

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study. It discusses the background of the research, followed by the research questions and objectives. Furthermore, this chapter explains the significance of the study and outlines the scope and limitations of the research.

1.1 Background of the study

Literature is not only a form of artistic expression but also cultural product that reflects and constructs social values, ideologies, and power relations within society. Literary works often reveal how dominant ideologies operate through everyday experiences and representations. As Eagleton (1996) argues, literature is deeply connected to ideology because it participates in shaping and reproducing social meanings. Therefore, literary texts can be analyzed as sites where power relations, including gender inequality, are embedded and contested.

One of the most persistent forms of power represented in literature is patriarchy, a system that privileges male authority while marginalizing women. Within this system, women are often depicted as passive, dependent, and confined to domestic roles. Feminist theory challenges these representations by arguing that gender roles are socially constructed rather than natural. Within patriarchal discourse, women are often positioned as subordinate subjects whose identities are defined in relation to male authority, limiting their autonomy and subjectivity.

Feminist literary criticism emerged as a response to traditional literary studies that largely ignored women's experiences and perspectives. This approach seeks to examine how literature reinforces or challenges gender inequality. Showalter (1977) explains that feminist criticism focuses on uncovering the cultural assumptions behind the representation of women in literary texts. Through this perspective, literature becomes a medium for analyzing how gender ideology is produced and maintained.

In addition to representation, feminist theory emphasizes the importance of the body as a central site of power. The female body is not merely biological but is shaped and regulated through social and cultural practices. Bordo (1993) argues that women's bodies are controlled through norms that define acceptable behavior, appearance, and roles, indicating that power operates directly and materially on the body. This concept, known as body politics, highlights how power operates directly on the body, making it a crucial aspect of feminist analysis.

The regulation of the female body is often reinforced by institutional practices, particularly in medical discourse. Historically, women's physical and psychological conditions have been interpreted and controlled by male-dominated medical authority. Foucault (1977) describes this phenomenon as disciplinary power, a form of control that operates through normalization, surveillance, and regulation rather than direct force. This framework helps explain how authority can shape and control individuals' bodies and behaviors under the guise of care or treatment.

These issues are clearly depicted in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which tells the story of a female character subjected to the "rest cure" by her physician husband. The treatment restricts her physical activity, intellectual engagement, and social interaction. According to Hedges (1973), the story serves as a critique of patriarchal medical practices that silence women and deny their autonomy. The Character's experience reflects how medical authority can function as a mechanism of control rather than healing.

The narrative also highlights how domestic space becomes a site of confinement and body restriction. The character is isolated in a room and prohibited from engaging in activities such as writing and working. Friedan (1963) argues that domestic confinement limits women's self-development by restricting their roles to the private sphere. In this context, the Character's body is not only physically restricted but also symbolically controlled within a patriarchal structure.

Previous studies on *The Yellow Wallpaper* have predominantly focused on themes such as psychological madness, symbolism, and narrative unreliability. Many scholars interpret the Character's mental breakdown as a form of resistance against patriarchal oppression. However, these approaches often emphasize psychological aspects while overlooking the role of the body as a central site of control, particularly how body restriction functions as a mechanism of power.

This creates a research gap, as there is limited analysis that specifically examines how the female body is systematically controlled and regulated within the story. While some studies acknowledge oppression, they do not thoroughly explore how body restriction contributes to the Character's psychological deterioration. As Bordo (1993) emphasizes, power operates materially on the body, suggesting that an analysis focusing on body control can provide deeper insights into the narrative.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing the control of the female body in *The Yellow Wallpaper* using feminist body politics theory. Bordo's concept of body politics is used as the primary framework to examine how the Character's body is regulated, while Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is employed as a supporting theory to explain the mechanisms of control. This study argues that the Character's psychological deterioration is closely linked to the systematic control of her body within patriarchal and medical structures.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the following research questions are formulated:

1. How is the female body controlled in *The Yellow Wallpaper*?
2. How do patriarchal authority regulate the female body in the story?
3. How does the control of the female body contribute to the character's psychological deterioration?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In line with the research questions, the objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the forms of female body control in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.
2. To Identify how patriarchal authority regulate the female body.
3. To Explain the relationship between body control and the Character's psychological condition.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of literary studies, particularly in feminist criticism, by analyzing the control of the female body in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The contributions of this research can be described as follows:

a. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of feminist literary criticism, particularly in understanding how the female body is constructed and controlled within literary texts. By applying the concept of body politics as proposed by Susan Bordo, this study highlights how the body becomes a site of power where social norms, gender expectations, and institutional authority are imposed.

Furthermore, this study also incorporates the concept of disciplinary power by Michel Foucault to explain the mechanisms through which control operates, especially through medical and patriarchal systems. This combination of theories provides a more comprehensive framework for analyzing how power is exercised not only externally but also internally through normalization and selfregulation.

In addition, by focusing on a canonical literary work, this study enriches the discussion of how literary texts reflect and critique sociocultural issues, particularly the regulation of women's bodies and the intersection between gender, power, and mental health.

b. Practical Significance

For Students of English Literature

This study can help students develop a deeper understanding of how feminist theories, especially body politics, can be applied in literary analysis. It also supports students in identifying forms of power, control, and resistance within texts, and enhances their critical thinking in interpreting literary works.

For Lecturers and Educators

For lecturers, this study can serve as a reference or teaching material in courses related to literary criticism, feminism, or cultural studies. It provides an example of how theoretical frameworks can be effectively applied to analyze literary texts in a structured and critical manner.

For Future Researchers

This study can serve as a reference for future studies that focus on feminist analysis, body politics, or power relations in literature. It may also guide researchers in applying interdisciplinary approaches, particularly by combining feminist theory with concepts of power and discourse.

For General Readers

For general readers, this study enhances awareness of how literary works can represent issues of gender inequality and control over women's bodies. It also encourages readers to interpret texts more critically, especially in understanding how power operates in subtle and normalized ways.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the analysis of the control of the female body in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. This study specifically focuses on how the female body is regulated through physical restriction, control of expression, medical surveillance, and spatial limitation as represented in the narrative.

The analysis applies the concept of body politics proposed by Susan Bordo as the main theoretical framework in order to examine how the female body becomes a site of power and control. In addition, the concept of disciplinary power by Michel Foucault is used as a supporting theory to explain the mechanisms through which such control is exercised, particularly through patriarchal and medical authority.

This study emphasizes the relationship between external control (such as restriction and surveillance) and internal effects (such as internalization, and psychological deterioration), rather than discussing feminist theory or power relations in general. Therefore, the analysis is directed at identifying the forms of body control and explaining how these contribute to the Character's mental condition.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single literary work, namely *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and its concentration on the issue of female body control. This study does not explore other aspects such as linguistic analysis, stylistic features, or broader sociohistorical comparisons in detail. In addition, while this research acknowledges the presence of patriarchal and medical systems, it does not aim to provide an exhaustive historical analysis of these institutions, but rather focuses on how they are represented within the text.