

# PROPOSAL SUMMARY – *Introduction*

“It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things” (Perkins Gilman, 1892)

For this project, I will be designing two costumes inspired by characters from the 1892 Short Story “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. I want to create costumes for both The Woman, the narrative’s central character, and The Wallpaper Woman, whom The Woman begins to see in the walls as she descends into madness. My project concept looks at the role of women’s bodies in a historically inspired, horrific narrative. I will incorporate thematic ideas surrounding the treatment of mentally ill women throughout history, and consider how the legacies of these practices affect a contemporary audience. I want to incorporate visual components and elements which evoke bodily horror, creating an overall outcome which is visually unsettling or uncomfortable to the viewer whilst still possessing a strange beauty.

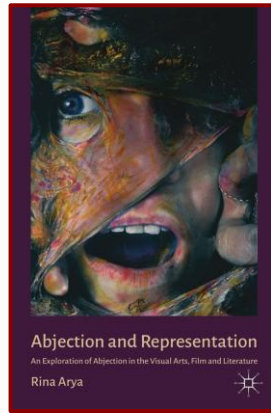


# Project Themes

- Evoke themes of body horror, using tactile materials like silicone and latex to create a creepy, unsettling aesthetic
- The grotesque and uncomfortable, considering ideas of abjection (Kristeva, 1982) and the monstrous feminine (Creed, 1993), taking the inside out
- Unsettling beauty, how these elements can still be beautiful
- Misogyny and systemic issues regarding women's bodies and women's mental health, specifically pertaining to 19<sup>th</sup> Century America
- Societal beliefs surrounding women's bodies, and how these relate to academic theories of horror.

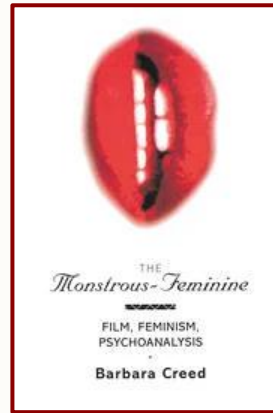


# TEXTUAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS – *The Yellow Wallpaper*



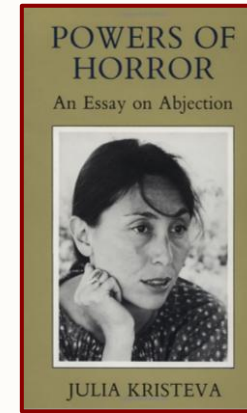
“In the Symbolic order the womb is the ultimate space of ambiguity with its invisible boundaries”

Arya, R. (2014) Abjection and representation : an exploration of abjection in the visual arts, film and literature.



“The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside”

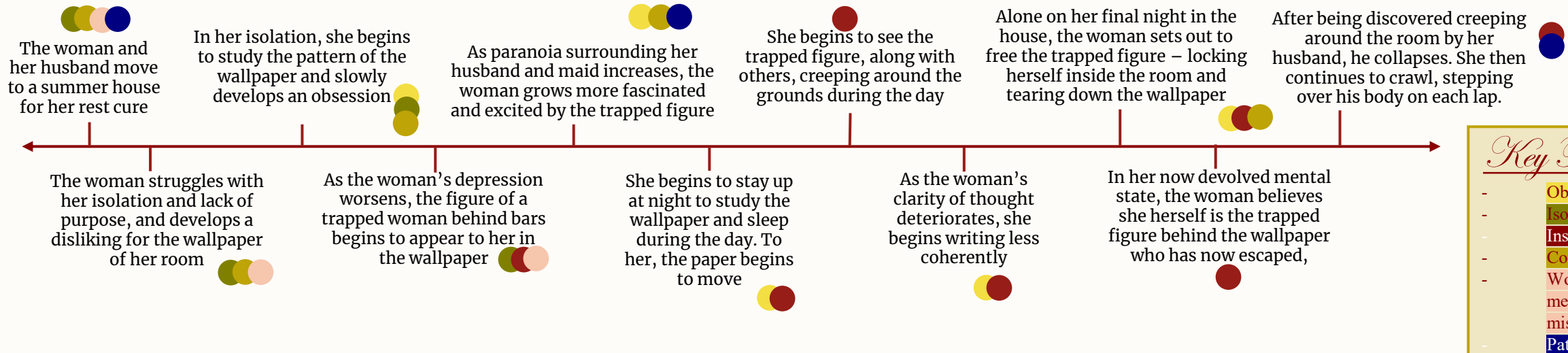
Creed, B. (1993) The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis. Routledge



“The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible object, a boundary and a limit”

Kristeva, J. (1982) Powers of Horror; an Essay on Abjection. Translated by L.S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press

The yellow wallpaper is an 1892 short story telling of a woman prescribed “Rest cure” for her post-partum depression, or hysteria. Whilst staying confined mostly within one room, she develops an **obsessive attitude** towards the room’s **wallpaper** and slowly begins to see the **figure of a trapped woman** behind the patterns. As she gradually **loses her mind** and becomes increasingly **obsessed** with the figure, her sanity begins to deteriorate as she grows paranoid and mistrusting. The story culminates in her **tearing down** of the wallpaper and finally coming to believe that she herself is the woman behind the pattern, seemingly losing her mind completely.



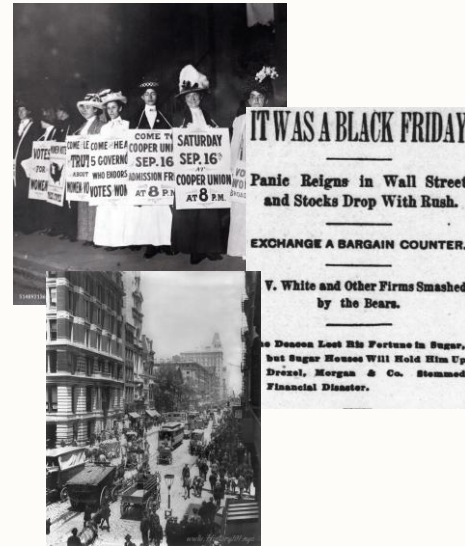
- Key Themes*
- Obsession
  - Isolation
  - Insanity
  - Confinement
  - Women’s medical mistreatment
  - Patriarchy

# INSPIRATION ANALYSIS – *Historical, Cultural, Social, Political*



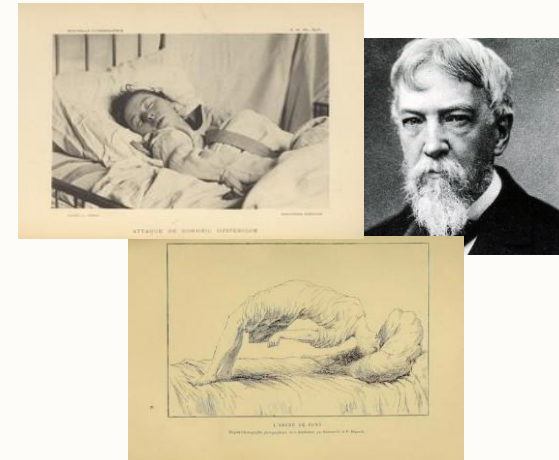
## FASHION & ART MOVEMENTS

As my main areas for social and cultural research, I was inspired by not only the fashions of the 1890s, but from artistic movements such as Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts. I particularly researched into the middle years of the 1890s instead of 1892, shifting the narrative setting to evoke the eras silhouette more clearly.



## 1890S AMERICA

The 1890s in America showed rapid social change with the growth of cities and industrialism, however also suffered economic issues with the panic of 1893. Womens suffrage movements flourished as a result, with women gaining independence and career freedom.



## HYSTERIA & WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's health in the late nineteenth century was overwhelmingly dominated by male physicians, especially with the rising field of obstetrics. Traditional, female led births were shunned and treatments became increasingly unsympathetic for women deemed "Hysteric".



## THE MODERN WOMAN

It was important to me for this project to acknowledge how relevant these principles are to the modern American woman, specifically ion regards to healthcare. With life saving policies such as Roe vs. Wade being overturned and systemic issues surrounding the validation of women's health issues, the legacies if these historical practices still significantly affect modern women.

# 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICA – *Hysteria, Birth and Obstetrics*

“Hysteria, ‘the daughters’ disease’, was depicted as a condition which particularly afflicted young well-to-do women, who would throw their households and family life into confusion with their irrational behaviour and attention seeking displays.”

(Marland, 2013)

“By the end of the 19th century, American women showed increased interest in controlling their reproduction, but many had few, if any safe, effective, or legal means to do so” (Withycombe, 2019)

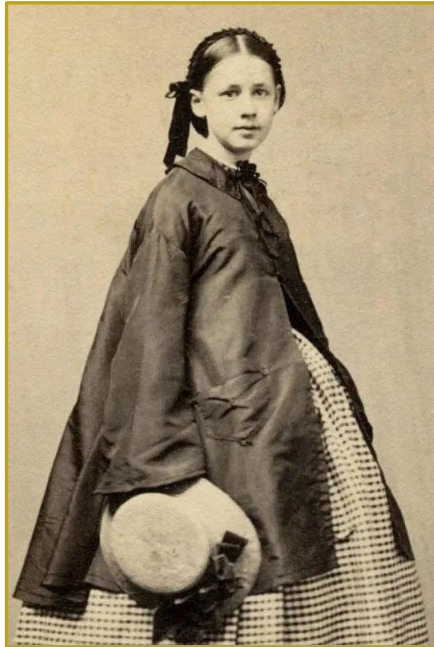
“Hippocrates and Plato spoke of the womb, *hystera*, which they said tended to wander around the female body, causing an array of physical and mental conditions.”

(Cohut, 2020)

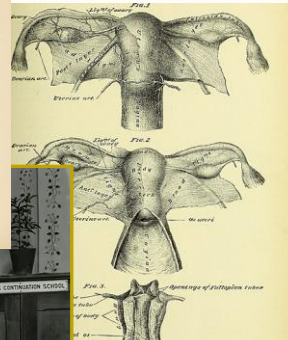
“a helpful bonus of outlawing abortion was that it could reverse the decreasing birth rates of white middle and upper class women”

(Withycombe, 2019)

- A very young expectant mother



- An example of a 19<sup>th</sup> century condom made with newly developed vulcanized rubber



- Nurses began to grow more common post-1860s



“From the mid-1870s to the 1890s gynecologists practiced their medical and increasingly surgical techniques on private patients and institutionalized women. Increasingly diseases of the reproductive system were listed as the cause for the insane symptoms of women admitted to asylums.”

(Theroit, 1989)

“An emerging narrative within the culture of the new urban middle class suggested that women were fragile and needed to be protected even from the natural process of childbirth [...] obstetricians tapped into this anxiety and argued that, during childbirth, white women needed medical assistance provided by a specialist”

(Withycombe, 2019)



## CHARACTER BREAKDOWN –

# *The Wallpaper Woman*



- As a physical representation of the woman in the wallpaper, she should use pattern and texture in her design
- Make use of the natural yellowy tones of latex and natural materials
- Will work with layering and fabric opacities to mimic the way the wallpaper in the text changes as the light moves around the room
- The writing structure of the text is key in displaying the woman's insanity relating to the wallpaper – display this through heavy structure in costume
- “Strangled heads and bulbous eyes” (Gilman, 1892) Bodily, fungal element to the character – the more horrifying of the pair
- Silhouette will reflect that of the woman to demonstrate the link between the two characters, potentially include elements that suggest 1887 (Gilman's own rest cure)
- Utilise materials which have a gross, uncanny/unsettling feel
- Work with yellows and reds to suggest both the yellow of the wallpaper and a sense of gore

# THE FILM – *Genre Research and Storyboards*



## Location: Greenwich Foot Tunnel

- Brickwork and lighting reminiscent of an asylum
- Yellowish-green uncanny lighting
- Opened 1902
- Industrial feeling from handrails and bars
- Nature of tunnel feels claustrophobic and closed in – obsession of the woman's mind

Whilst researching, I discovered @humanitself used the same tunnel as a location for a project shoot on LCF MA Costume. Their styling of this short really reflects the style I would like to achieve in my own film, especially the sense of uncanny it has.



## Themes of Female Hysteria in recent media:



- The film should reflect the woman's madness through its cinematography and camera movements
- It should also showcase the power which the wallpaper woman holds over the woman
- The hospital-like lighting in the tunnel should be utilised to evoke a sickly, medical feel
- Narrative should start feeling haunting and obsessive, but develop to become unnervingly intimate.



My storyboard

# TECHNICAL ENQUIRY – *Critical Reflection*

**HALF AND FULL-SCALE EXPERIMENTS**



**INCORPORATING COLOUR AND TEXTURE**



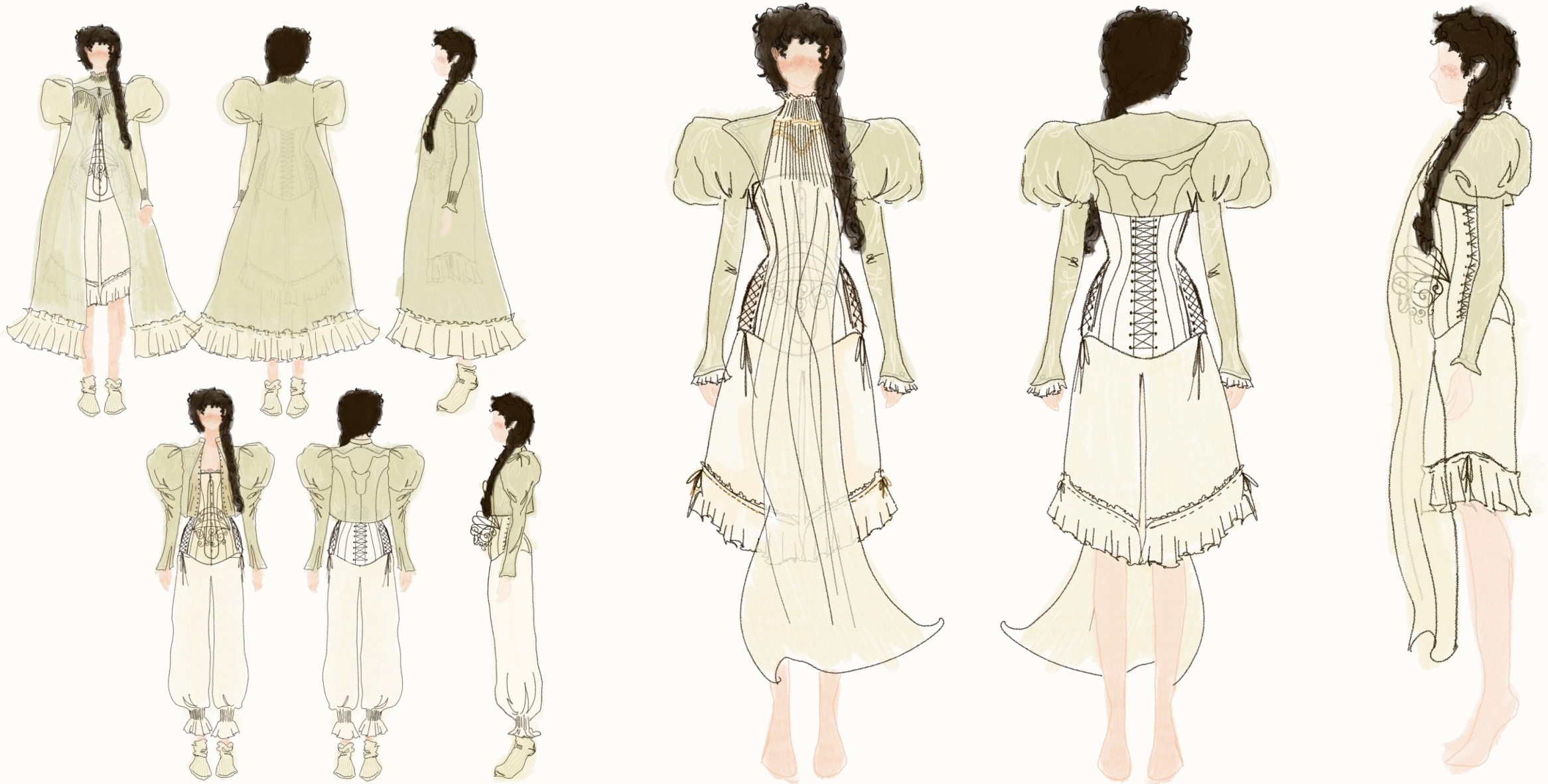
**FABRIC  
MANIPULATION:  
SMOCKING**

**CREATING SURFACE  
ADORNMENTS/DECORATIONS**



FINAL CHARACTER DESIGNS –

# *The Woman*



# DEVELOPMENT – *Materials & Samples*



“I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?”  
(Perkins Gilman, 1892)



- For Hannah’s character especially I wanted to consider the idea of the inside showing outside, in line with theories of abject horror. This led me to experiment with external or visible boning, and looking at the inside structures of period garments.
- To further convey how her character is confined or repressed, I want to consider layering different fabrics to give a stuffy, restricted appearance.
- Exploring how to create subtle details of the character through details such as smocking and rouleaux trim.
- Using creative pattern cutting to showcase how the narrative themes are built into the costume itself, not just as decoration.

FINAL CHARACTER DESIGNS –

# *The Wallpaper Woman*



# DEVELOPMENT – *Materials & Samples*

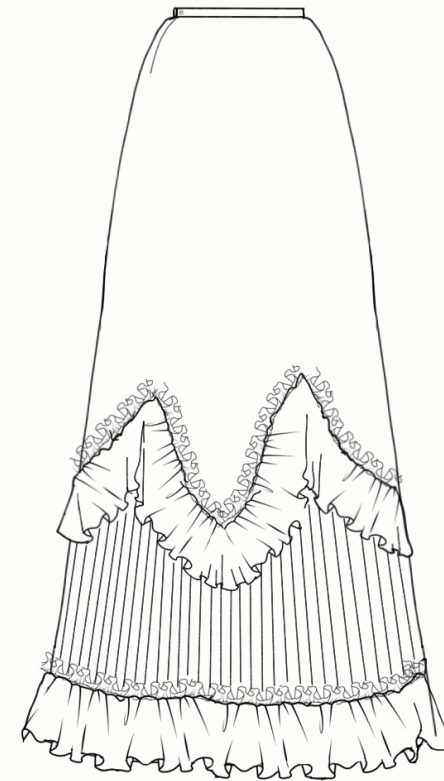
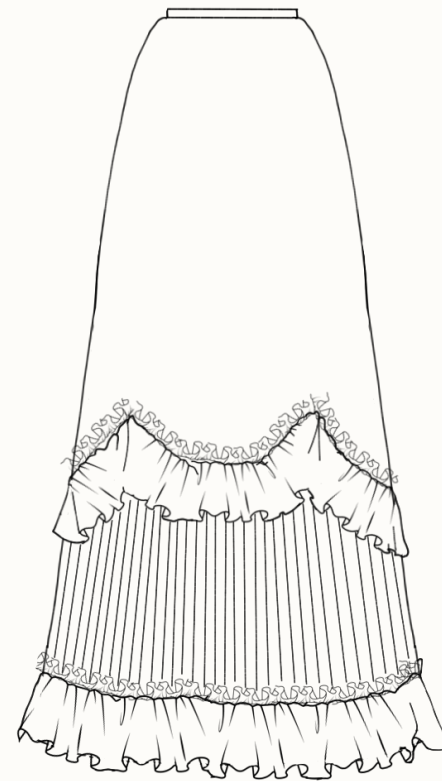
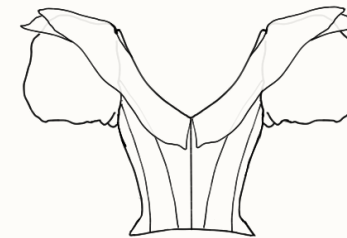
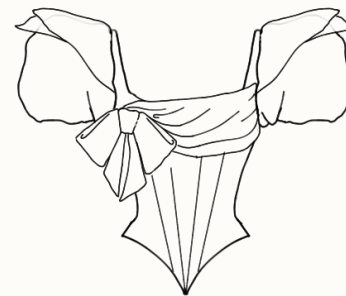
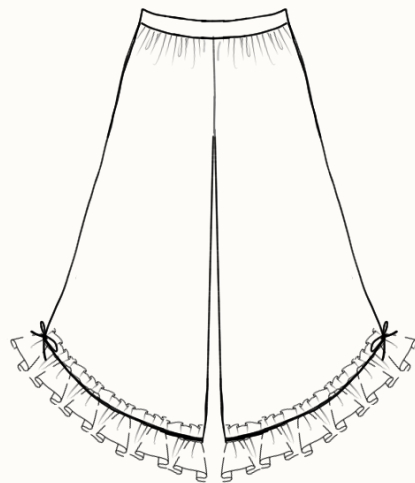
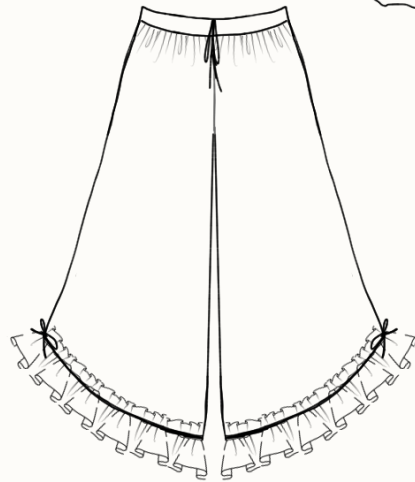
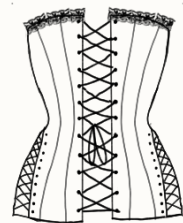
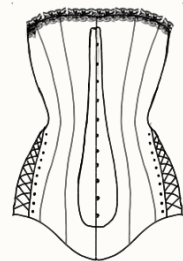
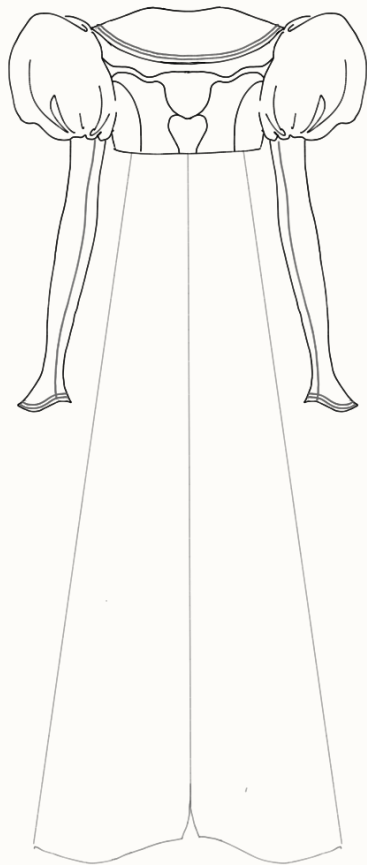
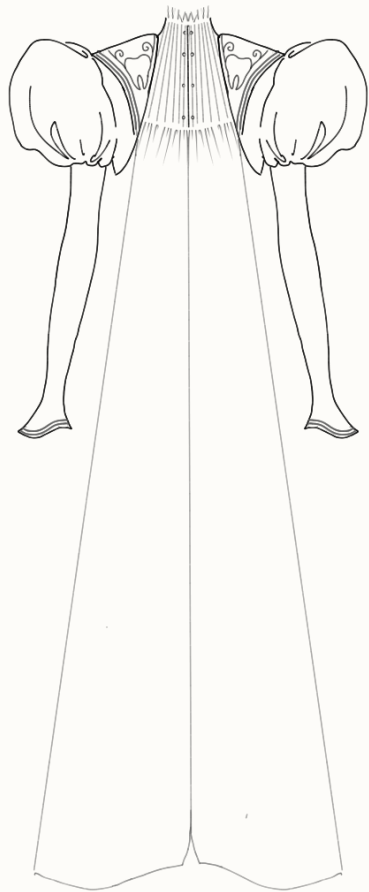
“There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.”

(Perkins Gilman, 1892)



- I found that embroidering chiffon and then coating the embroidered fabric in latex created a beautiful, yet still bodily, effect which is very effective for the characterisation.
- Considering how to present Bijou's character as off-putting yet intriguing led me to using asymmetry in my design, enhanced by the effect of mushroom like ruffles suggesting the idea of growth or infection.
- Emphasising this idea of a spreading fungus or mould, looking into how I can alter the fabrics themselves with bleach and paint to make this look integrated.
- Collaborating with The Shirley Leaf and petal Company to provide authentic and natural looking millinery flowers to enhance the outcome. Further, creating 3D latex elements to suggest a more unsettling feel.

# TECHNICAL FLATS





# *Character Lineup*

