising a positive effect.

REFERENCES

BEEKMAN, Mary. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 – 1935): Her life and work as a social scientist and feminist*. Available on: <<http://faculty.webster.edu/woolfm/gilman.html>>. Accessed in: Sept. 25th 2016.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS. *Cambridge English Mini Dictionary*. Cambridge: 2011.

FAIRCLOUGH, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Malden: Polity Press, 1992.

FERNANDES, Alessandra Coutinho. *Análise de Discurso Crítica para Leitura de Textos da Contemporaneidade*. Curitiba: Editora Intersaberes, 2014.

GILMAN, Charlotte Perkins. *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

_____. The Yellow Wall-Paper [1892]. In: WARD, Candace. *Great Short Stories by American Women*. New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1996, pp. 74-88.

HARRISON, Pat. *The Evolution of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Available on: <<https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news/radcliffe-magazine/evolution-charlotte-perkins-gilman>>. Accessed in: Sept. 15th 2016.

KESSLER, Carol Farley. Making Herself: A Biographical Exploration. In: _____. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995, pp. 13-38.

RAMALHO, Viviane; RESENDE, Viviane de Melo. *Análise de Discurso (para a) Crítica: O Texto como Material de Pesquisa*. Campinas: Pontes, 2011.

WARD, Candace. Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In: _____. *Great Short Stories by American Women*. New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1996, p. 73.