

M I C H A E L T R I N A S T I C ' S T H E Y E L L O W W A L L P A P E R

LIBRETTO

for Michael Trinastic's *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Adapted by the composer from the short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

SCENE I

Standing alone, far from the road, and miles from the village, so far from home.

The most beautiful place! A colonial mansion, a family estate! I would even say, "A haunted house," but John would laugh at me.

And the garden: large and shady with hedges and walls and gates that lock, long box-bordered paths through grape-covered arbors with seats beneath.

I always imagine people walking those paths.

But John says I must beware of fantasy.

Oh, if only I could write a bit it might free my ideas and ease my mind.

But John says I must control my tendency to make up stories.

And so he forbids me to touch pen or paper until I'm well.

If only I were better, I could write.

If only I were well!

I never used to get so angry at John.

It must be my nervous condition.

He schedules each hour of my day. I really should appreciate his care more.

I must use my will to stay calm. That's what John says, and he *is* a doctor.

And he *does* love me; he's my husband, after all.

That's what John says, and he *is* a doctor, after all.

He *does* love me; he's my husband, after all.

We came here solely for my sake, so I must be a good wife and try to get better.

Oh, I wish I could get better faster!

But I must not think of that!

So I'll talk about the house.

Our room is at the top, with sunshine streaming in from with windows all around, but it's funny—they have bars! . . . for children, I suppose. . . .

I wanted the room downstairs with the pretty lace curtains—but John would not hear of it!

So I'm stuck in this wretched nursery.

Oh, the furniture is no worse than inharmonious, but the wallpaper—I never saw a worse pattern in my life.

Some revolting old print with a hideous tint.
Dull enough to confuse the eye, loud enough to annoy and distract and attract attention.
But follow the lame uncertain curves just a bit and they suddenly die, plunging off in outrageous contradictions.
Sickly, yellow, and strangely faded in the slow turning sunlight, shining in low in the gloaming and slowly smoldering orange and yellow—*[gasp!]*
There's John on the stairs. . . .
[exasperated] Oh I can't stand it when he calls me his little goose!
[noticing the paper she's been writing on] I must put this away! He hates to have me write a word.
[hides the paper]
[retrieves the paper and tears it up]

SCENE II

Walking alone, coming back home to an empty house just to lie there alone.

John is away now most days in the village, even some nights when his cases are serious.
[sarcastically] I am glad my case is not serious!

Trying so hard just to do what I can, to dress and to eat and to hold back my tears.

I can't write this.
I don't know how to!
I can't write this.
I don't feel able!
I can't write this.
I just don't want to!
And I know that John would think it absurd.

If only I had someone here—anyone at all.
But I must not think of that,
For John says that no one can help me but myself.

And John says the best thing I can do is to rest.
And I must admit, I am tired.

So I lie here in this bed surrounded by that wallpaper.
I just can't get it out of my head!

Again and again I resolve to bring that pointless pattern to some kind of sound conclusion.
It grows and it grows like a jointed toadstool, budding, sprouting shoots in endless convolutions.

The bloated curves and flourishes waddle along to those ugly spots that loll like broken necks with bulbous eyes that blankly stare.
The color is bad, but the pattern is torture.

It breaks every law and resists any order.
Up and down and sideways they crawl like wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

Searching for secrets obscured by the light I can almost get the vast grotesques to coalesce in other contexts.

By staring just so I can barely glimpse still other layers floating in the sunlight's glare.
It knocks you down and tramples upon you; it's like a drunken fever dream.
It makes me so angry; it slips through my fingers, staining my clothes while my mind keeps on lingering,

I just hate to watch but I cannot tear my eyes away.
I see some figure hiding in there.
In sunlight it's faint, but in moonlight it shimmers.
It looks like a woman just creeping inside—

I can't take it any more!
I even tried talking to John the other night. . . .

I can't live here. Take me away.

JOHN'S VOICE: "Oh darling, you really are getting better. I am a doctor, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, and I really feel much better about you."

I can't eat here. I can't sleep.

JOHN'S VOICE: "Bless her little heart! She shall be as sick as she pleases. But really, dear, you *are* better! . . ."

Better in body, perhaps. But not in mind—

JOHN'S VOICE: "Stop! You must banish such silly ideas from your head. There is nothing so dangerous to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fantasy. Can't you trust me as a doctor when I tell you?"

JOHN'S VOICE: "Now, let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep. We can discuss it in the morning."

So naturally I said no more, and we turned out the light.

John thought I was asleep first, but I lay there for hours trying to determine if the front and back patterns moved together or separately.

SCENE III

I'm feeling so much better! I've stopped complaining, and my appetite's back.
I'm feeling so much better! John is so pleased—yes, so pleased—oh, so pleased to see me improve!

JOHN'S VOICE: "You seem to be flourishing in spite of your wallpaper."

I couldn't tell him it was *because* of the wallpaper.
He would laugh at me—he might even have me taken away.

There are always new tendrils and new shades of yellow, and by watching it all night to see it evolve, I
have finally discovered something at last: the pattern—it moves!
The woman—she grabs the bars and shakes them hard, she grabs them and shakes them, then she tries
and tries to climb through.
But the pattern strangles her 'til her eyes turn white.
If all those strangled heads were taken off it wouldn't be half so bad.

Lately John's been acting strangely.
I suspect the pattern may be affecting him.
Once I crept into the room and caught him looking at the paper, but he won't solve that pattern.
No one can understand but me!

I will find it, by myself, all alone!

I've made another find: that woman gets out in the daytime!
I see her out the windows creeping beneath those dark shaded arbors.

I will find out, by myself—
Oh, if only I could look out all the windows at once, but it makes me so dizzy.
I just want to know how many women—
Is there just one or are there many?
I will find out, did all those creeping women come from the pattern just like me?

I guess I'll have to hide inside that pattern when the sun goes down.
If only I could find a way to erase that front layer—tear it off of the bottom one.
I will free her once and for all!

The moon appeared, and once again that woman—she grabbed the bars and shook them hard.
I ran up to help her tear that pattern down.

So I pulled and she shook.
Yes, I shook and she pulled, and I pulled and she shook.
And I shook and she pulled and I shook.
And I pulled and she shook and I pulled and she shook and I pulled and by morning that pattern was in
tatters.

I can't wait for John to come home.
I want to astonish him!
That woman—she is free!
I am free at last!

There's John on the stairs!