

Structure of Control and Acts of Revolt: A Foucauldian Interpretation of “Omelas” and “The Yellow Wallpaper”

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Farhana Annushka

Lecturer, Mawalana Bhashani Science and Technology University Tangail, Bangladesh

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8904-9565>

Abstract

This paper showcases the structure of control and acts of revolt in two stories by Ursula K Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” And Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Here, authority is seen as an internal control mechanism of moral, medical, social norms. This study examines the creation of moral complicity showcased through a suffering child in “Omelas” and claws of paternal patriarchy and medicality used as a form of control in the home space of Gilman. The study is conducted through the lens of qualitative, comparative textual analysis and close reading. Both texts demonstrate resistance in two different forms- ethical withdrawal of Omelas and through psychological rebellion of the victim in “The Yellow Wallpaper”. These texts expose concealed violence within normalised authority, representing resistance as necessary yet partial and challenging. This study demonstrates the usefulness of Foucauldian theory as a way of liberation by analysing authority, obedience, and disciplinary power imposed on all of us.

Keywords: Foucauldian Analysis, Anti-Authority Resistance, Disciplinary Power, Moral Complicity, Subjectivity, Comparative Literature, Foucault, Surveillance, Power Relations, Literary Resistance, Close Reading.

Introduction

The role of authority in literary and cultural criticism has been a topic of controversy. The contemporary power is not an organisation itself, but a process of circulation: through institutions, discourse, surveillance, but also through naturalisation, habit (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 92–95; Foucault, *Discipline* 26), making people subject to it. In literature, one can see how power structures bodies, disciplines actions, generates consent and at the same time offers the space for resistance (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 98; Sawicki 25-27). For the analysis of seemingly natural obedience and gendered power, the Foucauldian concept around power is very suitable. As feminist critics have demonstrated, power of the patriarch does not simply exist in the form of prohibition, but also through discipline, self-policing and normalisation of bodies (Bartky 129-31; McNay 15-18).

The *Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Ursula K. Le Guin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman both demonstrate the importance of hidden mechanisms of control to sustain social order: dissent is an ethical and psychological struggle against the authority structures (Adams 35-36; Treichler 61-63). Le Guin in “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” paints a picture of a utopic and happy community, whose happiness is based on the suffering of one child, reveals the ethical principles of social assent and complicity (Le Guin 1-5; Adams 35-36). By contrast, Gilman depicts a woman imprisoned in her domestic sphere, whose voice, body, and imagination are medicalized in a patriarchal structure (“The Yellow Wallpaper”; Gilman 7-12; Treichler 61-63).

The aim of this article is to explore the concept and varieties of authority in these texts. In contrast to a rigid external power, authority acts as a normalised system that helps to form moral perspectives, to control the body and to ensure conformity by internalising the rules of discipline (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26–27; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 98). Le Guin demonstrates how social order produces ethical complacency in that citizens accept any suffering in order to achieve the happiness of the nation as a whole (Le Guin 3–4; Adams 35–36). The discourses of “care” and “rational treatment” (Gilman; Treichler 61–63) are used to exert control over the female body and voice in Gilman’s story.

The texts depict power in positive ways—its positive, it is everywhere and it can not be easily opposed—but they produce different, resistanceful, yet meaningful kinds of resistance (Bartky 129–31, McNay 15–18). In spite of the inconsistencies in the period, in the genre, and in the narrative form, the texts have some common ground: they challenge the conventional dominance, make subjectivity the basis of disciplining and problematize opposition as the way to respond (Khanna 48–50; Gilbert and Gubar 89–90).

This article maintains that there are moments in both texts where power appears normalised and interiorised, and moments where there is psychological rebellion against power in the form of embodiment and/or ethical resistance against a morally corrupt social structure, in *Omelas*, and in “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Le Guin 3–5; Treichler 61–63). The comparative study is important to the field of comparative literature, as it examines both the similarities and differences between Le Guin’s and Gilman’s depictions of authority and resistance in their respective texts (Adams 35–47). It also links feminist and political approaches through its juxtaposition of gendered oppression and ethical complicity in wider power structures (Bartky 129–31) and shows how Foucault’s theory continues to be useful for the analysis of power, discipline, and subject formation and resistance (Foucault, *Discipline* 26–27).

Literature Review on the Primary Texts

The critique of utilitarian ethics, utopian

criticism, gendered narration, moral complicity and sacrifice-based social structures have been topics of scholarship on Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from *Omelas*”. Rebecca Adams looks at the voice of the narrative, and how it threatens the maintenance of a stable utopian order, how it fosters doubt and marginalisation (35–47). Lee Cullen Khanna discusses the concept of utopia and gender issues, and uncovers the hypocrisies behind the seemingly ideal (48–58). But other critics call attention to interpretive instability, to ethical and ecofeminist critiques of domination and to symbolic design (Wyman 228–32; Bennett 63–64; Gavrilovic 89–105; Brandt 51–56; Rezkiyana 1–10). However, the fight against authority has not been analyzed exclusively in terms of power, discipline, and resistance, as in Foucauldian analysis.

The themes of feminist resistance, medical patriarchy, confinement, madness, and domestic oppression continue to take a strong foothold in what has been analyzed about “The Yellow Wallpaper” (St. Jean 397–415; Dock 1–50). Paula A. Treichler’s seminal reading of the story as a contest of discourse, diagnosis and interpretive authority is located between the competing forces of an enslaving language (61–77). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar place it in the larger context of women’s rage, silence and rebellion in male culture (89–90). Karen Ford and Susan S. Lanser analyse the politics of representation and the impact of language and domestic ideology (Ford 309–14; Lanser 415–41). Further research is concerned with the Gothic features, spatial symbolism, madness, embodiment, cultural inheritance of the rest cure (MacPike 286–88; Davison 47–75; Crewe 273–93; Khleif, Duarte and Costa 261–283; Wolter 195–210; Villar 45–50). This scholarship challenges the authority of men, but it also explores the ways in which power constructs and controls its subjects, with a Foucauldian approach to discipline, surveillance, and normalization, which will deepen understanding of this process (Foucault, *Discipline* 26–27; Bartky 129–31).

Recent scholarship on Le Guin lends weight to the existing review, which calls Le Guin’s *Omelas* an ethical and a disciplinary issue, rather than simply a utilitarian thought experiment or a utopian paradox. The walkers read Schrynemakers’s 2022 study, which

translates the concepts of non-coercive withdrawal from Taoism into the context of departure, as a spiritual and ethical rejection of it (Schrynemakers). Bassford's (2022) philosophical analysis also greatly contributes to the discussion by proposing that in Le Guin's story, there is a challenge to utilitarianism through conscience, guilt, and moral perception; in Foucauldian terms, this is useful because it provides insight into how Omelas produces citizens who suppress the very feelings that might lead them to resist (Bassford). The child's exclusion is further highlighted as the story's reliance on contradiction, balance and hidden suffering in Morais F.'s 2024 yin-yang reading, thereby affirming that Omelas is a story where the child's exclusion is normalised so as to maintain social harmony. The present article thus relies on the findings of these recent studies, which give credibility to the idea that it is not just the imposition of authority from above that makes it work, but that citizens learn a common moral truth and internalize it as common social knowledge.

The critique of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in recent years further enhances the review, as feminist studies of medical patriarchy are linked to disability justice, medical humanities, and stylistics and narrative form. A Foucauldian analysis of Gilman's article reveals a series of narrative devices of resistance against psychiatric control and disability marginalization (Pérez Casanovas 109–26). Unlike the previous "rest cure" conversation, which focused on Gilman in the nineteenth century, Villar's 2024 medical-humanities study makes the "rest cure" a more contemporary problem than a historical one, as it connects Gilman to current issues of underrepresentation in clinical research and medical authority (Villar). The unstable relationship between madness and sanity also enriches the discussion of the narrator's unstable state between madness and sanity (Singha 16-30), as he compares his experience of suicidal thoughts with the experience of mental distress in women. When taken as a whole, these works make the domestic room understandable as a location where patriarchal, medical, and epistemic authority overlap.

The Foucauldian dimension is even more vivid in recent studies. In the feminist stylistic analysis conducted by Lumanlan, the use of language in the story is seen to be a source of oppression and agency;

in this respect, language is considered a site of resistance (Lumanlan 367–78). Combining Foucault with psychoanalytic descriptions of female suffering, Kataria claims that the narrator's madness is the result of the increasing force of patriarchal medical treatment (2025–27). Zhang and Hu's (2025) study on fractured narrative voice also considers fragmentation as a psychological collapse and as resistance to patriarchal discourse (Zhang and Hu 1-21). Avşar's 2025 analysis is particularly similar to the current article because it explicitly links the story to the space of discipline, panoptic surveillance, and the creation of female subjectivity (Avşar 503–15). Recent studies, on the other hand, have mostly focused on either Le Guin or Gilman in isolation. Studies of 'Omelas' typically emphasize the utopian paradox, conscience or moral withdrawal and work on 'The Yellow Wallpaper' investigates gendered medical discipline, narrative resistance and panoptic subject formation. What remains underexplored is an account of how such regimes of power — a collective moral order in Le Guin; a domestic-medical order in Gilman — function comparatively to regulate compliance while also engendering modalities of resistance. This study seeks to fill that gap by utilizing one Foucauldian lens for both texts and comparing ethical withdrawal in Omelas with psychological and physical revolt in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Its main novelty is in depicting resistance in two forms that both arise out of internalised power relations and are crucial but structurally limited, despite differences of time, genre and place.

Methodology

As methodology, this article conducts a qualitative comparative textual analysis, based on a close reading of Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". In the close reading of these two primary texts, it analyses the language, image, characterisation, plot, thematic complexity, and symbolic structure with Foucauldian concepts of power, discipline, surveillance, normalisation, subject formation and resistance. The study aims at examining the construction of authority, discipline and resistance in each work, identifying common patterns and differences in anti-authority struggles through a

comparative approach. (Foucault, Discipline 26-27; Foucault, Power/Knowledge 98).

With close reading of “Omelas” and Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”, this article conducts a qualitative, comparative textual analysis, analysing language, image, characteristics, and plot, thematic complexity, structure with Foucauldian concepts of power, surveillance, normalisation, and resistance.

Discussion

The “Anti-Authority Struggle” in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

The city-state of Omelas is a seemingly happy one, filled with glamour and festivity, but with a system of discipline that is systematised through normalised violence and controlled moral truth. Citizens’ happiness is not a natural response, but a response that requires knowledge. As the narrator says, “the problem is that we have had a bad habit, promoted by pedants and sophisticates, of thinking of happiness as something rather stupid: Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting” (Le Guin 1; Gavrilovic 89-105). This is epistemic conditioning, where the collective belief makes some emotional dispositions seem to be acceptable to feel, so they become obligatory.

The narrator is talking directly to the reader: “Perhaps it would be better to imagine it your fancy bids, if it will rise to the occasion; for certainly I cannot suit you all” (Le Guin 1). The Foucauldian view of this speech as disciplinary recruitment takes the subject into the active production of the ideology (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 98; Knapp 75-81).

The backstory of Omelas is a child locked in a basement. Le Guin purposely leaves out the location: “in a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps one of the spacious private homes, there is a room” (Le Guin 3). This ambiguity is the basis for the view that authority is not located in any particular place, but is dependent on system arrangement. Foucault states that this structuring dependency constitutes a regime of truth in which structured cruelty is justified as rationality (98). This structuring dependency creates a regime of truth, Foucault says, in which structured cruelty is the norm and acts as rationality (98).

The narrator sets the scene of an endless logic: “If the child were removed from the darkness, taken to the sunlight, cleansed, fed and comforted, that day and that night and the happiness of all the beautiful citizens of Omelas would be ruined” (Le Guin 3-4). The people endure the pain of the child through the long exposure, and make it their ethical rule. “They all know that it has to be there” (Le Guin 3) is a collective sentence that imposes collective discipline. In this way, the linguistic repetition normalises the child’s presence (Rezkiyana 1–10).

Young people home “in tears, or in a tearless rage,” do not produce rebellion, but are part of the “disciplining” process. The reformation of subjects is effected by encounter, by moral obedience (Foucault, Discipline 177-84; Wyman 228-32).

The walk-aways are the biggest form of opposition to authority. Some teens or grown-ups, after viewing the child, don’t return home; “Sometimes, too, a man or a woman much older remains silent for a day or two and then departs home” (Le Guin 4). This non-verbal protest lacks a coordinated action or Manifesto, it is a rejection of an economy of morality. According to Foucault, resistance is internal to the relation of power, it is a denial of the conditions of power (Foucault The History of Sexuality 95–96; Schrynemakers). The departure, then, is a moral/ethical response, one that emphasizes conscience (Khanna 48-58; Bennett 63-64).

However, this opposition is not widespread. The destination they walk to is “even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness” (Le Guin 5), and it might not even exist, as Le Guin cannot describe it. Power withers the conceptual resources necessary to offer a true alternative. The walkers are not the ones who save the child or break up the system; they are only a protest, a testimonial and an ethically binding protest (Bennett 63-64; Foucault, Power/Knowledge 142), but structurally inadequate.

The Struggle Against Authority in “The Yellow Wallpaper”: Patriarchal and Medical Authority in the Domestic Sphere

In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the struggle against authority plays a central role in the antagonism between the two forms of authority, patriarchy and medical authority, in the domestic sphere.



Marital, medical, and domestic power are all intertwined in the system of authority in "The Yellow Wallpaper." As husband and doctor, John has exclusive control over his wife's body, voice and mind. But, the narrator poses the question, "If a physician of good standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but perhaps a transient nervous depression, and there is a slight hysterical tendency, what is to be done?" (Gilman). This is an example of how Foucauldian disciplinary power gains legitimacy from institutional approval and discursive construction (Foucault, *Discipline* 184-94).

The narrator is not allowed to engage in any intellectual pursuits: "I am absolutely forbidden to 'work' till I get well, personally, I do not agree with their ideas, personally, I think that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (Gilman). "personally" is repeated to emphasize resistance and disenfranchisement of medical patriarchy (Bartky 129-31). Rest cure maintains the visibility, controllability and docility through surveillance and confinement. Even the smallest of the small things takes much effort: "Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what I am able" (Gilman).

Writing is considered taboo: "There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word" (Gilman). This produces a panoptic effect, the narrator internalising surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline* 195-228). Confinement is also at the epistemic level – what she can perceive and communicate (Treichler 61-77; Davison 47-75).

The development of resistance comes with how the narrator interacts with the wallpaper. Discovery comes from obsessive observation: "I didn't know for a long time what it was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but then I'm sure that it's a woman, (Gilman). What she sees as the strangling pattern is a metaphor for patriarchal discipline: "she is always trying to climb through, but nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so, I think that's why it has so many heads" (Gilman). This other discourse makes her apparent irrationality a critique of imprisonment (Rodriguez Salas 105-12; Crewe 273-93; Ford 309-14).

Liberation and psychic annihilation are fused in the final. There is a mingling of liberation and psychic destruction in the ending. The narrator sees a lot of women behind the pattern: "The front pattern does move—and no wonder! Behind the woman do the shakes, "shakes it!" (Gilman). She crawls along like they do and when she finally emerges from us and Jane she defies us, "I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jane! I've already gotten rid of a lot of the paper and you can't put me back!" (Gilman). For Foucauldian perspective, the subject's disruption of the structure that produced her (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 142). In Gilbert and Gubar's view, this is an expression of suppressed sexual rage against patriarchy (89-90).

But the revolt comes with a hefty cost. The narrator realises earlier the limitations of rebellion: "I am becoming angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be good exercise, but the bars are too strong to try" (Gilman). Resistance is still within the realm of power; the disciplinary regime limits the possibility of the body as well as imagination (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 142). It is a discursive struggle that is not resolved and is pathologised by the narrator's alternative perceptions (Treichler 61-77). Her symbolic inversion seeks to unveil the structural imbalance of patriarchy, and the unabated agency that it produces and also prevents.

Shared Perspectives on Authority: A Comparative View

In Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", the two narratives portray the idea of authority as an authority that does not operate through direct violence. In both texts there is no restriction on the number of visible rulers, institutions or individual commands that give authority. Instead, it works on the basis of moral conviction, socialization, medicalization, domesticization, and internalized compliance. This is in line with Foucault's ideas of repressive and productive power – power that is repressive in that it constrains, but also productive in that it creates knowledge, behaviour, subjectivity, and the boundaries of what one considers truthful or

not (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 98, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26-27).

The collective moral normalisation of authority is the means of retaining it in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” Although the citizens of Omelas are aware of the harm done to the child captive, the majority accept the notion that in order to maintain social harmony and order they must endure such anguish. Their obedience isn’t generated by direct punishment; it is generated by a common moral logic that makes them learn to consider injustice as justifiable, inevitable, and even socially beneficial. Foucauldian claims that Omelas is a disciplinary society, because its citizens internalise the moral truth conveyed by the city and they self-regulate their ethical responses based on that city’s moral truth (Le Guin 3–4; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 177–84). Throughout the story, Adams claims, the reader’s trust of the utopian harmony is undermined by the revelation of the violence that ensures collective happiness (35–47).

Likewise, in the case of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, authority is exercised by the interrelatedness of patriarchy, medicine and domestic confinement. John’s power comes as a husband and a doctor of his wife. In this role he can control her body, speech, movement, writing and imagination. Control is shown as care and rational treatment, but little by little it is presented as a type of discipline, which makes the narrator subservient and silent. Thus, Gilman demonstrates how the visibility and protection of patriarchy appear as a liberating power, but actually are a power of surveillance and domination (Gilman; Treichler 61–77). Here too, Bartky’s feminist analysis of Foucauldian power comes into play: how women’s bodies and behaviors are disciplined in everyday ways by patriarchal systems is relevant (129–31).

As such, the two texts reveal authority as a routine and self-evident hierarchy. In both Omelas and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the characters rationalise the acts of injustice and confinement, respectively, through moral justification and science or domestic arrangements. While both works differ in setting, genre, and historical context, both reveal that power is most effective when it looks natural, moral, rational, and protective. By doing so Le

Guin and Gilman demonstrate that power is not just external to subjects but also internal, forming their consciousness and sense of duty as well as their perception of reality (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 92–95; McNay 15–18).

Modes, Limits, and Foucauldian Implications of Resistance

Dramatised resistance against authority is similar in both texts, but different in form, location and impact. Withdrawal is the form of resistance in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” Those who walk away are unwilling to submit to the moral basis of the city, since they cannot take part in the social order which has been founded on the suffering of the innocent child. They are quiet and individual departures, and they are of a very deep ethical nature. It also demonstrates an unsatiability for absorbing the dominant truth of Omelas and an rejection of the city’s moral justification for the cruelties it perpetrates (Le Guin 4-5; Bennett 63-64). But this resistance is not strong enough, as the walkers do not save the kid, topple the system, form a visible political movement. Their act reveals the injustice of Omelas, but it leaves the structure that brings about the injustice unchanged.

The opposite is true of “The Yellow Wallpaper” where resistance emerges from within the space of confinement itself. The difference is that the narrator can’t escape the oppression as the citizens of Omelas can, because the oppression is situated within marriage, within the domestic sphere, within medical discourse. So her resistance becomes stronger in the process of secret writing, private perception, imaginative interpretation and eventually through rebellion. She breaks down the wallpaper and it becomes a symbol for her rejection of the confinement of the patriarchy in her body and mind. As Treichler suggests, the narrative frames a battle over language, over diagnosis, over interpretive power—the language battle in which the narrator fights against the one that makes her seem irrational (61-77). Gilbert and Gubar also read the narrator’s collapse as a manifestation of inhibited female rage at the dominance of men (89-90).

The two stories demonstrate that from a Foucauldian perspective there is no resistance outside

of power. Instead, resistance can rise up in the very systems that create obedience. The moral upbringing of Omelas implies the possibility of ethical refusal, as some of the citizens of the city are unable to live by the rules of morality which also discipline them. Likewise, patriarchy and medicine in the case of “The Yellow Wallpaper” seeks to render a silent, obedient and passive woman, while also fostering the conditions for rebellion. The concept of power and resistance is therefore integral to both texts: wherever there is power, there is resistance, even if it is partial, unstable, and expensive (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 95–96; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 142).

The only difference is the direction and resistance results. The resistance spreads through Le Guin’s story, in the form of people leaving. In Gilman’s tale resistance becomes introspection and subsequently an outburst of psychological and bodily revolt. Resistance occurs through refusal to complicity on the part of the walkers, and through disruption of the domestic and medical authority that entombs Gilman’s narrator. But not either of the texts offers a total freedom from resistance. Omelas: The walkers walk away, the child stays trapped. The narrator breaks down the wallpaper, but this is her rebellion and psychological breakdown connected. Thus, two works offer that anti-authority fight is required but not sufficient. It can uncover hidden violence, challenge the normalised truth, upset the obedience system of structures but not necessarily lead to complete freedom or structural change (Khanna 48–58; McNay 15–18).

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. To begin with, the analysis today will refer only to two principal texts: Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”. While these texts provide abundant illustrations of disciplinary power, moral complicity, medical authority, and resistance (especially the latter), a wider range of literary examples might have yielded an even richer overview of anti-authoritarian struggles across traditions. Second, the research critically is based on Foucauldian theory, including

power/knowledge, technologies of surveillance, discipline, normalization and subject formation, resistance. Although this lens can provide valuable theoretical insight, restricting the analysis in such a manner limits the text, giving less consideration to other possible frameworks such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, post-colonial theory, trauma theory, and so forth—disability studies and affect theory. Three, the study uses a qualitative close-reading method, so conclusions made are interpretive in nature rather than empirical. The findings are based on textual analysis and critical interpretation, not reader response data or archival texts. Third, this study places greater emphasis on the structures of domination and acts of resistance than on broader historical, biographical, and cultural contexts. Consequently, the analysis may not fully investigate how each of the two chosen texts is informed by nineteenth-century medical practices, feminist movements, utopian fiction, or Cold War-era political anxieties.

Future Research Directions

We see several important directions for expanding this study in future research. To begin with, scholars may expand their texts to include other literary productions from disparate periods, cultures, and genres to better understand systems of authority and resistance beyond particular comparative frames. Taking this as an example, how else might we study alongside Le Guin and Gilman other populations/directions such as dystopian fiction to develop a model of Foucauldian literary resistance or feminist Gothic writing/postcolonial literature/prison narratives/speculative fiction? Second, while Foucault’s work makes it possible to establish a broad theoretical framework for future studies, it could also benefit from being combined with other critical approaches such as feminist theory or psychoanalysis, disability studies, trauma theory, or medical humanities. The value of interdisciplinary approaches would be to train a more in-depth examination, not just power and discipline, but class, gender, illness, and psychological suffering (that is, Third, future work may scrutinize more rigorously the historical contexts of our two texts, including the nineteenth-century “rest cure,” medical oppression of women, utilitarian ethics and utopian political

imagination. This strengthens the bond between actual social institutions and literary representation. Fourth, reader-response studies could explore how the walkers of Omelas or the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” are read differently today. Finally, future research could explore whether the resistance implied in these texts can be conceived as dereliction or half-liberation, but also as ethical refusal and symbolic sublation. It would also give rise to different arguments, with new limits and horizons of what is possible as far as revolt within disciplinary systems.

Conclusion

This paper has claimed that both “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and “The Yellow Wallpaper” are travelogues of a type of authority that is not simply exercised over a physical jurisdiction, institutional structure, or individual actor, but an epistemic foundation of coercion, normativity, and internalized psychic repression. In both texts, power is exercised so that subjects are produced via a combination of constructing how the subject perceives themselves and their context, managing the behavior of others, and creating subjects that will be complicit in producing their own subjecthood. It is only by showing obedience not just as a result of coercion per se but rather through moral thinking or domestication, surveillance, and truths that something approaching a Foucauldian conclusion emerges. In these stories, they also make clear that there is still room to resist in many of the systems. Whether through exit, subversive reading, or the practice of physical and mental resistance, anti-authority struggle becomes a necessary response to the normalization of suffering and silence, as well as societal, moral, and gendered power.

It has serious things to say, which can be summed up in three ways: First, Omelas is a kind of shared moral training for how citizens come to learn the logic of suffering and consent to injustice for their own happiness. Second, domestic medical discipline, as a mechanism regulating the feminine body and subduing discourse while transforming care into control, is exposed in *We*. Finally, the third similarity between both narratives is that they portray the anti-authority struggle as genuine but limited. Among

its manifestations are ethical refusal, discursive disruption, symbolic inversion, and psychological breakdown. Yet, neither text is fully liberating (Shumaker 588–99). Both demonstrate that opposing power is a real, costly, and messy affair, shaped by the very frames it strives to challenge.

This research serves comparative literary studies by framing Le Guin and Gilman simultaneously within a singular Foucauldian analytical frame and demonstrating how collective moral complicity and domestic-medical discipline can be assessed as parallel instruments of normalization. Its contribution is not just to point out the effects of oppression in both texts, but rather to theorize how each regime of authority produces subjects who internalize the truths that govern them while also producing modes of refusal from within their same relations of power. The more general point for comparative literary studies is precisely that the Foucauldian notion of the archeology of knowledge allows works — despite their historical and formal differences regarding the period, genre and social context they belong to — to be connected. Through a comparison of ethical withdrawal, discursive disruption, and embodied revolt, you frame your interrogation of how literary texts expose normalized authority while representing resistance as necessary and meaningful but also as structurally constrained.

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Author Details

Farhana Annushka, Lecturer, Mawalana Bhashani Science and Technology University Tangail, Bangladesh,
Email ID: farhanaannushka@mbstu.ac.bd