The Madwoman as Antagonist in English Gothic Fiction

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate the portrayal of madwoman characters as antagonists in English literature, in order to contribute to ongoing critical discussions on the subject of the madwoman in feminist literary criticism. The thesis performs a close reading of the characters of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mrs. Danvers in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) and its film adaptations, and Adeline March in Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006). The selection of texts from three different centuries demonstrates historical continuity in the representation of madwoman antagonist literary characters. Furthermore, this thesis refers to these fictional texts as well as critical commentary in order to demonstrate that the terms "madness" and "madwoman" have an inherent connection to the term "mental illness" and thus to real-world perceptions of mental disorder. For this reason, the representation of madwoman characters as antagonists is particularly notable, in that it suggests an association between madness, and by extension mental illness, and the villainous actions of the characters. This thesis demonstrates that in each of the three texts in question, the madwoman antagonist is associated with violent and destructive actions. This results in the implication that madness makes these women inherently dangerous and destructive. Given that they are not the protagonists or viewpoint characters of the novels, these madwoman antagonists are also unable to tell their own stories, meaning the novels provide no counter-narrative to their negative portrayals.

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Introduction

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* was originally published in 1979 and became a highly influential text of feminist literary criticism, largely because it worked to account for the exclusion of women writers from English literary history at a crucial moment in the canon wars of the period. The "madwoman" of the title refers both to the nineteenth-century, predominantly English, women writers Gilbert and Gubar examine, and to certain "mad" female characters these writers employ. A notable figure in this analysis is the character of Bertha Mason Rochester from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), whose entrapment in the third story of her husband's home is referenced by Gilbert and Gubar's title. Gilbert and Gubar assert that the nineteenth-century writers they discuss "project what seems to be the energy of their own despair into passionate, even melodramatic characters who act out the subversive impulses every woman inevitably feels when she contemplates the 'deep-rooted' evils of patriarchy" (77). This results in the character type of "a madwoman, a crazy and angry woman" (77) appearing in various texts by these writers. These characters act out the secret "rebellious impulses" of their authors (78). Gilbert and Gubar further assert that for this reason, "the madwoman in literature by women is not merely . . . an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (78).

The reading of the figure of the madwoman has become a point of critical contention, particularly in regard to Bertha Mason, since, as has been noted, positioning this character as Charlotte Brontë's double does not take into account Brontë's lack of identification with Bertha,

or Bertha's lack of subjectivity within the novel.[1] In this study, I begin by reaffirming this problem of the madwoman's association with the author, and furthermore assert that, regardless of the relationship these madwoman characters may bear to the authors of their texts, their narrative function as antagonists is significant and should not be overlooked. The connotations surrounding the portrayals of protagonist and antagonist characters differ, and antagonistic and destructive characters tend to be represented negatively simply through their opposition to the protagonist. For this reason, an antagonistic character who is understood to be a madwoman is likely to present a negative depiction of madness, and even if this portrayal is potentially a sign of positive rebellion, it nonetheless presents an association between madness and, often, violent and destructive actions, in opposition to the seemingly productive actions of the author.

The extent to which the madwoman can be seen as a subversive figure, or to which madness can be a useful form of resistance to patriarchal ideologies, is a common point of argument and discussion. In addition, critical discussions of the madwoman often must consider the relationship of this figure to mental illness. I begin with a brief survey of some of the discussions surrounding the madwoman in feminist literary criticism, particularly focusing on discussions of the character Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Following this survey, I introduce the novels this thesis focuses on, and give an overview of my discussion of the significance of the antagonist narrative role to literary representations of madwoman characters. For the purposes of this thesis, I define "fictional madwoman" as a female character perceived as mad by other characters within a work of fiction, by readers of the work, or both.

1 See for instance Baym, "The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory."

A Brief Survey of the Madwoman in Feminist Criticism

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis in *The Madwoman in the Attic* centrally concerns connections between the figure of the madwoman and the nineteenth-century woman writer. According to the authors, women writers of the Victorian era and earlier "struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness" (Gilbert and Gubar 51), because of the anxiety of authorship that they felt as women. In a social environment that encouraged women, particularly those in the upper and middle classes, to be ill (54) and placed little value on female subjectivity, women feared that they might be mad to want to attempt authorship at all (61). In this literature, the madwoman figure "emerges over and over again from the mirrors women writers hold up both to their own natures and to their own visions of nature" (77). Gilbert and Gubar interpret this monstrous or mad woman as a mad and typically violent double, symbolizing the woman writer's attempts to reject or rebel against patriarchal society, even if the women in question consciously embrace this society.

The madwoman figure takes shape most clearly and explicitly in Gilbert and Gubar's discussion of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Gilbert and Gubar note this novel's display of Jane's anger and potential rebelliousness within the confines of her patriarchal society (338). At points in the story, madness becomes, for Jane, a possible form of "escape" (341). According to this analysis, therefore, the mad Bertha Mason becomes "in a sense [Jane's] own secret self" (348). Bertha is a "double" of Jane (360) who performs the actions that the heroine wishes, in some sense, that she could do (359). Bertha's death is also the death of the madwoman in Jane herself: "the Bertha in Jane falls from the ruined wall of Thornfield and is destroyed" (362). The

madwoman who haunts the text is, in this analysis, a manifestation of the heroine's own repressed desires (360).

Since its publication, *The Madwoman in the Attic* has been a central text in academic discussions of the madwoman, and numerous critics have addressed points for further development as well as points of contention in its arguments.[2] For example, Nina Baym's 1984 article "The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory" is an early example of a text that critically addresses Gilbert and Gubar's analysis. Baym discusses the madwoman in the context of a critical discussion on feminist theory of the 1970s and 1980s. She indicates the problematic nature of Bertha Mason as symbol of feminist rebellion in Gilbert and Gubar's analysis. The understanding of Bertha as Jane Eyre's double (or a personification of her rage) arguably ignores the degree to which Brontë denies Bertha's humanity (48). Baym suggests that Jane's lack of "recognition of Bertha's likeness to herself" precludes the idea that Bertha could represent a part of Jane's psyche, or that Bertha Mason's role in the narrative has any truly subversive feminist potential (48).

In a number of critical discussions since Gilbert and Gubar's book, the literary madwoman is suggested to be inextricable from the lived experiences and history of women in relation to mental illness. I will provide a brief overview of key texts taking this position since the 1970s. *The Female Malady* (1985) by Elaine Showalter gives an overview of the history of mental illness in England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Showalter, women in England were disproportionately institutionalized and treated for mental illness from

2 See for example Spivak, "Four Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." Spivak critiques Gilbert and Gubar's analysis for its elision of the imperialist contexts of *Jane Eyre*, which have major significance to the novel's representation of Bertha. See also *Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years* (2009), edited by Annette R. Federico, which contains several essays which respond in some way to Gilbert and Gubar's text, and thus speak to its continuing influence.

the late nineteenth century onward (52). In addition, Showalter mentions that increases in medical attempts to socially control and treat certain mental illnesses, particularly those associated with women specifically, occurred alongside women's efforts at social change in the late nineteenth century (18).

Showalter contextualizes Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Bertha Mason in relation to early Victorian psychiatric discourse, suggesting that the character's madness is hereditary and implicitly linked to her reproductive system (Showalter 67). Showalter further asserts that Brontë's representation of Bertha had an impact on Victorian cultural perceptions of madness that extended beyond the literary, even influencing medical discourse (68). This madwoman, however, is an object warranting "no sympathy" from Brontë (69), and must ultimately be destroyed for the sake of the heroine's narrative. This historical overview makes it clear that the madwoman as literary metaphor cannot be separated from clinical and societal perceptions of madness in reality, because these images have developed alongside and in relation to each other. In addition, Showalter's analysis indicates that even if specific social and medical contexts change, the madwoman remains a persistent figure in western culture.[3]

Marta Caminero-Santangelo's *The Madwoman Can't Speak, or Why Insanity is Not Subversive* (1998) develops an approach to the madwoman that counters the ideas set forth in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. As its title implies, Caminero-Santangelo's analysis focuses on dispelling the idea that madness is an effective metaphor of resistance for women. The text focuses on the powerlessness of both real women (for instance, writers of autobiography) and fictional female characters (Caminero-Santangelo 19). In this analysis, madness cannot be an

3 Showalter asserts that "new treatments of mental illness and deinstitutionalization seem to have little effect on the cultural image of women as mental patients" (249).

effective source of female agency or empowerment, because the conditions (both psychological and social) imposed by madness may preclude any genuine social power. A recurrent theme and symptom of this powerlessness is the inability of the madwoman to speak for herself: "the symbolic resolution of the madwoman as an alternative to patriarchy ultimately traps the woman in silence" (4). Therefore, the autobiographical and fictional texts of women who have experienced madness are vital in informing a critical understanding of the madwoman.[4] These texts allow for an understanding that takes into account the lived experiences of and limitations imposed by madness, and the resultant limits to its subversive potential.

More recently, Elizabeth J. Donaldson's article "Revisiting the Corpus of the Madwoman: Further Notes Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Mental Illness" (2008), an updated version of an article originally published in 2002,[5] addresses Gilbert and Gubar's conception of the literary madwoman, and of Bertha Mason in particular. By developing an approach based in disability studies and conceptions of embodiment, Donaldson's analysis connects the figure of the madwoman even more explicitly to the issue of mental illness. Donaldson argues that madness is not a positive form of resistance for women (93). In addition, associations between madness as rebellion and mental illness "may limit our inquiry into madness/mental illness" in feminist literary criticism (94). Arguably, "when madness is used as a metaphor for feminist rebellion, mental illness itself is erased" (94). Donaldson revisits *Jane Eyre* through the context of physiognomy and "[r]eading the body" through phrenology (96). According to popular perceptions at Brontë's time, physiognomy – the practice of determining one's character through

4 See Caminero-Santangelo: "it is surely of the utmost importance from a feminist point of view to listen to what women who have experienced madness have to say about it" (18).

5 For the earlier version of this article, see Elizabeth J. Donaldson, "The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness," *NWSA Journal*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. 99-119.

facial features – could be used to identify signs of mental disorder (97). The "deep abiding faith in . . . physiognomy" (97) exhibited by Brontë's novel reinforces Donaldson's argument that Bertha Mason's madness should be understood within the context of nineteenth-century clinical discourse. Donaldson asserts the possibility of starting "with the premise that mental illness is a neurobiological disorder and still [remaining] committed to a feminist and a disability studies agenda" (106). In other words, a feminist conception of mental illness must take into account not only the imposition of ideas of madness by patriarchal clinical discourse, but must also include an understanding that mental illness as a biological condition affects people's lived experiences. It follows that feminist criticism should then apply this understanding when considering the representation of madwomen like Bertha Mason.

Paisley Mann's 2011 article "The Madwoman in Contemporary Adaptations" examines Bertha Mason's portrayal in film and television adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Mann points out how the differences in social perceptions and context between the time of Brontë's writing and the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries necessitate different approaches to the character, as well as to Rochester. Mann asserts that Bertha is no longer a threatening figure. Instead, in the contexts of modern understandings of mental illness and awareness of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, "the portrayal of Bertha as a wild animal and Rochester's ill-treatment of her become not only terrifying but repugnant" (Mann 152-3). Therefore, contemporary portrayals of this madwoman and her husband must diverge from Brontë's original portrayals. All three adaptations Mann examines depart from Brontë in ways that indicate concerns with mental illness (and, to an extent, feminism) which would not have necessarily been salient at Brontë's time. Of particular note is Mann's discussion of Robert Young's 1997 film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. This version

depicts Rochester as caring toward Bertha to the point of anachronistic behaviour, such as a statement that he had sought "alternative methods" for her treatment (160). In addition, Bertha herself is depicted as particularly monstrous in Young's adaptation: her "wild appearance and her grunts" suggest her lack of humanity (160). Mann asserts that these portrayals complement each other because they cement audience sympathy with Rochester, thereby allowing him to be viewed as a suitable partner for Jane (160). Modern understandings of the madwoman may need to be updated from nineteenth-century contexts, but this does not necessarily result in a sympathetic portrayal.

Megan Rogers' 2017 text *Finding the Plot: A Maternal Approach to Madness in Literature* addresses a wide scope of existing criticism surrounding the madwoman figure, and attempts to identify and suggest a solution to the problems this figure represents. Rogers, who is explicit in her concern for the impact of literature and criticism on the lived experiences of real women, asserts the importance of seeking feminist rebellion that involves "more contentment, more community, and . . . more empowerment" than the current academic understanding of the madwoman does (15). Rogers argues that the madwoman must be considered as an individual before being considered as a metaphor for women's rebellion (22-3). In addition, she posits that there is "a lack of criticism that identifies the madwoman as subject" (24), which her work aims to remedy through its examination of madwomen as protagonists (107). Rogers further asserts that madwomen persist as characters in twentieth and twenty-first century literature, although the contexts surrounding these madwomen differ depending on the time of their creation (38-9). For instance, the madwoman of the nineteenth century is not necessarily the central character of the work in which she appears. By contrast, Rogers positions the twentieth- and twenty-first-century

madwomen as the protagonists of their stories, which appears to be an indication of "authors wanting to provide women – particularly these previously peripheral characters – with their own narrative" (39).

The Literary Madwoman as Antagonist

The madwoman continues to be a prominent, if controversial, figure in feminist literary criticism. However, little attention has been given to how a madwoman's role within a given narrative, as protagonist or antagonist, determines her representation. This thesis develops a close reading of three madwoman figures in English literature, through the specific lens of their role as antagonists or villains. The key figures for this study are Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mrs. Danvers from Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and Adeline March from Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006). All three of these characters serve an antagonistic role due to their opposition to the female protagonists of their texts. In addition, all three narratives explicitly refer to each character as a "madwoman," generally in the words of one of the other characters. *Rebecca* and *The Thirteenth Tale* both develop intertextual relationships to *Jane Eyre*. Du Maurier's novel follows a similar plot to Brontë's, and Setterfield's novel references *Jane Eyre* at several points in the story. In addition, I discuss Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), also intertextually connected to *Jane Eyre*, as a counter-example in which the madwoman has the role of protagonist.

I aim to demonstrate that the madness of each of these characters connects to wider beliefs and perceptions surrounding mental illness. Furthermore, I suggest, the antagonistic roles these characters serve mean that not only are they largely unable to tell their own stories – as the narrative is not focalized through their perspectives – but the novels also associate their madness

with violent and destructive actions. This is significant for discussions of the madwoman in feminist literary criticism, because critical discussions of the madwoman should take into account how the madwoman relates to representations of mental illness. The depictions of madwomen as threatening and violent should not be taken simply as representing figures of feminist rebellion, but also may indicate a perceived association between mental illness and violence. Furthermore, the powerlessness and lack of self-representation ultimately exhibited by these characters show that, at least in the case of my focus texts, madness does not lead to empowerment.

In chapter one of this thesis, "Bertha Mason as Madwoman Antagonist in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," I return to Bertha Mason as the most prominent madwoman in feminist literary criticism and explore some of the reasons why Gilbert and Gubar's reading of her as Jane Eyre's double has been challenged. I note that Brontë herself showed little to no recognition of Bertha having any connection with Jane. Furthermore, Brontë's letters prove that Bertha's madness was representative of moral madness, a form of what might now be referred to as mental illness as it was understood in Brontë's time. I explore Bertha as a separate character from Jane, whose madness is connected by the narrative to mental illness, to her Creole heritage, and to her perceived moral flaws. Through a reading of the novel together with Brontë's own statements on Bertha,[6] I demonstrate that the predominant image of Bertha as portrayed by Brontë is that of a fiendish, monstrous, and speechless figure, designed to elicit horror rather than sympathy in readers. I then examine the significance of Bertha's narrative role as an antagonist by contrasting her to Antoinette Cosway, her protagonist counterpart in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso*

6 See Brontë's letter to W. S. Williams, 4 Jan. 1848, in *The Brontës: Life and Letters,* edited by Clement King Shorter.

Sea. Antoinette has a greater ability to represent herself within the narrative than does Bertha, and this, together with her role as protagonist rather than antagonist, means that her portrayal as madwoman lacks many of the negative connotations carried by Brontë's Bertha. This chapter overall raises questions about how to read the madwoman in feminist criticism, considering that the madwoman has, by necessity, a connection to representations of mental illness.

In chapter two, "Mrs. Danvers as Madwoman Antagonist in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*," I examine how du Maurier's novel and its adaptations utilize the madwoman figure. I demonstrate that, although Rebecca de Winter herself holds the "first wife" role which reflects Bertha's in *Jane Eyre*, it is instead Mrs. Danvers who serves as the most prominent madwoman antagonist of the later novel. I compare Mrs. Danvers' portrayal in the novel with her portrayal in two film adaptations, *Rebecca* (1940) directed by Alfred Hitchcock and *Rebecca* (2020) directed by Ben Wheatley. This analysis suggests the connections between Mrs. Danvers' portrayal as a threatening antagonistic figure and anxieties surrounding lesbianism in du Maurier's time, anxieties which persist in particular in the earlier film adaptation. In a culture in which homosexuality was often pathologized, Mrs. Danvers presents a representation of the madwoman being associated with sexual alterity. Although the 2020 film provides a potentially more nuanced characterization of Mrs. Danvers, her manipulative and destructive actions are largely the same as in the earlier versions of the narrative, which further reinforces her cultural image as a threatening madwoman antagonist.

In chapter three, "Adeline March as Madwoman Antagonist in Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*," I explore the use of the madwoman antagonist in Setterfield's twenty-first-century Gothic novel. I focus on a reading of the character Adeline March, who, like Bertha

Mason and Mrs. Danvers, ultimately sets fire to the house in which much of the novel takes place. Adeline's identity is obscured somewhat by the novel's conscious doubling of her with Vida Winter, one of the central characters, as well as with Adeline's own twin sister Emmeline. However, the descriptions of Adeline herself that are present suggest a close association between her apparent madness and medicalized understandings of mental illness, and this serves as part of an explanation for her otherwise largely inexplicable violent acts. Although her madness and her violence are traits shared to varying extents with other characters who are part of her upper-class family (which itself suggests a hereditary element to her behaviour), Adeline serves as the antagonist at the text's climactic moment. My analysis of *The Thirteenth Tale* shows the continued presence of the madwoman antagonist in popular literature, and this particular representation of the madwoman therefore remains relevant to critical discussions as well. This is because discussions of the madwoman in literature should take into account that a character's role in the narrative makes a difference in terms of the connotations that surround their portrayal. It is especially notable for the suggested association of mental illness with violence, as well as with barriers to self-representation.

Chapter One: Bertha Mason as Madwoman Antagonist in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Bertha Mason, often taken as the seminal madwoman in feminist criticism (Rogers 30-1), is an obscure figure in Charlotte Brontë's novel itself. Introduced to the reader as Rochester's mad and dangerous first wife, she is an obstacle to Jane Eyre's happiness who also serves to expose Rochester's duplicity by her very existence. Only after her removal from the text through her death, and Rochester's redemption in his attempt to save her as well as the servants, are Jane and Rochester suitable partners for each other, a resolution which allows the text to close on a happy ending. Given her plot role, Bertha's own subjectivity within the novel is limited, if it exists (or, rather, if it is acknowledged) at all. Indeed, Gilbert and Gubar describe her as representative of an aspect of Jane herself, rather than as her own separate subject (360). It is through this lens that they interpret her actions as acts of resistance against patriarchy. However, readings of Bertha as Jane's double risk subordinating Bertha as a character to Jane, and it is therefore important to consider her separately from Jane in order to understand her as her own character, and also in order to explore the significance of the fact that so little subjectivity is afforded to her. Scholars have taken up the question of Bertha Mason in the years since Gilbert and Gubar's study, and developed new interpretations of the character and what she signifies.[7] My particular examination focuses on Bertha's narrative role as an antagonist, and as a character who is, as Megan Rogers notes, "peripheral" to Brontë's story as a whole (38). Bertha's madness is explicitly connected to real-world understandings of mental illness, and this is important because her representation thus gives us indications of how mental illness was perceived in

7 See for instance Cox, "'The Insane Creole': The Afterlife of Bertha Mason." See also Plasa, "Prefigurements and Afterlives: Bertha Mason's Literary Histories." Plasa asserts that Bertha "constitues . . . a reimagining of two other figures" (7) from Brontë's works, namely "Quashia Quamina, the Ashanti rebel" from her Angrian narratives (7), and Juanna Trista from *The Professor*, who is, "like Bertha, a white Creole" (8).

Brontë's time. Furthermore, Bertha's antagonistic and peripheral role in the narrative, and her lack of ability to represent herself, make an important difference to the overall representation of her character: the novel associates her negative traits with her madness. In addition, Bertha's marginal role and lack of speech in Brontë's narrative result in her being unable to represent herself, which means that neither she nor the novel itself can offer any counter-narrative to Rochester's depiction of her as a violent madwoman.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the sections of *Jane Eyre* in which Bertha appears. Following this summary, I discuss how Brontë's portrayal of Bertha was informed by her understanding of moral insanity, a nineteenth-century concept that connected mental disorder to "deviance from socially accepted behaviour" (Showalter 29).[8] Furthermore, the novel associates Bertha's madness, and by extension her violence and perceived moral flaws, with her West Indian Creole heritage. I then compare Bertha's portrayal in *Jane Eyre* to the portrayal of Antoinette Cosway Mason in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette, an intertextual re-imagining of Bertha, can thus also be understood as a madwoman character. However, her portrayal as a protagonist and focalizer of her own story provides a counter-narrative to Bertha's representation as the madwoman antagonist of Brontë's text.

Bertha Mason enters *Jane Eyre* only briefly, but her presence has a marked impact on the plot. The section of the text in which she appears begins with the young Jane Eyre leaving Lowood, the school at which she had spent the last eight years of her life, in order to seek employment as a governess. Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall, an estate managed by the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax in the absence of its owner, Edward Fairfax Rochester. As Jane begins

8 Showalter explains that the concept of moral insanity was "introduced by James Cowles Prichard in 1835," and asserts that its "definition could be stretched take in almost any kind of behavior regarded as abnormal or disruptive by community standards" (29).

her instruction of Rochester's ward Adèle, she becomes aware of a sense of eeriness or ghostliness at the hall, particularly around the third story. From her first day, she occasionally hears a "tragic" and "preternatural" laugh coming from this floor, which Mrs. Fairfax leads her to believe is the laugh of the servant Grace Poole (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 120). The "eccentric murmurs" remain otherwise unexplained (123). Mr. Rochester returns to his estate three months into Jane's time there (138), and a courtship eventually begins between the two of them. Rochester eventually proposes marriage to Jane, who accepts (295-6). However, the mystery at Thornfield will not be explained until their wedding day.

Strange and ominous occurrences happen on certain nights during Jane's time at Thornfield. On one occasion, after hearing a laugh which she describes as "demoniac" (169), she finds that Rochester's bed has been set on fire, and she douses it with water in order to save him (170). She believes that the perpetrator was Grace Poole, and is confused as to why Rochester continues to let this woman remain at Thornfield without facing any consequences for her actions (178). Later on, Rochester hosts a number of guests at Thornfield, including the well-to-do and accomplished Blanche Ingram, whom Jane and the other residents at Thornfield believe for a time he intends to marry. During this time, an uninvited guest from the West Indies named Richard Mason also arrives at Thornfield, and to Jane's perplexity, his arrival seems to cause Rochester great distress (235-6). That night, Jane is awoken by a cry and subsequent struggle that she hears overhead (238). Rochester then calls on her to come to the third story to attend to Mason, who has been seriously injured by an assailant in an adjoining room (242). The assailant is identified as female (245), and Jane again believes, due to the laugh she hears, that she could only be Grace Poole (241). Two nights before her wedding (320), Jane awakens to the sight of a

female figure standing in her room. The figure, whom Jane describes later to Rochester as looking unlike anyone she has seen at Thornfield, including Grace Poole, proceeds to tear up Jane's wedding veil (329-30). Jane describes "a woman, tall and large," with a "discolored" and "savage" face (329). Jane says that this woman reminded her of "the foul German spectre, the Vampyre" (330). Rochester tries to convince Jane that the woman was Grace Poole, and that she seemed to have a "goblin appearance" due to the influence of Jane's nightmares (331). However, this explanation does not fully convince Jane (331).

Finally, when Jane and Rochester are standing at the altar, the wedding is halted by a lawyer's objection: Rochester is already married, and his wife is still alive (336). Her name is Bertha Mason Rochester; she is the sister of Richard Mason (337), and she "is mad" (339). Bertha is the daughter of "a West India planter and merchant" (354) and "his wife, a Creole" (337). Rochester then states that his wife "came of a mad family," and that "[h]er mother, the Creole, was both a mad-woman and a drunkard" (339). He further alleges that Bertha "copied her parent in both points" (339). Rochester then takes the entire company, including Jane, to the third story of Thornfield. He reveals that Grace Poole is merely the "keeper" (359) or caretaker of Bertha, who is kept locked in a room on the third story (340). Bertha herself first appears here "on all-fours" (340). Jane describes her in terms which leave her humanity ambiguous: "[w]hat it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell" (340). Upon seeing Rochester, Bertha rises up and attacks her husband, who ties her to a chair after a struggle. He then compares Jane, "what [he] wished to have," with the "demon" who is his wife (341).

The discovery of Bertha's existence leads Jane to flee from Thornfield (372). Near the end of the novel, after acquiring her own fortune upon the death of an uncle and receiving

another offer of marriage, Jane returns to Thornfield after supernaturally hearing Rochester's voice calling for her (488). However, she finds Thornfield Hall a ruin, and learns from an innkeeper that Bertha Mason had set the house on fire, and then jumped to her death from the roof (497-8). Rochester, who had survived the fire but was left blind and missing one hand, now resides at the more secluded Ferndean Manor, to which Jane then travels (499). She reunites with Rochester there, and they ultimately marry (522). Now free of the obstacle of Bertha as well as from his own faults, Rochester is now an appropriate partner for Jane, and she can conclude her story by marrying him without compromising her integrity.

Bertha Mason as Separate from Jane Eyre

As noted earlier in this thesis, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's conception of the madwoman figure appears prominently in their discussion of *Jane Eyre* in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar note this novel's display of Jane's anger and potentially rebellious feelings against the confines of her patriarchal society (338). At points in the story, madness becomes, for Jane, a possible form of escape (341). According to this reading, therefore, the mad Bertha Mason becomes "in a sense [Jane's] own secret self" (348). Bertha is an avatar and double of Jane who performs the actions that the heroine wishes, in some sense, that she could do (359-60). She is Jane free from inhibitions and societal restrictions. Bertha's appearances in the text, which occur at moments associated with anger on Jane's part, indicate this connection or doubling between the two women (360). Bertha's death is also the death of the madwoman in Jane herself (362). The fictional madwoman who haunts the text is thus, in this analysis, a representation of the heroine's repressed desires (425).

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of Bertha Mason as Jane Eyre's mad double has allowed for the development of useful explorations of Jane's character, and of Brontë's possible responses to the patriarchal realities in which she lived. However, this analysis also subordinates Bertha to Jane's character and desires, and thus does not take into account the complexities of Bertha's particular presentation in Brontë's narrative. My analysis aims to examine Bertha's narrative role as separate from Jane. What does she, independent of the protagonist, suggest? Key to this is her very representation as mad, and what the novel takes that to mean. Rochester explains that Bertha is not only "mad" herself, but comes from a "mad family – idiots and maniacs through three generations" (Brontë, *Eyre* 339). Furthermore, he describes her mother as a "mad-woman" (339), and later uses the same descriptor for Bertha herself (349). The hereditary nature of Bertha's "condition" (359) implies that it is not caused by her individual behaviour, feelings, or experiences alone, and also suggests that her heritage itself, specifically that of her Creole mother, is diseased.

Bertha Mason's madness has been explicitly connected to real-world understandings of mental illness since the character's original conception. Rogers notes that "Brontë's depiction of Bertha mirrors historical descriptions of mental illness, such as those she would have found in the family's volume of Modern Domestic Medicine" (32). Indeed, in an 1848 letter to W.S. Williams, Brontë refers to Bertha's condition as "moral madness," in which one's "sole aim and desire . . . is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end" (*Letters* 383). By this understanding, not only is Bertha's goal to antagonize, but she has an otherworldly or fiendish ability to do so. This explains, for instance, Grace Poole's statement that it "is not in mortal discretion to fathom [Bertha's] craft" (*Eyre* 341).

Elaine Showalter gives an explanation of moral madness as understood in nineteenth-century England. "'Moral insanity' redefined madness . . . as deviance from socially accepted behavior" (Showalter 29). The concept, which dates to 1835, presented a definition of madness which "could be stretched to take in almost any kind of behavior regarded as abnormal or disruptive by community standards" (29). According to Janis McLarren Caldwell, moral madness was "the idea that madness could affect temper and moral inclinations without disturbing the intellect or reason" ("Mental health" 346). However, some of Rochester's statements about Bertha, such as his belief that she had a "pigmy intellect" (Brontë, *Eyre* 356), suggest that she was deficient in intellect and reason to begin with. In addition, the fact that at least one of her brothers had a mental disability which is referred to as "idiocy" rather than madness may suggest that it is not only moral madness which affects Bertha (355), and therefore casts doubt on the idea that her behaviour is solely the result of her circumstances. Thus, while Brontë's definition links Bertha's behaviour with failings in her character, her madness is also hereditary and pathological, based on a medical and social understanding of "insanity" (356) in her time. It is impossible, therefore, to extricate Bertha as literary madwoman from her association with early Victorian perceptions of what we would now refer to as mental illness.

Articles on the Brontës' lives provide additional insight into Charlotte Brontë's representation of mental illness in *Jane Eyre*. Paul Marchbanks notes that, despite the "marked increase in the public's willingness" to have mentally ill family members institutionalized in the early Victorian era (55), Patrick Brontë refused to have his son Branwell institutionalized for his drug addiction. Due in part to her father's influence, Charlotte Brontë was a strong believer in a family's duty toward itself (59). Marchbanks argues that this connects to Rochester's refusal to

have Bertha either institutionalized or moved to a more remote location in *Jane Eyre* (63). However, the novel also makes it clear that Rochester is trying to prevent people from knowing about the secret and "'filthy burden'" of his wife (Brontë, *Eyre* 358). It is for that reason, after all, that he left the West Indies and returned to England: "'there it is not known what a sullied name [he bears]'" (358). Although he may have Bertha's well-being in mind in his choice to keep her at Thornfield, this is only a secondary concern for him.

Marchbanks argues that Rochester's story about his wife "only appears a desperate fabrication until one notices how closely his explanation corresponds to the period belief that alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity could accelerate the course of mental illness" (62). Nonetheless, this does not change the fact that Brontë's text grants little recognition to Bertha's humanity. Additionally, the character's subject position in relation to British imperialism and colonialism is a key difference from that of Branwell Brontë. This context is emphasized through descriptions such as that of the "West Indian night" (Brontë, *Eyre* 357) that brings out serious symptoms of madness in both Bertha and, briefly, her husband. (As Caldwell observes, Brontë represents Jamaica as a "tropical hell which accelerates Bertha's madness" and "Rochester's suicidal despair" ("Physical health" 341). Bertha, being born of this environment, seems to carry some of this "hell" within her; unlike in Rochester's case, moving to England does not alleviate her symptoms.) Even if Bertha's representation was informed in part by Charlotte Brontë's experiences with her brother, these imperialist contexts are also a clear factor in her character, regardless of the degree to which Brontë might have been conscious of her use of these contexts. As a result, Bertha's madness and moral flaws are implicitly connected to her Creole origins.[9]

9 Susan Ostrov Weisser, editor of the 2003 Barnes & Noble Classics edition of *Jane Eyre*, describes Rochester's use of the term "Creole" to mean "[a] person born in the West Indies," but notes that "the term could also imply mixed racial ancestry" (337n1).

The terms Rochester uses to describe his wife when telling his story to Jane hint at this further: he refers to Bertha as "the Creole" when mentioning his attempts to find a new lover in Europe, and then calls her his "Indian Messalina" in reference to her "debauchery" (Brontë, *Eyre* 361).[10] It is notable that all of Rochester's foreign lovers are ultimately unsuitable for him; only the English Jane appears to him as an appropriate partner for himself. However, his European mistresses – while he sees them as morally unfit or insufficient – are not mad, nor are they described in such bestial terms as his Creole wife. Marchbanks does note that Brontë's narrative subordinates the experiences and subjectivity of the mentally ill person to those of the caregiver (62). Whatever sympathy Brontë suggests is Bertha's due, the narrative focuses far more on Jane's sympathy for Rochester's situation. Jane reminds Rochester that his wife "cannot help being mad" (Brontë, *Eyre* 349), but this is before he relates to Jane his own story of his experiences with Bertha. Partway through his retelling, Jane affirms that she does "earnestly pity" Rochester (356), and Bertha is given little attention or sympathy by Jane after this, as the narrative moves its focus to Rochester's plight.

Jane's and other characters' animalistic, dehumanizing descriptions of Bertha suggest to readers that she is a grotesque animal or monster. Upon first seeing her after learning of Rochester's attempted bigamy, Jane repeatedly refers to Bertha as "it:" "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 face" (340). It is difficult for readers to empathize with a character who is introduced in such a way, especially since most of her few actions in the text are acts of violence. Furthermore, Bertha has no dialogue. Readers only learn secondhand that she verbally

10 Weisser clarifies that the term "Indian Messalina" "refers to Bertha's Creole ancestry," and to the Roman empress Messalina, who was "known for excessive greed and lust" (*Eyre* 361n2).

threatened her brother (246) and that she used to yell abuse at Rochester (357). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, Jane (and readers) must give credence to Rochester's representation of Bertha as fiendish and wicked, which indeed seemingly accords with Jane's observations of her.

Because of the connections between her madness and mental illness, Bertha's role in the story implicitly associates mental illness with violence and other "villainous" behaviour. Bertha is discussed more often in terms evocative of violence or monstrosity than of illness. She is a "wolf" (250) or "Fury" (244), first introduced to the reader by her "demoniac laugh" (169). The description of her telling her brother that she will "drain [his] heart" by sucking his blood produces horror rather than sympathy toward her (246). In addition, however her relationship to Jane is interpreted, the fact remains that she opposes Jane throughout the narrative by acting as an obstacle to her happiness. Brontë herself admits that the character's depiction is devoid of the sympathy that such a person might warrant in real life: "[i]t is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation, and equally true is it that I have not sufficiently dwelt on that feeling: I have erred in making *horror* too predominant" (*Letters* 383-4). Despite Brontë's awareness of this insufficiency, this letter does not imply her recognition of any connection or identification between Bertha and Jane. The result of this lack of both sympathy and identification is a character who primarily elicits horror in readers, and by doing so causes an association between Bertha's mental disorder and this sense of horror.

Brontë's representation of Bertha arguably both reflected and informed understandings of madness in Victorian medical and social discourse. Showalter asserts that her depiction may have contributed to arguments that mentally ill women should be institutionalized (68). Bertha's portrayal as both antagonist and madwoman therefore bears close relation to nineteenth-century

discourse surrounding mental illness in women, and to the idea that madness can be used as a sufficient explanation for violence and, in fiction, for villainous actions. A nuanced analysis of Bertha should take into account both her critical representation as an emblematic figure of feminist rebellion, and her narrative and cultural role (at least at the time of Brontë's writing) as an antagonist and a figure capable of producing feelings of horror in the reader. The fact that interpretations of Bertha as a feminist figure are possible reflects the political and cultural changes of the past two centuries. This does not change the fact that analyses of Bertha in her original context are still important, and may illuminate perceptions which have persisted over time as well as those which have changed.

The Madwoman and Narrative Role

Megan Rogers' *Finding the Plot* (2017) investigates four fictional madwomen who, unlike Bertha, are the protagonists and focalizers (viewpoint characters) of the texts in which they appear. Her study focuses on the female protagonists of these texts, including Antoinette Cosway in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Rogers' essential concern in *Finding the Plot* is "the day-to-day lived experience of women" (18), and how fiction impinges on this. Her analysis of madwomen who are the central characters of their texts is a highly productive study, as their roles as protagonists allow them to self-represent their experiences of mental illness.

It is interesting that Rogers begins her study of twentieth- and twenty-first-century madwoman protagonists by positioning Bertha Mason as the "primary nineteenth-century madwoman" (30). This suggests that Bertha is (in part because of Gilbert and Gubar) the quintessential madwoman in western feminist criticism, even when such criticism otherwise focuses on characters who have more central roles in the texts in which they appear. This

formulation of the study is deliberate on Rogers' part, and she discusses the differences between these types of characters based on their narrative position: "In the nineteenth century, what I will now define as the 'literary madwoman' – rather than the 'madwoman in the attic' – was not always the protagonist of her story, but sometimes a peripheral character . . . In contrast, the literary madwoman of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the protagonist of her story, a result of authors wanting to provide women – particularly these previously peripheral characters – with their own narrative" (38-9). This formulation, which envisions the madwoman protagonist as partially growing out of the peripheral madwoman, is highly useful. However, the study also begs these questions: How, then, do we interpret twentieth- and twenty-first-century madwoman characters who are peripheral characters or antagonists in their stories? Are they also literary madwomen? The fact that Bertha serves a different narrative role than the characters Rogers focuses on means that she can be read as a different type of literary madwoman than these characters. Bertha is an antagonist in *Jane Eyre*, and is given little to no sympathy or humanity by Brontë herself (Showalter 69). The fact that she is an antagonist means that her mad behaviour is vilified. In other words, her actions, which are apparently due to her illness, are all negative and harmful, and primarily consist of violence toward others and ultimately herself.

There are multiple ways of differentiating literary characters in order to examine and contrast them. Differentiating characters based on their role in a given narrative is one useful form of analysis because a character's narrative role can greatly impact their representation. Because Bertha Mason is an antagonist in *Jane Eyre*, associations are made in the reader's mind between her West Indian origins, her mental illness, and her antagonistic or villainous role. The text itself explicitly furthers this, because Brontë (through Rochester's words) suggests that

Bertha's origins account at least in part for the "defects" (357) occurring in herself as well as her family. Sue Thomas notes Rochester's affirmation that "the 'germs of insanity' are passed on by [Bertha's] Creole mother" (1). This suggests that a Creole cultural background somehow corrupts the mind. Jessica Cox, examining post-Brontë representations of Bertha, shows that these associations have the potential to persist: contemporary texts based on *Jane Eyre* sometimes feature references to Bertha being Creole alongside descriptions of her as demonic (227). As with mental illness, race and cultural origin can be imbued with associations of violence or villainy, and these associations may also persist to the present, even amidst a changing political and social background.

In order to examine Bertha as an antagonist, I will compare her to her protagonist counterpart in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette Cosway, who is understood intertextually to be Rhys's interpretation of Brontë's Bertha, narrates the first section of this text, describing her childhood and adolescence in the West Indies. She is the daughter of a white former slave owner, and lives shortly after the Emancipation Act of 1833. Antoinette's husband, understood by readers from context to be Rhys's version of Rochester, narrates the second part of the text, which describes events early in their marriage. As time goes on, he shows increasing hostility to Antoinette, especially after learning of the supposed history of madness and debauchery in her family (Rhys 82). Finally, the short third section of the text returns to Antoinette's point of view, and takes place during her time at Thornfield, under the watch of Grace Poole. This section shows Antoinette's, or Bertha's, perspective of some of the events relating to her that take place in *Jane Eyre*.

In Rhys's text, Antoinette (later renamed Bertha by her husband) is the protagonist. Even though her husband is the focalizer for large sections of the book, the story follows Antoinette's point of view often enough for readers to understand her feelings and the reasons behind her actions. Andrea Ashworth's introduction to the Penguin edition of the text includes Rhys's explanation on why she had Antoinette's husband narrate such a large portion of the story: "the author [herself a Dominican Creole woman] was afraid that the woman's story, delivered solely in her own words, might sound like the ranting of a crazy Creole, full of bias and devoid of credibility" (xiv). Rochester's perspective therefore does not serve to obscure Antoinette's voice or her subjectivity, but rather to give them additional credibility, even when Rochester himself doubts his wife's perceptions. For example, he (by this point informed of the history of mental instability in his wife's family) doubts the accuracy of Antoinette's recollections about the destruction of Coulibri, her childhood home: "I began to wonder how much of all this was true, how much imagined, distorted" (Rhys 109). The reader, however, has already seen this event transpire through Antoinette's eyes earlier in the story, with the result that Antoinette seems credible and Rochester perhaps unduly suspicious at this later moment.

Because she is the protagonist and at times the focalizer of the text, the reader can see and understand Antoinette's "side" of the story (Ashworth viii). Her West Indian origins therefore never appear to be a source of moral depravity in her character, except through the eyes of her husband. Furthermore, her husband himself is arguably the antagonist of Rhys's text, given the increasing hostility between the couple and his ultimate entrapment of Antoinette. He especially comes to be seen as an antagonist through Antoinette's recurring dreams, which depict a man – who, from context, seems to be her husband – as a threatening figure who eventually leads

Antoinette/Bertha to entrapment. She experiences the first two of these dreams in childhood, and describes her companion in the dream as "[s]omeone who hated me" (Rhys 23). In the second dream, he guides her to a set of stone steps (50), which represent Thornfield, as becomes clear when she has her final dream at the end of the text. In this final scene, she dreams of setting fire to Thornfield (154), and confirms that "the man who hated me" is her husband, who tries to call to her before she jumps from the battlements (155).

Speech represents a crucial difference between Brontë's Bertha and Rhys's Antoinette. Marta Caminero-Santangelo discusses the madwoman's inability to speak for herself or tell her own story. She asserts that "the symbolic resolution of the madwoman as an alternative to patriarchy ultimately traps the woman in silence" (Caminero-Santangelo 4). Caminero-Santangelo's study further explains the implication that madness is inherently silencing by examining the disempowering effects of mental illness in a variety of fictional and non-fictional texts, such as women's accounts of asylum experiences and the fiction of authors including Eudora Welty and Toni Morrison. Caminero-Santangelo notes that many of these texts represent madness as the "removal of the madwoman from any field of agency" (12). Nonetheless, although greatly disempowered by both her madness and her social circumstances, Antoinette is not entirely *silenced* by her madness – at least, not in comparison to her counterpart in Brontë's novel. She is unable to resist the forces of patriarchy and imperialism that direct her life, or the intertextual inevitability that leads to her entrapment in Thornfield Hall. The fact that she is protagonist and focalizer means that she is, however, able to represent herself and describe her experiences to the reader at the very least, and this makes reader identification and sympathy with her character more possible than it would be otherwise. In contrast, Brontë's Bertha is a

figure with even less power than Antoinette because she is completely voiceless and represented in the narrative entirely through the eyes of others.

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is a feral, monstrous figure who merely laughs, and is only represented in speech by others. Without the ability to tell her own story, not only are readers (as well as Jane) kept from any sort of identification with her, but there is no way to clearly ascertain her own perspective on her madness or on her circumstances. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, grants Antoinette speech. She narrates the first and final portions of her own story, as well as a small part of the middle portion. Even the sections narrated by her husband grant Antoinette a considerable amount of dialogue, which prevents reader sympathy or identification from entirely leaving her. While her narrative suggests at times that she is suffering from some sort of mental disorder (particularly in the book's third section, when her memories and perceptions of events are confused, as seen by her inability to remember attacking her brother (Rhys 150) or to recognize herself in the mirror (154)), this does not cause the text to vilify her. The difference in narrative focus allows events which occur in both texts to take on a profoundly different character in one as opposed to the other. In Brontë's tale, Bertha's attack on her brother Richard Mason is apparently unprovoked (*Eyre* 246). Richard himself is represented as concerned for his sister's well-being (249), which makes her attack on him seem even more unwarranted. In Rhys's version of events, however, readers are privy to Grace Poole describing the incident to Bertha/Antoinette herself, and to Bertha's own confused recollection of events. Key to this version of the scene is Grace's statement that Bertha only attacked Richard after he said he could not "'interfere legally between [her] and [her] husband'" (Rhys 150). The fact that Bertha/Antoinette required a provocation in the first place is a significant difference from *Jane*

Eyre, and this version of events suggests that Bertha's actions are the result of rage at her own entrapment. Additionally, in Rhys's version Bertha had apparently either sent, or more likely attempted to send, a letter to Richard pleading for him to rescue her from her situation (149-50). This all paints a profoundly different picture of her than that given by Brontë, and crucial to this difference is the madwoman's position within the narrative. There is no need to imbue Antoinette/Bertha's actions with horror in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for she is not the antagonist of this text. Instead, her circumstances and fate provide the most powerful source of horror in this story, because the text draws attention to her literal and psychological entrapment within an oppressive patriarchal system.

Conclusion

It is uncertain whether Bertha Mason, or the madwoman more generally, is able to serve as a source of feminist rebellion. She could potentially be seen as an effective feminist figure through the fact that she leads some readers to reinterpret her and recognize her previously-denied subjectivity. This has led to new stories like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and makes interpretations like Gilbert and Gubar's possible. However, the madwoman as antagonist also raises questions about the represented association between mental illness and violence. Brontë's depiction of Bertha Mason shows the character to be not only horrifying, but powerless within the narrative due to her lack of speech as well as the bestial terms used to describe her. The only times she exercises her own agency, she does so for malicious and violent ends.

The following chapters will demonstrate that antagonist madwoman characters similar to Bertha continue to appear in Gothic fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This will allow for the examination of how the representational contexts surrounding Bertha's mental

illness have persisted or changed in later intertexts. Through this exploration, it is possible to develop an understanding of the difference between the Gothic madwoman antagonist and the madwoman of western literary criticism, and thus to investigate the relationship between these two contexts and their uses of the term “madwoman.”

Chapter Two: Mrs. Danvers as Madwoman Antagonist in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) has been noted by critics for the similarities it bears to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Miquel-Baldellou, for instance, describes it as "a neo-Victorian adaptation" of *Jane Eyre* due to its "striking resemblances of plot, characters and thematic components" (89).[11] One such similarity is that both novels feature a protagonist whose relationship with a wealthy man is impeded by his first wife, a woman who therefore serves an antagonistic role, even when largely or completely absent from the text. However, while Rebecca de Winter herself fills a "madwoman antagonist" role comparable to Bertha's in a number of ways, du Maurier's text also includes a more overt madwoman figure in Mrs. Danvers, whose status as an antagonistic threat is more clear because she is physically present, unlike her deceased mistress. Bertha Mason's madness in *Jane Eyre* not only represents attitudes toward mental illness in the real world, it also suggests white English anxieties about racial alterity in Brontë's time. In the case of *Rebecca*, Mrs. Danvers' behaviour and actions relate wider cultural perceptions of mental illness to anxieties about female sexual difference in du Maurier's time. Mrs. Danvers' madness is entirely connected by the novel to her obsessive feelings for Rebecca, which results in problematic implications in terms of the narrative's representation of lesbianism as well as the connotations of mental illness that are intertextually reinforced by the connections to *Jane Eyre*. In this chapter, I will examine the novel comparatively with two film adaptations, *Rebecca* (1940) directed by Alfred Hitchcock and *Rebecca* (2020) directed by Ben Wheatley, in

11 For additional critics who note the connections between the two novels, see Bertrandias, "Daphne du Maurier's Transformation of *Jane Eyre* in *Rebecca* / La Transformation de *Jane Eyre* dans *Rebecca* de Daphne du Maurier;" D'Monté, "Origin and Ownership: Stage, Film and Television Adaptations of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca;*" and Stoneman, "*Jane Eyre* Between the Wars / *Jane Eyre* entre les deux guerres."

order to demonstrate how each version of the story engages with and contributes to the popular cultural image of Mrs. Danvers as the destructive madwoman antagonist of du Maurier's text.

Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* begins with the unnamed protagonist, a young woman working as a "companion" to the wealthy Mrs. Van Hopper (21), meeting Maxim de Winter, the owner of the estate of Manderley, whose wife Rebecca had drowned in a sailing accident the previous year. After they have spent several days together, Maxim proposes to the protagonist, and they quickly marry. Maxim then takes his new wife (whom I will hereafter refer to as Mrs. de Winter, or as the second Mrs. de Winter) back to Manderley, where they meet the servants, including the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers. Mrs. de Winter is particularly nervous around Mrs. Danvers from the beginning, because she perceives the housekeeper staring at her, with "scorn" and possibly "malice" (71).

Mrs. de Winter also feels increasingly haunted by Rebecca. She notices various traces of Rebecca's presence, such as records containing her handwriting (82), and her monogram on a handkerchief (115). Although Maxim never mentions her, other characters speak of Rebecca to her successor. Maxim's sister Beatrice, for instance, tells Mrs. de Winter that she is "so very different from Rebecca" (102), which Mrs. de Winter takes to imply that she is inadequate by comparison to her predecessor. Mrs. de Winter is later puzzled after Jack Favell, whom she later learns is Rebecca's cousin, comes to visit Mrs. Danvers while Maxim is away. When Mrs. de Winter meets Favell, he tells her to keep his visit a secret (157). Right after this incident, Mrs. de Winter encounters Mrs. Danvers in Rebecca's old room. Mrs. Danvers, who has kept the room preserved, makes Mrs. de Winter uncomfortable with her demeanour and words, which indicate

her love and devotion for Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers also expresses her belief that Rebecca's ghost still inhabits the house, and watches Maxim together with his new wife (167).

When a fancy dress ball at Manderley is organized, Mrs. Danvers suggests that Mrs. de Winter wear a dress based on a picture in the gallery (192-3). Mrs. de Winter agrees, but upon appearing at the ball in this dress, Maxim angrily orders her to change. Mrs. de Winter then sees Mrs. Danvers watching her, appearing like a "triumphant" and "exulting devil" (208). Mrs. de Winter learns that Rebecca had worn the exact same dress at the previous ball (210). The following day, Mrs. de Winter attempts to confront Mrs. Danvers, and Mrs. Danvers attempts to manipulate her into jumping from the window of Rebecca's room to her death: "Mr. de Winter doesn't love you. There's not much for you to live for, is there? Why don't you jump now and have done with it?" (239). This scene is interrupted by a commotion resulting from a ship going ashore in the bay near Manderley. While assessing the state of the ship, a diver finds Rebecca's boat underwater, with a body inside. Later that day, Maxim confesses to his second wife that he had never loved Rebecca and had murdered her the previous year, and then sunk her boat to make it appear that her death was an accidental drowning (259).

After an inquest shows that Rebecca's boat had been tampered with, Favell becomes suspicious and attempts to either blackmail Maxim, or uncover evidence that he had murdered his wife. Rebecca's engagement diary shows that she had seen a doctor named Baker on the day of her death (336). Toward the novel's end, a group including the second Mrs. de Winter, Maxim, and Favell travel to London to see Dr. Baker, and learn from him that Rebecca had terminal cancer at the time of her death (355), which supplies a motive for suicide rather than murder. However, Favell leaves Maxim with the warning that "[t]he law can get you yet, and so can I, in

a different way" (358). Maxim and his wife learn from a telephone call on their way back home that Mrs. Danvers has packed up her possessions and seemingly left Manderley, and that prior to leaving, she had answered a telephone call which Maxim believes to have been from Favell (362-3). The novel ends with Maxim and the second Mrs. de Winter returning home to discover that Manderley has been set on fire (367).[12]

Mrs. Danvers as a Monstrous Presence

Du Maurier's novel makes it clear that the second Mrs. de Winter feels threatened by Mrs. Danvers from the beginning. Mrs. Danvers first appears to her as a "gaunt" (64) figure in black with a "white skull's face" (69), a monstrous description that Mrs. de Winter repeats at multiple later points. Davies mentions that Mrs. Danvers is "a spectral, lurking presence" from her first appearance (185). Horner and Zlosnik note that Mrs. Danvers seems a "witch-like figure" with "all the appearance of a revenant" (120). Indeed, a descriptor in the novel itself suggests the notion of her as a witch: Mrs. de Winter states that she feels she is playing "Old Witch with Mrs. Danvers" (du Maurier 171). Virtually every physical description of Mrs. Danvers suggests her connections with the monstrous or fiendish, such as the statement that she has the "face of an exulting devil" after tricking Mrs. de Winter into wearing the costume previously worn by Rebecca for the fancy dress ball (208). These descriptions are not as monstrous or dehumanizing as those used to describe Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, and indeed, Mrs. Danvers is shown throughout as an intelligent character who is, unlike Bertha, capable of speech. Furthermore, she is capable of using her words to manipulate Mrs. de Winter. However, the suggestion of a devilish element to her character is just as present as it is for Bertha Mason.

12 Bertrandias describes the fire at Manderley as a "direct echo" (29) of the burning of Thornfield.

Part of the reason Mrs. Danvers seems monstrous or devilish is her close connection to Rebecca, the other monstrous woman in du Maurier's text. Maxim refers to Rebecca as "the devil" (266). Additionally, a number of critics have noted Rebecca's connection to the monstrous: for instance, through her potential relation to the vampire (Horner and Zlosnik 111), and through her construction as "the text's monster" in the representations of her given by Maxim and other (chiefly male) characters (Berenstein 243). Mrs. Danvers carries similar connotations by association, because she is Rebecca's "alter ego" (Bertrandias 29). Horner and Zlosnik describe her as a "grotesquely reductive version of Rebecca" (119). The novel itself suggests the ease with which Mrs. Danvers can be viewed as an extension of her late mistress. Dr. Baker, referring to the fake name Rebecca used when she was his patient, says he had never thought that "Mrs. [Rebecca] de Winter and Mrs. Danvers could be the same person" (du Maurier 356). Although the two women are not literally one and the same, their close connection means that there are similarities in how they are represented, as well as in their positions in the narrative. Comparing *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, Nungesser mentions the presence of a "triangular desire" in the two novels: "on the one hand, Rochester, Jane and Bertha, on the other hand Maxim, his second wife and Rebecca/Mrs. Danvers" (212). The inclusion of Mrs. Danvers in this second triangle suggests not only that she is an extension of Rebecca, but that she and Rebecca both partially fill Bertha's role in the text (while also expanding on it, since both of du Maurier's female antagonists are given more attention and characterization than was given to Bertha). It is therefore easy to see how aspects of the monstrous depictions of Bertha and Rebecca attach themselves to Mrs. Danvers as well.

Mrs. Danvers is a more frightening Gothic figure than Bertha because she is more powerful. She holds a lower class position than Bertha was born into, but Mrs. Danvers is not confined to a single room. She is free to roam Manderley and exercise her own authority within it, as the housekeeper who "does everything" in the household (61). She also wields more psychological power over Mrs. de Winter than Bertha is capable of wielding over Jane Eyre. While Bertha may have succeeded in frightening Jane in her bedroom, the revelation of her powerlessness means she arguably "can never be a source of terror, or even of anxiety" (Bertrandias 28), at least in terms of holding a comparable influence over Jane's psyche to that which Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca hold over the second Mrs. de Winter. Bertrandias specifically cites Rebecca's power over her successor in comparison to Bertha (27-8), but Mrs. Danvers also holds a significant amount of power through her role in the household and her association with Rebecca (29).

Mrs. Danvers is furthermore able to exercise her influence more directly than Rebecca, because she is present as a constant reminder to Mrs. de Winter of her own apparent inadequacy. Unlike Bertha, who is unable to participate in the normative social relationships expected of her class, Mrs. Danvers acts as an enforcer of upper-class decorum, while still maintaining her haunting presence. She affirms that a lady of Mrs. de Winter's social position should have a personal maid (du Maurier 70), and she connects later reminders of Manderley's customs explicitly to Rebecca. For instance, she tells Mrs. de Winter, who is reluctant to make changes to the daily menu, that Rebecca "was most particular about her sauces" (83). After Mrs. de Winter accidentally breaks an ornament in the morning room, Mrs. Danvers says that she and Rebecca used to dust valuable ornaments together, and that the between maid would never have been

allowed to touch them (137). This statement aligns Mrs. Danvers with the former mistress of the house, and suggests that the new mistress has proven herself as being no more worthy of maintaining the house and its possessions than lower-ranking staff.

Mrs. de Winter frequently feels unsettled by Mrs. Danvers' gaze: "I met her eyes . . . instilling into me . . . a strange feeling of disquiet, of foreboding" (71); "[s]he turned her eyes upon me and I felt quite cold" (155). The effects of Mrs. Danvers' gaze indicate the protagonist's own anxieties and perceptions about her place in the household, as much as they do anything about Mrs. Danvers' own intentions. Blackford suggests that "[t]he eyes of housekeepers, in the Gothic, become objects of horror, but they double for the heroine's eyes upon herself, scrutinizing the impossible task of having authority in the estate setting" (245). Indeed, this task seems to be at its most impossible for Mrs. de Winter, who was not born into an upper-class environment and does not know how to exercise the authority expected of her at Manderley. Consequently, Mrs. Danvers' familiarity with the setting, and disdain for her new mistress, grant her a power over Mrs. de Winter. Her imposing and staring presence is a constant reminder to Mrs. de Winter of her own inadequacy within the household. The possibility therefore exists that Mrs. de Winter's perception of Mrs. Danvers' behaviour is inaccurate, and that she reads her demeanour as malevolent due to her own insecurities. Blackford suggests as much: "Although it would seem that Mrs. Danvers does become increasingly hostile to the second Mrs. de Winter," her behaviour "can actually be read as a projection of the highly imaginative and insecure narrator" (244). Mrs. de Winter's perceptions about Maxim and Rebecca are indeed ultimately shown to be distorted by her own insecurity, as well as by Maxim's reticence about his first wife and the statements of other characters that emphasize Rebecca's beauty and talents. However,

although she is mistaken as to Maxim's attitude toward Rebecca, later events seem to prove that Mrs. de Winter's assessment of Mrs. Danvers as a malevolent figure is accurate. The only clear framework which exists in the novel through which to view Mrs. Danvers is that which Mrs. de Winter presents from their first meeting: she is cold, disdainful, and has particular feelings of hostility toward her new mistress. Her actions later in the novel do not contradict, but only confirm her hostility.

The 1940 film directed by Alfred Hitchcock emphasizes Mrs. Danvers (played by Judith Anderson) as a threatening and haunting figure. Most of her appearances involve the use of ominous music, and she is shown staring at Mrs. de Winter (Joan Fontaine) at multiple points. In her first appearance, she slowly walks toward the screen in front of the other servants, and directly in front of Mrs. de Winter, who appears intimidated. When Mrs. de Winter drops her gloves, Mrs. Danvers looks down disdainfully, and both women crouch down to pick up the gloves. Mrs. Danvers then continues to stare, frowning, at Mrs. de Winter after the latter moves away from her, and the camera emphasizes this stare (00:29:36). She is often positioned above Mrs. de Winter, by standing above her while the latter is seated. This contributes to her air of authority over her mistress. The portrayal of Mrs. Danvers reflects Mrs. de Winter's impressions of her, but is not entirely contained by these impressions. Because the viewer can see Mrs. Danvers' behaviour and general demeanour, the reality of her hostility and threatening presence is confirmed even more clearly, as not being merely a product of Mrs. de Winter's unreliable interpretations.

In the 2020 film adaptation directed by Ben Wheatley, Mrs. Danvers (Kristin Scott Thomas) has an overall warmer demeanour than she does in the Hitchcock film. She smiles at

times, and generally appears more animated and friendly, both toward Mrs. de Winter (Lily James) and in general. This seems, therefore, to be a more humanizing portrayal than she was given in the Hitchcock film. However, Mrs. Danvers still appears unnerving in certain scenes, and despite the change in demeanour, her actions are for the most part the same as they were in the novel. A key scene for Mrs. Danvers' characterization in each version of the story is the scene in which Mrs. de Winter encounters her in Rebecca's room after Favell's visit (or immediately before, in the 2020 film).

Mrs. Danvers' Attraction to Rebecca

Davies asserts that, aside from the protagonist, female characters in *Rebecca* are "often aligned with sinister, perverse connotation. From the loathsome vulgarian Mrs Van Hopper to the hideous Mrs Danvers, female presence is regarded in this novel as a threat" (Davies 182). Mrs. Danvers' "hideousness" and "perversity" are most clearly seen in her connections to her dead mistress. Although her skeletal, mechanical presence is unsettling, the moments in which she demonstrates livelier behaviour seem even more horrifying from Mrs. de Winter's perspective. Mrs. Danvers only seems to come alive when speaking about Rebecca. The first time she speaks of her to the second Mrs. de Winter, "her voice, which had hitherto . . . been dull and toneless, [becomes] harsh . . . with unexpected animation, with life and meaning" (du Maurier 71). The sudden change does not reassure Mrs. de Winter, but instead leaves her "shocked, and a little scared" (71). Later, upon finding Mrs. de Winter in Rebecca's old room, Mrs. Danvers' demeanour changes: "her manner instead of being still and unbending as it usually was became startlingly familiar, fawning even" (162). During this scene, Mrs. Danvers' familiar manner makes Mrs. de Winter feel both hypnotized and repulsed, as Berenstein notes of the 1940 film's

equivalent scene (254). Horner and Zlosnik note this even in the novel, however: "[Mrs. Danvers] casts a spell over the young wife so as to draw her into the recreation of her dead mistress" (120).

Mrs. Danvers' apparent desire for Rebecca seems to be part of the reason she unnerves Mrs. de Winter so much in this scene. Mrs. Danvers displays and holds several articles of Rebecca's clothing. She also mentions that she has kept the room preserved since Rebecca's death, and has kept her nightdress and hairbrushes unwashed (du Maurier 162-3). The change in Mrs. Danvers' demeanour frightens Mrs. de Winter, who notes that "her manner . . . became startlingly familiar" and that "her voice was low and intimate, a voice I hated and feared" (162). Mrs. de Winter's fear is in part simply from the general mistrust that she has felt toward Mrs. Danvers since their first meeting. It is also due to the sudden and jarring contrast with her usual lifeless and mechanical behaviour. However, Mrs. de Winter becomes especially unsettled by the intimacy that Mrs. Danvers shows both toward her and toward Rebecca in this scene. Mrs. Danvers leads Mrs. de Winter by the arm throughout the scene, giving her a tour of Rebecca's room and possessions, all the while describing her memories of Rebecca, including remarks on Rebecca's beauty and on Maxim's apparent devotion to her (163). Mrs. de Winter is here reminded again of her perceived inadequacy compared to her predecessor, as well as to her impression of Mrs. Danvers' hostility, which is due both to this inadequacy and to the fact that she has taken Rebecca's place. The latter is particularly evident toward the scene's end, when Mrs. Danvers wonders aloud whether Rebecca's ghost comes back to watch Maxim and his new wife together. After this, the second Mrs. de Winter retreats to her own room, feeling "deadly sick" (167). However, Mrs. Danvers' "fawning" manner has disturbed her at least as much as her

hostility. Mrs. Danvers' "sudden torrent of words" much later in the novel, in which she passionately expresses how Rebecca treated her relationships with men as a game, "revolted [Mrs. de Winter], even though [she] knew" (331). What Mrs. de Winter knows is the intense attachment that Mrs. Danvers feels toward Rebecca.

Rebecca was written at a time when homosexuality was viewed in Britain and America as "a form of sexual pathology" (Minton 3-4), especially "in medical and scientific circles" (49). This adds a particularly problematic layer to Mrs. Danvers' portrayal as a villainous madwoman, given that her strong attachment to Rebecca potentially indicates lesbian desire. A reading of Mrs. Danvers as a madwoman, and thus as representative of perceptions of mental illness, therefore risks following these narratives that pathologize homosexuality. However, the connection the novel makes between her madness and her sexuality is an integral part of how this text constructs her as a madwoman antagonist. While Bertha Mason's "moral madness" reflects perceptions of mental disorder that were circulating in the 1840s, it also indicates cultural anxieties surrounding alterity, as seen by the emphasis on Bertha's Creole heritage as the source of both her moral flaws and her illness in Brontë's novel. Likewise, Mrs. Danvers' construction as a madwoman figure reflects 1930s anxieties about women and homosexuality. Indeed, this aspect of her characterization is particularly clear in the 1940 film adaptation.

Both films convey Mrs. de Winter's fear and discomfort during the scene in which Mrs. Danvers shows her Rebecca's bedroom. In the 1940 film's version of the scene, Mrs. Danvers initially appears in silhouette, standing behind a curtain. She opens the curtain and walks a few steps toward Mrs. de Winter, moving slowly as usual. Mrs. de Winter appears nervous, body tense as she looks at Mrs. Danvers. Mrs. Danvers opens the room's curtains, and begins speaking

in a conversational tone, mentioning that "[e]verything [in the room] is kept just as Mrs. de Winter liked" (01:06:12-01:06:14). A close-up of the second Mrs. de Winter's frowning and uncertain expression immediately follows this statement. In Rebecca's dressing room, Mrs. Danvers picks up a fur coat and caresses her own smiling face with the sleeve, then caresses Mrs. de Winter's face with the sleeve as well. Mrs. de Winter seems uncomfortable, but makes no move to leave and instead watches as Mrs. Danvers shows her Rebecca's clothes and undergarments. Mrs. de Winter becomes more visibly unsettled when Mrs. Danvers begins to describe her memories of Rebecca. Mrs. Danvers places a hand on her shoulder and guides her to sit down at the dressing table, with the result that Mrs. Danvers is once again standing above the seated Mrs. de Winter. Mrs. Danvers describes how she would brush Rebecca's hair, picks up the hairbrush and mimes the action, but does not actually touch the second Mrs. de Winter's hair. Mrs. Danvers then moves to Rebecca's bed, and Mrs. de Winter walks toward her to hear the continuation of her story. She looks away as Mrs. Danvers takes out Rebecca's nightgown. When she looks back, Mrs. Danvers looks at her intently and bids her to come over with a gesture of her hand. Mrs. de Winter obeys, but after observing the delicate nightdress, she turns away again in distress. She walks rapidly out of the room, but Mrs. Danvers' words stop her as she reaches the door: "You wouldn't think she'd been gone so long, would you?" (01:08:59-01:09:01). Mrs. Danvers approaches close to the cowering Mrs. de Winter, and talks about how she believes she can still sense Rebecca's presence in the house. At this point, she is framed mostly in shadow, but her eyes are illuminated (01:09:07). She asks Mrs. de Winter if she thinks the dead come back to watch the living (01:09:21-01:09:23). Mrs. de Winter begins crying and says that she does not believe it. Mrs. Danvers, eyes wide, leans in close to Mrs. de Winter and says "I wonder if

[Rebecca] doesn't come back . . . [and] watch you and Mr. de Winter together" (01:09:29-01:09:33). Mrs. Danvers finally turns away from Mrs. de Winter, telling her to listen to the sea. She slowly moves back toward the bedroom and the window facing the sea, and Mrs. de Winter slips unnoticed out of the room behind her.

While Mrs. Danvers' overall demeanour differs in this scene from her usual coldness, she maintains her slow, gliding movements. This emphasizes her commanding presence, compared to the timid Mrs. de Winter, who indicates her fear by at times moving more rapidly. The latter's feelings in this scene contribute to the audience's sense of Mrs. Danvers' power as well, since Mrs. de Winter is the protagonist and the story is primarily framed in reference to her and her perceptions, even if not entirely contained by them (as the audience is not privy to Mrs. de Winter's thoughts in every scene, as is the case in the novel). However, for all her apparent discomfort, Mrs. de Winter follows Mrs. Danvers as she moves through the room, and joins her in the viewing and touching of Rebecca's clothing and possessions. Berenstein discusses the connotations of lesbian desire surrounding Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca, and potentially the second Mrs. de Winter herself, in this scene. Mrs. de Winter is compelled both by her own attraction and "interest in being as close as possible to Rebecca," and by Mrs. Danvers' "hypnotic and manipulative powers" (Berenstein 252). Mrs. Danvers' repeated gestures for Mrs. de Winter to follow her, which are silently obeyed, suggest as much, as does the camera's focus on Mrs. Danvers' eyes. Even taking into account Mrs. de Winter's own potential desire, the characterization of Mrs. Danvers as a manipulative seducer is significant. Part of the way in which the film portrays Mrs. Danvers as threatening is by portraying her desires as perverse or at least unhealthy. Part of this "threat" is the possibility that she could "[lure] unsuspecting victims

into her state of perversion," meaning homosexuality (252). Regardless of Mrs. de Winter's own desires (or, for that matter, Rebecca's), Mrs. Danvers' desires are portrayed as dangerous, especially when taken as part of her overall antagonistic role in both the novel and the film. Furthermore, while Mrs. de Winter is compelled in this scene by a mixture of "[a]ttraction and repulsion" toward both Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers (254), her feelings of repulsion ultimately win. Mrs. Danvers' statements about Rebecca may be alluring, but they also further remind Mrs. de Winter of her own feelings of inadequacy. Mrs. Danvers' memories of Rebecca and preservation of her room eventually drive Mrs. de Winter toward the door, and her commands to "listen to the sea" drive her out of the room entirely. This last behaviour disturbs Mrs. de Winter chiefly for two reasons. First, as in the novel, Mrs. Danvers approaches close to her and wonders aloud whether Rebecca comes back and watches Maxim and his new wife together, an implicitly threatening statement that suggests to Mrs. de Winter that she is unwelcome in the household. Second, Mrs. Danvers becomes detached and obsessive at the very end of this scene, evidently so lost in her memories of Rebecca that she does not notice Mrs. de Winter leave the room. In this scene, it is not only Mrs. Danvers' attraction to Rebecca that disturbs Mrs. de Winter, but also her inability to accept Rebecca's death and her successor's place in the household. In their study of depictions of women's mental illness in popular media, Quintero Johnson and Miller mention the "tendency for popular media to link lesbianism and psychosis" (214). Despite being at a different historical moment, hints of this exist in the potential madness of Mrs. Danvers, as suggested by her refusal to recognize Rebecca as dead and gone.

Berenstein demonstrates the degree to which the novel's implications of homosexuality were apparent to the makers of the film, citing a correspondence between Production Code film

censor Joseph Breen and producer David O. Selznick in which the former warned the latter that no hint of a "'perverted relationship'" between Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers could be present in the film (251-2). Billheimer also asserts that "Mrs. Danvers's lesbian attraction to Rebecca" was "clear to Hitchcock and to Breen" (67), and that "Hitchcock managed to suggest it implicitly through Danvers's fondling of Rebecca's lingerie and the tone of her recollections of the first Mrs. de Winter" (68). This implies that, Code censorship aside, the context of lesbianism was present in the film – and consciously recognized as present in the novel – even during the time of the film's production.

The 2020 film presents Mrs. Danvers as more aggressive during this first scene in Rebecca's bedroom. Mrs. de Winter initially enters the room on her own, as she does in the earlier versions, although in both of those cases it was in response to having seen Mrs. Danvers and/or Favell in the room. She looks around, picks up items, and sprays herself with Rebecca's perfume. She herself touches the case containing Rebecca's nightgown, and begins to open it when Mrs. Danvers speaks behind her, startling her. Mrs. Danvers walks swiftly up to Mrs. de Winter and takes out the nightgown that the latter had been about to take out herself. Mrs. Danvers smiles and softly tells Mrs. de Winter to hold and touch the nightgown, moving very close to her. She continues to stare at Mrs. de Winter as she (now appearing very nervous) does so, and holds it to her own face. Mrs. Danvers starts talking about Rebecca, and holds the nightgown against Mrs. de Winter's body. Mrs. de Winter then begins moving away from her, clearly uncomfortable. She stops moving when Mrs. Danvers calls back to her that she would brush Rebecca's hair "every evening" (00:56:16). Mrs. Danvers walks over to the vanity and pulls out the chair, looking at Mrs. de Winter, who obediently sits down. Mrs. Danvers

emphatically mentions that she used to brush Rebecca's "great mass of dark hair" (00:56:30-00:56:34), obviously contrasting her with the second Mrs. de Winter, who has short blond hair in this adaptation. She then picks up Rebecca's brush and begins brushing Mrs. de Winter's hair, while describing how Maxim used to brush Rebecca's hair. She laughingly recounts Rebecca demanding that "Max" brush her hair "harder," and as she does so, Mrs. Danvers brushes Mrs. de Winter's hair in aggressive strokes that pull her head back. Mrs. Danvers tells her that Maxim "was always laughing back then" (00:56:55-00:56:57). She stares in the mirror at Mrs. de Winter for a moment, then pointedly asks her whether Maxim brushes her hair. Mrs. de Winter shakily says no, then gets out of the chair and begins to walk away from Mrs. Danvers. She then turns around, visibly upset, and inquires whether Maxim asks Mrs. Danvers to keep Rebecca's room preserved. Mrs. Danvers, looking around and smiling, replies "He doesn't have to. She's still here. Can you feel her? I wonder what she's thinking about you. Taking her husband and . . . using her name" (00:57:15-00:57:32). Mrs. Danvers then tells Mrs. de Winter that Maxim will "never be happy" because Rebecca was "the love of his life" (00:57:38-00:57:44). The two women then silently look at each other for a moment, Mrs. de Winter glaring and upset and Mrs. Danvers calm and smiling. Mrs. de Winter walks out of the room, appearing distraught, and Mrs. Danvers stares after her, no longer smiling.

The indications of Mrs. de Winter's potential desire for Rebecca are perhaps even stronger here than in the earlier film, but at the same time, the scene is also more clearly wrapped in the subtext of jealousy and struggle over Maxim, something that Mrs. Danvers participates in to the extent that she tries to claim and enforce Rebecca's continuing right to the patriarch and his house. The house, in particular, seems to be the issue at the core of the "struggle" in this

version, which relates to Blackford's analysis of the story as an example of "women's own psychological concerns . . . expressed through struggles between female characters for houses" (236). With this sense of competition running through the scene, Mrs. Danvers' malice toward the second Mrs. de Winter is more evident here than in the earlier film's equivalent scene. For the most part, Mrs. de Winter's distress in this scene results from being made to feel like a usurper of Rebecca's place in the household, and a poor substitute for her. However, the moment in which Mrs. Danvers says that Rebecca is "still here," asks Mrs. de Winter if she can feel her, and wonders what Rebecca thinks of Mrs. de Winter also contributes to her distress. It is not only Mrs. Danvers' hatred that disturbs the second Mrs. de Winter, but also her inability to accept Rebecca's death – an irrational devotion to the dead.

Portrayals of Mrs. Danvers' Hostility

Another key scene for examining Mrs. Danvers as a character is the scene in which Mrs. de Winter confronts her in Rebecca's room after the fancy dress ball. Mrs. de Winter has realized that although she cannot speak to her predecessor, the woman whose shadow hangs over her life at Manderley, she can speak to Rebecca's living representative, Mrs. Danvers (du Maurier 234). Mrs. de Winter begins to accuse Mrs. Danvers of tricking her the previous night, and Mrs. Danvers responds by saying "[w]hy did you ever come here?" and "[n]obody wanted you at Manderley" (234), thereby confirming Mrs. de Winter's long-standing suspicions of Mrs. Danvers' hatred of her. Mrs. Danvers further confirms that she hates the second Mrs. de Winter simply for "[trying] to take [Rebecca's] place" (235). Mrs. Danvers' statement that Maxim "deserves to suffer" (236) for marrying again less than a year after Rebecca's death moves into a rambling recounting by her of her memories of Rebecca. Mrs. de Winter tries to tell her to stop,

but "[s]he did not hear me, she went on raving like a madwoman, a fanatic" (236). Mrs. Danvers' fanatical devotion to the dead Rebecca is the source of the second Mrs. de Winter's distress in this moment, especially given that Mrs. Danvers is once again more animated than her usual cold demeanour. Mrs. Danvers' raving about Rebecca eventually gives way to disparaging comments directed at the second Mrs. de Winter: "You take my lady's place. Why, even the servants laughed at you when you came to Manderley" (238). Mrs. Danvers repeatedly approaches Mrs. de Winter as the scene continues, and the latter eventually backs "away from her towards the window" in fear (239). At this point, Mrs. Danvers switches to threats, attempting to coax Mrs. de Winter to jump out of the window to her death. Before she can jump, the psychological spell of Mrs. Danvers' words is broken by the sound of rockets, indicating that a ship has run aground in the bay nearby (240). Mrs. Danvers returns to her cold professional demeanour, and leaves the room after speaking with Mrs. de Winter about the ship, acting as if the previous scene had not happened (242).

Horner and Zlosnik note that Mrs. Danvers' "hysterical outburst about her dead mistress" is immediately followed by her attempt "to seduce the narrator into death itself, almost as if trying to effect a diabolic exchange between the dead and the living" (121). The close juxtaposition of these actions, the raving and the enticement to suicide, suggests that Mrs. Danvers is particularly dangerous because she is hysterical, malicious, and perhaps even "diabolic" in her refusal to accept Rebecca's death, the last of which is further suggested by her wondering whether Rebecca is still present as a ghost (du Maurier 167). The scene not only confirms Mrs. de Winter's fears about Mrs. Danvers as a monstrous and hostile figure, but also emphasizes the latter's hypnotic or seductive power over the former. Mrs. de Winter is indeed

almost persuaded to jump to her death. Mrs. Danvers' attempt to entice her into suicide does not in itself suggest detachment from reality. Indeed, this act is calculated and manipulative, if driven by emotion, namely hatred, in the novel especially. However, the use of the term "madwoman" in the novel is nonetheless evocative of connotations of mental illness, due to the intertextual connection to *Jane Eyre* and because the term always has connections to mental illness.

In the 1940 film's version of this scene, Mrs. Danvers seems malicious and derisive. She is angry, but relatively calmer than Mrs. de Winter, who is distraught and falls onto Rebecca's bed crying (01:19:05). Mrs. Danvers then calmly and coldly opens the window and makes suggestions that lead Mrs. de Winter to stand in front of it, potentially preparing to attempt suicide. The corresponding scene in the novel is the same in some of its essential points, but does contain some notable differences. For instance, in the novel's version, it is Mrs. Danvers' "raving" about Rebecca which prompts Mrs. de Winter to refer to her as acting like a madwoman or "a fanatic" (236). Mrs. Danvers is also openly grieving Rebecca in the novel's version of this scene; Mrs. de Winter describes her strange dry-eyed sobbing (237). Additionally, while Mrs. de Winter is still distraught in the novel's version of the scene as well, she seems comparatively to be the calmer person in the room. This difference cements the portrayal of Mrs. Danvers as a particularly threatening antagonist in the film adaptation, even more so than in the novel, since she appears more in control and powerful in the film.

The 2020 film presents a relatively more sympathetic portrayal of Mrs. Danvers, although she is still clearly unsettling and threatening at certain points. The film contains a scene which does not have an equivalent in earlier versions: after learning from Maxim (Armie Hammer) that Favell (Sam Riley) is not welcome at Manderley, Mrs. de Winter attempts to fire Mrs. Danvers

for letting him on the property, and she confronts Mrs. Danvers in the latter's bedroom. During the ensuing conversation, Mrs. Danvers states that she will have few options if she is dismissed from Manderley. Given her gender and social position, her only options are marriage and service, and she is "too old for either" (Wheatley, *Rebecca* 01:07:14-01:07:22). Mrs. Danvers then gives a simple reason for never helping the second Mrs. de Winter: "You didn't ask for my help" (01:07:59-01:08:01). This potentially connects to Blackford's suggestion that Mrs. de Winter's perceptions of Mrs. Danvers' hostility are, in part, imagined (244), and adds an element of ambiguity as to the reliability of Mrs. de Winter's views of events. Mrs. de Winter does not fire Mrs. Danvers. This scene is followed by what appears to be a more positive relationship between the two women as they prepare for the fancy dress ball. However, this turns out to be insincere on Mrs. Danvers' part, and she tricks Mrs. de Winter into wearing a dress formerly worn by Rebecca, just as she had done in both the novel and the 1940 film. Her warm demeanour arguably makes her deception seem even more cruel and calculating than in the versions of the story in which she never pretends to be Mrs. de Winter's friend. Nonetheless, the portrayal of Mrs. Danvers in this version, as demonstrated through moments like the scene in her bedroom, creates a sense of ambiguity surrounding her character and Mrs. de Winter's view of her.

In this film's version of the window scene, as in the 1940 version, Mrs. Danvers is comparatively calm and standing above the much more upset Mrs. de Winter in multiple shots. While Mrs. Danvers' tone is gentler than in the earlier film, her words are similarly vicious: "You're worthless. Not worthy of him and not worthy of this house" (01:21:14-01:21:19). This is interesting, as it implies, perhaps more than in the earlier versions, that part of Mrs. Danvers' hatred for Mrs. de Winter stems from her being unworthy to hold her new social position. It is

therefore possible that Mrs. Danvers objects to Mrs. de Winter specifically as being unfit for her role, rather than simply objecting to her for being Rebecca's replacement. Mrs. de Winter had attempted to exert the privilege of her position over Mrs. Danvers the most clearly in this version, by attempting to fire her. Indeed, one of Mrs. Danvers' lines in this later scene echoes her conversation with Mrs. de Winter in the earlier scene: she claims that she "was helping" Mrs. de Winter by leading her to copy Rebecca's costume for the fancy dress ball (01:21:06-01:21:08), which calls back to Mrs. de Winter having asked her for help after deciding not to fire her. While Mrs. Danvers is still motivated by an unwillingness to accept the second Mrs. de Winter as taking Rebecca's place, she also seems to enjoy asserting some form of power over her new mistress, having earlier been reminded of Mrs. de Winter's own power over her as the wife of the estate's patriarch. In this version of the story, additional motives are thus hinted at for Mrs. Danvers' actions beyond just her devotion to Rebecca. The precarity of her own social position is a source of her anger.

Despite these complicating factors, Mrs. Danvers' relationship to the dead Rebecca still seems to be a source of horror in the 2020 film's version of the window scene. Mrs. Danvers says that Rebecca "won't stand for" Mrs. de Winter taking her place, speaking as if Rebecca was still alive (01:21:56-01:21:57). As in the earlier versions, Mrs. Danvers is particularly threatening toward the second Mrs. de Winter because she has not fully accepted Rebecca's death, and thus sees Maxim's new wife as usurping a position that is already taken. As in the novel and the earlier film, the threat represented by Mrs. Danvers lies in her connection to the dead Rebecca, and it is through this connection that she is willing and able to manipulate Rebecca's successor.

The Manderley Fire and Mrs. Danvers as Madwoman Antagonist

The fire at the conclusion of each version of the story holds major significance in terms of Mrs. Danvers' characterization. In the novel, Maxim and his wife arrive at Manderley to discover the fire on the last page, and it is not entirely clear who is responsible. Horner and Zlosnik have noted that the fire may have been set by Mrs. Danvers "*on the orders* of Jack Favell" (108). Mrs. Danvers had left Manderley earlier that day, and had received a telephone call from Favell after he learned about Rebecca's cancer. After the visit with Doctor Baker, Favell had threatened Maxim that "[t]he law can get you yet, and so can I" (du Maurier 358). If Mrs. Danvers indeed sets Manderley on fire at Favell's order or suggestion in the novel, then she almost certainly does so as a means of getting revenge on Rebecca's behalf.

As in the novel, Mrs. Danvers' relationship to Rebecca creates a sense of unease in the 1940 film. In contrast to the novel's ambiguity, the film makes it clear that it is Mrs. Danvers who sets Manderley on fire. Furthermore, in the film Mrs. de Winter claims she heard Mrs. Danvers give her exact reason for setting the fire: "[s]he said she'd rather destroy Manderley than see us happy here" (Hitchcock, *Rebecca* 02:03:51-02:03:54). In the line immediately prior to this, the heroine also says that Mrs. Danvers has "gone mad" (02:03:50-02:03:51). Here, the film explicitly connects Mrs. Danvers' violent and destructive actions to madness, and in doing so reinforces the intertextual connection between this narrative and that of *Jane Eyre*. The representation of Mrs. Danvers here is especially significant due to the popularity of the 1940 film. Billheimer notes that although du Maurier's novel had sold over two million copies by 1965, "Selznick and Hitchcock's film version of the novel reached over twice that number in its initial release . . . On the strength of those numbers, the lasting images of Rebecca are formed not by du Maurier's words, but rather by [portrayals such as] Judith Anderson as the malicious Mrs.

Danvers" (70). This means that the most prominent cultural image of Mrs. Danvers is that given by the 1940 film, and the image in question portrays her as particularly threatening due to the emphasis on her violent and destructive acts as well as on her madness.

Although Favell (George Sanders) also contacts Mrs. Danvers near the end of the film, the connotations surrounding this part of the story differ significantly from the novel. In the film, Favell makes no clear threat to Maxim after learning the truth about Rebecca's condition. He is shown calling Mrs. Danvers on the telephone and informing her of Rebecca's cancer, finishing the call by saying "now Max and that dear little bride of his will be able to stay on at Manderley and live happily ever after" (02:01:20-02:01:27). The implication is that Favell's statement convinces Mrs. Danvers to destroy Manderley in order to prevent the couple's happiness, but he does not give her any explicit instruction to do so. Additionally, Favell's demeanour is noticeably different between the book and the Hitchcock film. In the book, he is depicted as a habitual drunkard whose behaviour and "foolish" laugh jeopardize his credibility (du Maurier 322-3), and who appears "rather shaken" after learning about Rebecca's illness (357). Sanders' portrayal in the film seems more suave and self-assured, and even if he is still depicted as a scoundrel, he appears calm in the scene in which he calls Mrs. Danvers. The contrast between his calm demeanour and Mrs. Danvers' explicit act of setting the house on fire emphasizes her rather than him as the vengeful party.

The 2020 film also explicitly shows Mrs. Danvers setting Manderley on fire. After returning home to discover the fire, Mrs. de Winter searches for Mrs. Danvers, and finds her by Rebecca's cottage on the cove, which she has also burned. Mrs. Danvers then calmly tells Mrs. de Winter that she "can't let [Maxim and Mrs. de Winter] have Manderley," because "[i]t was

ours," meaning her own and Rebecca's (01:52:34-01:52:39). She then jumps off the cliff in the cove to her death, in the same waters in which Rebecca had supposedly drowned. Mrs. de Winter, who attempts to convince her not to jump, is shown having nightmares about Mrs. Danvers' death years later. While Mrs. Danvers is clearly responsible for setting the fire in this film, the implication is not that she does so out of madness. Instead, she does so out of possibly righteous anger on behalf of Rebecca and herself. She clearly states her motive to Mrs. de Winter: "[Maxim] killed the only person I loved" (01:52:31-01:52:34). This portrayal counters, to an extent, her depiction in the 1940 film, which emphasized the irrationality of her response to the circumstances surrounding Rebecca's death.

In the 2020 film, as in the novel, Favell threatens Maxim after Rebecca's cancer is discovered, and his demeanour is more serious than it was in the earlier film. His words are as follows: "I bet you think you've won, don't you? Well, maybe the law can't get you. I still can" (Wheatley, *Rebecca* 01:49:05-01:49:11). He is also shown in an earlier scene, picking up Mrs. Danvers in his car after she is dismissed from Manderley (01:43:57-01:44:10). The reasons Mrs. Danvers gives to Mrs. de Winter for the fire seem to be her own, but it is possible she was encouraged by Favell even if their motives were not identical. Her portrayal toward the story's end nonetheless seems less unambiguously villainous than in the 1940 film. However, this does not change the fact that her acts of violence against Mrs. de Winter (namely, sabotaging her at the fancy dress ball and attempting to manipulate her into suicide), as well as her final act of destruction, are just as present in this adaptation as in the earlier version.

Conclusion

While Bertha Mason is a definite reflection of real-world perceptions of mental illness (as evidenced by Brontë's letter discussing her), the case of Mrs. Danvers is much more ambiguous. However, she warrants discussion in relation to perceptions of mental illness for two reasons. First, as discussed in previous chapters, the concept of "madness" and the terminology surrounding it cannot be entirely separated from mental illness. Second, the intertextual similarities between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* mean it is worthwhile to consider in what ways the latter text evokes the madwoman antagonist of the former. There is no definite proof that Mrs. Danvers is mentally ill. However, her behaviour in certain scenes, particularly in the novel and the 1940 film directed by Alfred Hitchcock, suggests the possibility of madness, as Mrs. de Winter herself notes (du Maurier 236). The manner in which Mrs. Danvers talks about Rebecca, which at times borders on raving, is a strong indication of this. Her obsessiveness is particularly unnerving for Mrs. de Winter, and while this also indicates Mrs. de Winter's own psychological state and insecurities, Mrs. Danvers nonetheless gives the impression of being horrifying. Furthermore, the connection that both the novel and the film make between her horrifying madness and her implied lesbian attraction to Rebecca is key to her construction as a madwoman antagonist, and reflects pathologized discourses surrounding homosexuality in the 1930s. While the 2020 film directed by Ben Wheatley provides a somewhat different portrayal, particularly through its greater attention to her class and position in the household, her actions in this film remain largely the same as in the novel. Although there may be ambiguity regarding the protagonist's perception of the madwoman antagonist, the reader is given no clear counter-narrative to this representation. The primary lens through which readers are able to view Mrs.

Danvers is the lens which depicts her as threatening, sinister, and obsessive. Furthermore, the narrative association between mental illness and female homosexuality in Mrs. Danvers' characterization suggests that both are indicative of monstrosity.

Chapter Three: Adeline March as Madwoman Antagonist in Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*

Diane Setterfield's 2006 Gothic novel, *The Thirteenth Tale*, demonstrates the persistence of the madwoman antagonist as a character in twenty-first-century literature. *The Thirteenth Tale*, which makes numerous explicit references to *Jane Eyre* over the course of its story, includes the character of Adeline March, who, like Bertha Mason, sets a destructive fire near the end of the text. Adeline's identity is obscured for much of the novel by that of Vida Winter, who narrates the story of the past in which Adeline appears, and who the novel initially suggests is the same person as Adeline. This chapter begins with a detailed synopsis of *The Thirteenth Tale* in order to provide context as to the story and its characters. Following this, I examine Adeline's presentation in Setterfield's text to show how her narrative role compares to Bertha Mason's in *Jane Eyre*, and to demonstrate that the explicit intertextual references to Brontë's novel reinforce Adeline's status as a madwoman antagonist. I then discuss how Adeline's doubling with Vida Winter poses a difficulty to interpreting her character, because it obscures the distinction of identity between the two. However, unlike Vida's, Adeline's role in the narrative is additionally limited by her speechlessness, and the resulting fact that she is only ever represented through the words of other characters. Vida, the narrator of the Angelfield story, portrays Adeline as an antagonist whose violence is associated with both her own madness, and the madness of other members of her family.

The Thirteenth Tale, set in England, begins with amateur biographer Margaret Lea receiving a letter from famed author Vida Winter, requesting that Margaret write her biography. Vida is famously secretive about her own past, and has given various versions of her life story

over the years. She claims to Margaret that she is now willing to tell the truth about herself. Her first book was originally titled *Thirteen Tales of Change and Desperation*, despite only containing twelve stories, and the "mystery of the thirteenth tale" (Setterfield 31) has become a prominent part of the public speculation surrounding Vida. Margaret accepts the request, and travels to Yorkshire to meet the reclusive author. Vida, who explains that she is now ready to tell the truth about her life because she is dying, reveals that she was previously known as Adeline March. In the following days, she begins to tell Margaret the story of her past, and the story moves into a narrative of events more than sixty years prior to Margaret's framing narrative. Vida explains that she and her twin sister Emmeline were born into the upper-class Angelfield family, ostensibly the product of a brief marriage between Isabelle Angelfield and Roland March, the latter of whom dies soon after the twins' birth. However, Isabelle has had a lifelong tumultuous and incestuous relationship with her older brother, Charlie, who is probably the twins' biological father.

The two girls demonstrate strange behaviour as they grow older. They only speak to each other, and only in a "twin language" (180) that nobody else can understand. Adeline grows to be violent and aggressive, and Emmeline grows to be incredibly passive, allowing her sister to physically abuse her without fighting back. The housekeeper, known as the Missus, eventually believes that the pair "don't know that anyone is alive but themselves" (85). The girls trespass and steal in the village of Angelfield which lies close to the family property, drawing complaints in particular from the women living there. However, due to the twins being "the children of the big house" (92), nothing is done until they steal a pram with a baby inside. Although the baby is recovered, the villagers ask the local doctor, Maudsley, to visit the girls. His wife visits the house

first, and is attacked with a violin in a seemingly empty room. She later identifies her attacker as Isabelle, and Doctor Maudsley has Isabelle taken away to an asylum.

After Isabelle is taken to an asylum, Doctor Maudsley hires a governess, Hester Barrow, to care for the girls. Over time, Hester begins to notice signs of unexpected behaviour in Adeline. This behaviour manifests as an apparent interest in listening to Hester tell stories, most prominently *Jane Eyre* (171). This interest is contrary to Adeline's seeming lack of interest in anything besides herself and her sister, so Hester reports this to Doctor Maudsley, but notes that the behaviour is not "consistent," and the reading of *Jane Eyre* does not "always bring about the changes" Hester has noticed (171). The two decide to conduct an experiment in which they separate the twins, in order to see if Adeline's behaviour changes more consistently without Emmeline's presence. Adeline is taken to Doctor Maudsley's house. However, the separation results in Adeline becoming near-catatonic, and Emmeline reacts similarly to Adeline's absence. The experiment ends after Hester sees the twins playing together, then goes to Doctor Maudsley's house to discover that Adeline is somehow still there. Hester then leaves Angelfield, and Adeline is returned home. The twins' reunion leads them to recover from the effects of their separation. They mostly return to their previous behaviour, although Emmeline is now more independent from Adeline than she was before the experiment.

After receiving news that Isabelle has died in the asylum, Charlie disappears. Vida recounts that she found his body in the woods, but did not share her knowledge of his suicide with anybody, so he remained officially missing. The disappearance of Charlie is followed by the death of the Missus, after which the gardener, known as John-the-dig, hires a boy, Ambrose, to help in the garden. Some time after this, Vida finds John dead after the ladder on which he had

been working had been pulled out from under him. As Margaret listens to this story, she is left to speculate as to who tampered with the ladder. In the frame narrative, Margaret discovers one night that another woman, who has a strong resemblance to Vida but whose face is covered in burn scars, lives hidden in Vida's house. Margaret thus realizes that Vida's twin, Emmeline, is still alive. However, Vida later explains to Margaret that Emmeline is dying. Vida gives Margaret Hester's old diary, which allows Margaret to understand the truth of Vida's story. Hester's descriptions of events and moments that confused her lead Margaret to realize that there were actually three girls at Angelfield, not two, which explains Hester's observations of Adeline's inconsistent responses to her storytelling. The girl who showed an interest in stories such as *Jane Eyre* was the hidden third girl who was "the secret of the house" (352), and who masqueraded at times as Adeline. The real Adeline never showed any interest in these stories. This third girl, who grew up to be known as Vida Winter, was the product of Charlie's assault of an unidentified woman during the time of Isabelle's brief relationship with Roland March. Vida is therefore "a cousin," or "[m]ore likely a half-sister" (354), of Emmeline and Adeline.

In the hours following Emmeline's death, Vida finishes telling her story to Margaret. She explains that her mother abandoned her in the Angelfield garden and that she was taken in by the servants, who kept her existence a secret from outsiders. When the twins and the girl later known as Vida Winter are sixteen, Emmeline becomes pregnant by Ambrose, leading Vida to dismiss Ambrose from the house. After the birth of Emmeline's son, Vida realizes that Adeline is violently jealous of the baby, due to Emmeline's love for him. One night, Adeline attempts to burn the baby in the fireplace, using books which had belonged to Vida, including *Jane Eyre*, as kindling (377). Vida, witnessing this attempt, refers to the fire Adeline intends to set as "the fire

of a madwoman" (378). Vida rescues the baby and carries him to safety. When she returns, Angelfield House is on fire and the twins are fighting inside. Vida attempts to rescue Emmeline and pulls her out of the house, after locking her twin sister in the library to die in the flames. Once outside, Vida realizes that she cannot identify the surviving twin, who is badly burned and unresponsive. She wonders whether she actually saved Adeline, rather than Emmeline, in the confusion. After leaving again to take the baby to the doorstep of the woman who subsequently adopts him, Vida returns to the burning Angelfield House. Rescuers assume that she is Adeline, and that the surviving twin is Emmeline. In the frame narrative, Vida dies shortly after she finishes telling Margaret her story. Margaret decides not to publish Vida Winter's life story, but she does publish a short story by Vida which hints at the author's origins and abandonment by her mother. This story is the mysterious thirteenth tale.

Jane Eyre as Intertext in *The Thirteenth Tale*

The real Adeline March is an elusive character in *The Thirteenth Tale*. The narrative leads the reader to believe that she and Vida Winter are the same person for the first two thirds of the novel, and this complicates a reading of Adeline herself. Adeline's own characterization centers most prominently on her violence and destructive behaviour. For this reason, together with the fact that Adeline is responsible for setting Angelfield House on fire in the novel's climax, I posit that she fills a role in the narrative comparable, and indeed closely related, to Bertha Mason's role in *Jane Eyre*. *The Thirteenth Tale* explicitly "echoes" numerous Gothic works through intertextual references (Oliver 556), most prominently *Jane Eyre*. Both Margaret and Vida love *Jane Eyre*, and there are repeated references to Brontë's text over the course of the narrative. The book is a favourite of Margaret's (Setterfield 24), and Vida has an even closer connection to it.

Vida's repeated references to "[t]he book about the outsider in the family" (359) hint at her own hidden outsider status at Angelfield. As Pyrhönen notes, the "references help [Margaret] conclude that Vida is like Jane, a motherless, unwanted, and neglected child among indifferently hostile relatives" (149). The connections to Brontë's text extend beyond just the character of Vida, however. Margaret meets Aurelius Love, a man who was abandoned as a baby and is later discovered to be the son of Emmeline and Ambrose. Aurelius shows Margaret a bag of items which were found with him by his adoptive mother, and which provide clues to his origins at Angelfield. Among this "inheritance" (Setterfield 233) is a page from *Jane Eyre*, the presence of which both Margaret and Aurelius find inexplicable. Margaret will later learn that Vida had put this torn page in the bag she used to carry Aurelius away from the fire in order to keep it safe, after rescuing it from the pyre Adeline had made by destroying Vida's books. However, the page's mysterious presence among the items left with Aurelius prompts a brief conversation between him and Margaret in this earlier scene.

Aurelius has only read the first section of *Jane Eyre*, so he asks Margaret about the events of the rest of the story. She describes the Thornfield episode thus: "[Jane] falls in love with her employer. His wife – she's mad, lives in the house but secretly – tries to burn the house down, and Jane goes away. When she comes back, the wife has died, and Mr Rochester is blind, and Jane marries him" (234). Margaret and Aurelius do not see any connection between these events and Aurelius' story. A partial connection only becomes apparent later in Vida's narrative, when she describes the pyre Adeline built in Angelfield House with the intention of burning the infant Aurelius: "It was the fire of a madwoman" (378). Thus, while *Jane Eyre*'s intertextual presence in *The Thirteenth Tale* is relevant to the stories of both Vida and Aurelius, it also indicates

Adeline March's characterization as a madwoman. Adeline's role as a madwoman antagonist, together with her explicit intertextual connection to Bertha Mason, means that it is worthwhile to examine her through the lens of considering what her madness represents. This will require a closer look at her character throughout Setterfield's text. In order to explore Adeline's character, I will first examine the confusion of identity between her and Vida Winter.

Ambiguities Surrounding Adeline March's Identity

When Margaret first meets Vida Winter, she demands that the author tell her three verifiable truths about herself. Vida tells her that before she changed her name, she was legally known as Adeline March (49). At the end of her story, it becomes evident that this is not a lie. After the fire, the girl later known as Vida Winter was assumed to be Adeline, and the twin who survived the fire was assumed to be Emmeline. Vida thus took on Adeline's legal identity for most of her life. The confusion between the girl's identities began prior to the fire, however. The child Vida was able to live "unsuspected" and hidden in Angelfield due to her "uncanny resemblance to the twins" (353). In addition, Vida bore a closer resemblance to Adeline than to Emmeline when they were children, as both she and Adeline were "skin and bones" (184). This allowed Vida to occasionally pretend to be Adeline in front of other people during childhood. Her masquerading as Adeline allows the pretense that there are only two girls at Angelfield House to continue even after Hester's arrival, and this ultimately leads to the separation experiment that Hester and Doctor Maudsley conduct on the twins. Hester observes signs that, contrary to her expectations, "Adeline" occasionally listens to her storytelling. "It is as though there is a mist in Adeline . . . and sometimes the mist clears, and another Adeline appears" (170). Hester and the doctor then separate Adeline from Emmeline in order to see if this "clouded

intelligence" (323) develops further without her twin's presence. However, what Hester describes as a "clearing of the mist" is actually the occasional appearance of the secret half-sister in Adeline's place; Vida, not Adeline, is the "girl in the mist" (171) who shows an interest in Hester's stories. Therefore, there were occasions when Vida assumed Adeline's identity, or was assumed to be Adeline, even prior to the fire.

In the novel's earlier chapters, it is not clear where the real Adeline is at the times when Vida takes her place. However, there is some clarification after Margaret discovers Vida's secret, and Vida describes the months leading up to the fire. She states that Adeline would go "roaming alone" at times (368), which doubtless made it easier for Vida to take her place. She also says that if she had decided it necessary for Doctor Maudsley to attend when Emmeline gave birth, she could have "[locked] Adeline in the old nursery" for that length of time (370). Indeed, although Adeline is not entirely hidden from the world prior to the fire, it seems that Vida was increasingly taking her place in public during the girls' adolescence. This is especially the case after the deaths of the Missus and then John-the-dig, because Vida decides at this point that in order to ensure the household's survival, "the girl in the mist was going to have to come out of the shadows. It was time to stop playing and grow up" (248). Neither of the twins show either the ability or inclination to manage the household or take on any type of major responsibility.

Reflecting the novel's Gothic genre, Adeline thus serves as a double or doppelgänger to Vida. As has often been observed,[13] doubles are a common theme in Gothic novels: Gothic that

13 See for instance Rogers, who notes that in the nineteenth century, "[t]he motif of the double or [doppelgänger] manifested itself abundantly in gothic literature" (27). Cornwell states that Gothic that focuses on the "psychological" commonly includes "a crisis of identity, often introducing the doppelgänger theme" (66). Speaking of Gothic works of the late nineteenth century, Dryden asserts that the "doppelgängers" of these works "exemplify [a] slippage of identity . . . Identities merge or are masked" (40). Although written over a century after the texts Dryden examines, Setterfield's text also suggests this slippage and merging, which indicates that this particular Gothic theme persists across time.

focuses on the "psychological" commonly includes "a crisis of identity, often introducing the *doppelgänger* theme" (Cornwell 66). *The Thirteenth Tale*, a novel that consciously uses nineteenth-century intertexts as a "web of reference and suggestion" (Oliver 556), employs this theme as well. Oliver states that "the very Gothic theme of the doppelgänger puts in an appearance [in Setterfield's novel], in the apparently prosaic form of twins" (558). While Oliver here refers to Adeline and Emmeline rather than Adeline and Vida, the doubling is present in both cases, which is part of the mingling and confusion of identity that develops among all three of the girls. Indeed, the Angelfield fire in which one of the twins perishes "destroys one duality and creates another" (558). The duality of Vida and the surviving twin replaces that of Adeline and Emmeline, but the doubling between herself and one of the twins was present even before the fire, as explained above. In addition, the ambiguity of the survivor's identity blurs the distinction between Adeline and Emmeline as individuals.

As with the case of Bertha Mason, reading a character as a double of the protagonist risks reducing this double's own identity to merely an aspect or reflection of that of the protagonist. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, I especially question the reading of Bertha as Jane's double due to the fact that neither Jane nor Charlotte Brontë seem to recognize Bertha's own subjectivity or see "kinship" with her (Showalter 69). However, doubling is a conscious and deliberate element of Setterfield's construction of Vida and the twins, and the fact that Vida takes on Adeline's identity for most of her life not only demonstrates some degree of recognition and kinship between the two, but also means Adeline's narrative role as Vida's double is a significant aspect of how the novel presents her character. However, even though the doubling between the protagonist and the madwoman is more consciously employed in *The Thirteenth Tale* than in *Jane Eyre*, it is still

important to consider Adeline's character separately from Vida. The story's central mystery hinges on the fact that Vida and Adeline are separate individuals, and Vida herself represents Adeline as a madwoman at the novel's climax. Reading Adeline as a madwoman antagonist with an intertextual relationship to Bertha Mason means that it is important to consider her own characterization and representation.

Certain actions in the text cannot be definitively ascribed to Adeline, due to the muddling of identity among herself, Vida, and even Emmeline. For instance, it is not entirely clear who actually struck Mrs. Maudsley with a violin, an act for which Isabelle was wrongly blamed. There is evidence that Vida herself was responsible, having been startled by Mrs. Maudsley. This evidence includes the fact that the figure who attacked Mrs. Maudsley had been hidden by furniture (107), and the child Vida frequently used "the backs of sofas and the underneath of chairs" as some of her "hiding places" in the house (351). However, the violence of the act seems more consistent with Adeline's characterization, as does the "irritated, wild sort of a screech" the attacker gives (107). Furthermore, the twin who survives the fire "might or might not be" Adeline (381), and either way, this survivor has been made to assume the identity of Emmeline for most of her life, and seems to have lost her sense of self regardless, due to the death of her twin. The ambiguity as to whether this woman is truly Emmeline or Adeline means that her characterization, when Margaret meets her decades after the fire, cannot be definitely ascribed to either twin.

The surviving twin's presence in Vida's Yorkshire home at the time of the frame narrative is a further echo of *Jane Eyre* and of Bertha Mason specifically. Oliver notes that *The Thirteenth Tale*'s "motifs of a fire and a hidden presence in the house remind one of *Jane Eyre*" (556).

Indeed, Vida describes herself at several points as a "ghost" (383), referring to her childhood as a hidden "secret" (352) in Angelfield House. This parallels the hidden, ghostly presence of Bertha Mason in Thornfield,[14] thus connecting Vida herself not only to the "motherless cousin" Jane Eyre (359), but to Bertha as well. Nonetheless, this particular connection does not apply to Vida alone, since she later keeps the sister who survived the fire hidden in her home as an adult. Whether this sister is Adeline or Emmeline, she thus "becomes the secret Vida's house harbours" (Pyrhönen 147). Pyrhönen further describes this woman as "the mad woman in Vida's Gothic mansion" (148), and indeed, like Bertha, she is essentially speechless. While she does make one statement to Margaret when the latter discovers her in Vida's garden, this statement is not in English but in the "twin language" (282) Adeline and Emmeline employed as children. Margaret hears her statement only as "a string of senseless sounds" (252), and though she later deciphers the message as "[t]he dead go underground" (282), the meaning behind these words is still not entirely clear until after Margaret discovers the truth about Vida's identity, at which point she realizes that the woman was most likely "looking for" (350) her twin sister who perished in the fire. While Vida's ghostly presence in Angelfield reflects that of Bertha Mason in Thornfield, the adult Vida is able to narrate this story of her childhood, which differs from Bertha, who is only interpreted through other characters in Brontë's novel. The twin who survived the Angelfield fire, on the other hand, is not only unable to tell her own story, but the only statement she makes within the narrative is initially "senseless" to the listener (252). Regardless of whether this survivor is Adeline or Emmeline, her portrayal in the frame narrative is a continuation of the

14 In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Fairfax says to Jane that "if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, [the third story] would be its haunt" (119); Jane later learns of Bertha's imprisonment on the third story, after having heard her "preternatural" laugh (120) on multiple occasions. Rochester describes Thornfield as "haunted" (349) after revealing Bertha's existence to Jane.

twins' childhood inability to communicate with others, something which was especially prominent with the child Adeline.

Interpreting Adeline March as a Madwoman

The confusion of identity between Vida, Adeline, and Emmeline is a complicating factor in reading Adeline's character. However, this is not the only obstacle to interpreting her. Adeline is essentially silent in the novel, since she is unable to communicate in a language other than the twin language understood only by herself and her sisters. By contrast, her twin Emmeline does learn to speak English, and although she does not have a large amount of dialogue, she speaks at multiple points in the narrative. Adeline also becomes a completely mute "rag-doll" (370) during the separation experiment. From a narrative standpoint, her speechlessness is necessary in order to disguise the truth that she and Vida Winter are two different people. However, this complete lack of self-representation also obscures Adeline herself as a character, as does Bertha Mason's speechlessness in *Jane Eyre*. As a result, Adeline can only be interpreted through other characters' (chiefly Vida's) representations of her. The representations that do become apparent through Vida's narrative suggest Adeline's potential mental illness.

The Thirteenth Tale provides a number of explanations for the unusual behaviour of the Angelfield twins, and these explanations are important to keep in mind when considering Adeline's eventual characterization as a madwoman antagonist. Doctor Maudsley's wife wonders whether Adeline is "simply wicked" (179), and both the Missus and Hester attribute the girls' strangeness to the fact that they are twins: the Missus thinks that, "the twins being twins, perhaps their strangeness [is] only *natural*" (86). The resulting implication is that they have split their identity between them. The Missus believes that "[Emmeline has] the goodness of two children

in her, and Adeline the wickedness of two. In a way . . . it [makes] sense" (83). Hester suggests that the twins have "divided a set of characteristics between them" (180). This does seem to be the case, given, for instance, that Vida suggests the twins were missing "their very souls" while separated (186). However, the twins' behaviour is also suggestive of perceptions of developmental disability or mental illness, and pathologized interpretations of the twins recur over the course of the narrative. Doctor Maudsley notes that some of the villagers believe the girls are "not right" (103), and given his profession, he develops his subsequent assessment of them through a medical lens. Hester tells him that she believes Adeline is more seriously "afflicted" than Emmeline (171), and she even believes it possible that Adeline could be institutionalized later in life (171). The most prominent traits that suggest Adeline is "not quite right" (280) are her inability to communicate with others, and her violent and destructive behaviour, the latter of which often involves abusing Emmeline, such as by beating her or "[chasing her] wielding red-hot coals in the fire tongs" (83). By contrast, Emmeline, whom Hester describes as better-adjusted than Adeline,[15] is "affectionate" (321) and passive.

Although removed from Brontë's narrative by time and social context, there are similarities between the representation of Adeline's and Bertha's madness. As I explained in chapter one, Brontë connected Bertha's madness to conceptions in her time of moral madness, in which "[t]he sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is . . . to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end" (*Letters* 383). In *Jane Eyre*, when Rochester asks Grace Poole whether Bertha has a knife, Grace replies that "[o]ne never knows what she has" because it "is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft" (Brontë 341). In *The*

15 Hester believes that Emmeline is capable of "one day [leading] a satisfying life separately from her sister" (168).

Thirteenth Tale, Vida's descriptions of Adeline are reminiscent of the language used to describe Bertha Mason. Vida says that Adeline was different from "other mortals" (Setterfield 83) and that, in the days before the fire, she was "obeying dictates . . . outside [Vida's] understanding," and also, unlike Vida, "never tired" (374). Furthermore, Hester observes that "destruction seems to be Adeline's only motive, and rage something she has to . . . stoke up in herself, in order to generate the energy to destroy" (321). The similarities with Brontë's descriptions of Bertha, and of moral madness, are notable despite *The Thirteenth Tale*'s distance from the historical contexts and perceptions of Brontë's time. It is important to note, however, that associations between madness or mental illness and violence are by no means unique to Brontë's time. Ahonen (2019) notes that popular media often uses mental health problems as an explanation or scapegoat for violent acts, regardless of the degree to which these problems (as opposed to others) were actually a factor (5-6). For this reason, the continuing presence of madwoman antagonist characters in fiction is significant to contemporary discussions around portrayals of mental illness.

Like Bertha Mason's, Adeline March's behaviour focuses on destructive impulses, her mental state is incomprehensible to others, and she has no opportunity in the narrative to tell her own story. However, there are significant differences between the two characters, which indicate more general differences between the two novels. *The Thirteenth Tale* does not involve a central male romantic figure in a role clearly comparable to Edward Rochester or to *Rebecca*'s Maxim de Winter. While there are a number of significant male characters, the story as a whole concerns itself primarily with relationships among women, and a heterosexual romance is never the main focus. The heroine (in this case Vida, rather than Margaret, who is the heroine of the frame

narrative) and the madwoman are opposed not through their mutual relationships to a man, but through their mutual relationships to another woman: Emmeline. (This was somewhat the case with the dynamic of Mrs. de Winter, Mrs. Danvers, and the title character in *Rebecca*, but in *The Thirteenth Tale* there is no clear "Maxim" figure whatsoever.) The differences between *Jane Eyre* in particular and *The Thirteenth Tale* make the similarities that do exist, such as the presence of the madwoman antagonist figure, all the more significant.

The relationships between Vida, Adeline, and Emmeline are, for the most part, familial rather than romantic, as the three girls are sisters. However, their relationships have possibly incestuous implications, as seen for instance through Vida's statements near the end of her story – for instance, wanting to play getting married with Emmeline (259), and wanting to start a new life with Emmeline and the baby (378), whom Vida refers to as "our baby" (375). There is no suggestion that these relationships are actually sexual, and they seem to indicate more generally an intense devotion – or, in the case of Adeline and Emmeline, the concept of being two halves of one person. However, the incestuous overtones are difficult to ignore, given the explicit relationship between the previous generation, Charlie and Isabelle. In either case, however, Adeline's antagonistic role in relation to Vida exists primarily because of Emmeline.

The destructive fire at Angelfield that forms the climax of Vida's story is a clear echo of Bertha's burning of Thornfield. Indeed, the pages of Vida's childhood copy of *Jane Eyre* form part of the pyre that Adeline creates (377), and Vida's mentions of the novel during this scene further suggest the connection between the two fires. Vida retrieves one page of *Jane Eyre* from the pyre, and puts it "for safekeeping" (378) in the bag which she uses to carry baby Aurelius to safety. In the most explicit reference, Vida states that the fire Adeline is trying to create is "the

fire of a madwoman" (378). Her main reason for saying so is Adeline's purpose in setting the fire: "How could she ever imagine that burning her sister's child would restore her sister to her?" (378). Vida's statements ascribe Adeline's irrational violence and jealousy to madness, and the multiple references to *Jane Eyre* in this same scene cement the connection to the madness of Bertha Mason.

The explanations given for the behaviour of Bertha and Adeline are comparable, if not exactly the same. Rochester ascribes Bertha's behaviour first to her lineage, through her "mother, the Creole, [who] was both a mad-woman and a drunkard" (Brontë, *Eyre* 339), then to Bertha's own "excesses [which] had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (356), and finally to this "insanity" itself. Vida relays several explanations that she and other characters had given for Adeline's behaviour. Many of the explanations given are clinical or medical, beginning with an assumption by the villagers that both twins are mentally disabled (Setterfield 103). Doctor Maudsley, although he is initially unsure of this assessment, perhaps by necessity evaluates the girls from a medical perspective. Indeed, his reaction to the twins' mother Isabelle, whom he believes to have assaulted his wife and who also shows signs of having harmed herself, is to have her sent to an asylum (111). The families of both Bertha Mason and Adeline March are associated with mental illness. Hester determines that Charlie "is suffering from some kind of disorder of the mind" (317), and her belief that Adeline might be institutionalized in the future is likely influenced by her mother Isabelle's institutionalization. Critics note these aspects of Adeline's parents as well: Pyrhönen describes Charlie as "mad" (148), and Oliver describes Isabelle as "insane" (560), suggesting that these characters, as well as Adeline, demonstrate representations of madness and, by extension, mental illness, from the perspective of readers.

Emmeline, although Hester assesses her as "not . . . as badly disturbed as was reported" (Setterfield 321), is also included in the villagers' beliefs that the girls are "not right" (103), and even Hester asserts that Emmeline "will never be clever" (321). A notable difference from *Jane Eyre*, however, is that Adeline and her family are of the same cultural and racial background as the narrators of *The Thirteenth Tale*. Vida mentions that Charlie and Isabelle's mother was French, but their English father George Angelfield shows signs of madness similar to those of his son (namely an obsessive fixation on the women in his family, and reclusive habits in which he completely retreats from the outside world), so the novel does not suggest that the family's madness originates with their French heritage. There is no association between madness and racial or cultural alterity, since both Margaret and Vida, the latter of whom is a member of the family herself, are of the same English background and upbringing as the rest of the Angelfields. On the contrary, *The Thirteenth Tale* suggests a connection between the madness of the Angelfield family and their status as members of the English upper class.

Vida's narrative draws attention to the abuses of power that the Angelfield family's status allows them to get away with. The twins disrupt and steal from the villagers, but avoid punishment due to their status as "the children of the big house" (92). Most seriously, Charlie is able to abuse various people, chiefly women, due to his status as the heir to the patriarchal house. As a child, he would harm the housemaids in "sadistic experiments," and although the Missus "could scold" him, "she was only the Missus, and . . . he could maim and wound to his heart's content, in the certain knowledge that he would get away with it" (64). When he is older, he abuses his younger sister Isabelle, and eventually sexually assaults numerous other women once Isabelle temporarily escapes him during her relationship with Roland. Isabelle herself aids

Charlie in these abuses, by directing him toward specific victims: “there was an incident that could have been a scandal, and a vexed Isabelle told him that if that was how he intended to go about things then he would have to choose a different sort of woman. He turned from the daughters of minor aristocrats to those of farriers, farmers and foresters. . . . The world seemed to mind less” (73-4). It is particularly easy for Charlie to abuse women who lack social power not only due to their gender, but also due to their class; one of these women is Vida’s biological mother, whose identity Vida does not know.

These representations of Adeline’s family members are significant to Adeline’s own portrayal as a madwoman antagonist. They suggest a connection between her class position of power and the madness and corruption of her family, including herself. However, for all that the Angelfield family’s madness is associated with their power as members of the upper class, it is madness nonetheless, and thus also associated with the social powerlessness of mental illness. Furthermore, although Charlie Angelfield is arguably the true primary villain of the text given how his patriarchal abuses play into the story, in the climactic moment it is still Adeline who serves the destructive antagonistic role, and who renders herself completely powerless in doing so, as she either literally or psychologically destroys herself. Adeline’s act of destruction is also the culmination of the violence and destruction she has engaged in throughout the narrative, and Vida’s description of her “fire of a madwoman” (Setterfield 378) indicates the close connection between her representation as violent and her representation as mad.

Conclusion

Adeline March’s characterization in *The Thirteenth Tale* indicates the persistence of the madwoman antagonist in English Gothic literature of the twenty-first century. Vida Winter’s

narrative connects Adeline's madness to her violent and destructive actions. Characters such as Hester and Doctor Maudsley suggest that the twins' behaviour, particularly Adeline's, indicates some form of mental disorder. This pathologizing interpretation of the girls is important to keep in mind, even when considering that the madness of the Angelfields is also associated with their power as members of the upper class. Setterfield recognizes Adeline's subjectivity to a greater degree than Charlotte Brontë does for Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, and the conscious doubling of Vida Winter and Adeline reflects this. However, this doubling also obscures Adeline's characterization, particularly considering that readers chiefly access her through Vida's descriptions; Adeline has no opportunity in the narrative to challenge Vida's portrayal of her. Adeline March is, ultimately, just as speechless within the narrative of *The Thirteenth Tale* as Bertha Mason is in its intertext, *Jane Eyre*.

Conclusion

Critical examinations of literary madwoman characters should take into account the connection between perceptions of fictional madness and real-world perceptions of mental illness. The antagonist role brings negative connotations to the way in which a character is represented, and in the case of the madwoman antagonists this thesis has examined, there is a consistent association between their madness and acts of destruction or violence. In the case of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, her portrayal furthermore associates her madness with a family history of mental disorder that is specifically connected to her Creole heritage. Rochester describes Bertha as violent and morally flawed, and the narrative does not counter this portrayal, given Bertha's lack of speech and her violent attacks on other characters, culminating in her destruction of Thornfield. The fact that Bertha's madness has such a close connection to real-world conceptions of mental illness, as seen through Brontë's comments on moral madness, means that her representation as violent indicates a larger cultural narrative surrounding mental illness, in which Brontë's text participates. Feminist literary criticism which takes Bertha Mason as the paradigmatic madwoman, and which posits that her madness is rebellious or potentially liberating, must grapple with how these negative connotations can play into stigmatizing perceptions of alterity and of mental illness. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which re-imagines the character of Bertha Mason, presents the madwoman as a protagonist who tells much of her own story, although it is interrupted by her husband's narrative. The ability of Antoinette/Bertha to tell her own story allows Rhys to call into question the negative associations between Bertha's portrayal and her Creole heritage that Brontë's novel suggested, and also gives Bertha/Antoinette the chance to explain her violent actions as in part a reaction to the patriarchal pressures on her

life, rather than suggesting that she is violent simply because violence is an inherent aspect of her madness. Rhys' version of Bertha Mason thus provides a counter-narrative to Brontë's portrayal of the madwoman antagonist.

Although Rebecca de Winter herself has the role of the hated first wife in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Mrs. Danvers is the text's most prominent madwoman antagonist. The 1940 film adaptation directed by Alfred Hitchcock and the 2020 film adaptation directed by Ben Wheatley further cement her portrayal as manipulative and destructive, especially due to the fact that both adaptations explicitly present Mrs. Danvers as responsible for setting Manderley on fire. Each version of the story ties Mrs. Danvers' mad behaviour to her feelings for Rebecca, and thus suggests a connection between her madness and sexual alterity, which reflects pathologized perceptions of homosexuality in the time the novel was written. Furthermore, the novel does not provide a clear counter-narrative to the second Mrs. de Winter's monstrous portrayal of Mrs. Danvers, because the latter's manipulative actions, extending to an attempt to manipulate Mrs. de Winter into suicide, suggest that Mrs. de Winter's perceptions of her are accurate.

I have identified Adeline March as the madwoman antagonist of Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*. Adeline is a difficult character to interpret due to her speechlessness, as well as the fact that the novel initially leads readers to believe that she and her half-sister Vida Winter are the same person. Indeed, readers can only interpret Adeline through her portrayal by other characters, chiefly Vida Winter herself. The novel suggests a connection between Adeline's violent and destructive actions – the most prominent aspect of her characterization along with her speechlessness – and mental disorder or madness, given multiple attempts by other characters to understand Adeline's behaviour in medicalized terms. Although the novel also suggests that her

strange behaviour is a result of her being a twin, this does not remove the pathological connotations that surround her behaviour. The connection between *The Thirteenth Tale* and *Jane Eyre* is especially notable here. Vida Winter refers to Adeline as a madwoman in the scene in which the latter sets Angelfield House on fire, a description which occurs alongside Vida's explicit references to *Jane Eyre* in the same scene. While the novel also suggests that other members of the Angelfield family are mad, notably Adeline's biological father Charlie, Adeline is the character whose madness most closely parallels Brontë's portrayal of Bertha Mason.

The issue of the literary madwoman is complex. The term "madwoman" has acquired a significance in literary criticism, through texts such as Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* and those of later scholars responding to Gilbert and Gubar, which associates the term with repressed rebelliousness, and thus leads to debates over whether madness can be empowering. However, it is important to remember the wider cultural connotations of the terms "madness" and "madwoman," and the inherent connection these terms hold to perceptions and representations of mental illness. My thesis demonstrates that when a madwoman character has an antagonistic role in a literary work, there can be an association between the character's madness and the actions that make the character an antagonist, and this association potentially reinforces negative perceptions that people with mental illness are dangerous or prone to violence. Rogers comments that "[f]eminist literary criticism must view a character as human individual first and metaphor second" (22), and in the case of my study, this means that the contexts literally represented by these antagonist characters must be taken into account before examining the metaphorical implications of the characters, such as whether they could be interpreted as rebellious doubles for the texts' heroines.

I have limited my primary case studies to three Gothic novels by English women writers, the latter two of which have close intertextual ties to the earliest text, *Jane Eyre*. However, my insights on the importance of the madwoman antagonist's narrative role could be applied to a much wider variety of texts than this thesis has the scope to discuss. A broader examination of portrayals of madness can provide additional insight into how these fictional representations reflect and inform real-world perceptions of mental illness. In order to bridge the gap between academic and popular understandings of the literary madwoman, then, it is important to take into account the implications the term "madwoman" inherently carries.

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