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"She Was Not Even Normal": Unreliable Narratives of Female Insanity in Jane Eyre, Rebecca, and Wide Sargasso Sea

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“She Was Not Even Normal”: Unreliable Narratives of Female Insanity in *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

by

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A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council

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Abstract

In my thesis, I interrogate narrative reliability related to depictions of female insanity in *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. By subjecting the trustworthiness of her storytelling to criticism, especially as regards the concealed madwoman, Bertha Mason, Jane's narration is revealed as unstable, offering problematic insight into a character long considered unflinchingly honest. In du Maurier's later literary adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's parallel character, the eponymous Rebecca, comes to the fore, while the novel's unnamed narrator remains in the shadows, and bases much of her storytelling upon hearsay, rather than the "autobiography" of *Jane Eyre*. The most transparent narrative voice, however, is Antoinette, the main character of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the 1966 prequel to *Jane Eyre*. Despite her madness, Antoinette's narration makes no attempt at dissemblance, speaking forthrightly about her marriage and experience, proving a truthful narrator and openly rejecting the marginal status the earlier narrators try desperately to hide.

Introduction

“Reader, I married him” (Brontë 517).

When *Jane Eyre* was released in 1847, Charlotte Brontë’s portrayal of Mr. Rochester’s mad first wife, Bertha, functioned, for many readers, as a stock character of female insanity, a holdover from the familiar Gothic literary tradition with which the all of Brontë sisters engaged, and a convenient plot device in Jane’s journey of self-realization. Daphne du Maurier’s perennially popular 1938 novel, *Rebecca*, shares many Gothic aspects of the *Jane Eyre* plot structure and offers multiple character parallels with the original work, but the novel’s most overwhelming presence is that of Maxim de Winter’s late first wife, Rebecca: the shadowy, sexualized specter about whom the second Mrs. de Winter obsesses. In 1966, Jean Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and, in doing so, re-wrote the then-iconic madwoman, Bertha Mason, not as a ghost or femme fatale, but as a heroine deserving of her own life story prior to her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Rhys renames the Bertha character “Antoinette” and grants her a relatable voice, allowing the long-silenced “Bertha” to speak in her own defense against the claims leveled by Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. She positions Antoinette as a heroine at the center of the narrative, rather than as a set piece, there only to increase the Gothic ambiance of Thornfield Hall for the “real” heroine, Jane.

Rhys’s stylized redemption of the Bertha character demonstrates the massive strides made between 1847 and 1966 in depictions of marginalized women, while also bringing the Bertha narrative literarily full circle. Brontë certainly wrote the character of Bertha with more depth and attention than was required of a Victorian cliché of the madwoman in the otherwise masculine-Gothic space of Thornfield, but her treatment of

Rochester's first wife is also telling of contemporary attitudes towards female insanity. Her depiction of Bertha acts as a negative example of dangerous female excess against which the plain and pious Jane may define herself in order to succeed in her own narrative. While Rebecca is never actually accused of clinical insanity, her heavily implied homosexuality and her so-called perversity, (as conveyed to the narrator from multiple sources who knew Rebecca in life), position her as a threat to the gauche, sexually inexperienced narrator. Despite the liminal space available to Rebecca because of both her death (in the actual time of the novel) and her socially unacceptable sexuality (during her lifetime), she remains capable, through the memories of her devotees at Manderley, of exerting her will over the physical space of the estate, and of coloring its inhabitants' experiences by the sheer force of her ghostly presence. Bertha is also, ultimately, able to shape the plot of *Jane Eyre*, destroying the home of her unsympathetic husband, but throughout the novel, her presence in Thornfield, unlike Rebecca's, is always a suggestion, a carefully suppressed fear. Rebecca is the title character of du Maurier's novel, and its setting is littered with Rebecca's possessions, while Manderley's inhabitants are constantly concerned with the maintenance of her preferences and opinions. While Rebecca's memory looms large over the hapless, unnamed heroine in a much more obvious way than does the captive Bertha over the stronger character of Jane, neither "madwoman" is granted first-person narration in the way Rhys allows Antoinette. In her sometimes detached, sometimes painfully fresh account of her childhood, marriage, and imprisonment at Thornfield, Antoinette acts, at first, as the schoolgirl narrator of the earlier novels, marginal in colonial society and witness to the mental

breakdown of her own mother. She later becomes increasingly liminal as the madwomen at the heart of each of these novels, offering a glimpse of her fractured thought process, as conveyed by Rhys's convincing stream of consciousness prose.

The issue of narrative sources in each of these stories leads to a critical tenet of my argument: the questionable reliability via which the insanities of Bertha, Rebecca, and Antoinette are conveyed. How trustworthy are the narrators— Jane, the second Mrs. de Winter, and Antoinette, among other, secondary contributors— through whom readers encounter these marginal women? Jane Eyre has long been treated as a narrator of considerable reliability, but careful scrutiny of her life story offers several discrepancies and moments of doubt which potentially destabilize the trust which Jane is generally granted by her audience. Jane's own outsider position in Victorian society as a governess, and her state as an unloved, penniless orphan for the majority of the book reveal incentive for Jane's ascent up the social ladder, and her potential motivation to alter the facts of her experiences. Jane also relies heavily on Rochester's equally dubious account of his failed marriage to Bertha, his version of his liaison with the French dancer Céline, and the related question of Adèle's paternity. And even as she accepts his suspiciously skewed account of his past, Jane also admits to her reader that she has come to see her employer and "master" as her "god." Rochester's ulterior motives, combined with Jane's love for him, make their joint description of Bertha especially doubtful.

The unnamed heroine of *Rebecca* is, unlike Jane, completely dismissive of her own importance, so much so that she never discloses her name to her audience, focusing instead on schoolgirl daydreams and petty jealousies throughout the novel, all the while

obsessively gathering information from servants, friends, and family she comes into contact with in hopes of constructing a complete portrait of Rebecca against which she can compete for Maxim's love. Just as Jane defines herself against the stereotypical Victorian madwoman in her animal depiction of Bertha, so does the second Mrs. de Winter hope to differentiate herself from the sexual and social dysfunctions of Rebecca's private life by relaying her own naïve dreams of a sexless, scandal-free, companionate marriage. Perhaps, by keeping her identity a secret, the heroine intends to remain in the shadows of her own story in a way Jane rejects; the second Mrs. de Winter is, after all, much more intrigued by Rebecca than Jane is by Bertha. Whatever the reason for her insidious subterfuge, the heroine continues to voyeuristically collect evidence of her predecessor's lifestyle, manners, and appearance, in order that she might someday simultaneously please Maxim and flatter her own vanity by picking and choosing some impossible likenesses and differences between herself and the two conflicting versions of Rebecca: the posh society darling Mrs. Danvers lovingly describes, or the unnatural lesbian "freak" of Maxim's memory.

Antoinette's narrative is also unreliable, but for substantially different reasons. Readers of *Jane Eyre* must necessarily associate Rhys's story and its heroine with the monstrous portrayal of Bertha from Brontë's novel, and might potentially read *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a fictional documentation of that same character's descent into a madness deemed "inevitable" by the events described in the earlier work. Antoinette's madness, combined with her status as *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s heroine, is another reason why her version of events reads questionably, especially as the novel progresses, and

Antoinette's sanity becomes increasingly uncertain. The stylized use of stream of consciousness, and Rhys's vivid, bizarre imagery help to convey Antoinette's "otherness," while also evoking the strange, otherworldly vocabulary employed by Jane and Rochester in their courtship and day-to-day vernacular. Antoinette and Jane are both orphans, both attend religious schools, and both marry Rochester, but in spite of their many similarities, the complicated sexual and social distance between the two women and their common husband mark them as overwhelmingly different. As in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's opinion of his first marriage is pivotal in Rhys's novel, and she pointedly writes one of the book's three parts in Rochester's voice. In an interesting contrast to his embittered memories and outright dismissal of Bertha as human in *Jane Eyre*, the Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is reluctantly and erotically intrigued by his young wife and her exotic home, but eventually grows into those attitudes made famous by *Jane Eyre*'s Mr. Rochester.

Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar make Bertha's role in *Jane Eyre* the centerpiece of their influential 1979 feminist study *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha is Jane's dark double, an insane counterpart who carries out Jane's socially unacceptable impulses of anger and jealousy in her relationship with Rochester, thereby allowing Jane to strike back at the inhabitants of Thornfield who would belittle her, while, at the same time, maintaining her carefully balanced social position as a governess at a great estate. They write, "Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha, who burns down the house

and destroys *herself* in the process, as if she were an agent of Jane's desire as well as her own" (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Gilbert and Gubar's reinterpretation of Brontë's usage of Bertha has been foundational in practically every study of *Jane Eyre* since its publication, though in this paper, I argue that Jane is an independent actor, seeking to silence a sexually and socially problematic reminder of her own liminality in Victorian society.

Elisabeth Bronfen's 1992 study, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, was also a major influence upon this project. The critic's focus on the many beautiful, dead women populating nineteenth-century literature, and in the cult interest in tragic female death, is based around Edgar Allen Poe's famous quote in his 1846 essay "The Philosophy of Composition": "the death...of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe 163). Death of the madwomen in these novels, and potential death of the seemingly sane narrators Jane Eyre and the second Mrs. de Winter, are either physically described or intensely contemplated in each of these novels. The climactic death jump of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, present drastic contrasts to the quiet, pious brush with death of Jane Eyre on the moors, or of the unnamed heroine's narrowly avoided, sexually charged contemplation of suicide during a persuasive conversation with Mrs. Danvers. Unlike the two earlier narrators, Antoinette constantly flirts with her own death, entertaining suicidal tendencies since the burning of her childhood home. She informs a disconcerted Rochester that "I never wished to live before I knew you. I always thought it would be better if I died. Such a long time to wait before it's over" (Rhys 56). Yet she is the only narrator who does not

approach her own death until the novel's end. Neither Jane nor the heroine actually succumb to their potential untimely demises, but the death-of-a-young-woman trope manifests itself even more powerfully in *Rebecca* than in either of the other two novels. Rebecca, herself a beautiful and seemingly beloved young woman, has been dead a year at the novel's beginning. The cult interest involved in propagating Rebecca's memory at Manderley hearkens back to the nineteenth-century fixation with female death explored in depth by Bronfen, who writes, "the equation between femininity and death is such that while in cultural narratives the feminine corpse is treated like an artwork, or the beautiful woman is killed to produce an artwork, conversely, artworks emerge only at the expense of a beautiful woman's death and are treated like feminine corpses" (Bronfen 73). This bizarre and pervasive literary standard leaves indelible traces across all three novels, and influences depictions of the pivotal madwoman deaths occurring in each work.

Hélène Cixous is another critic whose work involving the female voice, especially her influential essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) and her collaboration with Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1986), significantly impacted my research. Cixous posits that woman writers must remain either paralyzed by the phallogentric language of patriarchal society, or they can embrace their own, female sexuality, and, by doing so, their inner "madwomen." Only in this way can women writers create a truly female literature, uninformed by masculine influences. Equating women to Freud's infamous "dark continent," Cixous writes, "Dark is dangerous...we have internalized this fear of the dark...we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies—

we are black and we are beautiful” (Cixous 878). These marginal spaces, created and policed by male authority to which both women writers and the voices of their female characters have traditionally been confined, are the domains of the madwomen of *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. What makes these literary prisons especially interesting, though, is the action the perceived “madwomen” control from within the strictures of their behind-the-scenes and offstage roles, transcending boundaries of the physical, the natural, and even of the traditionally sane in order to enact deserved revenge on their oppressors. With the publication of *Rebecca* in 1938 and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, each later iteration of the Bertha character has become more powerful, approaching the truly “female” literature Cixous prescribes.

Building from the arguments of these and other influential literary scholars, I feel that one of *Jane Eyre*’s most provocative and important motifs is its use of threshold imagery. At multiple moments in Jane’s narrative— and usually associated with the unexpected appearance of Bertha—Jane describes herself as standing at a physical threshold: the first time Bertha’s laugh wakes her from her sleep, the night when Bertha attacks Richard Mason and Jane tends his wounds, unknowingly inches from the madwoman on the other side of the wall, and the stormy night Jane nearly dies of exposure, on the doorstep of Moor House. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha acts as a projection of Jane’s dark desires and repressed anger because of her liminal position in society. I would take this argument further, suggesting that at these threshold moments, Jane reveals her most serious betrayal of the reader’s expectation of her narrative reliability, by demonstrating her own fallible grip on the “real world” and especially on

her own mental stability. Despite Jane's frequent reassurances of her sanity and the relatable nature of her feelings and actions, Jane, in these threshold moments, reveals her closeness to the much-feared madness exemplified by Bertha. The otherworldliness which has previously been one of Jane's endearing peculiarities becomes proof, once again, of her liminal status, this time between the dangerously close realms of sanity and insanity.

These threshold slips of narrative reliability are also present in du Maurier's revision of *Jane Eyre's* plot. The heroine's discomfort with Manderley, and her frequent hesitation over doorways and in passageways throughout *Rebecca* are not only hallmarks of the Gothic genre to which du Maurier subscribes, but also demonstrate chances when the heroine second guesses herself, and finds herself wishing she could become the "madwoman," Rebecca. The heroine's musings on the long, twisting driveway to Manderley offer multiple, detailed descriptions of Rebecca's domain, the house proper, and the dream sequence with which the novel begins offers a threshold overgrown with Rebecca's seductive power. The second Mrs. de Winter longs to enter Rebecca's beautifully preserved bedroom, but restrains herself until coerced by Mrs. Danvers's intimate tour. Leaning out this same bedroom's window, the heroine nearly allows herself to be enticed into a suicide jump in the style of Bertha or Antoinette. Only after the burning of Manderley is the heroine able to relapse into the safely monotonous patterns of her life with Maxim, no longer threatened by the many dark opportunities presented by the threshold realm of Rebecca's influence. The second Mrs. de Winter's fear of thresholds and passageways is pervasive, beginning with her assertion that she and

Maxim “can never go back” (du Maurier 4) with which she begins the novel’s second chapter.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is less concerned with concealing these threshold entrances into possible insanity because she, unlike the staunchly middle-class heroines of the earlier two novels, is unconcerned with the opinions of her neighbors. She does not require the literary device of Gilbert and Gubar’s Freudian double in the way Jane or the second Mrs. de Winter do to justify their “bad” behaviors. Instead, she behaves erratically as a symptom of her love for the distant Rochester, finds herself colonized in her own Jamaican home, and finally categorized as the madwoman Jane encounters at Thornfield, after forcibly crossing the natural threshold of the Atlantic, the titular *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In choosing to carry out her dream to burn Thornfield and jump from its roof, Antoinette intends to cross her final threshold, rejoining Tia and returning, she believes, to her childhood home in the Caribbean. For the purposes of this paper, Antoinette’s disinterest in the socially acceptable— but still liminal— space occupied by Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter position her, surprisingly, as the most reliable narrator of her experience, and a more trustworthy source on the subject of her own mental stability.

One of the most important common themes throughout the three works, however, is the gendering of setting. Though *Jane Eyre*’s Thornfield Hall is undeniably the Gothicized, masculine seat of Rochester’s power, the feminized Ferndean, where he and Jane are reunited and apparently live happily ever after, is, notably, a swampy, undesirable location with an atmosphere Rochester claims would have killed Bertha had

he banished her there. Manderley, from its violently sexualized azaleas to its powerful sea motif is from beginning to end Rebecca's domain, and at the very moment the unnamed heroine has a chance to best her powerful predecessor, Mrs. Danvers burns Manderley to the ground, destroying the future wealth and family hopes of the couple, and dooming them to listless, childless wandering for the remainder of their lives. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, all of Jamaica— but especially Coulibri— is described in terms of a tropical, female paradise, an Eden briefly visited by the Byronic Rochester whose sexual initiation of Antoinette results in her forced departure from her beloved home, as well as her descent into madness, ending with her captivity in the masculine stone enclosure of Thornfield.

The comparisons of male and female spaces, and their association with the “madwomen” of the novels offer powerful physical loci to their intrinsically female madness, most visibly in the theme of burning these homes in order to vanquish a (male) opponent, even at the cost of suicide, in the case of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Bertha destroys Thornfield, which leads to Rochester's metaphorical castration and his reunion with Jane, but he is no longer the dominant force in their relationship. Mrs. Danvers burns Manderley, rather than see Maxim and the heroine happy there, without Rebecca. Antoinette's mental instability can be linked to the destruction of her beloved family home, Coulibri. She is later driven from her mother's honeymoon home by Rochester's force of will, and eventually gets simultaneous revenge and release from her captivity in her plan to destroy Thornfield, bringing her narrative in sync with the *Jane Eyre* storyline.

Both Jane Eyre and the second Mrs. de Winter retell their story from a known future with an emphasis on rationality, rather than relating events as they unfold, as does the madwoman, Antoinette. *Jane Eyre* was published as a faux autobiography, clearly a mode which would invite editing and revision of certain elements for an eventual audience. The heroine of *Rebecca* is telling her story from a future in which she and Maxim are bored, unremarkable guests living out their days in a mediocre hotel. She has been pondering these most exciting moments of her (in general) uneventful life for many years by the time of the retelling, and has obviously never stopped dwelling on Rebecca. The first part of Antoinette's narrative is a rich retelling of her troubled childhood, upset when the third section of *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals her current whereabouts, under Grace Poole's charge at Thornfield, potentially repositioning her early story, in real time, as a series of deluded falsehoods, though they are largely corroborated by Rochester's Part II narrative.

What I ultimately argue in this essay is that Antoinette's transparency as a storyteller makes her the most "honest" of the three unreliable female narrators. Refusing the liminality ascribed to the supposedly sane and stable wife of the Gothic "hero," she insistently speaks in the present tense, telling the truth which Jane and the heroine systematically conceal in their skewed retellings, and reveling in her role as the madwoman Cixous celebrates. Rather than hiding behind convention, Antoinette insists upon her own name, speaking her identity rather than accepting the name Rochester attempts to assign her. From the animalistic Bertha of *Jane Eyre*, voiceless and trapped in a secret room, to the vocal, relatable, and realistic victim of *Wide Sargasso Sea* more than

a century later, the literary evolution Brontë's madwoman disproves her original liminality by her increasing importance to criticism over time, the growing power exhibited by her literary descendents, Rebecca and Antoinette, and her subversion of the narratives of concealment relayed by Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter.

Chapter One: Distrusting *Jane Eyre*

“Brontë’s concern not to romanticize either rebellion or insanity leads to a far more thoroughgoing hostility to sentimental and Romantic models. The result is something like a double edge to Brontë’s depiction of female madness, by which she exploits her readers’ awareness of the recent tradition of associating political insurrection with female insanity, and at the same time strives to alter what that association is allowed to say...*Jane Eyre*...respects the past, but resists its power to shape the present.” (Small 161)

Jane Eyre has never been out of print. Brontë’s novel thrilled Victorian audiences with its successful combination of *bildungsroman*, traditional love plot, and early feminism, and that same formula continues to excite modern readers. The work entertains while sparking serious literary criticism, and has, for the most part, successfully withstood the test of time. That said, though Jane is the novel’s heroine-narrator, her story would not be possible without the inclusion of Rochester’s first wife, Bertha: the madwoman in the attic. Jane’s narrative reliability is not what it seems: though the reader experiences the plot’s action without prior knowledge of *Jane Eyre*’s ending, the narrator’s position, ten years in the future, allows her to edit and re-appropriate certain elements of her feminist fairy tale, most obvious in her treatments of Rochester and the barely human prisoner of Thornfield, Bertha. In so doing, Jane legitimizes her own female role, at the cost of othering Bertha. Because madness, first concealed and later universally accepted, facilitates the plot of *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s own narration warrants close examination for potential manifestations of Bertha’s “affliction.” While Jane is lauded as the quintessential “sane” heroine, she must necessarily be associated, because of her close connection to Bertha, to the female madness of her “double” in ways which disrupt her “reliable” narrative.

In his essay “The Uncanny,” Freud raises several intriguing concepts which might be related to *Jane Eyre* and its derivative works and criticisms, most notably to Gilbert and Gubar’s influential text on this novel. The concealed but detailed doubling of characters within *Jane Eyre* is fascinatingly complex, and while bewildering, might well be illuminated by the phenomenon explained in Freud’s essay on the subject. Freud posits that any “doubling” is experienced as unsettling because “many people experience [the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (Freud 218). This particular form of necromantic uncanniness, so common in *Jane Eyre*, is also examined in Elisabeth Bronfen’s research into death of young, female characters in her work *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Certainly, Jane and Rochester’s relationship is fundamentally based upon their shared, casual acceptance of a supernatural element to their romance, their shared anxiety about the “doubling” of women in the text, and most obviously in the preternatural call Jane answers in her return to Rochester at the novel’s end. Freud also explores the loaded tropes of haunted houses and uncanny mother figures, which will be revisited in later chapters as they quite clearly shed light on the enduring power of Brontë’s image of the decaying Thornfield. The doubling of names and character structures across novels will also be examined later in this paper.

The plot of *Jane Eyre* is uncannily doubled by du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, as well as within the original work itself. Since Bertha and Jane can be seen as doppelgangers, the prevalence of the doubling structure, especially in Gothic literature, is something Freud struggles to explain. Freud writes, “the quality of uncanniness can only come from the

fact of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted...at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned to demons” (Freud 212). By Freud’s logic, we might read Bertha as a repressed double from Jane’s Dickensian childhood, perhaps the woman temporarily tamed by the harsh standards of Lowood, but never successfully eradicated, not even by the positive role model of Miss Temple. Of the careful tutelage of her mentor, Jane says, “I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits; more harmonious thoughts; what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character” (Brontë 100). However, Jane is anything but “disciplined and subdued,” though she has learned better to superficially control her fiery temper than she does in her childhood. In his essay “*Jane Eyre* Cubed: The Three Dimensions of the Text,” Jerome Beaty explores this phenomenon. He writes,

There are two somewhat more extensive descriptions of a quite different Jane, one closer to the mature narrator. She is first glossed over at Lowood...a comparable passage also fails to realize or dramatize this Jane and comes, in any case, too late. Though we are told that in the time between the end of the narrative and the narrating, Jane has had ten years of happy marriage, these few pages are expositional, undramatized summary narrative. The reader hardly knows the Jane Rochester who has narrated her life story (Beaty 76).

Even happily settled into marriage, middle-aged and economically stable, the “real” Jane remains a mystery. It seems that Jane successfully learned the art of dissembling and to conceal, for want of a better term, her “truest” nature during her time at Lowood. This education effectively subverts the intent of her Aunt Reed, who supposedly sent Jane to

school to overcome her unchristian habit of lying, leading to the creation of the double, heroine/madwoman figure around which Gilbert and Gubar construct their argument.

In their groundbreaking work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar corroborate Mary Poovey's later depiction of the period's archetypal, marginalized governess, beginning with the novel's initial red room sequence: "For the little drama...which opens *Jane Eyre* is in itself a paradigm of the larger drama that occupies the entire book: Jane's anomalous, orphaned position in society, her enclosure in stultifying roles and houses, her attempts to escape through flight, starvation, and...madness" (Gilbert and Gubar 341). The critics famously explain the phenomenon of Bertha, and of Jane herself, as a case of Freudian psychological doubling, with a proto-feminist agenda, begun in the childhood red room scene, and continuing until Bertha's death as she burns Thornfield. They write, "Bertha...is Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Gilbert and Gubar link each instance of Bertha's appearance in or influence upon the action of the novel as directly related to a moment of Jane's passionate, but internalized, anger over circumstances she is not at liberty to address or improve. Bertha, then, is the vengeful enactor of Jane's many inexpressible injustices. The critics note that this rage, so shocking in a fictional or even a real-life heroine, was more problematic for contemporary readers than were the novel's sexual charge or its fantastic plot. This makes her unreliable in their minds, as we tend to give more credence to dispassionate

female characters. They posit, “They were disturbed not so much by the proud Byronic sexual energy of Rochester as by the Byronic pride and passion of Jane herself, not so much by the asocial sexual vibrations between hero and heroine as by the heroine’s refusal to submit to her social destiny...what horrified the Victorians was Jane’s anger” (Gilbert and Gubar 338). With that understanding, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane’s “successful” ending is possible only by the indirect interference of the socially irrelevant Bertha, acting as the deviant double who conveniently commits suicide, securing the path to Jane’s happiness with the maimed Rochester at Ferndean (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Her double now dead, Jane is free to marry and live happily ever after at Ferndean, the same location in which Bertha would have, according to Rochester, died early.

Literary manifestations of female hysteria, a catchall medical diagnosis prevalent in the nineteenth-century due to widespread anxieties regarding gender roles, are explored in-depth in Claire Kahane’s 1995 work, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850-1915*. She explains that “Freud defined hysteria as the somatic representation of a repressed bisexual conflict, an unconscious refusal to accept a single and defined subject position in the oedipal structuration of desire and identity” (Kahane x-xi). This definition can be applied broadly to each of the three novels’ “madwomen”: Bertha, the physically repressed and promiscuous madwoman in the attic; Rebecca, whose likely bisexuality, contradicts traditional understandings of “appropriate” femininity; and Antoinette, whose refusal to conceal her desire for Rochester or relinquish her identity leave her no place in society, forcing her into the role of the madwoman. Kahane goes on to examine the gendered

understanding of melancholia and depression in the nineteenth century, and the effect these preconceptions had upon female characters (and writers) of the period. She writes,

for the nineteenth century, the privileged melancholy subject was male, a Keats or a Byron but not a Dorothy Wordsworth, a Rochester but not a Jane Eyre. Moreover, melancholy was considered not merely an affect, but a form of male creativity; it was precisely the ability of the subject to speak his melancholy in language that gave it cultural value...In contrast, women were typically represented as not melancholic but as depressed, a difference signified by their absence of speech, by their withdrawal into silence...a melancholy first person voice already transgresses the place of the woman in the nineteenth-century literature of melancholia (Kahane 48).

By Kahane's logic, Brontë's position as a female writer of Byronic characters complicates accepted notions of traditional Romanticism, but her inclusion of a vocal, unhappy heroine in Jane represents a further challenge to narrative normalcy. As the "madwoman," Bertha is appropriately silenced, and appears the very type of the Victorian madwoman, though the increasingly vocal madwomen of *Jane Eyre's* later iterations escape Bertha's nineteenth-century restrictions. Peter Melville Logan's 1997 study, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose*, deals with similar subject material, and focuses on the effects of hysteria upon the formation and style of female narrators. He argues,

The nervous female body contains a narrative within the fibers of its nerves. That narrative details the body's interaction with the social world around it, and so within each nervous body lies the story of the social conditions that created it. The non-nervous male body, certainly, has a history, but it is not pressed into its material structure, waiting to come forth in a moment of crisis. The nervous female body, however, possesses a constitutive relationship to narrative. It has a story to tell, whereas the healthy male body has none (Logan 29).

Like Kahane, Logan notes the separate medical and social expectations for men and women: while women are not subjected to the same psychological or physical tests as men, and the population expects them succumb to hysteria, their trials and the inherently different female experience make for distinctly female narrative which cannot be genuinely replicated by men. For the “madwomen” of these novels, the passage of time allows for increasingly detailed disclosure of their stories, in which their husbands are less and less able to control their storytelling.

Influenced by Freud’s concept of the uncanny double and the now-classic Gilbert and Gubar reading of *Jane Eyre*, Elisabeth Bronfen struggles with the fraught dichotomy of the Jane/Bertha dynamic which is underscored by their very different relationships to death. She writes, “*Jane Eyre* illustrates the most conventional association of femininity with death—the innocent, passive, fading woman as signifier for the desired Otherness of the sublime and the powerful, self-assertive woman as signifier for the threatening Otherness of the body, of nature, of sexuality” (Bronfen 223). Jane, though not naturally submissive or deficient in passion, nearly succumbs to an anonymous death of starvation and exposure on the moors, by which she establishes herself, in some ways, as a “normal” woman, in the feminine surrender of that death, abandoning her characteristic anger, and throwing herself on God and the Rivers family’s respective mercies. Jane also conforms by nature of her “plain, little” body, which fails to inspire the dangerous lust Rochester experiences for his first wife, and later causes St. John to think she will make a practical wife for his missionary expedition, in contrast to the beautiful but unsuitable Rosamund Oliver. Moments before St. John Rivers arrives to save Jane from death

outside the doors of Moor House, she piously thinks, “I can but die...and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence” (Brontë 386). Jane’s “dying” thoughts represent a significant contrast with St. John’s later, more decisive thoughts about his own approaching death, which triumphantly close the novel: “‘My Master,’ he says, ‘has forewarned me. Daily he announces more distinctly, ‘Surely I come quickly!’ and hourly I more eagerly respond, ‘Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!’” (Brontë 521). Both Jane and St. John focus their supposed last earthly thoughts upon their firm Christian beliefs, reinforcing once again their piety and their religiously-founded strength of character. However, both sentiments seem forced and out of character because of our greater understanding of their repressed passions.

Bertha, on the other hand, is systematically associated with pagan immorality, and approaches a kind of Otherness in the cult of feminine death compared to the passive, appropriate course enacted by Jane. Bertha’s violent and voluntary death jump, paired with her exotic appearance and supposed promiscuity cast her actual death in direct opposition to Jane’s pretended death on the moors. Because of this difference, Bertha is summarily rejected in the long term for those very same qualities which originally attracted Rochester to marry her. Jane first hears the story of Bertha’s death from a stranger, who emphasizes both his eyewitness position, as well as Bertha’s inherent Otherness:

I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed, Mr. Rochester ascend through the sky-light on to the roof; we heard him call ‘Bertha!’ We saw him approach her; and then, ma’am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement (Brontë 493).

Where Jane's quiet and privately religious brush with death, though out of character, approaches Burke's definition of the "feminine" aesthetic, the beautiful, and her subsequent sojourn with the Rivers family eventually leads to her financial and social independence, Bertha's fiery leap from the scene of her own destructive, final activities at Thornfield solidifies general poor opinion of the "madwoman" within the novel and supports Rochester's unreliable account of her impulsive tendencies and dangerous proclivities.

Though the specifics of Bertha's insanity are not explored in *Jane Eyre*, Helen Small addresses the clinical aspect of the madwoman in her book, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*. Small calls attention to Brontë's conflicting usage of the familiar trope of female insanity paired with the novelist's well-documented interest in modern science. She writes, "Although Bertha is a theatrically outmoded agent in the plot of *Jane Eyre*, she simultaneously fits a much more current analysis of insanity, and it is here, in the juxtaposition of the out-of-fashion with the contemporary, that Brontë's careful melding of realism with gothic supernaturalism does its most important work" (Small 161). Much has been made of Brontë's own marginal literary position between the gothic and the realist movements, and assigning Bertha solely to the category of Gothic is problematic for Small. To examine the voiceless, barely human Bertha, as she is presented in Jane and Rochester's narrations, as a potentially realistic example of female madness, reveals significantly more of Victorian society than the traditional theory, that Brontë intended Bertha as little more than an antiquated madwoman archetype. Small writes, "Brontë's unflinching application of contemporary theories of the mind to that tradition [of the love-mad woman] means that

Jane's love for Rochester becomes a state akin to madness, even before the necessity of losing him. Jane fears Rochester's love as the destruction of her will" (Small 168). Small's assertion that loving Rochester—or, more generally, love universally—leads to madness for women plays back into Gilbert and Gubar's idea that Bertha represents Jane's repressed other half. However, Small seems to suggest that Jane's madness might eventually reach the level of Bertha's, where Gilbert and Gubar posit that Bertha already acts as the physical proof of Jane's concealed madness, and the vehicle by which she can carry out all her darkest angers and aggressions. This lurking potential for Jane to become, herself, mad comes back into play in the "threshold moments" in which Jane's narrative is at its least reliable, discussed later in this chapter.

The unreliability of both Jane and Rochester, particularly as regards Bertha, but also in their depiction of their own past and present selves, necessitates a certain distrust of their narratives. In her 1989 book, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Mary Poovey addresses the uniquely marginalized position of the Victorian governess, which applies almost perfectly to both the plot and to the titular narrator of *Jane Eyre*:

Not a mother, the governess nevertheless performed the mother's tasks; not a prostitute, she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualized women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her "natural" morality (Poovey 14).

Though the above is not written in explicit reference to Brontë's novel, Poovey succinctly captures Jane's unstable position, both in society, as well as within the microcosm of Thornfield. The nature of Jane's liminality, closely related to her potential to become a

“redundant woman” in Victorian society is, I feel, one of the most telling motives for the unreliable narrative she delivers throughout the novel. Motherless herself, she finds employment acting as surrogate parent to the more scandalously orphaned Adèle. Castigated from childhood for her fiery nature and passionate outbursts, she enters into a sexually charged relationship with the unavailable Rochester, an entanglement which renders her sexually suspicious. And, faced with a seemingly textbook example of the madwoman in Bertha, Jane relies upon her schoolgirl logic and Christian morality to distance herself from any dangerous implications of insanity.

Despite Jane’s concerted efforts to identify with her middle-class values and place herself above question during her tenure as governess at Thornfield, Blanche and Baroness Ingram immediately dismiss her for the same reasons Poovey identifies above. Blanche says, “You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses; Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi” (Brontë 205). Corroborating her daughter’s opinion (in one of many instances of Brontë’s penchant for contemporary science), Baroness Ingram informs Mr. Rochester that she is “a judge of physiognomy, and in her I see all the faults of her class” (Brontë 205). Obviously, Jane’s often-discussed plainness and unpopularity is the narrator’s pointedly modest interpretation of this pseudo-scientific analysis, indicating to her audience that Jane’s lack of beauty in the classical sense (as exemplified by the scheming, ultimately rejected, Blanche, who is, herself, dangerously like Bertha) is not enough to remove suspicion of Jane’s potential promiscuity within the traditional

associations of the marginal Victorian governess, while simultaneously marking her as physically and emotionally unpleasant or abnormal.

Exactly how much of Jane's "plainness" is an affectation of the narrator is also difficult to pinpoint. Though Rochester makes it obvious that he does not find her beautiful, "you are not pretty any more than I am handsome, yet a puzzled air becomes you" (Brontë 155), he, just as clearly, never finds her hideous, in the way Jane at times describes herself. The most memorable moment of Jane's self-loathing, in which she draws her own portrait to remind herself, physically, of her small worth, is a self-assigned punishment laid out in unflinching terms: "place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, thoughtfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain'" (Brontë 187). In many ways, this masochistic command can also apply to the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, as the title character would like her reader to understand and interpret it, while in actuality, neither portrait nor novel is likely free from the unreliability inherent in any "autobiographical" art form. Though supposedly Jane's life story, as related by the heroine herself, the "glass" Jane holds up to her memories is at least marginally compromised, and it is hard to believe she does not "smooth away" some "displeasing irregularity" here and there. From her distance of ten years from the events of her "autobiography," Jane presents herself as the stereotypical embodiment of the friendless governess and unjustly treated orphan, forced into her profession because of unfortunate circumstances, and unable to leave it due to dim social and economic prospects. Eventually, these assumptions about herself are turned on their head when Jane

finds herself an unlikely heiress and returns to Rochester as the empowered party in their perpetually unequal relationship. Throughout the majority of *Jane Eyre*, however, these tightly held assumptions about Jane's tenuous social, financial, and physical role weigh heavily on her narration, and play directly into her depictions of herself, Bertha, and Rochester.

Unlike her successors in *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jane Eyre, (whatever her insecurities about her self-worth, or her other, related deceptions), is a narrator whose identity is never for a moment in question, because she pointedly reminds her reader of her feelings, appearance, and situation, frequently. She is the eponymous heroine, of course, and Gilbert and Gubar mention multiple potential meanings of the book's title: "her name is of course suggestive—is invisible as air, the heir to nothing, secretly choking with ire" (Gilbert and Gubar 342). These apparently contradictory subtexts to Jane's deeper nature, seem to speak both to Jane's shifting social position, as well as her uncertain knowledge of her own family history and legacy. For example, after the revelation of Bertha, Jane says, "I was in my own room, as usual— just myself, without obvious change: nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? – where was her life? – where were her prospects?" (Brontë 340). Though her entire life with Rochester has been, she thinks, ruined, and the identity of "Jane Rochester" she hoped to take on with her wedding has been made impossible because of Bertha, Jane maintains her focus on "Jane Eyre," on her own, unshakeable identity, though the physical, geographical, and social factors of that identity might be momentarily uncertain.

The very fact that she promotes her work as a self-titled “autobiography”—and that Brontë published the novel as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*—differs drastically from the openly evasive attitude adopted by Lucy Snowe, Brontë’s other famous narrator. While Lucy is tauntingly, but consistently, elusive throughout *Villette*, Jane goes to great lengths to assure readers of her trustworthiness, (“I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth” (Brontë 128)), while throughout the work relaying depictions of plot, characters, and setting in ways which invite scrutiny. In fact, Jane outright informs her reader that “this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know the responses will possess some degree of interest” (Brontë 99). In her essay, “Narrative Distance in ‘Jane Eyre’: The Relevance of the Pictures,” Jane Millgate investigates Jane’s middle-aged retelling of her childhood and early adulthood, with special interest in Jane’s portrayal of her perceived social superiors, “Outwardly she seems calm and detached—an isolated observer in the window-seat—but the frequent shifts into the present tense and the non-realistic presentation of the guests...show a high degree of distorting involvement. The infrequent interventions of the voice of thirty serve only to underline the disastrous loss of perspective” (Millgate 317). While Jane endears herself to her audience with assurances of similarity, familiarity, and high moral intentions, Lucy continually rejects intimacy, at the cost of the beloved following and implicit (if misguided) trust associated with *Jane Eyre*.

Jane’s friendly attitude toward her reader is a marked difference from the narrators of the later “iterations” of *Jane Eyre*’s literary legacy: the nameless second Mrs.

de Winter, and the increasingly detached and unreliable Antoinette. Jane constantly reminds her reader of her full name, which is also the book's title, and often used by other characters in dialogue, or else written in her governess advertisement, or in her inadvertent signature on Rosamund's portrait, eventually revealing her true identity to St. John Rivers. Though at times awkward, this technique functions in a manner not dissimilar from Brontë's frequent direct address of her reader, reinforcing the stable and honest narrative style Jane professes to be her own, which the later iterations increasingly subvert. Still, Jane waits until the last chapter of her story to inform her reader of the distance from which she records the novel's events, as Millgate notes: "By the simple device of refusing to say what period has intervened between the events and their narration Charlotte Brontë evades the obligation to maintain a constant narrative distance; at the same time she retains the unifying effect of the single first-person narrator...a productive tension between the judgments of thirty and the vision of ten or eighteen" (Millgate 315). In this way, Jane is not so different from Lucy Snowe after all, though she eventually reveals more of her story's outcome than does the later character, who concludes her narrative with more evasions and half-confessions.

Convinced, as she is, against all social evidence and opinion, of her own merit as a person, Jane could hardly be more different from the gauchely diffident narrator of *Rebecca*, who never shares her own name with her reader, and who is only acknowledged as the wife of Maxim, or an imposter Rebecca. The late Rebecca remains, even in death, the "real" Mrs. de Winter, and she is the novel's title character. Even more challenging, though, is the evolving naming dilemma for *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s Antoinette, whose

given name reminds many of the Jamaican and English characters within the novel of her troubled mother and namesake, Annette, from whom Antoinette's later madness is supposedly inherited. The most problematic naming moment in this novel arises when, in his anger, the young Rochester renames Antoinette "Bertha," the name under which she will become known as the madwoman of *Jane Eyre*, effectively rewriting his wife's identity in the ultimate act of patriarchal colonization, and, doubtless, contributing to the insanity Rhys responds to in the Bertha of the original text.

Unreliable narrators are the subjects of significant Brontë scholarship, but the majority of that critical work focuses on the frame narrators of *Wuthering Heights*, or on the defiantly unreliable Lucy Snowe, of *Villette*. Relatively speaking, *Jane Eyre* is questioned significantly less frequently, making investigation of her narrative honesty and motives all the more interesting, because of their mostly successful concealment. I believe Jane's "autobiography" does not entirely stand the test of detailed investigation, disproving the transparency she claims throughout *Jane Eyre*, and exposing Jane's own dubious thoughts and actions, especially as concerns the unilaterally maligned character of Bertha.

Jane's brief depiction of Bertha, though grotesque, is strangely detached. She appears to feel for Bertha none of the sympathy she evinces for the motherless Adèle, and she demonstrates no discernible jealousy of Bertha's status as Rochester's wife, as she does when it appears her rival, Blanche Ingram, will assume that coveted role. In fact, Bertha's physical similarity to Blanche becomes a sort of warning against traditionally beautiful women, when Rochester mentions his initial impression of Bertha in Jamaican

society: “I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram, tall, dark, and majestic” (Brontë 352). Does Rochester, then, reject Blanche because he has learned from his previous mistake in marrying for money and lust, or does he sense that Blanche might potentially follow in Bertha’s footsteps? Jane chastises Rochester (once) for his virulent hatred of Bertha, saying, “Sir...you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy, It is cruel—she cannot help being mad” (Brontë 347). This instance of female charity towards an unfortunate seems, though not out of character for the compassionate and just Jane, a necessary moment, in which Jane reminds her reader of her unique ability to see beyond outward appearances and social conventions, and a foreshadowing of her reunion with the blinded and maimed Rochester at the novel’s end.

Despite these few moments of liberal-mindedness as regards Bertha, Jane, in general, describes her as subhuman. She informs her reader, “What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; its snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face” (Brontë 338). The overwhelming animal imagery applied to Bertha is shocking; so too is Jane’s observation “but it was covered with clothing,” implying that Bertha is recognizably human only because of the manmade apparel she wears. The use of “it” rather than the gendered pronoun “she” is probably the most insidious statement Brontë makes on the humanity (or lack thereof) associated with woman’s madness. A similarly callous use of pronouns is applied, in *Wuthering Heights*, to the boy Heathcliff, after the death of Mr.

Earnshaw, this time because of Heathcliff's gypsy-like appearance. Bertha, even in her decidedly female, romantic madness, loses any discernable traces of her femininity, becoming an "it." Small corroborates Brontë's commentary on the unfair double standards applied to women's love:

In Bertha Mason, the convention of love-madness is invoked as a bitter parody. Following a black version of the sentimental stereotype, her insanity increases as her husband registers his own loathing for her and his desire to abandon the marriage. Her 'hyena laugh' mocks lovers' laughter, her embrace is savage, her kiss is life-threatening (Small 166).

This "life-threatening" sexuality is revisited multiple times throughout *Jane Eyre*, as a counterpoint to the less physically passionate relationship between Jane and Rochester: in Bertha's attempt to burn Rochester in his bed, a reminder of their previous sexual liaisons; her attack on her stepbrother, Richard Mason, who helped arrange their marriage; and, finally, her fatal burning of Thornfield, where Rochester imprisoned her. Jane even feels her own life to be endangered by the madwoman in the one scene where she and Bertha knowingly share space. Jane says,

Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athlete as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow, but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her (Brontë 338).

Of course, Jane's well-documented love for Rochester prompts her to highlight his protection of her, heroism, and nobility in treating Bertha with a degree of kindness given her compromised mental status. In this depiction, though, Jane calls attention to the masculine physique of Bertha as a corrupted form of classical womanly beauty. In

Elizabeth J. Donaldson's essay "The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness," she rejects Gilbert and Gubar's psychoanalytic reading of the madwoman figure, arguing that "*Jane Eyre's* plot rests on a structure not exactly of mad doubles, but of juxtapositions between normative and non-normative bodies, between the accidental and the congenital, between masculine rationality and feminine embodiment, and between melancholy and raving madness" (Donaldson 102). Drawing upon Brontë's engagement with contemporary science and its influence upon interpretations of gender and social roles, Donaldson focuses on the discrepancies in Bertha's description to assign her a more modern psychological diagnosis.

Perhaps this physically-based appraisal of her rival's mental state is the "plain and little" Jane's warning against statuesque beauties such as Bertha and Blanche: Rochester would be able to physically overpower Jane under any circumstances, and, unlike Bertha— who is disconcertingly able to hold her own against a male opponent—Jane, at least physically, requires male protection, be it in the form of St. John on the moors, or Rochester at Thornfield. Although she repeatedly bemoans her own "mean" stature, Jane's description of Bertha's near-domination of Rochester seems to send a message that theirs was never the slave/master romantic dynamic which Jane relates of herself and her employer, and that this too-even sexual relationship might have contributed to some of Bertha and Rochester's problems as a couple. In their physical similarity, Bertha becomes a double of Rochester, and their struggle could potentially be read as a metaphor for an

illicit, queer affair. In this case, it provides reasoning for Rochester's concealment of Bertha and his inability to publically marry the similar character of Blanche Ingram.

Because Bertha is denied a voice beyond her manic laughter, Jane's understanding of her character and prior life are completely the product of Rochester and Grace Poole, the former of whom hates Bertha, and the latter a known drunk in Rochester's employ. These monstrous "parents" work to conceal her very existence, while simultaneously offering little in the way of human comforts. As her guardian, Grace warns against Bertha's deceitful nature, saying, "One never knows what she has, sir: she is so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft" (Brontë 338). This low, animal "cunning" evinced by Bertha lends her already unpopular actions an even more malicious undercurrent. Grace also demonstrates what seems to Jane an inadvisable and somewhat untrustworthy comfort with Bertha's frightening temper when she informs the party of Bertha's mood on the day of the failed wedding, calling her patient "tolerable...rather snappish, but not 'rageous.'" Jane, however, notes that "A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favorable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet" (Brontë 338). Grace's cool acceptance of her unruly, frightening charge is contrasted by Jane's passivity and Rochester's passionately violent hatred of his deranged wife.

Jane demonstrates surprising tolerance in discussing Rochester's prior liaisons. She seems socially predisposed to accept extramarital affairs on the (upper-class) male side, while later refusing point blank to participate in such a relationship herself, when asked

by Rochester. After Rochester recounts the story of his wasted passion for Adèle's mother, Jane reflects that,

As he had said, there was probably nothing at all extraordinary in the substance of the narrative itself: a wealthy Englishman's passion for a French dancer, and her treachery to him, were everyday matters, no doubt, in society; but there was something decidedly strange in the paroxysm of emotion which had suddenly seized him when he was in the act of expressing the present contentment of his mood (Brontë 171).

Jane is surprisingly progressive in her attitude, especially as regards a subject about which she is normally staunchly conservative. Though possibly her budding love for Rochester explains her leniency, it is potentially also the unoriginal, "pulp fiction" aspect of her own desire for Rochester which keeps her from condemning his affair with Céline. In upholding society's double standard, Jane complicates her otherwise feminist stance regarding the differing opportunities available to men and women. Later, Rochester's callous dismissal of Adèle as his probable child sounds decidedly defensive. Claiming that, because Céline had many lovers, Adèle could not possibly be his daughter is patently absurd, and one of the dramatic Rochester's most ludicrous opinions. Though Rochester was one of Céline's sexual partners, he rejects the child at every turn. Claiming phrenology and physical appearance as proof of Adèle's lowlier origins, he exclaims to Jane, "what do I want with a child for a companion, and not my own child – a French dancer's bastard? Why do you importune me about her!" (Brontë 348). And, despite Jane's tender heart as regards the lonely, motherless Adèle, she does not defend her pupil against Rochester, instead leaving her to attend boarding school upon her governess's departure.

Despite his shocking deception and attempted polygamy, Jane's forgiveness of Rochester appears easy and complete, further proof of her unreliability. This uncharacteristic lack of self-respect can be read as evidence of concealed feelings, or at the very least as a lack of the transparency she claims throughout the novel. She says, "Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner: and besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien—I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart's core" (Brontë 344). Like Rochester, Jane's openness has a distinct limit, despite her role as narrator; this is one of several moments in the text where Jane actually comments on her occasional dishonesty. In the same scene, Rochester makes a similar, but much more problematic comment about the nature of his trickery: "To tell me that I had already a wife is empty mockery: you know now that I had but a hideous demon. I was wrong to attempt to deceive you; but I feared a stubbornness that exists in your character" (Brontë 363). Though, of course, Rochester is correct in assuming that his honesty about Bertha would have kept Jane from accepting his proposal, minimizing her personal integrity, religion, and independence into a single streak of female "stubbornness" seems an unfair leap to make.

Rochester's portrayal of his past self is at times congruent with Jane's depiction, and, at times, at odds. Shortly after meeting Rochester, Jane describes him as,

proud, sardonic, harsh to inferiority of every description: in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others. He was moody, too; unaccountably so; I more than once...found him sitting in the library alone...a morose, almost a malignant, scowl blackened his features. But I believed that his

moodiness, his harshness, his former faults of morality...had their source in some cruel cross of fate (Brontë 178).

Of course, Jane loves Rochester, and, as such, her descriptions of him are subject to serious scrutiny and doubt. Consistently lenient about his dubious actions, Jane easily overcomes his worst failings. Rochester's darkly magnetic figure of distinctly nineteenth-century male allure appears very much in keeping with the class of Byronic heroes to which critics typically assign him. Millgate argues that

Rochester behaves, quite deliberately and self-consciously, like a Byronic hero, taking up dramatic poses, singing Corsair songs, acting arbitrarily and inscrutably; he talks of his past in *Childe Harold* terms; he delights in dressing up and playing exotic roles. When such a figure is presented through the still more naively Romantic imagination of the eighteen-year-old Jane Eyre the coloration becomes positively violent (Millgate 318).

The Byronic hero, another Gothic archetype at work in multiple Brontë novels, manifests itself undeniably in Rochester. As the hero with a dark, troubling past, he is given a distinct narrative voice in *Jane Eyre*, and, with the novel supposedly set in the 1830s, (placing Rochester and Bertha's marriage around 1820), Rochester's youth conveniently coincides with the peak moment of Byron's popularity. It seems likely that the young Rochester would style himself after the great Romantic poet of the moment— or that Jane would style him that way— and Byron's literary and biographical proclivities are, as such, overwhelmingly present in Rochester's portrayal of himself and his interpretation of the story's action. Rochester is also seductive in a manner befitting the sexually prolific Byron, at times overwhelmingly Romantic and reclusive to the point of antisocial behaviors. In his recollection of the affair with Céline, Rochester pointedly makes Jane uncomfortable with her sexual inexperience, saying,

You never felt jealousy, did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not ask

you; because you never felt love. You have both sentiments yet to experience: your soul sleeps; the shock is yet to be given that shall waken it...you will come some day to a craggy pass in the channel, where the whole world of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up and borne on by some master-wave into a calmer current (Brontë 166).

Rochester's curious word choice in his invocation of love's all-consuming power proves lacking when compared with the raw sexuality he attributes to Bertha's Caribbean home. The staunchly English Jane is assigned craggy channels and charging streams, while Bertha's descriptors include wolfish cries and moonlit oceans, a divide in female sexuality further explored by du Maurier in *Rebecca*.

In Rochester's brief explanation of his concealed first marriage, he justifies his deception of Jane, while pointedly contrasting Bertha's appearance with that of the more appropriate candidate for the position of second wife:

'That is *my wife*,' said he. 'Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know— such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have' (laying his hand on my shoulder): 'this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon...Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder- this face with that mask- this form with that bulk; then judge me, priest of the gospel and man of the law, and remember, with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged!' (Brontë 339).

Rochester's hyperbolic and unfeeling description of Bertha, exaggerated in order to exonerate his own questionable motives in attempting to take a second wife during his ongoing first marriage, and justify keeping said first wife locked in his attic unbeknownst to the staff or community, is one of the most vivid depictions of Bertha offered in *Jane Eyre*, which is surprising as it is expressed through reported dialogue, supposedly conveyed by Jane to her reader. Even in contrasting the "good" example of the plain but devoted Jane as a foil to the insanity and dangerous sexuality of Bertha, Rochester

purposefully doubles his two brides as an excuse for his own bad behavior: one is cast as the epitome of modesty, and the other as a cautionary tale of female excess. Bronfen goes on to examine Bertha's role for Rochester:

For her husband she is all that lies below acceptable femininity, the feminine body as dangerous Other to man; a cunning and malignant lunatic, a maniac, a monster, a wild beast, a goblin, a fury. Because she 'castrated' him socially, 'sullied' his name, 'outraged' his honour, 'blighted' his youth and threatens his life, she is the superlative figure of death (Bronfen 221).

Importantly, though Bertha may have symbolically castrated Rochester socially before the novel begins, Rochester's blinding and injury after the burning of Thornfield become a more physical castration metaphor, without which his ultimate reunion with Jane would be impossible, as it would complicate Brontë's feminist agenda. Pointedly, Bronfen makes use of terminology for describing Bertha which also appears in Jane's depiction of her own personal appearance, "am I a monster?" (Brontë 305). Bronfen's usage of animal imagery, often applied to male sexuality, as well as in certain elements of the otherworldliness which function as a strange language of endearments between Rochester and Jane, also have doubled meanings. These bizarre qualities can be overlooked in the sexually uninitiated and unthreatening Jane, but become disgusting and unnatural in the more physically and sexually powerful woman, Bertha. Almost perversely, Jane appears relatively disinterested in pursuing the topic of her rival for Rochester, her supposedly blasé attitude a complete departure from the second Mrs. de Winter's obsession with her predecessor in du Maurier's retelling of *Jane Eyre*. Bronfen argues, "In her perception, Bertha is a figure of ambivalence, appearing alternately as a foul, ghastly spectre or vampire, between living and dead" (Bronfen 221). Jane's short musings on the subject of

Bertha paint a harsh but brief portrait of Victorian conceptions of madness, before refocusing the narrative upon her own journey of personal growth and empowerment.

Interestingly, Rochester's depiction of his marriage to Bertha is another occasion in which Brontë taps into her wealth of Gothic stylistic tropes. He tells Jane, "I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her...Her relatives encouraged me: competitors piqued me: she allured me: a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was" (Brontë 352). In Horace Walpole's 1764 novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, as Isabella faces the prospect of an unwanted marriage to Manfred, Walpole writes, "Alone in so dismal a place...thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions. She addressed herself to every saint in heaven, and inwardly implored their assistance" (Walpole 28). Though the Walpole scene is charged with horror rather than the sexual excitement Brontë describes, both characters are the subject of unexpected sexual advances; Rochester is seduced, while Isabella escapes. As he tries to explain his mistake to Jane in terms she will understand, Rochester casts Bertha as the aggressor in their relationship, making himself her unwilling, feminized victim, a theme matching Jane's earlier image of Bertha being equal to Rochester in size, and potentially capable of physically besting him. Rochester claims,

I lived with that woman upstairs four years, and before that time she had tried me indeed: her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong, only cruelty would check them, and I would not use cruelty...Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste (Brontë 353).

Though Rochester seems to mean that his honor bound him to the mad and promiscuous Bertha, his phrasing belies a certain dependence upon his wife. Of course, the background of their story reveals that for the first few years of their marriage, Rochester was beholden to Bertha's wealth and estate in Jamaica, but following the death of his father and brother, Rochester is made master of both his and Bertha's inheritances, and his imprisonment of her quickly reverses their power dynamics. Still, Rochester's scathing depictions of Bertha, and his continued insistence on her power over him might as easily be read as evidence of the emasculating sexual superiority Bertha exerted over Rochester, in addition to his past financial obligation to his bride.

Rochester repeatedly reassures Jane that he was not capable of loving Bertha in the way he now loves her, but he admits that he did lust after his first wife, which, again, Jane seems to accept relatively easily. Rochester declares,

I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her. I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature: I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners—and, I married her—gross, grovelling, mole-eyed blockhead that I was! With less sin I might have—but let me remember to whom I am speaking (Brontë 352).

The love, esteem, and trust which Rochester has frequently expressed for Jane are the tools he uses to excuse his prior behavior, and his contemplation of seducing her and ruining Bertha's prospects, without marrying her, is interesting when compared to his later suggestion that he and Jane live together as platonic companions. Clearly, Rochester means to imply that the young Bertha would have willingly parted with her virginity before marriage, where Jane would never betray her convictions without brute force.

Shortly after his implausible housing suggestion, Rochester makes one of his most impassioned speeches, saying,

never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand. . . I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her? Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage— with a stern triumph. Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it— the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose. Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place. And it is you, spirit— with will and energy, and virtue and purity— that I want: not alone your brittle frame (Brontë 366).

While Rochester, admittedly, wants a sexual relationship with Jane, he is unwilling to force her in order to get it. His detailed, disturbingly romanticized contemplation of raping Jane is set apart from his lust for Bertha, because the driving factor behind Rochester's attraction to Jane (Jane claims) is her unique mind and personality, rather than her "plain" body. The intensely physical Bertha, on the other hand, he implies would have been willing to have sex before their marriage, and Rochester, in retrospect, wishes he had indulged his lust and moved on, rather than following the socially acceptable path of marriage with Bertha, even if such an act would have been sinful. Though Bertha, like Blanche, is physically superior to Jane, sex with Jane has higher ultimate value than with these paragons of female sexuality, for whom Rochester reveals startling depths of animosity. Still more intriguing, though, is Jane's treatment of Rochester's account of his marriage to Bertha, and his ensuing behavior.

Rochester cites many causes for his unhappiness with Bertha, and this foundation in the original text becomes the basis of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In another example

of Brontë's engagement with the modern science of inherited defects, Bertha's madness is made to be a family complaint, manifested also in her mother and brother. Rochester informs Jane, "My bride's mother I had never seen: I understood she was dead. The honeymoon over, I learned my mistake; she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum. There was a younger brother, too— a complete dumb idiot" (Brontë 352). The theme of the Mason family's unjust betrayal of Rochester's trust is familiar, and he and Jane both seem to tacitly accept that the Caribbean family, paired with Rochester's father and older brother, are the villainous masterminds of the marriage, and Bertha herself a physically attractive but ultimately inhuman Pandora's box of promiscuity and lifelong trouble.

At several key moments in the text, Jane reveals her most serious narrative unreliability, approaching the madness of Bertha, Gilbert and Gubar's dark double. These slips in sanity occur in physical threshold spaces, and are associated with moments of the supernatural which might be explained simply as an atmospheric use of the Gothic, or perhaps as insidious bouts of insanity occurring in a narrator. Standing physically in doorways, or in hallways, Jane's reliability is at its least stable, and as she operates in these in-between locations, her narrative hovers between the realms of the "truth" she tells for most of the novel, and Gothicized moments of disbelief, not far distant from the domain of the laughing Bertha. These thresholds are, notably, also present in *Wuthering Heights*, and are highlighted there by Emily Brontë's repeated use of locked, or closed door imagery. On the border of her normal, reliable narrative and certain, distinct lapses

in the sanity Jane usually defines herself by, these moments are critical to the narrator/madwoman dynamic present in all three works examined in this paper.

The first of these threshold moments takes place during Jane's childhood, in Gateshead's memorable red room. She recalls, "Mrs. Reed, impatient of my now frantic anguish and wild sobs, abruptly thrust me back and locked me in, without further parley. I heard her sweeping away; and soon after she was gone, I suppose I had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene" (Brontë 22). Terrified of the ghostly, supernatural, and otherworldly associations attributed to the red room, Jane fights so hard on the dangerous side of the room's closed door to escape back into the safety of the "known world" of Gateshead that she seems to set off an episode of sorts, potentially the first in a lifetime of similar instances. The narrative of the actual incident is unclear, as it would likely be in a nonfiction recollection of a psychotic event.

Following the red room incident, in glossed over years at Lowood following Helen's death, it seems as though Jane has succeeded in making herself a productive member of society. But, quickly after her arrival into the new, masculine territory of Thornfield, it becomes clear that Jane's borderline psychoses have only gained strength during their years of repression. Jane describes the first time she hears what she later recognizes as Bertha's mad laugh:

I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story... While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh— distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped. The sound ceased, only for an instant. It began again, louder— for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber, though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued (Brontë 126).

The terrifying laugh, which Jane considers ghostly, is in fact all too human. Jane's immediate identification with the sound is proof of her deeper interaction with the frightening laughter, heard while Jane believes herself to be alone, but trapped in a border state on the third story, which becomes increasingly associated with the unidentified madwoman until the revelation on Jane's intended wedding day.

One of *Jane Eyre's* most memorable and suspenseful scenes takes place directly following Bertha's attack on her brother, the unwanted visitor who interrupts a romantic moment between Jane and Rochester earlier that evening. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha's attack on her stepbrother is actually Jane's revenge for his earlier intervention. Whether or not that is the case, Rochester assigns Jane the task of tending to Mason's wounds until the doctor arrives, but pointedly locks her into an antechamber with her patient, trapped between the exit and the door behind which Bertha is kept by Grace Poole, unbeknownst to Jane, who cannot help but sense something amiss. She retrospectively writes,

I experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his retreating footsteps ceased to be heard. Here then I was in the third story, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door: yes— that was appalling— the rest I could bear; but I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me (Brontë 243).

Does Rochester lock Jane between the two doors because he senses her potentially faulty sanity? In the inescapable threshold space of the locked room, Jane once again experiences an awareness of the concealed madwoman, although she misattributes her fears to Grace Poole. Though locking Jane and Mason into the room is likely only a

security measure, preventing the knowledge of Bertha's existence from spreading to the other guests, it forces Jane to examine her fears, and raises her suspicions about Grace Poole even further. It is also a physical doubling of Jane and Bertha's experiences. They have both been confined and silenced by Rochester, in order to protect his secret first marriage, and yet Jane's experience of this treatment does not increase her sympathy for Bertha when she learns of this deception.

Jane's near-death moment at Moor House has already been touched upon, but aside from the religious moment Jane experiences when she believes she is about to die, she is also dangerously close to succumbing to her own inner madwoman. Indeed, previously turned away from other dwellings because of her frightening appearance, questionable sanity also marks her appearance when she meets the Rivers family, into whose kitchen she has been spying for some time. Jane says of the experience of her rescue, "Presently I stood within that clean, bright kitchen— on the very hearth— trembling, sickening, conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten" (Brontë 386). Though the physical ailments she describes are normal and reasonable for a person who almost starved and died of exposure, her otherworldly, "ghastly" appearance, suggests a connection to supernatural phenomena she engaged with on the doorstep of Moor House, be they real or imagined, sane or insane.

The ultimate supernatural moment in *Jane Eyre* occurs when Rochester, in agony, calls for Jane from Ferndean, and she hears his cry at Moor House, while speaking to the skeptic St. John Rivers. Though generally pragmatic throughout the course of the novel, Jane does not hesitate to answer Rochester's cry, nor does she question its inexplicable

source. Understandably, St. John doubts Jane's sanity when she begins talking to herself out of the blue, but Jane remains undaunted in her mission to return to Rochester:

“‘Down, superstition!’ I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate. ‘This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature’” (Brontë 483).

Though she fights against and attempts to repress the “superstitious” event, Jane's next sentence is rife with examples of suspicions of the old school to which Jane and Rochester characteristically subscribe: ghosts, yew trees, and witchcraft. Jane's mention of gates, as she physically crosses the thresholds of the room she is in with St. John, and of the house itself, correspond with this border-based theory, while this extremely Gothicized, dramatic threshold moment corresponds to Jane's most fantastic-seeming error in judgment, and very obvious potential lapse in her sanity.

While still at Thornfield, Rochester briefly engages with the female space of Jamaica, a harsh contrast to the dramatically masculine English estate, and setting up themes I will extensively address in Chapter Three. Conflating the tropical environment with Bertha, he recalls that

The air was like sulphur-steams— I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake— black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball—she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and the scene, and my ears were filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out; wherein she momentarily mingled my name with a tone of such demon-hate, with such language! – no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she: though two rooms off, I heard every word – the thin partitions of the West Indian house opposing but slight obstruction to her wolfish cries (Brontë 354).

Here Brontë (once again) makes use of the Gothic tradition, this time to add the exotic flavor of a far-off location, which becomes equated with looser morals and distinctly feminized in a way which disturbs Rochester. Like her Jamaican home, the young Bertha is naturally and overtly sexual; she is inherently less restrained than a woman raised in the more strict cultural and physical environment of nineteenth-century England. Rochester, unable to manage Bertha emotionally or sexually, is equally overwhelmed by the intense climate and by the flora and fauna surrounding him. While the less physically attractive Jane is refreshing compared with the Bertha and Blanche types Rochester has encountered before, the intensity with which he renders the landscape is intoxicating despite the multiple years of narrative distance, fifteen for Rochester, and then ten more for Jane. Even in his memory of their marriage, Rochester describes Bertha in terms of wild, beastlike imagery, and foreshadows his return to England (and Bertha's permanent removal from her home) in the description of the bloody, setting sun glancing at the tempest. That glancing sun recalls Bertha's eyes, later described as "red balls" by Rochester, though the vile language he claims she spoke is absent from Jane's first-person narrative, as Bertha does not speak at all.

Thornfield Hall is Rochester's domain: male-gendered, more alive when he is in residence, and Bertha's prison. Thornfield is firmly located in the far past, and though Mrs. Fairfax keeps it in painstaking readiness for Rochester's unpredictable visits, Jane still perceives the estate as unflinchingly Gothic: "A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude; and I was glad when finally ushered into my chamber, to find it of small dimensions, and furnished in

ordinary modern style” (Brontë 116). Relieved to find herself gainfully employed in a location where she is welcome, Jane is more impressed by Mrs. Fairfax’s friendliness than the fine, old-fashioned furnishings and treasures of Thornfield. Upon Mr. Rochester’s return, however, she notes that “Thornfield Hall was a changed place. No longer silent as a church, it echoed every hour or two to a knock at the door or a clang of the bell. Steps, too, often traversed the hall, and new voices spoke in different keys below. A rill from the outer world was flowing through it. It had a master; for my part, I liked it better” (Brontë 139). Without the physical presence of its master, Rochester, Thornfield is more mausoleum than home, and the all-female inhabitants (Jane, Bertha, Grace Poole, Adèle, Mrs. Fairfax, and Simone), are unable to maintain the home’s necessary momentum without Rochester. And, as the house and Rochester are inextricably linked, when Bertha enacts her revenge on Rochester, it is physically reflected in Thornfield. Jane notices, in another threshold moment of prescience that there is “No need to cower behind a gate-post, indeed...there was the silence of death all about it, the solitude of a lonesome wild...the grim blackness of the stones told by what fate the Hall had fallen— by conflagration” (Brontë 489). After seeing the ruin of Thornfield, Jane knows she must seek out Rochester in his second home, Ferndean Manor, the monstrous female double of Thornfield.

Ferndean is first mentioned in the novel as a potential prison for Bertha, but Rochester claims that he was unable to keep her there. He says,

I possess an old house, Ferndean Manor, even more retired and hidden than this, where I could have lodged her safely enough, had not a scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood, made my conscience recoil from the arrangement. Probably those damp walls would

soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate (Brontë 347).

Rather than allow Bertha to die in peace, he forces her into the harshly masculine realm of Thornfield, while she, being from the lush Caribbean, might have been better suited to Ferndean, after all. But not only is Bertha not a suitable inhabitant for Ferndean, apparently the Rochester family have long been unable to rent the house because of its unhealthy location. Jane explains that “He would have let the house, but could find no tenant, in consequence of its ineligible and insalubrious site” (Brontë 496). And yet, Jane and Rochester set up house in Ferndean, and raise their family in this female-gendered location, considered too unpleasant a site for the average tenant, or even the family madwoman. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that after Jane’s transformative journey, her marriage to Rochester is able to be successful only in the female space which he always underestimated, and which is even more mysterious to him after his injuries. Jane describes her arrival at Ferndean thus: “I thought I had taken a wrong direction and lost my way. The darkness of natural as well as of sylvan dusk gathered over me. I looked round in search of another road. There was none: all was interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense summer foliage—no opening anywhere” (Brontë 496). The overwhelming womb imagery Brontë employs to describe Ferndean could potentially act as a final threshold over which Jane has crossed, into a female space in which she, now an independent and eligible woman, may marry the reduced Rochester who was previously unworthy of her.

Jane Eyre’s madwoman, though critical to the novel’s plot and Rochester’s character formation, is kept consistently silent, either by Jane’s narrative bias, or Brontë’s

Victorian understanding of mental illness. However, in Daphne du Maurier's doubling of *Jane Eyre*, the first wife, though still a marginal figure due to her dangerous sexuality and pre-plot death, steals the spotlight (and the title) from the narrator, moving to the forefront of the novel's action, and forcing the unnamed heroine into a position of weakness Bertha is unable to effect upon the stronger character of Jane.

Chapter Two: Complicating the Madwoman in *Rebecca*

“We tend today to think of *Jane Eyre* as moral gothic, ‘myth domesticated,’ *Pamela*’s daughter and *Rebecca*’s aunt, the archetypal scenario for all those mildly thrilling romantic encounters between a scowling Byronic hero (who owns a gloomy mansion) and a trembling heroine (who can’t quite figure out the mansion’s floorplan).” (Gilbert and Gubar 337)

Though unremittingly popular since its initial publication, *Rebecca* has been frequently consigned to the “lesser” literary genre of the romance novel, and was accordingly, until recently, overlooked by many literary critics. Often typecast as a modernized reread of *Jane Eyre*, du Maurier’s novel is sometimes accused of moving the progressive social agenda of the original novel backwards rather than forward with the substitution of the fiery, passionate Jane for the meek and mild unnamed heroine. I believe, however, that these apparent bows to convention and Gothic melodrama in fact obscure a more impressive secret than does *Jane Eyre*, as regards the trope of female insanity. In Brontë’s novel, the madwoman is confined to the attic, made hideous, and quickly killed off. For du Maurier, the “madwoman” not only claims the novel’s title, but her deviance is expertly concealed by her many loving devotees at Manderley. Her fabled beauty and social renown have been almost universally fetishized in the year since her death. By her use of not-quite parallel plot structure, setting, and characters, du Maurier alludes heavily to *Jane Eyre*, but gives herself ample distance from which to subvert the original narrative. By diluting the Byronic Rochester and fiery Jane characters, *Rebecca* becomes all the more appealing to readers, making the dull heroine’s obsessive interest in her predecessor amply warranted. The ghoulish housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, allows the heroine to glimpse *Rebecca*’s secret, unsuitable lifestyle, specifically her “abnormal”

lesbian activities while maintaining a cult interest in the preservation of Rebecca's memory in a manner very much belonging to the Gothic tradition. The overall effect of the second Mrs. de Winter's paranoia and panic in her new situation is conveyed by du Maurier's extensive use of unreliable narrators. From the heroine herself, to the intense testimony of Mrs. Danvers, and the everyday inhabitants of and visitors to Manderley, no interpretation is unbiased or satisfactorily substantiated. Even the older narrator's continued obsession with the past, concealed from Maxim, is problematic; her final state of mind is uncertain, potentially unstable. Rebecca's overwhelming presence, her postmortem control of Manderley, her final triumph over her successor to the name Mrs. de Winter, and even the novel's continuing popularity, act as a testaments to the character's enduring allure—a far cry from the popular reaction to *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha prior to the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rebecca opens, unforgettably, on the dream sequence return of the heroine to the long-destroyed Manderley. The dream's stylized envisioning of the estate run wild, overgrown with the feminized, overtly sexual plant life associated throughout the novel with Rebecca, is only one facet of the dream's function. It also sets the novel up as a retelling of a familiar story, (*Jane Eyre*), but one which has been materially altered, and narrated by a very different person. The second Mrs. de Winter recalls,

The drive was a ribbon now, a thread of its former self, with gravel and surface gone, and choked with grass and moss...Scattered here and there I would recognize shrubs that had been landmarks in our time, things of culture and grace...No hand had checked their progress, and they had gone native now, rearing to monster height without a bloom, black and ugly as the nameless parasites that grew beside them (du Maurier 1).

The drive approaching Manderley recurs throughout the novel as the site of threshold moments, comparable to those occurring in *Jane Eyre*. However, this first mention of the space reveals the “thread” of the Brontë storyline, rewritten by a new writer and retold by an original character. Bertha, the “landmark” madwoman, has grown, like the shrubs, into the more powerful character of Rebecca, and her growth has choked the storyline of the heroine and Maxim, forcing herself into the role of leading lady by default, in a manner not possible for Bertha within the strictures of *Jane Eyre* and Victorian society.

The frame narrative of *Rebecca*, in which the heroine reveals her narrative location (approximately a decade or so in the future), acts as the second level of entrance into the novel’s plot, which finally begins in chapter three. Rather than leave her reader guessing as to her story’s outcome, in the style of Jane, the second Mrs. de Winter eliminates a degree of intrigue with her portrait of a dull passing of days in an unremarkable Mediterranean hotel. In her essay, “‘Returning to Manderley’: Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class,” Alison Light argues that the dual position of the narrator in the story’s past and present offers a uniquely unreliable framing system for the events taking place at Manderley. She writes,

The reader knows from the beginning that the girl makes it, becomes that adult woman...But this twist means also that we can be given clues about Rebecca which the girl misses and which come from the hindsight of the older woman. Thus ‘Rebecca’ the novel and ‘Rebecca’ the woman, are being simultaneously written and revised. The ‘editorial’ position of the older self and the insecure persona of the young girl are both available for the reader (Light 12).

To go a step further than Light, perhaps the “editorial” older narrator goes so far as to increase the young girl’s appearance of naïveté, the better to reassure her readers of her

position as “heroine.” Though she claims that she and Maxim “march in unison” (du Maurier 6), the second Mrs. de Winter reveals that she secretly dreams of Manderley, and her subsequent narrative proves that, over the years, she has never stopped dwelling on Rebecca. While Jane relates details of her happy marriage to Rochester, their children, and a relative equality with her husband, the second Mrs. de Winter spends her days distracting Maxim from his worries. She explains, “if we are sometimes bored— well, boredom is a pleasing antidote to fear. We live very much by routine, and I— I have developed a genius for reading aloud” (du Maurier 6). For the less sharply drawn characters of the heroine and Maxim, there is apparently no tenable middle ground between the Gothic terror of living under Rebecca’s shadow, and the ennui of an indefinite, uneventful vacation. Peter Melville Logan argues that “The nervous narrator is recuperated to the realm of health and science” (Logan 30), but though the heroine and Maxim “recuperate” away from the Gothic realm of Manderley, they cannot move beyond their experiences there. Living vicariously in her own memories, she warns that “When the leaves rustle, they sound very much like the stealthy movement of a woman in evening dress, and when they shiver suddenly, and fall, and scatter away along the ground, they might be the patter, patter of a woman’s hurrying footsteps, and the mark in the gravel the imprint of a high-heeled satin shoe” (du Maurier 9). Rebecca remains for the couple an unforgotten nightmare, and the heroine’s continued sense of foreboding is proof positive that Rebecca’s memory has not left the pair in peace, regardless of their pretended contentedness in their boredom.

Following the doubled introduction to the story proper, du Maurier sets about her doubled plot. After a whirlwind romance and a hasty wedding, the middle-class, friendless heroine arrives at the Gothic mansion, Manderley, with her brooding, older husband. There, she is forced to acknowledge the dangerous presence of Maxim's first wife, whose memory (strictly policed by Mrs. Danvers) eventually drives the couple off of their estate, forcing them to settle somewhere away from Maxim's ancestral seat, supposedly happily ever after. Du Maurier reveals characters bearing a striking resemblance to Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester, and even to Bertha, but the differences inherent in their characterizations serve her subversive narrative purpose.

Like Jane, the heroine represents herself to be most comfortable as a schoolgirl. Both physically unremarkable orphans, each has little experience with men or upper-class society. They both disclose their modest salaries to their future husbands as evidence of their financial status (Jane makes thirty pounds a year, the heroine makes ninety). Unlike Jane's bold initial conversation with Rochester, of her first meeting with Maxim the second Mrs. de Winter recollects, "the conversation found me at my worst, the raw ex-schoolgirl, red-elbowed and lanky-haired, and I said something obvious and idiotic about the place being artificial" (du Maurier 16). Still, uncomfortable in society and generally unnoticed by the friends of her unpleasant employer, the heroine's attempts to blend into the scenery are reminiscent of Jane's uncomfortable attendance of Rochester's house party. "Later her friends would come in for a drink, which I must mix for them, hating my task, shy and ill-at-ease in my corner hemmed in by their parrot chatter" (du Maurier 42). But while Jane eventually travels up the social ladder through hard work and the

revelation of an inheritance, enabling her to return to Rochester the more independently empowered in their relationship, the heroine marries Maxim almost immediately, surrendering her autonomy, abandoning her unpleasant work with Mrs. Van Hopper and her unknown former identity to become Mrs. de Winter, a title she wears uneasily.

The decision to become Maxim's wife, though she is supposedly violently in love with him, is phrased in the language of a business arrangement. Maxim informs his intended that "instead of being companion to Mrs. Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same" (du Maurier 54). After this underwhelming emotional display, the heroine, in a daze at her sudden good fortune, does not consider Maxim as a man or her future lover, delighting instead in the impressiveness of the new identity their marriage would provide her. She thinks, "I would be Mrs. de Winter. I considered my name, and the signature on cheques, to tradesmen, and in letters asking people to dinner" (du Maurier 55). Imagining herself to be, finally, a great social and womanly success, is the second Mrs. de Winter's pet pastime, but, unfortunately her daydreams do not come to pass: she remains gauche and unfashionable, and despite her efforts to interact with him as an adult equal, Maxim continues to treat her as a child. A few months into her marriage, following the traumatic costume ball, the heroine interacts with a family of tourists on a picnic, and longs for the simplicity of their middle-class lifestyle. She recollects that "I wished I could lose my own identity and join them" (du Maurier 261). So soon after acquiring the coveted name of Mrs. de Winter, the heroine is ready to give it up in the hopes of realizing actual happiness, a phenomenon for which she is, as revealed by the frame narrative, not destined.

The schoolgirl depiction of the second Mrs. de Winter persists until Maxim's confession of murder, and is tied to his treatment of his young wife as a child, much to her confusion. Describing the hopeless nature of her infatuation with Maxim, and conveying her deeply engrained conviction of worthlessness, she recalls, "I was like a little scrubby schoolboy with a passion for a sixth-form prefect, and he kinder, and far more inaccessible" (du Maurier 36). When Maxim finally does make his abrupt proposal, the heroine, shocked, says, "I'm not the sort of person men marry" (du Maurier 52); it is extremely telling that her noun choice here is "person." The rejection she expects is not confined to men seeking wives, she feels herself certain of failure both on the marriage market, and in her general success as a woman. (The genderless "person" is also reminiscent of Bertha, whom Jane calls "it.") As Maxim and the heroine's marriage progresses, their unequal social footing does not improve, and the second Mrs. de Winter expresses the wish that Maxim "would not always treat me as a child, rather spoilt, rather irresponsible, someone to be petted from time to time when the mood came upon him, but more often forgotten, more often patted on the shoulder and told to run away and play" (du Maurier 199). Once, when he catches the heroine pondering the unending mystery of Rebecca, Maxim remarks, "I don't know that I can explain. You looked older suddenly, deceitful. It was rather unpleasant...I don't want you to look like you did just now. You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge" (du Maurier 205). His parental attempt at control of even the heroine's mind constitutes a very different approach from the one adopted by Rochester, who attempts to seduce Jane in spite of her firmly held principles. Maxim, meanwhile, is

Hell bent on maintaining the symbolic innocence of his girl-bride, despite her recent sexual initiation. Convinced that she is merely a distraction to his longing for Rebecca, the second Mrs. de Winter proposes a plan very like Rochester's dubious sibling arrangement, saying, "I'll be your friend and your companion, a sort of boy. I don't ever want more than that" (du Maurier 269). In sacrificing her female identity of Mrs. de Winter, for one of a "sort of boy," the heroine would revert to her prior, nameless past. Jane, regardless of her eventual assumption of the name Mrs. Rochester, never questions the validity of her identity as Jane Eyre; the heroine of *Rebecca* does not offer a single hint of either her Christian or her maiden name. While this interesting choice by du Maurier is definitely a signal to her reader of the heroine's social unimportance, it also constitutes potential proof of the heroine's own desire to conceal her identity, to remain in the shadows of the story she is retelling. The second Mrs. de Winter does not completely grow up, in her husband's eyes, until he makes her an accomplice in his murder of Rebecca. Afterward, he notes, "It's gone forever, that funny, young, lost look that I loved. It won't come back again. I killed that too, when I told you about Rebecca" (du Maurier 304). Bronfen writes, "Functioning as a double, the second woman's uncanny resemblance to a dead woman signifies fatality, for the teleology of all the texts is that the exchange between mourner and second beloved ends in a second killing" (Bronfen 328). Though the heroine is consistently considered a poor replacement for Rebecca, she has undertaken Rebecca's role, and after this voluntary "rebirth," becomes the potential next victim of the murderous husband, Maxim. In order for her to become a fully successful mistress of Manderley (a skill set which quickly becomes irrelevant when

the house is burnt), the heroine's youthful persona must be violently destroyed, a sort of mental deflowering which Maxim "regrets," but cannot prevent.

Like Jane, whose engagement with portraiture and fantastical, Romantic artwork is given significant attention in *Jane Eyre*, the heroine also repeatedly mentions her interest in artwork. In Jane, this hobby is one of her many accomplishments, and also a form of comparison between Jane and the more traditionally accomplished choice of bride, Blanche Ingram against whom Jane competes. For the second Mrs. de Winter, sketching is a hobby by default. She has no other skills, and, unaccustomed to the sporting activities of the elite at Manderley, is therefore forced to make art her primary hobby. Bronfen notes the "duplicity of [artistic] representation" (Bronfen 330) throughout her work, hinting that the heroine's sketches might not be all that they appear. The second Mrs. de Winter's pastime also becomes a useful plot device in describing Maxim's appearance, and establishing early the fanciful nature of the heroine. Sketching Maxim from memory shortly after meeting him, she recalls, "I sketched in fancy with an absent mind a profile, pale and aquiline. A sombre eye, a high-bridged nose, a scornful upper lip. And I added a pointed beard and lace at the throat, as the painter had done, long ago and in a different time" (du Maurier 19). So dull that Beatrice can think of no better wedding gift for her than generic volumes on art history, the same hobby which differentiated Jane from many likewise-sketching schoolgirls excludes the heroine from the social activities of Maxim's circle.

Because du Maurier deliberately glosses over the second Mrs. de Winter's wedding to Maxim, the disastrous fancy dress ball at Manderley becomes a natural parallel to Jane and Rochester's failed wedding scene. The heroine says of the day of the ball,

I felt very much the same as I did the morning I was married. The same stifled feeling that I had gone too far now to turn back...[the dress] looked perfect, in its fold of tissue paper. And the wig was a triumph. I had tried it on after breakfast and was amazed at the transformation. I looked quite attractive, quite different altogether. Not me at all. Someone much more interesting, more vivid, more alive (du Maurier 208).

In an uncannily similar moment in *Jane Eyre*, as Sophie dresses Jane for her ill-fated wedding, Jane notes "I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (Brontë 331), heady praise for both plain narrators of these events. Of course, the *Rebecca* excerpt takes on a darker undertone when she notes that the costume, which is as much as costume of Rebecca as it is of Caroline de Winter, makes her feel "more alive" when, in fact, both characters she is impersonating are dead. Bronfen writes, "For the second woman to repeat or double a predecessor means that she functions as a revenant in more than one sense. She represents a dead woman, her body lodges and rematerialises a deceased whom a mourner seeks to retain among the living" (Bronfen 328). If Bronfen is correct, then Mrs. Danvers's revenge against the second Mrs. de Winter also signifies her desire to turn the heroine into a "living cipher for the lover's lost object" (Bronfen 328), which proves true in Mrs. Danvers's later "seduction" of the heroine in Rebecca's bedroom. The second Mrs. de Winter is complicit in this conspiracy, up to a point. Swept away by the excitement of playing dress up, she remarks that "I felt different already, no longer

hampered by my appearance. My own dull personality was submerged at last” (du Maurier 214). The water imagery is, again, foreshadowing of the hideous revelation of the costume’s origin, an allusion to Rebecca’s supposed watery demise. After her return to her room, however, the heroine follows Jane Eyre’s scene of regrouping almost to the letter. The second Mrs. de Winter recalls, “When I had finished I laid the dress ready on the bed. Then I cleaned the make-up off my face...I combed my hair, and washed my hands. I put on my blue dress and the shoes that went with it. I might have been my old self again, going down to the lounge of the hotel with Mrs. Van Hopper” (du Maurier 225). This scene, with certain adjustments to the styles of the period, could easily be interchanged with Jane’s, and both women are forced to question the effect the preceding trauma has had on their sense of identity and of self, disrupted at what they assumed would be a moment of happiness and success.

The heroine’s embarrassing inability to conduct herself appropriately after her humiliation at the hands of Mrs. Danvers (“This was her triumph, hers and Rebecca’s” (du Maurier 244)), is written off as a defect of class. Unlike Rebecca, or even the unflappable Beatrice, the second Mrs. de Winter’s “inferior” breeding cripples her as a hostess, in the same way it prevents her from succeeding as mistress of Manderley. Imagining Beatrice in her place, the heroine muses that “She belonged to another race of men and women, another race than I. They had guts, the woman of her race. They were not like me...She would have stood by Giles’s side, and shaken hands with people, a smile on her face. I could not do that. I had not the pride, I had not the guts. I was badly bred” (du Maurier 223). This defeatist attitude and undue denigration of her self-worth

would never be found in Jane, (“the more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself”(Brontë 365)). The heroine cannot overcome the class difference between herself and Maxim, or between herself and Rebecca, until she is made aware of Rebecca’s murder, after which she becomes less desperate to imitate her predecessor.

The similarities between Rochester and Maxim are even more heavy handed than those between Jane and the heroine. In fact, in du Maurier’s original draft of *Rebecca*, Maxim was crippled in the fire that destroyed Manderley, his specific complaints a “maimed body and scarred hands” (du Maurier 409). Perhaps du Maurier thought such a blatant allusion too obvious, potentially explaining her revision of Maxim as merely bored in the company of his now middle-aged wife. She comments on his forbearance of their situation, “He is wonderfully patient and never complains, not even when he remembers” (du Maurier 5), a sentiment which retains a certain feeling of the invalid.

Maxim’s appearance, like Rochester’s, is constantly a subject of discussion for the narrator, but he is made to be more conventionally handsome than Brontë’s emphatically unattractive hero. Negotiating the romance reader’s penchant for swashbuckling leading men with the unorthodox appearances of the characters in *Jane Eyre*, du Maurier associates her leading man repeatedly with an image of old world patriarchy and more feminized masculinity. The heroine muses that

He belonged to a walled city of the fifteenth century, a city of narrow, cobbled streets, and thin spires, where the inhabitants wore pointed shoes and worsted hose. His face was arresting, sensitive, medieval in some strange inexplicable way, and I was reminded of a portrait seen in a gallery I had forgotten where, of a certain Gentleman Unknown. Could but one rob him of his English tweeds, and put him in black, with lace at his

throat and wrists, he would stare down at us in our new world from a long distant past— a past where men walked cloaked at night, and stood in the shadow of old doorways. A past of narrow stairways and dim dungeons, a past of whispers in the dark, of shimmering rapier blades, of silent, exquisite courtesy (du Maurier 15).

Of course this description pairs excellently with *Jane Eyre*'s theme of portraiture; even as the heroine takes in Maxim's appearance for the first time, she improves subtly upon it in her mind, rather than relaying his actual appearance with any attempt at realism. Her association of Maxim and gothicized, medieval tropes of dungeons and stairways position him within the tradition of the Gothic romance, while keeping him an actual inhabitant of the twentieth century. And, like his Gothic literary forebears, Maxim is extremely concerned with issues of succession. It is the threat of Rebecca bearing a bastard son to inherit Manderley which finally prompts her murder. According to Maxim, she says, "If I had a child, Max...neither you, nor anyone in the world, would ever prove that it was not yours. It would grow up here in Manderley, bearing your name. There would be nothing you could do. And when you died, Manderley would be his. You could not prevent it. The property's entailed" (du Maurier 283). Maxim's willingness to kill to protect his estate is, in the end, futile, as Mrs. Danvers's destruction of Manderley robs him of his home, and the heroine does not give him children. Rochester, meanwhile, though not the rightful heir to Thornfield, achieves happiness as the second son, in his second home, with his second wife, who, despite her small frame and lack of beauty is able to bear his children. Despite Maxim's strict adherence to the rules of patriarchal succession and laws of primogeniture he fails to retain Manderley or produce heirs, while Rochester circumvents obstacle after obstacle to succeed, by Victorian standards, as a wealthy man.

Rochester's Byronic nature is probably his most memorable and defining feature. In Maxim, however, the Byronic personality only extends to a convenient point of similarity evident in most male characters in harlequin romances. Like Rochester, Maxim has a dark past he would rather forget, haunted, as he is, by the specter of his late wife. He tells the heroine, "You've taken me out of myself, out of despondency and introspection, both of which have been my devils for a year.' I looked at him and believed he spoke the truth, he seemed less fettered than he had been before, more modern, more human, he was not hemmed in by shadows" (du Maurier 25), a sentiment almost identical to the one Rochester expresses in his nascent friendship with Jane, and seeming to reflect the otherworldly dynamic of Jane and Rochester's romance. Later, when the heroine doubts the legitimacy of his regard for her, Maxim repeats similar feelings about the unnamed girl as a savior, in the style of the despondent Rochester for Jane. He claims that

You have blotted out the past for me, you know, far more effectively than all the bright lights of Monte Carlo. But for you, I should have left long ago, gone on to Italy, and Greece, and further still perhaps. You have spared me all those wanderings. Damn your puritanical little tight-lipped speech to me. Damn your idea of my kindness and my charity. I ask you to come with me because I want you and your company (du Maurier 40).

Like Jane, the heroine is here accused of being too sheltered, religious, and self-effacing to believe Maxim could want her in place of the sophisticated and sensual Rebecca, when, in fact it is the women's very difference that attract both Maxim and Rochester to their eventual wives. Despite his bouts of Byronic fervor, Maxim is, in general, significantly more practical than is Rochester. Unlike Rochester's impassioned proposal to an equally fiery Jane, Maxim offers marriage as a business transaction, and the hapless

heroine is left to puzzle over the fact that “He had not said anything yet about being in love” (du Maurier 57). Without any insight into her future husband’s thought processes, the heroine enters her marriage at a considerable disadvantage, which Maxim occasionally comments upon (“I wonder if I did a very selfish thing in marrying you” (du Maurier 148)), his guilt not unlike Rochester’s when he is caught attempting to make Jane an accomplice to polygamy.

While Jane sees Rochester as her “master” and “god,” the second Mrs. de Winter comes to see her husband as a figure of parental authority, an unsurprising turn of events based on his treatment of her. She tells him, “You are my father and my brother and my son. All those things” (du Maurier 148). Note that the heroine does not list him as her husband in this situation. This is not to say that she forgets his legal role, but that she speaks these other, inappropriate designations aloud is decidedly strange. In another instance, Maxim equates his role as husband with that of a father, limiting her access to certain knowledge, particularly as regards the snake-associated Rebecca. He informs the second Mrs. de Winter that “A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key. So that’s that. And now eat up your peaches, and don’t ask me any more questions, or I shall put you in the corner” (du Maurier 205). In spite of his paternal attitude, Maxim still has sex with his wife, a fact the heroine is quick to call to her defense, and which Mrs. Danvers mockingly rejects: “Well he’s a man, isn’t he...No man denies himself on a honeymoon, does he? Mr. de Winter’s not forty-six yet” (du Maurier

246). Maxim occupies a curious liminal space, himself, old enough to be father or husband, and torn between his perceived duty and his desire.

The real liminal space in *Rebecca*, however, is occupied by the title character, herself. As the heroine slowly pieces together the woman with whom she competes for the title of Mrs. de Winter, she finds herself unable to overcome the genuinely larger than life memory of Rebecca. Light argues that “once the process of identification with Rebecca has been set in motion its effects can never be fully contained, nor its disruptive potential fully retrieved. This narrative of wishful projection and identification, displacement and repulsion is then the story of all women, of what we go through in the constructing and maintaining of our femininity” (Light 13). She discovers from Rebecca’s clothing that she was tall but elegant in frame, and based on the evidence she collects, envisions her as “someone who was never awkward, never without grace, who when she danced left a stab of perfume in the air like a white azalea” (du Maurier 128). The unusual pairing of stabbing imagery with floral perfume is clearly one of what Light deems the older narrator’s editorial hints, which crop up with increasing regularity the more the heroine fleshes out her portrait of Rebecca. One of the few people not charmed by Rebecca, Beatrice comments that “She had an amazing gift, Rebecca, I mean, of being attractive to people; men, women, children, dogs” (du Maurier 190), a remark which only fuels the second Mrs. de Winter’s jealousy, but is clearly intended as a clue to the true, deviant nature of Rebecca’s attractiveness, which the young heroine, in her current state of relative purity, cannot understand. Assuming everything about Rebecca to be perfect, she is also confused by Rebecca’s cousin, Favell. She muses, “I could not connect him

with my idea of Rebecca. Rebecca, with her beauty, her charm, her breeding, why did she have a cousin like Jack Favell?" (du Maurier 203). Of course, Favell is an indicator of Rebecca's problematic relationships, both sexual and familial, but the narrator is unable to understand his role without grasping the full extent of Rebecca's voluntary outsider status. Light writes that Rebecca "jeopardizes the given social categories by existing outside them" (Light 11), a very dangerous prospect for the socially uncertain heroine.

Unable to understand her competition, the heroine relinquishes her coveted title after the disastrous party, saying, "Rebecca was still mistress of Manderley. Rebecca was still Mrs. de Winter. I had no business here at all" (du Maurier 237). Light claims that Rebecca's elite social class, paired with her beauty and intense sensuality, obscures her "dangerous" proclivities from her successor, whose attempted self-definition fails as a result of her incorrect conclusions: "Rebecca emerges as an aristocratic mix of independent and 'essential' femininity, a strong physical presence, a confident and alluring sexuality. The girl emerges as literally a 'girl,' immature by Rebecca's standards" (Light 11). Of course, the "truth" of Rebecca's character is eventually revealed, at least to the extent that the characters who lived with her knew it. Mrs. Danvers triumphantly recalls a particularly violent incident from Rebecca's youth:

No one got the better of her, never, never...She did what she liked, she lived as she liked. She had the strength of a little lion too. I remember her at sixteen getting up on one of her father's horses, a big brute of an animal too, that the groom said was too hot for her to ride. She stuck to him, all right. I can see her now, her hair flying out behind her, slashing at him, drawing blood, digging the spurs into his side, and when she got off his back he was trembling all over, full of froth and blood...that's how she went at life when she grew up. I saw her. I was with her. She cared for nothing and no one. And then she was beaten in the end. But it wasn't a

man, it wasn't a woman. The sea got her. The sea was too strong for her.
The sea got her in the end (du Maurier 248).

Rebecca's unwomanly cruelty and her unnatural female strength are later grounds for her condemnation by the heroine and by Maxim, but the protection of death and of social class are enough to maintain her image even after the inquest returns a verdict of suicide. Light argues, "From the outset, the novel acknowledges that the regulation of female sexuality finds its weapon in the expression of class difference. In so doing, it threatens to expose the social construction of all sexuality and the inherent instability of *all* those class and gender definitions" (Light 11). Light goes on to highlight the importance of Rebecca in the heroine's attempt to identify herself. She writes, "it is clear that Rebecca can never be forgotten since she is the condition for the girl knowing 'who she is'" (Light 17), and since the girl is a familiar but forgettable portal into the realm of Rebecca, the title character's mysterious memory quickly steals center stage, in a way Bertha Mason cannot, given the more powerful and interesting narrator, Jane Eyre.

Though parallels between Bertha and Rebecca are present, in her life Rebecca apparently performed her femininity in a way which kept her from the attic prison of *Jane Eyre's* "monster." Still, both women are repeatedly described in terms of animals. Frank Crawley informs the heroine that "she was the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life" (du Maurier 137). That statement might pass as simply sexist, were it not corroborated by Maxim's depiction of Rebecca's illicit activities. He recalls that after an evening performing her role as dutiful wife and hostess, "she would be up at dawn driving to London, streaking to that flat of hers by the river like an animal to its hole in the ditch, coming back here at the end of the week, after five unspeakable days" (du

Maurier 278). Like Bertha, Rebecca is accused of foul language (“she flared up at once, using every filthy word in her particular vocabulary” (du Maurier 279)), and low, bestial intellect for purposes of deception: “Rebecca grew cunning again. Her behaviour was faultless, outwardly” (du Maurier 280). The heroine rejoices that “Rebecca is dead. She can’t speak, she can’t bear witness” (du Maurier 286), much like the voiceless, disenfranchised Bertha. Much as Bertha was imprisoned to protect Rochester’s social standing, Maxim supposedly endures Rebecca’s unfaithfulness and general perversity in order to keep up his public image. And, like Bertha’s apparently inherited mental infirmity, Rebecca’s abnormality is ultimately explained away by her physically deficient womanhood. Doctor Baker explains that “The X-rays showed a certain malformation of the uterus...which meant she could never have a child, but that was quite apart, it had nothing to do with the disease” (du Maurier 373). Despite the knowledge by all parties that Rebecca was murdered by Maxim, this medical proof suffices to close Rebecca’s case, the prospect of a lingering death deemed “Enough to send a lovely young woman straight off her head” (du Maurier 377). Suddenly, the elaborate drowning in her sailboat is no longer “the hysterical, impulsive freak of a neurotic girl” (du Maurier 336), but a reasonable and expected course of action in the face of medical adversity and social stigma.

In spite, or more likely because of her jealousy of Rebecca, the heroine’s quest for information quickly turns voyeuristic. While Jane pointedly avoids dwelling on the subject of Bertha, and is certainly not sexually excited by her past life as Rochester’s wife, the second Mrs. de Winter’s curiosity becomes an obsession by the time she is

actually initiated into the mystery of Rebecca. Rochester supposedly has to beg Jane to listen to his explanation for Bertha's presence; the heroine is desperate to know anything she can about Rebecca, by any means necessary. The first time she has the courage to ask directly about Rebecca, she recalls, "I could not believe that I had said the name at last. I waited, wondering what would happen. I had said the name. I had said the word Rebecca aloud. It was a tremendous relief. It was as though I had taken a purge and rid myself of an intolerable pain. Rebecca. I had said it aloud" (du Maurier 126). Shortly after this moment of relief, the heroine admits a more sexually charged "excitement" at the chance to learn more about Rebecca. She claims, "A strange sort of excitement was upon me. I had to go on with my questions. He did not want to talk about it, I knew that, but although I was sorry for him and shocked at my own self I had to continue, I could not be silent" (du Maurier 132). After the ball, however, her interest in Rebecca, though still out of her control, becomes tainted: "as I said her name it sounded strange and sour like a forbidden word, a relief to me no longer, not a pleasure, but hot and shaming as a sin confessed" (du Maurier 242). Equating her unsavory knowledge about the snake-like Rebecca to the biblical fruit of knowledge, the heroine admits her guilt in seeking this inappropriate information, and is ashamed of her previous desire to fill Rebecca's shoes.

Rebecca, unlike Bertha, is given voice through Maxim, Favell, and Mrs. Danvers' testimonies, but she has also left behind numerous reminders of her presence in her handwriting and monograms. Even before her marriage, the heroine questions "The bold, slanting hand, stabbing the white paper, the symbol of herself, so certain, so assured" (du Maurier 44). Disturbed by the masculine strength of Rebecca's calligraphy, and the

penetration imagery of the “stabbed” paper, the second Mrs. de Winter is not reassured as Rebecca’s handwriting continues to appear throughout the novel. Remembering that unique and memorable hand, she claims to have thought, “She was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. They slept in peace, the grass blew over their graves. How alive was her writing, though, how full of force. Those curious, sloping letters. The blob of ink. Done yesterday. It was just as if it had been written yesterday” (du Maurier 58). The heroine’s conviction to avoid thoughts of the dead is comical given her enduring fixation on Rebecca, but this excerpt is also oddly reminiscent of the ending of *Wuthering Heights*, in which the outer frame narrator imposes quiet slumbers on the late Catherine, Heathcliff, and Linton, when in fact the entire work hinges on their postmortem disquiet. So too does the murdered Rebecca “sleep” without peace, as her memory continues to haunt the later years of the heroine and Maxim.

Unlike Bertha’s Thornfield prison, Rebecca was too strong a “madwoman” to suffer imprisonment. And, because of Mrs. Danvers’s unfailing devotion to her memory, the bedroom Rebecca shared with Maxim remains a shrine to her memory, and the scene in which the heroine’s obsession reaches a critical turning point. The uncanniness of the space (within the already haunted house) where Mrs. Danvers preserves Rebecca’s evening and sexual rituals is also the location in which she carries out Rebecca’s seduction of the heroine by proxy. Upon entering this forbidden room, the second Mrs. de Winter recalls “my legs were trembling, weak as straw” (du Maurier 168). As Mrs. Danvers walks the heroine through Rebecca’s nightly routine, forcing her to touch her beautiful possessions, the heroine is unswervingly aware of the sexual charge of this act.

She recalls, “I noticed with a sick dull aching in my heart that there were creases in the nightdress, the texture was ruffled, it had not been touched or laundered since it was last worn” (du Maurier 169). Even after all the physical reminders of Rebecca the heroine has already encountered, touching the nightgown her predecessor presumably wore while seducing Maxim is easily the most intimate and unsettling. Well aware of the second Mrs. de Winter’s discomfort, Mrs. Danvers is described as “Triumphant, gloating, in a strange unhealthy way” (du Maurier 170). The “unhealthiness” of Mrs. Danvers’s triumph is an implicit reference to her passion for the late Rebecca, and a precursor to her vicarious seduction of yet another inhabitant of Manderley by its true mistress: “She took hold of my arm, and walked me towards the bed. I could not resist her, I was like a dumb thing. The touch of her hand made me shudder. And her voice was low and intimate, a voice I hated and feared” (du Maurier 171). The heroine emphasizes her unwillingness to participate in Rebecca’s/Mrs. Danvers’s sexual contact, and the traditional scene of Gothic seduction fits well with Rochester’s memory of his entrapment by Bertha’s charms. This mimed sex act is a turning point in the novel, after which the heroine no longer aspires to be like Rebecca, but begins to fear her corrupting influence. At the end of the scene she recalls, with an apparent absence of irony for her choice of words, “I felt deadly sick” (du Maurier 176), much like Walpole’s Isabella, a textbook Gothic heroine.

Hélène Cixous’s essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” applies excellently to Rebecca’s characteristic laughter. Unlike Bertha’s undeniably mad laughter, du Maurier uses Rebecca’s laugh to signify her apparent circumvention of the critical social rules which baffle the heroine, and to characterize her as an evil, even spiteful, opponent. After

learning of Rebecca's cancer and her unfeminine inability to bear children, Maxim concludes "that Rebecca lied to me on purpose. The supreme last bluff. She wanted me to kill her. She foresaw the whole thing. That's why she laughed. That's why she stood there laughing when she died" (du Maurier 380). Cixous claims that women "have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing" (Cixous 877), much like the second Mrs. de Winter, who has failed in her attempted entrance into Rebecca's closed realm of Manderley, because of her adherence to social pressures she is not equipped to meet. Rebecca succeeds within her social role, but also transcends it, manipulating the patriarchal system at Manderley in order to enjoy her life in the manner she wishes. Cixous writes, "We're stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; we're not afraid of lacking" (Cixous 878). The heroine's final dream at the novel's end includes her approaching a mirror in which "A face stared back at me that was not my own. It was very pale, very lovely, framed in a cloud of dark hair. The eyes narrowed and smiled. The lips parted. The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed" (du Maurier 385). The mocking finality of that laugh, at the expense of her murderer and the woman tied to him for the remainder of his life, is one of the reasons the so-called heroine can present herself as such, but also one which keeps the reader from completely condemning the fascinating and powerful Rebecca.

Mrs. Danvers's desperate maintenance of Rebecca's memory is distinctly reminiscent of the cult of nineteenth-century female death explored by Bronfen. About *Rebecca*, Bronfen writes, the "second wife must 'kill' the revenant of a first wife, lest she be completely absorbed by the image of her predecessor" (Bronfen 323). Du Maurier writes all of *Manderley* as a sort of functioning shrine to Rebecca, in which business and life are conducted in "the lowered voice that is always used about the dead or in a place of worship" (du Maurier 125). The cult of Rebecca is essentially the state religion at Manderley, and though the heroine initially conforms to this household practice, her increasing knowledge of Rebecca forces her to abandon her role in the ritual. Mrs. Danvers eventually admits her hatred of the heroine, exclaiming, "What do you think it meant to me to hear Frith and Robert and the rest of the servants talking about you as 'Mrs. de Winter'?...all the while my Mrs. de Winter, my lady with her smile and her lovely face and brave ways, the real Mrs. de Winter, lying dead and cold and forgotten in the church crypt" (du Maurier 246). As the heroine grows more comfortable in her role at Manderley, the staff become more accepting, with the hostile exception of Mrs. Danvers. By unapologetically declaring herself Mrs. de Winter after she learns the truth of Rebecca's murder, she wrests leadership at Manderley from Rebecca's death grip, literally sparking Mrs. Danvers's spiteful destruction of Maxim's home, keeping the second Mrs. de Winter from successfully becoming its mistress.

Completely unlike the motherly and well-meaning housekeeper of *Thornfield*, Mrs. Fairfax, the Gothicized Mrs. Danvers is yet another trope on display in the haunted house setting of *Manderley*. Shortly after meeting Mrs. Danvers, the heroine recalls "I

wished she would go; she was like a shadow standing there, watching me, appraising me with her hollow eyes, set in that dead skull's face" (du Maurier 75). Filling the role of Rebecca's physical "shadow" at Manderley, Mrs. Danvers also works to confirm and to reveal Rebecca's deviant sexuality, as well. Throughout the novel, hints of Rebecca's socially unacceptable lifestyle increase, but the seduction of the heroine in Rebecca's bedroom serves as their inarguable confirmation. The second Mrs. de Winter is repeatedly informed that Mrs. Danvers "simply adored Rebecca" (du Maurier 102), though the novel makes that adoration increasingly questionable. Mrs. Danvers's unmatched knowledge of the heroine's pet subject, Rebecca, makes her a figure of undeniable interest: "Mrs. Danvers knew how she walked, how she spoke. Mrs. Danvers knew the colour of her eyes, her smile, the texture of her hair. I knew none of these things, had never asked about them, but sometimes I felt Rebecca was as real to me as she was to Mrs. Danvers" (du Maurier 139). Of course, the older woman narrator might mean this imagined "realness" of Rebecca's memory to be a misconception of the naïve heroine's. For Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca is a lost love as well as the ultimate exemplar of femininity, for the second Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca is a fascinating specter she competes against for Maxim's love, and though she initially wants Maxim to desire her in the same way he did Rebecca, she abandons that wish when she learns of Rebecca's "true" nature. In the threshold scene of the heroine and Mrs. Danvers in Rebecca's bedroom window, Mrs. Danvers's near-success at sparking the heroine's suicide transforms her into a bizarre and ghoulish figure, characterized by her lesbian identity and her violent jealousy of the heroine. "I watched her, fascinated, horrified; a queer ecstatic smile was on her lips

making her look older than ever, making her skull's face vivid and real" (du Maurier 247). Mrs. Danvers' own marginal position, between the realm of the living and the dead apparently invites a certain "madness," in which her lesbian passion for Rebecca can occur.

Du Maurier casts Mrs. Danvers's unspoken passion for Rebecca as the crucial problem with her character, and the final proof for the heroine of Rebecca's concealed evil. While the second Mrs. de Winter's initial interest in understanding her predecessor reads as a justifiable crush on an older, and by all accounts incredibly attractive person. Mrs. Danvers shares in the heroine's voyeuristic excitement in speaking of Rebecca, becoming increasingly "alive" as she speaks of her dead mistress:

'I came here when the first Mrs. de Winter was a bride,' she said, and her voice, which had hitherto, as I said, been dull and toneless, was harsh now with unexpected animation, with life and meaning, and there was a spot of colour on the gaunt cheekbones. The change was so sudden that I was shocked, and a little scared. I did not know what to do, or what to say. It was as though she had spoken words that were forbidden, words that she had hidden away inside herself for a long time and now would be repressed no longer (du Maurier 74).

The increased liveliness of Mrs. Danvers as she speaks of her "repressed" and "forbidden" memories of Rebecca is a telling sign of their illicit relationship. In her essay, "Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: The Shadow and the Substance," Teresa Petersen explains Rebecca's uncertain social role, claiming "Rebecca's search for identity— her being elaborately associated with the uncanny, the covert, the taboo— takes popular romance through the darkly Gothic and into the domain of modern understandings of the sexual" (Petersen 61). Indeed, Rebecca's sexuality is described to be aggressive, especially when contrasted with the passive, virginal heroine. Rebecca is repeatedly

assigned a masculine, snakelike sexuality and identity, because her version of female sexual interaction apparently fails to conform to social norms. Ben, himself an “insane” character, recalls Rebecca as “Tall and dark...She gave you the feeling of a snake” (du Maurier 157). Mrs. Danvers, who loved Rebecca for her beauty and her unmatched performance as mistress of Manderley, notes on multiple occasions that Rebecca might have been more successful as a man, or that she had the strength of character to fill the role of a man, saying, “She had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs. de Winter. She ought to have been a boy, I often told her that” (du Maurier 247). And yet, Mrs. Danvers’s very possessiveness of Rebecca’s memory is revealed, by testimony, to be untenable. She explains the general jealousy of Rebecca’s many lovers to Colonel Julyan:

Of course he was jealous. So was I. So was everyone who knew her. She didn’t care. She only laughed...A man only had to look at her once and be mad about her...They made love to her of course, who would not? She laughed...it was like a game to her...Who wouldn’t be jealous? They were all jealous, all mad for her. Mr. de Winter, Mr. Jack, Mr. Crawley, everyone who knew her, everyone who came to Manderley (du Maurier 249).

Triumphantly laughing again, Rebecca is simultaneously depicted as an unattainable woman, who is, problematically, very sexually available. For Maxim, despite his claims of longstanding dislike, the issue with Rebecca is her potential to emasculate him publically. He informs his second wife, “I hated her, I tell you, our marriage was a farce from the very first. She was vicious, damnable, rotten through and through. We never loved each other, never had one moment of happiness together. Rebecca was incapable of love, of tenderness, of decency. She was not even normal” (du Maurier 275). Rebecca’s

sexual liberality is recast as abnormality, and conflated with her elsewhere reported violent temper and successfully deceptive nature. Mrs. Danvers reveals a more plausible reason for Maxim's animosity, saying, "She was not in love with [Favell], or with Mr. de Winter. She was not in love with anyone. She despised all men. She was above all that" (du Maurier 346). Though Mrs. Danvers's own lesbian love for Rebecca potentially informs her unilateral rejection of Rebecca's male lovers, she implies that Rebecca's practice of free love constituted a more enlightened attitude toward sex than those the patriarchal Maxim, or the roustabout Favell, were capable of understanding. Both of them hoped to possess Rebecca and failed.

The multiple unreliable narratives via which *Rebecca* is told are essential to the story's sneaking, suspenseful, mysterious tone, and also allow continued room for interpretation of Rebecca, herself. Logan explains this technique: "Because there is no firm ground on which to base narrative authority...novelists attacking sensibility must devise extraordinary strategies to develop some alternative foundation for their criticism, distancing the speaker's narrative from the disease it criticizes" (Logan 47), in this case Rebecca's deviant sexuality. The most serious narrative liability is, of course, the heroine. Unlike the supposedly honest Jane, the heroine establishes early that she is not adverse to tactful deceptions. Of the uncomfortably forthright Beatrice, the second Mrs. de Winter "wondered if there was not some virtue in the quality of insincerity" (du Maurier 81). At the party, she finds herself "wondering why I found it so easy to lie suddenly, no effort at all" (du Maurier 230). The repetition of her "wonder" at her own deceptions can be read as a pretence of innocence included by the older woman of the frame narrative. After she

becomes an accomplice to Maxim's murder of Rebecca, she is apparently less able to dissemble without effort. Talking to Frank, she recalls, "I did not look at him. I was afraid he would understand my eyes" (du Maurier 303). In the same scene, the heroine apparently sees the lies being perpetuated by all the supposedly "good" characters at Manderley. She claims, "I understood it all. Frank knew, but Maxim did not know that he knew. And we all stood there, looking at one another, keeping these barriers up between us" (du Maurier 308). The necessary boundaries of these lies about Rebecca are broken when the "truth" of Rebecca's death is revealed, but without their deceptions, the characters lose Manderley.

Other importantly unreliable narrators are Mrs. Danvers, Maxim, and Frank. Mrs. Danvers's passionate memory of Rebecca compromises her believability, though she remains an important source of otherwise unavailable information about Rebecca's apparent thoughts and practices. In one of the editorial moments of the older heroine, she suspiciously notes upon first meeting Mrs. Danvers that "I had the impression that she chose her words with care, that she was feeling her way, as it were, into my mind, and watching for the effect upon my face" (du Maurier 74). Later, after catching Mrs. Danvers meeting with Rebecca's other lover, Favell, the second Mrs. de Winter thinks, supposedly for the first time, "that perhaps Mrs. Danvers was dishonest, that all this time she was engaged in some business behind Maxim's back" (du Maurier 166). Maxim is also qualified as a narrator of dubious reliability. Giles makes the offhand remark that Maxim is a "Funny old boy, one never quite knows with him" (du Maurier 106). With purported self-loathing, Maxim bemoans the fact that after murdering Rebecca, he was

forced to deceive his friends and family, “I had to face all these people, knowing every word I uttered was a lie” (du Maurier 274), seeming to place the blame for his voluntary murder of his wife upon her history of “lies and filth and deceit” (du Maurier 282), rather than his own violence. Unlike the Byronic, hyper-dramatized memories of Rochester’s marriage to Bertha, Maxim summarizes his life with Rebecca thus: “I don’t want to look back on those years...I don’t want even to tell you about them. The shame and the degradation. The lie we lived, she and I” (du Maurier 278). Maxim’s closest ally and fellow victim of Rebecca’s love is Frank Crawley. Even as she questions him about the actual events of Rebecca’s life and death, the heroine “wondered suddenly if he had been in love with Rebecca. His voice was the sort of voice I should have used in his circumstances, had this been so” (du Maurier 130). Her own overwhelming interest in Rebecca makes the second Mrs. de Winter sensitive to similar feelings in Frank, and his compromised description of the competition is rendered ineffective, when the heroine notes, “I almost believed him. But he did not deceive me really” (du Maurier 130). Of course, she does not much deceive her own readers, either.

Manderley is never the home of the second Mrs. de Winter, despite her marriage to Maxim. Neither is it, despite its physical similarity, the masculine space of Thornfield. Because it was Rebecca who made Manderley the famous showpiece, it is the seat of her distinctly female power. The heroine hyperbolizes this extreme example of female-gendered space in the opening dream sequence of chapter one:

The drive wound away in front of me, twisting and turning as it always had done, but as I advanced I was aware that a change had come upon it, it was narrow and unkept, not the drive that we had known...Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way,

had encroached upon the drive with her long fingers, The woods, always a menace in the past had triumphed in the end. They crowded, dark and uncontrolled, to the borders of the drive. The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, making a vault above my head like the archway of a church. And there were other trees as well, trees that I did not recognize, squat oaks and tortured elms that straggled cheek by jowl with the beeches, and had thrust themselves out of the quiet earth, along with monster shrubs and plants, none of which I remembered (du Maurier 1).

Like the snaky, sexual, deceiver herself, Manderley and its haunted memory have “encroached” into the heroine’s purported happily-ever-after abroad with Maxim, their “menace” still powerful across oceans and the passage of time. The dark woods leading to Rebecca’s cottage are now characterized as her various lovers, thrusting themselves into the once-sacred space of Maxim’s inheritance. Feminized beech branches participate “in a strange embrace,” potentially one of Light’s “editorial” hints. Rebecca’s abnormal sexuality manifests itself more obviously in the violent flora of the heroine’s dream:

The rhododendrons stood fifty feet high, twisted and entwined with bracken, and they had entered into an alien marriage with a host of nameless shrubs, poor, bastard things that clung about their roots as though conscious of their spurious origin. A lilac had mated with a copper beech, and to bind them yet more closely to one another, the malevolent ivy, always an enemy to grace, had thrown her tendrils about the pair and made them prisoners. Ivy held prior place in this lost garden, the long strands crept across the lawns, and soon would encroach upon the house itself (du Maurier 2).

The “lost” Eden of Manderley was never truly that. But now, the flowers have mated and reproduced with inappropriate plants, much like Rebecca’s threatened bastard heir. In the heroine’s dream, these extramarital children have possession of the uncannily haunted house, which is itself characterized as a woman (“secretive and silent as it had always been” (du Maurier 2)). Petersen notes that “One of the stock devices of the Gothic novel is the haunted house, and its gendered and ideological construction as woman’s place is

used by du Maurier to signify the containment of women within traditional power structures, whereas the standard motifs of violence and eroticism in the novel combine to create the uncanny that typifies the genre” (Petersen 58). This subversion of Bertha’s prison at Thornfield is hugely important to Rebecca’s success as the more powerful, modern “madwoman.” Because Manderley was already a zone of femininity, there is no Ferndean in which Maxim and his second wife can enjoy a successful marriage. Their failure in Rebecca’s domain literally haunts the second Mrs. de Winter’s dreams, as she relates in her famous dream sequence, “A cloud, hitherto unseen, came upon the moon, and hovered an instant like a dark hand before a face...I looked upon a desolate shell, soulless at last, unhaunted, with no whisper of the past about its staring walls. The house was a sepulchre, our fear and suffering lay buried in the ruins. There would be no resurrection” (du Maurier 3). Though Manderley is destroyed, like Thornfield, the couple’s lack of a second home, their exile from England, and their constant dwelling on the lost opportunity of Maxim’s estate are a far cry from the feminist success of *Jane Eyre*.

Perhaps the most important of the similarities *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre* share, however, is the incidence of threshold spaces, at which the supposedly sane heroines disclose their true instability. The first and most pervasive threshold throughout *Rebecca* is the long driveway by which Manderley is entered. The opening lines of the novel remind the reader of the now-closed nature of that particular threshold in the real world, though the memory of the estate continues to haunt the heroine. She recalls, “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the

drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me. There was a padlock and a chain upon the gate” (du Maurier 1). Though in her dream, the second Mrs. de Winter transgresses this manmade boundary into the forbidden territory of Rebecca, overrun with nature, her waking self, recounting the dream, is aware that actual entrance to Manderley is no longer an option. When she arrives at her new home for the first time, the second Mrs. de Winter notes the unusual quality of the driveway, and its serpentine nature— imagery she later associates with Rebecca:

This drive twisted and turned as a serpent...Even the midday sun would not penetrate the interlacing of those green leaves, they were too thickly entwined, one with another...here there was no wind...still this drive that was no drive twisted and turned like an enchanted ribbon through the dark and silent woods, penetrating even deeper to the very heart surely of the forest itself, and still there was no clearing (du Maurier 65).

The intense, enclosed driveway is oxymoronically womblike and snakelike, into which no outside influences can enter, a fact the heroine notes with trepidation, and anticipation of Manderley. Potentially this combined phallic and yonic imagery denotes Rebecca’s bisexuality. Odd things happen to the second Mrs. de Winter on the driveway: she is unrecognized by an employee, Favell attempts to take her for an automobile ride, and she witnesses the final burning of Manderley.

In Monte Carlo, the heroine encounters another threshold, this time a sharp cliff face, where she fears Maxim intends suicide. She recalls, “I was aware that I was trespassing on forbidden ground...a barrier between him and others” (du Maurier 23). Even as the memory of Rebecca rears up between them, the girl notes that she has transgressed a boundary that is, for one reason or another, mystical. Her entry into this forbidden space triggers Maxim’s guilty conscience, giving him “the face of one who

walks in his sleep, and for a wild moment the idea came to me that perhaps he was not normal, not altogether sane” (du Maurier 29). At the Monte Carlo threshold, a physical space between the earth-associated heroine and the turbulent sailing enthusiast, Rebecca, Maxim is revealed as abnormal, though the second Mrs. de Winter later explains this bizarre moment as foreshadowing of Rebecca’s lingering power over Maxim.

Rebecca’s most dramatic threshold is another potential moment of suicide, in which Mrs. Danvers attempts to cajole the girl into killing herself, leaving Maxim with what they both believe to be the memory of his beloved Rebecca. The heroine says, “The situation was mad, unreal” (du Maurier 245). The female, heavily Gothicized setting directly echoes the suicide jump of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and the heroine imagines a death for herself very like the one Jane describes of Bertha. Du Maurier writes,

There was nothing but the white mist about me, smelling of sea-weed dank and chill. The only reality was the window-sill beneath my hand and the grip of Mrs. Danvers on my left arm. If I jumped I should not see the stones rise up to meet me, the fog would hide them from me. The pain would be sharp and sudden as she said. The fall would break my neck. It would not be slow, like drowning. It would soon be over...The mist entered my nostrils and lay upon my lips rank and sour. It was stifling, like a blanket, like an anesthetic...Soon I would not have to think about Rebecca any more (du Maurier 251).

Whereas Antoinette’s suicide is deliberate and empowering, and Bertha’s a symptom of inhuman insanity, the heroine’s potential death here is nothing like Jane Eyre’s pious “death” on the moors, praying for religious salvation. Even Rebecca’s laughter, in the moment before her murder, seems preferable to the second Mrs. de Winter’s escapist, cowardly motivation. Anesthetized by her momentary slip in sanity, the heroine recalls, “I stepped back into the room still dazed and stupid, not sure of myself or of her” (du

Maurier 252). Though one might argue the heroine seems dazed and unsure throughout most of the novel, her brush with death falls into neither of Bronfen's categories for appropriate or othered female death, and must therefore be categorized as a bout of temporary insanity. The girl corroborates this idea, as she recalls that "I had just experienced something that was degrading and horrible and mad, something I that I did not fully understand even now, that I had no wish to remember, that I wanted to bury forever more deep in the shadows of my mind with the old forgotten terrors of childhood" (du Maurier 256). The uncanny recurrence of childhood fears, a key factor in Freud's conception of doubling, is a connection she shares with Jane, though it is ultimately Mrs. Danvers who fills, by proxy, Bertha's role as destroyer of her husband's home.

In *Rebecca*, du Maurier accomplishes much more than a simple reiteration of a well-liked nineteenth-century plot. She minimizes the role of the heroine, introduces even more unreliable narratives than does Brontë, and writes Rebecca as the novel's most exciting and important character, even in death. When compared to the silent and imprisoned Bertha, Rebecca, though murdered, triumphs over the Rochester and Jane doppelgängers, Maxim and his bride, despite her socially unacceptable sexuality and lifestyle. Though cast in a villainous light, Rebecca is a key stepping stone whose near-transcendence of her marginality anticipates Antoinette's outright refusal of her assigned liminal space in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Chapter Three: Reliable Madwomen in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

“The two feminine figures of death, once sacrificed, provoke regeneration, though not without leaving scars— in the form of the gravestone Jane erects for Helen, in the form of the burnt mansion that incites public gossip about Bertha and Rochester...They are uncanny scars because they can ‘mark the spot’ and acknowledge the presence of these two feminine bodies previously positioned ambiguously between life and death only once the bodies of both are definitely missing.” (Bronfen 223)

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys successfully creates a prequel to *Jane Eyre* in which the “Bertha” character is not only the first person narrator, but also the heroine. Rhys’s work rejects the earlier models of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, titling the novel after the mysterious body of water separating Antoinette from her Jamaican home. Anchored by a female-gendered location, rather than the legacy of one woman, *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers a more transparent, and less problematic narrative than do Jane or the second Mrs. de Winter, though, of the three heroines, Antoinette is the least mentally stable. Parts I and II are set in Antoinette’s home, Jamaica, while Part III details her tenure as the “madwoman” Jane encounters at Thornfield. In the interest of continuity with *Jane Eyre*, a newlywed Rochester narrates Part II, the account of the couple’s marriage, and moments of uncanny doubling permeate the text. The most important departure from the previous two novels, however, occurs in the textual presence of Antoinette’s mother, Annette, who also goes mad following a crisis.

Throughout the course of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette’s narrative— told, importantly, in the present tense, unlike the retrospective accounts of Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter— conveys honesty and openness. Based on Jane’s harsh depiction of Bertha, and the explicit image the heroine of *Rebecca* constructs of her predecessor,

Antoinette surprises by engaging her reader's sympathy with the openness of her storytelling, and her staunch refusal to pretend at stability, as do Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter— in the liminal space of the Gothic heroine— preferring her own, “mad” identity to the one assigned her as Rochester's wife.

The fundamentally different childhood experiences of Jane and Antoinette explain, Rhys implies, the very different women they grow into. Antoinette relaxes into her interior world with minimal regard for the strict religion under which she is nominally educated, developing into the seductive and latently dangerous woman Rochester accesses in the early days of their marriage. Meanwhile Jane, despite her disdain for her authoritarian education, maintains strict Christian morality in the face of temptation, a characteristic which becomes one of her defining traits, while Antoinette is eventually condemned in both novels for her supposed promiscuity and unreliability. Neither girl seems very successful at making friends, though their isolation occurs for different reasons: Jane is made a pariah from her first introduction at Lowood, while Antoinette appears to have no interest in friendship. However, despite their different backgrounds, both characters leave the female, marginal spaces of their transition from girls to women to be reintegrated into patriarchal societies via the dubious auspices of Mr. Rochester: Antoinette as his wife, and Jane as governess to his ward.

While Antoinette is a seemingly truthful, transparent narrator, regardless of her sanity, unlike Jane Eyre, Rhys portrays Rochester as an emotional, unreliable source, rewriting history to serve his purposes and assuage his own guilt, very like Brontë's character. *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers an unprecedented look into his psyche in Part II of

the novel, through Rochester's first-person narration of his early marriage to Antoinette. There are moments when, looking back, Rochester echoes the Romantic figure Jane perceives him to be, but, more frequently, Rochester indulges the bitterness and self-pity he cultivates in *Jane Eyre*. Ironically, young Rochester claims that "I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place" (Rhys 104); in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester pays for his confinement of Bertha with his home and his vision. Also echoing the Brontë text, on one of the couple's first evenings at Granbois, Rochester says, "It was very late when I poured out two glasses and told her to drink to our happiness, to our love and the day without end which would be tomorrow. I was young then. A short youth mine was" (Rhys 51), which sounds suspiciously like his early remark to Jane that he "was thrust on the wrong track...and...never recovered the right course since; but I might have been very different" (Brontë 158). This familiar reluctance to admit his culpability for his role in his (and Antoinette's) unhappiness is a theme in his wallowing, melodramatic narration, and constitutes one of Rochester's insidious forms of narrative unreliability.

Early in Part II, Rochester insists that he was under a sort of romantic spell while in Jamaica, which cannot be fully related to others. He says, "As for my confused impressions they will never be written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up" (Rhys 46). These "blanks" seem related to the previous heroines' threshold moments of insanity, and are another instance of Rochester styling himself as a Gothic heroine. In *Jane Eyre*, the story of Rochester's first marriage is relayed mostly through the Jane's memory of Rochester's own dialogue; *Wide Sargasso Sea* removes one layer of bias by

eliminating Jane's interpretation, Rochester's opinions remain. Though he paints himself as the victim of the Mason family's scheme, he also criticizes the islanders for their naïveté, Antoinette included: "these people are very vulnerable. How old was I when I first learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted" (Rhys 64). Acknowledging his own deeply ingrained habit of casual deceit, Rochester distrusts the islanders' appearance of openness, an issue that rises to the fore when Antoinette calls upon Christophine's taboo, obeah magic.

Meanwhile, Rochester contents himself to project his unfounded impressions of Antoinette onto the woman he barely knows, much as he does with Jane in their introductory tête-à-tête. The difference is, with Jane, those impressions are, firstly, more flattering than are his feelings for Antoinette, and secondly, voiced aloud. Rochester's musings about Antoinette are entirely private, and perhaps it is this complete lack of accountability which allows Rochester to develop such vehement and contradictory emotions concerning his wife. Sometimes, Rochester is nearly tender in his feelings for Antoinette, saying, "I would look at her for long minutes by candlelight, wonder why she seemed sad asleep, and curse the fever or the caution that had made me so blind, so feeble, so hesitating. I'd remember her effort to escape" (Rhys 56), though he is more frequently negative in his interpretation of her mysterious character. Ironically, one of Rochester's criticisms of Antoinette comes from her rigid, critical interpretation of England, when, really, his feelings about Jamaica, a place he has physically experienced, are scarcely more open-minded. Rochester complains, "her mind was already made up.

Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe” (Rhys 58). As offended as Rochester is by Antoinette’s dreamlike vision of England, his impression of her home is likewise unchanging.

The true depth of Rochester’s unreliability, however, remains unrevealed until the final moment of his narration. Chillingly, he concludes, “I hated the place....I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it” (Rhys 111). This much passion and bitterness the narrative of *Jane Eyre* has prepared readers for. Rochester’s admission of his continued lust for Antoinette is conflated with his passionate outburst against her overtly feminized home. Rochester’s ultimate rejection of his now hated wife is made clear when he changes her name from “Antoinette” to “Bertha,” effectively replacing the sexual, dynamic Antoinette of the first days of their marriage with the madwoman from *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette, cognizant of the significance of this alteration, protests, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me another name. I know, that’s obeh too” (Rhys 94). Despite Antoinette’s protests, however, on the next page, Rochester’s description matches the inhuman one Jane offers of Bertha: “Then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body, and it was like a dream in the large unfurnished room with the candles flickering and this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me” (Rhys 95). This

moment acts as a sort of preface for the later attic revelation in *Jane Eyre*, and, though Rochester narrates, the events of the passage lay the blame for Antoinette's final madness at his feet, (and Christophine's) in spite of his attempts to diffuse or ignore his guilt. The combination of Antoinette's righteous fury over Rochester's betrayal, and her intrinsic understanding of Jamaica's inaccessible, female "secret," is designated by Rochester as proof of Antoinette's sexualized, female insanity. He claims, "Very soon she'll join the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough...But others are waiting to take their places, it's a long, long line. She's one of them. I too can wait—for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie..." (Rhys 111). Rochester's disturbing closing thought for Part II suggest a wish that Antoinette might not only be reinvented as the voiceless, subhuman "Bertha," but that she might cease to exist, entirely.

In "diagnosing" Antoinette's madness, Rochester claims to recognize signs of her flawed chastity— an impurity which he later associates with imperfect whiteness and burgeoning insanity. He says, "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette? After we left Spanish Town I suppose. Or did I notice it before and refuse to admit what I saw?" (Rhys 40). In the surroundings of Spanish Town, the Anglo-Jamaican colonial seat, Rochester was, he implies, fooled by the familiarity of English manners and behavior, and Antoinette's otherness escaped his notice. In the female wildness of the jungle en route to Granbois, Rochester begins to see, (or to imagine that he sees), a

certain fundamental difference between his wife and himself, to his torment. Here, as in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester blames his misfortune on others, whom he claims took advantage of his youth and inexperience. The more comfortable (though unreliable) explanation comes from questioning his own memories of the period before their wedding, and assigning blame to his illness and the trickery of Antoinette's equally untrustworthy relatives, as he also does in *Jane Eyre*. Realizing himself to be out of his depth with his new wife, Rochester evaluates Antoinette as a "dark continent." Freud's phrase, examined by Cixous and Clément, is heaped in both female and imperial connotations, both applicable in the case of Antoinette:

The 'Dark Continent' is neither dark nor unexplorable: It is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. Because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. We have been frozen in time between two terrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss (Cixous and Clément 68).

Rochester makes no convincing attempt to understand or to empathize with Antoinette. He is not interested in the excessive, feminized beauty of his wife or her home. Instead, he others and colonizes her, undermining her initial financial authority in their relationship, and, most importantly, accessing the emotional, romantic elements of her nature which have lain dormant in Antoinette since leaving Coulibri as a child, not unlike Gilbert and Gubar's theory of Jane's dark double, repressed at Lowood, but reawakened at Thornfield.

Though Rochester eventually familiarizes himself with Antoinette sexually, she remains an enigma to him. "I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or

feel as I did” (Rhys 58). Unfortunately for Antoinette, while Rochester is able to remain emotionally aloof, new as she is to romance and to normal, human companionship, she grows dependent upon her husband and his love: “Very soon she was as eager for what’s called loving as I was- more lost and drowned afterwards” (Rhys 57). But, as Cixous and Clément argue, this male-controlled “kind of love is death for us” (Cixous and Clément 67). Logan corroborates Cixous and Clément’s argument about the dangerous repercussions of love, saying “to be capable of feeling pleasure is to be unavoidably exposed to the dangers of feeling pain” (Logan 26). In allowing Rochester to break down the barriers of detachment and carefully cultivated independence Antoinette has assiduously maintained since her troubled childhood, she makes herself irreparably vulnerable, becoming susceptible to the imprisonment Rochester eventually imposes, and even, potentially, sparking the “madness” she is presumed to have inherited from her mother.

In the convent, Antoinette relishes the relief of coolness, an escape from the sweltering heat of her ruined Coulibri, and it is with that studied coldness that she behaves before her marriage. Rejecting her own natural warmth and potential for passion might have been the safest route for Antoinette, but in the early days of her marriage at Granbois, she relinquishes her former self-control. Rochester says, “If I have forgotten caution, she has forgotten silence and coldness” (Rhys 56). Though he seems moderately pleased by her newly amicable demeanor, he never abandons his own studied aloofness, and never becomes a part of the island culture in which Antoinette rejoices. He complains, on the same page, “It was often raining when I woke during the night, a light

capricious shower, dancing playful rain, or hushed, muted, growing louder, more persistent, more powerful, an inexorable sound. But always music, a music I had never heard before” (Rhys 56). The music of this rain, “powerful and persistent,” seems related to Rochester’s partial understanding of Antoinette as a woman. Rochester fears the potential of her “persistent power,” and works to subvert it. Eventually disgusted by the effect love has on the distraught Antoinette, he says, “Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she’ll have no lover, for I don’t want her and she’ll see no other” (Rhys 107). Rochester’s possessive hatred of his wife leads to her incarceration in Thornfield, and his plan to lock her up is phrased in terms of incongruous tenderness: “Antoinetta—I can be gentle too. Hide your face. Hide yourself in my arms. You’ll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl. Here’s a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun. No sun...no sun. The weather’s changed” (Rhys 107). The planned return to cloudy England, away from the heady passion of Jamaica and of Antoinette herself might be Rochester’s twisted ideas of assuaging her “madness” by placing her in Grace Poole’s care, but removing her from the rest of the world. Her marriage to Rochester has irrevocably altered Antoinette, so much so that, when the time comes to leave him for her own sake, she cannot, spelling her own downfall, becoming the Bertha of *Jane Eyre*. But, unlike the disgusting, monstrous Bertha that Jane describes in the scene following her unsuccessful wedding, Rhys’s Antoinette is not evil or inhuman. Because Antoinette voices her side of the story, her violent behavior toward Rochester becomes relatable and tragic, rather than inexplicably vicious. According to Cixous and Clément, “All you have to do to see the Medusa is look her in the face: and she isn’t deadly. She is beautiful and she laughs”

(Cixous and Clément 69). Antoinette's laughter, unlocked by her wedding and a fixture until her death, may be mad, but is it also a lingering reminder of the woman she was, prior to her imprisonment by Rochester?

Cixous and Clément conclude *The Newly Born Woman* with a discussion addressing their differing overall approaches to women's writing and feminist scholarship. Cixous's scholarly work is deemed "halfway between theory and fiction," while Clément's is "more demonstrative and discursive, following the most traditional method of rhetorical demonstration" (Cixous and Clément 136). Cixous's argument is significantly more applicable to the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s Antoinette, but Clément's interpretation also offers an interesting and important perspective of differing critical stances regarding the "hysteric," especially.

Cixous begins the discussion by taking a strong stance against the traditional male domination of female writing, very like her thesis in "The Laugh of the Medusa." She writes, "until now, women were not speaking out loud, were not writing, not creating their tongues— plural, but they will create them, which doesn't mean that the others (either men or tongues) are going to die off" (Cixous and Clément 137). This thought, alone, seems tailor-made for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as concerns Antoinette's unprecedented ability, for a literary "madwoman" in the *Jane Eyre* tradition, to narrate her own story. Clément, who is generally less radical than Cixous, takes issue with Cixous's interest in "mastery," or the idea of a "woman mistress," and the position of "giving" knowledge. Cixous argues that "The one who is in the master's place, even if not the master of a knowledge, is in a position of power. The only way to bar that is to execute the master,

kill him, eliminate him, so that what he has to say can get through, so that he himself is not the obstacle, so it will be *given*. Something on the order of a personal gift, a subjective one” (Cixous and Clément 140). Here, as elsewhere, Cixous prescribes an aggressive feminism, to which Clément objects, claiming, “I don’t like that term—personal gift, it tends toward oblation and sacrifice” (Cixous and Clément 140). In general, Clément rejects Cixous’s impassioned defense of the hysteric, as I have generally applied it to Antoinette, preferring a more passive, rational mode of female empowerment.

The final part of the theorists’ conversation is focused upon Freud’s classic Dora case study, in which his patient, “Dora,” exhibits the hysterical symptom of muteness. Cixous argues that “The source of Dora’s strength is, in spite of everything, her desire. The hysteric is not just someone who has her words cut off, someone for whom the body speaks. It all starts with her anguish as it relates to desire and to immensity of her desire— therefore, from her demanding quality” (Cixous and Clément 154). For Cixous, the earlier “madwomen,” such as Bertha and Rebecca, have paved the way for the later figure of an empowered female “insanity,” in which the hysteric may transcend her “anguish,” and is able to speak, not only with her body, but also with her distinctly feminine voice. She writes,

the hysteric, with her way of questioning others (because if she succeeds in bringing down the men who surround her, it is by questioning them, by ceaselessly reflecting to them the image that truly castrates them, to the extent that the power they have wished to impose is an illegitimate power of rape and violence). –The hysteric is, to my eyes, the typical woman in all her force (Cixous and Clément 154).

Antoinette, as the hysteric, fills this role. She asks more of Rochester's love than he is willing to give, and in her disappointment with his ill-treatment of her, reflects back the image of Rochester as an oppressor, rather than the Byronic lover he styles himself to be. Angry, but decidedly in the wrong, Rochester has little choice, as an agent of the patriarchy, but to silence and imprison Antoinette, who is, as she seems to stress throughout the novel, a "typical woman," increasingly warped by circumstance. In her final suicide jump, Antoinette, by Cixous's standards, finally succeeds in "truly castrating" Rochester, though the "sacrifice" rejected by Clément is a necessary factor in this act. Clément argues that

The distinction between them, between those who nicely fulfill their function of challenging with all possible violence (but who can enclose themselves afterward) and those who will arrive at symbolic inscription, no matter what act they use to get there, seems essential to me. Raising hell, throwing fits, disturbing family relations can be shut back up (Cixous and Clément 156).

For Clément, the successful "female mistress" can never be a hysteric, and certainly not of Dora's mold, whom she rejects due to Dora's mute flight from her therapy, and rejection of forward-moving (if phallogentric) progress. The ultra-feminine, "hell-raising" woman demanded by Cixous cannot be a step forward for Clément. While Cixous condones a certain degree of violence in the achievement of a true women's literature, Clément is more skeptical, believing that such women will never be taken out of their asylums. Clément seeks a more subtle alternative, but Cixous, persuasively, argues for her laughing Medusa.

As far as gender roles go, the young Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is traditional, even by nineteenth-century standards. A devotee of Byron and the other Romantics,

Rochester celebrates masculine melancholy and passionate artworks, but rejects his wife's right to express these same emotions, as Cixous and Clément wish Antoinette could. Rochester is also very sensitive to the fact that, in his marriage to Antoinette, he "[has] not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks" (Rhys 42), and so at Granbois he carefully usurps her, twisting her childhood home into something hated; emotionally, as well as legally, stealing her property.

I loved this place and you have made it into a place that I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else I have been unhappy, and all the other things are nothing to what has happened here. I hate it now like I hate you, and before I die I will show you how much I hate you (Rhys 95).

This desecration of Granbois, Antoinette's last refuge, is a greater insult to her than is Rochester's liaison with Amélie, or his acceptance of the vicious rumors circulating about her family. Antoinette's threat to make Rochester understand her hatred is an obvious foreshadowing of her later burning of Thornfield, physically ruining his home as he has mentally destroyed hers, but it also highlights a point made by Cixous and Clément about the madwoman and personal spaces: "She has not been able to live in her 'own' house, her very body. She can be incarcerated, slowed down appallingly and tricked into apartheid for too long a time- but still only for a time" (Cixous and Clément 68). Her love for Rochester has blinded Antoinette, allowing him to assume control of both her home and her body, but the realization that the love she has for him will never be returned in kind forces Antoinette to reevaluate what power she has left remaining to her. Antoinette's incarceration by Rochester, the reader knows, will stretch across fifteen

years, but before her death, she successfully makes him pay for his crimes against her, in the razing of Thornfield, and his related injuries.

For Jane Eyre, Thornfield is a place where she has been warm and loved, but for Antoinette it is a prison of the most dehumanizing kind. Of Jane's experience in Rochester's home, Gilbert and Gubar write "This gloomy mansion is often seen as just another gothic trapping introduced by Charlotte Brontë to make her novel saleable. Yet not only is Thornfield more realistically drawn than, say, *Otranto* or *Udolpho*, it is more metaphorically radiant than most gothic mansions: it is the house of Jane's life, its floors and walls the architecture of her experience" (Gilbert and Gubar 347). This description is also applicable to the Antoinette's relationships to Coulibri and to Granbois. Although Antoinette does not encounter the "gothic mansion" until she is brought to England, she is haunted by her own lost, "radiant" home.

Antoinette's refusal to believe that she is truly in England pairs interestingly with her earlier conception of England as an unreal, dreamlike place. "Oh England, England," she called back mockingly, and the sound went on like a warning I did not choose to hear" (Rhys 43). Because England is unfathomable for Antoinette, she does not believe Rochester capable of understanding her own home at Coulibri, though she lovingly describes it in her narrations of childhood. She pinpoints the end of her emotional development with the destruction of the estate, saying, "After Coulibri it was too late. I did not change" (Rhys 56), a claim which, in a sense, explains her at times childlike behavior as an adult. Cixous and Clément argue, "madmen embody the impossible configurations of a return to childhood" (Cixous and Clément 7), (echoing Freud's theory

of uncanny doubles), and it is this very impossibility to which Antoinette returns at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as she leaves her attic prison to enact her dream of returning to Coulibri.

Antoinette's love for Coulibri is balanced by her mother's fear of it, now that it has been, at least in part, reclaimed by the island, and the former slave population. Deemed socially unsuitable because of her French colonial origin, Annette is even less able to operate in Jamaica's English society than is her daughter, years later. At least, by the social system's logic, Antoinette's father was (presumably) English, and her stepfather, also an Englishman, has provided her with a sizeable inheritance, an enticement to marriage unavailable to the widowed and increasingly desperate Annette. Antoinette's childhood comprehension of the social tensions underpinning her mother's second marriage is very astute. "Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English. And my mother, so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either" (Rhys 18). These complicated racial politics later contribute to Antoinette's identity crisis at Rochester's attempted renaming, and potentially spark her rejection of any liminal social position. Caught in the middle of black and white colonial opinion, she says, "So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 64). Still, Antoinette's tangible and monetary ties to English culture make her a viable candidate to marry the aristocratic but penniless Rochester, though the ambiguity of her mother's background eventually creates issues in their marriage, just as Annette's foreignness interferes with her plans to escape the wildness encroaching upon Coulibri before it is too late to save her family.

The fact that Annette was able to “catch” a second husband based on beauty and charm alone is actually what angers both the black and the white people of Jamaica. She has gone outside the system, and for taking such liberties, as well as for salvaging the colonial wreck of Coulibri before it is completely reclaimed by the islanders, she brings the anger of the ex-slave population down upon the family. Antoinette describes popular opinion at her mother’s wedding: “everything I wore was new- even my beautiful slippers. But their eyes slid away from my hating face. I had heard what all these smooth smiling people said about her when she was not listening and they did not guess I was. Hiding from them in the gazebo I listened to them” (Rhys 13). Annette, Aunt Cora, and even the child Antoinette recognize the necessity of their leaving the old plantation as racial tensions threaten to boil over, but the staunchly English Mason refuses to recognize the danger which is, to everyone else, palpable. Annette, speaking to her husband of the estate’s servants and of the black population in general, says, “‘You don’t like, or even recognize the good in them,’ she said, ‘and you won’t believe in the other side...They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn’t understand.’” (Rhys 15). This incomprehensible cruelty foreshadows the acts of *Jane Eyre*’s madwoman, whom Rochester also underestimates. Coulibri is finally burnt, not out of anger for its history of profit via slavery, but because the ex-slave-owning family had the presumption to build again on the ruins of its own past wealth, attempting to reestablish themselves in a society which has outgrown them. Later Rochester, like Mason, underestimates the servants at Granbois, and faces similar, though less immediate

consequences: his family estate is also razed, this time by a different Jamaican malcontent, Antoinette.

Before Annette's marriage to Mason, she and her children are wholly dependent upon the dubious protection of Christophine and her reputation for voodoo. Like Annette, Christophine is made "other" by her non-native, but also non-English, background. Christophine's room at Coulibri, the seat of her obeah power, holds a kind of mythic status for young Antoinette, comparable to the haunted red room of Jane Eyre's childhood. Antoinette worships Christophine, but does not shy away from describing some of her more specious characteristics, and even seems to respect or envy some of her more unreliable traits. "She had a quiet voice and a quiet laugh (when she did laugh), and though she could speak good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois, she took care to talk as they talked" (Rhys 7). The deception inherent in the easy adoption of different accents clouds Christophine's origins, marking her as dangerously unreliable to most of the inhabitants of Coulibri, with the notable exceptions of Annette and Antoinette. Christophine's ability to adopt several languages and accents, signaling her mobility in multiple social circles, (and among racial groups) is also perceived as untrustworthy by Rochester, with whom Christophine shares a mutual dislike. In the early days of her marriage, Antoinette looks to Christophine for advice in pleasing her new husband, and as their marriage fails, it is to Christophine's voodoo that Antoinette, genuinely believing in obeah's mysterious powers, turns for a solution to her problem. Christophine discourages her from trying to use the island's power against an

Englishman, and is, once again, correct: Antoinette's marriage is destroyed, and Rochester is unforgiving of her use of obeah against him.

Christophine, as a border-crossing woman, is a key character in many postcolonial readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In his 1989 essay "‘Like in a Looking-Glass’: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Lee Erwin casts Christophine as a character notable for "talking back" (Erwin 152) against her opponents. In "‘She Walked Away Without Looking Back’: Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" Joya Uraizee interprets Christophine as Antoinette's surrogate mother after Annette's "maternal rejection" of her daughter, serving to love and instruct Antoinette, but also complicating Antoinette's understanding of her ethnicity and sense of place. (Uraizee 269). Erwin's argument, that it is through the liminal character of Christophine that Rhys is able to subvert the original text of *Jane Eyre*, is especially pertinent when compared to the monstrous mother figure of Grace Poole, surrogate parent and prison warden to Bertha in *Thornfield*. Uraizee echoes this idea, writing, "Rhys does not or cannot create a new destiny or closure to the one set in place for her by Brontë; she can only destabilize it and make it ambiguous" (Uraizee 264). Not only is Christophine the early savior of the Cosways before Annette's remarriage, she also tries and fails to save both mother and daughter from their problematic English husbands. Uraizee identifies Christophine as a sort of middleman between the Creole Cosway-Mason family, and the former slave population. A member of neither group, she is uniquely able to communicate more effectively than either, though even her versatile voice is not strong enough to disrupt the foregone conclusion of *Jane Eyre*. She writes,

“Rhys’s text involves dominant/imperialist voices that are continually subverted by marginalized/Creole ones, which in turn are destabilized but not replaced by subaltern/black ones whose silences rupture the surface” (Uraizee 277). Annette is lost after the burning of Coulibri, and Antoinette slips out of reach when Christophine is unsuccessful in convincing Rochester to allow his wife to leave him. Rochester notes of Christophine in the moment before she leaves the family for good, “When I looked at her there was a mask on her face and her eyes were undaunted. She was a fighter, I had to admit...She walked away without looking back” (Rhys 104). The racially-charged mask imagery reaffirms Christophine’s acknowledged ability to dissemble, (which she did not succeed in teaching the inherently transparent Antoinette) and also reiterates Rochester’s flawed understanding of the women at Granbois. Christophine is noted for her power by Daniel Cosway and by the local law enforcement officers Rochester contacts, and it their combined condemnation, as conveyed to Rochester, which finally separates her from Antoinette, allowing *Wide Sargasso Sea* to remain on course for the later narrative, *Jane Eyre*.

Mothers are conspicuously absent in both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, but in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Annette plays a major role in predicting and shaping her daughter’s future. Jane is an orphan, completely unaware of her existing family until the revelation by St. John that the Rivers siblings are her cousins. The second Mrs. de Winter was raised by her father, with only passing mention of a deceased mother. Jane has only her peer, Helen Burns, and her role model Miss Temple at Lowood School to look up to for positive female role models during her adolescence. Gilbert and Gubar identify the lesson taught

by these two parental figures: “What she learned from her two mothers is, at least superficially, to compromise” (Gilbert and Gubar 347), a principle which explains Jane’s later narrative and social instability. The second Mrs. de Winter is in the employ of the simpering social climber, Mrs. Van Hopper, when she first encounters Maxim. However, a large part of Rochester’s decision to turn against Antoinette comes from her family’s perceived history of mental illness; before she begins manifesting her eventual madness, he has already consigned her to the fate of her mother and brother, while the factual basis for his decision is hearsay and gossip, mostly from the malevolent Daniel Cosway, whose own lack of a definitive identity makes him a dangerous and unpredictable figure.

Much of the foreshadowing of Brontë’s novel *Rhys* incorporates into *Wide Sargasso Sea* is based upon that classic Gothic hallmark, the uncanny. Freud discusses issues of mothers and childhood memory in great depth. Especially important to the Gothic, Freud repeatedly draws attention to the use of the term ‘uncanny’ to describe the sensations associated with haunted houses, a phenomenon present in all three novels. Jane hears the secondhand story of Bertha’s burning of Thornfield, but the other two narrators witness their homes’ destructions, and for the second Mrs. de Winter and Antoinette, imaginary returns to these specific homes are recurring dreams or nightmares, because, for all three characters, the homes represent a lost childhood or innocence, be it real or metaphorical. Freud writes,

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning... whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been

here before', we may interpret this place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case, too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of repression (Freud 221).

This sexualized association is particularly apt in these novels, where the places returned to, at least in the cases of *Manderley* and *Coulibri*, are so deliberately feminized. In each story, fires cost human life, as well as the loss of home, and these deaths are also a part of the uncanny nature of their recurrence. The ghostly and necromantic associations of Bronfen are also related to Freudian uncanniness, and occur in each book. *Jane Eyre* engages repeatedly with language and imagery of the supernatural. The heroine of *Rebecca* is haunted by the memory and lingering power of the late title character. After the early destruction of *Coulibri* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette frequently contemplates and seems to flirt with her own death, while maintaining her belief in the mysterious obeah power of Christophine. For Antoinette, too, *Coulibri* is especially poignant in its association with her mother, whose fate she eventually inherits. At Thornfield, Jane meets the frightening mother substitute, Grace Poole, and at *Manderley* the second Mrs. de Winter grapples with Mrs. Danvers, who is not maternal in the slightest.

Though *Rebecca* directly mirrors the plot of *Jane Eyre*, the uncanny is also firmly present in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by virtue of the novel's pointed use of doubles. Most notably, this phenomenon occurs between Helen Burns and H el ene, Tia and Antoinette, Antoinette and Bertha, and, most unsettlingly, Antoinette and Jane. Tia's unexpected reappearance in Antoinette's final vision, prompting a pivotal moment from the original *Jane Eyre* narrative, brings the doubling of the Bront e novel, as well as the childhood doubling present within *Wide Sargasso Sea*, full circle. Just as it is uncanny for readers

familiar with *Jane Eyre* to encounter an alternate universe Helen Burns character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one who is the school darling rather than the bane of her instructors, so is it unsettling, but at the same time, fitting, that Antoinette's childhood friend-turned-enemy should be the face she envisions just before her decision to leap to her death. Even Antoinette's death jump has a certain aura of the uncanny in its likeness to the ill-fated fiery flight of the parrot, Coco. Freud posits that "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression...something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (Freud 217). The frightening reappearance of these once-repressed memories, and the sense of uncomfortable déjà vu they engender, are microcosmic versions of the many pointed similarities across plot and character structure which Rhys sets up in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to evoke uncanny memories of *Jane Eyre* in readers.

The early image of Annette at the window, desperately hoping for an escape from the isolation of Coulibri, parallels one of the most memorable feminist moments in *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane restlessly paces Thornfield, prior to Mr. Rochester's arrival, thinking "Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot... Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel... they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation" (Brontë 130). Antoinette remembers, "My mother walked over to the window. ('Marooned,' said her straight narrow back, her carefully coiled hair. 'Marooned.')" (Rhys 11). Cixous and Clément would cast Antoinette and her mother as two different sorts of madwomen: "for

the witch (the hysteric), breaking apart can be paradise, but for another, it is hell” (Cixous and Clément 33). While Antoinette, at Thornfield, revels in the return to her idyllic home which her insanity facilitates, Annette fights to maintain her slipping grasp on reality and to escape the encroaching jungle threatening to overwhelm Coulibri, a struggle her daughter witnesses, and which likely shapes Antoinette’s later passivity in her own battle with mental illness. Logan explains nineteenth-century opinion about inherited mental illness, writing, “This hidden temperament also can be inherited. When a mother or father is...actively suffering from a nervous disorder, the acquired temperament of the parent will be inscribed on the body of the child, who is born with an inherited nervous temperament and so is predisposed to the protean host of nervous disorders” (Logan 21). A pivotal moment in Antoinette’s early narration takes place when she describes her relationship with her mother, which becomes increasingly estranged as Antoinette grows up, ending with Annette’s unreachable madness, and death prior to her daughter’s wedding: “Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa—once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe. But not any longer. Not any more” (Rhys 8). This same attitude applies to Antoinette’s general philosophy throughout her life story: once she might have attempted to correct the trajectory of her life, but after Coulibri, and her marriage and the brief happiness she experiences with Rochester, she seems prepared to accept the repercussions of her actions and inheritance.

Between leaving Rochester, whom she has come to love with an intensity he makes no attempt to match, and an insanity which seems to be building as their failing

marriage worsens, Antoinette does not fight her developing insanity, becoming a “madwoman,” if not of her own volition, than at least without the desperate battle her mother waged to remain a functional member of traditional society. Perhaps her choice is influenced by a childhood spent almost exclusively in questionably sane environs; Antoinette makes it clear in her early narrations that she was happiest at Coulibri, that she embraced that wild isolation which so terrified her mother. “Visitors! I dragged up the steps unwillingly—I had longed for visitors once, but that was years ago” (Rhys 10). Like the isolated Jane Eyre at Gateshead, Antoinette spent a childhood of quiet, friendless observation. The important difference between the two characters: Antoinette loved Coulibri, while Jane Eyre was desperate to leave for school.

The human company which a “normal” person (Annette) would crave after so long in isolation is undesirable to Antoinette—where her mother clings to normalcy for as long as she possibly can, Antoinette disdains it, choosing to embrace her “inheritance” of madness, where her mother fought it at every turn. Christophine suggests to Rochester that Annette’s madness was the product of her environment, saying, “They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husban’ he go off, he leave her... They won’t let Antoinette see her. In the end—mad I don’t know—she give up, she care for nothing” (Rhys 101). Despite this warning of the potential “cause” of Annette’s madness, and the cycle he is perpetuating, Rochester still chooses to treat Antoinette as a madwoman, as her mother was labeled before her, potentially sealing her fate. Still, in Antoinette’s madness, there is a sense of triumph and,

in the end, of vindication, as she burns Thornfield. Annette gets no such revenge— her English husband left her to rot in Jamaica, while Rochester chooses to bring Antoinette to England, to the distinctly male-gendered Thornfield, instead of leaving her on her own terrain, or in Ferndean, where he believes she would have died.

Were *Wide Sargasso Sea* able to be entirely separated from *Jane Eyre*, then reading Antoinette's final insanity as a result of her potential genetic predisposition and unfortunate circumstances, rather than as a preordained certitude, would be significantly easier. However, while Rhys's novel is literarily more than capable of standing alone, the pervasiveness of *Jane Eyre* as a staple of popular English literature is almost inescapable. Antoinette does not struggle against the stigma of the madwoman. In her betrayed rage, she prefers the marginal position of female madness to the pretended stability of Rochester's unloved and unappreciated wife. She says, "I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to save me, I would refuse. This must happen" (Rhys 59). Antoinette's beloved paradise home is quickly slipping through her fingers, and though she later turns to Christophine's unreliable voodoo to stymie the damage, she has already admitted her belief that Rochester's plans cannot be circumvented. Antoinette is effectively helpless against Rochester's English and masculine power; he has both the law and public opinion on his side, and Antoinette ultimately seems to choose passivity in the face of her own encroaching madness rather than emulate her mother's desperate, though unsuccessful, attempts to cling to her slipping sanity. Because of this surprising and empowered choice, Antoinette does not undergo the threshold slips of consciousness or sanity that the early narrators experience

while pretending at unshakeable narrative reliability and “truthfulness.” The titular *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as a physical threshold over which Antoinette, in becoming the “madwoman,” passes only once. In going to England, Antoinette assumes the increasingly fragmented role of Bertha, having rejected a loveless marriage and the subversion of her identity.

Though the events which take place there in Part I of *Wide Sargasso Sea* align Coulibri as a placeholder for Thornfield Hall, the former is always depicted, by Antoinette, as a much more vividly alive place than the latter. In place of a properly planned English garden, Antoinette remembers Coulibri as “large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible- the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild” (Rhys 6). The implication of the formerly tame lapsed into wildness designates Coulibri as an unruly, female space, allowed to develop outside the rules of male-dominated society. Living there with only Christophine, her mother, and her younger brother, Antoinette’s childhood is similarly unstructured, a radically different environment from the one in which she ends her life, imprisoned at Thornfield.

The female space of Coulibri, before its renovation, bears a striking resemblance to the Manderley of the second Mrs. de Winter’s initial dream sequence in *Rebecca*, haunted by the title character’s dangerous sexuality. Rhys writes,

Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered— then not an inch of the tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The smell was very sweet and strong. I never went near it (Rhys 6).

Though the orchids at Coulibri are not quite the frightening hybrid plants in residence in the dream-vision of Manderley, they evoke a similar sexual energy. While the orchids perpetuate Rhys's theme of Jamaica as lushly female, the insidiously seductive snake imagery simultaneously reinforces Antoinette's characterization of Coulibri as an overgrown Garden of Eden. Antoinette emphasizes the overwhelming power of these physical attributes of her first home, and imbues her youthful impression of the place with a mysterious aura of darkly seductive femininity which, though not gothic, bears a distinct similarity to the intensely sensual descriptions of Manderley and Ferndean.

The female space of the house, fallen into disrepair before Annette's remarriage to Mason, is characterized as wet, uncared-for, and cash-poor. Devoid of male influence since the death of Antoinette's father, the house is a physical representation of Annette's liminal social position; she needs to catch a second husband in order to operate in Jamaican society. Antoinette overhears the local gossips say, "her new husband will have to spend a pretty penny before the house is fit to live in— leaks like a sieve" (Rhys 13), further evidence of the house as an untended, feminized space. After the changes, once Coulibri has been built back up to its former glory, Antoinette is hesitant to accept her updated home. She says, "Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn't feel the same" (Rhys 14). The bargain struck by Annette in marrying Mason is made manifest in the rehabilitation of Coulibri, but, like the recent marriage, the newly refurbished estate is threatened by underlying tensions. Later, after the fire destroys Coulibri, Antoinette awakens to find her "plait, tied with red ribbon...in the chest of drawers. I thought it was

a snake”, to which her Aunt Cora replies that her hair will grow back “longer and thicker”, but Antoinette dwells on the fact that it must also grow back darker (Rhys 24). The stylized evocation by the snaky braid of Antoinette’s shorn hair marks the fall of Coulibri as the Eden-like garden of childhood and innocence, signifying a true and final end to that chapter of her life, and opening another, promising darker, more adult themes.

While Jane only hears about the destruction of Thornfield second-hand, in both *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the female narrators are present to witness the destruction of their beloved homes, and, in the case of Antoinette, to later desecrate the home of her husband by fire, making good on her promise to even the score after his infidelity spoils Granbois for her. In keeping with Rhys’s rich, erotic depiction of Jamaica, even the razing of Coulibri becomes a beautiful act, though Antoinette’s account betrays her bitterness over the ruin of her once-happy home:

The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller’s Daughter. When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not be stolen or burned (Rhys 24).

Unsurprisingly, the arson committed at Coulibri is conflated with a rape, underscoring once again the inherent femininity of the space, and the depiction of blackened walls and remaining stones matches Jane’s account of the ruined Thornfield. Antoinette is not only describing the desecration of a beautiful home, though. She is marking the distinct and finite end of her childhood. By destroying the physical evidence of her lost youth and family, the fire marks a turning point for Antoinette, one against which she cannot help

but define herself as she undergoes the transition to womanhood in the convent.

Dreaming of a return to her childhood and to Jamaica, Antoinette seeks, in her final desperation, to recreate this all-important scene after dreaming once again of the wrecked Coulibri. She dreams,

[the sky] was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames...I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* And the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and streamed out like wings. It might bear me up if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated she laughed. (Rhys 123).

Her imagined reconciliation with Tia, and the violent nature of their reunion speaks volumes to Antoinette's conflicted image of herself as a woman on the margins of society, first negotiating the binaries of black/white and Jamaican/English, and later as the madwoman consigned to Thornfield's attic, compared to her remembered, youthful freedom. Her impossible attempt to fly, as did her pet bird, Coco, is equal parts escape and suicide. Finally, Antoinette is able to find solace in the death she has courted since adolescence, though her attempted flight is inevitably hampered by her lack of wings; unlike Jane Eyre, she is just as pinioned as Coco, and both have been captive too long to fly to safety.

The other key location in Antoinette's adolescence is the convent where she spent the years between her separation from her remaining family and her marriage to Rochester. Jane Eyre is also indelibly marked by her time at Lowood School, (it is where she learns the art of repressing her rage), but the two women's experiences could scarcely

be more opposite. While the fiery Jane resents the freezing hostility and unsympathetic rigidity of Lowood, dreaming from a young age of an escape into the real world, Antoinette passes these intermediate years reveling in the coolness of her unexpected sanctuary. “The convent was a place of refuge, a place of sunshine and death where very early in the morning the clap of a wooden signal woke the nine of us who slept in the long dormitory” (Rhys 31). Antoinette’s narration suggests that her fixation with death has been a constant since her last night at Coulibri. Bronfen notes the female author’s familiar association with death, writing “As women writers reflect upon the relationship between authorship and feminine death, (as this often translates into issues of feminine authorship and death), the crucial point is that femininity, which in its linkage to death marks uncanny difference within, has not been translated into canny Otherness” (Bronfen 395). This fatal, written female art form ties back into Bronfen’s earlier conflation of works of literature and female corpses. Notably, Lowood is, in spite of its female student body and faculty, a distinctly male-gendered sphere, under the direction of its tyrannical patron, Mr. Brocklehurst. Conversely, though she is placed in the convent by male authority figures, Antoinette makes no mention of any men, other than her stepfather and stepbrother, until her marriage.

If Coulibri parallels Thornfield, then Granbois is set up as the precursor to Ferndean. Rochester, from the start, dislikes Granbois: “Everything is too much...too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger” (Rhys 42). The feminized excess with which Rhys characterizes all of Jamaica (except the colonial English section) is

distasteful to Rochester, who longs for European tradition, and who hates the fate his father and brother supposedly foisted upon him. Despite the fact that Jamaica is by all accounts a paradise, Rochester never warms to it, rejecting the unfamiliar on principle despite the fact that he, over time, seems to become unwillingly fond of aspects of Jamaica, even of Antoinette (at least as an available sexual partner). But whenever this happens he checks himself with memories of England and notions of propriety. Associated as Rochester is with Satan and with Byron, the Jamaican “paradise” is not where he belongs. Cixous and Clément would denounce this reinforcement of social norms as one of the reasons madwomen are misunderstood: “If the good smell is diabolical the bad smell must be therapeutic, invested with values to be defended” (Cixous and Clément 37). Rochester projects a nuanced sense of peril onto his surroundings at Granbois, “There was a soft warm wind blowing but I understood why the porter had called it a wild place. Not only wild but menacing. Those hills could close in on you” (Rhys 42). The surrounding wilderness of Granbois is assigned characteristics of Antoinette’s own, as yet untapped, madness. Rochester, acting out of insecurity for his newly marginal position, moves to secure control of Antoinette before she can overwhelm him in the same way the island threatens to.

Wide Sargasso Sea’s Antoinette is the madwoman Brontë and du Maurier’s earlier works promised. In relaying her story openly, without the editorializing of Jane or the second Mrs. de Winter’s retrospective retellings, Antoinette offers a portrait of a likable and relatable “madwoman,” Cixous’s triumphantly laughing Medusa, to humanize the literary victims who came before, especially in *Jane Eyre*. In Rhys’s three-

dimensional rendering, Antoinette is a woman forced into an impossible situation, refusing to speak the language of her oppressors, unlike the capitulating Jane and the voluntarily liminal second Mrs. de Winter. Though Antoinette is ultimately imprisoned and renamed “Bertha” in the masculine-Gothic enclosure of Thornfield, she regains her agency at the novel’s end, enacting her dream to “return” to Coulibri, and, in doing so, exacting her promised revenge on her husband, aligning with the original plot of *Jane Eyre*, but with very different sentiment.

Conclusion

“I ran away and did not speak of it for I thought if I told no one it might not be true”
(Rhys 6).

How, then, if we accept Rhys’s Antoinette as the most truthful heroine across the three novels, can audiences continue to identify with Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter’s characters, in spite of their sometimes blatant deceptions? Though the publication and critical acclaim of *Wide Sargasso Sea* draw greater attention to the voiceless, ill-treated Bertha of *Jane Eyre*, the fact remains that Jane is the title character of that novel, and, as readers, we wish for her to succeed in marrying Rochester on her own terms. For that to happen, Bertha has to die, vacating the position of Mrs. Rochester. The second Mrs. de Winter is only elevated to the position of Maxim’s wife because the first Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca, has been murdered. Rebecca figures more prominently in the plot of du Maurier’s novel, and is, even in death, the most dynamic character at Manderley, but as readers hope to learn more information about the mysterious Rebecca, they must do so through the increasingly knowledgeable heroine, whose research further secures her position as Maxim’s wife. Antoinette, with no such agenda, transcends her predecessors, becoming a heroine in spite of the “madness” condemned in the earlier novels. These themes have been reflected differently over time, most obviously in the form of the books’ ever-changing cover art.

In the first chapter of *Over Her Dead Body*, Bronfen examines Gabriel von Max’s 1869 painting, “Der Anatom,” in a manner I believe to be applicable to the cover art of the novels I have discussed, at length, above. Drawing upon past themes of female death in artwork, Bronfen writes, “The pictorial representation of dead women became so

prevalent in eighteenth and nineteenth century European culture that by the middle of the latter century this topos was already dangerously hovering on the periphery of cliché” (Bronfen 3). As Bronfen proves throughout her study, this subject matter was equally popular in the literature of the period, and these overarching cultural attitudes toward dead women as “poetical” continue well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Bronfen goes on to argue that the proliferation of the female death trope is so prevalent as to render readers of literature and viewers of artwork relatively immune to this potent subject matter. She writes, “Like the purloined letter in Poe’s story, representations of feminine death work on the principle of being so evident, we are culturally blind to the ubiquity of representations of feminine death. Though in a plethora of representations of feminine death is perfectly visible we only see it with some difficulty” (Bronfen 3). It is this principle, of the unseen or even forgotten subject, (the madwoman), which I apply to the cover art of *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The “madwomen” in each of these novels, (though she is rarely pictured on the cover of *Jane Eyre* or *Rebecca*), remains a critical presence in many artistic representations, be this by power of artistic suggestion, or outright allusion, such as a shadow (Figure 2.1). Bronfen writes, “signification can be understood as implying an absent body or causing the signified body’s absence. The dead body of the text serves as a metaphor of the correlation between designation, as well as interpretation, and absence” (Bronfen 6). Bronfen also engages with artistic discussions of Freudian doubling, suggesting that like cover art, artwork not only tells a story, or a part of a story, but also engages with a dead (or mad) woman’s story and that story’s very being, which is, in this

rendering, an inherently retold narrative tinged by artistic or narrative opinion or bias, rather than an actual snapshot of an irrefutable event. She argues, “By implication the difference brought about by this doubling is such that the anticipated manuscript will both represent the dead woman in her absence and refer to its own status as representation” (Bronfen 8). Most important for Bronfen, however, is the dead woman’s critical presence in “Der Anatom,” as the reason the story is being told, as the problematically feminine centerpiece of the chosen moment. Would “Der Anatom” be a famous painting if the body on the table were male? To decide definitively is impossible, but much of the subtext with which Bronfen interacts would become moot without the young, beautiful, female body on von Max’s table. Bronfen writes, “In the midst of all these moments of indeterminacy...what remains persistently constant is that signification in all possible cases occurs over her dead body” (Bronfen 13). This same theory applies to the equally crucial characters of Bertha, Antoinette, and (most literally) Rebecca. None of the larger works are possible, or even particularly interesting, without the presence of the “madwoman,” upon whose bodies the plots are founded, and whose deaths keep the works’ plots in motion.

The enduring popularity of *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be measured, not only by sales of books and critical works written, but also, on the most seemingly superficial level, by the novels’ evolving cover art. Although literary cover art is largely influenced by market research and artistic trends of the precise moment that particular cover is published, the scenes selected, or not selected, by illustrator and

industry members, indicate shifting sensibilities over time, and the changing audiences of a perennial classic, such as *Jane Eyre*.

Though many *Jane Eyre* covers display the classic, often Spartan, image of the heroine (Figure 1.5), the depiction of action sequences from the novel, especially those involving the “madwoman,” generate exciting and interesting engagement with the text within, rather than the seemingly arbitrary portrait of a unknown, nineteenth-century woman. The examples highlighting Jane’s somber image, often found on student critical editions, nod to the novel’s theme of portraiture, and promote a more serious interpretation of the novel than do many of the more lurid trade editions. However correct these “serious” examples of cover art, they problematically ignore the Gothic ambiance of Brontë’s novel, circumventing what was likely the main draw for many Victorian readers.

Probably the second most popular theme in *Jane Eyre* cover art plays up just that atmosphere of the uncanny prevalent throughout the novel. Images of Thornfield as a hulking, Gothic mansion rendered in a dark color scheme are readily available, such as Ati Forberg’s 1962 illustration (Figure 1.2) of Jane’s flight from Thornfield. Although Bertha is not pictured, Rochester’s imprisonment of his first wife is the context for this scene of terror and escape which, with some minor modifications of costume and architecture would also be suitable artwork for *The Castle of Otranto*. In a more intimate image, (Figure 1.4), rendered in moody greens and yellows, an angry-looking man in nineteenth-century dress, (Mr. Rochester), stands dangerously close to a young woman, (Jane), his expression angry, and hers less easy to interpret. Whether this depiction of

Jane is intended to evoke her “grave” acceptance of Rochester’s first wife, or her complicity in narrating his character favorably within the novel is difficult to say, but the image is decidedly unsettling.

Even more interesting, however, are the more extreme examples of action and romance visible on less expensive editions of *Jane Eyre*. Hyperbolizing the Byronic passions of Rochester and Jane, a 1953 cover (Figure 1.3) depicts a passionate embrace between the lovers, before a backdrop of sensual drapery. Rochester’s unattractive visage is, notably, turned away in a measure of attempted accuracy to the novel, while Jane is made beautiful in an ecstatic passion, though dressed in the demure costume of the governess. The book’s tagline “The true story of a tortured love” plays on Jane’s autobiographical conceit, while alluding to the cause of the lovers “torture”: namely, the existence of Bertha to prevent their marriage.

By far the most interesting *Jane Eyre* cover art I have encountered in my research, however, is an Italian edition from 1967 (Figure 1.1), featuring Jane’s shocked face, lit by the flames of the burning Thornfield, from which Bertha, in silhouette, makes her suicide jump. Aside from the misleading nature of this illustration (Jane did not witness the burning of Thornfield or Bertha’s death), the depictions of the two women are also telling. Jane is shown with tightly bound hair and a high necked gown, while Bertha’s hair is loose and her body, in silhouette, is curvaceous and attractive, hardly the “beast” Jane can barely identify as female. Notably absent from this image is Rochester, reducing the story, for a viewer unacquainted with the plot, to the tale of two very different women.

Because *Rebecca* has been often reduced to a salacious rewrite of *Jane Eyre*, much of its cover artwork deals in garish colors and trite images of Gothic mansions, but these perceived “less serious” artistic interpretations actually offer as much or more information about the novel they advertise as do the critical editions of *Jane Eyre*. Because so much is made, in *Rebecca*, of the title character’s striking signature, it features heavily on many covers. On a 2010 publication (Figure 2.1), the “bold, slanting hand” is evoked in the font used for the title and author’s name, while in the background, the shadow of a female figure on a staircase is projected onto an elaborate oriental carpet. Whether this woman is the heroine, Mrs. Danvers, or the shadow of Rebecca herself is unclear, but a tone of fear and suspense has been set before the reader turns the first page.

A 1943 cover of *Rebecca* (Figure 2.3) features a corpse-like Mrs. Danvers, set against a sinister red and black backdrop, and dressed in the old-fashioned attire du Maurier describes. However, the silver-gray tones the figure wears paired with her frighteningly yellowed, inhuman skin also invoke the ghostly presence of Rebecca, while the heroine remains conspicuously absent, potentially lost in the shadowy background of Manderley.

In a 1975 cover calling the novel du Maurier’s “world-famous bestseller of love and suspense” (Figure 2.4), the heroine occupies the center of the image, but she is looking back at the cover’s focal point, the flaming estate of Manderley. As always, the second Mrs. de Winter is destabilized by Rebecca’s memory. The heroine appears to be surrounded by waist-high, leafy plants, alluding to her dream of Rebecca’s deviant Eden, while her backward glance and expression of longing imply her impossible desire to

return to Rebecca's domain, tempered by her knowledge that such a hope cannot be accomplished.

Maxim is featured with less frequency in *Rebecca's* cover art than is his parallel character in *Jane Eyre*, and I have encountered no examples in which he evinces the Byronic passion of Brontë's hero, or even embraces the heroine as Rochester does Jane in Figure 1.3. In a 1960 cover (Figure 2.2) from the same publisher of that overtly sexual *Jane Eyre* cover, *Rebecca* is rendered as a sort of "whodunit," in which three of the main characters are depicted. The heroine, portrayed as an anxious Grace Kelly type, is again shown looking back to a portrait of Rebecca, whose dark hair and gown, and forbidding expression seems to convey her uncontested dominion of Manderley and Maxim, who is problematically pictured between his two wives. The tagline reads, "A brilliant novel of an unforgettable wife," emphasizing Rebecca's continual haunting of the couple, even after their forced departure from Manderley.

This publisher rereleased *Rebecca* in 1964 (Figure 2.5) as a mass market paperback with a more literal cover than the Hitchcockian image of Figure 2.2. In contrast to the darkness and fear of the earlier cover, this scene is rendered against a white background, representative the heroine's purity, the moment before she descends the staircase in her costume, channeling du Maurier's interpretation of *Jane Eyre's* failed wedding scene. At the bottom of the stairs, Maxim waits, blurred but immediately identifiable, proof of the heroine's incipient failure at the party, as the memory of Rebecca, not pictured, comes between them yet again.

This ominous bridal imagery also bleeds into the artwork for *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Figure 3.4). Set against a dark backdrop, Antoinette is veiled and dressed for her wedding to Rochester. More beautiful than either of the previous heroines, Antoinette's curly hairstyle, lacking the severity of Jane's traditional portraiture, might also allude to her racial ambiguity, as a member of Jamaican colonial society. This edition is given the tagline "The extraordinary story of the first Mrs. Rochester, the mad wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," immediately establishing Antoinette as the future Bertha Rochester, and predisposing Rhys's audience to read the story's outcome as a foregone conclusion.

The first edition cover of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Figure 3.1) capitalizes on the novel's tropical setting, with a picture of the Antoinette amongst her beloved flora and fauna featured on the front cover. The dust jacket's other side, however, reveals Granbois, much as many *Jane Eyre* illustrators have utilized Thornfield, and Rochester, whose dark wardrobe mars the otherwise colorful scenery. His location between Antoinette and her home clearly foreshadows his later removal of his wife to England, to Thornfield. A 1997 edition (Figure 3.2) takes the emphasis of the lush paradise imagery a step further, excluding all of the novel's characters, and with the only proof of human presence being the home in the cover's background. It is unclear, however, whether this pictured dwelling is Coulibri or Granbois.

Easily the most shocking of any cover art I uncovered features elements of Gothic scenery, a ghoulish Antoinette, and a perplexing tagline (Figure 3.3). The slogan, "A novel of unforgettable romance and terror. 'A triumph...a Caribbean Gothic'" seems like false advertising, especially when paired with the image of a ghostly woman wrapped in

a sheet, wandering a darkly tropical area, while a burned structure (Coulibri) looms in the distance. While this sinister image might well have moved copies of Rhys's novel, the image must be of Antoinette's final dream of returning to Coulibri; a darker interpretation of the novel's contents than any other I have encountered.

Of the *Wide Sargasso Sea* cover art, a 1992 reprint (Figure 3.5) best represents, I think, the novel within. Not dressed up with the shocking flash and sexuality of Figure 3.3, this version shows Antoinette, lying on her side (is she sleeping? Is the artist attempting to evoke her unique point of view?) in a field of tropical flowers, her hair unbound and her dress loose, as it would have been in her happy childhood. Her expression is tranquil, while in the background a house burns, though whether that home is Coulibri or Thornfield is unknown.

Though there are many more interesting examples of cover art, exposing different literary and popular interpretations of these interconnected novels, the books remain a presence in popular culture as well, in the form of film adaptations, television miniseries, musicals, and operas. As students and pleasure readers alike return to the nineteenth-century romance of *Jane Eyre*, most individuals rely on Jane's truthful narrative to relay her modified fairy tale and unlikely success in Victorian society. Changing attitudes about female insanity, and increased attention to disability studies make Jane's treatment of Bertha problematic for a growing number of readers, as evidenced by the enduring popularity of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Similar progressive changes effect readings of *Rebecca*, whose main character, though murdered and supposedly a "freak" by reason of her promiscuity and dangerous femininity, is depicted, by the judgmental heroine, as a

monster. In spite of the second Mrs. de Winter's maligning, Rebecca remains the most dynamic character at Manderley, and, unlike Bertha after the burning of Thornfield, Rebecca's memory haunts Maxim and the heroine even ten years after the destruction of Rebecca's "female" domain.

By working with a hated character from a much-loved novel, Rhys writes a laughing madwoman whose rejection of middle-class morality and social pressures (both of which heavily influence the narrations of Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter), paired with a pervading transparency of storytelling, rendering Antoinette the greatest heroine of these three novels, the heroine Cixous demands in "The Laugh of the Medusa." Though Jane returns to Rochester financially independent and of her own free will, in marrying him she bows to Victorian social convention, and her "autobiography" is duly edited for her own benefit. While madwomen are restricted to the margins of society, Jane and the second Mrs. de Winter are also liminal, unstable characters, facts they unwittingly reveal in their threshold slips in sanity. Antoinette's unconcern with propriety and convention keep her from experiencing this phenomenon: she is the "madwoman," but of her own choosing.

Jane's eventual name change (to Mrs. Rochester) and the second Mrs. de Winter's assumed identity as Maxim's wife keep them safely in the shadows so long as they follow the social rules required of the Gothic wife. In doing so, they sacrifice their narrative reliability. Antoinette refuses the identity of "Bertha Rochester," and, even in her otherness and her eventual violence, hers is the most legitimate and honest portrayal of the female experience. The transition from Bertha, to Rebecca, and, finally, to the

“successful” madwoman, Antoinette, took more than a century, but Rhys’s novel propelled *Jane Eyre* into the twentieth century, vindicating a character long voiceless, and creating a fantastic novel, in the process.

Images



Figure 1.1

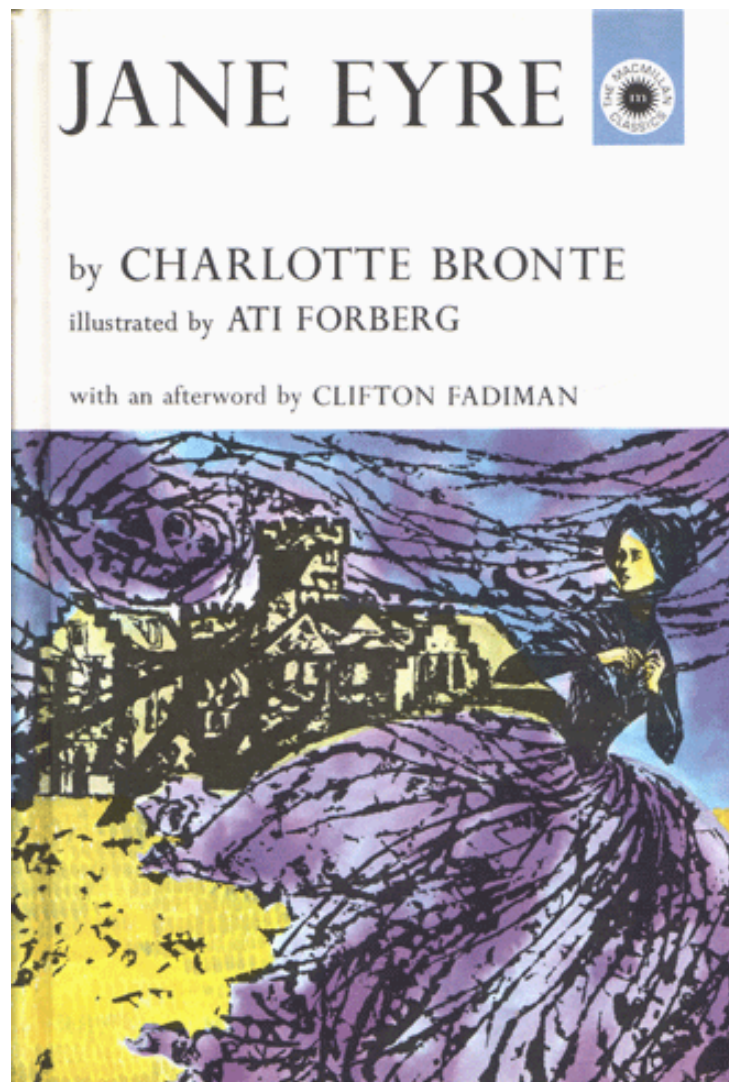


Figure 1.2

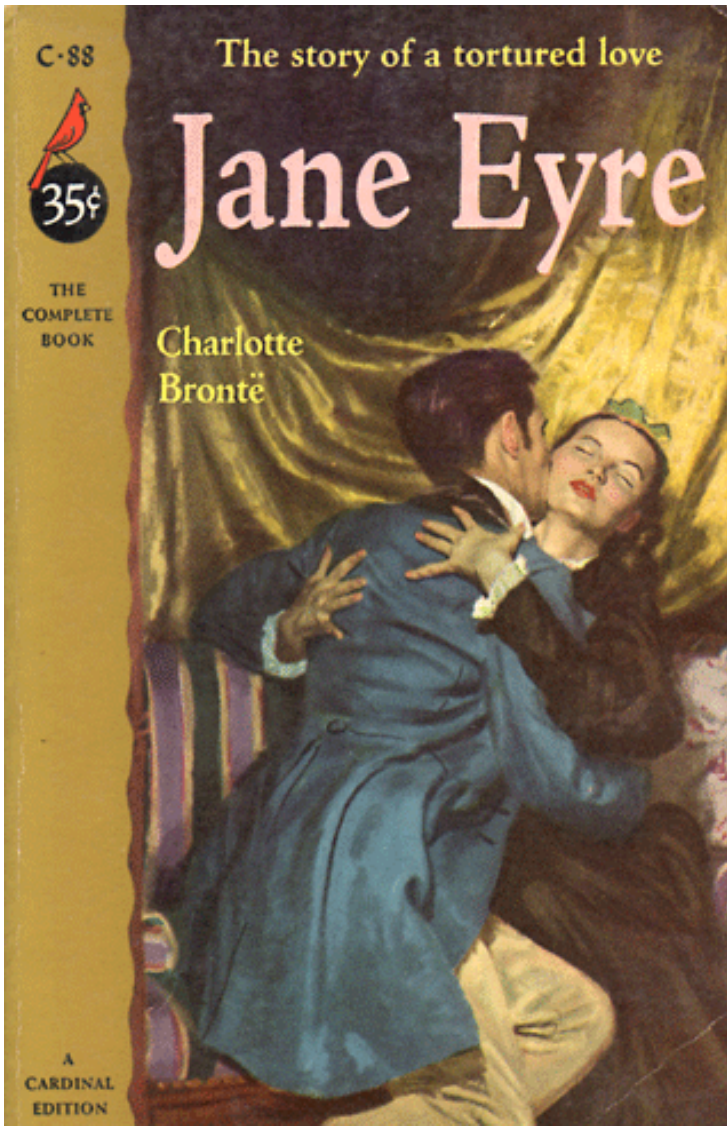


Figure 1.3

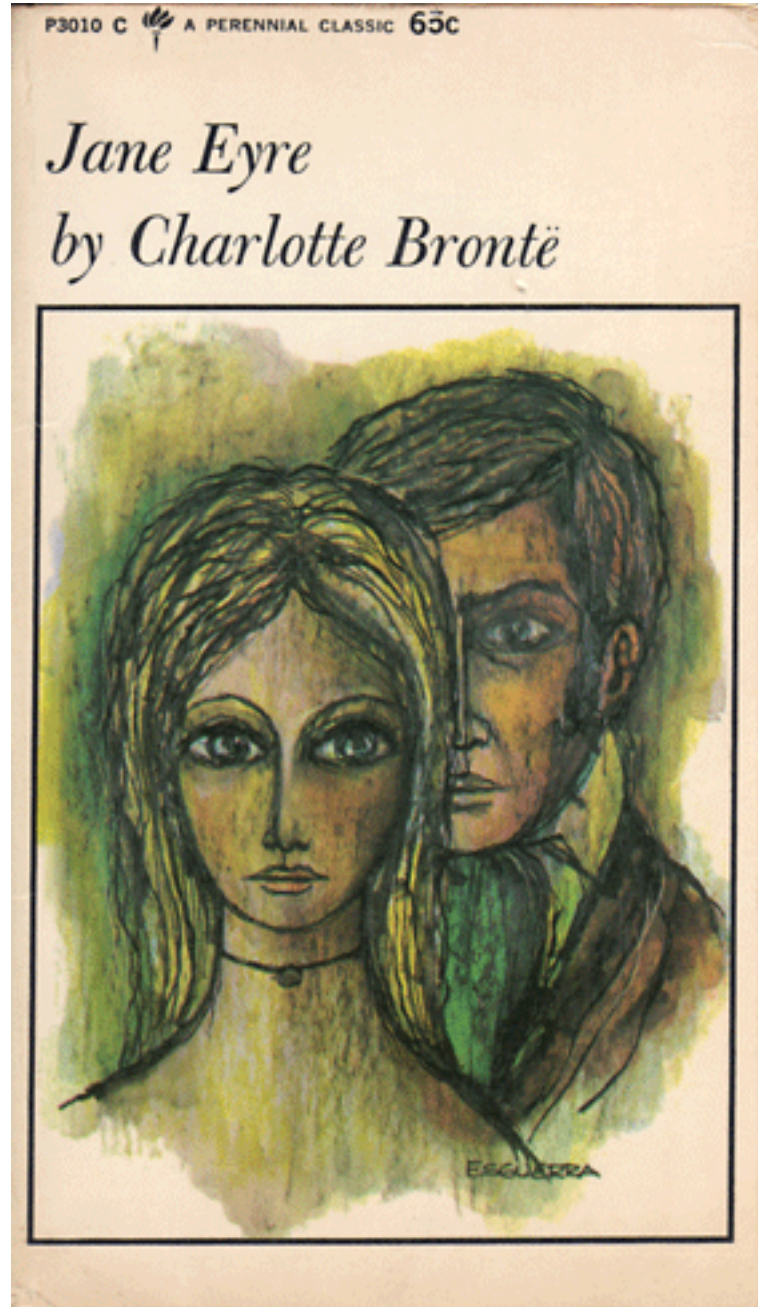


Figure 1.4

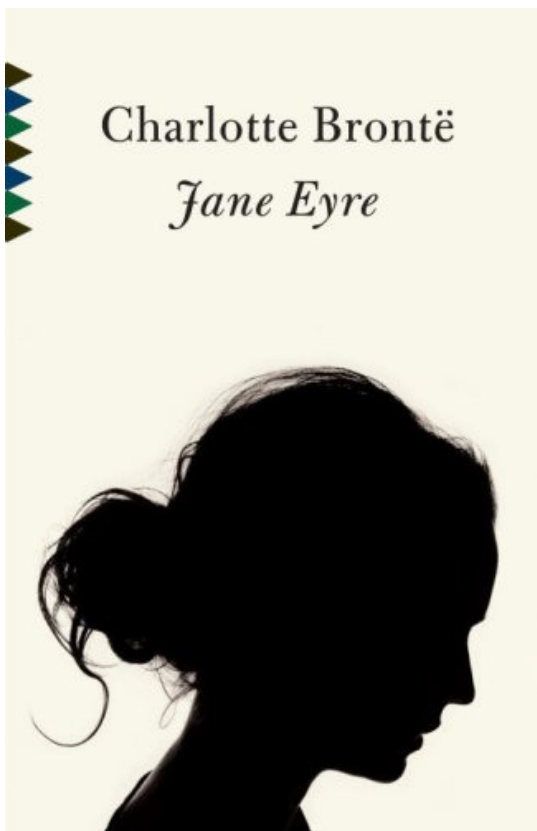


Figure 1.5

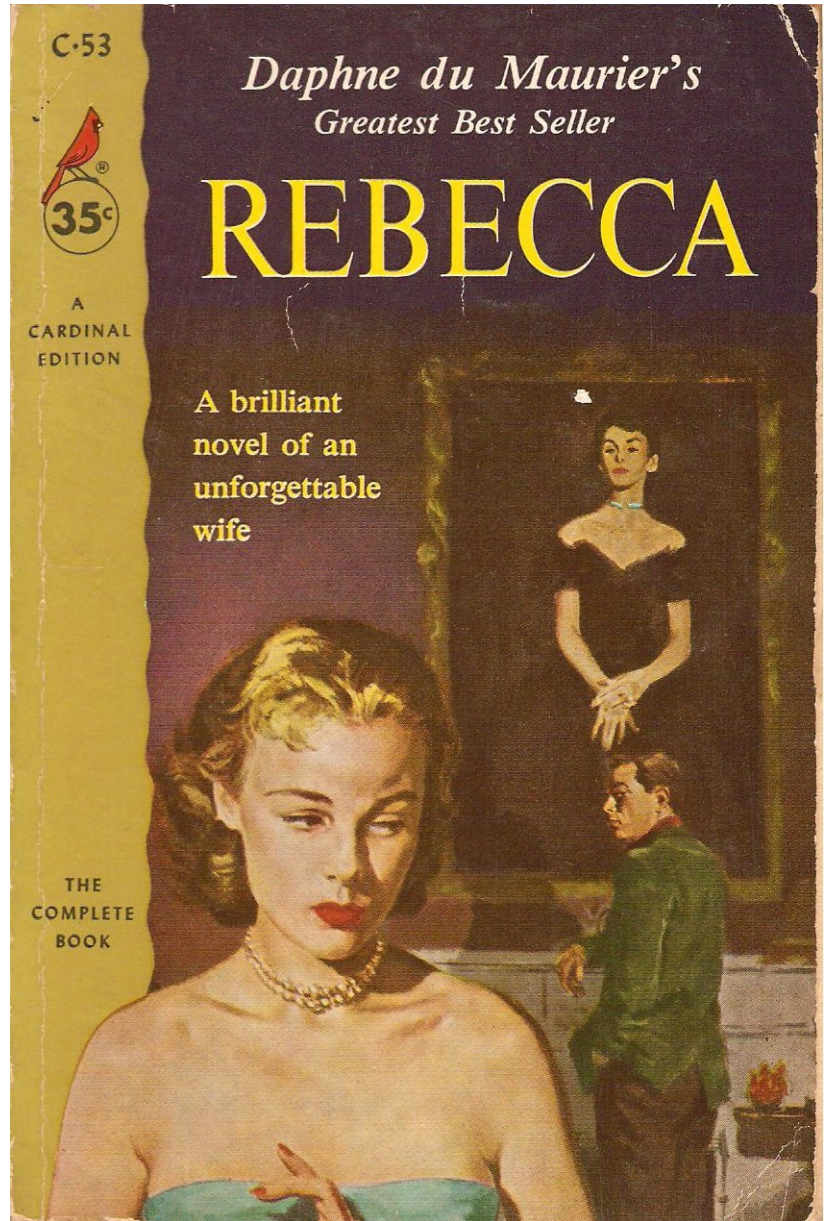


Figure 2.2

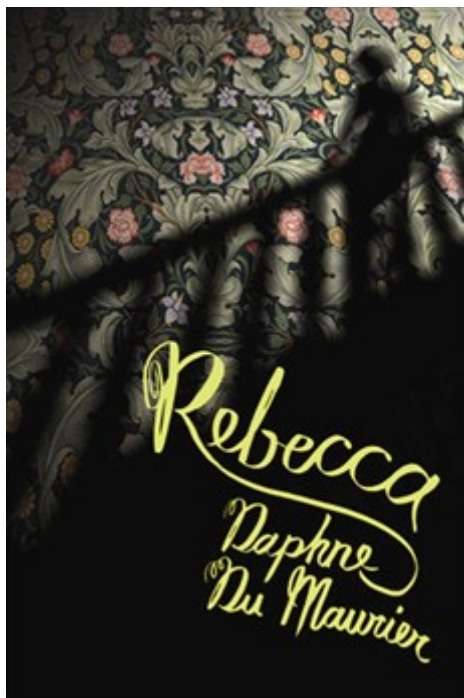


Figure 2.1



Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4

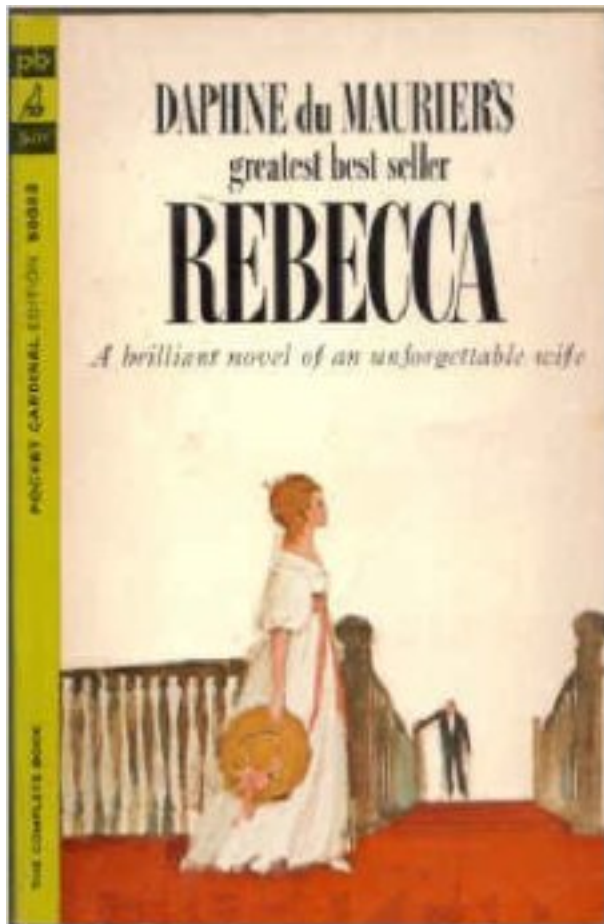


Figure 2.5

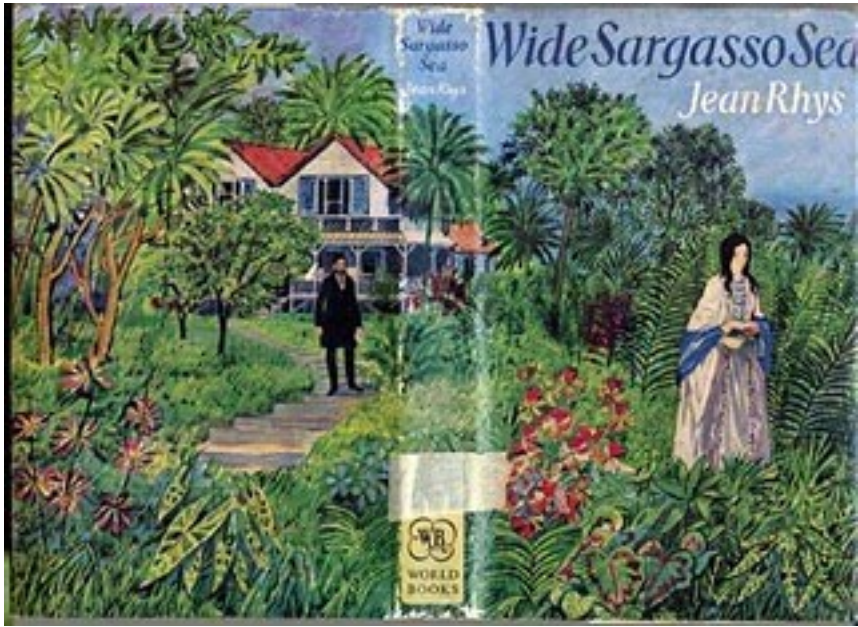


Figure 3.1

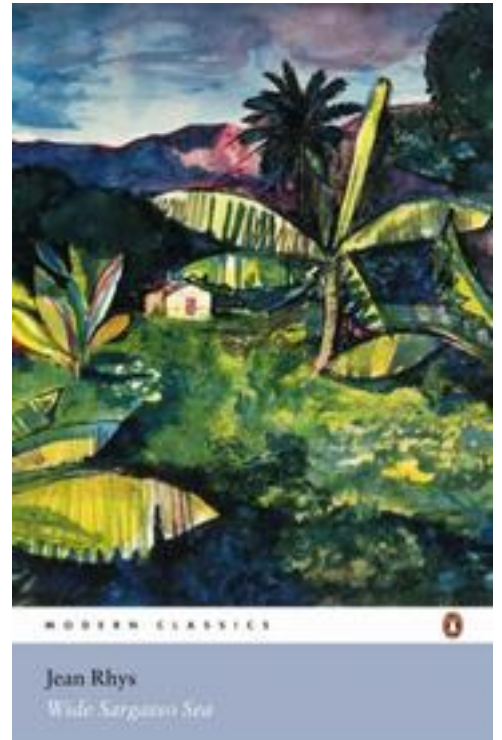


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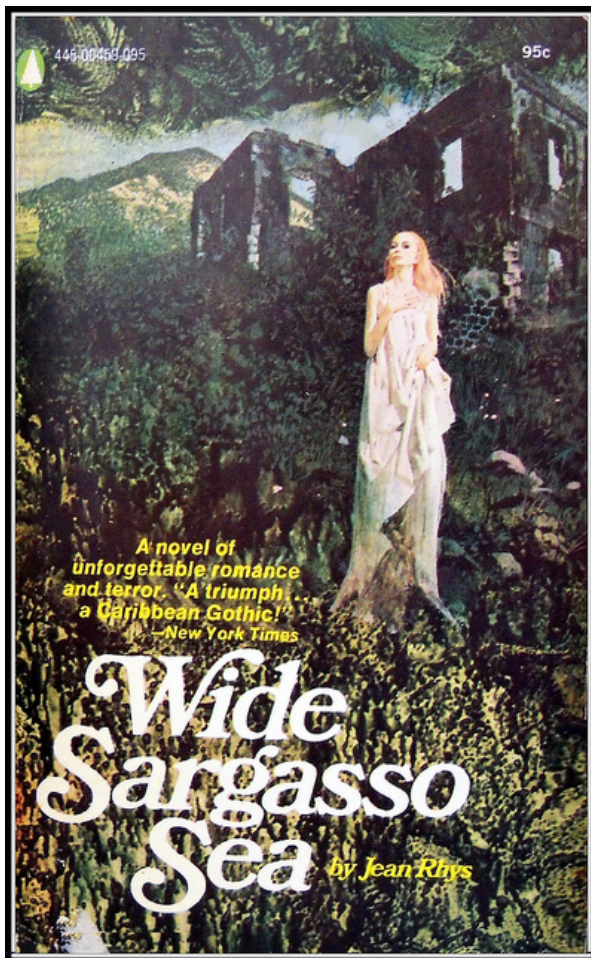


Figure 3.3

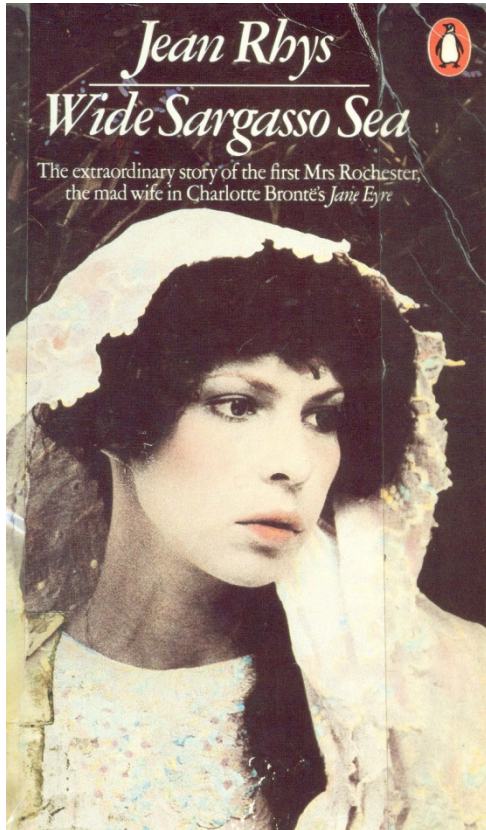


Figure 3.4

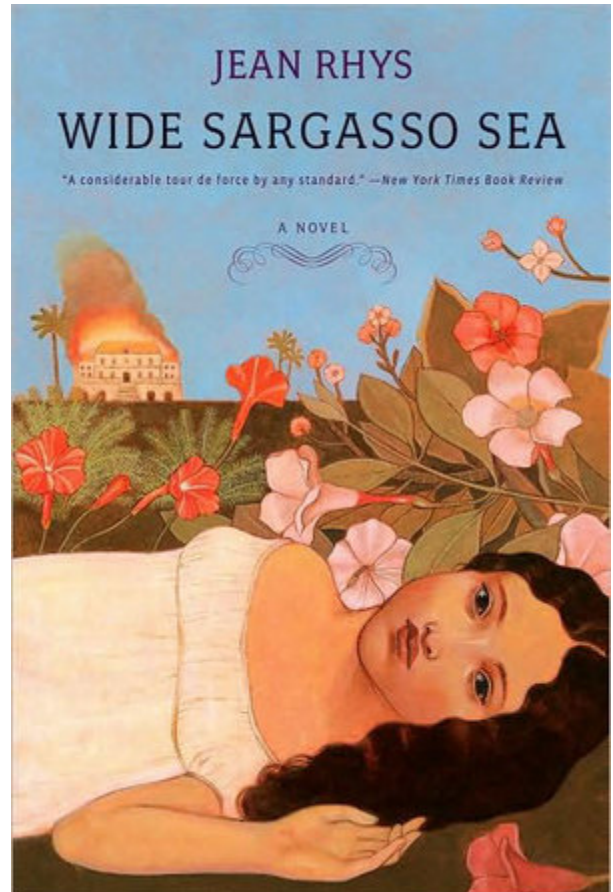


Figure 3.5

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