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Narratives of Madness: A Functional-Cognitive Analysis of Inner Speech in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a functional-cognitive linguistic analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Vygotsky's cognitive approach to inner speech, the study examines how the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of language reflect the narrator's psychological decline and the oppressive gender roles of her time. The ideational metafunction decodes the mental processes experienced by the protagonist, while the interpersonal metafunction reflects the deterioration of identity and relationships under the immense strain of stress. Furthermore, the textual metafunction highlights the thematic progression and the cohesion strategies that mirror the protagonist's descent into psychosis. Qualitative analysis of mental processes, modal verbs, syntactic fragmentation, and repetition reveals a gradual breakdown in linguistic structures that mirrors the narrator's descent into madness. The features of inner speech (ellipsis, compression, and subject omission) are analyzed as they serve as linguistic markers of cognitive decline. The Yellow Wallpaper emerges as a symbolic text onto which the narrator projects her inner turmoil and resistance to societal norms. By aligning linguistic form with cognitive function, this research contributes to interdisciplinary discussions in linguistics and psychology, offering insights into how language encodes mental illness and the marginalization of women's roles.

Keywords: The Yellow Wallpaper; Inner Speech; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Mental Illness

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1. Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a landmark feminist short story that critiques 19th-century medical practices and the social confinement of women [1]. The unnamed narrator, confined to a room and forbidden to read, write, or interact with others, finds solace only in her secret journal, which she describes as 'dead paper' and 'dead language' [2]. At the beginning of the story, the woman suffers from sadness and a lack of pleasure. However, as the story progresses, the symptoms worsen because of the increasing oppression. Ultimately, the woman descends into madness, tearing down the ugly yellow wallpaper that confines her freedom. Gilman's narrative was informed by her experience with the rest cure after the birth of her baby, resulting in her suffering from hysteria [3]. She shares her deepest thoughts and emotions, and readers are her trusted confidants, and as Hood notes writing offered Gilman a therapeutic power 'a writing cure' that both documented her suffering and defied medical patriarchal norms [4].

2. Review of literature

The Yellow Wallpaper inspired extensive academic inquiry across disciplines, particularly in feminist, cognitive and psychological frameworks. Treichler interprets the protagonist's psychological decline not just as a mental deterioration, but also as a symbolic rebellion against social confinement [2]. This medical diagnosis functions as a "sentence" that confines her freedom. The disturbing yellow wallpaper is viewed not only as an ugly décor but also as a metaphor for marginalized female identity. Betjemann expands this idea suggesting that the story critiques not only the visual pattern but also the limits of expressive language under social repression [5]. Suess sees the act of tearing the paper as a symbol of rejecting patriarchal language [6].

Similarly, Kaye further investigates how Charlotte Perkins Gilman uses language to show how the home and marriage can both be ways of female confinement [7]. The wallpaper itself becomes a metaphor for the domestic space. By using metonymy, Charlotte Perkins Gilman subtly demonstrates that the woman's private suffering is part of a wider problem affecting many women. The main findings show Gilman was against the way women were treated in marriage and how men were authoritative.

Rodríguez Salas views *The Yellow Wallpaper* as aiming to prove that, in line with some feminist readings of the story (e.g., Haney-Peritz, 1986) [8]; the unnamed female protagonist consciously employs mad language as a strategy to resist social suppression [9,10]. Parveen and Venkateswaran further reinforce the feminist perspective by framing the story as a feminist-semiotic text, arguing that *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a rich feminist-semiotic narrative and Charlotte Perkins Gilman chose a semiotic voice to express feminist protest against the silenced 'female voice' [11].

From a psycholinguistic perspective, Weatherford highlights Gilman's innovative approach to depicting mental illness through language, shaped by her personal experience of psychological distress [12]. More recently, Jakhrani *et al*. conducted a psycholinguistic study of the narrator's linguistic markers, including pronouns, deixis, repetition, metaphors, and fragmented syntax, to explore the narrator's mental deterioration [13]. The study concludes that the narrator's gradual shift from first-person pronouns ("I") to third-person references and collective forms ("we") signals an increasing dissociation from her identity. Repetition of words and phrases highlights the obsessive thought patterns, while syntax becomes incoherent and fragmented, mirroring the mental illness.

Using Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistic Analysis framework, Khan *et al*. examine how Gilman's language constructs power imbalances between the narrator and her physician husband, critiquing patriarchal authority [14]. Similarly, Sindhu adopts a psychosocial approach to show how emotional neglect and social expectations contribute to the protagonist's psychological collapse [15].

While prior studies have extensively explored the feminist, semiotic, or stylistic aspects of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, this study offers a new contribution by integrating psycholinguistics and systemic functional linguistics to trace how inner speech and syntactic features reflect cognitive disintegration. This interdisciplinary approach enhances insight into how language conveys trauma, mental illness, and feminist resistance.

3. Theoretical framework

This study adopts a functional-cognitive linguistic framework by integrating Lev Vygotsky's concept of inner speech with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).This interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how linguistic form reflects cognitive and psychological states. It is particularly suited to *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which relies heavily on internal monologue and fragmented narration to portray the protagonist's mental decline.

3.1. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a comprehensive framework for examining the role of language in conveying meaning within social contexts. A key concept of SFL is that language fulfills three metafunctions: Language performs three metafunctions:

Ideational Metafunction: Language represents our experience of the world through transitivity structures**,** including processes (e.g., mental, material), participants, and circumstances.

Interpersonal Metafunction: Language enacts social relationships by expressing attitudes, judgments, and degrees of certainty through mood and modality, managing interaction, authority, and subjectivity.

Textual Metafunction: Language organizes discourse using cohesive devices, and grammar organizes the flow to create cohesion and continuity as it progresses. The theme is what the clause is about, and the theme provides new information.

3.2. Vygotsky's Theory of Inner Speech

To complement the social-semantic focus of SFL, this study incorporates Vygotsky's theory of inner speech, which highlights the cognitive and developmental aspects of language [16]. Vygotsky proposed that language and thought, although separate systems, gradually interconnect through functional development. He conceptualized inner speech (also known as endophasia) as psychological silence**,** distinct from external communicative speech. It is an internalized and abbreviated form of language. Inner speech functions as a self-directed communication, while external speech is directed at other people. It evolves through a slow series of functional and structural shifts and becomes a core component of the person's thinking. External speech is vocalized and audible. The lack of vocalization is a result of inner speech. Inner speech differs structurally from external speech. External speech transforms thought into words, giving it a concrete form, while inner speech reverses the process, moving from outward to internalized cognition. According to Vygotsky, the relation of thought and word is dynamic; thought is expressed through language. Every thought connects something with something else to establish a relation between things. Every thought moves, grows, and develops because it is fundamentally relational and functional. This inner movement of thought unfolds across multiple cognitive planes before it is articulated in external language.

Inner speech differs structurally and functionally from external speech; external speech is oriented toward communication with others, whereas inner speech is egocentric, directed inward, and serves as self-regulation [17]. A key feature of inner speech is its elliptical, condensed, and predicate-based structure. This often results in inner speech appearing fragmented or elliptical compared to the structure of external language. The structure of inner speech, both semantic and syntactic, and problem-solving are interconnected aspects of the same mental development process [18].

4. Research questions

1. How do the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* reflect the narrator's mental deterioration?
2. How do the syntactic structures of inner speech (including clause complexity, coherence, and modality) differ between the early and late stages of the narrative?

5. Methodology

This study draws on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind, with particular emphasis on the developmental

trajectory of inner speech and its role in the emergence, representation, and deterioration of mental functions. To investigate these dynamics, a qualitative linguistic analysis of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is conducted focusing on transitivity processes (mental, material, relational), mood and modality markers, and cohesive devices (parallelism, anaphora, ellipsis). Additionally, the frequency of modal verbs is tabulated to support the interpersonal analysis. To guide this analysis, the study adopts an integrated framework that combines Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics SFL with Vygotsky's theory of inner speech. This dual approach is well-suited to *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a narrative centered on the protagonist's psychological decline. While SFL provides tools for examining how linguistic features (such as transitivity, modality, and thematic structure) mirror shifts in cognition and identity, Vygotsky's concept of inner speech explains the syntactic fragmentation and ellipsis typical of internal monologue. As the story unfolds through fragmented journal entries and internal monologue, this combined approach reveals how language reflects psychological distress, cognitive breakdown, and resistance to patriarchal norms.

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1. The Syntax of Inner Speech in *The Yellow Wallpaper*

In her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman skillfully uses the protagonist's inner speech to reflect her mental fragmentation. This stylistic technique aligns with Vygotsky's which describes it as silent yet structurally distinct from external communication [16]. Inner speech is characterized by abbreviation, ellipsis, and predication reflecting the speaker's internal state. Within this framework, the syntax of the protagonist's inner monologue reflects her deteriorating mental health.

6.1.1. Elliptical Syntax and Omission of Subjects

A hallmark of inner speech is its elliptical nature. Because the speaker and listener are one and the same, certain grammatical elements, particularly subjects, are often omitted, as they are understood internally. This implicitness results in abbreviated constructions that are natural within self-directed thought. The narrator's inner discourse offers multiple examples of this syntactic feature:

1. *To jump out of the window would be an admirable exercise.* The infinitive construction "to jump" lacks an explicit subject (e.g., *for me to jump*). This elliptical structure is natural in an inner speech where the self is implied, not stated.
2. *If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one!* The structure lacks an agent, making the expression predicative and emotionally loaded. This matches Vygotsky's claim that inner speech lacks the subject and relies on predicates.
3. *I don't know when John is here.* An example of elliptical structure, the verb is omitted: "I don't cry."

6.1.2. Fragmentation and Compression of Thought

The syntax of inner speech is condensed; it compresses meaning into minimal structures, which results in disjointed sentences. Thoughts develop internally with minimal words. This can be seen in

1. *Such a peculiar odor, too!* This is a noun phrase with no verb or subject, just an exclamatory structure.
2. *No person touches this paper but me, not alive!* The phrase "not alive" is a compressed elliptical predicate. The full expression would be "if they are alive," but it is omitted.
3. *Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach, standing on the floor.* The sentence lacks a clear transition. In inner speech, the person omits logical connectors and explicit subjects, as he understands the context internally.
4. *It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I have ever met.* No finite verb in the first phrase ("not bad—at first") emphasizes subjective judgment in real time.
5. *If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.* "If only" introduces a hypothetical wish, leaving the consequence clause unexpressed

6.2. Halliday's systemic functional grammar

6.2.1. Ideational metafunction

Gilman frequently employs mental process verbs, particularly those of perception (see) and cognition, to reflect the narrator's growing obsession and psychological deterioration. Early in the narrative, such verbs convey rational thought and internal conflict. As the story progresses, perception verbs like *see* and *feel* become more prominent, signaling the narrator's increasing fixation on the wallpaper and emotional detachment from reality. In the final stage, the dominance of *see* and *know* underscores a full psychological collapse, as hallucination and delusion replace reason. As shown in **Table 1**, the analysis reveals the frequency and illustrative examples of mental verbs employed in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Table 1. Frequency and Examples of Mental Verbs in *The Yellow Wallpaper.*

Mental verbs	Frequency	Quote
See	23	*I can see her out of every one of my windows!*
Know	16	*John does not know how much I suffer.*
Think	16	*I think that woman gets out in the daytime!*
Feel	11	*I must say what I feel and think in some way*
Wonder	8	*I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper*
Wish	5	*I wish I could get well faster.*
Believe	7	*I believe that congenial work is with excitement.*
Remember	1	*I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big, old bureau*

Halliday suggests that behavioral processes form the dividing line between *material* and *mental* processes, as they represent observable actions rooted in internal states, such as *laughing* or *sleeping*. Verbal processes, which link consciousness to external expression through actions like *saying* or *telling*, occupy an intermediate position between *mental* and *relational* processes. Meanwhile**,** existential processes, which assert that something exists or occurs, lie between *relational* and *material* processes [19].

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, mental processes are conveyed through verbs like *fancy*, *want*, *feel*, *suppose*, *believe*, *think, guess, wonder*, *realize*, *forget*, and *decide*, all of which indicate internal state and perception. These verbs highlight the narrator's psychological conflict with reality. Material processes are evident in action verbs such as *creep*, *get up*, *go*, *feel*, *see*, *lift*, *push*, *lock*, and *throw*, demonstrating physical reaction to her confinement [20]. Verbal processes appear in forms such as *say*, *tell*, and *talk*, often in the negative form (e.g., *I don't tell them*, *It is hard to talk*), suggesting oppression and lack of freedom. Behavioral processes including verbs such as *laugh*, *sleep*, *exhaust*, and *faint*, highlight bodily responses to psychological stress. Existential processes are marked by phrases like "there is," to prove the presence of something unusual, as in *There is a funny mark on the wall*. Finally, relational processes *(eg.am* and *is*) indicate recognition as in *I am quite sure it is a woman* reflecting the protagonist's connection with an imagined figure. Taken together, these diverse process types map the narrator's cognitive disintegration and illustrate the interplay between language and psychological fragmentation**.**

Gilman uses metaphorical constructions to embody the narrator's mental deterioration through the symbolic embodiment of the wallpaper as in:

1. *The front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!,*
2. *It is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern*
3. *She is all the time trying to climb through*
4. *It is the strangest yellow…not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things…a yellow smell*

These metaphors reinforce the ideational metafunction, revealing how *the woman behind the wallpaper* becomes a projection of the narrator's repressed self [21].

6.2.2. Interpersonal metafunction

Modality and markers of uncertainty

In Halliday's systemic functional grammar, the interpersonal metafunction accounts for how language constructs relationships and expresses attitudes. Modality serves as a key resource within this metafunction. A central resource in this metafunction is modality, which encodes the speaker's judgment regarding the likelihood, necessity, or obligation of a proposition [22]. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, modality functions as a linguistic tool to foreground the woman's mental instability. The narrative is marked by a high frequency of modals of ability and volition, such as *can* (31 occurrences) and *would* (27), which reflect the narrator's ongoing struggle to impose an imagined or internalized version of reality. Meanwhile, modals of obligation like *must*, *should*, and *shall* signal external pressures and social constraints, particularly those imposed by her husband or the patriarchal medical discourse. These modals construct an interpersonal dynamic of powerlessness and compulsion, positioning the narrator as someone acted upon rather than acting. As the story progresses, the increasing use of modals expressing uncertainty and doubt (e.g., *might*, *may*, *ought*) suggests a growing disintegration of epistemic control, reinforcing her descent into madness [23]. The sparse use of *may* (2 instances), *might* (3), and *ought* (1) also highlights the narrator's restricted possibilities available to her within a repressive domestic setting.

As Rodrigues notes, modality in literary texts not only indexes certainty or obligation but also reveals how subjectivity is textually negotiated [24]. In this case, the narrator's modality choices reflect a sustained conflict between her internal desires and the external authority embodied by her husband. This tension between what is imagined and what is permitted becomes increasingly unresolved, culminating in a modality system marked by uncertainty and imbalance. **Table 2** shows how the narrator's modal verb choices reflect the tension between her personal agency and external constraints.

Table 2. Frequency and Function of Modal Verbs in *The Yellow Wallpaper.*

Modal verbs	Frequency	Example	Function
Can	31	*I **can** see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure.*	ability and desire for control
Would	27	*He **would** make fun of me.*	inner conflict
Will	13	*I **will** proudly declare that there is something queer about it.*	single-mindedness
Could	12	*Nobody **could** climb through that*	weak actions
Must	10	*But I **must** get to work.*	external control
Should	7	*I **should** hate it myself*	social obligation
Shall	5	*Nobody **shall** find it out but me!*	Restrictions
Might	3	*John thought it **might** do me good*	Uncertainty
May	2	*My appetite **may** be better in the evening*	minimal freedom
Ought	1	*I **ought** to use my will*	Expectation

Mood and thematic function

Halliday highlights a close connection between semantic choices and cognitive processing, arguing that the structure of a clause, particularly its mood and theme, reflects how speakers enact social roles and exchange information. Within the indicative mood, clause types are typically classified as declarative (statements), interrogative (questions), and imperative (commands), each fulfilling distinct interpersonal functions. In interrogative clauses, the WH-element (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, *how*) occupies the thematic position, functioning simultaneously as part of the Mood structure and as a relative element in clause complexes.

Halliday emphasizes that WH-words serve dual functions: they signal the speech function (e.g., questioning) while also contributing to thematic organization by appearing at the front of the clause. Additionally, they can act as relative pronouns**,** introducing embedded clauses that modify noun phrases and contribute to textual cohesion. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the declarative mood dominates the early part of the narrative, reflecting the narrator's initial conformity to medical and social authority**.** Her statements describe her husband's prescriptions and her acceptance of restricted roles, suggesting passive align-

ment with patriarchal control. This indicative structure, and her limited use of interrogatives, reveal a constrained interpersonal stance—she does not question, she reports. As the story progresses and her psychological state unravels, mood structures begin to shift, signaling instability and increasing resistance.

As the narrator's psychological condition deteriorates, her clause structures exhibit increasing thematic markedness, disrupting the expected flow of information. Halliday (2014) notes that marked themes (such as temporal adjuncts, locative phrases, or modal elements placed in clause-initial position) signal a departure from normative discourse patterns and often index shifting perspective or emotional urgency. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the increasing presence of marked themes such as *But what is one to do? O*r *If only that top pattern could be gotten off* the foreground's internal conflict and narrative disorientation. Thematic progression becomes erratic, with incomplete rhemes and disjointed theme-rheme transitions, reflecting impaired reasoning and destabilized selfhood. These thematic disruptions reinforce the text's representation of cognitive fragmentation, while also enacting resistance to the authoritative, orderly discourse imposed by the husband's medicalized language. The narrator's departure from thematic predictability becomes a stylistic mechanism for expressing both madness and feminist dissent. **Table 3** illustrates how variations in mood structure and thematic choices foreground the narrator's psychological conflict and narrative instability.

Table 3. Mood structure and thematic function analysis in *The Yellow Wallpaper.*

Clause Type	Clause	Mood structure	Function
WH-interrogative	*But what is one to do?*	Finite: is / Subject: one	asks for a solution or possibility. WH-element specifies the entity in question; "But" adds contrast.
Hypotactic conditional	*Whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.*	Declarative: Subject *windows* + Finite *are*	Conditional marked Theme sets a circumstantial condition, affirming the existence of an entity.
Declarative with a temporal clause	*I can write when she is out.*	Subject: I / Finite: can	logical relation of time
Declarative + WH-embedded	*I wonder how it was done and who did it.*	Subject: I / Finite: wonder	Interrogatives are WH-elements that carry interpersonal meaning
Declarative with a relative clause	*There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck*	Existential "There is..."	The relative WH-clause elaborates on the spatial setting.
WH-interrogative	*Why, how can I, dear?*	Finite: can / Subject: I	Why" expresses emotional appeal or disbelief, "how" asks about the means. Both are Thematic

Repetition and negation as indicators of cognitive decline

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, repetition and negation function as psycholinguistic indicators of cognitive decline. Together, these linguistic features produce a pattern of semantic overload**,** fragmentation, and inner speech, characteristics often associated with mental disintegration.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman employs various forms of repetition, including anaphora and lexical recurrence, to represent the narrator's obsessive mental state and growing alienation. The repeated use of the adverb *"personally"* preceding mental process verbs *Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good*; the adverb "personally" precedes both the mental verbs 'disagree' and 'believe,' reflecting the woman's inner voice struggling with oppression. The repetition of 'personally' emphasizes the woman's subjectivity and insistence, while the repeated use of the pronoun 'I' highlights her independent thought.

Similarly, obsessive behavioral patterns are made linguistically visible through the repeated action verb *"lie down"*, as in: *I lie down ever so much now… I lie down after each meal… I lie down again and sleep…* The frequent repetition of 'lie down' indicates her growing detachment from reality. Her internalized paranoia and helplessness are further expressed through recursive statements such as *I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody*

come in, and *I do not know why I should write this. I do not want to. I do not feel able.*

For instance, when she mentions, *I crept slowly so as not to disturb the paper* this repeated behavior transformed from mere curiosity to a deep-rooted habit. Similarly, her statement, *I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand* reflects her increasing paranoia and helplessness. Compulsive visualizations of the wallpaper also manifest through reiterative phrases such as *I see her creeping* and *She is all the time trying to climb through* which expose the narrator's blurring of perception and hallucination**.** Her obsessive analysis of patterns *I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern did move together* further demonstrating disordered cognition.

Repetitive intensifiers as in *The color is hideous enough and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is tortur*ous reflect a buildup of affective disturbance**.** Later, phrases such as *she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left*, indicate a profound sense of psychic emptiness and disintegration**.** Ultimately, lines like *I cry at nothing* and *Round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!* evoke a spiral of mental fragmentation,

Negation functions throughout the text as a marker of self-denial and suppressed agency. Repeated self-negating statements *I do not want to go out, and I do not want to have anybody come in* portray the narrator's growing disconnection from the external world. The recurrence of *I do not want* underscores obsessive self-monitoring, while negative evaluations like *I do not like the look in his eyes* and *I don't like to look out of the windows* demonstrate her sense of entrapment. The protagonist's negated emotions and invalidated perceptions lead to fragmented cognition. *I must not get tired*, the use of "must not" directly mirrors control and restrictions**.** These negations not only signal emotional suppression but also contribute to cognitive fragmentation, as perceptions and emotions are invalidated or denied**.** As Oakley argues, *The Yellow Wallpaper* critiques a system rooted in gendered psychiatric control, and the narrator's repeated use of negation becomes a linguistic symptom of resistance and deterioration [25]**.**

6.2.3. Textual metafunction

The textual metafunction, according to Halliday and Matthiessen, concerns how language is structured to produce a coherent and meaningful message. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman masterfully manipulates syntactic structures (such as parallelism, coordinated clauses, and fragmented syntax) to mirror the protagonist's descent into psychological disarray.

Parallel structures

Parallel grammatical structures serve as expressive linguistic devices that enhance the thematic progression of confinement**,** control, and resistance. Their repetition creates rhythmic cohesion while also foregrounding the narrator's escalating obsession.

Parallel nouns

Gilman employs parallel noun structures to foreground both physical and psychological entrapment. For instance, the nouns *hedges, walls, and gates* emphasize the woman's spatial isolation through physically repeated boundaries. Similarly, *a real rest and comfort* reflect her sense of guilt for not fulfilling her role as a wife, and support thematic cohesion around gender roles. A semantic sequence such as *twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all, by moonlight,* illustrates the semantic progression of lights starting with natural light and moving toward unnatural and scary light, reflecting how her thoughts are getting more confused. Furthermore, the list *radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry*, reveals her obsessive focus on the wallpaper's pattern, indicating a loss of logic and control projecting inner chaos through linguistic form.

Parallel noun phrases

The use of parallel noun phrases strengthens experiential meaning and reflects psychological entrapment. Physical objects such as *the heavy bedstead*, *the barred windows*, and *the gate* suggest a lack of freedom. Similarly, hallucination appears in phrases *strangled heads*, *bulbous eyes*, and *waddling fungus growths* illustrate her hallucinations and the horror of her mental state. The recurring spatial phrases *hovering in the dining room*, *skulking in the parlor*, *hiding in the hall*, and *lying in wait on the stairs* describe her sense of fear that spreads throughout the place. Finally, her observation of the *lack of sequence* and *defiance of the law* shows her complete psychological deterioration.

Parallel verb phrases

Verb phrases in the text predominantly belong to the

material process type, signaling action and control. The sequence *gathered me up*, *carried me*, *laid me*, *sat by me*, and *read to me* illustrates John's complete control of the narrator's passivity. Violent imagery appears in *slaps you*, *knocks you down*, and *tramples upon you* reflects the narrator's inner turmoil. Her growing burden is further highlighted in *to dress and do what little I am able, to entertain, and order things*. Meanwhile*, commit suicide*, *plunge off*, *and destroy themselves* reflect her awareness of mental collapse. In contrast, John's authority is subtly demonstrated through behavioral and verbal processes, such as *let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep*, which masks control with affection. The narrator's emotional dependence is evident in *he loves me* and *hates of having me sick*, reflecting mental processes that show her emotional dependence. John's dismissive stance is syntactically layered in *he scoffs openly* at ideas *not to be felt and seen*, where material, mental, and verbal processes converge to invalidate her experience [26].

Parallel clauses

A series of assertive material and causal clauses underscores shifts in perception, emotional reasoning, and the narrator's eventual psychological climax. Circumstantial clauses, such as *the crosslights fade and the low sun shines,* convey how environmental shifts impact her mind. The repeated relational clause*, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so*, the repetition of *because* reveals a form of self-deception. By the end, the liberated assertion in the clause *I've got out at last... and I've pulled off most of the paper*, the narrator expresses a sense of mental freedom. The narrator needs to find her voice to heal [27].

Syntactic patterns as a reflection of sanity

Gilman's manipulation of syntax evolves from cohesive to fragmented, marking a gradual unraveling of the narrator's rationality. Early on, coordinated, balanced structures suggest logic and self-restraint, as seen in *John laughs at me…He has no patience with faith… and he scoffs openly at any talk*. These sentences demonstrate syntactic stability and show her attempts to be reasonable. However, as her mental state deteriorates, this syntactic order gives way to subordinate clauses overloaded with parenthetical insertions. This signals her growing internal conflict and helplessness. Ultimately, syntax fragments entirely *I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!* reveals a disordered mind consumed by obsession. These disjointed clauses, punctuated by dashes and marked by obsessive, looping thought, mirror a mind consumed by anxiety and delusion. This transition from syntactic order to linguistic fragmentation directly supports Halliday's textual metafunction, wherein the organization of message structure reflects psychological reality**.** As Semino argues, inner speech in literary texts can be linguistically manipulated to evoke empathy and signal cognitive instability [28]. Here, the narrator's increasingly incoherent syntax functions both as a symptom of madness. This shift is further illustrated in **Table 4**, which contrasts the narrator's early syntactic stability with the fragmented style of the later stages.

Table 4. A Comparative Analysis of Early and Late Narrative Stages in The Yellow Wallpaper.

Linguistic Features	First Stage	Late Stage
Syntax	Long, coordinated clauses	Short, fragmented, dashed clauses
Cohesion	High cohesion through conjunctions	Low cohesion; loss of connectives
Lexicon	Rational, socially framed	Obsessive, repetitive
Tone	Submissive, hopeful	Defiant
Pronoun Use	Stable ("I," "John")	Unstable, blurred identity

7. Conclusion

This study examines how inner speech and sentence structure in *The Yellow Wallpaper* reflect the narrator's psychological decline and feminine oppression. Throughout the story, the female protagonist remains unnamed while her husband, John, is named. Applying the integrated approach of Vygotsky's theory of inner speech and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, the analysis reveals a shift from coherent declarative structures to fragmented elliptical clauses, reflecting the narrator's mental state. Mental processes, modal verbs, and parallel syntactic pat-

terns reflect the narrator's internal conflict and obsession. The story's structure, with repetitive phrases and disjointed syntax, echoes her instability. The yellow wallpaper itself becomes a symbolic text onto which the narrator projects her cognitive breakdown and resistance.

The predominance of mental processes, intensified modal verbs, syntactic parallelism, and textual disjunction collectively index a collapse of rational thought and epistemic certainty. Furthermore, the textual and interpersonal metafunctions illuminate how the narrator's shifting stance, modality choices, and thematic structures encode her resistance to medical, marital, and linguistic authority. The yellow wallpaper itself functions metonymically as a discursive site upon which inner turmoil, psychological alienation, and subversive self-reclamation are projected. By linking linguistic form to psychological function, this study contributes to interdisciplinary discourse on the interface between language, mind, and gendered subjectivity in literary texts.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could apply the same functional-cognitive framework to other literary texts that portray women's psychological decline, such as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, or Edgar Alan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, to examine how inner speech functions across different literary contexts.

Author Contributions

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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