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"I'm Just a Girl": Madness, Male Domination, and Female Imprisonment in Jane Eyre, "The Yellow Wallpaper", Wide Sargasso Sea, and Faces in the Water

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Errata

page number: line number

1: 16 citation should read (Smith-Rosenburg, Disorderly Conduct 197)

4: 6 insert citation (Bordo 75)

4: 8 "Wood" should read "Douglas Wood"

5 footnote should be deleted

14: 12 citation for Smith-Rosenburg should read (Disorderly Conduct 655)

22:23 Should read: A monster or madwoman was not allowed an identity of her own; she functioned merely as a symbol.

23: 3 Should read: Fearing its discovery, the patriarchy guards the secret lest other women be encouraged also to show their anger and rebellion.

28: 11 "Fetterly" should be "Fetterley".

47: 15 "Child" should be "childhood".

51 the footnote should be on the previous page.

52: 13 citation for Smith-Rosenburg should read (Disorderly Conduct 656)

75: 3 citation should read (Smith-Rosenburg, Disorderly Conduct 675)

82: 17 citation for Smith-Rosenburg should read (Disorderly Conduct 677)

83: 17 Should read: If, she implies, the time were taken to actually assess the patients, problems could be solved instead of the patients tortured.

ABSTRACT

Female madness is not always caused by the domination of women. In the texts Jane Eyre, "The Yellow Wallpaper", Wide Sargasso Sea, and Faces in the Water, however, male domination, and female imprisonment do have a relationship to madness. Medical discourse rose to a position of great power in the nineteenth century, as science and reason really began to take over. Suddenly there was a scientific and biological theory behind female inferiority, greatly influencing doctors' perspective of their female patients, and contributing to the enforcement of traditionally female roles. Whilst madness is a real and greatly misunderstood illness, these four texts illustrate that the internalisation and socialisation of medical discourse locked women into roles that, it was believed, they were not capable of escaping.

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INTRODUCTION

Part of natural human growth is the need for us to define ourselves. It is necessary for us, as humans, to know how and why we fit into this world. For many women, however, this is difficult if not impossible, because of the biases and restrictions operating against them in society. Self-definition and autonomy are permitted to most men, but women find it a struggle to realise and recognise themselves as independent individuals. Whilst it would be easy to say that times have changed and women are less subject to domination and therefore have greater opportunities for growth, there are still obstacles to women's development. The socialisation of women into subordinate positions is ingrained in our language, in our attitudes, and in our lifestyles. Part of the reason for this is that women have been excluded from, or at least not encouraged to participate in the discourses of knowledge, in particular those of science, technology, and reason. Consequently, women continue to be theorised into positions of inferiority in successive disciplines which have dominated the West.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as faith in science increased, the position of power changed from religion to science, and science became responsible for justifying women's inferior social position (Smith-Rosenberg 197). The sexist nature of scientific knowledge is reflected in the field of medicine, as researchers into medicine and sexual politics, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, explain. They comment that,

> The medical system is not just a service industry. It is a powerful instrument of social control, replacing organized religion as a prime source of sexist ideology and an enforcer of sex roles. Certainly it is not the *only* haven of institutional sexism in our society....But it has the unique authority to judge who is sick and who is well, who is fit and who is unfit. (87)

Science appeared to hold more authority than religion, as medical judgements also came with the possibility of a physical rather than moral cure. Women went straight to the

doctor with the belief that science could solve all their problems. Doctors encouraged this belief, not only because it was great for business, but because they truly believed that most of women's problems stemmed from a fault with their bodies. The *medical* definition of middle to upper-class women as sick (and of poor women as robust) served to lock women in their social spheres and domestic duties more rigidly than perhaps any other patriarchal institution (Ehrenreich and English 42). After all, how many people would argue with their doctor? The doctor's definition is more than legitimate; it is gospel. From the nineteenth century on – the focus of this thesis – women's roles were set in concrete by a sphere they were forbidden to enter. The domination of women by men now had its basis in science – something that appeared beyond argument.

Patriarchal domination underlies all of society's institutions. And within this thesis, it is seen to have a direct link to the mad characters in the four texts. Madness is not always directly caused by oppression, but often the oppression of women is endemic to systems and ingrained into our society. Whether we like it or not, the discourse that surrounds us is distinctly male – especially the discourse dealing with science. There may be a number of reasons women become mad, but the only way they can be diagnosed and cured is through medical treatment. Men have control of this treatment. It is men who have the power to define women as sick or as healthy, and they use methods that have been developed by other men. Even female doctors must use methods designed and invented by men. It is no wonder women have trouble finding out who they are; they do not know how to.

For the purpose of this thesis the several different categories of madness – because there are several – will not be relevant. What is relevant is how the texts consistently display the domination of women by men. It is implied that this

domination often leads to madness – not a clinical definition of madness, because one is never given, but a male's definition of madness. In these four texts the definition of what makes a mad woman differs only slightly. For the most part, when the women start to deviate from what a proper woman should be, and begin to exhibit masculine or odd behaviour, more often than not, the label of madness follows. This is not to say that men make women mad, or that the patriarchy always drives women to madness, but that the socialisation of women and their roles is defined by men for the benefit of men. For women who are not content to be dominated, their struggle for identity is difficult and lonely. Both men and women are taught what is acceptable behaviour. However, only men enjoy the relative freedom of the privileged.

More often than not, women have been ornamental creatures. Especially in the nineteenth century they were not expected to think for themselves or display any amount of intelligence, as a wife's ignorance was a sign of a husband's affluence, and as women were not actually thought to be capable of intelligence (Ehrenreich and English 10). Consequently, they were forbidden or discouraged from higher education. It was not thought natural for them to pursue a career in science or medicine because doctors believed that a woman was ruled by her womb. Her womb would actually shrink or cease to function because the brain could not support both intellectual pursuits and natural growth. Haller and Haller in The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America comment that doctors'

> usual remarks...were that such a step [towards intellectuality] was impossible, that women could not equal the brain work of men, and that further, in those cases where women were not yet married, they would 'probably be deprived of a happy marriage' through a weakened mental and physical constitution. (35)

Women could not enter medicine because their health and happiness depended on staying ignorant and trusting men. Therefore, for a very long time, male doctors

decided what was wrong with women. Women were denied the right to define their own bodies. They were kept in the dark and so could not argue (Haller and Haller 111). For the most part doctors wanted women to be ignorant because the female body was a mystery. Susan Bordo comments that the doctors' lack of knowledge of female anatomy was interpreted by them as a sign of their weakness, which returned power to women by default.

Rather than admit to a lack of knowledge, many doctors chose guesswork, as Wood says of American doctors:

> Before the Civil War the American doctor was quite simply ignorant, and even his post-Civil War successor did not receive the training expected of a doctor today. Few medical schools before 1860 required more than two years of attendance....Lectures on 'midwifery' and the sexual organs...usually provided a professor more opportunity for dirty jokes than for the dissemination of knowledge. (32)

The results of this ignorance appear amusing, but often had disastrous consequences for women. Doctors decided that whatever was wrong with a female patient was directly related to her womb. Having a womb was an illness in itself (Ehrenreich and English 9), as doctors believed it would wander around the body infecting other organs. The view men had of women, and women came to have of themselves, was that they were sick and sick because they were women.

The doctors were therefore able to define 'proper' female roles, and had the power to regulate society (Ussher 12[1]). Middle to upper-class women were told they were frail and were to spend most of their time resting, or only taking part in light activities. Therefore the wealthier women were restricted to the home, often causing boredom and frustration. In the name of ill-health and proper behaviour, women could not do anything for themselves. It is this mind-numbing inactivity that led many

women to depression, hysteria, and madness. This idea is apparent in "The Yellow Wallpaper," and implied in Jane Eyre. For others it was the sense of alienness. Women did not know their bodies, and their behaviour was controlled by male institutions. Wide Sargasso Sea illustrates this alienness through the total lack of understanding between Antoinette and her husband. Faces in the Water, the only twentieth century situation, further displays isolation by highlighting the importance of conformity. The pressure to be what they were not caused women to become confused and angry – not suitable behaviour for ladies.

Madness by itself is not the topic of this thesis, although it will be discussed in some length. The most important aspect is the underlying theme of patriarchal domination. Whether it is obvious or not, women are controlled by men. This domination is internalised by both men and women, benefiting men but harming women. Women have not been taught to grab power and become independent. Their 'natures' are submissive. What this thesis deals with is the presentation of these ideas by four different women writers. Over time the message becomes stronger and stronger. Women are not necessarily ill, but they are largely ignorant of how their lives have been shaped, customised, to fit the needs of patriarchal society. Jane Eyre, "The Yellow Wallpaper," Wide Sargasso Sea, and Faces in the Water are expressions of how women are trapped and rendered helpless because they have not been taught to be themselves.

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[1] Jane Ussher is the author of Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness.

"Take this pink ribbon from my eyes": Bertha, Madness, and the Exposure of Male Domination

Jane Eyre is one of the most well-known love stories. But apparent within it is the strict socialisation of women's roles. The domination of Rochester, the arrogance of John Reed, and the religious obsession of St John Rivers, are as equally disruptive as the madness of Bertha Mason. Bronte's purpose was to highlight the injustices women face within society. Bertha, however, appears as a replica of the male discourse surrounding madness, hideous and misunderstood. To Bronte, Bertha's significance lies not with her madness, but with her presence. Bertha serves as a warning to Jane that she must retain her independence in order to escape male domination, which at the sacrifice of Bertha, she does.

Jane's Engulfment

Jane's first encounter with Thornfield's mystery is laughter coming from an attic room. The laughter, described as mirthless but not mad (126), is explained to Jane as belonging to Grace Poole. Whilst Rochester is unable to control or prevent Bertha's laughter (Beattie 499), he is able to control Jane's knowledge of it. Rochester takes control of his future by controlling Jane's knowledge. Afraid what reaction the truth would bring, he chooses to lie. His activity is somewhat justified by society, as explained by Ussher,

> The construction of masculinity in our society allows for, even encourages, the subjugation of women and the perversion of desire into oppression and pain, all in the name of male pleasure. (33)

The truth will destroy Rochester's chances with Jane, so, at the risk of causing her great pain, he lies, all in the name of his love for her.

Bertha's laughter is significant, though, as it highlights Jane's naivety. Jane, having been forced into early independence, believes women should have the same opportunities as men to fulfil their hopes and dreams. She believes that women should extend themselves further than the home and domesticity:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel...it is narrow minded...to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings. (129)

But Jane goes on to reveal that when "thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha! which when first heard, had thrilled me" (129). Karen Stein believes Bertha's laughter highlights the impossibility of women extending accepted social boundaries, and that Jane's ideals are just dreams. She explains,

> Because Bertha is a symbol of the way in which male definition and control limit women's sphere of activity, her laughter mocks Jane's aspirations. Locked up by her husband in an attic for her 'excesses' of passion, Bertha is quite literally trapped. (Stein 128)

All women are trapped within roles determined by patriarchal society. Also, it was a common belief women were not capable of extending themselves further than their natural duties (Ussher 66). Haller and Haller comment that in the nineteenth century women "personified an ideal and the 'new woman' was sacrificed to that ideal: she was mad to perpetuate the myth outside the home. Her position in the community could only mirror that of her domestic life-style" (39). Jane may wish for women to have freedom, but the only avenues open were as debilitating as domesticity – just as her own position proves.

Although ultimately escaping incarceration, whilst she is at Thornfield Jane's Self suffers Rochester's domination and engulfment. Although she comments she does not accept his superiority merely because he is older and more experienced, it is quite clear that her love for him renders her totally submissive: "I was growing very lenient to

my master: I was forgetting all his faults....The sarcasm that had repelled, the harshness that had startled me once, were only like keen condiments in a choice dish" (208). Jane begins to see Rochester as much more than just her employer, she begins to worship him. Indeed, as Farkas comments, Jane's definition of him gets consistently more agreeable: "[T]hroughout her stay at Thornfield, Jane's vision becomes increasingly dazzled by Rochester, so that her interpretation of what she sees – and thus, of what she feels and knows – is biased, and easily manipulated" (62). However, she can show no anger at his manipulation of her, because she does not believe she is being manipulated.

During her time at Thornfield, Rochester constructs Jane in his image of her. She is never truly herself, but merely his interpretation of her. But even before they meet he has a preconceived version of her in his mind. Knowing that a governess is arriving, he prepares educational and private material for her from the library. However, he leaves only a few books available, believing that the meagre supply would surely be sufficient for her kind, as Jane notices:

> Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one bookcase left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works....I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal. (122)

It may seem insignificant, but as Farkas observes, this is just another instance of Rochester claiming intellectual superiority:

> Before he has even met Jane, his influence, his power to control knowledge within the boundaries of Thornfield is felt....Rochester's thoughtful selection of books for the governess may have been well-intentioned, but nevertheless this indirect limitation of intellectual resources presages his later attempts to manipulate Jane's understanding of his secrets, their relationship, and her identity. (55)

Rochester's attitude does prevail and he characterises Jane as a young, inexperienced, obedient woman, who is fairly clever and bold, but is suitably mild and subservient. To him, she cannot be anything more.

Unlike Bertha, Jane is willingly silent. This is one reason why Jane is so pleasing to Rochester – she obeys without question and can easily be silenced. When she saves Rochester from the fire, he insists that she not bother the rest of the staff with the incident, and Jane immediately agrees. Freeman observes that by agreeing to be silent Jane unknowingly assists him in his efforts to hide Bertha's existence. Indeed, Rochester is extremely pleased with her as "Jane is most acceptable to him when she holds her tongue," and obeys without question (Freeman 694). So, when Mason is attacked, he employs her to nurse him whilst Rochester summons the doctor. But he must ensure that his lies are not revealed, and insists Mason and Jane do not speak: "'I shall leave you in this room with this gentleman....You will not speak to him on any pretext'....[B]ut I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me" (230-31). He leaves Jane frightened, in the room next-door to a violent, murderous creature, without any explanation.

Both the fire and the attack on Mason reveal Rochester has little respect for Jane as a person. He would rather lie to protect his interests and preserve his image than spare a thought for Jane's safety. This is most apparent when Jane comes face to face with Bertha. Jane describes the event in great detail to Rochester, who shows apparent concern, but still refuses to tell her the truth. Despite the fact that she was lucid and sure of every detail, "when Jane finishes her story about the veil, Rochester deliberately misinterprets it for her, and Jane...accepts his interpretation" (Peters 228). Rochester tells her she was suffering from nerves and imagined the monster. He suggests that the monster was a mixture of wedding nerves and Grace Poole:

> 'Now Janet, I'll explain to you all about it. It was half dream, half reality: a woman did, I doubt not, enter your room: and that woman was – must have been – Grace Poole....In a state between sleeping and waking, you noticed her entrance and her actions; but feverish, almost delirious as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance different from her own.' (309)

By purposely taking away her reality, Rochester silences Jane. He presumes to tell her what really happened, nullifying Jane's version of events, and hiding behind the premise that he has her best interests at heart (Farkas 64).

Rochester's image of Jane as his creation becomes conspicuous during the pre-wedding shopping trip. In the carriage he showers her with compliments, likening her to a fairy and to various other images of beauty (291). Despite her increasing impatience, he is unwilling to stop and Jane is powerless to prevent him. Rochester continues to humiliate her by purchasing expensive and elaborate material for her clothes. Jane finds the situation demeaning as she has no wish to be flaunted like a trophy and she becomes increasingly aware of their economic inequality: "Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jeweller's shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (291-92). She objects, protesting that lavish clothing is not a part of her character, and she will not pretend to be something she is not. However, Rochester mistakes her objections for modesty and continues to mould Jane into his own image of her.

Constantly concerned with the truth, Jane views Rochester's attention as false. She is not a rich, beautiful, upper-class woman interested only in appearance, yet Rochester behaves as if she were. Jane resents his compliments because they have no foundation in fact – she believes he is lying to her. And, in addition, his change in conduct towards her is confusing. Homans comments that suddenly Jane is treated like one of his greatest possessions, and she is frightened: "Jane fears that Rochester views her as a feminine object when he wants to dress her in jewels and silks that correspond not to her individual character but to his abstract idea of Mrs. Edward Fairfax Rochester" (278). Having won her heart, Rochester believes he can control her mind, trying to complete his image of her by ensuring she reflects his ideals through fine

clothing, elaborate jewellery, and through the qualities of cleverness, independence, and subservience. It is clear that whatever love he has for her, Rochester puts it aside in favour of possessing and controlling Jane's heart, mind, and body.

Rochester treats her this way because he has already defined her double. Bertha Mason is, to him, the incarnation of evil. Therefore, because Jane appears to be Bertha's opposite, she must be his perfect match. And so, it does not matter what Jane actually is, because Rochester can only see his image of her. The two women become part of the traditional male dichotomy that has "split the concept of Woman into pairs of stereotyped antithesis: saint/sinner, virgin/whore, nurturing mother/devouring stepmother, and angel/witch. Objectifying women and casting them as praiseworthy or blameworthy types diminishes the threatening power which women hold for men. Significantly, the women who have been most acceptable to patriarchal culture are those who have been powerless" (Stein 128). By defining Jane as 'good' and Bertha as 'bad,' Rochester diminishes both of their power as human beings. His justification for his actions illustrates this objectification: "`This young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell…I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout…look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk'" (318). Bertha's "bulk" represents the misery in his life, and Jane's "form" the opportunity for redemption. Both women have been engulfed by Rochester's representation of them.

And Jane, despite her anger during the shopping trip, does not realise the extent of Rochester's control. Until the wedding gets closer, Jane believes she is content, worshipping Rochester: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world….He stood between me and every thought of religion….I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol" (298). However, at the

announcement of her wedding, Jane expresses fear at the thought of becoming a different person (Mrs Jane Rochester): "The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy – something that smote and stunned: it was, I think, fear" (281). This is further enforced at the eve of her wedding as her trunks are all labelled with her future name, the name of the person that is to displace Jane Eyre: "Mrs Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till tomorrow...and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive, before I assigned to her all that property" (298). Homans observes that Jane slowly realises that in becoming Mrs Rochester she would completely lose her identity: "As Mrs Rochester's clothes 'displace' Jane's, so does Jane fear that her desire to love and be the object of love will entirely displace her equally strong wish to maintain her independence" (Homans 264). If it were not for Bertha's timely appearance, Jane would have remained Rochester's creation.

Jane's Madness: Gateshead, Lowood, and Moor House

Rochester attempted to shape Jane as patriarchal institutions shape and define women, making them creations of men. This is represented in the novel through Jane's encounters with different institutions. The repressive forces Jane faces spark outbursts of rage and indignation from her. But, although she exhibits behaviour similar to Bertha (Hill Rigney 30), Jane transforms her rage into positive results. Jane, through her independent nature and self-determination, emphasises the oppression inherent within patriarchal institutions.

Jane first experiences oppression in her Aunt's home, where the adult male and male child within the family are favoured. Jane's Aunt only accommodates the poverty-stricken child because it was her husband's wish. Mrs Reed therefore aims to isolate

Jane rather than integrate her into their social group. Jane comments, "[Mrs Reed] had drawn a more marked line of separation than ever between me and her children; appointing me a small closet to sleep in by myself, condemning me to take my meals alone, and pass all my time in the nursery, while my cousins were constantly in the drawing room" (43). The Reeds represent compliance with patriarchal society, and Jane is isolated because she is a threat to John Reed - the male authority figure in a household of females. Jane is offensive to the Reeds, not only because she is poor and dependent, but because she refuses to be controlled by an oppressor. Peters comments that, as such, Jane represents an abnormality in their lives, which is highlighted so Jane's isolation can be justified: "By transforming Jane into the other – an animal, creature, or non-entity – her aunt avoids the guilt of crimes against her…social group" (Peters 61). But, as heroine, rather than become mad like Bertha, Jane becomes self-reliant and independent.

In disregard to all restrictions placed on women by the patriarchy, Jane becomes angry and retaliates when John Reed knocks her down. She not only insults him, but also physically defends herself. As John is the dominating figure in the house, Jane's retaliation is a direct undermining of his power. According to patriarchal law John has every right to treat Jane as he wishes. And Jane has no right to question his authority – but she does: "'Wicked and cruel boy!' I said. 'You are like a murderer – you are like a slave driver – you are like the Roman emperors'" (27). In a patriarchal society, however, male definition determines female existence, and this scene "lays the groundwork for a pervading subtheme in Bronte's novel: the victimization of women by men, condoned by the system" (Tyson 97). When Jane defies John's authority, he is able to define her actions as "mad" and demand she be punished (28). She may have displayed rebellion, but because of John's demand, she is punished, as, ultimately, all

rebellious women are punished. This punishment for Jane means her removal from the Reed home. Jane is pleased with this decision, but her inferior position is enforced within the patriarchal institution of Education.

At Lowood, Jane is an obedient student. She does not believe, though, that all punishment for disobedience is acceptable. Due to the treatment she received at Gateshead, she does not believe any cruelty can be justified. Jane comes to realise that, in a patriarchal society, she is unique. Helen Burns becomes a close friend of Jane's, but Jane cannot understand why Helen accepts her fate so easily. In Jane's opinion Helen is a good and wise girl. However, Helen maintains that the teachers would not harass her if she were, in fact, good. But there was, as Smith-Rosenberg explains, a certain prescription of good behaviour doled out to women: "The ideal female in [the] nineteenth-century...was expected to be gentle and refined, sensitive and loving" (655). So when Helen is told she is dirty, messy, and inclined to daydream - all abominable faults in a woman - she accepts that she is wicked. Therefore, when Helen is punished, she is resigned to her duty of bearing her punishment. Jane, however, passionately exclaims that cruel people and their actions should not be tolerated. Helen displays a perfect model of female submission as she dismisses Jane's comment, telling her she is childish and silly (73) – but as Tyson recognises this childish and silly behaviour is still a threat which frightens Helen's oppressed nature that commands her submission: "The obedient Helen reflects the self-repression that supposedly inferior individuals are expected to cultivate under the powerful onus of gender and class" (Tyson 100). The lesson of domination is something Jane must learn. She must, like Helen, learn not to question pain or humiliation, and believe in accommodating society's conventions.

But Jane will not believe in complying with society's demands when there is a conflict of interests. She is, therefore, devastated when Mr Brocklehurst labels her a

liar, standing her in front of the school. Jane must submit whilst he is there, but later she protests, claiming her innocence, fighting to disprove Brocklehurst's claim. In effect, Jane is seeking to discredit patriarchal authority by undermining Brocklehurst's declaration. He believes he has the authority to label Jane, and that his words have power, but she destroys this by labelling his words false, and her own true (89, 92).

Similarly, at Moor House Jane refuses to behave in the traditional manner. St John Rivers questions Jane about her background, but wishing to be silent, she refuses to answer. She is also extremely bold discussing Rosamond Oliver with St John, who is taken aback by Jane's forward manner: "[T]he surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare speak so to a man" (401). But, he is not offended until she refuses to marry him, whereupon he reproves her for her unfeminine behaviour (Hill Rigney 26). Tyson comments that Jane cannot accept the proposal of a man whose interest in her is only as a tool (Tyson 98). Farkas comments that Jane, learning from her experience with Rochester, refuses to be sacrificed by a dominating male: "Having come dangerously close to losing sight of her identity once before, she realizes how important it is now that she resist St John's blasphemous attempt to re-create her in his own image" (Farkas 59). Her refusal is a direct threat to his masculine identity, and Jane once again rejects patriarchal authority.

The Representation and Function of Madness

However, it is Bertha Mason who most obviously rejects society and authority (and is in turn rejected by society and authority). The physical representation of madness in Jane Eyre is brief but hideous. The blackened creature epitomises the evil of female insanity, the perversion of a woman into an animal-like being, as the explicit description of her shows:

> In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it 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. (317)

Although Small comments this is "no humane vision of female insanity" (159), it is at least consistent with nineteenth-century beliefs. Ussher remarks,

> Prior to the 'enlightenment', the mad were seen to be closer to animals, their loss of reason resulting in the loss of their very essence of humanity. Consequently, the mad deserved no better treatment than that meted out to a bad or difficult dog. (65)

In this way, Bronte's representation of mad Bertha enforces the medical (male) discourse. Also, Bertha is further cast as 'other' by not being pure white, but a Creole. Rochester complains Bertha was a drunken and violent woman – two of the most common stereotypes associated with blacks or coloureds (Meyer 164), as well as the mad. She is savage and uncivilised, and in need of correction. Clearly, madness in this novel serves to agree with the cultural construction of women and madness. The mad Bertha did not have to be so excessively mad. Despite Bronte having a wilful and independent (and feminist) heroine, the underlying discourse is still controlled by patriarchal society.

Women were disempowered because society's rules dictated female behaviour, teaching conformity and obedience. Variation and independence, threatening to social order, were severely punished, and the label madness was often part of the punishment. Because madness in women was seen to stem from the body, more specifically, the womb, women were defined as prone to illness because of their sexuality. One of Bertha's symptoms for her madness was promiscuity, as sex was an unnatural desire for women. Ussher points out that women "who were promiscuous, who bore an illegitimate child, or even women who were sexually assaulted or raped…were sent to the asylum….Such women were a bad influence" (73). Women who were in any way

sexual threatened the male vision of femininity, and so were thought to need curing. Therefore most cures for insanity centred on women's sexuality, and Ehrenreich and English comment that "nineteenth-century medical treatment of women made very little sense as *medicine*, but it was undoubtedly effective at keeping certain women...in their place" (40-41). Rochester, obviously, has managed to keep his "raving, aggressive sexual woman" confined and in her place (Ussher 86), through the medical definition of madness.

The definition of Bertha's madness can be argued, but as a character she is important in other ways. She portrays the isolation of women from themselves and from society. Her presence serves as a warning to Jane of the enslavement and domination within marriage. More than just a "costume drama madwoman" (Small 156), Susan Meyer claims Bertha can be interpreted as the centre of the novel's action: "Bertha functions in the novel as the central locus of Bronte's anxieties about oppression, anxieties that motivate the plot and drive it to its conclusion" (163). Unconsciously, though, Bronte supports the oppression she protests against by conforming to a discourse dominated by men and which had its backing in science.

Bronte's portrayal of madness, and Bertha, highlights the prejudices that accompany it. Why has Rochester locked Bertha away and denied her an existence? And, when forced to confront her public appearance, why must he create her story and identity? Especially when, under the circumstances, he cannot be seen as the villain. As Tyson points out, "On a literal level, however, Rochester does his wife a kindness by locking her in the attic under the care of Grace Poole, when the alternative is an early-nineteenth-century insane asylum" (Tyson 96). This further emphasises that madness was an illness to be hidden away. Rather than admit his wife is mad, Rochester prefers to save his reputation by denying her existence. Bertha must be hidden because madness

breaks the rules of patriarchal control, and Bronte's attitude reflects this in her treatment of Bertha through Rochester.

It is known that Rochester, as the second son of an affluent man unwilling to split his wealth, was forced into an arranged marriage. The bitterness and humiliation he felt towards his father and older brother grew as he realised he was being sold. Under these circumstances, any bride, no matter how perfect, would have reflected on them, these feelings of bitterness, humiliation, and anger. The foreignness of the bride and country, rather than being a delightful change, would only add to Rochester's resentment. So, Rochester, unable to provide for himself, and given only two options - marriage or poverty - chooses to leave his home country, marry a stranger for money, and adapt to a new culture and lifestyle. Rochester's feelings towards Bertha, then, were likely to have been conceived through a veil of bitterness, anger, and humiliation.

Bertha's wealth and power would no doubt have also threatened Rochester. Despite being a woman, Bertha was in a position of power as Rochester needed her money to avoid poverty. Thus, his position of second son rendered him less than a woman - a damaging situation within a patriarchal society – giving him reason to feel insecure. And, given that Rochester was a proud man - as Jane continually comments - he would not, most probably, have been comfortable with the knowledge that his wife held more power than he did. Is it not reasonable, then, to speculate that Rochester could have been looking for an opportunity to regain authority? This opportunity would have arisen with her excessive and unfeminine faults, giving Rochester occasion to have his wife labelled mad, because her "sexuality, her capacity for passion, apparently presented Rochester with real difficulties" (Hill Rigney 23). Also, he comments that he does not hate Bertha because she is mad, but because she is immoral (Jane Eyre 325). It is likely that a nineteenth century man, reduced to accepting an arranged marriage for

money and leaving the only home he has known, would face insecurity problems sufficient to incarcerate and keep secret the source of his humiliation - Bertha.

Jane's perception of Bertha is not as straightforward as Rochester's because she is at first ignorant of Bertha's existence. Like the reader, Jane believes the harmful presence in Thornfield is Grace Poole. As Jane has no knowledge of another woman in the house, she is forced to make her judgements based on what she knows of Grace. She comes to believe Grace is dangerous, violent, strange, and clever:

> What mystery, that broke out, now in fire, and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey? (232)

But every other resident of Thornfield appears to think nothing wrong with her and heeding Rochester's demand that she keep silent, Jane does not ask questions.[1] Because of Rochester, Jane ignores her instincts that tell her Grace is a boring but normal woman, and instead believes his assertions that she is a corrupt and vicious woman: "Jane seems to deliberately suppress her own knowledge, instead placing her faith in Rochester, surrendering any power she may have had over the truth of events to him, as proof of her trust in him as her Master" (Farkas 56). Unfortunately, Jane does not lose her trust in him when Bertha is revealed and Rochester shown up as a liar. Jane is still confronted by Rochester's interpretation of events.

Because Bertha has been silenced, Rochester, Mason, and the servants speak for her. This means, then, that Jane's perception of Bertha can only be a version of society's creation of Bertha and a version of Rochester's. Through Bronte's reflection of society's attitude towards madness, Jane can only interpret Bertha as a helpless and

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[1]Despite the fact that Jane believes lives to be in danger, she is happier to obey her master. This implies that Rochester not only has the power and the right to control his employee's lives, but also their deaths. His concern is for nobody's safety but his own. Even Jane is far less important.

hideous mad woman, in accordance with the general opinion of the time (Small 163). Jane realises that the culprit was not Grace Poole, but Bertha; and Bertha, as is described to Jane, is merely a grotesque beast.

But, Bertha's existence causes Jane to confront her situation clearly and objectively. This is best explained considering Bertha and Jane as doubles. The most obvious instance of doubling is that they are both Mrs Rochester. And although separate in the novel, they can be seen as different versions of the same woman. This is made possible because Bertha does not have an identity of her own; therefore she can function as several different things. Jane encounters the dangers female identities – Bertha's and all women's – face within patriarchal society, whilst Bertha can be seen as an alternative ending to Jane's Romance story. The novel does not allow Bertha her own story, but it is suggested that all female experiences within patriarchal society are similar. This is brought to light in Lowood, where all the girls at the school were to conform and develop according to the same pattern. Bertha also represents an extreme version of Jane's escaped fate. Just as Bertha is incarcerated within the four walls of her room, Jane would be incarcerated within the institution of marriage and within the domestic walls of Thornfield – experiencing, if not physical suffering, at least mental incarceration.

Bertha Mason and madness are essential to the novel in that they assist the progress of the heroine Jane Eyre. Bronte does not approach the issue of madness as a female condition, as, during the nineteenth-century, madness was a humiliating and degrading illness (the emphasis was on the embarrassment of the relatives rather than of the victim). Although madness serves to illustrate the excessive control men exercised on women, it is not discussed as an effect of patriarchal domination. Although Jane Eyre supports the independence and growth of women, Bronte is restricted by the

cultural construction of patriarchal language. Her representation of madness reflects the ingrained prejudices against it. Jane, as the main character, is more important than issues of Bertha's non-existent identity.

The Female Gothic: The Nature of Bronte's Rebellion

As an incarcerated mad woman, though, Bertha is part of an historical tradition. She is typical of the monsters and madwomen abundant in Female Gothic stories written a century before Jane Eyre. The stigma of madness and monstrous women has been kept alive by gothic stories that highlight the necessity of ostracising abnormalities in people. The Female Gothic became a popular genre as it tended to express the vulnerability of female identity; whilst acknowledging the subordinate position of women, it ignored the marginalised aspects of society, sticking to mainstream, wealthy society. Carefully hidden within a Romance plot, the Female Gothic articulated women's fears of marriage and portrayed their defencelessness within patriarchal society. Women could easily relate to the monsters and madwomen, who represented common feelings – anger, rebellion and a sense of imprisonment (Howells 5), but *only* as representations of their feelings. On the other hand, women related to the heroine as a person because she was "normal." In contrast to this, the madwoman was perceived as a narrative strategy.

The plots were generally similar. A young, beautiful, naive woman would, more often than not, be sent off in search of a husband. She would come across an apparently suitable man and fall in love. This man, however, would turn out to be a villain concealing several secrets, possibly a hidden monster or madwoman. This monster or madwoman would turn out to be the villain's incarcerated sister, mother, or wife, and it would be apparent that the heroine was to be incarcerated next. She would then, after

several frightening ordeals, be rescued by a hero and settle into an uneventful marriage.

But the Female Gothic was deceptive. As Howells comments, the hero is also the villain as he traps the innocent heroine in marriage: "[T]o be angelic and robed in white is only the romantic side of eighteenth-century convention, the other side of which is the condemnation of woman to a passive role in which she can be sacrificed by society for sexual and economic interests" (Howells 11). The Female Gothic exposed marriage for what it was for many women - a trial of hardship, boredom, and domination. The hero may have stopped the heroine's physical incarceration, but he imprisons her behind patriarchal society and the institution of marriage. These stories posed the question of which was worse: the obvious incarceration of women, or the subtle and socially acceptable incarceration of women. The heroine believed she was free from terror and domination, but in reality marriage may be just as terrifying and dominating as forced captivity. Thus, the madwoman, who usually turned out to be the villain's mother, sister, or wife, represents the fate of women within marriage, but is overlooked as a separate issue. The Female Gothic attempted to portray that marriage was an institution of domination, and was not concerned with the issue of female madness.

Jane's marriage to Rochester would have meant the loss of her Self through his domination, but Bertha's existence is able to intervene to forestall that. The monster or madwoman in a Female Gothic usually represented anger, rebellion, and repressed emotion, generally the part of a woman patriarchy suppressed and denied (and therefore labelled the monstrous or mad part of female identity). A monster or madwoman was not allowed an identity of their own; they functioned merely as symbols. And, the heroine was exposed to these monstrosities by the villain in order that she understands the consequences of patriarchal domination. The stories highlighted patriarchal

oppression through the grotesque and secreted creatures. Female anger must be locked away and denied as it is a threat to patriarchal society. Fearing its discovery, the patriarchy guards the secret lest other women be encouraged to also show their anger and rebellion. Because of this, female rebellion was a rare public occurrence, and the heroine, terrified by what she discovers, allows herself to be rescued. Unfortunately, it would not be long before she realised that the anger that had once terrified her is actually a piece of herself, but she would no longer be capable of reclaiming it.

Ann Radcliffe is generally believed to be the originator of the Female Gothic (Kilgour 113). Her most famous novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, contains innocent Emily St Aubert who has been recently orphaned and taken away to a foreign land, and the novel "explores the relation between female madness, passion, and the dangers of the indulged imagination" (Kilgour 113-14). Radcliffe deals with male domination, repressed passion, and the stasis of female identity, but in the end, Emily has not developed and ends up exactly where she began. Although Emily's lack of development accurately portrays the stasis of female identity, the outcome is disappointing for female growth in society. Most of the women writing Gothic stories were bored middle-class wives who were dissatisfied with their lives, but confused about their dissatisfaction (Howells 6). Obviously angry and needing to express their feelings, these women allowed their heroines attitudes of freedom and rebellion, which were extremely controversial, and so softened their stories by giving their heroines a 'happy' life and a passive role in marriage: "Gothic writers were certainly expressing attitudes which were hostile to eighteenth-century Enlightened views of human potential, but so timidly that they undermined the significance of their own insights" (Howells 7). Indeed, Radcliffe herself believed that individuality threatened a sense of community, and that women, especially, were not supposed to be independent. Also, a

happy ending increased sales. But at least anger and resentment were finally being recognised amongst women in the public view. Even if the messages were buried under sentimental Romances, female rebellion was finally being expressed.

These elements of anger, Bronte makes clear, have not changed nor disappeared over time. They have grown stronger. Meyer observes that Bronte has Bertha be typical of the madwomen in earlier Gothic stories in order to make this point. Bertha is Jane's dark double, the unacceptable other that Jane wishes to deny. Jane, although not beautiful, is certainly young, naive and clouded by love, just as her predecessors were. Similar to the Gothic stories, in Jane Eyre, Bertha represents the incarceration of female identity and the suppression of irrational anger and rebellion, and "serves as a distorted mirror image of Jane's own dangerous propensities toward 'passion'" (Hill Rigney 16). Her anger is the anger of all women who have subjected themselves, and continue to subject themselves, to the humiliation of marriage and male domination.

Just as her Gothic predecessors a century before her discovered an horrific secret about the men they were to marry, Jane realises there is a terrible mystery involving Rochester at Thornfield Hall.[2] Fulfilling all the elements of a superficial Gothic figure, Bertha is, of course, the secret[3]. Most importantly she represents the emotions of a tyrannised and imprisoned woman - a woman trapped in a patriarchal marriage. And, as Gilbert and Gubar recognise, because she is Jane's double, she is a projection of Jane's suppressed rebellion: "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). Jane's marriage to Rochester

[2]Many critics make a point of discussing the large amounts of Gothic imagery present in the novel, such as the huge, gloomy mansion. But in this context, it is more profitable to limit the discussion to Bertha and her specific Gothic role.

[3] By "superficial" I mean Bertha is given no depth of character, not that she has no importance.

would have resulted in the imprisonment of her soul, because Rochester's only interest in her was as his creation. Jane could not have become an equal partner in marriage because she is cast as the pure heroine. The Female Gothic emphasises the male fear of female sexuality and the female repression of sexuality, and often links sexuality with madness (Howells 13). Bertha's hideousness represents Rochester's fear of her as a sexual being. In wedlock, because female sexuality is threatening, Jane would lose the purity Rochester assigned to her, and therefore would become another hideous female.

If these aspects of marriage have not changed between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bronte suggests that perhaps it is time to start addressing the issue, hence Bronte's alteration to the traditional Female Gothic. Jane is not rescued by a suitable male whom she decides to marry. Instead, as Hill Rigney comments, she is repulsed by St John's self-righteous religious manner and his attempt to repress her Self: "St. John…is seen as a potential murderer, both of the mind and of the body….[He], like Rochester, is seen in fact as threatening the self with engulfment" (Hill Rigney 25). Rather, she returns to the villain (Rochester) who has been reduced by female anger (Bertha), enabling Jane to marry him and keep her identity intact. Stein recognises that Jane 'wins' because Bertha, as non-human, is sacrificed: "[T]he darker, monstrous, more sexual, angry self, Bertha, is killed in order that the more moderate, more controlled self, Jane, can live within the limitations imposed by society" (Stein 136). Like the earlier Female Gothics, Jane Eyre makes a feminist contribution towards highlighting the inequality of a patriarchal marriage, but, instead of submitting, Bronte has her heroine find an alternative to domination. Jane carries with her the seeds of change, but Bertha does not. Whilst Jane develops into an independent and strong woman, Bertha remains a static image of madness, and a representation of Jane's anger, that is, she dies just as Jane's anger is extinguished.

Conclusion

As a person, Bertha is not important. Her only function is to provide Jane with the means to escape an unhappy marriage. It becomes clear that underlying Bronte's rebellion is a socially constructed patriarchal attitude. Although Jane escapes madness and incarceration, Bertha is described in the terms that reinforce the definition and domination of women by men. Bertha's actual state of mind cannot be commented on, nor is it relevant to the novel. It is significant, though, that the term madness applied to many different symptoms in the nineteenth century. The doctors who define who is mad and who is sane acted not only from a medical point of view but also from a social one (Ehrenreich and English 30). Often their diagnosis explained behaviour that was inconsistent with the male image of femininity. Bronte appears unaware of her own inconsistencies – her feminist ideals versus her submersion in patriarchal culture. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, however, does not. Bertha's madness is a function for Bronte so her rebellious heroine can triumph. In Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," madness becomes the rebellion itself, attacking male (medical) discourse, and serving to question the definition of women's roles, and the diagnosis of their madness.

"I'm Just a Girl Living in Captivity": Patriarchy and the Entrapment of Women

The narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" suffers the humiliation of a controlling husband. John, the narrator's husband and physician, forces his wife to conform to his definition of her. The physical and emotional imprisonment in this story explicitly shows how men control and define women using an authority like medicine. Unlike Bertha Mason, the narrator is still being defined as wife and has the ability to tell her own story. Also, Gilman's protest against patriarchal society differs from Bronte's in that Gilman undermines its condescending attitude to women. Bronte created a character who adapted to life within patriarchal society; Gilman sows the damaging effects of an institution that claims women are inferior. She not only questions men's right to define women's health, she questions the *roles* men define for women.

Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the hope it would change doctors' approach to treating mad women. S. Weir Mitchell, the originator of the famous "Rest Cure" and Gilman's own doctor, devised a 'genius' cure for women suffering from nervous illnesses. The guise was physical rehabilitation, but he believed "that the hysteric should be broken, almost like a wild horse, which will eventually be cowed and tamed" (Ussher 76). Hysterical women, he thought, were equivalent to badly behaved children, and their cure depended on the doctor mastering their will. Under this treatment the narrator ends up mad. The implication is that whilst men have the authority to control women's bodies, there can be no true freedom for women. The narrator is trapped in madness, but she was previously trapped within her husband's (and society's) role for her.

Who Controls the Language?

As a male and a doctor, John has control of language and, as a consequence, of his wife's behaviour. Treichler observes, "The diagnostic language of the physician is coupled with the paternalistic language of the husband to create a formidable array of controls over her behavior" (65). Even though it is the narrator telling her own story, her words often echo her husband's. In the beginning she records in her diary his opinion as much as her own. She may assert a fact, but will immediately retract it if it contradicts her husband's opinion: "John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him" (33). She admits she does suffer, but because John *knows* there is no reason to suffer, she backs down, "Of course it is only nervousness" (33). Because John has authority and is further supported by science, the narrator's truth is defined as false. Fetterly believes that women, forced to live within male discourse, become extremely frustrated and often mad:

> In 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' Gilman argues that male control of textuality constitutes one of the primary causes of women's madness in a patriarchal culture. Forced to read men's texts, women are forced to become characters in those texts. And since the stories men tell assert as fact what women know to be fiction, not only do women lose the power that comes from authoring, more significantly, they are forced to deny their own reality and to commit in effect a kind of psychic suicide. (Fetterly 182-183)

The narrator is forced to deny her reality and live by her husband's definition of her. But, as a woman, she expects this treatment within marriage because "what is one to do" (29)?

The defeatist tone of the narrator shows how utterly powerless she is. John's consistent amusement at her comments echoes the nineteenth century belief that women were irrational and ignorant. Because the couple rent an old colonial mansion, the narrator is reminded of an English haunted house,[1] and suggests to her husband that a

[1] The fact that she is reminded of an *English* haunted house, and she ends up in a room of the upper most floor, is reminiscent of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. Perhaps the narrator becomes the American version of Bronte's creature?

ghostly presence may be lurking in the house. John responds by scoffing at her imagination – which he later tells her is dangerous. The narrator comments, "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (29). That she accepts John's immediate dismissal of her ideas highlights the authority of the male position firmly rooted in science, logic, and reason. Treichler comments that,

> It is the voice of male logic and male judgement which dismisses superstition and refuses to see the house as haunted or the narrator's condition as serious. It imposes controls on the female narrator and dictates how she is to perceive and talk about the world. (65-66)

John believes women have enormous imaginations and delight in fancies, and uses that as an excuse to dismiss his wife's suggestion of ghosts, invalidating her as a person and rendering her language ineffectual.

The narrator, however, cannot as easily dispose of her husband's views, although there is huge doubt in her mind concerning his diagnosis of her (30). She believes John is wrong about her condition, despite his confident proclamations to friends and relatives that "there is really nothing the matter with [her] but temporary nervous depression" (29-30). She senses that work, excitement, and intellectual activity would benefit rather than harm her, but because John is a doctor, he has control of an extremely authoritative discourse that she does not have access to and that women were forbidden to enter (Ussher 69). What makes this discourse so powerful is that women were dependent on it. Discouraged from becoming involved in medicine, women turned to men when they wanted to know about their bodies. And doctors "were quick to draw the obvious conclusion that, for women, higher education could be physically dangerous. Too much development of the brain, they counseled, would atrophy the uterus" (Ehrenreich and English 32). This opinion is reflected in John's attitude towards his wife. He does not believe his wife is capable of intelligent thought, and so basically ignores her. Therefore her only outlet is her journal of "dead" paper where she

is free to discuss her doubts: "John is a physician, and *perhaps* – (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) – *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster" (29). However, as Kasmer acknowledges, the narrator is forced to accept John's authority because he is a physician of "high standing":

> It becomes clear within her journal writings…that she has accepted her husband's diagnosis, acknowledging that "when one's husband is a physician and of high standing what can one do?"…She understands that the authoritative opinion of her husband will be taken as law. (Kasmer 4-5)

She knows that John would invalidate her thoughts, so she uses the journal as a form of mental release.

John also tries to control her thoughts by forbidding her to write. He tells his wife any work is detrimental to her health, and although she disagrees, she does admit writing tires her out: "I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition" (30). However, it is not her work that tires her out, but rather having to hide it, having to pretend she is what he perceives her to be. Shumaker comments that John seems to be afraid of his wife's independent thoughts and expressions, and therefore he defines them as bad and attempts to restrict her mind, thus leaving himself secure: "By defining his wife's artistic impulse as a potentially dangerous part of her feminine 'temperament,' John can control both his wife and a facet of human experience which threatens his comfortable materialistic view of the world" (Shumaker 68). At the same time he explains there is nothing really wrong with her, he forbids her to write and gives her a rigid prescription to follow and medicine to take so she can get well (31). John claims to believe this is the appropriate course of action. However, his goal is not to cure his wife, but to ensure she can be controlled through language.

She complies with his demand to control her emotions and not give in to her nervous illness, but does so only in front of him. Shumaker recognises that, like her writing, the narrator hides the truth from John, because she knows he would disapprove: "Her remarks reveal that her relationship with her husband is filled with deception on her part, not so much because she wants to hide things from him, but because it is impossible to tell him things he does not want to acknowledge" (Shumaker 69). Gilman implies that female behaviour within a patriarchal society is an act as women are forced to behave as men perceive they should behave. Women are locked into false identities because men have the power to speak and to define. John's 'cure' for his wife is to ensure she behave normally - what he defines as normal behaviour for a wife which is to think as he does. As Kasmer observes, to him she is not sick, but temporarily off track and needing correction: "His diagnosis of his wife…exemplifies his pattern of thinking as grounded in phallocentric logic and patriarchal culture….[H]e subscribes to the medical profession's view within the nineteenth century of women as inferior and in need of moral training" (Kasmer 6). Therefore, she should not be acting sick (because he believes she is not) but concentrating on acting normally.

Indeed, the narrator does take great pains to behave as her husband wishes her to. Unfortunately, the effort makes her worse: "I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition. But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself – before him, at least" (31). Obviously, the effort of maintaining the farce for John takes a huge toll on the narrator, but she is forced to pretend in order to satisfy him. She succeeds because John searches only for physical evidence of her recovery, as Shumaker comments: "John wants to deal only with physical causes and effects….The rest cure is a denial that her view has any validity, an affirmation that all human needs and problems are physical" (Shumaker 67).

His wife only has to act more lively around him, appear to be eating well, and seem to be sleeping, for him to believe she is recovering. But, when she tries to explain that she really is not recovering, giving him evidence, he highlights her physical improvement, dismissing her words as insignificant:

> 'I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you.'
>
> 'I don't weigh a bit more,' said I, 'nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!'
>
> 'Bless her little heart!' said he with a big hug, 'she shall be as sick as she pleases.' (41)

Because she is a woman, John believes his wife cannot know what is wrong or what is best. He says that *he* is a doctor therefore *he* knows. Despite the fact that only she can be the best judge of her own body, he will not accept his wife's assertions.

In fact, John treats his wife as though she were a child. Not only does he ignore what she has to say, but when he does listen, he patronises her, treating her like an idiot. He tells her he loves her, but he behaves like an inexperienced doting parent. She is a "little girl" to him, as well as a "blessed little goose"(40, 34). And, responding to this, the narrator's language is very childlike. She uses simple language in her journal that mirrors her husband's simple language to her. She uses short sentences and starts a new line with almost every one. She is inconsistent with her topics, neglecting to follow a logical train of thought. Her statements are often hesitant and saturated with apologies: "[H]e takes all care from me, and I feel so basely ungrateful not to value it more" (31). Statements of defeat follow the few assertions she makes: "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?"(30). Despite having the ability to tell the story, the narrator is, until she becomes obsessed with the wallpaper, totally immersed within her husband's – and therefore patriarchal – language.

By leaving her female protagonist unnamed, Gilman highlights the lack of individuality of the female Self. In doing this, as Wagner-Martin recognises, she forces readers to label the woman as either wife or mother, thus equating 'woman' with the roles forced upon women within patriarchal society (Wagner-Martin 54). As representative of patriarchy in general, it is John who defines her roles. As a wife it is her duty to recover for her husband's sake, and as a mother, for her child's sake. Never at any stage is it truly for her own benefit that she recovers. John states that renting the country house is solely for her benefit, but contradicts this by not allowing her the room of her choice (which, interestingly, is a single room). The narrator says,

> I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.
>
> He said that there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another. (31)

His reasons appear to be concerned with leaving her by herself, but there is also the implication that he wants her to be sexually available to him – that is, to perform her *wifely* duties. It is clear, as Wagner-Martin points out, that John thinks of his wife only in terms of himself. He wants her to be rational and logical like himself:

> One continuing struggle between John and his wife is his forcing her to think in a different way, to become 'rational,' to *know* with the same surety and dogmatism that her husband does. Anything other than this assertive knowledge is feminine whim, and is totally objectionable. (Wagner-Martin 57)

Because of this attitude he has no knowledge of her true state of health as, to him, her version does not exist. The narrator's definition of herself is not acceptable to him, only his definition and his version of the truth are valid.

The Yellow Wallpaper

As John has emphasised to his wife, women do not have the authority to discuss serious topics. So, in order to avoid mentioning her condition, the narrator talks about

the house (30). This is a suitable topic for the narrator because it is relevant to feminine interests and the domestic sphere. Eventually, her discussion focuses on the yellow wallpaper:

> I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin....The color is repellent, almost revolting: a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight. It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others. (32)

She can confidently comment that this particular paper is the worst she has ever seen, and she is able to describe it accurately without fear of contradiction from her husband. This is one subject upon which John cannot claim expertise, nor would he want to intrude on his wife's inferior sphere of knowledge. Therefore the yellow wallpaper provides a safe-haven for the narrator.

Initially the narrator's complaints about the paper are fairly superficial and are interwoven with her other observations about their temporary home. However, as Treichler comments, the further John intrudes into her sense of being, the more she begins to depend on the wallpaper: "Disguised as an acceptable feminine topic (interest in décor), the yellow wallpaper comes to occupy the narrator's entire reality" (Treichler 62). The narrator starts to notice the wallpaper in much more detail, giving it almost humanoid qualities: "This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down" (35). At first merely an offensive part of the décor, the wallpaper takes on human characteristics to become another `person' plaguing the narrator's life. However, this is one thing she feels she can control. The wallpaper becomes an obsession because there is nothing else in her life of which she is allowed control.

The paper's importance extends as her life is controlled increasingly by her husband. The more she thinks about it and discusses it the more confidence she gains.

This is reflected by her tone when describing the wallpaper: "I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alteration, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I have ever heard of" (37). The thought and effort she puts into the wallpaper is an exercise in mental agility that she finds "such a relief" (37) and, as Kasmer comments, once discussing the wallpaper, she speaks with an authority absent from her normal speech: "[W]hen she begins to describe the wallpaper, her sentences become convoluted and complex with phrase piled upon phrase, suggesting emotion and excitement" (Kasmer 11). The more she analyses the paper, the more at home she becomes with her own judgements and her own discourse.

After each incident where John treats his wife like a child, she returns to the wallpaper, each time discussing a new aspect of it. The narrator is consistently frustrated by John's refusal to take her seriously, and this is reflected in the shapes that she begins to distinguish. At first the paper is an aesthetic problem, then it appears purposely to offend the narrator, and finally seems to be hiding an incarcerated woman. The narrator's experiences take the same shape. At first John's denial that the narrator's opinions have validity is something she believes she must put up with, like accepting the ugliness of the paper; however, she slowly finds his attitude annoying, and then imprisoning. So, the more frustrated she becomes the more she unwittingly transfers her situation onto the wallpaper.

Originally the narrator only sees a single pattern that is not symmetrical or repetitive, but as John continues to restrict and patronise her, she begins to distinguish an imprisoning front pattern, and a trapped back pattern. The back pattern becomes clearer every day, and after John refuses to let her visit Cousin Henry and Julia, the narrator believes it to be in the shape of a woman: "Behind that outside pattern the dim

shapes get clearer every day. It is always the same shape, only very numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" (39). And again, when John rejects her wish to leave the house, the narrator begins to see the front and back patterns moving: "So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately" (41). The narrator parallels John's continuing restrictions with the shapes she sees in the wallpaper. The more John controls her, the clearer the woman behind the front pattern becomes, and the clearer the entrapment of the woman.

The narrator also starts to become increasingly possessive towards the wallpaper because it is the only aspect of her life where John cannot intrude. Therefore, she becomes suspicious and threatened if either Jennie, her sister-in-law, or John shows any interest in it:

> The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look. It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis – that perhaps it is the paper. I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times looking at the paper! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once. (43)

Through the wallpaper the narrator has gained control of her own thoughts, which is why she becomes so possessive of it. Although in John's opinion her behaviour is more insane, she is now able to make decisions for herself, without needing her husband's approval. Her language is more authoritative and descriptive, and there seems to be no need to mention her condition.

However, the more interest the narrator places in the paper, the more intertwined she becomes with it. At first she sees many female shapes behind the restricting front pattern, but later observes that it is one woman creeping around. She also notices that

the woman shakes the front pattern in an effort to free herself. But, some of her comments reveal confusion:

> There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even smooch, as if it had been rubbed over and over. I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. (45)

Later it becomes apparent that it is the narrator who has made the streak. The narration becomes harder and harder to follow as the narrator finds it difficult to distinguish between herself and the wallpaper woman:

> I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I'll tell you why – privately – I've seen her! I can see her out of every one of my windows! It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight. (45)

The narrative appears to say that the wallpaper woman escapes during the day, yet the narrator insists the wallpaper woman cannot get past the front pattern. It makes more sense to say the wallpaper woman watches the narrator, as it is the narrator who is allowed daily exercise, but it is difficult to say for sure. The narrator even admits to creeping herself: "It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight. I always lock the door when I creep by daylight" (46). The narration becomes increasingly ambiguous as the story continues. Finally managing to rip off the wallpaper, the narrator comments: "I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her" (48). However, a few lines on, the narrator seems to have changed, "But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope – you don't get *me* out in the road there" (49). But this ambiguity raises interesting questions about identity.

Gilman makes it difficult for us to follow who is speaking because it is not important. The narrator has already commented that all women creep, suggesting that all women share similar experiences. The woman in the wallpaper is trapped behind a

restrictive force just as many women within patriarchal marriages are trapped and importantly just as the narrator is trapped. The narrator is driven to help this woman, but as she becomes obsessed with the wallpaper she increasingly identifies with the other woman's condition, but "[w]hat she has discovered, which she does not state, is that she and the woman behind the paper are the same" (Treichler 73). The woman in the wallpaper is herself, so it is necessary to gain freedom.

Unfortunately, the only freedom the narrator can gain is within madness. She is no longer restricted by her husband's demands, displaying this by having a more confident approach to him, calling him "young man" just as he called her "little girl": "Why there's John at the door! It is no use, young man, you can't open it" (49). But this confidence is only possible because she has placed herself outside normal society. The obsession with the yellow wallpaper has given her authority (albeit limited) over her life and her own discourse; however, it has also isolated her from the chance to communicate effectively with her husband.

The narrator has become able to express her thoughts and feelings with confidence, but there has been a price to pay. Through her interest in the wallpaper she has found her own authority. However, as Delamotte comments, the narrator has had to sacrifice her place in the world: "Clearly, the woman she has found is a victim who needs to be rescued…but she is also someone who destroys the heroine's prospects of domestic tranquillity by her angry and rebellious presence" (Delamotte 5). The patriarchal world of her husband does not allow for female imagination or independence; therefore the narrator is forced to find some sort of release. That release is the wallpaper. She becomes obsessed with assisting the wallpaper woman because it allows her some autonomy in her life and a chance to use her mind, but it also renders her unable to function in patriarchal reality.

What Does it Mean?

As Hedges discovered, the vagueness of the narration has left Gilman's story open to many interpretations:

> The wallpaper…has been read as inscribing the medical, marital, maternal, psychological, sexual, sociocultural, political and linguistic situation of its narrator-protagonist; as an image of the situation of the woman writer and hence a way of understanding the dilemmas of female authorship; as revealing the relations between gender and reading and gender and writing; and as a description of the problems of female self-representation within both the Lacanian world of the Symbolic and the capitalist world of the United States in the late nineteenth century. (Hedges 222)

The yellow wallpaper stands for many things and represents many things, but the most essential point is the importance of recognising female imprisonment. No matter how you interpret the wallpaper, the message is unmistakable – John and the patriarchy, unwilling to see her as anything more than a wife and mother, causes the narrator to become trapped within their definition of her. Gilman's protagonist is sent mad through the frustration of domination, inactivity, and misunderstanding.

The yellow wallpaper begins as merely a distraction, but slowly forms its own importance to the narrator. She recognises that it does not follow any conventional pattern, instead appearing to do what it wants, but as she pays it more attention, the narrator uncovers secrets it seems to be hiding – such as the woman behind the front pattern. According to the narrator, in different light the paper changes. At night in the moonlight, the front pattern becomes bars and the woman shakes them violently in an effort to free herself. During the day, however, she is silent: "By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour" (42). Thus, during the day the wallpaper woman acts as she

should, quiet and subdued. Under cover of night and the feminine moonlight, however, she tries to get out. Subconsciously the narrator wishes to be free of her dominating husband. The main pattern can be seen as the restrictions of the patriarchy that force women to be perpetually quiet and restrained, and the sub-pattern is the restricted female struggling to be free.

Outwardly the narrator begins to eat better and behave as John expects her to, merely because of her obsession with the paper. John believes his wife is improving – he only checks for physical indications – because she looks like she is improving. Because his expectations of her recovery are rigid, John does not notice his wife's fixation with the wallpaper. He is content to see her physical progress:

> John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper – he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away. (43)

The wallpaper is something John cannot understand because it represents female discourse. Only the narrator can see the peculiarities as she slowly gains confidence with a discourse completely different to her husband's.

The narrator begins to flourish because the paper gives her a voice. Jennie, the loving sister-in-law, is not interested in the paper because she is content with her position. The narrator comments that Jennie is good, nurturing and an excellent housekeeper: "She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession" (36). Jennie therefore is not receptive to the wallpaper because she does not believe she is trapped. Like all women completely immersed within patriarchal culture, Jennie is oblivious to the power struggle she has lost. She is as men expect her to be – passive and easily dominated.

On the other hand, John's wife describes the wallpaper pattern as "torturing" and fungus-like (41), suggesting that male interference in female life is torturing and

parasitic. Rather than being allowed growth, women are restricted by patriarchal expectations of meekness whilst men capitalise on the lack of competition. The Rest Cure treatment is an excellent example of this. The narrator believes stimulation and excitement would be beneficial to her, but John, refusing to accept his wife's judgement, insists she stay inactive – and of course the result is a decline in her mental stability. Rather than allow his wife autonomy in her own life, John demands she follow his presumed knowledge and interpretation of her condition.

The wallpaper's colour is significant as a comment on female imprisonment. Yellow generally is associated with sunshine, brightness and happiness. However, the yellow of the paper is described by the narrator as foul: "It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul bad yellow things" (44). This disgusting yellow is often associated with female sexuality – gross, evil, and threatening (Hedges 225). Because women within the patriarchy are conditioned to believe female sexuality is impure, the wallpaper at first naturally disgusts the narrator. However, once she becomes familiar with it, and recognises shapes and images, she is no longer frightened or disgusted by it, but wishes only to understand it.

John, on the other hand, only wishes to ignore the wallpaper because he wants to ignore its significance. Men would rather ignore female sexuality, as it is mysterious and therefore threatening. Whatever men cannot understand must be redefined in a masculine way. Therefore, female sexuality is evil. Patriarchal men define their wives as not having urges or needs, but as only interested in satisfying their husbands. John treats his wife as a child, rendering her sexless. Within society, where women bear children, sex becomes a duty not a pleasure. However, the yellow wallpaper serves to

remind the reader female sexuality is a reality. A message that John, unfortunately, does not receive.

Another aspect that interests the narrator is the wallpaper's smell. If the paper cannot follow her when she goes outside, the smell can and does:

> But there is something else about that paper – the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here. It creeps all over the house. I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs....It is not bad – at first – and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met. (44)

As Kasmer recognises, the "description of the smell clearly links it to female sexuality" (Kasmer 9), and here, the smell emphasises the wallpaper's role. Like the colour, the smell serves to portray female sexuality as defined by men. To men it is rank, rotten, and foul, and the narrator notices and cannot escape this definition, which follows her, and all women, around.

The yellow wallpaper is a metaphor for women's lives. The conflict between the front and back patterns of the paper, then, represent the disharmony between men and women, specifically the struggle between the narrator and her doctor-husband. And the colour and smell represent the male definition of female sexuality. The narrator, like most women in patriarchal marriages, is trapped behind John's ideas and ideals. What she comes to see in the wallpaper is a representation of her own life. Not allowed inspiration or stimulation of her own, the narrator is forced to creep around behaving in the manner expected of her – that is, she is eclipsed by John's expectations. Therefore, an understanding between husband and wife is impossible, as Lanser comments: "[J]ust as it is impossible for the narrator to get 'that top pattern...off from the under one,' so it is impossible to separate the text of a culture from the text of an individual, to free female subjectivity from the patriarchal text" (Lanser 235). Through the wallpaper the

narrator is able to come to terms with her Self, but is unfortunately isolated because she will no longer conform to patriarchal society and its rules.

Although the narrator has managed to escape John's definitions of her, she is in no better position. The rope tied around the woman's waist signifies that despite becoming more authoritative and confident within herself, restrictions are nevertheless present: "The final vision itself is one of physical enslavement, not liberation: the woman, bound by a rope, circles the room like an animal in a yoke" (Treichler 74). Her freedom from John's ideals is useless because she is still limited by his authority as doctor; John's response to her actions will be to commit her. The narrator has discovered a discourse where she can have autonomy, but hers and the main discourse are not compatible. John's authority over language obstructs the narrator's chances of exploring freedom. Recognising this, the narrator expires into madness. Just as she knew the impossibility of over-riding his diagnosis, she realises neutralising the patriarchal discourse is equally impossible.

Conclusion

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is an expression of indignation. Whilst men have the power to define women and control them through that definition, women will always be trapped. John misinterprets his wife, leaving her as nothing more than a reflection of himself. She exists only as he sees her. This is representative of the nineteenth century attitude towards women. The ignorance and arrogance of the doctors caused them to deduce some incredible things, which far from benefiting women often caused more harm than good. The protagonist's decline into madness represents how destructive patriarchal society can be. Doctors only served to enforce its restrictions.

Madness appears to be presented as a process of female discovery warped by male intervention. Through the yellow wallpaper the narrator comes to important realisations concerning her situation, and as a result is motivated to change. However, her growth is halted by the prevailing patriarchal power. Individually the narrator has made progress; but this progress is insignificant because it is immediately engulfed by the patriarchy. Although the paper offers insight, the nature of patriarchal society determines the failure of female thought. The narrator is driven mad by the realisation that she and her husband can never be equal.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" presents the difficulties women faced within nineteenth century patriarchal society. Not only did women have to contend with arrogant male doctors defining them, inside their own homes they encountered husbands who fully supported the doctors' opinions. Gilman, writing this story from experience, did not exaggerate the effects of following the Rest Cure. Almost sent mad herself by the inactivity and boredom, "The Yellow Wallpaper" portrays Weir Mitchell's 'cure' as nothing short of cruelty. However, it did not matter how many women complained, they were ignored. Gilman's story not only comments on the obstacles with which women contended, it highlights that women's voices were largely insignificant.

Gilman's story intended to show that the narrator's dilemma was not an individual case. Many women suffered because of patriarchal arrogance. Under the light of Gilman's explanations, it becomes clear that whilst patriarchal society controls language, and therefore reality, there can be no equality between female and male. This inflexibility is emphasised in Wide Sargasso Sea, as it is made very clear why and how Antoinette Cosway declines into madness. The arrogance and cold-heartedness of her husband, and her powerlessness, show the realities and horror of a patriarchal marriage.

The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is dissatisfied with her role in life and her husband's infantilisation of her. Antoinette, however, is rejected by her husband because she does not conform to his ideals. Whilst Gilman's message of female imprisonment is implied, Rhys's is not. The underlying patriarchal control becomes obvious, as Antoinette is destroyed by her marriage.

"This World is Forcing Me to Hold Your Hand": Madness and the Inflexibility of the Patriarchy

As the prequel to Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea introduces a more humane vision of the first Mrs Rochester. Antoinette's madness and gradual loss of control emphasises and subverts the male definition of the madwoman. The domination of Antoinette by her husband is obvious rather than implied, because her history and development is shown. In Wide Sargasso Sea there is a direct relationship between Antoinette's madness and patriarchal domination. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" Gilman implies her protagonist becomes mad through John's condescending treatment. Wide Sargasso Sea, however, explicitly portrays Antoinette's destruction. Her father, her stepfather, the convent school, and her husband, contribute to Antoinette's madness as enforcers of patriarchal society's domination of women.

Patriarchy, Colonialism and Antoinette's Background

Both Antoinette and Rochester are victims of a rigid and unforgiving system, but the nature of patriarchy determines that women suffer the most. Believing Antoinette to be beyond his realm of knowledge, Rochester is determined to confine his wife within a familiar definition. Rochester wants to think of Antoinette as an English woman, but is conscious of her foreignness. The only image that he can have of her is one he has been brought up to believe in; she appears to be an English gentlewoman, therefore he wants to believe she is (Bordo 76). The several cultural conflicts between the two are never resolved because neither will accept the other's difference. Unfortunately, Antoinette loses the struggle because she is a woman, and therefore powerless. Since both Antoinette and her mother (Annette) become mad, Rhys implies patriarchal marriages

are so restrictive, that they all have the potential to drive wives mad. Wide Sargasso Sea is specifically about Antoinette Cosway, but portrays the lives of many women trapped within a destructive marriage.

From the beginning of the novel, Antoinette's isolation is made obvious. It is made clear that her family life is not secure, as she proclaims, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (15). Antoinette and her family are always defined as being outside the power structure. As Nunez-Harrell and also Starks (109) explain, the Cosways' position as a cultural mixture, without male support, situates them as exiles within their own country. Nunez-Harrell writes, "[T]he white Creole woman is an outcast, a sort of freak rejected by both Europe and England, whose blood she shares, and by the black West Indian people, whose culture and home have been hers" (281). This suspension between two cultures is the environment with which Antoinette must cope throughout her child, and which shapes her identity "constituted by culture" (Bordo 76).

Antoinette, as she is only a child, has little difficulty coping with the isolation. Her mother, however, young, beautiful, widowed, and only used to a wealthy lifestyle, is devastated by her continual losses. To a certain extent Annette is able to ignore the situation as she hopes for a miracle, but once the blacks destroy her only form of freedom – her horse - she withdraws and gives up: "But later that day, Godfrey found him, he had been poisoned. 'Now we are marooned,' my mother said, 'now what will become of us?'" (16). For Annette, the horse symbolised her former life. His death meant the impossibility of things returning to normal.

Annette's helplessness indicates the vulnerability of women within patriarchal society where only men hold the solutions to difficult problems. Annette's son Pierre, although male, has no power to alter his family's destitute situation because he is a

child, and physically and mentally handicapped. Antoinette is immediately useless to her mother because, as a female and a child, she cannot be of any use. Unfortunately, women are therefore defined, and define themselves, in accordance with their usefulness to a patriarchal system (Fayad 438). Campbell observes that Annette, conditioned by patriarchy only for marriage, does not have the practical skills to save her family: "Too impractical by nature to adjust to a shifting status quo, Annette becomes the victim of her society" (Campbell 139). As a product of rich upper-class society, Annette cannot do anything but wait for death.

Ironically, it is only through the help of Annette's black slave that the family survives. Rody observes that free from white patriarchal restrictions, Christophine has the knowledge to provide food, support, and hope:

> Christophine is a mother whose racial otherness, perversely, overcomes some of the debilitating effects of her gender. The young white heroine is vulnerable, trapped in a disempowering, self-betraying role, but Christophine, though a servant, is independent, resistant, and unhesitatingly blunt. (Rody 307)

Rhys characterises the black Christophine as capable, and the white mistress Annette as dependent. When Annette gives up, Christophine takes over the running of Coulibri and the mothering of Antoinette.

Christophine, sensing her loneliness, provides Antoinette with a playmate, Tia. Unfortunately this friendship is doomed to failure as the culture barrier, obvious between Annette and Christophine, separates them: white must be white and black must be black. Characterised as slave-like and resourceful, Tia amazes Antoinette with her knowledge: "[F]ires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry" (20). The implication is that Antoinette believes she would be happier if her life was like Tia's. But when Tia bets that Antoinette cannot turn a somersault in the water and then takes the pennies anyway, racist language associated with colonialists and slave-owners emerges from Antoinette, showing the distinct social gap between the

two: "'Keep them then you cheating nigger,' I said…'I can get more if I want to'"(21). Barnes comments that without understanding why, Antoinette turns against her friend to use the language of her slave-owning father. The two may have plenty in common, but the social and racial barriers are too large to cross:

> Although Tia and Antoinette can recognize themselves in the other, they cannot cross the boundary of race and class. Rhys poignantly portrays this tragedy of alienation; both children are uncomprehending of the forces that control them and their reactions to each other, but both must suffer as victims of an inhumane colonial structure. (Barnes 155)

No matter how appealing Tia's life may be to Antoinette, it becomes obvious there are rules determining who they can be and how they can live.

Arriving home Antoinette realises there are white visitors on the glacis with her mother. They find her appearance extremely amusing because they see a white girl in a black's dress. Antoinette is deeply ashamed, provoking a nightmare where she dreams of being chased by someone who hates her. This dream symbolises that her fate is inevitable because of her social and cultural position. Antoinette is female and brought up as wealthy and must accept the consequences these things bring with them, like marriage. As Olaussen remarks, Antoinette's dream, triggered by the incident with Tia, portrays her fear of white women's lives. Her mother is a tortured and long-suffering woman, and Antoinette wishes to escape the same fate, but she cannot: "[Marriage and] fear of sexual violation [are] linked to the rejection by Tia: Antoinette is not a black person; thus she cannot escape what lies in store for all white women" (Olaussen 78-79). Despite her identification with Tia, she cannot be like her; as white, Antoinette is doomed to follow the white patriarchal prescription.

However, Annette, totally immersed within patriarchal culture, feels compelled to raise her family out of trouble - she does not want her child to grow up black. But educated only in the art of femininity, Annette cannot improve their situation except by

mingling in society and finding a husband: "In a week she had a new dress and so had I. The Luttrels lent her a horse, and she would ride off very early and not come back till late next day – tired out because she had been to a dance or a moonlight picnic" (23). Forced into the realisation that their situation needs to change, as Madden observes, marriage and dependency on a male are her only options:

> Annette's main gesture to protect her daughter is to marry the Englishman Mr. Mason so Antoinette will not grow up 'wild'....It is one of the few options – perhaps the only option – available to her as a white Creole woman in a patriarchal/colonial society. (Madden 163)[1]

Conditioned to believe in the patriarchy, Annette presumes her marriage will solve their problems. Unfortunately, it does not and she becomes disillusioned when her husband also punishes her for not being what he expected.

Antoinette observes that Mason does not realise the West Indies is not England, Annette is not an English woman, and the hostility to the family is real: "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" (24). Only Antoinette and her mother are aware of the danger, Rochester is oblivious: "Now it had started up again and worse than before, my mother knows but she can't make him believe it. I wish I could tell him that out here is not at all like English people think it is" (29). In his arrogance Mason refuses to listen to his wife's warnings and underestimates the resentment and anger of the blacks. Madden comments, as the head of the family and a white male, Mason believes he single-handedly rescued the family from poverty: "Mr Mason, who, by his marriage to Annette, lifts the family from their lowclass status to a position of respectability, is representative of the colonizer mentality" (Madden 163). Although he admits he does not understand, his non-understanding is reason to stay, not to leave. He therefore imagines he can simply

ignore Annette's warnings: "'They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand.' 'No, I don't understand,' Mr Mason always said. 'I don't understand at all'" (28). Mason does not understand, therefore Annette must be imagining "enmity which doesn't exist" (27).

Mason believes he has the authority to control the situation because he is a white English male – he simply *knows* more than the natives do because he is civilised (Knapp 212). Despite Annette having experienced the anger and hatred of the blacks, Mason can dismiss these facts and assert his own opinion – implying to Annette that she is paranoid. Because of the frequency of these discussions between the couple, Annette becomes frantic, but is finally proved right when the blacks' anger erupts. Instead of admitting his mistake and losing authority, Mason prefers to mask the situation and pretend that he is in control:

> 'A handful of drunken negroes.' He opened the door leading to the *glacis* and walked out. 'What is all this,' he shouted. 'What do you want?' A horrible noise swelled up, like animals howling, but worse. We heard stones falling on to the *glacis*. He was pale when he came in again, but he tried to smile as he shut and bolted the door. 'More of them than I thought, and in a nasty mood too. They will repent in the morning. I foresee gifts of tamarinds in syrup and ginger sweets tomorrow.' (32-33)

Even though he recognises he was wrong, he still insists on covering the truth just to appear in control. Unfortunately repenting is far from the blacks' minds as they proceed to burn down Coulibri. Bitter and resentful of Mason's arrogance, Annette believes she has the right to blame her husband. Annette had the knowledge and the sense to want to leave, but she was held back by her husband's need to assert his authority.

Mason's money may have improved their lifestyle, but because of his conceit, Annette loses everything that is important to her, her home, her son, her parrot, and her Self. Repulsed by her husband, not only does she scream abuse at her husband, she

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[1] Olaussen also makes the same point. Annette's feminine qualities make it impossible for her to change their situation; all she can do is concentrate on getting a new husband (Olaussen 71).

challenges his authority by defining him as wrong and herself as right: "'I told you,' she said, 'I told you what would happen again and again.' Her voice broke, but still she screamed, 'You would not listen, you sneered at me, you grinning hypocrite'" (34). Mason's wealth "rescued" Annette from certain death, and believing this allows him to control the family, he is appalled at Annette's abuse. Despite his wife having suffered the trauma of losing her son and her home, Mason shows incredible insensitivity by believing her behaviour to be inappropriate and seeking to correct it. Her distress is not met with sympathy as Mason decides to have her removed from society. To him she has become nothing more than an hysterical, screaming woman. As Smith-Rosenberg comments, "The stereotype of the middle class woman as emotional, pious, passive and nurturant was to become increasingly rigid throughout the nineteenth century" (656). Annette is argumentative, aggressive, and angry, qualities which do not conform to the cultural attitude concerning women. Therefore she is regarded as mad. Because the balance of power is with him, Mason can transfer his mistakes onto his wife. He is not wrong, she is. She is defined by her husband as mad, and so, isolated from her Self, she becomes mad.

Also, Mason unknowingly ensures that the cycle of female passivity continues by sending Antoinette to a convent school where she will learn to become a "proper" woman. All the girls learn the skills necessary for marriage, modesty, chastity, cleanliness, and sacrifice, as Mother St Justine illustrates:

> She shuts the book with a clap and talks about pushing down the cuticles of our nails when we wash our hands....This remark is made in a casual and perfunctory voice and she slides on to order and chastity, that flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended. (45)

As Madden observes, rich white females cannot escape being conditioned for marriage, and religion is also a tool of the patriarchy used to dominate women: "The convent, in effect, educates her for a female destiny in a patriarchy. She is taught needlework,

neatness of appearance, deportment, modesty, and chastity: lessons in how to be a well-bred woman according to white European standards" (Madden 164). If these girls do not learn their lessons, then they may spoil their chances for marriage.

The convent teaches that self-sacrifice is important for women in order to catch a husband, but happiness is not: "But what about happiness, I thought at first, is there no happiness? There must be. Oh happiness of course, happiness, well. But I soon forgot about happiness" (47). But it is within the convent walls that Antoinette is finally able to coolly name herself (Oates 56), that is, to give herself an identity, placing herself in the novel and identifying with the brilliant colours of the Caribbean: "We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath, I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, nee Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839" (44). Antoinette feels the convent is a refuge because no men or mirrors are allowed within. It is, however, a false refuge as the girls are conditioned to become part of patriarchal society. Antoinette may be comfortable enough to finally name herself, but it is within the convent that she learns the dichotomy associated with being female (Starks 112). Life in the convent is divided into opposites - light/dark, day/night, heaven/hell - mimicking the male view of women as either virgin or whore. The convent is only a temporary haven. In the end, it is merely another aspect of male domination.

When Antoinette reaches seventeen, Mason declares she cannot be hidden away forever – implying it is time for her to marry. Mason seems to have forgotten Antoinette experienced childhood traumas (all related to men and marriage). As Oates observes, Antoinette is also expected to forget the tragedies she has lived through: "Even after the worst has happened – the estate burned, the idiot Pierre killed, Mrs. Mason hopelessly insane – Antoinette must continue to live in her poisoned atmosphere as if it were not

poisoned: as if it were, simply, the world" (Oates 55). Claiming he wants her to be happy, Mason explains that he has tried to arrange it for her, but he is blind to the economic and emotional dangers that await Antoinette (Knapp 220). With the experience of her mother's bad marriages, Antoinette is terrified of whatever Mason is planning; she realises her life is not her own, but does not want to admit it: "It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me. This time I did not let him see it. It was like that morning when I found the dead horse. Say nothing and it may not be true" (49). The shock of reality triggers another dream about the man who hates her. Despite her fear, she feels she must follow him. She does not believe she can escape the potentially destructive patriarchal institution of marriage:

> I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. (50)

Antoinette and her mother, although recognising the injustices, are incapable of rebelling against the system (Barnes 159). For Antoinette, her fate as a rich, white, Creole women cannot be prevented, and, as with Annette, the consequence is madness.

Representation of Madness

Bertha Mason's madness in Jane Eyre is explained as being hereditary. However, in Wide Sargasso Sea madness is obviously the result of male arrogance and of the patriarchal structure. The imposition of Mason's culture onto his wife's causes her pain and confusion. Both Annette and Antoinette become further isolated from their home because Mason insists on enforcing aspects of his own culture, such as English food and décor (Knapp 212). Therefore within Wide Sargasso Sea "Rhys examines the destructive effect of English Victorian sexism (and racism) on the female psyche and

the marital relationship" (Starks 106). As Rody explains, madness is not viewed as an inherited disease, but a condition these women are driven to: "Rhys recuperates the mother, who, mentioned in *Jane Eyre* only to suggest a genetic source of Bertha's madness, is shown here to have been *driven* mad, like Antoinette, and under similar circumstances of loss, violence, and exploitation in marriage" (Rody 304).

Annette's only other available response to her husband's behaviour is to give up. Having attempted to save her family and failed, she realises she cannot do anything else and slips into despair, as Christophine later explains to Rochester:

> 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 me see her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end – mad I don't know – she give up, she care for nothing. (130)

She has tried, but the lack of appropriate skills has rendered her helpless. Rhys presents Annette not as a hideous and deformed mad creature, but as a woman whose life has been destroyed by the men she has married. Madden believes it is obvious Annette's madness is the result of her suffering and her husband's insensitivity:

> Annette's madness begins as excessive emotion – grief for her dead son. It is not a spontaneous eruption of madness: she is driven to it by others....Then she is shut away, treated as if she is mad, abandoned by her husband, friendless, isolated. The man in charge of her treats her as a sexual toy, and when the rumour spreads, the community brands her promiscuous – and sees this as more evidence of her madness. In the end...she loses hope. (Madden 170)

Both Annette and Antoinette's madnesses are presented as the result of the anger and frustration felt towards their narrow-minded husbands and the inflexible society they represent.

Antoinette remembers her mother as a sad and abandoned woman:

> My mother usually walked up and down the glacis....Standing by the bamboos she had a clear view to the sea, but anyone passing could stare at her. They stared, sometimes they laughed. Long after the sound was far away and faint she kept her eyes shut and her hands clenched. A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep....I hated this frown and

> once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. (17)

Antoinette is haunted by a woman destroyed by her experiences, and whom she does not have the power to help. After Annette's marriage to Mason, Antoinette witnesses their frequent and passionate arguments and recalls her mother's increasing distress: "I'd been awake… and heard my mother screaming….I'd put my hands over my ears, her screams were so loud and terrible" (39). Antoinette knows that her mother cannot be the same after losing her home, and doubts that Annette is recovering in the country: "I remember the dull feeling as we drove along for I did not expect to see her. She was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone, I was certain of it" (40). The destruction of Coulibri could have been prevented had Mason listened to Annette. Therefore his arrogance, and the arrogance of the system he represents, is to blame for Annette's loss of identity and her descent into madness.

Mason denies his responsibility by isolating her in a country house. He provides care in the form of a black couple, who instead take advantage of Annette's helplessness. But rather than being looked after, Annette has been discarded and forgotten, again an object of ridicule. Antoinette watches her mother, desperate and broken, finally give up:

> Before I reached her house I heard her crying. I thought I will kill anyone who is hurting my mother. I dismounted and ran quickly on to the veranda where I could look into the room….I saw the man lift her up out of the chair and kiss her. I saw his mouth fasten on hers and she went all soft and limp in his arms and he laughed. (110-111)

Annette has become nothing more than an amusement for her caregivers. Mason's disposal of her has left Annette open to abuse. The caregiver's kiss and Annette's immediate submission is further proof that men have complete control over female identity.

Mason, by sending Antoinette to the convent school, does, in a way make Annette's madness hereditary. As Koenen recognises, he ensures that Antoinette take after her mother by sending her to a school that only prepares girls for marriage and frustrating subordination: "The pattern of her mother's struggle with male reason will be repeated precisely in Antoinette's marriage with Rochester, who will further displace her and drive her into madness, so that she will suffer the same fate as her mother" (Koenen 19). They are not given the skills to cope by themselves, but rather the knowledge necessary for pleasing men. Antoinette is groomed for a society marriage, which, from her mother's experience, she can only associate with tragedy.

Unfortunately Antoinette believes that Rochester is sincere because he has come all the way from England. Educated by nuns and completely naive, she has no reason to question his motives. Desperate for any form of happiness, Antoinette needs to believe that Rochester loves her. It is significant that he narrate the second part of the novel as it highlights, specifically the loss of identity Antoinette faces within her marriage, and generally the silencing and loss of identity many women face within the institution of marriage. After her marriage Antoinette has been silenced by the man she has married because he perceives her as an object to be owned, studied and critiqued. As Mezei observes,

> Rochester has married her, taken possession of her, and made her *his* wife, and so he now tells *her* story and the story of their marriage which had become *his* story and no longer hers. Instead of narrating her own story, Antoinette becomes a character in his narration. (Mezei 205)

He expects her to conform to his expectations of women, therefore ignoring her as an individual: "I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting" (56). Knapp comments that Rochester does not allow Antoinette any needs or feelings of her own, she is merely his wife: "Solipsistic, dwelling on his own problems, Rochester never

bothers to ponder his wife's needs. Nor are his reactions – those of a nineteenth-century husband – surprising. A woman's place is in the home; she has a role to fill" (Knapp 221). His wife and the island they are on must conform to his expectations or be redefined by him.

The island is too alien and threatening for Rochester to comprehend, and because he relates his wife to the island, she also becomes alien and threatening (Madden 167). There is nothing familiar on the island for him, and therefore nothing comforting: "There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me" (123). The colours he describes as too vibrant and unreal are the same colours Antoinette uses to define herself. For her, they are familiar and comforting, but for him they are threatening: "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. 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" (59). Used to calm and subdued colour, Rochester is uncomfortable amongst all the flamboyance. He can only accept Antoinette when she becomes familiar to him, that is, when she appears English: "She dismounted quickly, picked a large shamrock-shaped leaf to make a cup, and drank. Then she picked another leaf, folded it and brought it to me. 'Taste. This is mountain water.' Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank" (60). Rochester only wishes to please her when he can relate to her as English. When she is not English, he is not interested.

Rochester, with typical colonial mentality, believes that he is superior to most people on the island, including his wife. He is therefore disconcerted when the servants do not seem to recognise fully his authority, like English servants would. They call him "Master," but they also appear to be mocking him, as he comments: "The girl Amelie said to me this morning, 'I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon

house.' She was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful" (55). Used to assuming authority within a strict patriarchal environment, Rochester is appalled at the apparent lack of respect he receives.

Rochester, expecting defined lines between master and servant, openly disapproves of Antoinette hugging and kissing their black servants: "'Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?' I'd say. 'Why not?' 'I wouldn't hug and kiss them,' I'd say, 'I couldn't'" (76). He cannot understand nor accept her familiarity with them, therefore, as Madden comments, immediately identifying his wife with the servants: "[Rochester] dislikes her easy familiarity with the blacks; he expects her to treat them as inferior and Other, and when she does not, he sees her as Other" (Madden 167). But hypocritically, he later has no qualms about sleeping with the servant girl Amelie. Obviously, the struggle he has is not with moral insufficiencies, but with power. Whilst Antoinette does things he cannot understand, she is powerful. He must therefore resort to doing things she cannot understand in order to regain control. Because he feels confused and vulnerable, it becomes more essential for Rochester to dominate his wife than to compromise and be happy.

Rochester believes the flamboyant place and the mocking people are threatening, but especially frightening are Antoinette's contradictions because they place him outside the circle of power. When discussing Christophine's habit of allowing her dress to drag, Rochester desperately tries to assert his interpretations and opinions of her:

> 'Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit.'
> 'It is. *You don't understand at all.* They don't care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn't the only dress they have. Don't you like Christophine?'
> 'She is a very worthy person no doubt. I can't say I like her language.'
> 'It doesn't mean anything,' said Antoinette.
> 'And she looks so lazy. She dawdles about.'

> '*Again you are mistaken.* She seems slow, but every move she makes is right so it's quick in the end.' (71-72)[2]

However, Antoinette has an answer for every negative comment he makes. The island culture system seems foreign, barbaric and untrustworthy to Rochester, and he is constantly wrong or misinterpreting information. He begins to feel that the secret of control lies in knowledge. Rochester believes that if he knew the secrets of the island he could control Antoinette. As Fayad comments: "His need to control immediately surfaces, and because he equated the island with woman, the proof of his control must come in being able to control the women around him, especially the woman who seems the key to the whole situation, Antoinette" (Fayad 444). Rochester feels ignorant amongst these people who do not know their own age or how to behave (57), so he is desperate to know what they know: "'What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing'" (73). Rochester feels that he is isolated in this place. It is Antoinette's home, Antoinette's people, and Antoinette's money – he has no role in this foreign land and therefore no power.

Consequently Rochester is driven to control and dominate, as Starks observes:

> Unfortunately, Antoinette fails to adhere to Rochester's expectations of what the ideal woman – a 'pure' Englishwoman – should be and how she should behave. Emblematic of English imperialism, the character of Rochester sets out to 'colonize' the other, Antoinette, in a struggle for domination and supremacy. (Starks 108)

Neither he nor Antoinette can see beyond their own realities, but it becomes vital for Rochester to enforce his own. Antoinette's reality is the island and its people and England is merely a dream. But to Rochester reality is England and the island is merely a vivid dream, as the following exchange illustrates: "'Is it true,' she said, ' that England is like a dream?'....'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream'" (67). Because Antoinette

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[2] My italics.

has failed to conform to his standards he must deny Antoinette and her reality, replacing it with his own. But to gain control he must first destroy her.

Rochester's narrative reveals his destructive motives, yet because he is male his words mean more than Antoinette's. She trusts in the power of words as, to her, speaking words means that something must be true (16). However, she comes to realise that words may be misused. Rochester tells Antoinette that he loves her, and so she believes he does. She then gives his words power over her life and death. His "love" gives her the strength to live and he recognises that should he withdraw his love, she will be devastated:

> 'Why did you make me want to live? Why did you do that to me?'
> 'Because I wished it. Isn't that enough?'
> 'Yes, it is enough. But if one day you didn't wish it. What should I do then? ....If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die.' (77)

Antoinette gives her husband complete control over her identity because she trusts his words. But to him words are not to be trusted. He claims he does not love his wife and does not mean what he says to her:

> I'd touch her face gently and touch tears. Tears – nothing! Words – less than nothing. 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.* (78)[3]

Unlike Antoinette, he does not confuse sex for love. He thirsts for her when she displays English characteristics. But by satisfying his sexual needs, Antoinette becomes part of the wild island and is therefore repulsive to him. His definitions of her change as his attitude changes. He labels Antoinette both desirable and offensive, trying to control her by changing her reality.

Rochester changes her truth to lies and the rumours to his truth. He finds Daniel Cosway a repulsive man, and does not believe a word he says, but uses him as an

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[3] My italics.

excuse to doubt Antoinette. Rather than disregard Daniel Cosway's letter, Rochester uses the pretexts it provides to dominate Antoinette: "I folded the letter carefully and put it into my pocket. I felt no surprise. It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it" (82). He changes Antoinette into a deceptive woman hiding her hideous background from him. Although Rochester is disgusted and sickened by Daniel (104), Daniel gives evidence to support his interpretation of Antoinette as a deceiver. He purposely hurts her because superiority is more important to him – his pride will not allow him to lose, and in doing so displaces Antoinette from her true identity, giving her one that he creates.

Watching her world once again crumble around her, Antoinette desperately seeks a solution to her misery. Not interested in winning or losing, Antoinette merely wants love within a happy marriage. Believing sex is the solution she seeks, she desperately asks Christophine for a love potion (93). Like her mother, Antoinette can only see a single solution, and she fully believes her happiness depends on the restoration and preservation of her marriage: "'But Christophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me'" (93). Christophine tells Antoinette to leave Rochester, but she does not realise the impossibility of this within a patriarchal system: "'A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out. Do it and he come after you.' 'He will not come after me. And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all. Everything I had belongs to him'" (91). Like her mother, Antoinette is trapped and helpless within her marriage. She is economically dependent, frustrated, confused, and desperate for someone to love her.

Just as Annette tried to convince Mason to leave Jamaica, Antoinette tries to reason with Rochester. Christophine advised her to speak to her husband, as she

believes understanding will bring the two together (96). Unfortunately, Rochester, and the patriarchal system he represents, is not interested in understanding and equality. Antoinette describes the traumas of her childhood and her mother's suffering. She outlines the isolation, bitterness, and the loss. She explains her mother's frustrations and her descent, through grief, into madness. But even Antoinette realises that the lies are far more attractive: "'Lies are never forgotten, they go on and they grow'" (108). Wanting to believe he has been deceived, he discredits her words. Despite her obvious suffering, Rochester prefers to label Antoinette a liar and a cheat. Antoinette is desperate to make a connection with her husband, but Rochester doubts her words: "I began to wonder how much of all this was true, how much imagined, distorted" (109). Preferring to have control, he will not give his wife the benefit of the doubt.

Acknowledging Antoinette's words as truthful would be, to Rochester, equivalent to surrendering his control over her. Rochester's pride will not allow him to do this. Her words can mean nothing to him or he will have lost. Finally Antoinette realises that he is unwilling to understand her because that would give her an amount of authority, however minimal. She continues talking but understands the futility of the exercise: "'I have said all I want to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed....I will tell you anything you wish to know, but in a few words because words are no use, I know that now'" (111). Koenen recognises that despite Antoinette's attempt to form a dialogue with her husband, he is only interested in winning: "[T]he dialogue shows only attempts at understanding the other, attempts that are doomed to failure because in the end Rochester cannot...face the other without the impulse to dominate or annihilate" (Koenen 19). Rochester has succeeded in completely silencing his wife, and in forcing her to yield to his power.

Desperate to save her marriage, Antoinette is driven to use Christophine's love potion. Not caring that Rochester has recreated her according to his own image of her, Antoinette is convinced he will love her after sleeping with her one more time. He submits to her sexual advances but still maintains an element of control by refusing to use her real name. Antoinette asks him, "'My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?'(111) Rochester responds by forcing an identity on her, "'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha'" (111). Rochester tries to control Antoinette by taking away her flamboyant name, and replacing it with a cold, English name – Bertha. He even goes so far as to call her "Marionette," suggesting she is a doll, a mere toy to him. In this way, although Antoinette succeeds in sleeping with her husband, her plan is doomed to fail.

Instead of falling in love with Antoinette, Rochester feels more oppressed by her and believes he has been poisoned. Rather than allowing himself to feel anything for her, he still prefers to play the victim: "I thought, I have been poisoned. But it was a dull thought, like a child....I was too giddy to stand and fell backward on to the bed" (113). This incident merely becomes another reason to dominate his wife. He refuses to believe that her motive was love, regarding his wife as a mad and dangerous woman. This conforms to nineteenth century medical beliefs. Rather than truly trying to understand the situation, it is more desirable to attempt to contain it within an available definition. Rochester tries to force Antoinette to be submissive and obedient. Her resistance is an indication of madness. He considers the 'poisoning' as another indication of her madness.

By believing Antoinette poisoned him, Rochester can justify sleeping with Amelie. If his wife is a mad and dangerous woman, then there is no real crime in satisfying his personal needs. Antoinette, however, is neither mad nor dangerous, and

views Rochester's actions as a betrayal. He has finally succeeded in mastering her through betrayal, and this victory allows him to forego remorse for his betrayal of Antoinette: "I pulled [Amelie] down beside me and we were both laughing....She was so gay, so natural and something of this gaiety she must have given to me, for I had not one moment of remorse" (115). Antoinette finally must admit defeat. Her husband, whom she believed would love her, has destroyed her. Rochester, however, is not interested in love but rather in appearance and honour. Believing Antoinette does not conform to his ideals, he would rather crush her than change his ideals.

Changing his ideals would be comparable to admitting defeat. So rather than attempt happiness and equality and challenge the structure of his society by submitting to a woman, Rochester destroys his wife. Rochester describes Antoinette as a hideous and mad creature. The description is reminiscent of Bronte's Bertha: "The door of Antoinette's room opened. When I saw her I was too shocked to speak. Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen" (120). Although Rochester's victory over Antoinette has ultimately disadvantaged his situation, he now considers himself a true master, as he believes he has conquered the source of his misery.

Conclusion

Rochester has recreated his wife. Never actually a real person to him, she finally becomes much less. However, Rhys leaves no doubt that he is the cause of Antoinette's destruction. Rochester's explanation in Jane Eyre describes Bertha Mason as an evil, mad beast, but in Wide Sargasso Sea this is not the case as Antoinette is driven to total despair. Antoinette attempts to explain this to Rochester:

> 'Do you know what you have done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I loved this place and you have made it into a place 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....I hate it now like I hate you.' (121)

As Starks also acknowledges, Antoinette's behaviour is a result of her husband's arrogance and lack of understanding:

> [H]is desire to destroy Antoinette transforms into an obsessive wish to own and torment her....Rochester, like the patriarchal culture that he represents, deals with Antoinette by stripping her of any identity and by forcing her into a state of mental distress that he can label as madness....He will not allow her to live as an autonomous subject, she must exist only as an object defined and controlled by him. (Starks 114-115)

For Rochester, nothing appears to be more important than maintaining strict control of his environment, disregarding any consequences or effects.

In the end Antoinette must become mad because it is the only definition Rochester allows her. He sees his role towards his wife as Master rather than as Partner. And, his unwillingness to allow her self-autonomy, means her death as a person is inevitable, either because she submits or because she refuses to submit and is punished. Therefore, madness in Wide Sargasso Sea is a condition of frustration. Although Rochester is clearly the villain in Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys makes it apparent he is also a victim. His confusion, insecurity, and need to dominate stem from his English patriarchal background.

Neither Antoinette nor Annette was mad until their husbands proclaimed that they were. Rhys demonstrates that Mason's and Rochester's inability to accept cultural behaviour different to their own prompted them to find some way to make the odd behaviour familiar. Both men, because they found they had little control over their wives, used a label to rationalise their wives' behaviour. Madness, Koenen acknowledges, was a convenient label for Mason and Rochester to use because it described without making understanding necessary: "Madness...is always a definition from the outside, from an objectifying distance, never from the inside" (Koenen 18).

The definer, then, always has control over the defined. Madness in Wide Sargasso Sea is a male invention used to bring females to order. Rochester has destroyed the original Antoinette and replaced her with the puppet Bertha Mason. Antoinette's existence is denied so Rochester can claim possession of the wife he has created for himself. He uses the label madness to win the power struggle between himself and his wife.

Rhys emphasises the destructiveness of a society that focuses on control of women. Both Antoinette and Annette are incapable of supporting themselves because women are more ornamental than functional creatures. Rochester's cultural conditioning locks him into narrow-minded interpretations of Antoinette. Although both are controlled by society's constructions, only Rochester is in a position of power. Cultural construction is also significant in Faces in the Water. The power of the medical staff reflects society's beliefs and restrictions. This domination of the female patients is absolute. Like Antoinette, Istina Mavet is trapped within someone else's definition of her.

"What I've Become is So Burdensome": The Expectations and Hypocrisy of the Patriarchy

Janet Frame's Faces in the Water explores the sordid and frightening world of twentieth century madness by looking at the asylums that house the mad. It is Istina Mavet, a madwoman, who narrates and explains the poor treatment the female patients' experience. Within the asylums it is the medical staff who have complete control and who insist on conformity. The mental institutions reflect the restrictions and biases women face within society, because medical discourse has the ability to define normality and abnormality, health and ill health. Although the novel never explicitly argues this point, the socialised domination of the women becomes apparent as only feminine qualities and domestic occupations are rewarded.

The Expulsion of Difference

The history of asylums goes back to the sixteenth century. The early asylums resembled the prisons of the time. Mad people were kept in dungeons and cells or tightly packed into small rooms (Foucault 71). During the mid-eighteenth century, the physical shackles came off the majority of mentally ill patients. The asylums reduced their obvious resemblance to the prisons. However, patients were left with guilt, as the mad were told they "must hold no one but [themselves] responsible for the punishment [they receive]" (Foucault 246). Madness was seen in the eighteenth century as something that was capable of being cured through a control of morality. All patients needed was to see the error of their ways. Madness became a "movement of moral consciousness"(Foucault 250). Although the asylums were no longer barbaric, treatment was administered as punishment. Patients learnt to behave through threats

and chastisement. During the eighteenth century, conformity of behaviour within society (especially within mental institutions) became rigorously enforced. The mad were made to feel ashamed.

The fear and shame of the eighteenth century asylums are reflected in Faces in the Water. Rules and regulations of society are enforced within the mental institutions as commandments of sanity. They are numerous and strict. The long list on the first page illustrates the extent to which society is controlled. The world is a place that concentrates on reality and the concreteness of life. It is a place where Safety is worshipped and personified. Safety is the "Red Cross who will provide us with ointment and bandages for our wounds and remove the foreign ideas the glass beads of fantasy the bent hairpins of unreason embedded in our minds" (9). Imagination is not acceptable because it cannot be limited or defined. The worship of Safety, reason, and science, therefore, is an indication of sanity.

Istina places herself outside of these rules by explaining her alliance to imagination. She becomes, to society, an uncultured savage because she sides against reason: "I was not yet civilized; I traded my safety for the glass beads of fantasy" (11). As Rutherford explains, an affiliation with imagination sets you apart: "[I]ndividuality is an affliction rather than a blessing, for 'life' necessitates suppression of all that falls outside the accepted pattern; conform or be annihilated" (41). Frame implies that society severely punishes those who dare to remove themselves from the "accepted pattern". This is highlighted within the walls of the mental institutions. The female patients are forced to submit to rules that enforce female roles within society, and punishment occurs if they refuse to be submissive. And, as Robertson acknowledges, the "imagery of imprisonment for the crime of difference is present throughout the novel" (45). Asylums serve not to heal the mad, but to correct their differences.

Asylums as Places to Heal?

Although, in theory, mental institutions are supposed to shelter and care for the insane, Istina's experiences show that this is not always the case. Within the asylums the women are made to understand that they are unacceptable and must be changed. The treatment they undergo is presented as being more like torture. Like Gilman in "The Yellow Wallpaper", Frame aims to undermine doctors' diagnoses by giving the patients' view. To Istina, Electric Shock Treatment is a punishment for being herself, and a way to enforce rules and regulations and conformity:

> Every morning I woke in dread, waiting for the day nurse to go on her rounds and announce from the list of names in her hand whether or not I was for shock treatment, the new and fashionable means of quieting people and of making them realize that orders are to be obeyed and floors are to be polished without anyone protesting and faces are made to be fixed into smiles and weeping is a crime. (15)

The emphasis is placed on obedience and keeping up an appearance of happiness. As in the nineteenth century, the medical definition of sanity looks towards the male definition of femininity, focusing on submission. S. Weir Mitchell believed female patients needed to have their wills broken. From Istina's description, it appears the patients in Faces in the Water are being broken rather than cured. For the doctors, treatments like EST are an excellent way to treat distressed or difficult patients. But to the patients the treatment is, as Robertson acknowledges, "violent, terrifying and painful, and most often administered as punishment" (46). The female patients learn that they need to be passive and accepting before they will be recognised as sane.

EST assists doctors in changing the women because it effectively kills each woman's sense of self. Istina describes EST as something that disconnects her identity and leaves her feeling vulnerable and helpless:

> I feel myself dropping as if a trap door had opened into darkness....Then I rise disembodied from the dark to grasp and attach myself like a homeless parasite to the shape of my identity and its position in space and time. At first I cannot find myself, someone has removed all trace of me. (26)

Istina's sense that she has been robbed of her own identity illustrates the power of the medical staff. They decide whether or not the patients have been behaving appropriately, and whether or not EST is necessary. Istina likens EST to a virtual death because of this loss of control over her own identity. She comments that if the mortuary "were built in proportion, to really house the dead, its size would swallow the greenhouse and the laundry and the boiler room and the Big Kitchen, perhaps the entire hospital (34). She also mentions that EST is the patients' "training for Sing Sing when [they] are at last convicted of murder and sentenced to death and sit strapped in the electric chair" (23), which brings together the image of death and punishment. EST not only causes the death of the patients' Self, it is made clear the death is reproach for being mad.

The treatment within asylums, then, is not shown as positive or rehabilitating, but as frightening and humiliating. Rather than treat the women with respect and kindness, the answer is "to shout and hit and herd" (139). The mad women are transformed into animals that only respond to violence. The staff denies the women are human beings, because all trace of socialised normality has disappeared. In the back wards, the staff contribute to the chaos:

> The nurses, feeling bored because there hadn't been a recent fight, would fetch a bag of sweets from the tin which was brought ever [sic] fortnight as part of the Social Security allowance for the patients. The paper lollies would be showered into the middle of the dayroom and it would be first come first served with fights developing, people being put in strait jackets, whistles blowing. (98)

The mad women, according to the nurses, are not human enough to require respectful treatment. Simply, patients were considered "a nuisance and were treated as such" (112).

The degradation of patients is justified by claiming the women are less than human. It is also accepted practise as it teaches subordination. The female patients have been removed from society for failure to obey rules; their treatment, then, must teach them how to function in society, and obedience is essential for women. Essential subordination is highlighted in the novel by the obvious patriarchal structure of the asylums. Every aspect of these women's lives is focused on obedience and conformity to patriarchal rules, right from patients' occupational therapy through to the nurses' attitudes.

The only therapies available for the patients consist of traditionally feminine hobbies. The women may choose from sewing, embroidery, cane-work, knitting, or other equally sedate crafts. Obviously, the women are given the impression they need to learn skills essential for homemaking. This idea is further emphasised by the occupational therapist who is young, enthusiastic, and ends up marrying a doctor:

> Dr. Howell would enter the day room where the elderly ladies and those younger but not yet fit for work...sat dreamily turning over the pages of an old *Illustrated London News* or a *Women's Weekly*; or knitting blanket squares for the lepers; or doing fancywork under the supervision of the newly appointed Occupational Therapist who, it was rumored...was having an affair with Dr. Howell. (28)

'Normal' women hope to be good homemakers and hope to marry well, like the occupational therapist. But, this seems illogical to the patients – especially to those who believe their qualities are far greater than those of a mere occupational therapist:

> [W]hen Dr. Howell finally married the occupational therapist, Noeline was taken to the disturbed ward. She could not understand why the doctor did not need her more than anyone else in the world, why he had betrayed her to marry someone whose only virtue seemed to be the ability to show patients who were not always interested, how to weave scarves and make shadow stitch on muslin. (30)

The occupational therapist's marriage to Dr Howells represents the 'normality' that Noeline is not a part of. The women who embrace traditional roles, it appears, are the ones more likely to be rewarded with marriage and happiness. And this is what the

asylums hope to emphasise; according to patriarchal society, sanity in women is equivalent to domesticity.

So, the women who approach their work eagerly are rewarded for following the accepted (patriarchal) prescription. Patients rushing to show the doctor their tapestry or fancywork, are rewarded with smiles and interested comments (28). And, as Roberston comments, those who take their position as women very seriously are given extra responsibility:

> Domestic duties...represent the only possible means of gaining a sense of power or self-worth within the wards, because they are the only achievements recognised and rewarded by the staff. (48)

The long-term patients of mental institutions are trusted enough to cook, clean, and be general maids for the hospital and the hospital staff, therefore proving their usefulness (as women) to society. Mrs Everett and Mrs Pilling "share control of kitchen affairs and are responsible for the fire" (35), and "Minnie, from Ward One, was the matron's personal maid and was allowed a key" (43). There is also Hillsie, "Mrs. Hill, another of the faithful long-term patients *whose life is to serve*" (72, my italics). These women have already learned the benefits of serving the system and are rewarded and appreciated for their conformity. Their humanity is recognised because they understand women's place and they understand the purpose of the institutions – not to heal, but to correct.

For the majority of patients, who are not well behaved, however, life within mental institutions is difficult and degrading. The nurses, to them, are condescending and cruel. No effort is taken to understand the patients; the nurses are only interested in obedience. As "overworked besieged staff" (95), the nurses forget sympathy and treat the patients like naughty children or animals, as Istina narrates:

> In the end I did not seem to care; and if I wanted to go to the lavatory from the special table, and I was often wanting to go, *and I was refused permission*, I

> would slide from my seat under the table and wet on the floor like an animal. (95, my italics)

And, in order to ensure their own sanity, and for amusement, the nurses bait the patients into acting violently:

> 'Love me, Helen,' the nurse would call, and Helen smiling with anticipated joy, would advance carefully towards the nurse only to be turned aside with a scornful remark when her arms had almost encircled their longed-for object of flesh. Her love changed to hate then; she would attack. (90)

Istina highlights incidents such as this to portray how humiliating it can be having your life controlled. Very little attention is given to the needs of individual patients, again denying the women humanity. Also, the treatment of the patients is hidden behind comments proclaiming it is for their own good, "a persuasive argument that will eventually make man agree to his own destruction" (72). Within mental institutions, any punishment is simply corrective treatment for women who do not wish to conform, and is therefore not seen as either cruel or inhumane.

Even the female staff in the hospitals enforce the rules which humiliate and suppress the patients. New nurses pity patients who, in the end, become nothing more than nuisances:

> The very new nurses in their first few days of scrubbing, making beds and filling coal buckets…find it somehow soothing to stand in the dayroom and comb the hair of the old ladies with the coarse-toothed ward comb….Later, the same nurses will become impatient with their charges; but at first they are full of sympathy. (59)

Even the strict and experienced Sister Bridge was, as a new nurse, horrified by the helplessness and constant humiliation of the patients:

> [S]he had begun as a timid young girl in the days when, as a matter of course, all disturbed patients wore locked boots and strait jackets; and that, after her first day on duty, she cried most of the night and resolved…to submit her resignation and leave the appalling place and become a nurse in a general hospital where the patients were not shamed and abused because of their illness. (139)

In the beginning the nurses sympathise with the patients, yet are ruled by the system that dictates segregation and correction, a system that prescribes treatment meant to exert control over patients, and also to punish (Smith-Rosenberg 675). The doctors rule over the mental institutions like gods. They are entities neither the patients nor the nurses can touch, as Istina observes:

> Now there was Dr. Steward without his wife but shouldering his little boy and being stared at in wonder and admiration by the woman patients, especially those of Ward Two, who could not keep their eyes off him, gaping at the marvel of him....I saw the spellbound gaze of the Ward Two patients and I recoiled from the facts of illness and hospitals that make the comings and goings of an ordinary human being seem prodigious events. (251)

The system in the asylum, which reflects patriarchal society, dictates that these few men hold all knowledge and rule over one thousand female patients, and a few female staff. They are considered all-powerful, yet have very little contact with the women, and expect the prescribed treatment to work on the patients, despite never witnessing the true results. Although spoken of as gods, Frame's imagery characterises the doctors as almost evil, as there are "parallels between patients and the dead, hospitals and hell, staff and devils" (Dell Panny 28).

The Patriarchy and the Doctors

Medical discourse emphasises that doctors' treatment of patients is necessary, however cruel the patients believe that treatment is. Although medicine was advancing rapidly, in the 1950s it was still dominated by beliefs and attitudes generated in the eighteenth century. The doctors' opinions are often portrayed as incorrect, as they do not consider individual patients. Frame emphasises that despite this, they still maintain complete control because only the doctors' versions are seen as corresponding to reality.

The difference between doctors and patients is highlighted at every opportunity, and is reflected by the awe in which the patients hold the doctors. The doctors are

above everyone else in the hospital. Even small things set them apart, such as the use of coffee mugs. Istina observes, "Dr. Howell drank from the special cup which was tied around the handle with red cotton to distinguish the staff cups from those of the patients, and thus prevent the interchange of diseases like boredom loneliness authoritarianism" (27). Doctors and patients cannot mingle, as hierarchy, and patriarchal structure, determines they must be kept separate. This hierarchy establishes the doctors as people who must be pleased at all costs.

This, however, does not mean doctors cannot be popular with the patients. Dr Howell's appearances contrast him to the older men who run the hospital. Although not fully interacting with the patients, Dr Howell appears to make an effort to treat the women well. The invisible, older doctors, as the heads of this patriarchal system, are too far removed from the patients to care about everyday, mundane factors. But, Dr Howell, who was young and energetic, and seemed to care, was at least liked:

> It was the youth of Dr. Howell which appealed to us: the other doctors who did not look after us but who were in charge of the hospital were gray-haired and elderly and hurried in and out of their offices down in front of the building like rats in and out of their hiding places. (29)

The doctors at the very top of the hierarchy, reluctant to interact with the patients, are eager to define them. Dr Howell alters definitions slightly by spreading "the interesting news that mental patients were people and therefore might like occasionally to engage in the activities of people" (29). But, the activities he sets up for the women are children's games, "cards – snap, old maid, donkey and euchre; and ludo and snakes and ladders, with prizes awarded and supper afterwards" (29). So, although Dr Howell is popular and appears sympathetic, his good will and enthusiasm do little to enhance the madwomen's lives. They are still children who need large amounts of supervision. As women and clinically insane, the patients are not allowed adult activities.

Istina's narrative aims to highlight the difference between her opinion of herself and the doctors' opinions of her. On many occasions, the doctors' definition of her seems alien and mystifying. She says, "I have passed through the treatment room with a basket of dirty linen and seen my card. Impulsive and dangerous, it reads. Why? And how?" (23). She does not understand why or how her actions caused this definition: "I tried to remember the incidents of the day before. Had I wept? Had I refused to obey an order from one of the nurses? Or, becoming upset at the sight of a very ill patient, had I panicked, and tried to escape?" (15). It is implied that the fate of the patients lies in what the doctors see and how they interpret what they see. Obedience and serenity appear to be the sane attributes doctors were looking for in Istina. But, the doctors' "truth" may not be accurate.

This inaccuracy is emphasised by the fact that there are so many patients and very few doctors. Therefore the women are not given much individuality. Everything is done as a group – meal times, bed times, activities, washing, dressing, and EST. Within mental institutions, individuality, and privacy are seen as luxuries. To the authority figures, it does not matter who these women are, because they are all perceived to have the same thing wrong with them. This is appropriately displayed on visitors' day, where distinctions are deliberately not made:

> Those assessed as likely to have visitors...were brought beyond the enclosure...to wait for the dressing operations which began when two nurses entered dragging a sheeted bundle. The knots were untied and "best" clothes, anybody's clothes as long as they nearly fitted, lay ready to be put on anybody. (102)

As failures of society, and the bottom of the patriarchal hierarchy, these women are considered not important enough to need individual identities. Names and faces merge as the women are known under one title – mental patients.

The worst cases, though, get relegated to the back wards. They rarely see a doctor, and care for them is not regulated. The prescribed treatment has not worked for these women, so they have been ignored and forgotten by the doctors. These women horrify them because they do not know how to treat them. It is presumed that these are the hopeless cases who once there "never get out" (90). It seems better to forget these women than admit that the treatment is not always effective. As Istina implies, the back wards are no place for idealistic male doctors:

> Only once I saw the doctor pass through the dayroom of Lawn Lodge. He limped quickly from door to door. On his face was an expression of horror and fear that changed to incredulity as if he were saying to himself, "It is not so. I am a young enthusiastic doctor, only a few years out of medical school. I live with my wife and child across the road in the house provided for me. My God what means the hospitality of the soul?" (101)

Medical school does not prepare doctors for such failure of science (the fact that the women are beyond help). The back wards house women without humanity and, seemingly, without souls. The wards are the haven of unreason and the women are best forgotten.

According to the doctors, patients' mental health depends on their level of obedience. However, Istina's experience demonstrates that this is often wrong. The first time Istina is declared well enough to go home, the final part of the process involves an interview with the hospital superintendent, Dr Portman. Despite having had no previous contact with Dr Portman, Istina's fate depends on his decision. He asks her a single question – which she answers to his satisfaction – and then he allows her to go home: "He leaned forward, 'Have you ever been raped?' he asked. I told him no. He got up from his desk then and came and shook hands with me and wished me well, and I left the hospital" (57). Istina's "I told him no" implies that she gave the answer Dr Portman wanted to hear regardless of whether it was the truth or not. Rather than be difficult, Istina has learnt to please patriarchal authority, emphasising the control it has

over reality. Dr Portman has the final say over her release from hospital. As he lets her leave, he has judged her answer as appropriate and believes her to be sane. But this judgement proves incorrect.

Istina returns to a mental institution after recognising her inadequacies within society. Comparing her life to her sister's, who is a wife and mother, Istina believes she is not complete enough. Frame implies that for women who do not choose traditional roles, their lives are difficult and guilt-ridden. Without an identity as wife or mother, Istina feels as though she has no identity at all. She says,

> Have you ever been a spinster living in a small house with your sister and her husband and their new first child?...I did not know my own identity. I was burgled of body and hung in the sky like a woman of straw." (65)

Watching her sister create an acceptable identity for herself while she cannot, Istina increasingly feels as though she has failed at life: "My sister was pregnant. I cried at night in bed, with self-pity and strangeness, hiding my face in the pillow and muffling the overhead surge and sigh of the condemned fir tree, 'Oh God, why am I empty?'"(130). Robertson comments that this,

> sense of loss may be ascribed to the dominance of a culture which prescribed functional maternity as the only creative possibility for women. In such a culture, a woman who decided not to bear children effectively lost the opportunity to express her creative desires. (44)

Istina recognises that normality is measured within patriarchal society by marriage and motherhood. Patriarchy does not acknowledge any other definition of woman, apart from spinster teacher, which Istina also failed at (11).

The women who end up in asylums have failed life. The mental institutions function as places to rehabilitate patients. Inside the institutions patients learn that they have failed and that their rehabilitation is a great burden on society. The female patients are expected to accept the treatment they are given, and be grateful that time and effort

are spent on them. Furthermore, the patients' continual illness is an inconvenience. Sister Honey often tries to inform the women of this:

> At this point Sister's expression would become stern and she would turn to look meaningfully at us as if to say Remember you've got something to be grateful for, so pull yourselves together, snap out of it, everything is being done for your own good, there are others far worse off than you, my ladies. (48-49)

The patriarchal structure within the asylums ensures that the women feel guilty for disrupting normal society. The patients are made to feel that the terror and torture they undergo must be accepted because they owe something to society, and because it is necessary.

Dead or Alive?

Because the female patients have little to do with the outside world, they are treated as though they are dead. Even nurses comment that "these people to all intents and purposes are dead" (105). Society no longer wants them, and so the patients are clearly left on the outside:

> We stood at the gate, considering the marvel of the world where people, such is the deception of memory, did as they pleased, owned furniture, dressing tables with doilies on them and wardrobes with mirrors. (52)

In a way these women *are* dead, but not in the way the doctors and nurses claim. The patients are 'dead' because their identities have been taken away from them, and are forced to accept someone else's definition of them.

Istina's narration highlights several patients whose pasts are not explained. These women are in the asylums for reasons, which are not divulged, but rather implied. This emphasises that what the women were before entering a mental institution is not important to the doctors. Istina, however, often wonders why and how it happens that people must end up isolated from society. To Istina, who these people were is extremely important, and essential for truly understanding them. She questions,

> Where was the former Tilly, the wife and mother of three children? How can people vanish without a trace and still be in the flesh before you? And it startled me to learn that Lorna had been a cultured intelligent woman. What now immovable debris of sickness had fallen from the sky to blanket an ordinary human landscape and give it this everlasting winter season? (167)

In brief, Istina tells the stories of many patients who suffer without understanding or knowing why. It is implied, by the sheer number of casualties, that the patriarchal definitions of wife, mother, and lover, have contributed to each woman's illness.

Mrs Hill, one of the lifetime patients of Treecroft Mental Hospital, runs the cooking and cleaning of Ward Seven. She appears to be a dedicated and efficient housewife, yet she will never leave the hospital. The explanation is given in only two sentences:

> She had roses from the garden in a bowl on her dressing table and a photograph of her son in his sailor's uniform, a pale handsome lad like his mother. She had been taken to Treecroft when he was born and in those days there had been no treatment for her. (73)

It is implied that Mrs Hill was not given the support she needed when her son was born. The consequence of this is a lifetime of captivity inside an asylum. She is dedicated to the day to day running of the ward, and every morning "she would be up early and in the kitchen preparing breakfast, looking after the nurses with surprise cups of tea…,scrubbing polishing" (72). However, simply because she failed at motherhood, a 'natural' female function, Mrs Hill is condemned to a life separated from society.

Mrs Everett, who is detained in hospital "'at the sovereign's pleasure'"(32), also enjoys looking after the domestic affairs of her ward. For her willingness to cook and clean she is rewarded with her own room. She is described as part of a group who would be in hospital forever -- Mrs Pilling, Miss Dennis, and "Mrs. Everett who, as an inexperienced overwrought young mother, had murdered her little girl" (42). Because she, like Mrs Hill, failed at motherhood, she is unable to leave the hospital. Instead of receiving assistance, these women are labelled and, effectively, punished by being

placed in a mental institution. The few words given to their backgrounds indicates a general lack of interest in the hows or whys contributing to their breakdowns. This is typical as, Ussher explains, women's voices are never heard when their madness is being discussed (246). Once a person's failure is perceived, the patriarchy considers an effective death the only solution. These two women, incapable of contributing to society, are dead to outside society.

Brenda, a young girl who is seriously disturbed, appears to have a subtler story. Istina does not give an explanation for Brenda's breakdown merely saying, "Brenda, I learned, had been a talented girl, a pianist who was shortly to have taken a scholarship overseas. And now, five years later, she was in Ward Two" (147).
Patriarchal society claims that success is not a woman's place. Women have been socialised to accept submissive roles, which leads to self-sacrifice, or confusion if they attempt to pursue success. As Smith-Rosenberg explains,

> The effect of this socialization [is] to teach women to have a low evaluation of themselves, to significantly restrict their ego functions to low prestige areas, to depend on others and to altruistically wish not for their own worldly success, but for that of their male supporters. (677)

Brenda's success could have caused her great stress, as illustrated by her tantrums at the piano, and she may simply have been unable to cope with the opportunities her talent brought her. How can you be successful if you are not taught to be?

Brenda was also "one of the first to have the 'new' operation to change the personality" (147). The doctors, rather than sort out the roots of her problems, removed part of her brain. The surgery did not work and in desperation she is given another operation "to remedy the too-soon evident and frightful effects of the first" (148). As Istina comments, Brenda is no longer whole: "I knew they had tried without success to bore holes in her brain to let the disturbing forces fly out, like leaves or demons from a

burning tree. Who could make her whole?" (192) Brenda's Self has been completely destroyed by the patriarchal need for conformity.

Carol, a small woman whose constant chatter focuses on men and marriage, Dame Mary-Margaret, in charge of the day room, Minnie Cleave who loses her handkerchief, Big Betty whose voice thunders, the woman who thought she was God, and all the other women whom Istina meets, have untold stories. Each female patient has had her life nullified by patriarchal control and domination. These women who all seem to have tragic lives are just a few of a thousand inside the asylum. Individuality and personality do not matter, and they are, to all intents and purposes, dead. Istina, however, tries to highlight the importance of each woman by hinting at the stories behind the admission into an asylum.

Frame's View

Although Frame stresses that her novels are works of pure fiction, Robertson says of Faces in the Water that, "The principal characters have been identified with real people in New Zealand, and the hospitals as Seacliff and Avondale" (38). Frame, like Gilman, does write of her own experiences. Her preoccupation with the lives behind the mad women illustrates Frame's anger at the treatment she, and her fellow patients, received. If, she implies, the time was taken to actually assess the patients, problems could be solved instead of the patients tortured. The fact that Istina reveals very little about her fellow inmates reflects the lack of interest the doctors showed in them, and undermines the doctors' abilities to accurately diagnose illnesses.

Frame, after spending several years in mental institutions, was found to be "not schizophrenic, nor in any way insane" (Broughton 228). Frame therefore has the right

to question how and why she was diagnosed as mentally ill if she was not. Sir Aubrey at the Maudsley Hospital gave the verdict that Janet Frame had "never suffered from schizophrenia" and "should never have been admitted to a mental hospital" (The Envoy from Mirror City, 89). The institution of medicine has immense power over society because of its claim to knowledge, from which women have been purposely denied entrance. Frame's experience, however, illustrates that doctors can be wrong, and that misdiagnoses can occur. Ussher comments,

> I know that women trapped in unhappy marriages, isolated, lonely, with young, demanding children, no money and no friends are often deemed mad. That to be a woman is often to be mad. If we stay inside our prescribed roles and routes as my mother did, or if we speak out, or move outside our designated paths we become mad. My mother may have been mad because she was adhering to the dictates of her feminine role, staying as wife and mother she desperately wanted to flee. I can be called mad because I reject the same role. (5-6)

Writing in the 1990s, Ussher still repeats Frame's observation that the label madness depends on who holds the power. Ussher and Frame (and Bronte, Rhys, and Gilman) recognise that it is the male perception of femininity that dominates the definition of madness.

The perception of herself as other is an important aspect of Frame's identity. Having been obsessed with this image on a social level as a child, Frame gives the idea of woman as 'Other' more serious tones in Faces in the Water (Broughton 225). 'Otherness' becomes associated with mental illness. Frame shows the inability of patriarchal society to accept behaviour that is different and the force with which this behaviour is eliminated. Rutherford comments,

> To contravene the accepted norm, is not merely antisocial, it is a criminal act and those who do so must be locked away until they learn to 'adapt.' Modern medicine has an operation designed to help them do so, the 'ice pick of lobotomy' which will fit, cut and tailor the mind to the ways of the world. (43)

Frame illustrates how anything outside patriarchal definition of normality is instantly defined as incompatible with society. Difference is other; woman is other; mental illness is other and a crime against society.

Frame questions the right of people to diagnose and define what they do not take the time to understand. And what is not known, is feared. Istina's adoration of the books in the mobile library is quickly halted by the chaplain who fears that she "suffered from a disease that would infect the books" (241). Istina is forbidden to look at the books because she "had not the status necessary" for viewing them (241). The chaplain, who is "curiously lacking in understanding" (240), fears her because she is a patient and patients need to be dealt with. Patients are not people because they are different, and because that difference is beyond patriarchal society's scope of knowledge. But, most importantly, the difference is beyond what patriarchal society wants to understand. The chaplain will not accept that a patient likes books.

Conclusion

Faces in the Water emphasises the complete control of the medical staff over the lives of the several female patients. It is more significant, though, that the socialisation and internalisation of medical belief is shown to have determined the 'correct' roles for women, and the 'correct' behaviour for sane people. The asylums, then, function to rehabilitate women to cope with their lives within patriarchal society. They do not solve underlying problems.

Istina mentions patients whose problems or history she knows, emphasising the doctors' lack of care. There is no distinction between the women patients, as they are conveniently kept under one label of madness. Despite the differences between the patients, the treatment is the same. Also, they must conform to the same definition of

femininity and sanity, and are condemned if they do not (Mercer 46). As O'Sullivan comments, "The rule of language is the rule of one mind over another" (27). Submission and obedience are highlighted as the main values patriarchal society requires from women. The mental institutions stress the importance of learning feminine skills. Tidiness, cleanliness, serenity, and overall domesticity are all indicators of sanity because they are acceptable female values. For patriarchal society it is essential that women (and different people) learn to conform. To allow difference is to admit that the rules do not work for everyone.

Conclusion

Patriarchal domination is an ingrained part of society. Its basis in science and reason – integral parts of our culture – means that male superiority is seen to be an established fact, and is, therefore, beyond question. Also, because women have been discouraged for so long from intellectual pursuits, there are very few females able to challenge the masculinist basis of many areas of knowledge. Most women are not equipped to question the intricate parts of society. The effects of a dominating and restricting society, therefore, are even more debilitating. How can you question without knowledge? The female image had been distorted by male perspective, meaning that women see themselves as men wish to see them, not as they see themselves.

A male image of femininity is confusing; it becomes disastrous for women when it locks them into particular roles, that are, for some, impossible. The limitations that women face within society do cause frustration and anger. In a male dominated world, female outrage has been interpreted as mad behaviour because it is seen as inappropriate. However, this thesis does not aim to suggest that madness is not a real illness. It is the definition and diagnosis of madness within patriarchal society that are being disputed. Medical discourse is a patriarchal construction, and as such, women are disadvantaged within it.

This is clear from the different methods doctors used to cure women. Ehrenreich and English outline methods nineteenth century doctors used. As all female ailments were thought to stem from their reproductive organs, women were made to believe that they were sick because they were women. This meant that the outrageous 'treatment' they

received had to be accepted. The worst case scenario was the surgical approach to treating women's personality disorders. Removing women's ovaries was

> considered a solid theoretical basis in the theory of the 'psychology of the ovary.' After all, if a woman's entire personality was dominated by her reproductive organs, then gynecological surgery was the most logical approach to any female psychological problem. (Ehrenreich and English 39)

These operations were performed in less than adequate conditions, and often caused the patients (victims) enormous, and lifelong, pain. But, removing the ovaries was considered equivalent to removing the poisoned parts of a woman's body. Other methods of treatment include hot pokers used to burn the uterus, leeches placed in the opening of the uterus, and the use of acid in the uterus. Although this is a reflection of general medical inadequacies, men simply did not go through this particular kind of torture because men's roles were not exclusively identified with their bodies (that is, they did more than have children).

It was believed that women were ruled by their bodies, physically incapable of anything more than basic domestic duties. This restriction of intellect caused many women to suffer breakdowns. Phyllis Chesler outlines four women who did not fit into traditional female roles. Each were hospitalised for "various psychiatric 'symptoms'" (5). Elizabeth Packard, Ellen West, Zelda Fitzgerald, and Sylvia Plath were all extremely talented women, yet "buried their own destinies in romantically extravagant marriages, in motherhood, and in approved female pleasure" (5). However, their creativity could not be denied, and "their repressed energies eventually struggled free" (5). Desire for creativity other than motherhood and marriage caused their husbands to label them disloyal. For the four women, the traditional female role was not fulfilling and not satisfying. However, an attempt to create their own sense of Self produced disastrous results. The four women rejected (and were rejected by) the patriarchal image of femininity, and were in turn rejected by society.

The four texts analysed illustrate how patriarchal domination rules the female image. Jane Eyre is nothing more than a conquest to Rochester until he realises she is a person with her own will. But whilst Jane escapes incarceration, becoming an equal within her marriage, the characterisation of Bertha almost contradicts Jane's feminism. Jane is allowed freedom, but Bertha is incarcerated within madness and within a description that echoes the ignorance of nineteenth century medical discourse.

Gilman aims to undermine the wisdom of doctors, by allowing her mad protagonist a voice with which to contradict the male discourse. It is clearly implied that the narrator's husband is ignorant of, and does not care about, the true health of his wife. "The Yellow Wallpaper" illustrates the ignorance of the dominating discourse, as John believes himself to be right because of what he *knows*, not because of what he is presented with.

Similarly, Antoinette Cosway's tragic story outlines the arrogant and unforgiving nature of patriarchal society. Both Antoinette and Annette suffer because they have not been equipped with the skills necessary for survival. When Annette and Antoinette exhibit signs of independence and determination, however, they are considered threatening and are removed from society. Because they do not fit into the definition of femininity, they are punished.

Istina Mavet's punishment is also incarceration. She is literally locked up within a patriarchal institution, since medicine contributed to the oppression and imprisonment of women. Her narrative explores the sordid world of madness, focusing on the treatment the female patients' experience. Despite the medical opinion that the treatment is for their own good, the patients live in a world dominated by fear. Conformity is emphasised as the best measure of sanity.

In Jane Eyre, "The Yellow Wallpaper", Wide Sargasso Sea, and Faces in the Water, there is a link between madness, male domination, and female imprisonment. Each

of the four texts illustrates the power of patriarchal society to define and diagnose normality. This power is enforced and supported by a basis in science and reason. Madness is not always caused by the restrictions of patriarchal society, but patriarchal society does have a huge influence on the definition of what is sane behaviour and what is not. The reality of madness is not being denied, but the methods used for its diagnosis are questioned here, especially in the light of the fact that gender bias is an ingredient of that diagnosis. Definitions do not come from the silenced and ignorant women.

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