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Jennifer Stern

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Jennifer Stern  
University of Arizona

## Gender, Genre, and Thematic Expectation in Logan Thomas' *The Yellow Wallpaper*: How Filmmakers Can Use Palimpsest Against the Audience

**Abstract:** In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon posits that adaptations give audiences the best of both worlds: something familiar and recognizable while also presenting something new and unexpected. Media makers can play on audiences' expectations, creating a "palimpsestuous" relationship between the original and adaptive texts. Director Logan Thomas depends on his audience's prior engagement with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" in his 2012 film of the same name. While the film is a clear departure from Gilman's text, acting as the origin story of the author's experience in writing the story, Thomas' reliance on the viewers' familiarity with Gilman is necessary to his larger trans-genre project. Thomas expects that his viewers will expect Gilman's gothic setting, tone, and language and delivers those expectations for much of the film. This palimpsest of genre expectation however becomes a perfect way for him to enhance audience fear when the film turns out to be a horror. Thomas' technique of using the palimpsest against the audience changes his adaptation of a text from one genre to another, revealing the shock that can be garnered from working with popular canonical texts.

**Keywords:** Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Logan Thomas, genre, adaptation theory, palimpsest

### Introduction

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon outlines the operating factors and ramifications of adaptations, enlightening media-literate readers as to the sociological motivations behind cross-medium adaptations. Early on, she discusses the functional principle of the palimpsest that connects audience members to adaptive works via their experiences with and prior knowledge of original texts. According to Hutcheon, adaptive texts are "haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (6). In *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (2010), Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan further complicate the relationship between the adaptive and the adapted in stating, "One of the seductions of adaptation criticism is that the literary text will not disappear, and its traces (often obscured or unacknowledged) come to the surface in numerous ways, just as adaptation, particularly a successful one, inhabits and imprints itself upon the notational original" (12). For the new work to function as an adaptation and enter into conversation with the adapted original, the audience must be aware of the original text. Without a preexisting relationship with the original text, the audience may still enjoy a new work but will miss the elements that "[stress] the relation of individual works to other works and to an entire cultural system" (Hutcheon 21). Hutcheon claims that adaptations are so popular due to palimpsestuous familiarity; a successful adaptation works well when it is both familiar to the audience and able to offer something new. Given this broad definition of success, Logan Thomas' 2012 film adaptation works as a reimagining of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." The film of the same name has foundations in Gilman's text in setting and extremely basic plot elements but shifts genre from Gilman's Gothic at a key moment. In fact, the film should be considered less of a successful adaptation and more of an intertextual origin story as Thomas' narrative follows Gilman herself as she writes her canonical story in the type of gothic "colonial mansion" that serves as the setting for her short story (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 334). According to Geoffrey Wagner's three-tiered scale of adaptations' faithfulness

to source texts found in *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), Logan's film exemplifies the loosest category of fidelity, an "analogy," by presenting a substantially different narrative from Gilman's story. However, incorporating enough familiar material into his film makes Thomas' sudden shift in genre toward the film's end much more shocking, a directorial choice that serves as an example of how theoretical notions of the palimpsest can favor media makers who work with popular texts. Additionally, Thomas uses the genre shift to complicate Gilman's discussion of gender politics.

### Methodology

This article situates Gilman's original text firmly within a genre and historical context. From Gilman's Gothic and *fin de siècle* timing, specifically female tensions of being pressured by and attempting to press back against patriarchal rules emerge. Relying on adaptation theory and a feminist critical lens, a male auteur (Thomas is the film's director, producer, and co-writer) film maker's revisioning of Gilman's text is explored for adaptive purpose, generic adherences, and thematic shift. The film moves away from the Gothic in a manner that shocks the audience because of both their palimpsestuous relationship with the source text and Thomas' misleading adherence to the Gothic in the film's opening. However, film history and theory can illuminate Thomas' techniques as his Gothic and Horror elements recall the gendered implications of those genres and what they can mean for his original thematic statement on gender in the twenty-first century.

### Gilman's famous Gothic story and its feminist interpretations

The popularity of the source text works in Thomas' favor; "The Yellow Wallpaper" is typical fare in high school literary studies. Published in 1892, Gilman's frequently anthologized short story follows the first-person narrative via the diary of a woman, an unnamed everywoman, isolated in an unfamiliar house while being treated for various psychoses by her doctor husband. Part of the audiences' unease comes from questionable narrator credibility. A new mother, the character labels her illness a "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 334), but she may actually be ignoring personal symptoms of what we now call postpartum depression (PPD). While PPD was not listed as an official diagnosis until 1994 in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM), it has been commonly alluded to throughout history beginning with Hippocrates' awareness of depressive symptoms common in women after giving birth (Sparks 3). She might also be under a significant amount of stress caused by treatment—with or without reason—administered by her husband, a mental health professional.<sup>1</sup> Her husband serves as a caricature of Victorian patriarchal control (Hume 478), "prescribing that [which keeps] the narrator infantilized, immobilized, and bored literally out of her mind" (Lanser 418). Whether or not readers choose to trust the narrator, they can feel her sense of unease amplified by being contained at her husband's whim without any creative outlet in a room designated for use by children. Most of the narrator's worry stems from her placement in this space; the room has creepy, fetid wallpaper that may or may not have a woman trapped behind its complex pattern. Many other classic elements of the Gothic genre appear in Gilman's story.

The genre itself is notably difficult to define. Suzanne Rintoul's essay "Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition" (2005) confronts this issue by examining the variations in definitions provided by contemporary scholars and educators. Rintoul finds that engagement with this problem of classification yields two types of results: critics either "attempt to cover several aspects of the Gothic in order to define it in its most expansive sense" or perform "more focused studies of individual works that situate

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<sup>1</sup> The narrator sees this possibility while acknowledging the fact that she is not well: "John is a physician, and perhaps...that is one reason I do not get well sooner" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 334).

a definition of the genre along a historical, cultural, and political continuum" (702). As these studies produce definitions that are either too broad or too narrow to be of consistent use, it is perhaps better to define the genre through consistently employed conventions. After all, the Gothic tends toward a "thematic emphasis on the impossibility of securing limits" (Rintoul 702). "The anxieties thematized in the Gothic are so spectral, so indecipherable and sublimely broad" as to cover many socio-cultural anxieties as they change from place-to-place and throughout time (Rintoul 701). Most scholars agree that the Gothic functions as a genre by indirectly confronting social concerns over issues such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. As Jerrold E. Hogle states: "the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural" (4).

It does so by supporting a number of conventions, many of which Gilman makes use. Gothic fiction often confronts "the fear of one being exerting total power over another" (Seed 271). It also "usually takes place...in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space" that conceals "some secrets from the past...that haunt the characters" (Hogle 2). Hauntings appear frequently as "ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death)" that make the Gothic text a common site for exploring the relationship "between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural" (Hogle 2). Furthermore, authors who create a first-person point of entry into distressing places and situations often do so in order to play upon reader emotions: "authors of Gothic heroes frequently presented *themselves* as heroes through narrative and editorial strategies" (Rintoul 708). Strategies like the first-person point of view make the plot seem more real by legitimating the author's supposed experiences while also positioning the reader in the place of the "I" who experiences the trauma of those experiences. Gilman troublingly employs the first person in a tale that actually is semiautobiographical; she famously endured treatment for depression after childbirth. Her tale is set in "ancestral halls" that the narrator is tempted to call "a haunted house" (Gilman, "The Yellow Paper" 334). She herself is haunted by the specter of the woman in the wallpaper, a physical manifestation of her being haunted by her illness and/or her paternalistic husband who has complete control over her every facet of life.

The Gothic genre has always been of significant use to female writers and readers. Horace Walpole is credited for introducing the literary Gothic with the 1764 release of *The Castle of Otranto*. The genre received sporadic use for several decades before "it exploded in the 1790s...throughout the British Isles, on the continent of Europe, and briefly in the new United States, particularly for a female readership" (Hogle 1). Anne Radcliffe, "the most popular English woman novelist of the 1790s" and poster child for the genre, and her contemporaries "[developed] the primal Gothic scene of a woman confined and [turned] it into a journey of women coming into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency, albeit within a still-antiquated and male-dominated world full of terrors for every female" (Hogle 10). Hogle notes the frequency with which the genre's texts center around a female character who unearths some secret from within the physical expression of western patriarchal lineages: the large, ancestral estate. Contemporary critics confront the troubling reoccurrence with which Gothic "women are the figures most fearfully trapped between contradictory pressures and impulses" (Hogle 9). Increasingly, feminist critics examine "how female protagonists can represent women's empowerment when such empowerment is predicated on their roles as victims" (Rintoul 709). Michelle Masséde problematizes this feminist conflict by stating "that subversion in the Gothic depends on the illusion of submission. For Massé, the submissive Gothic heroine subverts by quietly masking her disobedience of the patriarchy that oppresses her" (Massé qtd. in Rintoul 709). Indeed, "[t]he Victorian wife had so little control over her own life that it was through [the] 'frivolities' such as clothing and even wallpaper that these women exercised their autonomy" (Crowder). It is therefore no surprise that the

narrator finds an outlet for her rebellion and anger in the wallpaper hung in her nursery prison; not only were Victorian women reduced to minor means of exerting autonomy, but they were also expected to be obedient wives and doting mothers, proverbial angels of the house, regardless of their ambitions or desires. Gilman's heroine exemplifies Victorian subversion; she notes the pains she takes "to control [herself] – before [John], at least" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 335). Gilman's heroine performs submission by feigning sleep, concealing the document she is writing, and hiding her attempts to uncover the mystery of the wallpaper.

Despite the Gothic's and Gilman's reliance on an active rather than reactive female protagonist, there is some scholarly debate as to whether "The Yellow Wallpaper" is meant to be a feminist text. Originally interpreted as a ghost story akin to Poe's canon, feminist criticism opened up the possibility that Gilman was making claims about male authority in her text. Given her experiences as a female patient in masculine mental health settings, her failed first marriage, her nervous breakdown following her daughter's birth, and her active participation in the suffrage movement, labeling her text a woman-centered one that comments on the restricted place granted to women in patriarchal systems is unproblematic. In a short article entitled "Why I wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" originally published in 1913 in Gilman's magazine, *The Forerunner*, Gilman herself discloses her authorial intentions. Having suffered from "a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia," she sought out treatment from a specialist. "The wise man" prescribed a "rest cure," telling her to "live as domestic a life as far as possible," to limit herself to two hours of intellectual work a day, and "never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again" in her life. After three months of further progression toward "utter mental ruin," she began to work, "in which is joy and growth and service." She goes on to mention that the specialist later amended his treatment protocols and mentions awareness of at least one woman who was spared from "a similar fate" (Gilman, "Why I Wrote..." 348-349). "The Yellow Wallpaper" has a rightful place in feminist anthologies, where it is very often republished, and should be taught as a criticism of *fin de siècle* gender politics, which it very often is. Additionally, Gilman notably wrote *Herland*, a short novel about a productive utopian society comprised entirely of women that is intruded upon by male explorers, a more overt treatment of gender hierarchy. The feminist critical view of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is so prevalent that Logan Thomas relies on viewers of his film having knowledge of the text's recognition among its vast readership as a commentary on women's limited agency as wives, mothers, and patients although the term "feminism" would have been unfamiliar to Gilman's contemporary audience.

### **Thomas' adaptive generic and thematic changes**

On its surface, Thomas' 2012 film does not appear to be making a specific assertion about gender equity due in part to its departure from Gilman's plot. Instead of focusing on the narrative voice of a woman dominated by her husband, Dr. John Weiland (Aric Cushing)<sup>2</sup> provides a male perspective through voice over. The film opens in 1892 with a shot of Charlotte's (Juliet Landau) back, a further signal that this adaptation will not foreground female experiences as Gilman's adapted text does. Rather, Thomas' work follows the Weilands as a couple along with Charlotte's sister Jennie (Dale Dickey). The group settles into an eerie rental home in a faraway town after receiving a letter from realtor Isaac Hendricks (Michael Moriarty) when a fire destroys their familial home and kills their daughter. The house seems to carry some stigma in the community as various locals comment on their wellbeing, a line of inquiry that only exacerbates their shared distress. John's misogynistic mentor and

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Cushing has published a collection of Gilman's work entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories: The Complete Gothic Collection*. His introductory essay, "Is 'The Yellow Wallpaper' a Gothic Story?," highlights Gilman's career as a Gothic writer.

former professor Dr. Jack Everland (Raymond J. Barry) visits him and guides John through his grief over the loss of his daughter, Sarah. Charlotte and Jennie also receive visitors, local women who attempt to befriend them. The women are snubbed and dismissed as Charlotte turns her focus on family and devastating loss inward and begins writing "The Yellow Wallpaper." She works from the attic where she cloisters herself after having visions of Sarah in the house. Jennie leaves the house after a number of unexplainable events and heads "back East." John alone supports Charlotte, and the film briefly becomes a romance as the couple reconnects. Charlotte produces her story and regains her grasp on sanity, seeming to come to terms with her daughter's death through artistic effort. Jennie returns with her former college friend, psychic Catherine Sayer (Veronica Cartwright). John is as dismissive of Catherine's supernatural abilities as he is about her thoughts on "secular rights and the modern woman." Catherine feels the house "calling for" John to search under the house where he finds Sarah. The family has a short-lived reunion before Sarah becomes a man who threatens them all with hell, pointing specifically at Charlotte. John determines that they will leave the house in the morning. When morning comes, he sets out to town even though Catherine has mysteriously disappeared, leaving Jennie and Charlotte behind. He demands that the women do not go back into the house, but after finding Catherine's body in an unearthed coffin and being threatened by wild dogs, they have no other course of action. Meanwhile John is confronted by a man dressed as a Greco-Roman sentry, a bizarre experience that leads him back to the house where Charlotte and Jennie have somehow been separated. John returns to find a blood-covered shawl, the first sign that viewers have been engaging with a horror movie all along. Eckhart van Wakefield (Pieter Kloos), the home's ancestral owner, appears as a centuries-old vampire who has been preying on renters found by Mr. Hendricks. Wakefield feeds on John, leaving him alive to find Charlotte's body. Hendricks reenters to tell John that Charlotte has been turned into a vampire. John must choose between leaving Charlotte to die, an action that would cause him to die of reasons that go unexplained, and finding people to serve as her food source. He chooses the later, and the film ends with him inviting a husband and his pregnant wife into the home. The final frame depicts John wearing contemporary clothing leaning against the "hideous, ...unreliable, ...and infuriating" wallpaper (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 340).

In this departure, Thomas' work seems to step away from the feminist critical readings of Gilman. While her text highlights interiority and autonomy, Logan highlights breaking down boundaries: in time (ancient Mediterranean past and Victorian presence), insiders and outsiders (townspeople and the incoming Weilandts), the normal and paranormal, and—of course—genres and genders. In fact, this film is as much about gender and gendered relationships as the story from which it purportedly originates. On its surface, the film seems to offer as many anti-feminist as it does feminist stances. An easy explanation of this would be that the film is largely the product of two men: Logan Thomas and Aric Cushing. John has supplanted the voice of Gilman's first-person female character. Truly, the two lead female characters are silent through the first several minutes of the film. During one of their extended conversations, they refer to their neighborhood visitors as an ignorant "flock of chickens." They balk and chide John when he talks down to Jennie, snapping at her as she tries to translate a document written in French and constantly commenting on what he refers to as her overreactions. While sometimes brusque, John is not the proud doctor of the short story. He claims that, despite his medical training, he is willing to do physical labor. It is hard to imagine Gilman's Dr. John doing so to support his family. Chauvinistic Jack, John's former professor, insists that a woman's need for a child trumps all other desires in her life, for "what else does a woman have if not the joy of creation?" It is clear that he does not consider artistic creation as a possible meaningful occupation for a woman. The short but crucial portrayal of Jack—during which he offers psychological counseling to John—questions patriarchal medical and gendered practices while reinforcing the concept of a paternalistic dynamic between doctors and their patients, between men and women. John refers to Sarah as "my baby," an emotional



claim over a child that has usually been socially reserved for mothers while men were expected to stoically view their children and wives as physical property. John refuses indifference, crying in bed over the grief of losing Sarah and the frustration of his current living situation. However, challenging gendered perceptions of emotionality are not enough to warrant labeling the film a feminist text as Gilman's story is. While the Jennie of the film does mention her lack of options as an older, unmarried, well-educated<sup>3</sup> woman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* cannot be said to be "about" these issues.

There does not seem to be evidence enough for one cohesive stance on gender relations or the options available to women sustained throughout the plot, a perceivable absence for audiences familiar with Gilman. Feminist critics highlight the limited agency of the Gilman's nameless narrator at the controlling hands of her doctor/husband as he instills in her the very anxiety he laughably claims to be treating. Gilman's many unseen but mentioned female players are also worthy of note. Jennie figures into the action, but "Mary" and "Jane" are apparitional figures whose absence forms part of the justification for feminist readings of Gilman and furthermore make the reader question the narrator's sanity. Contrarily, Thomas' Charlotte and Jennie carry a great deal of the action despite not voicing their inner thoughts one-on-one with viewers as John does. With the ghosts of Gilman's text lingering on viewers' mental parchment, Thomas' filmic text may be read as taking advantage of the palimpsest to skirt expectations of an overt statement on hierarchical social relationships. Thomas' genre shift serves to conceal his message on gender politics.

The shift in genre may seem abrupt for viewers. Throughout the film, Gothic elements provide a sense of unease that culminates in the bloody image that signals the genre shift. The soundtrack is filled with dissonant chords and the loud pounding of a heartbeat. The possibly haunted house is situated next to a cemetery, is full of dust, contains a mysterious portrait, is infested with rats, and has clearly inspired some mythic status among the surrounding community. The film incorporates these elements to build a growing sense of discomfort among viewers. Establishing shots of gothic settings are juxtaposed with tighter shots of characters lost in the discomfiting spaces. In one sequence, John awakes to strange noises and sees an unknown man in the house. Shirtless, he lights a candelabra and searches the house. Situated in the center of the dimly lit frame in a medium shot, John walks away from the screen and looks up a staircase to his left. The music becomes increasingly shrill. The next scene shows him advancing up the stairs to the attic decorated with the titular wallpaper. The tension reaches its peak, but nothing happens. There is no confrontation with any spectral being. Instead, in the morning, the characters debate over realistic explanations and possible solutions; Charlotte suggests that a previous tenant may have returned for something, and they decide to start locking the doors at night. Anxiety is quickly built and easily dissipated in true Gothic fashion, an emotional ebb and flow consistent with readers' and viewers' prior experiences in the Gothic genre which are also firmly rooted in familiarity with Gilman's text.

Thomas' film departs from the Gothic by providing a real physical danger for the characters once the vampire plot is revealed. The Gothic provides a "blurring of the division between hallucination and reality" while horror derives its heightened sense of danger only from reality, from the very real possibility of death (Seed 272). Hogle "[suggests] that [the Gothic genre] might be best thought of as a 'symbolic realm,'" an apt recommendation as Gothic anxieties are produced with symbols and suggestions of vulnerability without forcing characters (and by extension the audience) to confront their mortality (Hogle qtd. in Rintoul 703). Hogle also hints at a generic family tree in which the Gothic acts as horror's ancestor. He uses the term "horror Gothic" to define texts that make characters encounter "the

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<sup>3</sup> Jennie states "knowledge is not considered desirable in a woman." For all of her talk about her education, being educated seems not to afford her any career opportunities. She appears to be largely dependent on her married sister.

gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms...of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences" (Hogle 3). Both genres are definable by the emotional response they try to elicit in audiences. The Gothic hopes for unease and anxiety that will set teeth gnashing; going one step further, Horror hopes for terror over the possibility of blood spilling.

The film does hint at its shift to Horror in several ways. John is shown shaving with a straight razor at one point and cleaning a gun in another. These acts foreshadow the bloody conclusion of the plot but again by playing off viewers' expectation. John's use of the razor and gun suggests to viewers that—like for Gilman—the character of John will cause distress/death for the women in the house, an indictment of male authoritarianism. It further aligns him as an instrument of death, a tool that Charlotte will later rely on to feed her vampiric bloodlust. The casting offers additional hints as the actors' combined corpus includes many classic horror films. Landau performed in *Ed Wood* (1994), a biographical look at the infamous B Horror director. Dickey acted in *A Perfect Getaway* (2009). More worthy of note, Cartwright starred in countless made-for-television horror projects, *The Invasion* (2007), *Scary Movie 2* (2001), and most famously *The Birds* (1963). *The Yellow Wallpaper's* female actors are especially affiliated with Horror, although this intertextual use of gender to symbolize genre should be expected given Horror's history.

#### **Historical uses of genre and twenty-first century gender politics**

Like the Gothic, women have had a notable place in the Horror genre. Like the Gothic's reliance on the anxieties produced by the idea of being under another's total control (a female reality through most of Western history), Horror is grounded in bodily vulnerability and exploitation. As rape, domestic violence, and partner murder are overwhelmingly female problems, Horror works well as a women's genre just as the Gothic has. In *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (2011), David Greven argues that the woman's film of the early twentieth century that centers on female characters' economic and social upward mobility later becomes the modern Horror genre "in which the trope of female transformation not only persists but really flourishes" (2). Of course, Charlotte's turn to vampirism is the horrific counterpoint to the transformative achievement of success as a writer despite being a woman during the turn of the century. Greven further notes that generically, the "horror film treats heterosexual union as a bond forged in hell, the result of violence, domination, and subjugation" (14). Throughout the film, John makes belittling comments to Jennie and Charlotte, but they are often returned. Thomas gives viewers no indication that John is physically abusing either woman. The trio do appear to function within a gender normative context. The women clean; he finds work outside the home. They sew; he kills rats. *The Yellow Wallpaper* does not depict repression of women, at least not to the extent that its adapted text does. Jennie acknowledges that her financial situation is bleak without marriage, but she has experienced personal growth and development through education. Charlotte thrives as a writer, partly due to her husband's encouragement. While the family do not adhere fully to the rigid gendered boundaries, outside social restrictions are made overt in characters' conversations and preoccupations as well as in its eventual turn toward Horror. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* "argues that the primary fear at the core of the horror film genre is that the subject will be reengulfed by the terrifying figure of the archaic mother, whose maw-like threat hovers around the cultural narratives...that repress her presence" (Creed qtd. in Greven 13). However, the film does not depict either woman or femininity itself as monstrous until suggesting Charlotte's off-screen vampire feedings. All three main characters experience the Gothic anxieties produced by the house and the vampire it houses. These anxieties are representative of the general apprehension felt by everyone in a society with strict gender boundaries defined by performing specific behaviors. John specifically feels these anxieties and tensions.



In making John the target character for the terror summoned by the film's turn to the Horror genre, Thomas makes his comment on gender although it is not one that viewers expect. The palimpsest of Gilman's confined and agentless woman, the film's use of Gothic elements that focuses on Charlotte and Jennie's gendered experiences, and the appearance of the monstrous feminine during the film's genre shift and resolution work together to turn viewer's attention away from Thomas' statement on the stunted position patriarchy grants to men. Both female characters overtly struggle with their limited power as women, often calling into question their restricted social and financial options. John, however, struggles silently.

The film hints at its ultimate claim on gender relations from the onset. The move from Gilman's female-centered narrative to Thomas' male-centered one proves not to be a misogynistic effort when so much of the narrative revolves around John's emotional responses. Only in solitude or with a close male friend does John show emotion or discuss his feelings concerning the loss of his daughter and his wife's subsequent breakdown. The female primary characters push the boundaries of proper female behavior, negotiating a space previously unavailable to women. Charlotte writes "The Yellow Wallpaper," and both women feel comfortable sporadically deriding John. John, meanwhile, is very wooden and stoic around them, careful to never show fear or grief, to remain "reasonable if not logical." Some may say that Cushing has poorly acted his role due to his forced portrayal of John, but his performance in those few scenes where John breaks the mold of masculinity serve to explain that John is performing male behavior as society expects, perhaps unsuccessfully.

As the genre ultimately switches to Horror, Charlotte embodies the monstrous feminine, a woman who is also a vampire. Vampires' and women's corresponding connection with blood and the abilities to give and take life make vampirism a fitting choice of monster for his heroine.<sup>4</sup> The choice also explains that, in a biological sense, women have always had power. The power to create life suggests that any attempt to oppress women is doomed to eventual failure. The true horror of Thomas' work should be felt by patriarchy as an institution. However, this institution still has a hold on subduing men. In their two final scenes together, Charlotte tells John that she is sorry for acting foolishly. A reading of the film as misogynist would claim that these scenes act as an apology for feminism and reassurance that paternalism benefits women. In light of John's struggles where the women are free to explore, if not complete freedom, vaster modes of expressing themselves fully, these apologies function to express sorrow for feminism leaving men behind to struggle with the boundaries of strictly defined masculinity. As the film concludes, viewers never see Charlotte as a vampire, proving again that this film is not about her transformative experiences. She subverts patriarchy, and John assumes the role of her guardian and feeder, bringing unsuspecting tenants to the house as Hendricks did for van Wakefield. In the final frame, John stands with his back against the wallpaper which, using the palimpsest of Gilman straight on for the first time, symbolizes patriarchal control. This scene suggests that men have been confined to continuing the act patriarchy demands, unable to crawl through its complex designs or tear it down as women have. Thus, the true horror of the film is not directed toward women or patriarchy but toward men whose suffering has not yet received the attention that recent intersectional feminism has given to women.

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<sup>4</sup> The turn to vampire also calls back to Gilman's text. As the narrator discovers the woman living in the wallpaper, she tracks her nocturnal movements, stating "most women do not creep by daylight" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 342). As a vampire, the film's Charlotte can no longer go out in daylight.

## Conclusion

Mainstream feminism promoted by middle- and upper-class, white, straight, Christian women in the West, has been challenged in recent decades for having a limited mission toward helping already privileged women. Women of color, poor and/or uneducated women, queer and trans women, non-Christian women, and women from across borders have changed the narrow perspective of the mainstream movement. Even in the realm of Gilman critics, "virtually all feminist discourse on 'The Yellow Wallpaper' has come from white academics and...has failed to question the story's status as a universal woman's text" (Lanser 423). Yet, even generally, very few approach the topic of male experiences under patriarchy in holistic ways that do not position men as willful dominators, guaranteeing that feminism remains a *women's* liberation movement. Thomas' film directs attention to this oversight by highlighting the misery that John feels as "a good man," a label Jennie bestows upon him, in a system of hierarchy. Feminism will continue to languish as a movement for a specific minority (e.g., privileged white women) unless it addresses the needs of all those that must be liberated from heteropatriarchy.

Gilman and Thomas provide complementary texts that, when partnered, offer a well-rounded critical approach to a two-gendered power structure. Carol Margaret Davison argues that Gilman's text "not only haunts the predominantly male Gothic tradition in America but is, itself, haunted by that tradition" as the author lends a female voice with female concerns to a genre dominated by figures like "Brockden Brown, Poe, and Hawthorne" (49). More than a century later, Logan answers her palimpsestuously. Like other "analogous" adaptations, Logan's "willful infidelity [to Gilman's text is] in fact the very *point*: adaptations [interrogate] the political and ideological underpinnings of their source texts, translating works across cultural, gender, racial, and sexual boundaries to secure cultural space for marginalized discourses" (Murray 10). It is no wonder that Gilman's analysis on the repercussions of patriarchal oppression of women would receive a response concerning the patriarchal limitations placed on men after Masculinity Studies became an area of study in its own right. Historically, mainstream feminism has constructed a hegemonic layering, "an essentially false and problematic 'male' system beneath which essentially true and unproblematic 'female' essences can be recovered – just as the figure of the woman can presumably be recovered from beneath the patriarchal pattern" on the narrator's wall (Lanser 422). The film's final frame likewise depicts that John is perhaps not trapped within the wallpaper but is nonetheless trapped within a violent—and vampiric—system that stifles him.

In effect, Thomas' reliance on palimpsest functions to upset audience expectations of genre and thematic message. His adaptation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" provides startling shifts in narration and genre to promote a social message that often gets lost concerning men and the emotional unrest caused by inflexible confines of traditional masculinity. Gilman's text and its popularity provide a set of expectations from which Thomas' film and message can flourish, providing something new while offering familiarity in setting, tone, and the presence of Gilman herself. In sum, Thomas' text works well by distracting viewers with transcoded features like the shift in plot, narrative voice, and medium, presuming that they will suspect a thematic message which relates to or corresponds with Gilman's own. However, the hidden shift in genre needs to be acknowledged first. Only then should readers wonder what the transcoding in plot, narrative voice, medium, *and* genre/s have to say about 2012's social anxieties over gender relationships and performativity. The film's two genres—one assumed and one true—add layers to Thomas' social commentary, layers with "back-somersault[s]" and "florid arabesque[s]" like Gilman's famous wallpaper (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 340).

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## Author:

Jennifer STERN is a recent graduate in American Indian Studies focusing on literary and filmic representations at the University of Arizona. Her broader research interests include gender, the horror genre, educational practices, and adaptation. She has published on pulp fiction as indicators of social progress in the twentieth century.

Contact: [jeps@email.arizona.edu](mailto:jeps@email.arizona.edu)

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