(RE)-VISITING THE MADWOMAN:
MADNESS OR (SELF)-IDENTIFYING
THE INDIVIDUAL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the narratives of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and their treatment of Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester. *Jane Eyre* describes Bertha as the “lunatic, Mrs. Rochester” while the other novel gives an account of Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester who is unable to be the person her husband expects.

The idea of Bertha and Jane being combined as one genre, Woman, is absurd. Jane Eyre, a British woman who finds her way from Orphan, to Governess, to an independently wealthy woman who marries for love. Meanwhile, Bertha Rochester, a wealthy Jamaican white woman who has all her rights revoked and is labeled by her husband, as well as those who encounter her, insane. Though both these women are at the mercy of the patriarchal Victorian society in which they reside, one is able to overcome obstacles while the other, who was born within wealth and upper class society, is cast aside and rejected. Since these two characters are both female and considered “wild” by various relatives, my question is how does Jane Eyre, the character born underprivileged, manage to socially and monetarily climb her way to independence while the other woman, Bertha, who is born with monetary means for financial freedom, finds herself trapped and held against her will?
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who more or less kept me from so-called madness. Especially the two white fuzz balls who kept reminding me to relax, take my time, and more importantly, feed them. Last, but not least, a special note to my dearest: nerd puzzle boxes aside...forever and always.
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In the above section, there are two accounts of the burning of Thornfield, a fictional setting in Charlotte Bronte’s novel, *Jane Eyre*. One is an eye-witness’s tale of how the “lunatic, Mrs. Rochester” escapes her bedroom on the third floor to wreak havoc upon her husband’s house, Thornfield; the other, is a first-hand account of the occurrence by the arsonist and eventual victim of the fire, Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester (Bronte 431). In the witness’s account, as given by Jane Eyre, Bertha’s husband, Mr. Rochester, with no account for his own safety, goes to rescue his crazy wife. The reader feels sympathy for Mr. Rochester, and believes he is performing a noble deed. Why else would he save his crazy wife when he wants to be rid of her and marry Jane Eyre?

Then there is the account of the Thornfield fire recounted by Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester, as given by Jean Rhys. Rather than being insane, Mrs. Rochester is confused as to why she is being kept against her will. She does not know where she is, though the reader knows she is at Thornfield. After her dream of freedom by fire and finally escaping...
from her husband who hates her, she realizes why she was brought to this house and goes to complete her “destiny” by setting fire to Thornfield, and paving the way for Jane Eyre marry Rochester. However, Rochester’s second marriage will be different. He will not rule over her, nor will she rule over him. Instead, both have equal power within their relationship.

These two sections are poignant because they are both narratives told by woman characters. The first narrator is Jane Eyre, a British woman who finds her way from Orphan, to Governess, to an independently wealthy woman who marries for love; the second is Bertha Rochester, a wealthy Jamaican white woman who has all her rights revoked and is labeled by her husband, as well as those who encounter her, insane. Though both these women are at the mercy of the patriarchal Victorian society in which they reside, one is able to overcome obstacles while the other, who was born within wealth and upper class society, is cast aside and rejected. Since these two characters are both female and considered “wild” by various relatives, my question is how does Jane Eyre, the character born underprivileged, manage to socially and monetarily climb her way to independence while the other woman, Bertha, who is born with monetary means for financial freedom, finds herself trapped and held against her will?

By asking this question, I would like to extract the woman from the male/female in order closely examine the idea of feminism and the steps taken in order to ensure the survival of the one female individual from
another. Both women were married to Rochester, but one marriage ends in tragedy while the other proves to be happy. Though I understand that Woman within a patriarchal society like the Victorians is irrefutably tied to Man, I only wish to study the Woman’s role and space, not the Man’s.

At first glance, Jane and Bertha appear to have the same chance of gaining independence: they are both rebellious women, but while one is poor and English, the other is rich and colonized English in that she was born and raised on a British colony. Studying these two women as one ideal woman is unfair to both as women, for they are two very different people. However, studying the Woman within the context of the patriarchal Victorian society combines both women into the same category of Other. This presents the problem conveyed by Gaytatri Chakravorty Spivak’s article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in which she states the problem of grouping all women together as one category, since “this [type of alliance] does not encompass the heterogeneous Other” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 288). In fact, the idea of a collective Other, does not exist because of the differences within culture: whether it be in Victorian society, or in colonized culture outside of Victorian Britain, “there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogeneous Other referring only to our own place in the seat of the Same or the Self” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 288). Since Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester is from a colonized country, she may have a different view as to what the Woman
does within Victorian society. From Antoinette’s account of the Thornfield fire, she came to the manor not knowing she was even in England, nor did she know why she was there. Only after her dream of setting the manor on fire does she accept the possibility of her purpose to be the colonized woman who will pass on so that another can succeed.

The difference between English Jane and the colonized Bertha remind me of the “First World” and “Third World” or Subaltern woman as discussed by both the aforementioned Spivak as well as Chandra Talpade Mohanty. The idea of Jane and Bertha, or women in general, “as an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (Mohanty 64). However, as both Mohanty and Spivak point out, the idea of a universal Woman is impossible due to the “assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality” as well as “inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of the western scholarship on the ‘third world’ in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other” (Mohanty 63). Jane, the privileged colonizer cannot begin to understand how “Antoinette, [the] white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native” (“Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism 250). Instead, for Jane and the Victorians, the ideal of woman is ethnocentric. In other words, the
idea of a woman speaking for Women is impossible, just as a man cannot speak for all Men.

This individualization of women, suggests a Hegelian thought or idea of Woman vs. woman. If I were to examine both Jane and Bertha in the same context, I would identify both women in the way of Female/Male as Simone De Beauvoir, and would not like to do so. Instead, I wish to look at Woman in the context of ideal Victorian woman and how it is possible for the colonizer (British Jane) to more flexibly move through this definition and rid herself of the term “wild” or “insane” when the colonized (Jamaican Bertha) who is deemed mad, is kept hidden away, cast off from Victorian society even to the point of demonization.

The idea of Bertha and Jane being combined as one genre, Woman, is absurd. These are two different people with different experiences. Though Georg Hegel has predetermined women as Other within his works, I wish to appropriate his section “Self-certainty and the Lordship and Bondage of Self-consciousness” within the work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in order to separate the idea of woman into the individual person and the feminine Ideal to which she feels obligated to conform. Hegel’s idea of the Self-consciousness is driven by the use of identity and understanding self by way of comparing it to another self. The first “Self-consciousness, has before it another self-consciousness; it has come outside itself…It has lost its own self, since it finds itself as an other
being, in order thereby to become certain of itself as true being” and it must find the differences and similarities between itself and the second self-consciousness (Hegel 71). In order to do this, the first Self-consciousness must then convince itself to negate the independence of this other and proceed to dominate it (69). Even if women are bound together by gender, they still have their own grouping by which they dominate and are subordinate to each other. There exists the Self-consciousness of each individual female and therefore there will be a struggle to find similarities create a subject of the differences in order to dominate and relegate the other to and object rather than an individual. This is done so that one female can at least hold power over another female, therefore having some power within the male/female sphere.

From there, we can consider the way an individual defines herself is through the ideal that is propagated through herself as well as society. How does this become truth? The idea of society can be explained by Benedict Anderson’s idea of imagined communities, in which “the members of even the smallest nation [read: society] will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). This could be conceived as a social or culture that people feel they must conform to society, or the Ideal. In this way, an individual female will feel the differences between her Self and the Self-consciousness that exists by way of the imagined community as Anderson describes.
The idea of Self-consciousness is then broken into two parts: Individual Self-consciousness and Social Self-consciousness. The Individual Self-consciousness is seen as the being as she sees herself, while the Social Self-consciousness is the Ideal imposed by the imagined community. There is a battle between the two in order for both to exist. A way of looking at this is Hegel’s Lordship and Bondage section within Phenomenology in which he expresses the idea of two Self-consciousnesses battling for the possibility of existence or acknowledgement by the lesser. The idea that one will submit means the dominating Self-consciousness will then be the one acknowledged to exist within the Individual.

At the same time, what happens when the woman decides to resist the Ideal or Social self-consciousness and allow her Individual Self-consciousness to emerge? There is a point at which the Social Self-consciousness will punish and cast off the Individual Self-consciousness; however, there is also another point in which the Social Self-consciousness will allow the separate Individual Self-consciousness to co-exist. For example, Jane Eyre succeeds in her autonomy while Antoinette Berth Mason Rochester is deemed mad. How does Jane succeed in her quest for autonomy when the first Mrs. Rochester fails?
**Madness Defined: A Fluctuating Theory**

In order to define the term madness, I must first delve into a brief history of the term and create a template, or equation as to how any society determines the sanity or insanity of a person.

The idea of madness is always in flux, however, one characteristic of madness will never change, the idea that the term is opposite to sanity. Though this may or may not fully explain madness, the idea of comparing the two apparently opposite words does allow for explanation of the terms as well as how madness assumed its form as social outcast. Michel Foucault found madness to be a multitude of definitions since:

> the element in which the world was born to its own truth, the domain where reason will have to assert itself. Madness had to be squarely placed against the free horizon of unreason for its real dimensions to be understood. *(The History of Madness 157)*

In order to understand madness, one must first understand what Society expected of its citizens. The idea of mad citizen depended upon the definition of Ideal citizen.

In order for madness to be somewhat understood by a society, its people had to compare the Ideal of a citizen and then realize the exact opposite was then insane, or social misfit, creating the clash of “madness vs. sanity.” This can also be seen as a relationship in the sense that without sanity, madness cannot be explained; nor can sanity be explained without madness as a contrast.
The idea of madness and sanity being constantly referred to each other in order to define the other reveals the power that madness has in that placing the term against the sane in order to show those deemed “fit” for society, and how the sane are threatened and fearful of those who were considered inadequate for society. Though one could reason that the insane citizens who appeared to oppose its society by their very existence needed to be removed for the greater good, one still must realize that, “madness summed up the whole of unreason in a single point” thereby making it the symbol of society’s cast-offs, or the people marked dangerous to the public as well as the status quo within the culture (The History of Madness 158). The idea of sanity could only exist with the idea of the madness. Without the opposing viewpoint, the clear definition for sanity is non-existent. Therefore, the Ideal citizen can only be related to by defining what it is not (mad). This point is clarified even more when Foucault states: “A critical consciousness of madness, which identifies madness and designates it against a backdrop of all that is reasonable, ordered and morally wise” (The History of Madness 164). Only by seeing this opposition can the terms madness and sanity be clearly defined.

Though the mad were cast off, they were placed at what was determined to be a safe distance, to serve a warning or spectacle as to what happens to those who do not conform. At the same time, they are kept within the public sphere, giving mad power since the Victorian
society acknowledging their existence. Therefore, madness and sanity are a continuing battle for establishing dominance and control. Though the Ideal (dominant) society attempts to cast off those who oppose it (subordinate or Mad), there is still need for the existence of madness in order to maintain control. For without the mad, there is no difference between identity and control. The tension between the sane and mad must exist in order to for the sane to keep power. The imagined community casts off the individuals who do not adhere to the Dominate social structure, thereby casting them off as other, subjecting them to the label of mad.

Another way of reading this idea of dominant and subordinate within society can be seen by appropriation of the Hegelian terms of the Lordship and Bondage struggle as seen in “The Phenomenology of Spirit”. Here, we can look at society identifying itself by a collective Self-consciousness, or Ideal, by comparing itself to what it perceives as the Other, or those outside of society. In order to define itself, the Self-consciousness compares itself to the differences of the Other just as Hegel explains, “Self-consciousness has before it another self-consciousness; it has come outside itself” (Hegel 71). From there, the Self-consciousness “must cancel” the differences of Other and itself. Within the process of cancelation, the Self-consciousness must [subdue] the other independent being” (Hegel 71). This is seen as an attempt of the dominating Self-consciousness to separate itself from another existing
self-conscious, making the first consciousness higher or more esteemed. Those who identify themselves as sane must then define the insane by way of subordinating those who in some terms behave differently within the Ideal society and its expectations. In many ways this could be confusing, yet at the same time, one cannot doubt the existence of the Ideal society, the idea of madness or even the Other cannot deny the existence of the Ideal, or sane.

Without each other, there is no definition for either sanity or madness. As Foucault stated, “the madman is not manifest in his being, but if there is no doubt about his existence, it is because he is other (The History of Madness 181). When a citizen within Ideal society compares himself to a mad person, he is “the subject measured in the difference against his own self: “I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself” (The History of Madness 181). The behavior of the so-called madman is then translated as unproductive as well as inappropriate within a society since madness is considered the opposite of sanity. In this way, the madman then becomes a symbol for opposing Ideal society, since the dominant Self-consciousness sees his behavior as proper and deemed the Other’s behavior as mad.

At the same time, there is a double consciousness in that the Self-consciousness now actualizing the awareness of an Other. Even if the Other is identified as opposite and degenerate, the Self-consciousness still acknowledges the existence. By accepting the existence of the
madman, the Self-consciousness has given the madman an opportunity within the “struggle against order, and against all that reason can show of itself in the laws of men and things, it reveals itself to have strange powers” (The History of Madness 166). The strange power madness clings to its very existence? The reality of madness allows for there to be a way to fight the opposition of the Self-consciousness. Society, condensed to a Self-consciousness, recognizes within itself the double consciousness, or various people residing within it.

When looking at any culture, one can see how the ideas of Lordship/Bondage and Mad/Sane of Hegel and Foucault, respectively, are useful tools to study any society. One culture in particular is that of the upper to middle class Victorians. When using the term Victorian, I am implying the middle and upper classes within Victorian society. In all, Victorian society had very strict social dictations on the roles of the sexes. Though I could diverge on another Foucaultian route of power plays between the sexes, I will focus primarily on social Self-consciousness of the feminine ideal and the Other female which is cast off when the Self-consciousness identifies differences, rather than gender.

Though the roles and power of sexes are indeed interesting and worth delving into, I only wish to study the female roles and the movements within those confines.
II—The Victorians: Ideal Woman and Cast-off

The Victorian era marked an important change in the discursive regimes which confined and controlled women, because it was in this period that the close associate between femininity and pathology became firmly established within the scientific, literary and popular discourse: madness became synonymous with womanhood. —Ussher, *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness*, 64

Confinement hid unreason, thereby demonstrating that it was something to be ashamed of; but it put madness on show, pointing it out at arm’s length. The concern with unreason was the avoidance of scandal, but madness became an organised pageant. —Foucault, *The History of Madness*, 145

My intention to focus primarily on women rather than men is rooted in the upper to middle class Victorian notion “that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control (*The Female Malady* 55). Through biology and scientific experiments, the Victorian scientists theorized the female to be the weaker sex. Since they were bound by their reproduction systems to bouts of temper and bleeding, women were thought to be more unstable than men. Though I could argue that is due to the power of the male over the female gender, I am concerned with the Victorian’s strict roles of women and men; specifically the women.

Since there was much to be said about the ideal behavior of women by both women and men, there must be some battle within society’s Self-consciousness and Other within communal form. The fact women complied and even supported the gender roles within Victorian times is a basic problem for 20th century feminists. What about
individualism? However, in order to better understand this, I would also like to implore the reader to understand Lordship/Bondage and Mad/Sane in a two dimensional relationship from Social to Individual Self-consciousness. There is a Social ideal as well as an Individual ideal a person must face and attempt to reconcile in order to shape her identity.

The Victorian upper to middle class woman knew the ideal expectations of her gender. She was raised by her family and culture to expect certain ideas and roles through gender alone. Again, the idea of imagined community flows through her sense of thought. Though she may not have known every upper to middle class woman within the Victorian British Empire, she identified with them in the sense that she could apply the expectations of her class to understand the concept or identity of her unmet fellow woman. If she were to see another woman of the same social class on the street, she would assume that the other woman was like herself, held the same beliefs, and taught the same social rules her family taught her. She could then identify with the woman as a daughter, mother, or even fiancée. Her social Self-consciousness bonded with this sense of community and began to negate the Other within her individual self in order to show unity with the societal whole.

Here we see yet again the two dimensional relationship of Self-consciousness: that of society as well as the individual. At the same, there exists the Self-consciousness of the woman as she sees herself.
Oftentimes there are ways she believes and identifies herself that contradict Society’s Self-consciousness. When this happens, there is war between the two just as there is a war between Hegelian Lordship and Bondage. This is inevitable “for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well” (Hegel 73). The existence of the two Self-consciousnesses, Social and Individual, necessitates a battle since the two exist yet are clearly opposed to each other.

When the Victorians handed out societal roles to women, they mixed them with ethics, “inevitably reproducing structures of class and gender that were ‘moral,’ that is, ‘normal,’ by their own standards” (The Female Malady 34). The ideas of madness and insanity were then tied to those who were immoral while those who attended to the socially dictated duties of the moral Victorian middle class woman were then considered sane. Those whose individual self-consciousness went against the Victorian social norms were then considered immoral and the clashing of the two began.

The imagined community of the Victorian middle to upper class society, upheld “[t]he ladylike values of silence, decorum, taste, service, piety, and gratitude” (The Female Malady 79). The woman who was not silent or who felt marriage was not for her often found herself with the other social degenerates in the asylum. If Victorian middle class women
decided to leave this role, they were immediately shunned by society, even put away into asylums. This act shows the dominant Self-consciousness of society acting to put away the Other, women who refused the societal roles given to them. However, it can be argued that the social confinement of women led to the insanity that many middle class women were charged with after the onset of puberty. As Elaine Showalter explains:

> menstruation sharply marked the beginning of a different and more limited existence. While their brothers went away to school most middle-class girls were educated at home, their social life outside the home restricted to a few safe contacts (*The Female Malady* 57).

The beginning of puberty meant the beginning of suppression for Victorian middle class women as well as adherence to strict dictations for their social life. Any sharp deviations from the imagined community were met with medical concern.

There are multiple examples in which women were brought to doctors or psychiatrists simply because the woman wished “to take advantage of the new Divorce Act of 1857” (*The Female Malady* 76). Another case was of a “twenty-one year old girl” who was abnormal since “she had suffered ‘great irregularities of temper,’ had been ‘disobedient to her mother’s wishes,’ and was sexually assertive in sending her visiting cards to men she liked, and spent ‘much time in serious reading’” (*The Female Malady* 77). Victorian society dictated that her mother can tell her what to do, and yet the younger woman does not obey her mother.
Here I would like to point out that a female had medical control as well as social control, albeit parental, over the girl and could designate the “rebellious” girl as abnormal. Again this is an example of a woman unable to put off her individual Other from her individual Self-consciousness in order to conform to society’s Self-consciousness. In response, Victorian society, which included women, would then reject and cast the rebellious woman from their social Self-consciousness as social Other, or mad.

**Can they fight back?: The “Insane” Cast-off**

Though the mad were socially cast off, they still remained within society to bear witness to the dangers of resisting Victorian social morals and norms. Crowds gathered daily for visitors’ admittance into Bedlam, a popular and well-known establishment for the insane. People could even attend social functions at asylums such as Somerset County’s Lunatics Ball, in which the mad and sane joined together for a night of dancing and entertainment (*The Female Malady* 39). When society separates the mad into an asylum but does not fully hide them from society, madness still has some power over sanity. Again, there is the interdependence of madness and sanity in order for both to exist; however, it is more clear that “[m]adness now had a double mode of facing reason—it was at once on the other side, and offered to its gaze” (Foucault 182). Rather than being locked away and never looked back upon, “madness was an exemplary form in the world of confinement on show at time when all
other forms of unreason were reduced to silence, [in] that...it carried within it the power of scandal” (The History of Madness 158). With this weapon of scandal, madness then had the power to change the grounds of sanity and question the motives of society.

After all, the “[c]ases of puerperal insanity seemed to violate all of Victorian culture’s most deeply cherished ideals of feminine propriety and maternal love” as well as question the validity of such morals (The Social Malady 58). With so many women defying society’s Self-consciousness for their social Other, or Individual Self-consciousness, and entering the asylums during the nineteenth century, the question of women’s roles began to eat away at societal Self-consciousness. The individual Other would not be ignored, struggling with the Social Self-consciousness to be recognized as an autonomous person rather than a subjective social woman. As I have previously stated, there is struggle between the Individual Self-consciousness and the Social Self-consciousness as created by the imagined sense of community. Hegel’s idea of the two Self-consciousnesses warring between each other is not anything new. However, I introduce the concept of an Individual woman battling with the Social ideal of woman in order to gain her autonomy. There is a struggle between the two since the imagined Ideal social community attempts to make the Individual conform. The imagined community or social order can only exist if disorder subsists to define the order. A madwoman can only be called mad if she does not adhere to
what society has declared to be sane, womanly behavior. Therefore, there will always be a battle between social order and disorder, madness and sanity, for both to survive. At the same time, sanity cannot always win. There must be a time when madness must win in order for there to be an equal struggle. Order cannot always win, nor can disorder; there must be a balance.

As Foucault muses, the definition of madness is always changing and given that the meaning of madness is dependent on sanity, and vise versa; the very idea of sanity and madness hinge upon the ideals of any society. Since Society is always in flux with its ideals, there is always room for change within. This also means there is room for the individual to change the ideals within her society.

Though the sane pious Victorian woman was held in high regard, the Victorian mad woman became the focal point of art, literature, and even the inspiration for actresses who played Shakespearian roles. The Victorians began to name the mad woman with such names as Crazy Kate or Jane. With each archetypal crazy woman, the characteristics were different yet each had a quality which endeared her to society. For example, “Crazy Jane was a touching image of feminine vulnerability and a flattering reminder of female dependence upon male affection or [even] a wistful orphan of the storm” (The Female Malady 13). At the same time, there were those women whose individual Other was claimed and taken into their Self-consciousness, defying the social Self-consciousness,
wanting there to be social change. These women had to walk a thin line between madness and sanity in order to be heard within society. After all, if their fellow women could not conceive a “deep, horizontal comradeship” with them, they would be cast off as a social Other (Anderson 7). Many women authors such as Charlotte Bronte often took the idea of madwoman and began to shape the character in such a way that made the reader question their Self-consciousness and idea of the societal Other who refuses to conform and identify with the so-called community.

Within Charlotte Bronte’s works, the reader can see her questioning the ideals of womanhood and reshaping them to her own definitions. For example, in Jane Eyre she uses the name of Jane, closely associated with the archetypal crazy woman who is dependent on men as well as others for her survival, and reclaims this madwoman, turning her into someone who demands independence from society. We see Jane as an orphan, but she does not always thrust herself upon the kindness of her male relatives, nor does she play the role of pious orphan as her name would suggest to the Victorian readers. This attitude presents a problem for Bronte, since she must prove to her readers (societal Self-consciousness) that this particular Jane character, though demanding, is not a societal Other (mad). There must be a balance within this Jane character in order to reshape the ideal of woman or even orphan to the Victorian society. In order for Bronte to give her heroine freedom, there must be acknowledgement of her Otherness, yet at the same time, there
must be another character who is even more socially repugnant that allows this Jane to escape the archetypal insanity that has been placed on her. However, in the wake of this, Jane leaves another “madwoman” to take her place. This creates a problem in that if Bronte wishes to give more social credence and independence to women, Jane has clearly left a fellow woman behind to suffer for her individual Self-consciousness.
III—Jane Eyre: Moral Character?

“No,” responded Abbot; “if [Jane] were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.” —Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 28

The hero and heroine are being both so singularly unattractive that the reader feels they can have no vocation in the novel but to be brought together; and they do things which, though not possible, lie utterly beyond the bounds of probability. —Rigby, *The Quarterly Review*, 162

Though I have previously stated that I will focus primarily on the clash between the clash of the Ideal Woman and the Individual Woman, I will now prepare the grounds on which an individual woman is able to battle against the Victorian feminine ideal as well as those who uphold it, while still gaining acceptance by the Social self-consciousness.

At first glance, *Jane Eyre* appears to be a romantic novel in which the penniless, orphaned heroine goes on a journey only to find her true love, a home, and wealth at the end. However, Charlotte Bronte’s novel was very radical for the period in which it was written and published. Many of the women Victorian critics wrote the novel off as a “pre-eminently...anti-Christian composition” due to the “murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God’s appointment” (Rigby 173). Other critics regarded the novel to be “a dangerous book” due to the “outrages on decorum, [as well as] the moral perversity” of a woman who defied Victorian social conventions (Mozley 423). Yet, this novel was immensely popular during its time and has been a mainstay within the literary canon for years.
Rather than adhering to Victorian standards by preserving dependence on either her husband or a male relative, Jane asserts autonomy from the novel’s beginning to the end when she states, “Reader, I married him” (Bronte 452). In this statement she claims herself to be an independent subject who has performed an action which happens to be marriage, something for which a male is usually responsible. Instead, Jane, a female is enacting this word, showing her power. Rather than being taken as a spouse, she is the one who obtains one. This works against the previous claim Rochester uses to show his possession of Jane by summoning her to be his wife.

Jane states her independence from the very beginning. She does not back down when her autonomy is threatened. Instead, Jane fights back to reclaim her independence. This reading of the character coincides with Charlotte Bronte’s ideal that the security and survival of a woman could “be achieved only through a strong feminist consciousness and the affirmation of such interdependent values as chastity and independence” (Rigney 16). However, during the time Bronte wrote Jane Eyre the power structure leaned towards a more patriarchal society in which the women were forced to rely upon their male counterparts (husbands or relatives) to ensure their survival. The “ontological security and psychological survival in a patriarchal Victorian age,” of the feminine were accomplished when the woman adhered to strict gender roles. (Rigney 16). Within Victorian society, women were given limited roles,
including marrying a suitable husband, managing the household, and bearing children; the woman who found herself unmarried found work as a governess, servant, or companion to wealthy widow. Those who could not fulfill those roles found themselves at the mercy of their relatives for financial support. In any of these situations, the woman found herself dependent upon the mercy of others to feed, clothe, and shelter her.

This presents a problem in that Bronte’s heroine affirms her independence by forcefully fighting back. As Miss Rigby (a critic for the December 1848 edition of the *Quarterly Review*, an English journal) writes:

> Jane Eyre is proud, therefore she is ungrateful, too. It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, and penniless—yet she thanks nobody, least of all Him, for the food and raiment, the friends, companions, and instructors of her helpless youth—for the care and education...On the contrary, she looks upon all that has been done for her not only as her undoubted right, but as falling far short of it. (Rigby 173)

To the readers, Jane has no reason to fight for independence. When her mother, born of a well to do middle class family, married Jane's father, her family considered the alliance below her and disowned her. Their union was “in the space between classes...socially ambiguous, and this ambiguity is part of the legacy to Jane” (Fraiman 616). She was born poor and when her parents’ died without leaving her any money, she was considered a charity case; dependant on others to care for her. Despite this fact, Jane still demands to be treated as an equal to her relations who have money and becomes irate if treated unfairly. In the end, “what
horrified the Victorians was Jane’s anger” (Gilbert and Gubar 338). To the Victorian critics, Jane has no reason to lash out; she is an orphan, and since her relatives have been kind to give Jane food, water, and shelter, she should be grateful.

According to Parama Roy, author of “Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetic of Property in Jane Eyre,” Jane’s words prove to the Victorian read that Jane is “witty, proud, unsubmitive, and quick to demand her rights and resent her injuries—qualities manifestly foreign” to a child in her position (Roy 714). Even the servants are flustered by Jane’s behavior, and are often telling Jane:

You ought not to think of yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none: it is your place to be humble and to try to make yourself agreeable to them. (Bronte 15)

Instead, Jane is seen verbally attacking her male cousin, John Reed, comparing him to “a murderer...a slave-driver” when he throws a book at her (Bronte 13). Even worse, when her Aunt Reed isolates Jane by telling the other children to not interact with her, since “she is not worth of notice,” Jane shouts, “They are not fit to associate with me” (Bronte 29). The very idea of an orphaned Jane being allowed to associate with a Victorian gentleman’s children was considered charitable.

In response to Jane’s attack on her cousin John, her blood relatives often isolate her in the red room, where her Uncle Reed died. This isolation is accepted as just punishment for the heroine’s
“atrocious” behavior. The isolation also coincides with the experience a female would endure during menstruation. The Victorians believed menses to be the cause of madness within a woman. Any young woman about to reach puberty was to take extreme caution so as not to slip into insanity. Jane’s outbursts before she is sent to the red room are then equated to the idea of feminine madness. Since Jane’s Self is refusing to adhere to the Ideal feminine orphan, she is cast off and isolated from her relatives.

The ‘Master’ of the house, her bully cousin John Reed, further classifies Jane as an outsider, calling her a “bad animal” who has:

no business to take our books; you are a dependent...; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentleman’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. (Bronte 11; 12-3, my emphasis)

Distinguishing between our/us/we and you/your, Jane is cast as Other, while John places himself as the patriarchal Victorian society. Since Jane is a poor female orphan, she is then reduced to the role of dependant Female. However, Jane desires independence and equality, leading her to be the Other, or “bad animal” as John often calls her (Bronte 11). The reduction to animal is signifying the madness or outsider role that Jane takes when her Individual self-consciousness differs from the Societal Self-consciousness of ideal Woman.

As a Victorian orphan, Jane is an outsider, dependent upon her relatives for survival and yet she claims autonomy. This is not the only
way Jane has set herself apart. She yet again struggles for power over the patriarchal Victorian society with her romantic interest, Rochester.

**The Psychological Double or Opposite Comparisons?**

Just as Bronte creates a power struggle between Jane and the patriarchy, she creates two Opposites for Jane: one being that of the Victorian Ideal of a woman and the other being the Victorian nightmare. In a gesture of acquiescence to the Victorian reader, Bronte first pairs her heroine with a sickly schoolmate named Helen Burns.

Helen is “a necessary symbol” portraying the ideal Victorian woman (Eagleton 16). She is dutiful and obedient; Jane’s opposite. Within her, the reader sees characteristics of Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House” which praises the “so simply, subtly sweet” woman who “by her gentleness [is] made great” (Patmore 1586). Helen is indeed “the Angel of Lowood, the perfect victim and representation of the feminine spirit in its disembodied form” (A Literature of Their Own 118).

In the first few glimpses we see of Helen, she is being unjustly punished; however, she receives her punishments silently, without weeping or blushing (Bronte 54). Instead, she “composed, but grave... her sights seemed turned in, gone down into her heart” (Bronte 56). Helen receives her punishment gracefully and without malice even though she is wrongly accused. Had Helen been the heroine rather than Jane, the Victorian critics would have been appeased. She is the epitome of what is expected of a female orphan: she is “pious, intellectual, indifferent to her
material surroundings, resigned to the abuse of her body," and even furthering her archetypal state, she is suffering from consumption, a disease that makes the body weak as well as frail (A Literature of Their Own 118).

Throughout her time at Lowood, Helen clings steadfastly to religion and the belief that God loves her. Unlike Jane, she does not give into passionate outbursts, believing that “[i]t is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and…the Bible bids [people] to return good for evil” (Bronte 58). Jane replies: “I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly” (Bronte 60). Helen’s response is that of the dutiful Angel in the House, mildly rebuking the rebellious Jane, comparing her to uncivilized “heathens and savage tribes” who hold to that doctrine as opposed to the “Christians and civilized nations [that] disown” such fleshly morals (Bronte 60). In saying this, Helen chastises Jane for allowing her passions to rule her. By comparing her to “savages” and explaining that British or Christian, civilized societies are ruled by logic and not emotion, the heroine is given yet another lesson of the Victorian social Self-consciousness which expects rationality, not anger.

There is a distinct difference between Helen and Jane. One restrains herself, while another gives into her passions and allows herself
to become angry. By comparing Helen’s “Angel” to Jane’s “Demon,” Bronte reveals the reasons for rebellious passion within Jane’s nature as well as a warning for following passions without reason. However, since passionate Jane is the heroine, challenging society by wishing for her independence, she must be the victor, not Helen. There must be a change that occurs to allow for Victorian readers’ sympathies to turn towards Jane rather than judging her passions. The very idea of running with one’s passions threatens the Victorian notion of morality. Since morality and sanity are one in the same to the Victorians, Jane, when compared to Helen could be considered mad.

The first time the reader and Jane encounters Helen, she is being bullied by a teacher who chastises her for having dirty fingernails. Jane is in awe of the older girl who does not defend her dirty nails by explaining, “that she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen” (Bronte 56). Helen believes this treatment necessary, since she finds flaws in herself, though Jane and the reader find no fault with the older girl. Though Helen has been set up as the “Angel” of Lowood School, she is treated considerably unfairly. This unjust treatment creates a sense of resentment by the audience and Jane to question the society in which the girls reside. Helen’s death is essential in order to allow Jane to continue with her journey. Helen dies in her sleep, leaving the world as she lived in it, passively; while Jane clings to her passionate spark necessary for her journey, Helen does not
give into such passions and lacks the spark necessary to live. She is quite comfortable with dying, telling Jane, “when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve: there is nothing to grieve about” (Bronte 84). Though Helen lives and dies passively, through her and Jane’s exchanges, the reader begins to realize the necessity of passion that leads to strength in order to live within a harsh reality. The ideal Social Self-consciousness Woman, or Angel, must pass away to prove the folly of holding women to such lofty and weakening terms, terms that keep the woman who follows such a model from the strength necessary to live.

Though Jane has the necessary will to keep going, she also has a passionate temper that some Victorian readers condemn. Through her first act of outburst towards her cousin, John Reed, Jane makes it very clear that “she is particularly inveterate against the ascendancy of property and male authoritarianism as manifest in the manorial world” (Roy 720). Her anger is justified through the treatment of Helen, the Social ideal orphan girl, who does not fight for herself. The frustration she feels to fight back is understandable to the reader since she too is angered at Helen’s mistreatment.

Just as there is a need for the Angel to acknowledge Jane’s defiance, there needs to exist an Other, or “mad woman,” to make Jane’s otherwise rebellious behavior socially acceptable. Enter the Other: Bertha Antoinette Mason Rochester. Jane has defied societal
expectations and, she could technically be considered mad. However, throughout Bronte’s novel the heroine “never feels herself to be going mad, but there is a madwoman in the house who exists as her opposite, her image horribly distorted in a warped mirror, a threat to her happiness” (Rich 98). Bronte creates an Other that serves as a “doppelganger, who has represented the self as split,” between the madness and the sane (Rigney 123). So that Jane Eyre can survive, there needs to be another outsider whose actions are clearly worse than Jane’s rebellions.

Jane, though not completely the ideal of Victorian femininity, has become a lady despite her shortcomings. That “Jane first sees Bertha’s face reflected in a mirror, and a wall, after all, is all that separates Jane from Bertha…” is not just a coincidence to some critics (Rigney 28). Even Jane’s narrative, through Rochester, begs the reader to “compare [Jane with her] clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk [that is Bertha], then judge…” the story, the heroine Jane, for her rebelliousness (Bronte 296). Madness is only comparable to society and an anomaly within an individual. Thereby “illustrating through Bertha the consequences of unrestrained passion, and by linking Bertha to Jane, this novel, substantiates, by illustration, the premise upon which is didacticism is built” (Grudin 157). As suggested by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of The Madwoman in the Attic, who argue “that the specter of Bertha is...avatar
of Jane” since “Bertha now does, for instance, is what Jane wants to do” (Gilbert and Gubar 359). Ultimately, it is Bertha’s status as Rochester’s legal wife that allows Jane to escape her marriage to her “Master” Rochester.

Though Gilbert and Gubar make an interesting point of making Bertha Jane’s psychological double, I must point out again that Jane herself never feels herself going mad. The audience may believe her to be insane, but Jane never states this. Instead, I propose that it is through Bertha the reader is able to judge Jane’s actions as less heinous; allowing the heroine to move freely within the text towards her own independence. At the novel’s end, Jane discovers Bertha’s death has created circumstances by which Jane is now free to marry her equal, Edward. As Lerner states:

If Bertha represents the very opposite to Jane, as woman and as potential wife for Rochester, if her presence in the attic symbolizes all that Jane does not feel, if she tears the bridal veil when Jane with her whole being wishes to wear it, if she tries to burn Rochester and this horrifies Jane because she feels no hostility to him, even unconsciously, then the parallels will be just as strong. (Lerner 291)

Even if Bertha’s actions do appear to coincide with Jane’s whims of passion, one could assume that this occurs for comparison only. With Jane’s passionate acts, the reader now has a worse passionate act. A scandalous governess falling in love with her master appears less dangerous and threatening than a wife setting fire to her husband’s bed.
These comparisons happen throughout the Thornfield portion of the novel.

Though “[w]e see little of Bertha Rochester; she is heard and sensed rather than seen” she is an ominous presence throughout the novel from her first laughter to the end of the novel (Rich 99). Just as the Angel in the House is sensed yet not seen, Bertha’s presence lurks the shadow; however, the only non-violent reminder of her comes in the form of her menacing laugh. Like Jane, Bertha is prone to whims of passion, often during the full moon. Using these two characters as opposites, “Bertha [then] embodies the moral example which is the core of Bronte’s novel—in a society which itself exhibits a form of psychosis in its oppression of women, the price paid for love and sexual commitment is insanity and death, the loss of self” (Rigney 16). She is then the opposite of the Angel: the Demon. Jane is now freed from the role of rebellious “Demon” and is able to pursue her role as Angel within her own right fit to her individual Self-consciousness.

Though we know of the madwoman as an ominous voice, the first time we are aware of the madwoman enacting violence is when Bertha sets fire to Rochester’s bed. This act presents the reader with two figures within the manor: the subsequent Angel in the House, who rescues her master without any recognition of her deed and the Madwoman who attempted to burn this same master in his sleep. Up until now, “Jane has always been portrayed as the social outcast who is, by virtue of her
very Otherness,” in that when she is faced with choosing the action that will lead her closer to the Social Self-consciousness, she goes with her own Individual Self-consciousness by giving into her passions (Roy 724). Her act of silent heroism has begun to change the reader’s mind about her. Jane acts silently and without reward. Bertha’s act of violence rewards Jane’s actions as the silent Angel status that has eluded Jane throughout the novel.

**Governess: In-between the Social spaces**

Jane’s station as Governess places her in an unlikely situation. She is above most servants; however, since Jane is employee, she is not exactly the master’s houseguest either. The wealthy upper to middle-class Victorians viewed the Governess to as “a being who is [their] equal in birth, manners, and education, but [their] inferior in worldly wealth” (Rigby 176). Since the Governess lacks monetary assets, she does not fit into the category of upper and middle class society. However, she also does not belong to the working class even though she must earn her wages. The working class “invariably detest her, for she is a dependant like themselves, and yet, for all that, as much their superior in other respects as the family they both serve,” meaning that though she too is a servant to the family; she is ranked higher than the servants and they must attend her as they do the family (Rigby 177). As a governess, Jane yet again finds herself in a position in which she does not fully belong.
She is educated yet employed, ranking her higher than the servants at Thornfield; at the same time she is still subjected to the will of Rochester who employs her. When Rochester claims Jane to be his equal and likeness, most readers would find this statement scandalous during a time in which a governess “is a bore to almost any gentleman” (Rigby 177). The ladies of Rochester’s society whom he invites to his estate find governesses to be uninteresting and have no reservations about speaking ill of them, even when Jane is in the same room. In return, Jane chastises herself for harboring feelings for Mr. Rochester. As self-punishment, she forces herself to draw a “disconnected, poor, and plain” self-portrait as well as an image of “an accomplished lady of rank,” Miss Ingram, Mr. Rochester’s rumored interest (Bronte 163). When Jane thinks of Mr. Rochester, she will use the portraits as a way to deter her interest since Mr. Rochester would not “waste a serious thought on this indignant and insignificant plebeian” (Bronte 163). Here Jane’s Individual Self-consciousness wars with her Social Self-consciousness. Her autonomy reveals her attraction to Mr. Rochester, while her Social Self-consciousness dictates the relationship to be impossible. Jane is not alone in this assessment, Mrs. Fairfax too expresses her concern when she states “Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses” (Bronte 267). Here we realize that upper, middle, and working class are all attuned to these stations, and aim to stay in their
places. And though Jane claims autonomy, she still struggles to stay within her social confinement.

However, Mr. Rochester is indeed interested in Jane. He pursues her and though he claims that she is his equal, “his behavior suggests that [Jane] can be neither his equal nor his likeness” instead, Jane becomes “his object, his possession, [as well as] an extension of himself” (Moglen 123). Once he is engaged to her, Rochester seeks to posses Jane and attempts to make her into his own creation. He plans to “pour [the heirloom jewels] into [her] lap” as well as “attire [his] Jane in satin and lace...[and force] the world [to] acknowledge” Jane’s beauty (Bronte 261). After their engagement, Jane is no longer referred to as her own person, but rather as Rochester’s: “my bride....my darling...Rochester’s child-bride” (Bronte 256; 258; 260). Jane protests this outward change, telling Rochester such things would only make her look like “an ape in a harlequin’s jacket,—a jay in borrowed plumes” (Bronte 261). Rochester appears to comply with Jane’s wishes; however, it is made clear he plans to see Jane changed. He begins to call Jane, “Janet” as if to dress up her name. Jane may fight the changes Rochester makes, but he is determined to see them through.

Though she has education, Jane lacks the monetary wealth to equate her to Rochester. She is still dependent on him, which is contrary to her nature, since Jane desires autonomy. During preparations for her wedding, Jane, tired of Rochester’s plans to recreate her as Janet, longs
to write her Uncle, who wishes to adopt her and make her his heiress. She thinks to herself, “It would, indeed be a relief...if I had ever so small an independency” (Bronte 270). Jane loves Rochester, but her autonomy rebels against the changes and dependence he brings. She wishes to escape by claiming the inheritance than is hers, an inheritance that, if claimed, would establish her autonomy through economic means. With a substantial inheritance, Jane could control her own life rather than rely on her master and soon-to-be husband for economic security as governess and fiancée.

After Rochester and Jane’s wedding is interrupted and called off due to the existence of Rochester’s wife, Bertha, Jane must still rebuff Rochester’s desires for her. He entices her to run away with him and be his mistress. However, Jane will not be moved. Her independence will not allow for her to rely upon someone else’s will. Instead, she responds that she will leave Thornfield and Rochester. Rochester becomes angry. He threatens violence if she will not listen to his reason (Bronte 304). When he again asks her to come away with him, and Jane yet again refuses him, Rochester wonders aloud, “Never...never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable...I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her” (Bronte 320). In his quest for power over Jane, he considers forcing himself upon her, trampling and breaking Jane as he would a plant. Desperate though he may be for Jane, he realizes that violence would only exacerbate the
situation, and attempts to guilt her into staying. However, his psychological hold on Jane is not strong enough and she leaves him and Thornfield.

The renowned Victorian author and critic George Eliot showed her distaste for Jane’s escape. Eliot believed Jane should have a better reason than “self-sacrifice [to a] nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which claims a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase” (qtd. in Haight 268). George Eliot believed marriage to be a distasteful law that hindered people. She believed that if Jane had stayed with Rochester as mistress, she would still have her autonomy rather than taking on Rochester’s name with him holding legal status over Jane. Yet I argue that Jane’s exit from Thornfield asserts her self-control and power. Rather than becoming a Mistress and conforming to patriarchal society, Jane reinstates her independence. As a Mistress she would still be economically dependant upon Rochester, something for which Jane’s individual Self-consciousness would not stand, for especially since she barely tolerated the prospect of being Rochester’s wife.

Jane does return to Rochester of her own accord. She has become her Uncle’s heiress and is fully independent. Upon her arrival, Jane finds Thornfield in ruins. Rochester, too, is physically ruined. He is maimed, having lost his eye and hand while attempting to rescue his wife in the fire that destroys Thornfield. He is now dependant on his servants to help him find his way around the house. When Jane returns to him,
Rochester has no choice but give her equal share, something Jane wanted from the beginning. To signify this change, the watch chain he previously threatens to use as a leash on her is now relinquished to Jane. She has become his sight and right hand, in the literal sense. The last chapter reveals this equality when she boldly states: “Reader, I married him” (Bronte 452). Though she still refers to him as Mr. Rochester, she no longer calls him “Master.” Instead, she uses his Christian name, Edward, even to the point of saying, “My Edward” to show that he belongs to her (Bronte 455). Jane explains her equality stating: “I am my husband’s life as full as he is mine” (Bronte 454). This is directly opposite of the life Rochester had originally envisioned. Rather than him owning Jane, the two of them own each other. Jane still keeps her autonomy despite being married.

By bringing Jane to this level of independence, Bronte has brought upon herself a problem that was earlier discussed: her Victorian readers may not find Jane and her inclinations towards her Individual Self-consciousness rather than the Social Self-consciousness sympathetic or even a viable option. Just as Bronte paved the way for her heroine to triumph in the Rochester-Jane power struggle, she also made it possible for Jane to be considered a Victorian heroine by the reader, as well as convey the message of feminine independence.
A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet...The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognized well that purple face,—those bloated features.
—Bronte, Jane Eyre, 295

It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments! — Bronte, Jane Eyre, 286.

I have established that Bertha is the “demon” to Jane’s “angel.” In the comparisons of Jane’s and Bertha’s actions, it is very apparent to the reader that Bertha is indeed more disturbed than Jane. However, upon closer examination of Bronte’s novel, I began to realize the differences in the treatments of the two so-called “doubles.” Jane is the narrator of this story, therefore she controls the way the reader views Mrs. Rochester. And, unfortunately, through Jane’s quest for self-autonomy, Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester is oppressed and pictured as the Social Self-consciousness’ Other so that Jane’s individual Self-consciousness can thrive.

Jane’s first introduction to Mrs. Rochester’s presence is that of a “demonic laugh—low, suppressed, and deep” (Bronte 153). As the heroine gains more insight to the mysterious character whose laughter haunts Thornfield, she offers explanations through Victorian psychiatry as to the Bertha’s madness (The Female Maladay 67). Peter Gruden states, “Bertha’s pathology is clearly modeled on a then recent scientific theory, the notion of ‘moral madness’ propounded in the thirties by psychologist James Cowles Prichard” (Grudin 147). The first time Jane
encounters a physical act of this mysterious presence, she awakens in the dead of night to the laughter she has previously heard, only to smell smoke. The specter is then presented as an actual person in that it has set fire to Mr. Rochester’s bed. As previously described, Jane puts out the fire, and becomes an unsung heroine in that no one but Rochester knows she has rescued him. However, I wish to discuss this night and first physical act the reader uncovers the specter to be real. Jane has written the narrative after everything has happened, meaning though the reader is experiencing this for the first time. When she remembers this night, she details this as an evening in which

the moon, which was full and bright (for the night was fine), came in her course to that space in the sky opposite of my casement, and looked at me through the unveiled panes, her glorious gaze roused me. Awaking in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disk—silver-white and crystal-clear. (Bronte 207)

This night of the full moon is no coincidence. The Victorian reader knew the myth of a woman’s insanity due to the female cycle of menstruation. More often than not, the full moon coincided with a woman’s menstrual period, since both appeared to occur once a month, causing some Victorians to believe the two to be equal signs of the other. The night of Rochester’s bed being set on fire is not the last incident to occur on a full moon in Thornfield. Bertha’s attack on her brother, Mr. Mason, also occurs during a full moon.

Bertha is kept in the attic, which was common for the wealthier class during the 19th Century in order to avoid sullying a family’s good
reputation by having a family member committed to an asylum (The Female Malady 26). She is kept hidden away on the third floor, much like Jane during her childhood outbursts of passionate rage at her Aunt Reed's house. When Jane is finally privy to viewing Bertha for the first time, she describes the other woman as a “clothed hyena” similar to the “bad animal” label placed on Jane by Master John Reed (Bronte 11; 295). Here, the narrative allows the reader to compare the two women who could both be considered mad or even less than human due to their actions. Both are described as animals, and each attacked relations (Bertha attacked her brother, while Jane attacked her cousin); however, here is where the similarities end. For without a “true” madwoman, there is no one to exonerate Jane from this label, allowing her to split from the Social Self-consciousness to become an independent individual. Therefore, Jane’s freedom comes at a cost, another woman who will then take her place in the attic as madwoman.

Rather than giving Bertha a proper title or name, Jane continues to describe Rochester's first wife as “the lunatic” or a beast with human clothes (Bronte 296). Jane establishes Bertha as a female, she then strips any sense of femininity from the older woman as if to remove any compassion from the Victorian audience. Continuing her description of Bertha Mason Rochester, Jane describes her as “a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic
as he was” (Bronte 296). Bertha lacks any feminine qualities that would relate her to the reader. She can easily overtake her husband in strength. Her physical features have no womanly qualities. For the Victorian society’s Self-consciousness, this description takes away any form of compassion for Bertha. This woman is obviously mad, given to violence, and lacks any qualities that would allow the reader to believe she could be reformed.

Interestingly, for a woman who believes in her own autonomy, Jane has no trouble reducing another woman’s self to the hands of the very society Jane wishes to escape. Though Jane is usually vocal about unjust treatment, “she approves Rochester’s summary and callous treatment of his West Indian wife; and she is manifestly enthusiastic about the exploitation of colonized peoples” (Roy 715). This is also revealed in her treatment of her past pupil, Adèle Varens. Once she is Rochester’s wife, she dictates that his ward is sent away to school to have “a sound English education [which] corrected [Adèle’s] French defects” (Bronte 453). Even though Jane’s life is very similar to Adèle’s, she does not allow the child to live with her and Rochester. Rather than sympathizing with Adèle, she sends the girl away to rid her of any non-English traits.

In this same way, Jane also negates Bertha’s rights as an oppressed woman. Rather than allowing Bertha to speak for herself, the Jane allows Mr. Rochester to tell his first wife’s story. Rochester further
strips Bertha of humanity, giving more credence to Jane’s humanity within her autonomy. He claims Bertha to be mad. Furthermore,

she came from a mad family;—idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard...Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent... (Bronte 300)

The reader and Jane now know Bertha as both insane and Creole. The first separates Bertha’s Self-consciousness from the Social Self-consciousness in that there is nothing within Bertha’s individual self-consciousness to relate or identify with the Victorian social self-consciousness. Also, there is now attention drawn to difference of race in that Bertha’s “madness and licentiousness are inextricably linked to her Creole Blood, whereas Jane’s sound and chaste nature is the legacy of her English inheritance” (Beaty 153). This doubling and differing between “social” British woman to “sociopath” Creole, allows the creation of the brutal and savage colonized being, especially since “Bertha never really loses the mysterious qualities that make her very humanness suspect” (Grudin 147). She is now identified as Creole, like her mother. This gives the reader a sense that Bertha is now a double outsider: first an outsider by her madness and now an outsider in that she is not fully British since she was born in a British colony.

**Madwoman or Colonized Other?**

In many ways Bertha fits the definition of the Gaytatri Chakravorty Spivak’s subaltern. Throughout the novel, Bertha is always cast as the outsider and Other to the point of being not human “first seen darkly as
a ghost, then as a goblin, as vampiric and lycanthropic, (Grudin 147). Though this difference is created to serve a purpose, the damage given to the colonized character is great. Though women and their rights appear to be of importance to Bronte, her use of the Other, or colonized is brutal. Since the narrative does not imbue “the West Indian madwoman with speech, reason, a history, a grammar of motives, or even a human personality,” we are left with an unclear study of Bertha through the voices of Rochester and Jane. (Roy 720). Due to Bertha’s silence, the reader’s knowledge of her is that of a degenerate who could not control her own passions.

Not allowing Bertha a voice, she becomes a body, an Other, a simple reflection in the mirror and not her own identity. She is a clear example of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls the “average third-world woman” in that she “leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender” within the attic without a voice (Mohanty 65). “In contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women” or Jane who is clearly shown “as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the ‘freedom’ to make their own decisions” Bertha is set outside the feminine discourse (Mohanty 65). As far as the reader knows, she lacks education, and by being locked up in the attic, Bertha clearly does not have control over her body. The mistake is this: as Jane’s narrative progresses, the reader encompass Jane and Bertha as “the heterogeneous Other” or Woman rather that realizing the
mistake of ignoring the “circuit of the international division” (Spivak 288). In other words, Jane and Bertha, though both women, are completely different individuals. Both have had different life and cultural experiences. If the reader were to look at the work this way, as Laurence Lerner, author of “Bertha and Her Critics,” states: “It seems to me misleading to call Bertha the site of anything: we are simply not given enough of her consciousness for her to be considered the site on which such issues are enacted (it is Jane who is the site; Bertha is the symbol)” (Lerner 292). In looking at the text as Jane being the site of social rebellion and autonomy, Bertha would then be the symbol or cautionary tale to Jane if she should fail. But Jane does not fail.

Instead Jane uses this madwoman’s body as proof of Jane’s own sanity within her individual self-consciousness and obtains the approval of the reader. Since Jane uses this woman in order to justify her autonomy, Bertha is then a colonized being and Jane is the colonizer. The readers condemn Bertha as mad and allow Jane her autonomy. However, on further investigation of this colonized and supposed madwoman, I wonder if she is truly insane.

Bertha is considered the colonized subject for which there is emphasis placed on her Otherness in order that she may become a symbol. At the same time, as Rigney suggests, “[p]erhaps Bertha’s madness quite literally has a method” (Rigney 27). What happens when the colonized subject begins to speak for herself? Is this possible?
Though Spivak states “the subaltern cannot speak,” the subaltern must be taken into account when speaking of the diverse Other.

**Bertha or Antoinette?**

When Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea*, “she was moved by Bertha Mason,” and attempted to “render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken” the argument as to Bertha’s madness (“Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” 249). As Spivak states Rhys “keeps Bertha’s humanity, indeed her sanity as critic of imperialism, intact” throughout the novel in order to give the supposed madwoman a chance to speak for herself (“Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” 249). This is done by re-locating and re-identifying Bertha the mad Creole, as Antoinette the Creole beauty from Jamaica.

The definition of Creole is itself ambiguous. This term had four different meanings before 1850:


The blurred definition left room for doubt within Victorian society and Edward Rochester, concerning Antoinette’s national identity, creating the main concern throughout Rhys’ novel. Being labeled Creole gives Antoinette a social and national ambiguity.
*Wide Sargasso Sea* opens to the intermixing racial politics within a newly emancipated Jamaica. The former owners find themselves poor and without people to run their plantations, and the economy becomes unstable. Antoinette and her mother are two of these people who find themselves at the mercy and kindness of their former slaves. Because of this, “Antoinette develops a very intricate and accurate perception of the world she lives in” which breaks down many Imperialistic ideas that were placed upon Victorian Britain of racial superiority (Moore 26). Due to her upbringing, Antoinette Mason understands her duality. As a young girl growing up poor, she realizes she is not like the other colonizers in Jamaica. At the same time, she realizes she is different from the natives as well. She stands within the in-between just as her race of Creole suggests: not wholly European, not wholly native Jamaican. It is within this identity that Antoinette is faced with hybridity, or the mixing of two opposing cultures: British and native Jamaican. She must create her own identity, claiming her own individuality just as the natives with the Bible in Babha’s “Signs Taken for Wonders.”

In this text, Homi K. Bhabha explains a phenomena recounted by missionaries in India who stumble upon natives who are dancing with the Christian Bible. Though the missionaries insist it is their culture and people who have brought the natives this religion, the natives are quick to dismiss the missionaries by stating it was God who gave them His word. Though the missionaries believed the Bible to be a ideology “of the
Western sign...that sustain[s] a tradition of English ‘culture’ authority,” the natives have intervened this sign, read Bible, for something else; a sign for which they ascribe their own meaning. In other words, the two Social Self-consciousnesses battle, but rather than one being dominant and the other being subordinate, the two mix and become a hybrid of both cultures. The definitions the Natives give the book and the religion then becomes an amalgamation of Christianity, British, and Indian culture. By the same way that the Indian natives have taken the Bible to their own meaning, Bertha Antoinette Mason has subscribed her own meaning. However, her downfall is when her individuality comes against those in power who do not understand hybridity.

When her mother remarries the British Mr. Mason, both women are unable to comprehend his ethnocentrism. A year later, her mother argues with Mr. Mason about leaving. She desires to leave because she feels the people in the area hate her and the family. Mason, not understanding the threat of the freed slaves states “They are curious. It’s natural enough...You imagine enmity which doesn’t exist,” to which his wife responds, “You don’t like, or even recognize, the good in them...and you won’t believe in the other side” (Rhys 15). Through his British understanding, Mr. Mason sees these colonized people as innocent and incapable of malice. His wife and step-daughter, Antoinette, however, perceive the threat that is coming.
In the end the family is forced to flee their home as it destroyed by the very servants they employed. Antoinette’s brother dies due to his injuries and her mother suffers a mental breakdown. Antoinette recalls:

my mother hated Mr. Mason. She said she would kill him, she tried to, I think. So he bought her a house and hired a coloured man and woman to look after her...I saw the man lift her up out of the chair and kiss her” (Rhys 85-86).

Her mother’s madness is brought on by the death of her son, abandonment of her husband, and the subsequent abuse of her caretakers. She gives up on life, and dies later when Antoinette is at school. Antoinette remembers not being able to cry or pray (35). To Antoinette, the person her mother was died when their home was destroyed.

As Antoinette later reveals to Edward Rochester, “[t]here are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about” (Rhys 81). In many ways Antoinette is also speaking for herself as well. However, there is no room within society for Antoinette’s Individual Self-consciousness. Though she is strong enough to fight for her autonomy, Antoinette, with her understanding of hybridity, is incapable of communicating her autonomy to others. She then finds herself “split between the image thrust on her and her own knowledge of herself” (Abel 172). When she marries, Antoinette faces the challenge of convincing her husband to see both her English and native side to her personality. Her understanding of hybridity “is to look...without coveting or expecting, a stance that strikes her English bridegroom Edward Rochester...as simple-minded at best, at
worst insane. She tries to make him understand why she does not expect people to act according to their race by telling him what Jamaica is like as well as her habits, why she kisses Christophine, her black maid and former nurse, or even of her life before her step-father Mr. Mason.

However, Antoinette is fighting an unwinnable battle. Edward Rochester, like Mr. Mason, is unable to understand his Creole wife. Instead, he wishes for her to be more English and is disgusted when Antoinette embraces the servants when they arrive at the house. Rochester begins to call Antoinette, Bertha. Though he argues this is because he’s “particularly fond of [her],” Antoinette realizes that Rochester wishes she were someone else and is attempting to make her into his ideal by calling her another name (Rhys 86; 94). Here the reader sees Rochester attempting to reclaim and colonize Bertha, making her into someone he can understand rather than attempting to understand the individual named Antoinette.

Rather than leaving his wife, Rochester’s pride and jealousy get the better of him. The English law is on his side. He will take his Creole bride to Britain. Fully convinced Bertha is mad just like her mother, Rochester plans to keep Antoinette out of the public eye, and attempts to go on with life. Since Rochester “is not only unable to admit neutrality but unwilling to entertain the possibility that any part of the world exists in its own right and not primarily in relation to himself,” he is unable to relate to his wife’s hybridity (Moore 27). The misunderstandings continue to drive.
them further apart. In the end, when Antoinette goes to England, her hybrid social understandings, and the lack of understanding by the Victorian Social self-consciousness, Antoinette is renamed Bertha and labeled mad.
V—Conclusion

As long as people are going to call you a lunatic anyway, why not get the benefit of it? It liberates you from convention.

Perhaps some day we will no longer really know what madness was. Its face will have closed upon itself...The familiar game of mirroring the other side of ourselves in madness...will once and for all have become nothing but a complex ritual whose significations will have been reduced to ashes. —Foucault, et al, "Madness, the Absence of Work" 290).

Both Jane Eyre and Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester wish to be autonomous. At the same time, these Self-consciousnesses must battle with the Social Self-consciousness in order to be seen. Within this battle, madness is a tool both Jane and Antoinette use in order to move through the Victorian social expectations and attempt to create their own autonomy. Since Jane’s Individual Self-consciousness is not full recognized as Other by the Social Self-consciousness, her Individual Self is accepted by the Social Self. The fact that Jane’s Self-consciousness is able to manipulate her narrative/story to focus on the Otherness of the subaltern Antoinette also enables Jane’s acceptance. This is due to Jane’s use of localizing Woman and Individual Woman to a universal term. However, as Spivak has stated:

There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. (“The Subaltern Cannot Speak” 308)

In other words, it is not possible to read Antoinette as insane by using the definition of moral sanity by the Victorians. Since she is Subaltern,
she was not given a voice to defend her actions. Instead, the idea of Universal woman is twisted and the Subaltern is then used as a warning in order to create the Woman Colonizer’s Individual identity.

However, to be fair, the idea of hybridity and understanding of fluctuation within Identity was not necessarily heard of within the strict confinement of Victorian society. Due to the lack of understanding of hybridity, the colonized Woman is unable to maintain the label of sanity within the Colonizer’s discourse. It was not until *Wide Sargasso Sea* that the reader was able to understand the battle between the Individual Self-consciousness and Social Self-consciousness and the fine line between Madness and Sanity. As Elizabeth Able states:

Rhys does more than account for Antoinette’s insanity and more than merely reverse Bronte’s roles of villain and victim. By identifying Rochester with attempted rationality and objectivity and Antoinette with intuition and subjectivity, Rhys dramatizes the interaction of two fundamentally different ways of ordering experience, and by subtly reinforcing Antoinette’s perceptions, she forces us to re-examine our response to madness. (Abel 173)

The idea of madness can then only be explained culturally and individually. Bertha may or may not be mad due to her past experiences. Had she been able to speak, perhaps the reader would feel sympathy for Antoinette rather than condemn her.

The concept of comparing ideals and Self-consciousness in order to find the Other, or difference, and therefore establish identity is definitely a notion that needs to be re-examined. Madness and Sanity are relative
terms depending on the individual. Jane was labeled as sane due to Bertha’s insanity. The idea of Antoinette Bertha as an object that must play out her role, act out the transformation of her “self” into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of the British novel... (“Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” 251)

is appalling. No woman should have to degrade another woman in order to gain status within any society. Perhaps, as Foucault suggests, there will be a day in which madness does not exist. There will not be a need for comparison in order to define. Maybe one day another writer will re-examine Rhys and Bronte’s texts only to appropriate the story of Antoinette Bertha Mason Rochester and Jane Eyre into a creation of two overpowering Rochester, escaping to Jamaica with Adèle Varens to set up their own life away from madness and the freedom to pursue their individual Self. Until then, we can only look to both these characters as a warning of injustice that women give to each other in order to gain a foothold in society.
Works Cited


