The Perfectly Unadjusted Woman: Reading Adaptation in "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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Abstract:

Sylvia Plath and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's openness on the restraints of the domestic sphere appear in their autobiographical and creative texts. Both authors employ the figure of an unadjusted woman as their narrator, a figure forced into docility and obedience; she denies her passions and forgoes isolation at the hands of patriarchal figures. Deemed 'mad' and 'unnatural,' the transplanting of this woman into seclusion intersects the work of the nineteenth-century gothic writers with twentieth-century feminist poetry. In "Tulips," intrusion appears as the uncanny presence of a gift – red flowers. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the walls, grotesquely yellow and fungal, disturb the narrator. In advancing the perfectly unadjusted woman, Plath reframes the domestic gothic in the twentieth-century while consciously utilizing classic gothic tropes, images, and themes. She redefines isolation as an escape from not only motherhood but also from her career as a writer. Oppression, isolation, and flight link Gilman and Plath's domestic gothic texts, and the parallels found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" demonstrate the advancement of the unadjusted woman into the twentieth-century imagination. This advancement complicates and redefines the oppressed woman's adaptation from patriarchal confines, subverting the expectations of motherhood for imaginative thought.

Keywords: Domestic gothic, ecocriticism, gothic feminism, gothic poetry, postpartum literature, gothic fiction.

The unadjusted woman, forced into docility and obedience, denies her passions and forgoes isolation at the hands of dominating patriarchal figures. The perfectly unadjusted woman exists as a "simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine" (Scharnhorst 1993, 157). Deemed 'mad' and 'unnatural,' the transplanting of this woman into seclusion intersects the work of the nineteenth-century gothic writers with twentieth-century feminist poetry. In Sylvia Plath's "Tulips," the intrusion appears as the uncanny presence of a gift – red flowers. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," the walls, grotesquely yellow and fungal, disturb the narrator. Gilman, introducing the perfectly unadjusted woman through domestic gothic qualities, shapes a character that would later manifest in Plath's poetry, particularly in "Tulips." Thus, Gilman creates a figure that would become Plath's primary narrator, a female protagonist distinct to female Gothicism. However, Plath pushes this character beyond madness and metaphoric protest. Plath advances this character, as well as the domestic gothic as a literary genre. Likewise, the feminist resistance Gilman defines in "The Yellow Wallpaper" would pave the way for twentieth-century

confessional feminist poets, who eradicate the reliance on metaphoric coding found in nineteenth-century feminist writing. In advancing the perfectly unadjusted woman, Plath reframes the domestic gothic in the twentieth-century while consciously utilizing classic gothic tropes, images, and themes. She redefines isolation as an escape from not only motherhood but also from her career as a writer, a profession she deems male-dominated. Plath's definition of escape deviates from Gilman's definition that emphasizes the importance of escapism through writing. Oppression, isolation, and flight link Gilman and Plath's domestic gothic texts, and the parallels found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" demonstrate the advancement of the unadjusted woman into the twentieth-century imagination. This advancement complicates and redefines the oppressed woman's adaptation from patriarchal confines, subverting the expectations of motherhood for imaginative thought.

Although Plath did not explicitly identify as a gothic writer, the qualities echoing throughout her work suggest an intentionally gothic hand shapes her poetry. In poems like "The Manor Garden," Plath describes a death-ridden home, "more suitable for a Gothic horror tale than for a birth," repeatedly conveying babies as lowly creatures but natural signs of life. Gina Wisker examines Plath's fear of nurturing another human being in a destructive and oppressive world, offered through a domestic gothic lens. Wisker states in "Viciousness in the Kitchen" that Plath "utilizes the strategies, images, and tropes of the literary Gothic and horror to express hidden secrets, the undersides of our complacent everyday" (Wisker 2004, 104). This forbidden underside, the taboo of women subverting the patriarchal notions of naturalness, Plath explores with the unadjusted woman's voice in the domestic gothic genre. This unsatisfied voice exists in both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," as discontent from restrictive gender roles confines both women. However, fearing the revelation of their discontent, both stories contain hesitancy in expressing this hidden underside that exists. Growing resentful, the voice in "Both the domestic incident and the terrifying short story suggest the familiar Gothic themes of confinement and rebellion, forbidden desire and 'irrational' fear" (Johnson 1989, 522). Both authors utilize Gothic tropes, such as the distraught yet pervasive heroine, the forbidding room, and a repressive male antagonist. In "Tulips," the unadjusted woman confidently derails the need for the heavy coding and metaphoric language. Although the symbolic resistance of motherhood found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" progresses in "Tulips," and other poems, through Plath's uninhibited confessional voice, she opts for a flight from the patriarchal hierarchy that opposes Gilman's call for female unity and action; death, not writing, becomes Plath's escape.

Restraint and oppression appear in the domestic gothic, and the triumph over the patriarchal hierarchy occurs in both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." Gilman and Plath utilize the gothic, framing the natural word as encroaching upon the constructed environment as a way to demonstrate resistance and flight. In "Tulips," Plath's narrator becomes disturbed by a flower bouquet's presence, a 'get-well' gift from her husband. Likewise, Gilman's narrator describes the hideous, unreliable, fungal wallpaper as torturous, as John confines her to this room. She describes how "You think you've mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face and knocks you down, and tramples upon you" (Gilman 2013, 398). The natural world becomes pervasive to both women, at least initially, as it serves as a reminder of maternal expectations, the naturalness of childbirth, life, and motherhood. These expectations burden both Plath and Gilman's narrators, yet their similar escape from the patriarchal hierarchy becomes focal – the depths of the mind as its epicenter. John and the husband who brings tulips live bound to rationality

and incapable of understanding the unadjusted woman's oppression, but more significantly, Plath and Gilman express the men's inability to access imaginative thought.

Ironically, John places his wife in the yellow-wallpapered room as a means to contain and control her. The narrator in "Tulips" enters confinement willingly, as physical illness results in her hospitalization. The confined space frees both women, as creative discovery and greater autonomy follow their isolation from the restrictions inflicted upon them by a predominantly patriarchal society. The unadjusted woman's placement into this space opens both texts to a Marxist lens, given the emphasis on hierarchy and flight. The isolation of women signifies their worth, a phenomenon Bruce Robbins notably explored in his Marxist critical essay on another domestic gothic text, *The Turn of the Screw*. In Henry James's novel, the placement of figures on a staircase magnifies the story's social hierarchy and, shortly after that, the disruption of that hierarchy. Placement, encasement, and the confusion of locations infiltrate gothic tales, and as shown in "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," operate as disorientating forces, disrupting the familiar. For example, in the final scene of "The Yellow Wallpaper," John's social placement above his wife, inferiorly residing in a child's room, inverts when her metaphoric protest against domestic confines actualizes as she physically triumphs over him. In this disturbing scene, the narrator "creeps" over John, demonstrating her successful escape from the hierarchy. Likewise, the yellow-wallpapered room, initially her prison, with unbreakable bars and intrusively fungal, transforms into a liberating and creative space, becoming a haven from John's oppressive watch. The narrator states, "John is so pleased to see me improve...said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper...I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wall-paper – he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away" (Gilman 2013, 399). The tulips and the hospital room mirror this transformation, evolving from the confining reminder of the narrator's role as mother and wife to a source of relief, as her triumph ensues. In this disturbing scene, she sees recounts:

> The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.
> The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
> They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,
> And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes
> Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me. (Plath 2007, lines 57-61)

For both women, the wallpaper and tulips, symbols of confinement and restriction, become enablers of free thought and self-acceptance. As each woman accepts her environment and adapts within it, fungal walls and tulips, once reminders of naturalness and motherhood, no longer function as imprisonment. Instead, the women reshape the confined space as an area in which they can explore. Both the wallpaper and the tulips, organic, fungal, intrusive, and even animalistic, embody qualities that define motherhood. Restraints against free thought and flight bind each woman. Returning to a Marxist lens, both women adapt away from the patriarchy within their environment. John, overly confident in his ability to control his wife, attempts to restrict her. Ironically, what he deems as madness liberates her imagination, allowing subversion of his shortcomings as a solely logical physician. However, since the story ends in madness, and she remains within the walls of her confinement, she does not wholly escape her imprisonment. Similarly, Plath's narrator does not escape the confines of her place in the hierarchy either since she forces herself to accept the tulips, symbolic of her servant role as wife and mother. The complicated ending of "The

Yellow Wallpaper" describes, "It is so pleasant to be out in this great room...I don't want to go outside...Why there's John at the door! It is no use, young man, you can't open it! How he does call and pound...It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!" (Gilman 2013, 402). She has no desire to go outside. She seems unwilling to explore the world outside, a now foreign environment to the one she adapted to within the nursery. She mocks John, declaring that "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!" and that "I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in" (Gilman 2013, 402). In order to gain access to the room, he must go beneath her and the stairs for the key. Furthermore, he faints after opening the door, and she comes to "creep over him every time," overturning his rule (Gilman 2013, 402). Therefore, she successfully subverts the patriarchy.

Gilman's narrator gains a sense of superior wisdom over her arrogant and overly rational husband while maintaining her imaginative freedom (perhaps her only freedom) within this society. She was aware from the beginning of the story that people of their class do not receive "ancestral halls" and exquisite positions of wealth and authority. John, however, attempted to overthrow the system, neglecting the only sense of freedom he could have had – imaginative freedom through his wife's "nervous condition." However, just as in "Tulips," illness confines both women, a confinement John does not face. Though he faces a literal downfall and faints, her mental illness peaks and possibly prevents her complete liberation from the room. Their roles as servants, wives, and mothers, dissipate as each woman redefines the wallpaper and tulips, accepting them as a means of creative escape, imagination, and exploration.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator discusses dissatisfaction with marriage, as well as rage and distaste towards motherhood. Incessantly undermined by her husband, the narrator describes how she takes "pains to control myself – before him, at least, and that makes me very tired" (Gilman 2013, 393). As aforementioned, she initially asserts her dislike for the room, a place of John's choosing, an "atrocious nursery" (Gilman 2013, 394). The nursery, a domestic sphere used against the narrator as a place of confinement, initially worsens the narrator's nervous condition, a condition that has been identified as postpartum depression, a condition Gilman's physician Dr. S. Weir Mitchel diagnosed her with (Ghandeharion 2016, 116). Gilman records in her 1935 autobiography that Mitchel advised her to "Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time. Lie down an hour after every meal. Have but two hours intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live." Given the details available through her autobiography, "The Yellow Wallpaper" functions as a text rejecting such treatment, as the narrator finds multiple women entrapped behind the walls, confined to the inescapable roles of domesticity; the unadjusted narrator refuses to find gratification as a mother and housewife. Instead, she fights for her right to imaginative expression and independence from John and motherhood. Her desire to free the women in the walls from the nursery's confines, paired with Gilman's rejection of Mitchel's treatment, support the claim that motherhood is the ultimate source of anxiety, inserting the uncanny into the narrative. In the "atrocious nursery," a place where nothing hinders the narrator's writing, she writes as much as she pleases, so long as her strength prevails (Gilman 2013, 394). However, when the narrator finds herself, "In his presence, John's wife behaves according to socially accepted norms...she must do what she likes in secret...But the longer everyone leaves her alone, the stronger her individual identity becomes" (Griffin 2000, 11). Hence, she discovers an escape despite the intrusive nature of the wallpaper, for once she recognizes her struggle in the faces of the women behind the paper, John becomes the intrusive presence.

Only in her solitude can creativity flourish, an idea that Plath utilizes throughout her final and most notable book of poetry, *Ariel*. Despite the prison in "The Yellow Wallpaper" becoming a place of imagination, her flight from restriction occurs in the very space John places her in. Plath would later take the concept of motherhood's uncanniness, and her call for escape from all roles, including her creative identity as a poet, to show concerns of patriarchal dominance in the working place of writers as well, almost with a tinge of defeat. Notably, Plath's advancement of Gilman's call for higher female agency differs in that she does not find escape through advocating the right for women to write. In focusing again on the domestic Gothic world, a place that carries into the twentieth-century imagination, this refocuses the release of imaginative power as present in both texts. Yet what Plath does as a twentieth-century confessional and feminist writer not only calls attention to repression in the domestic sphere, through her poetry, she also concludes "that our ideas about motherhood and poetry are in fact dead or useless because they are formed from and adhere primarily to the traditional, formal conventions of our society. By repeating life patterns, such as continuously having the same opinions, beliefs, and associations about things (like motherhood and poetic form), we are distracted and living automated lives, and therefore not truly living at all" (Zane 2011, 270). This quote fits well when examined in light of Bruce's Marxist concerns with female gothic characters, suggesting either more work must be done to break the hierarchal structure, or that since the structure dominates the narrative, vain efforts will not succeed.

Rather than dwell extensively on how the isolated space changes over time, or whether the breaking of the hierarchy in place can be successfully done, turning attention back to the intrusion of the natural world into this imaginative and isolated space creates a critique on naturalness. This functions in linking the texts though the anxieties surrounding the horrors of motherhood. These anxieties surrounding domesticity and in rarity, its pleasures, exist within the framework of "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." For in both Gilman's short story and Plath's poem, the placement within an enclosed environment operates as the primary indication of the domestic gothic in action. Twentieth-century concerns with female agency, the uncanniness of motherhood, and madness harken back to Gilman's era, and it becomes clear that the burden of motherhood weighs heavily on female gothic writers. What Gilman begins in "The Yellow Wallpaper" Plath completes in "Tulips": a call for the perfectly unadjusted woman to acclimate against domestic constraints. However, looking at the biographical contexts that shape why each woman enters solitude becomes necessary before arriving to this essay's claim that Plath advances Gilman's unadjusted woman. Likewise, the gothic heroine each author creates operates differently within the unique nineteenth and twentieth-century conditions. The conditions in which Plath's narrator and Gilman's narrator enter isolation differ, as Gilman's narrator's faces psychological impairment and for Plath's, physical. By placing his distraught wife in a nursery, John "is merely following the nineteenth-century equation of non-maternal women – that is, spinsters and 'hysterics' – with helpless children. Yet he is unthinkingly allowing her the free play of imagination and abdication of social responsibility also characteristic of children. Thus, as the story progresses, the narrator follows both her childlike promptings and her artistic faith in creating a Gothic alternative to the stifling daylight world of her husband and the society at large" (Johnson 1989, 524). John defines the illness, creates the space of isolation, and instigates fear. Yet in "Tulips," also autobiographical, Plath's then-husband Ted Hughes did not impose her hospitalization, yet the same fear and hatred Gilman describes would permeate this solitary space nonetheless.

The narrator in "Tulips," who has been identified as Plath, finds herself isolated in a hospital, following an appendix removal. She describes how she gives her "name and day-clothes up to the nurses," and likewise, her "history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons" (Plath 2007, lines 6-7). In contrast, the female protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is forced into her confinement, a bedroom rather than a hospital room, an entirely different landscape. Although the degree of agency each woman displays seem unequal, with Gilman's narrator being placed and Plath's placing herself, there are natural elements that become othered to each woman, connecting their narratives far more closely than initially perceived. In the pivotal study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine nineteenth-century female writers, such as Charlotte Bronte, and how they express discretely their "forbidden emotions in powerful but carefully disguised forms" (Gilber and Gubar 1979, 338). This hidden expression of emotion, for Gilman, was the only way she could reach a broader audience while also creating a call for women to demand further agency and escape the restrictive domestic sphere. In no way a flaw on Gilman or Bronte's part, this less-obvious way of criticizing restrictive norms would allow writers such as Plath to push symbolic action further, derailing the need for a discrete expression of spousal horror and more powerfully, the horrors of birth and motherhood.

For Plath, willingly entering the hospital due to physical ailment rather than a mental one, shapes her adaptation as effortless. This decision may be a mark of the times changing, asserting adaptiveness in an era quite different from Gilman's. Alternatively, perhaps it is not whether or not each woman chooses to adapt in solitude, but it is what each woman adapts away from that becomes central. In acknowledging that much of what both women wrote was likely inspired by their own domestic experiences, both women write in ways that alert readers to the horrors of this sphere. Plath less subtly "alerts readers to the domestic limitations in a reader's life...she tries to reach the reader through a shared set of references to domestic relationships with which they can identify. Plath represents these domestic issues not as simply confessions of her own problems in life, but as a means of defamiliarizing the reader and the reader's conventional assumptions about the domestic" (Zane 2011, 261).

Plath's narrator finds forgoing mental stimulation cathartic, whereas Gilman's, forced to forgo stimulation, finds it torturous. An interesting dichotomy, despite both perfectly unadjusted women's directness in their desire to abandon motherhood, their longing for a distinct sense of independent-self are quite different. Although the gothic qualities of Plath's work are underexamined, the domestic sphere and anxieties of motherhood have long been subject to conversation. For Plath, "There's a hex on the cradle" and "death in the pot," as the horrors of infants and domicile dwellings permeate her poetry. Both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" focus, at one level, on sickness, madness, injury, torture, death, and confinement, forms of suffering recurring in the feminine domestic gothic. Male gothic pioneers, such as Charles Brocken Brown and later, Edgar Allan Poe, also focus on such themes, yet within the repressed conditions of the perfectly unadjusted woman, endurance and flight within confined spaces develops. The desire to be free from baggage, exist utterly empty and ultimately escape the female roles and domestic experience demonstrate a disharmonizing view of life. Writing decades apart, both Plath and Gilman write about the looming tension between obligations to home and the creative desire for a career. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," sharp images of the physical act of writing and the inability to hide it inserts the gothic's element of repression. Likewise, in "Tulips," Plath also explores repression, but of another kind – repression of the role of motherhood and writing. She rejects the ensnarement of her family and career, and the gift of flowers propel her into rage. She expresses, "I didn't want any flowers,"

and continues to describe the intrusive tulips to be "like an awful baby" that "eats my oxygen" (Plath 2007, lines 38-49). The context of this poem helps support how Plath intentionally frames it, one of her last to be written, as akin to Gilman's domestic gothic. Ted Hughes would go on to detail that not only was "Tulips" written after Plath's hospitalization from appendectomy in March of 1961 but that she had also miscarried a child shortly before this operation, as depression following this loss touches Plath's work (Dobbs 1977, 21).

The physical and mental suffering inflicted upon women through pregnancy inserts an uncanniness that Gilman frequently writes on as well, and in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator, also a new mother, copes with postpartum depression. The treatment of female depression by male physicians in Gilman's story contrasts the feminine nurses in white that swab Plath's narrator "clear of my loving associations," allowing her entrance into a place so pure, where she meets her desire:

> To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
> How free it is, you have no idea how free—
> The peacefulness so big it dazes you (Plath 2207, line 26-28)

Only after the nurses arrive, she adapts within the confined environment, the hospital room, and empties her mind. Focusing on the enclosed space, she describes how in the emptiness of the light that "lies on these white walls," she starts "learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly" (Plath 2007, lines 3-4). The narrator's adapting qualities foster her survival. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator's mind mirrors the room that encloses her. She and the wallpaper are intertwined, as "Its remoteness and neglected beauty unsettle her. It oozes with everything a practical, positivistic husband says do not exist and adds Gothic mystery to the realistic surface" (Van 2010, 53). Hence, the room, a placidly colored and solitary space, becomes a haven away from husbands and children. However, Gilman's perfectly unadjusted woman triumphs memorably at the end when she creeps over her husband, signifying defiance and empowerment. Although Plath's unadjusted woman does find relief momentarily from such restrictive roles, the tulips' intrusion permeates through an ecological conceit that both harkens to earlier female gothic writers while also inserting fears of nature; the tulips become the vessel for reinserting the domestic into the poem.

The tulips are perhaps the most horrifying and perplexing presence in the piece. Their animalistic qualities eerily provide a gothic moment similar to what has been interpreted as a rape in Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford's 1860 story "Circumstance." The tulips are described as consuming the narrator, as she recounts with disgust how the tulips are "Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour, / A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck" (Plath 2007, 41-42). Moreover, by the end of the poem, they are explicitly stated to be panther-like, as she asserts, "The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals; / They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat" (Plath 2007, lines 58-59). The scenery pairs with the early frontier preoccupation with the monstrosity of felines and the wilderness, an uncanny moment in the poem, providing a stark contrast to the many images of purity, cleansing, and escape found in earlier stanzas. The tulips, an organic presence, are directly tied to the domestic sphere. A gift from her husband, they painfully reunite her with her role as a mother. The redness corresponds to the wound, lifeblood, and motherhood. The red is a stark contrast to the white, death-like sterility of the hospital walls. Her preference of white over red puts illness and death above the domestic restraints that life offers. However, some critics have argued that "the fact that white and all it stands for (post-natal

depression, hospitalization, sickness, loneliness, bareness, withdrawal from life) is the choice of an (by patriarchal standards) abnormal woman, reaffirms rather than challenges the healthy, traditional values of motherhood and of caring for the family" (Gjurgjan 1997, 138). However, the perverse, rape-like descriptions of the flowers invade the perfectly unadjusted woman's isolation, complicating the space and destroying a place of mental relief and lack of dedication to expectations.

Examination of the flowers provides support that Plath intentionally utilizes gothic qualities to subvert domestic expectations. Plath "applies strange, abstract, and conceptual descriptions to these domestic settings and relationships in order to force readers to think differently about them. More specifically, she consciously uses tropes that are trademark to the feminine and domestic gothic rather than rely on broader gothic qualities" (Zane 2011, 273). The lasting effect: a story of horror that is also understandable. However, this advocates a bold statement for Plath's time, despite the progression of feminist views decades after Gilman's era. "Tulips" is one example of several in Plath's vast body of poems that expand upon the domestic gothic's grotesque imagery, yet perhaps the most notable example of this shock effect occurs in "Stillborn." With subtle hints at sorrow and feelings of maternal loss, the perfectly unadjusted woman's voice of protest underlies this poem, in which "Plath suppresses the reader's traditional connotations of motherhood, such as warmth, nurture, and love – which are being defamiliarized. Instead, she associates motherhood with new images. She not only invokes death and decay here but the deceased" (Zane 2011, 269). Furthermore, the natural world and its creatures become symbols for horror, as "The 'mother' compares her 'children' to pigs or fish, which are not animals that are typically associated with human children. The connotations with "dead fetuses in jars are usually things for scientific study that is dehumanizing" (Zane 2011, 270). In doing this, Plath replaces the expectations of love and motherly adoration with monstrosity by degrading them as less-than, as repulsive animals.

The demonizing of the domestic sphere by taking animals and plants and making them monstrous reappears in the domestic gothic as a way to invert the natural and biological associations with maternal instinct, creating a way for female gothic writers to boldly, or subtly as Gilman does, resist and redefine patriarchal norms. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the natural world outside the constructed yellow world become horrifying, inserting a commentary on the pressures of natural law. Likewise, "As the story ends, the real natural world outside the room becomes the strange, misfitting one in which she feels like an alien. She finds that 'outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.' Nevertheless, she becomes fully comfortable creeping openly in her yellow world." (Scott 2009, 202). Likewise, in Plath's sterile hospital, "The focus on the details of the operation suggests once more that the peacefulness is temporary and somehow unreal" (Efron 1975, 118). The constructed environment in which the women find freedom becomes a haven contrasting the natural world, a place of little to no escape from gendered expectations of women as mothers. Despite both narrators being required to forgo intellectual and social stimulation, to eat and sleep indulgently, and to remain almost entirely in isolation, for Gilman, in "the strange upstairs room of a rented colonial mansion... this woman is forced by the rest-cure to adapt to her surroundings" (Scott 200). In a complicated society, the specific social constructs of John and his wife's world are never implicitly given. Though readers do not receive details of the specific societal restrictions and regulations of this society, the dialogue and actions of the characters depict a hierarchy in place, and the unfolding of actions and events within the tale highlight both the restrictions and the minimal possibilities of finding freedom under this system. In both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," illness, both physical and mental, are the primary

confinements both women face, and though they seem to find a sense of liberation in the space they are physically confined too, they never truly escape this ensnaring imprisonment. Likewise, since the narrator in "Tulips" comes to accept the flowers' presence and even relies on them, she remains entrapped as her servant role as a wife and mother. Finally, in a similar fashion, though the unstable narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" attempts to free herself from the confines of the society she lives in, she only does so through her engagement with the yellow wallpaper, symbolic of John's imposed treatment of her nervous condition.

Only in an isolated space does each narrator find a possible outlet within the system, though it is doubtful that either woman finds a true escape. John's downfall evokes what Robbins calls the "unfallen state of something." It is both of the narrators' imaginative minds that represent the unfallen state, and ironically, it is John's assimilated logical mind that is the accurate indicator of being trapped, in every sense, within the hierarchy. Both women try to escape their confining roles as mother and wife, and though their roles and treatment are imposed upon them, it is in this solitary space that they find the only sense of freedom available – creative thought. Likewise, it seems that the subject who sees subversive versions of fungal walls and flowers, as well as sick and strangled life forms, reveal their own sick and strangled psyches by these articulations. Nevertheless, amid sickness, each woman finds a new kind of health, as imagination grows receptive to the world around them. Stimulated through adapting to the restrictive environment, the perfectly unadjusted women reclaim purpose by breaking gender norms.

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