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Spring 2017

“Shutting Her Up:” An Exploration of the Madwoman and the Madhouse in Victorian Literature

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Recommended Citation

Bachman, Savannah Jane, ""Shutting Her Up:” An Exploration of the Madwoman and the Madhouse in Victorian Literature" (2017). *Senior Projects Spring 2017*. 146.
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“Shutting Her Up:” An Exploration of the Madwoman and the Madhouse
in Victorian Literature

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages & Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
May 2017

For Lillian Olivia Johnson Harding

Acknowledgements

To Stephen Graham, thank you for your guidance and invaluable feedback throughout the course of this project; without you I would have been completely lost.

To Marisa Libbon, thank you for being so supportive and for your insightful perspective during my midway board; I am forever grateful that we were introduced my first year at Bard.

To Mom and Dad, thank you for your softness and generosity and love. I love you more. And Dad, I know it's not Princeton, but it'll have to do.

To my friends, you know who you are, thank you for everything, but especially for allowing me to make the joke that my senior project is "insane, pun intended" probably one hundred times.

And to Moe, thank you for putting up with me; you're my favorite person.

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Introduction

‘We always advise ladies under these circumstances to keep quiet.’ In the month of March 1871, Louisa Lowe, who had been six months confined in three private insane asylums, requested an interview with the Commissioners in Lunacy. Established under the Lunacy Act 1845, the eleven male commissioners were entrusted with supervising those detained in both public and private asylums throughout England (Mellett 281). While they had the authority to release a patient, they seldom did so and patients were expected to apply for an interview if they had any grievances (Porter, *Madness* 9). In her interview, Louisa Lowe demanded to be discharged by the commissioners. She claimed that she was incarcerated falsely; her husband had signed the statutory order attesting to her insanity after she had moved out of their home and refused to return. Moreover, the two medical men who signed the certificate of insanity had done so after Louisa accused her husband of being unfaithful. Whether the accusation was true or not, the medical men considered it imperative to have her confined, thus preventing her from further tarnishing the reputation of her husband (Nicholson 141). The circumstances of Louisa’s confinement led her to expect an early release through the commissioners. Instead, they reportedly informed her, and ladies under those circumstances, “to keep quiet.”

Victorian gothic and sensation fiction concerned with madness astutely likens a madwoman’s confinement to the madhouse to “shutting her up.” The double meaning of “shut up” is significant, as the insane asylum is understood both to be the confinement and physical restraint of the “madwoman” *and* the suppression and prevention of her free speech. Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* emphasizes the relationship between silence and confinement; Anne Catherick declares “I have risked being shut up again in the mad-house” when she endeavors to “ruin” the man who incarcerated her by communicating his secrets to his wife

(Collins 278, 330). Anne Catherick's confinement within the asylum prevents her from circulating Sir Percival's secrets. The historical accounts of Louisa Lowe (1883), Georgina Weldon (1879), and Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1880) demonstrate how independent, opinionated women warranted their own confinement and suppression. Indeed, independent women were particularly vulnerable to accusations of madness, as female independence was believed to be symptomatic of hysteria (Porter, "Georgina Weldon" 8). Believed to be social embarrassments, who were tarnishing the reputations of their husbands, Lowe, Weldon, and Lytton were confined, or attempted to be confined, to the asylum by the very husbands they humiliated.

Testimony from women patients indeed indicates that confinement was accompanied by the suppression of their speech. Censoring of patients' mail was a lawful practice; with the exception of writing to the lunacy commissioners, no patient could send a letter unless the addressee was authorized by their incarcerator. Additionally, a private asylum could withhold letters written by the patient and present them to their visitors or to the lunacy commissioners (Lowe 4). Even the Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society, an advocacy organization for lunatic patients, supported the censorship of women patient's mail. During the House of Commons Select Committee on Lunatics hearings in 1859, the organization "protested the censorship of patient's mail, except for that of ladies, who, they agreed, *needed* to be protected against possible indecorous self-revelation" (Showalter, "Victorian Women" 166). The protection of women from "indecorous self-revelation" is suggestive of a sexual hierarchy, as women are denied self-discovery and privacy. Madwomen were prohibited from communicating with the world and were confined from it, both legally sanctioned for their "protection." Within the asylum,

expectations of repression and restraint forced “madwomen” into conformity, requiring that they adhere to conventional feminine behaviour and morals.

Partially attributable to stringent Victorian gender ideology and the expectation of non-resistance, passivity, and modesty in women, women were incarcerated for “their inability or unwillingness to conform to notions of appropriate feminine behaviour. The belief that the over-education of women was liable to induce attacks of hysteria is reflected in a number of medical writings of the period and women who displayed an inappropriate or excessive sexuality were also at risk of committal” (Showalter, “Victorian Women” 143). Victorian women exhibiting morally and socially “unacceptable” behaviour were likely to be labelled “mad.” Not only that, women were believed to be more susceptible to madness than men, as madness was linked to the female reproductive system. The relationship between women and madness constructed in nineteenth century England, in addition to the insistence that some madness was specifically female, suggests that diagnosing women as “mad” was an attempt to control them. The medical profession, inherently patriarchal, employed female madness to discipline women who refused to conform to the feminine ideal (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 7-8).

In Victorian England, controlling and restraining “madwomen” by confining them within the asylum was a responsibility afforded to men. After 1774, the law required two certificates of lunacy to confine an individual, each signed by a “medical man,” who could be any registered medical professional (Lowe 4). The person (or, in the context of this project, the man) who acquires two certificates against an individual signs the statutory order mandating their incarceration in a private or public asylum, or a licensed or unlicensed house providing for lunatics (Lowe 4). As public asylums in England were not legally allowed to employ women doctors until 1927, the physician examining the patient would additionally be a man (Showalter,

“Victorian Women” 165). Women like Louisa Lowe, who was confined for fourteen months, refused to be suppressed by the men who had her confined. Upon her release, Louisa publicized her experiences within the asylum, and even published a book, *The Bastilles of England*, in 1880. Louisa warned through her publications that women “did not know how bad husbands were,” and while her book chronicles the wrongful incarceration of both women and men, she identified women as being particularly vulnerable to confinement (Weldon 17). Louisa argues that

it is naturally more frequent for women in general and wives in particular to be ‘put away,’ as it is called, without due cause, than for men. Impecuniosity and dread of *esclandre* will, it is well known, generally debar the former if by accident they regain liberty from seeking to get redress, while in the case of married women the marriage disabilities have hitherto effectually stopped the way. (Lowe 46)

In Victorian England, women were legally, economically, and conventionally dependent upon men. Prior to the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857, commonly referred to as the Divorce Act, and the Women’s Property Act 1882, married women were not permitted to possess property or their own income, nor could they sue in their own name (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 8). Louisa Lowe understands that married women are legally considered to be subordinate to their husbands and that *all* women are restrained from seeking redress for fear of being penalized for their unconventional behaviour.

Women, however, did act “unconventionally” after being released from confinement. Refusing expectations of modesty and silence, women wrote about and published their experiences with madness. In exploring the relationship between women, madness, and confinement in nineteenth century England, I examine three novels and three historical nonfiction accounts (one of these being Lowe’s); significantly, five of the seven women confined within these narratives are done so by their husbands and, as previously stated, all seven are confined by men. Evident in these six accounts featuring “madwomen” is the symbolism of

female madness, as nonconforming, uncontrollable women are confined under the guise of mental illness.

The first chapter, entitled “Madness in Historical Nonfiction,” considers the female perspective on madness and improper confinement in historical nonfiction. Authored by irrepressible women, these narratives are *A Blighted Life: A True Story* (1880) by Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *The Bastilles of England; or, The Lunacy Laws at Work* (1883) by Louisa Lowe, and *How I Escaped the Mad-Doctors* (1879) by Georgina Weldon. The chapter begins by succinctly discussing the emergence of institutions that catered to the insane in England, before analyzing the substantial increase of confined insane in the nineteenth century and its contribution to Victorian anxieties regarding lunacy laws and improper confinement. Then, the narratives of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Louisa Lowe, and Georgina Weldon are examined, particularly assessing the events that led to their incarcerations in 1858, 1870, and 1878, respectively. While Georgina Weldon was never confined within the asylum, her narrative, in addition to Rosina and Louisa’s, informed public perceptions of madness. The chapter concludes by attempting to explore the relationship between nonfiction and fictional accounts of female madness in Victorian England, tracing the influence of the three narratives discussed in this chapter, in addition to the three novels discussed in the following two chapters.

The second chapter, “Madness in Gothic Fiction,” exclusively pertains to the narrative of *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. Examining the doubling of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, this chapter compares the two “madwomen.” In the comparison, the behaviour of both Jane and Bertha is analyzed in an attempt to determine what behaviour warrants physical restraint, confinement, or freedom. Additionally, this chapter considers the binaries of “good” and “naughty” girls, “good” and “not good” races, and “mad” and “sane” women, arguing that each

of these categories are utilized to exert control over women who operate independently of Victorian conventions of femininity. Then, exploring the relationship of Bertha and Jane to Edward Rochester, Edward's behaviour reveals the assumed authority of men within the novel and his insatiable desire for controlling and confining the "madwoman." This chapter argues that Bertha's associations with the supernatural, in addition to the presumed relationship between immorality, criminality, and madness, is crucial to understanding her confinement. Finally, this chapter argues that female madness in *Jane Eyre* appears to require restraint and examines the role of internalization in Jane's freedom from restraint.

The third chapter, "Madness in Sensation Fiction," juxtaposes *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *The Woman in White* (1860) by Wilkie Collins. Following an against-the-grain reading of Braddon's sensation novel, this chapter explores the ambiguity of the "madwoman" in both novels, instead of treating Lady Audley as categorically insane. Both novels feature men who understand that the responsibility of restraining and controlling women is their responsibility. However, *The Woman in White* portrays a male fantasy madwoman, as Collins' Laura Fairlie is dependent upon men to redress the wrongs of her improper confinement, emphasizing endurance and patience as feminine qualities. Whereas, *Lady Audley's Secret* constructs a female fantasy madwoman who possesses agency and authority. Following the doubling of *Jane Eyre* discussed in the second chapter, this chapter explores the doubling in *The Woman in White* of Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick and in *Lady Audley's Secret* of Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks. Finally, it considers the role of doubling in female madness and the purposeful ambiguity of madness and sanity in women.

Chapter I: Madness in Historical Nonfiction

A Blighted Life: A True Story (1880) by Rosina Bulwer Lytton

The Bastilles of England (1883) by Louisa Lowe

How I Escaped the Mad-Doctors (1879) by Georgina Weldon

Victorian literature concerned with madness often recounts harrowing narratives of improper confinement. Overwhelmingly authored by women, accounts of improper confinement revealed domineering, conspiring husbands who desired to control and silence their wives by displacing them within the asylum. The insane asylum became representative of masculine authority, a place where medical men substituted husbands in restraining uncontrollable “madwomen.” Notable cases of improper confinement were widely circulated from the mid-nineteenth century onward, published by women who had escaped the asylum; expected to remain passive and non-resistant, these women defied Victorian decorum as they sought publicity. Victorian fiction, too, became concerned with the relationship between women, madness, and confinement. Both gothic and sensation novels positioned men as constraining the movements of “madwomen,” who refused to control themselves. The relationship between Victorian fiction and nonfiction is symbiotic and both widely influenced public perceptions of madness and English lunacy laws. Despite the anxiety surrounding improper confinement, female madness in Victorian literature is not representative of mental illness; instead “madwomen” symbolize Victorian anxieties regarding inconvenient, uncontrollable women.

The emergence of institutions and the desire to segregate the insane from the sane, began at the end of the Middle Ages, when “formal segregation [was] often inspired by the Christian duty of charity.... In London the religious house of St Mary of Bethlehem, founded in 1247 and lastingly known as Bethlem (‘Bedlam’), was catering for lunatics by the late fourteenth century” (Porter, *Madness* 90). Significantly, the use of public funds for asylums was not sanctioned until

1808 and “not until 1845, and against those who denounced it as a waste of money or an infringement of freedom, was provision of such county asylums made mandatory” (Porter, *Madness* 94-5). Roy Porter argues that the early history of “private asylums is obscure, for they prized secrecy; families would wish to avoid publicity and only from 1774 were they required even to be legally licensed in England” (*Madness* 95). Private institutions which thrived on secrecy and operated for profit were rapidly increasing in nineteenth-century England. Beginning in 1800, “the confined mad were largely housed in private asylums, operating for profit within the market economy in what was frankly termed the ‘trade in lunacy.’ In 1850, more than half were still in private institutions” (Porter, *Madness* 95).

The anxiety surrounding English insane asylums can be attributed to the “trade in lunacy,” or the rapid increase of the number of individuals committed to asylums throughout nineteenth century England (McCandless 340). Beginning in 1800 “no more than around 5,000 people were held... in specialized lunatic asylums in a nation whose population was approaching ten million” (Porter, *Madness* 94-5). However, “between 1807 and 1855 the rate per 10,000 increased more than sevenfold, from 2.26 to 16.5; and although the rate of growth eased off considerably in the second half of the century, the proportions had risen further to 29.3 by 1890” (Walton 1). The shocking increase of confined persons in the second-half of the nineteenth century, in addition to the prolonged duration of confinement, resulted in the public’s apprehension of English lunacy laws.

Elaine Showalter argues that “Victorian England endured the stigma of epidemic insanity” as the number of insane confined to public and private institutions continued to rise. However, she recognizes that Victorian England additionally “enjoyed a reputation as the center of lunacy reform. From the 1830s to about 1870, experiments in the humane management of

madness put English psychiatry in the avant-garde of Western medical practice and made English lunatic asylums a mecca for doctors and social investigators from all over the world” (*The Female Malady* 25). Prior to the adoption of the humane management of madness, “it had long been assumed that the mad were like wild beasts, requiring brutal taming” (Porter, *Madness* 100). Releasing madness “from restraint” was quite pioneering and beginning in the 1830s

instruments of physical restraint and the use of force were officially abolished in British asylums and replaced by techniques of moral management: classification, surveillance, and the creation of a homelike therapeutic environment in which the kindly authority of the medical superintendent was to encourage the patients to develop self-control, self-respect, patience, and industry. (Showalter, “Victorian Women” 158)

Showalter argues that the “domestication” of insanity “coincides with the period in which the predominance of women among the insane becomes a statistically verifiable phenomenon... until the middle of the century, records showed that men were far more likely to be confined as insane” (“Victorian Women” 159). Edgar Sheppard, “the medical superintendent of the male department at Colney Hatch,” attributed the “‘large aggregation’ of women ... [to] the accumulation of female incurables, and the statistics indeed suggest that women stayed in the asylums for longer periods than men” (“Victorian Women” 161).

The predominance of female patients within the insane asylum, in addition to the greater likelihood that they would be diagnosed as “incurables,” perpetually confined within the asylum, contributed to Victorian anxieties regarding wrongful confinement. Although the 1774 Madhouses Act safeguarded against wrongful confinement (requiring “two medical certificates signed by two medical men and a relative or guardian”), accounts from Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1880), Louisa Lowe (1883), and Georgina Weldon (1879) reveal the ease in which women in particular could be improperly confined within the asylum (Porter, *Madness* 8). Among the causes of confinement, or attempted confinement, were desiring marital separation, publicly defaming an abusive husband, and ignoring societal conventions of femininity. The questionable

circumstances that led to Lytton, Lowe, and Weldon's husbands endeavoring to confine them emphasizes the extent of masculine authority in Victorian England.

The case of improper confinement that arguably attracted the greatest publicity occurred in 1858. In July 1858, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, a novelist and politician, had his wife, Lady Rosina, confined within Inverness Lodge, a private asylum in Brentford. Rosina later documented the events leading up to her incarceration in her autobiography, *A Blighted Life: A True Story* (1880) (Porter, "Georgina Weldon" 11-2). Rosina Doyle Wheeler married Edward thirty-one years earlier, in 1827. As they married prior to The Married Women's Property Act 1882, Edward controlled her annuity of £400 (Porter, "Georgina Weldon" 12). Their marriage was overwhelmingly unhappy, defined by the physical abuse Rosina suffered at the hands of her husband. They legally separated in 1836, after Rosina discovered Sir Edward's latest mistress (Blain 211). A result of the separation, Edward allocated his wife £400 annually, despite his income "increas[ing] to over £8,000 per year" (Porter, "Georgina Weldon" 12). As Rosina's social status continued to rise through her husband's political success, her ability to afford the associated lifestyle declined; resultantly, Rosina lived abroad, "often in dire poverty, from 1839 to 1847" (Blain 216). Although Edward was aware of his wife's strained finances, he "refused to increase his wife's allowance... [as] he felt it was his only weapon in his fight for the divorce she would not grant him" (Blain 217).

Once Parliament passed the Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857, Rosina could obtain legal redress against her husband. However, she could not afford a lawsuit; so, she began publishing pamphlets chronicling her husband's stinginess and mistreatment. She additionally "made a frank appeal for financial help; for, as she said, 'amid modern progressions there are yet not workhouses for the destitute wives of rich men'" (Blain 217). In July 1858, as her husband was

preparing to address his constituency at Hertfordshire, Rosina circulated pamphlets announcing that she too was to address the crowd (Mulvey-Roberts). Upon her arrival, Rosina observes that “the mob began to cheer.” Amidst the popular reception, she addressed “the mob:”

‘My good people, make way for your member’s wife.’ They then began to cheer, and cry ‘Silence for Lady Lytton!’ Sir Liar’s head fell *literally* as if he had been shot... Then, turning to the crowd, I said, ‘Men of Herts! if you have the hearts of men, hear me!’ ‘We will. God bless you! Speak out.’ Here Sir Liar, with his hands before his face, made a rush from the hustings. The mob began to hiss, and cry, ‘Ah, coward! he’s guilty; he dare not face her.’ (Blain 230)

Following his public humiliation, Edward, or “Sir Liar” as Rosina calls him, immediately returned to London and accused his wife of being insane.

Shortly after Rosina addressed her husband’s constituency, she was visited by a doctor, Mr. Hale Thompson, who questioned and examined her. Instead of immediately confining Rosina, Dr. Thompson returned that evening to inquire what her demands were for her husband regarding the divorce he desired. According to the *Somerset County Gazette*, Rosina “requested that her debts be paid and an allowance of £500 p.a. settled upon her” (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 12-3). Edward, instead of accepting his wife’s demands, executed her confinement. When Rosina visited Dr. Thompson’s London office to inquire whether her husband had accepted her demands, she was forcibly removed to Inverness Lodge by several policemen and asylum personnel. The proprietor of Inverness Lodge, Robert Gardiner Hill, was to be given £1,000 p.a. for confining her (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 13). The sum of money to be given to Mr. Hill, double the amount Rosina had requested, reveals Edward’s desire to permanently prevent his wife from affecting his reputation; the asylum would forcibly silence Rosina and prevent her from publicly humiliating him again. However, Victorian distrust of the asylum secured Rosina’s release. The public outcry which followed Rosina’s confinement led Queen Victoria to notify Edward, now Colonial Secretary, that he must release Rosina or resign (Porter,

“Georgina Weldon” 13). Resultantly, Rosina was released from Inverness Lodge after three weeks.

Rosina wrote *A Blighted Life* shortly after being released; however, she did not publish her narrative until 1880. In the autobiography, she recounts the three weeks she spent at Inverness Lodge. Upon her arrival, she was shown to her private bedroom and she describes her introduction to the other patients: “Looking through the window, I saw between thirty and forty women walking in the grounds. ‘Are all those unfortunates incarcerated here?’ I asked of the little keeper. ‘Those,’ she said, rather evasively, ‘are our ladies. They are out gathering strawberries’” (Lytton 6). Rosina’s transparency regarding the asylum is impeded by the “evasive” asylum keeper and Rosina immediately sends for Mr. Hill, whom she then addresses:

‘Mr. Hill,’ said I, ‘I sent for you to *order* you to remove those two keepers from my room, for I am *not* mad, *as you very well know*, and I won’t be driven mad by being treated as a maniac, and as for walking out with or associating with those poor creatures out there, if they really are insane, I’ll *not* do it, if I am kept in your madhouse ten years!’ ‘Madhouse! madhouse! nonsense, Lady Lytton! this is no madhouse, and those are my children.’ (Lytton 6)

Rosina confidently asserts her own sanity and others’ awareness of it, as well. However, she recognizes the potentiality of being “kept in your madhouse ten years,” understanding that her release may not be imminent. Mr. Hill’s response to her accusations uncovers the stigma associated with madness, as he denies that she has been sent to a madhouse. Moreover, he refuses to refer to the women confined within his asylum as insane. Instead, he fondly terms them “my children.” Mr. Hill’s language establishes himself as the patriarch of the institution and infantilizes the female patients, removing their agency and denying their self-control.

Rosina argues that “if [the patients] really are insane,” she will not associate with them. Her refusal to interact with madwomen insinuates that they will infect her with madness, reproducing the belief that madness is a contagion and justifying the segregation of the insane.

This assumption will be crucial to the storyline of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* and will additionally appear in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. However, fortunately for Rosina, "Mr. Hill sent *all* his 'children' to his other madhouse further on the road, so that I had the Palladian villa of Inverness Lodge, Brentford, all to myself" (Lytton 7). It appears that Rosina was considerably fortunate in her improper confinement, as she was never required to associate with madwomen.

Significantly, Virginia Blain argues that, despite public support securing her release, Rosina never received as much support as her husband. "It was the force of public sympathy that secured her release from the insane asylum... Yet even in the face of substantial evidence of her mistreatment by Bulwer, Rosina never received a fraction of the moral support that Bulwer enjoyed. Indeed, her most enduring reputation is that of a madwoman" (Blain 211). Passivity and non-resistance appear to be the expectation of women who fall victim to improper confinement. Blain explains that Rosina's refusal to remain silent after her release was unsettling, even to those who believed her narrative instead of her husband's; "even those who believed her version felt she should have preserved a dignified silence about it" (Blain 218). Rosina, along with the Victorian women who publicized their narratives of improper confinement, managed to maintain their outrage amidst the expectation of silence. Rosina Bulwer Lytton, who reclaimed her life through writing and publicity, disturbed the patriarchal institution that sought to control and restrain them.

An account of improper confinement similar to Rosina's occurred in 1870. In September of that year, Louisa Lowe was confined to Brislington House, a private asylum, by her husband, after she separated from him and refused to return home on account of his emotional abuse. Confined for fourteen months, Louisa continuously challenged the Commissioners and caused herself to be transferred first to Lawn House and then Otto House prior to her release. Confined

for fourteen months, Lowe's distressing experiences led her to advocate extensively for lunacy reform. Twenty-eight years prior to her confinement, Louisa married George Lowe, a Devonshire vicar, in 1842 and she "brought property worth £1000 per annum to the marriage" (Nicholson 139). Throughout their marriage, Louisa frequently visited the continent; these visits, she later revealed, were "attempts to escape from her unhappy marriage and cruel husband. For most of their marriage prior to Louisa's committal, George Lowe had accused his wife of insanity. Louisa, living with this threat of the asylum, had on occasions succumbed to attacks of nervous instability, and in 1856 had even attempted suicide" (139-140).

Louisa became attracted to spiritualism in 1869, which was becoming popular in the 1870s, especially among women, as the séance "reversed the usual sexual hierarchy of knowledge and power: it shifted attention away from men and focused it on the female medium, the center of spiritual knowledge and insight" (Walkowitz 8). Spiritualism, as a distinctly feminine practice, became vulnerable to associations with insanity. Female spiritualists were "vulnerable to special forms of female punishment: to medical labelling as hysterics and to lunacy confinement" (Walkowitz 9). Medical men who were distressed by spiritualism's popularity "caricatured spiritualists as weird women and feminised men engaged in bizarre and bogus practices... Other scientists too denounced the trance as a variety of hysteria to which women, with their mutable reproductive physiology, were unusually susceptible" (Porter, "Georgina Weldon" 5).

In connection to her spiritualism, Louisa Lowe "developed the technique of passive writing, and became convinced of the validity of the communications she was receiving." The communications "encouraged Louisa to reject the authority of... her husband" (Nicholson 139). Resultantly, Louisa left her home in September 1870 and refused to return, despite her husband's

demands that she do. As her anxiety for her domineering husband increased, Louisa “consulted a family acquaintance who also happened to be a doctor” (Nicholson 140). Shortly after she visited the doctor, Louisa was visited at her lodgings by “a surgeon who was also an acquaintance of the Lowe family” (Nicholson 140). Two days later, she was taken to Brislington House, a private asylum and Louisa, “unwilling to make a public spectacle of herself, did not resist when captured, accepting her imprisonment in the belief that in due course she would be released” (Nicholson 140-1). Helen Nicholson argues that Louisa’s confidence in the two medical men, during which she accused her husband of being unfaithful, led to her confinement; “whether this allegation was true or not, it obviously alarmed the medical men, and it was therefore considered necessary to have her confined in order to prevent her from spreading rumours which would blight the reputation of an otherwise respectable clergyman” (Nicholson 141). A woman denouncing her husband is presented as disturbing; just as Rosina was expected to maintain a “dignified silence” regarding her husband’s abuses, Louisa, too, is expected to silently endure her dreadful marriage.

Within the asylum, Louisa “objected to both the order and the certificates on the grounds that they were misleading and inaccurate. It was a legal requirement that the doctor had to seek the interview with the patient, and since Louisa had initiated the interview with Dr Shapter, the certificates was technically unsound” (Nicholson 141). Louisa continuously entreated the Lunacy Commissioners to release her; her numerous letters led her to be transferred to Lawn House after four months, bringing her closer to the Lunacy Commissioners in London. She continued to complain about her treatment within the asylum and caused four visits from the Commissioners. Nevertheless, she spent nine months at Lawn House before she was transferred to Otto House. After a month, Louisa was finally released (Nicholson 142).

After her release, Louisa Lowe become closely involved in the lunacy reform movement. She argued that the Lunacy Commissioners failed in their public duty and ventured to prosecute them, claiming that they had authorized her confinement despite their knowledge of her sanity (Nicholson 142). Lowe was ultimately unsuccessful; however, she continued to speak out against cases of wrongful confinement, publishing numerous pamphlets and articles, most often appearing in the *Spiritualist*. Then, in 1873, Louisa founded the Lunacy Law Reform Association, lecturing on English lunacy laws and in 1877, she provided evidence of her own confinement and brought attention to other cases of wrongful incarceration to the Select Committee investigating the lunacy laws (Nicholson 142). Finally, in 1880, Louisa Lowe published *The Bastilles of England*, which extensively detailed the dangers of wrongful incarceration.

Georgina Weldon, whose evasion of the lunatic asylum is anonymously described in Lowe's *The Bastilles of England*, published her own narrative, entitled *How I Escaped the Mad Doctors* (1882), documenting the events leading up to her attempted confinement. Helen Nicholson argues that both Georgina Weldon and Louisa Lowe "suffered at the hands of husbands who had discovered that it was financially and socially advantageous to dispose of their wives rather than to involve themselves in the cost and public embarrassment of separation agreements and divorce proceedings" (Nicholson 139). Significant of Rosina, Louisa, and Georgina's confinement is the looming termination of their marriages and the vehement accusations against their husbands upon their release. However, Georgina, unlike Rosina and Louisa, never set foot inside an insane asylum.

Georgina's involvement with women's rights and lunacy reform cannot be uncoupled from her experiences from mid-April of 1878, when her husband, Henry Weldon, conspired to

have her shut up in a lunatic asylum. She was forty years old and had been married for eighteen years. Marrying in 1860, Georgina experienced a decade of waning success in amateur theatricals, before seeking fulfillment teaching music to orphaned children (Walkowitz 7). Her husband disapproved of her bringing “dirty, diseased orphans” into their home to be educated and consequently separated from his wife in 1875 (Walkowitz 7). Judith Walkowitz argues, however, that their separation was amicable, as Henry Weldon assigned Georgina £1000 a year and allowed her to occupy Tavistock House, their home in Bloomsbury (Walkowitz 7). Georgina’s idiosyncratic occupation and independence startled society, as she disregarded convention in both her personal and public life. Her radical livelihood and her marital troubles estranged her from her family; they considered her “insane,” suggesting that disregard for and violation of decorum was attributable to insanity. Significantly, lunacy reform gained prominence in nineteenth-century England once the public began to believe that the definition of insanity has expanded to include morally and socially unacceptable behaviour (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 6). Georgina Weldon’s associations with “unconventional” and “progressive” behaviour certainly suggest that she violated Victorian expectations of acceptable behaviour (Walkowitz 7).

Georgina Weldon, already vulnerable to “peculiar” labels, embraced spiritualism after separating from her husband. Dr. L. Forbes Winslow, who would be prominent in Georgina Weldon’s case of improper confinement, “identified spiritualism as the principal cause of the insanity epidemic, particularly among ‘weak minded hysterical women’” (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 6). Porter argues that the publicity of Dr. Winslow’s opinions “brought him to the attention of Henry Weldon. A chain of events had obviously led Mrs. Weldon’s estranged husband to decide that enough was enough. His wife had grown more and more peculiar. He had

suffered sufficient annoyance, inconvenience and embarrassment. The time had come to see about having her locked up” (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 6). However, Henry Weldon would suffer more “annoyance, inconvenience, and embarrassment” before opportunity allowed him to confine his wife.

Georgina abruptly left London in 1878, to “avoid further associated scandals,” after a “complex” relationship with the composer Charles Gounod, that is, Porter argues, “now very difficult to unravel” (“Georgina Weldon” 15). When she returned to London,

she became embroiled in a criminal charge against a certain Anacharsis Ménier, a clerk whom her husband had installed in Tavistock House during her absence. Ménier, she alleged, had opened her post and showed it to her husband... At court proceedings against him, Ménier’s defence tried to cast doubt on her testimony by claiming that she was suffering from delusions. Nevertheless, Mrs Weldon’s Bow Street prosecution of Ménier for theft succeeded. (“Georgina Weldon” 15)

Soon after Georgina successfully prosecuted Ménier, on April 14, 1879, she was visited by a series of strange men. Once the men departed, Georgina became weary of confinement, remembering that Ménier had caused rumors to circulate that she was suffering from delusions. Georgina responded by telling her servant to “lock and bolt up the house” (Weldon 11). Georgina Weldon suspected that her husband had conspired with Ménier “to get rid of me” because he “did not want to come back and live at Tavistock House as I had proposed he should, and did not know how else to avoid this dilemma” (Weldon 11). As revealed in the accounts of Rosina and Louisa, confinement is expected to be less scandalous than divorce; unfortunately for their husbands’, and attributable to the lunacy panics, improper confinement proved to be quite dishonorable.

The following morning, Georgina corresponded with Louisa Lowe, whom she was familiar from reading Lowe’s warnings against improper confinement in the *Spiritualist*, (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 16). The following day, Louisa arrived, informing Georgina that she “might

be in the most horrible danger” (Weldon 15). As the two women were speaking, several strangers forced their way into Tavistock House, whereupon Georgina locked herself in her bedroom. She soon learned that the strangers were madhouse keepers in possession of a lunacy order signed by her husband. Georgina initially disbelieved her husband’s involvement; however, she was soon persuaded by Louisa:

Being put into a lunatic asylum [Louisa] knew, by experience, was worse than death, that I should be driven mad in an hour, that I did not how bad husbands were, that she believed it was all Mr. Weldon’s doing ... that if I stayed I was a doomed woman, and that no power on earth could get me out again if I once got put in. (Weldon 17)

Louisa Lowe emphasizes, as she expresses in *The Bastilles of England*, that women are particularly vulnerable to improper confinement and that being confined is overwhelmingly a woman’s issue. Moreover, Louisa argues that a sane woman “should be driven mad in an hour” in a lunatic asylum, reduplicating the popular Victorian assumption that madness was infectious.

In *How I Escaped the Mad Doctors*, Georgina firmly denies that she was an inconvenience to her husband at the time of her attempted confinement, arguing that she was “irksome to no one, interfering with no one in any way” (Weldon 18). After the events, she likens her husband to be worse than a murderer (Weldon 18). As the title of her narrative suggests, Georgina managed to escape the mad doctors, staying with Louisa Lowe until the Lunacy Order was no longer valid (Walkowitz 11). Once the lunacy order was expired, Georgina was “determined to avenge herself... Acting on her own behalf, she appeared before Mr. Flowers of the Bow Street police court” (Walkowitz 11-2). Although her married status disallowed her from redressing her case through the courts, Georgina received an endorsement from the police court. “Flower’s statement of sympathy legitimized her case and publicly established her sanity, even to the medical press, who acknowledged her to be a ‘lady abundantly capable of enjoying her liberty without harm to herself or others’” (Walkowitz 12). Georgina then sought publicity,

as she quickly “published her story in the spiritualist press, offered interviews to the daily newspapers, ... stood on public platforms and embraced the cause of lunacy reform” (Walkowitz

12). In a particular interview with the *London Figaro*, Georgina accused her husband of

conspiring with Gen. de Bathe to get rid of her in order to marry de Bathe’s younger daughter; she further claimed that de Bathe had nurtured a long-standing grievance against her for having once spurned his sexual advances... Mrs. Weldon interpreted the male conspiracy of doctor/family friend/husband as a ‘traffic in women,’ in which doctors colluded in the private sexual designs of men by defining female resistance as madness. (Walkowitz 14)

Georgina attributed the male ego and the boundless sexual desires of men to her improper confinement, as she rejected and hindered their lechery. Georgina’s resistance of men, both her husband and General de Bathe, prompted accusations of madness.

Despite Georgina’s resistance and “peculiar” lifestyle, she successfully avenged herself and cast doubt on the motivations of male conspiracy, publically attacking both her husband and her doctor. However, her success was determined by her public presentation. Walkowitz argues that “although the turmoil and drama of her life were the direct results of her determined resistance to the conventions of gender, she presented herself as a sweet, gracious lady with a feminine voice who led a ‘quiet, domestic life’” (Walkowitz 12). Georgina needed to exaggerate her femininity and devotion to her husband in order to prove her innocence. Georgina, like Louisa Lowe, was required to “cast herself, in a traditional mould, as an endangered heroine and an innocent victim” of her husband’s abuses (Porter, “Georgina Weldon” 18). Because Georgina, Rosina, and Louisa sought redress through the public domain, they became susceptible to negative attention and criticism; credible women authors depended on their domesticity and femininity. Georgina needed not only to conduct herself as a sane woman, but evidently as a shameless woman, as well.

Concluding *How I Escaped the Mad Doctors*, Georgina Weldon argues that “the object of this Lecture [is] ... arousing [public] indignation.” Within her narrative, Georgina describes the insane asylum she never set foot inside:

I certainly wish the public to support me, for the more hold I gain over the public so much the more will Parliament listen to me on behalf of many thousand victims, now lingering in those horrible dens among idiots, raving maniacs and deranged simpletons, of which the sights for half-an-hour only is enough to drive one out of one's mind.
(Weldon 19-20)

Georgina understands herself as a voice for the “many thousands victims” improperly confined in English lunatic asylums. Influenced by the sensation novelists Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, Georgina's illustrations of both the asylum and the patient conform with the exaggerated accounts of madness found in their novels (Walkowitz 13) Her illustrations additionally exploit Victorian public perceptions of lunacy. Insane asylums become “horrible dens,” evoking the supernatural and animalistic language employed by the sensation novels, while patients are described as “idiots, raving maniacs and deranged simpletons,” an overwhelmingly unsympathetic depiction.

Georgina Weldon concludes her narrative by emphasizing the effect that these patients would have on women who were improperly confined. She restates Louisa Lowe's belief that madness can be transferred to healthy persons, claiming that “half-an-hour only” in sight of them “is enough to drive one out of one's mind.” The severe and inhuman depictions of insanity in the accounts of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Louisa Lowe, and Georgina Weldon appear to inform public perceptions of madness. However, Victorian fiction also conveys madness as dangerous. Both fiction and nonfiction accounts are concerned with “madwomen” and their influence over Victorian anxieties regarding improper confinement begins with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Arguably the most prominent representation of female insanity, Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason has influenced public perceptions of madness from 1847 onward. Scholars have

argued that Bertha Mason informed Victorian conceptions of madness because of Brontë's ability to rewrite Romantic conventions of madness. Showalter contends that Brontë's "work shows an evolution from Romantic stereotypes of female insanity to a brilliant interrogation of the meaning of madness in women's daily lives" (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 66). She contends that *Jane Eyre* unveiled an authentic perspective on the relationship between women and madness, replacing stereotypical Romantic representations from the Romantic period. Helen Small similarly argues that "Brontë's rewriting of Romantic insanity has all the confidence and yet all the anxiety of the mid-Victorian period: that acute awareness of a danger past but still lurking, mixed with considerable confidence that the threat can be forestalled" (Small 178). Small insists that *Jane Eyre* embodies the paradoxical Victorian confidence and anxieties regarding madness. As Bertha Mason is such an authoritative madwoman, her origin should be explained.

There is evidence that Brontë had surprisingly ample access to the developing medical opinions on madness in mid-Victorian England. Small references Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), which contextualizes Brontë's writing within nineteenth century psychological discourse. "Sally Shuttleworth has shown that Brontë had an intense interest in the progress of medical theory and practice, reading widely in the journals and books available at the Library of the Keighley Mechanics Institute and attending occasional lectures on physiology and related subjects" (Small 155). Small then argues that "*Jane Eyre*... uses the insights of mid-nineteenth-century medical writing to support its recasting of Romantic ideas about insurrection and insanity" (Small 155-6). Brontë's breadth of knowledge on insanity is evinced in several of her letters responding to criticism of *Jane Eyre*. In a letter she wrote a

few months after *Jane Eyre*'s publication, Brontë describes moral insanity, "responding to complaints ... that Bertha Mason was unnaturally hideous:"

The character [of Bertha] is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-like nature replaces it. The sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end.... It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation... Mrs Rochester indeed lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity: the truly good behold and compassionate it as such. (Small 164-5)

Brontë argues that to understand Bertha as "shocking," suggesting that Victorian readers experienced revulsion and repugnance from her character, is to be misinformed. Instead, she insists that "the only sentiment elicited" from the reader should be "pity." Brontë even attributes Bertha's sins as consequential of her insanity, arguing that sin *is* insanity. Brontë's knowledge of Victorian psychology, particularly moral insanity, allows her to account for Bertha's character; seemingly, her Victorian readers were unable to do so, as Bertha's criminality and madness led her to being read as "unnaturally heidous." Public reception of Bertha as "madwoman" suggests that they were altogether unfamiliar with the female perspective on Victorian insanity.

Showalter maintains that the female perspective evidenced in *Jane Eyre* is rare. "Women did not have access to the pages of the professional journals that discussed the statistics and the theories of insanity. There were not female medical officers to speak about the psychology of women... We do not hear the voices of female lunatic patients, either." If women could not ascertain feminine experiences of insanity through psychology, Showalter argues that they must access other forms of literature; "to find the female perspective on insanity, we must turn to Victorian women's diaries and novels... the psychological fiction of Charlotte Brontë, and the sensation novels of Mary E. Braddon give us a more subtle and complex way of understanding the crises of the female life-cycle than the explanations of Victorian psychiatric medicine"

(Showalter, *The Female Malady* 60). Showalter suggests that women novelists are the principal authority on female insanity, as their accounts “are psychologically much richer than the descriptions by Victorian doctors” (*The Female Malady* 60).

Showalter’s claims seem absurd; however, scholars have argued that Victorian doctors relied upon fiction to depict madness. Helen Small claims that John Conolly, the superintendent of the Hanwell County Asylum in Middlesex and “the most famous alienist of his generation,” appropriated literature to create case-studies on madness (Scull). Referring to Conolly’s *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity: with Suggestions for the Better Protection and Care of the Insane* (1830), Small claims that “a striking number of [his case-studies] are literary... in that they are taken from novels, poetry, and plays.” However, Small admits that “his references to female patients noticeably depart from literary stereotypes, and their tone tends to be oddly comic or strained.” Small concludes that “there are significantly few of them” (Small 50). Perhaps the limited representations of female patients in Conolly’s studies are a consequence of the scarce fictional “madwomen,” if the former is truly dependent upon the latter.

Referencing medical accounts published after October 1847, Showalter asserts that Bertha Mason’s “violence, dangerousness, and rage, her regression to an inhuman condition and her sequestration became such a powerful model for Victorian readers, including psychiatrists, that it influenced even medical accounts of female insanity.” Referencing Conolly’s *Treatment of the Insane Without Mechanical Restraints* (1856), Showalter argues that “the image of Bertha Mason haunts” its pages:

Lady patients at home, Conolly writes, are ‘quite estranged’ from all their relatives; ‘all their conduct has been fierce and unnatural’ and the house itself is rendered ‘awful by the presence of a deranged creature under the same roof: her voice; her sudden and violent efforts to destroy things or persons; her vehement rushings to fire and window; her very

tread and stamp in her dark and disordered and remote chamber, have seemed to penetrate the whole house; and, assailed by her wild energy, the very walls and roof have appeared unsafe, and capable of partial demolition.’ (*The Female Malady* 68)

Showalter concludes, “surely it is Brontë’s Bertha Mason that Conolly describes and her final successful effort to burn down Thornfield that is hinted at in his imagery of conflagration and destruction” (*The Female Malady* 68). Evidently, Victorian psychology, especially that reliant on fictional accounts of madwomen, produces exaggerated and dramatic cases of madness. Porter expands upon Bertha Mason’s influence, arguing that she became the stereotypical madwoman of the Victorian period. “The female maniac assumed prominence in Bertha Mason... Depressive, hysterical, suicidal, and self-destruction behaviour thus became closely associated, from Victorian times, with stereotypes of womanhood in the writings of the psychiatric profession, in the public mind, and amongst women themselves” (Porter, *Madness* 87-8). Porter argues that Bertha Mason even informed Victorian women’s understanding of themselves.

Jane Eyre appears to be one of the most authentic depictions of female insanity existent in a period when the number of women in insane asylums was increasing. Showalter claims that accounts of female insanity by women authors:

suggest that the rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history’s self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population. (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 73)

The “madwoman” as a consequence of Victorian gender ideology is certainly supported within the historical accounts of the period, as they are equally concerned with women as deviants.

Small asserts that historical accounts detailing improper confinement both confirmed and exploited earlier novels that exaggerated the corruption of English lunacy laws. These historical

accounts triggered the genre of sensation fiction, which influenced future historical accounts.

Small argues:

The year 1858-9 saw the first of two major ‘lunacy panics’ in Britain, following the exposure of numerous cases in which sane men and women had been wrongly diagnosed as insane... the scandal brought into the open many of the covert antagonisms which had made themselves felt in fictional writing about the medical treatment of insanity over the previous decade. (Small 184-5)

The exposure of numerous cases of wrongful confinement, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, verified “the covert antagonisms” featured in prior fictional writing and fueled public fears. Showalter argues that following the second lunacy panic of 1876-77, both Georgina and Louisa’s historical accounts “drew attention to the abuses of the system, and especially to the power that could be exerted by vengeful husbands over erring wives” (“Victorian Women” 174). Small references several sensation novels which followed the first lunacy panic, including Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s “hugely popular” *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1861) and Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash* (1864). Small contends that these novels gave “imaginative force to public fears about the competence and trustworthiness of doctors who cared for the mad” (Small 184).

Small claims that Rosina Bulwer Lytton’s improper confinement, among others, inspired Wilkie Collins’ sensational novel, *The Woman in White*. According to Small, Collins’ “response to the issue of wrongful incarceration cannot be fully understood... without reference to one further person:” Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, whose controversial incarceration of his wife would have, Small asserts, been familiar to Collins (Small 186-7). Small claims that “dramatic though it was, the Lytton scandal was not the only case likely to have affected Collins’s... thinking about female insanity in 1859-60” (Small 190). Small references Collins’ relationship with the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, who, beginning in 1840, had his wife Isabella in and out of asylums for fifty years. Small additionally asserts that “Collins’s Laura Fairlie and Anne

Catherick have been identified” with several women who were victims of false incarceration (Small 191).

In contrast to Small, Nicholson contends that the exaggerated narratives of sensation fiction directly shaped public perception of English lunacy laws, instead of historical accounts. “The part played by the sensational novelists in raising public awareness of the need for lunacy reform cannot be underestimated. These novelists shaped the public perception of the lunacy problem, and created the expectation of sensational stories of wrongful incarceration and dramatic escape.” Nicholson asserts that sensation novels even began to influence historical accounts of lunacy, referencing Georgina Weldon’s adoption of Charles Reade and Collins “Indeed, when Georgina Weldon came to tell her story of the incarceration attempt, she adopted many of the stylistic devices of the sensational novelists” (Nicholson 145).

Nicholson asserts that Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash*, which features the wrongful confinement of a son by his father, appears to have influenced one woman in particular: Rosina Bulwer Lytton. After publishing, Reade argued that he had “made something happen,” implying that *Hard Cash* had brought “to light numerous cases in which the grounds for committal to an asylum were in doubt” (Small 192). The conviction behind Reade’s fictional account influenced Rosina enough for her to solicit his advice regarding her own experiences. Rosina’s letter is no longer extant; however, Reade’s response, dated 28 February 1864, is:

‘Dear Madam, The narrative you have sent me is indeed a romance. I cannot however but think that the idea of incarcerating you first occurred *seriously* to Sir E L. after your appearance on the Hustings at Hertford. You then terrified as well as provoked him; and I think I could almost divine who it was that whispered in his ear, what facilities the lunacy laws afford, for disposing of inconvenient wives. The large sum Hill was to receive, double your own most moderate demand, is a proof that Sir E was seriously disturbed, and not master of a very cool judgement.’ Reade goes on to remark that Rosina’s own account of her forcible committal ‘rather takes the shine out of the parallel scene in *Hard Cash*.’ (Blain 211-2)

Reade asserts that the reality of men disposing of “inconvenient wives” “rather takes the shine out of” fictional accounts. Reade’s fictional *Hard Cash* affected Rosina Bulwer Lytton enough for her to communicate with the author regarding her own account of improper confinement. Reade’s advice appears to have been solicited, as he suggests that “Sir E” conspired with Hill to incarcerate Rosina.

Similar to Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s sensational novel appears to reproduce historical accounts of madness and wrongful incarceration. Showalter argues that *Lady Audley’s Secret* parallels a particular case study of John Conolly’s; however, it is unclear whether Braddon would have had access to the study. Showalter asserts that the plot of *Lady Audley’s Secret* “echoes one of Conolly’s case studies of a woman with puerperal insanity. This ‘sensitive woman, whose mother had been insane, became deranged and melancholic almost as soon as her poor little child came into the world of want.’ Before her confinement, her husband had ‘left her, and his home, and his country, to seek employment in Australia’” (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 71-2).

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, like Charlotte Brontë, employs a specific type of insanity without referencing it directly in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Just as Bertha Mason is never diagnosed with moral insanity, Lady Audley is neither explicitly said to be suffering from puerperal insanity. Both Brontë and Braddon provide accounts of female insanity that were being experienced by nineteenth century women. Showalter goes on to argue that the female insanity in *Lady Audley’s Secret* is reproduced by later sensation novels, describing Braddon’s narrative as the “prototype:” “In the sensation novels of the 1860s and 1870s, for which Mary Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* is a prototype, madness, usually hereditary in the female line, is the standard explanation for any act of feminine passion, self-assertion, or violence” (Showalter,

“Victorian Women” 175). As Bertha Mason becomes the stereotypical madwoman, the madness of *Lady Audley’s Secret* becomes a convention in the late nineteenth-century.

The substantial influence of the literary “madwoman” on the larger discourse, referring to both psychological convictions and public perceptions, is complicated. A deficiency of women writing on their experiences with madness, especially prior to the publication of *Jane Eyre*, meant that Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason heavily impacted understandings of female madness. The contributions of Charlotte Brontë and Mary Elizabeth Braddon on authentic representations of female madness in Victorian England is stressed by many scholars. Women who publicized their narratives of madness and improper confinement, like Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Louisa Lowe, and Georgina Weldon, managed to maintain their outrage amidst Victorian conventions of femininity. The relationship of these three women to their husbands, all separated from them and considered to be tarnishing their reputation, is significant to their confinement. Men attempted to control women who were otherwise irrepressible, inconvenient, and uncontrollable. The role of the humiliated husband in these accounts is significant, as public defamation, scandal, and rejection from wives warrants their confinement. Despite expectations of silence, passivity, and non-resistance, evinced in the criticism their writing received, historical accounts published by women existed as a provocation toward the patriarchal institutions that sought to control and repress them.

Chapter II: Madness in Gothic Fiction

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

Jane Eyre is notable for its confined madwoman, an accomplishment of the madwoman's husband, as he erases both her identity as "Mrs. Rochester," his wife, and her identity as Bertha Antoinetta Mason, "the mysterious lunatic kept [in Thornfield] under watch and ward" (Brontë 318). Resultantly, he dismisses his responsibilities as her husband. Not until he is caught in the church with Jane Eyre, the governess he wished to make his (second) wife, does Edward Fairfax Rochester confirm that he has disposed of his wife, Bertha Mason. He confesses: "Bigamy is an ugly word!—I meant, however, to be a bigamist... I have been married, and the woman to whom I was married lives!" (Brontë 318). Edward then reveals Bertha's "den" on the third story of Thornfield and explains their fifteen years of marriage in "only minutes" (Brontë 234, 332). In *Jane Eyre*, madness is expressed as an inconvenience. Edward hates his wife because she is uncontrollable and insubordinate, both characteristics of her madness. Bertha's existence hinders him from acquiring "another and better wife" (Brontë 336). So, Edward confines her and erases her from his narrative. To emphasize Bertha's erasure within the narrative, she is named a mere seven times, in contrast to Jane Eyre's 365 and Blanche Ingram's nineteen. Significantly, Blanche Ingram, the Englishwoman who copies young Bertha Mason's beauty and attracts Edward's attention for that reason, is afforded more attention than the original. "Bertha Mason is mad" Edward declares to justify her eleven years of confinement (Brontë 319). While Bertha Mason is arguably raving mad, her madness cannot be uncoupled from her unfeminine, uncontrollable, and inconvenient behaviour. As Jane Eyre's madness is expressed similarly within the narrative, *Jane Eyre* suggests that female madness is representative of uncontrollable, unnatural women.

Edward is first introduced to Bertha Mason by his father, who presents her as the daughter of “Mr. Mason, a West India planter and merchant” (Brontë 332). Not until later does he learn that she is the daughter of “an infamous woman,” whom he terms “the Creole” (Brontë 335, 319). He is sent to Spanish Town, Jamaica “to espouse a bride already courted for me” (Brontë 332). Reflecting upon his introduction, Edward affirms that Bertha Mason requires one to be on their “guard;” he understands himself to have fallen for her because he was once “ignorant, raw, and inexperienced” (Brontë 320, 333). Edward describes how he was deluded into espousing her: “I seldom saw her alone, and had very little private conversation with her. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her” (Brontë 333). Edward imagines Bertha to be an enchanting, desirable wife, emphasized by the admiration and envy of “all the men in her circle;” she is so agreeable in her initial silence that he admits: “I thought I loved her.” The madwoman as enchanting and fiendish occurs in *Lady Audley's Secret*, as well. Lucy Graham, like Bertha Mason, is dangerous because she manipulates an unsuspecting man into marrying her; in both these situations, the man is the victim of the madwoman's treachery.

Edward reflects upon his introduction to Bertha Mason and uncovers his initial attraction toward her:

My father said nothing about her money; but he told me Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic. Her family wished to secure me because I was of a good race; and so did she. They showed her to me in parties, splendidly dressed. . . . She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. (Brontë 333)

Edward presents himself as enchanted by Bertha Mason's opulence and attention, as she both “flattered” and “pleasure[d]” him. Bertha's success in securing a husband is attributed to her

concealment, as Edward is able to project his desires and emotions onto her. He additionally attests that he knew “nothing about her money,” suggesting that he was infatuated with her physicality. Undeniably, Edward initially desired Bertha Mason. He agrees that she “was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty,” concluding that “I found her a fine woman.” Edward’s physical attraction to Bertha reveals itself as he describes young Bertha as being “in the style of” Blanche Ingram, suggesting that they are of comparable beauty.

As Edward only utilizes three descriptors (“tall, dark, and majestic”) to recount young Bertha Mason, and because she is absent for most of the narrative, Bertha can be imagined through a description of Blanche Ingram. Mrs. Fairfax summarizes Blanche’s appearance: “*Tall*, fine bust, sloping shoulders; long, graceful neck: olive complexion, *dark* and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester’s: large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair; raven-black and so becomingly arranged” (Brontë 172, emphasis mine). When Jane encounters Blanche for herself, she adds, “If [Edward] liked the *majestic*, she was the very type of majesty: then she was accomplished, sprightly.” (Brontë 186, emphasis mine). The similarities between Bertha Mason and Blanche Ingram are significant because Edward seeks out a mistress who resembles his wife. Once confining Bertha in Thornfield, Edward leaves for the continent, claiming “my fixed desire was to seek and find a good and intelligent woman, whom I could love: a contrast to the fury I left” (Brontë 339). Edward’s usage of “the fury” to describe Bertha is significant as it signifies his contempt for her raging madness (OED). He expands: “I longed only for what suited me — for the antipodes of the Creole” (Brontë 340). Bertha as “the Creole” is ambiguous; H. Adlai Murdoch explains that “whether or not [Bertha] is both racially and culturally Creole remains” unclear (Murdoch 7). “Creole” can denote “a descendant of white European settlers... who is born in a colonized

country,” “any person of mixed ancestry born in a country previously colonized by white Europeans,” or “a person of black African descent born in the Caribbean” (OED). Despite the ambiguity of Bertha’s ethnicity, Blanche *is* arguably “the antipodes of the Creole,” as she is an Englishwoman, whose name unfortunately translates to “white” or “pale” (OED). Edward potentially conflates madness and darkness in more ways than one; Blanche as “white” can emphasize her race and can connote purity, indicating that she is of a sound mind.

Bertha as “the Creole” does not prevent Edward from marrying her. Edward marries Bertha knowing that the Masons’ “wished to secure me because I was of a good race” (Brontë 333). The etymology of “race” in nineteenth-century England may refer to ethnicity or ancestry; nevertheless, assigning Edward to being “of a good race” signifies that there are both “good” and “not good” races. It is implied that Bertha is of the latter category and Edward claims that Bertha agrees with her family. Bertha’s agreement suggests that she was willing to appease Edward to “secure” him and his “good race.” Edward insists that Bertha “allured me” into marrying her and that her “nature” was not revealed to him until after they were married (Brontë 334). Once married, Edward laments: “I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her. I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature: I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners—and, I married her” (Brontë 334). The qualities Edward desires in his wife, “modesty,” “benevolence,” “candour,” and “refinement in her mind and manners,” are evidently associated with Victorian conventions of femininity. Bertha as a Creole woman is considered undesirable by her husband, who soon understands her to be a madwoman.

The distinction between “good races” and “not good races” resembles one of the earliest binaries established in *Jane Eyre*, which is utilized to create a proper code of conduct for girls.

Relying heavily on biblical ideologies, the binary separates the “good girl” from the “naughty girl” and the young heroine is subject to these categories until they become ingrained within her. Early in the narrative, Jane Eyre is preparing for her entry into Lowood Institution, a charitable school for orphan girls, when the superintendent, Mr. Brocklehurst, addresses her: “Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?” (Brontë 29). Jane has been made to believe that she is not a good child: “Impossible to reply to this in the affirmative: my little world held a contrary opinion: I was silent. Mrs. Reed answered for me by an expressive shake of the head” (Brontë 29). Jane’s aunt and guardian, Mrs. Reed, has impressed upon ten year old Jane that her behaviour is “not good.” The narrative opens with a similar revelation, as Jane is punished for her “unnatural” behaviour:

[Mrs. Reed] regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she... could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner—something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children. (Brontë 1)

Jane is kept “at a distance” and isolated from the individuals at Gateshead for her unacceptable disposition, as she is neither a “sociable” nor “childlike” child. Mrs. Reed conveys to Jane that she must acquire a “more natural” manner to be included; her language suggests that Jane is confined because her behaviour is unnatural and unexplainable.

Mr. Brocklehurst communicates similar punishment to Jane, but he institutes gendered expectations of children. He concludes, “No sight so sad as that of a naughty child... especially a naughty little girl” (Brontë 29). “Naughty” is reduplicated Mr. Brocklehurst for emphasis; he claims that there is “no sight so sad as that of a naughty child,” yet he clarifies that there is a sadder sight, if the “naughty child” is a “naughty little girl.” Mr. Brocklehurst reveals that women are held to a stricter moral and social code, even as children. Women are more vulnerable to being labelled “naughty” and are subject to stricter punishment for that label,

suggested in Mrs. Reed “exclud[ing]” Jane from certain “privileges.” This relates to the coupling of women and madness, as both “naughty” and “mad” are terms employed to control women who operate independently of Victorian gender ideology. The weight of these labels is revealed in Jane as she forces them onto herself and other girls. The last mention of “naughty” girls in the narrative arises when Jane questions “I wonder what sort of a girl she is—whether good or naughty” (Brontë 51). Jane reveals the effect of both Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst’s language as she determines the desirability of other women. Jane has internalized patriarchal expectations of women and learns that either she must construct her own confinement or be confined by men.

As Jane is made aware of her position as a “naughty little girl,” so is Bertha convinced that she is not of a “good race.” Consequently, Bertha becomes complicit in silencing her family secrets so that she may secure a husband of a “good race.” And while Edward’s deceit is a masculine endeavor (he asserts that the men in the Mason household sought “a good race” and the two elder Rochester’s “thought only of the thirty thousand pounds” when securing his marriage), Edward holds Bertha accountable for her family’s deception (Brontë 334). Once married, Edward reproaches his wife for her treachery:

My bride’s mother I had never seen: I understood she was dead. The honeymoon over, I learned my mistake; she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum... These were vile discoveries; but except for the treachery of concealment, I should have made them no subject of reproach to my wife, even when I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger. (Brontë 334)

The vehemence Edward expresses to describe his wife’s differences indicate that he does, in fact, reproach her. His disdain for Bertha arises from her position as “alien” to him, which can merely reference Bertha as “strange, unfamiliar, different” (OED). However, Bertha’s “alien” nature, “obnoxious” tastes, and “common, low, [and] narrow” mind are arguably symbolic of Bertha as “foreign” and “the Other” as a Creole woman.

As he considers Bertha to be “the true daughter of an infamous woman,” Edward cannot uncouple Bertha’s “alien” nature from her mother. He announces: “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!” (Brontë 335, 319). Elizabeth J. Donaldson argues that Bertha’s “madness is contextualized as a matrilineal legacy of national, ethnic identity and physical disorder.” (Donaldson 106). However, she continues, “The gestation of her madness is specifically linked to her drinking and to her sexual appetites — failures of the will, not the body, in Edward’s opinion. Therefore, despite Bertha Mason’s fated madness, Edward still holds her morally accountable for her illness” (Donaldson 106). However, Charlotte Brontë significantly determines that Bertha’s “drinking” and “sexual appetites” *are* failures of the body, as Brontë asserts: “Mrs Rochester indeed lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity” (Showalter, “Victorian Women” 165). Contradicting Edward’s opinion of his wife, Brontë links Bertha’s madness and her morally unacceptable behaviour. The relationship between madness and immorality is later supported by Edward, as he claims that he is bound to a “bad, mad, embruted partner” (Brontë 319). *Jane Eyre*, in addition to the author, assumes that madness and criminality in women are connected.

As Edward discovers Bertha’s madness and immorality, he confines his wife within his home; first, for a year in Jamaica, before transporting her to England, where she is housed within Thornfield for eleven years. Historically, a husband deciding to confine his wife at home, in early to mid-nineteenth century England, was not the most sensible recourse. Rather than confining Bertha to one of the many asylums in England, Edward imprisons her in Thornfield. As Edward does so, he recollects: “I knew that while she lived, I could never be the husband of another and better wife” (Brontë 336). However, Edward refuses to kill Bertha; he explains: “my

plans would not permit me to remove the maniac elsewhere — though I possess an old house, Ferndean Manor... where I could have lodged her safely enough... those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination” (Brontë 328-9). Remaining a sympathetic character, Edward refuses to “indirectly assassinate” his wife. Yet, he maintains complete control of Bertha whilst she is confined within Thornfield, as he “charged” those aware of her existence to “conceal... all knowledge of” Bertha (Brontë 328). He Edward additionally informs Jane that if she were mad, “in your quiet moments you should have no watcher and nurse but me” (Brontë 329). Edward’s desire to surveil and control the women he desires is evident in his language toward both Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre.

Jane exposes the way in which women must control themselves around Edward to avoid his constraint, as he entreats her to become his mistress. He vocalizes his plan to abandon Thornfield and the madwoman confined there, informing Jane: “*You* are to share my solitude. Do you understand?” (Brontë 330). Edward’s demand arguably does not allow for dissent; however, Jane objects: “I shook my head: it required a degree of courage, excited as he was becoming, even to risk that mute sign of dissent. He had been walking fast about the room, and he stopped, as if suddenly rooted to one spot. He looked at me long and hard: I turned my eyes from him, fixed them on the fire, and tried to assume and maintain a quiet, collected aspect” (Brontë 330). Jane is forced to disagree with Edward; however, the shake of her head is a “risk,” insinuating that, in her dissent, she is exposing herself to injury. Thus, to avoid further provoking him and endangering herself, Jane must quickly avert her gaze and “assume and maintain a quiet, collected aspect.” Despite Jane’s restraint, Edward threatens her:

‘Jane! will you hear reason? ... because, if you won’t, I’ll try violence.’ ... I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of frenzy more, I should be able to do nothing

with him. The present—the passing second of time—was all I had in which to control and restrain him—a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom,—and his... I took hold of his clenched hand, loosened the contorted fingers, and said to him, soothingly— ‘Sit down; I’ll talk to you as long as you like, and hear all you have to say, whether reasonable or unreasonable.’ (Brontë 330)

As Edward threatens to utilize “violence” to force Jane to remain with him, she recognizes that “a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom,—and his,” believing that Edward might kill her. In his “frenzy,” Edward appears insane and mirrors his wife’s behaviour. Edward’s violent “frenzy,” exhibited by a madwoman, results in her confinement. However, instead of confining Edward, Jane “control[s]” and “restrain[s]” him by agreeing to “hear all you have to say.” Whereas Edward relies on physical restraint and force, Jane adopts an enlightened approach to treating the insane.

Once Jane has controlled Edward, she must ultimately leave him, as she cannot be his mistress. She says “Mr. Rochester, I will *not* be yours.” He responds “it would not be wicked to love me” to which she replies: “it would to obey you” (Brontë 345). Nevertheless, Jane is momentarily ruled by “Feeling;” she considers herself “insane—quite insane” as she desires to “tell him you love him and will be his” (Brontë 346). Jane associates female sexuality with madness, as her “temptation” leaves her “body and soul” “in mutiny” (Brontë 346). Jane understands that both self-denial and self-restraint are principles attached to female sanity. As she leaves Edward, Jane describes herself as “indomitable,” arguing that “I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now” (Brontë 346). Jane “flee[s] temptation” by departing from Thornfield (Brontë 346). Jane’s sexual suppression contrasts Edward’s description of his wife: “Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë 335). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) contends that Bertha’s “intrusion” within the

narrative “provide[s] the governess with an example of how not to act” (Gilbert and Gubar 361). Confining Bertha to Jane’s “truest and darkest double,” Gilbert and Gubar reference Claire Rosenfeld’s definition of doubling: “the novelist who consciously or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles’ frequently juxtaposes ‘two characters, the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self’” (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Throughout the narrative, Jane reveals her ability to control and restrain herself, while Bertha altogether resists constraint.

Jane’s ability to control herself amidst her “madness” is evident even in her youth. Jane’s cousin, John Reed, has learned from his mother that Jane is “a dependent” who should not “live here with gentlemen’s children like us.” Deciding to “teach” her of her place, John throws his book at her, causing Jane to fall and hit her head. She responds: “You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors;” John then assails her:

I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. . . I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me ‘Rat! Rat!’ and bellowed out aloud. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who was gone upstairs: she now came upon the scene, followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot. We were parted: I heard the words— ‘Dear! dear! What a fury to fly at Master John!’ ‘Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion!’ Then Mrs. Reed subjoined— ‘Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there.’ (Brontë 6).

Jane’s “fear” of her cousin subsides when she is inspired by “pungent suffering,” understanding her lengthy and patient endurance of her cousin’s abuse. Then, Jane receives him “in a frantic sort,” insinuating violent and raging madness (OED). Jane emphasizes her “madness” with narrative delirium, as she loses awareness of her body and actions. She declares, “I don’t very well know what I did with my hands” and describes the scene auditorily: John “called” and “bellowed out aloud,” before she hears “the words” of Bessie, Abbot, and Mrs. Reed. Bessie and Abbot describe Jane as “a fury” and “a picture of passion,” conveying a “disorder or tumult of

mind approaching madness” (OED). Finally, Mrs. Reed’s instruction to “lock her” in the red-room emphasizes Jane’s “madness,” as she is confined for her behaviour.

Jane Eyre’s “madness” against “Master John” mirrors Bertha’s conduct toward her husband, as he reveals her “den” to his interrupted wedding party. Edward “invites” the clergyman, Richard Mason, and his solicitor to “to come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole’s patient, and *my wife!*” (Brontë 319). Jane describes the introduction:

The clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet. ‘Ah! sir, she sees you!’ exclaimed Grace: ‘you’d better not stay.’... The three gentlemen retreated simultaneously. Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. (Brontë 320-1)

Bertha’s raging madness commences when her husband enters the inner room on the third story. As soon as Bertha “sees” her husband, she “sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek;” Bertha’s violence against Edward is intimately vengeful. Bertha’s rage against her husband and incarcerator mirrors the rage Jane experiences as she defends herself against John Reed. Both women are understood to be “mad,” and both women are arguably provoked by patriarchal “superiors” whose presence emphasizes their own inferiority. As a madwoman with “virile force,” she is masculine and “almost equalling her husband” “in stature.” While sanity is associated with femininity, female madness is identified with the masculine and the undesirable.

Jane’s “madness” in the inception of the narrative, evinced in her inability to allow John Reed to parade his possessions and power, does not reappear as Edward threatens her with violence. Jane has learned to quietly acquiesce in order to pacify men; Edward clearly states that Bertha was unable to do so. He explains: “I found that I could not pass a single evening, nor even a single hour of the day with her in comfort; that kindly conversation could not be sustained

between us, because whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile” (Brontë 334). Edward argues that his discomfort is the result of Bertha’s natural inability (or conscious decision in the contrary) to appease him. He expects Bertha to indulge “whatever topic I started,” desiring her obedience. Contrary to Jane Eyre, Bertha does not submit to ensure Edward’s comfort; she remains authoritative, uncontrollable, and insubordinate.

As Bertha’s inconvenience results in her confinement, Mrs. Reed sends Jane to Lowood Institution for being a “burden.” Mrs. Reed deliriously describes her relationship with Jane to Jane, almost a decade after having her removed from Gateshead:

I have had more trouble with that child than anyone would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands—and so much annoyance she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition, and her sudden starts of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one’s movements! I declare she talked to me once like something mad, or like a fiend — no child ever spoke or looked as she did; I was glad to get her away from the house. (Brontë 251-2)

Mrs. Reed remembers Jane’s “incomprehensible disposition,” “sudden starts of temper,” and “continual, unnatural watchings of one’s movements,” suggesting madness. Describing Jane as both “incomprehensible” and “unnatural” emphasizes that she is unpredictable and alien. Mrs. Reed summarizes that “no child ever spoke or looked as she did.” As Jane did not resemble other children, she was “like something mad, or like a fiend,” suggesting that Mrs. Reed’s definition of madness includes socially unacceptable behaviour. Mrs. Reed’s use of supernatural language insinuates that Jane was haunting or tormenting Gateshead, as she concludes that “I was glad to get her away from the house.”

Edward similarly confesses to Jane: “I was wrong ever to bring you to Thornfield Hall, knowing as I did how it was haunted” by Bertha Mason, who he considers to be “the curse of the place” (Brontë 328). Edward understands that the madwoman “haunts” and “curses” Thornfield,

linking her to the supernatural and inhuman. He continues, “Concealing the mad-woman’s neighbourhood from you... was something like covering a child with a cloak and laying it down near a upas-tree: that demon’s vicinage is poisoned, and always was” (Brontë 329). Bertha as an “upas-tree” refers to “the Javanese tree *Antiaris toxicaria*, yielding a poisonous juice” conveying Bertha’s deadly influence (OED). Edward asserts “that demon’s vicinage is poisoned,” once again associating Bertha with the supernatural and more specifically, the devil, suggesting that she is corrupted and evil. Edward fears that his wife will have a corrupting influence on the “child”-like Jane Eyre, whom he previously informs that she possesses “much of the good and bright qualities which [I] have sought for twenty years, and never before encountered; and they are all fresh, healthy, without soil and without taint” (Brontë 237). Edward dreads that Jane, “without soil and without taint,” will be polluted with Bertha’s sins or corrupted by her influence (OED). Edward understands that it is his responsibility to protect Jane from Bertha and her influence. After Jane is brought to the third story to tend to Richard Mason, whom Bertha has bitten and stabbed, she announces “I was afraid of some one coming out of the inner room,” to which Edward responds: “But I had fastened the door—I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb—my pet lamb—so near a wolf’s den, unguarded” (Brontë 234). Jane is domesticated whilst Bertha is fierce and beastly and Edward is the “shepherd” who supervises both.

Bertha as a “wolf” justifies Edward “fasten[ing] the door” to her “wolf’s den.” Bertha’s association with the supernatural warrants the madwoman’s confinement and isolation. However, Valerie Beattie argues that Charlotte Brontë associates madness with power:

It is all too often assumed that Bertha is materially powerless because of her consignment to the attic... whereas in fact, she spends more narrative time out of the attic, verbally and physically, than in it. In this, Brontë appears to be exploring a complexity of power relations... Michel Foucault has pointed out that relations of power rely upon a certain

form of liberty: ‘One must observe that there cannot be relations of power unless the subjects are free. If one or the other were completely at the disposition of the other and became his thing, and object on which he can exercise an infinite and unlimited violence, there would not be relations of power.’ (Beattie 495)

Within the narrative, Edward’s confinement and surveillance of his wife are largely ineffective.

Bertha cannot be denied her agency and refuses to remain constrained in her movements.

Edward desires power and control in confining her within Thornfield, but Bertha maintains certain power. Beattie continues, “the double downfall (of Rochester and Thornfield) that Bertha single-handedly brings about is inexplicable without an informed concept of agency/power relations. Brontë’s overlapping of madness and power indicates a deliberate undermining of the disciplinary force of confinement” (Beattie 495). However, Bertha as “madwoman,” emphasis on both *mad* and *woman*, leaves her vulnerable to confinement and control. Jane, in her “madness,” is equally liable to confinement.

As Jane is taken away to the red-room by Bessie and Abbot for “fly[ing] at Master John,” she understands herself to be “*out* of myself” and consequently, “liable to strange penalties:”

I resisted all the way: a new thing for me, and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me. The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself; or rather *out* of myself, as the French would say: I was conscious that a moment’s mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties, and, like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths. (Brontë 7)

Jane’s “mutiny,” or her rebellion against her “master,” has led to her confinement to the red-room and her “resistance” to this confinement can be understood as madness, as she explains that “I was a trifle beside myself; or rather *out* of myself.” Jane as “*out* of herself” implies that she has lost control of her mental faculties and is both insane and delirious in her “resistance” (OED). Jane’s “madness” is an inconvenience, as it “strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me.” Jane, already “liable to strange penalties,” concludes: “I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths.”

Jane “go[ing] all lengths” as she is brought to the red-room mirrors Bertha’s behaviour as Edward reveals her “den” to his interrupted wedding party. Jane announces that Edward “would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges” (Brontë 320).

Like Jane, Bertha is resolved “to go all lengths.” Bertha’s unrestrained violence against her husband results in her being physically restrained by him. Whilst Edward restrains her, Bertha’s “fiercest yells” and “convulsive plunges” persist. Edward, as her husband and incarcerator, binding her to a chair is significant, as it symbolizes his power to control and confine his wife.

Contrastingly, Jane is able to control her movements, even at a young age, and even amongst her madness. Once Bessie and Abbot have carried her to the red-room, Bessie threatens Jane with restraint:

‘If you don’t sit still, you must be tied down,’ said Bessie. ‘Miss Abbot, lend me your garters; she would break mine directly.’ Miss Abbot turned to divest a stout leg of the necessary ligature. This preparation for bonds, and the additional ignominy it inferred, took a little of the excitement out of me. ‘Don’t take them off,’ I cried; ‘I will not stir.’ In guarantee whereof, I attached myself to my seat by my hands. (Brontë 7-8)

Jane notices the “preparation for bonds” and confesses that it “took a little of the excitement out of me.” She then vocalizes her ability to constrain herself and visually displays her ability, as “I attached myself to my seat by my hands.” Bessie, then, does not tie Jane to the stool as Bertha is bound to a chair. Both women are confined for their madness, Jane in the red-room and Bertha in the third story, but Jane’s ability to control her movements allows her the freedom of movement within confinement, whilst Bertha’s persistent raging madness requires physical restraint.

Edward asserts that “madwomen” are subjected to both confinement and physical restraint. As he compares Jane Eyre to his wife, he argues that even she would not escape his restraint: “if you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a strait waistcoat— your grasp, even in fury, would have a charm for me: if you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace, at least as fond as it would be restrictive” (Brontë 329). Edward presents “my arms” with “a strait waistcoat” and “fond” with “restrictive” as part of a continuum. Edward is both “a strait waistcoat” and “restrictive.” He implies that masculine affection is confining; it is because he loves Jane that he may confine and restrict her. Edward’s love protects “mad” Jane Eyre from experiencing a genuine, restrictive strait waistcoat. Despite his hatred for Bertha and admiration for Jane, Edward believes that he has the authority to restrain both women. In *Jane Eyre*, both restraint and confinement are necessary for “madwomen” (Donaldson 107).

The doubling of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason reveals that the relationship between confinement, restraint, and madness is assumed; however, Jane Eyre’s ability to internalize patriarchal expectations of women and adopt feminine behaviour allows her to avoid physical restraint. Unlike Bertha, Jane learns that either she must construct her own confinement or be confined by men. Both women are considered to be “mad” in their refusal to submit to patriarchal authority. Yet, Edward’s restraining of Bertha with rope opposes his admission that Jane would be confined by his embrace, “at least as fond as it would be restrictive.” The differentiation of physical restraint suggests that the restraint of a “madwoman” is dependent upon her desirability. Jane Eyre, while subject to confinement and vulnerable to physical restraint by Edward, is allowed certain freedom through her expressions of femininity, modesty, and generosity. Contrastingly, the movements of Bertha Mason are significant within the

narrative because she does not speak, associating female madness with violence, destruction, and agency. The relationship between madness and immorality is established, as well; Bertha is considered dangerous because she allures and manipulates Edward into marrying her. Confinement of the “madwoman” is justified as she targets an unsuspecting male victim, warranting men to revengefully restrain her, claiming protection and control.

Chapter III: Madness in Sensation Fiction

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins

Lady Audley's Secret by Mary Elizabeth Braddon

Existing in *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and *The Woman in White* (1860) is the doubling of women; specifically, the doubling of a “madwoman” and a “sane” woman. The doubling of Brontë’s Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre, Braddon’s Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks, and Collins’ Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie represents three significant features of women. First, doubling emphasizes the duplication or interchangeability of women, most obviously expressed in the conspiracy to confound the identities of Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, which concludes in Laura clothed in a false name and Anne buried under a false name. Second, doubling reveals the duplicity of woman, which clearly warns against the ability of a woman to deceive (principally men) regarding her identity. This is evidenced in both Sir Michael Audley and Robert Audley’s infatuation with Lady Audley, and Alicia Audley’s immediate ability “to see, through the normal expression of [Lady Audley’s] face, another expression that is equally a part of it” (Braddon 73). Thirdly, doubling defines the dualities of sanity and insanity, suggesting that a woman’s identity is dependent upon other women. The difference between two women must be established to diagnose madness in one or the other, suggested as Edward compares Bertha to Jane, contrasting “this face with that mask—this form with that bulk” (Brontë 321). Evidently, comparisons between women are necessary to define difference and madness.

In juxtaposing *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, Lady Audley can be understood as a female fantasy madwoman, while Laura Fairlie is a male fantasy madwoman. Lady Audley, who becomes dangerous through her beauty, is manipulative, authoritative, and cunning. Unlike Collins’ Laura Fairlie, who passively

endures the asylum and requires a man to punish those who wrongfully incarcerated her, Lady Audley possesses agency. Providing an against-the-grain reading of *Lady Audley's Secret*, a text which paradoxically features a woman who declares herself to be a “madwoman” and a doctor who asserts that she “is not mad... she is dangerous!”, the comparison between Lady Audley and the madwomen of *The Woman in White* can suggest that madness in both Braddon and Collins’ narratives is ambiguous (Braddon 372). Specifically, employing Charlotte Brontë’s definition of moral insanity, which considers sin to be madness, Lady Audley’s behaviour, which is overwhelmingly deceitful and violent, cannot be explained through anything but madness. Moreover, both novels rely on the definition of madness as undefinable; however, both portray an exclusively female kind of madness. Collins’ descriptions of seemingly “sane” women through the discourse of madness and Braddon’s suggestion that criminality and madness are indistinguishable in women presents “madness” and “sanity” in women as ambiguous and interchangeable.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley's Secret* chronicles the brief marriage of Lucy Graham, now Lady Audley, to Sir Michael Audley. During their two-year marriage, Robert Audley, Sir Michael’s nephew, uncovers Lady Audley’s relationship to his missing friend, George Talboys. Discovering that Lady Audley is Helen Talboys, George’s wife, who faked her own death after her husband “ran away to Australia, and left the lady, a week or two after her baby was born,” Robert Audley confronts Lady Audley about her past (Braddon 242). Lady Audley is “defiant” and disregards his charges (Braddon 294). Learning that Robert Audley desires to find someone who will “identify her” as Helen Talboys, Lady Audley realizes that “hee will do it, unless some strange calamity befalls him, and silences him for ever” (Braddon 306). She then endeavors to set fire to the inn in which he is staying. However, Robert Audley

survives the fire and confronts Lady Audley again. The titular character of *Lady Audley's Secret* then confesses her secret, "You have conquered—a MAD WOMAN!" and Robert Audley is assigned "the awful responsibility of a wicked woman's fate upon his shoulders" (Braddon 340).

Sir Michael entreats his nephew to "take upon yourself the duty of providing for the safety and comfort of this lady whom I have thought my wife" (Braddon 352). The exposure of Lady Audley's duplicity, as she discloses her past as Helen Maldon, her first marriage to George Talboys, and her hereditary insanity, is enough to convince Sir Michael, who has no knowledge of her crimes relating to the disappearance of George Talboys, that Lady Audley was never his wife. Robert Audley considers his uncle "the generous old man whose fatal confidence in a wicked woman had brought much misery upon his declining years" (Braddon 371). Considering that his uncle's misery is a consequence of his own "discovery," Robert Audley requests that Dr. Alwyn Mosgrave, a "physician experienced in cases of mania," "save our stainless name from degradation and shame" (Braddon 371). He later admits to the doctor that "my greatest fear is the necessity of any exposure—any disgrace" (Braddon 372). Robert Audley desires to "quietly put away" Lady Audley within a madhouse to avoid degradation, shame, exposure, and disgrace of the Audley name (Braddon 378). Dr. Mosgrave advises him against "any *esclandre*," arguing that "no jury in the United Kingdom would condemn her upon such evidence" (Braddon 372). Without evidence connecting Lady Audley to the death of her first husband, Robert Audley can only be concerned with the degradation, shame, exposure, and disgrace relating to her confession of madness, and her resultant bigamy and entrapment of his uncle. The exposure of Sir Michael's mad wife would, according to Robert Audley, dishonor the "stainless" Audley name, suggesting that madness and publicity affects the reputation of those associated with the madwoman.

Robert understands himself to be Lady Audley's "judge and ... her jailer. Not until he had... given up his charge into the safe-keeping of the foreign mad-house doctor, not until then would the dreadful burden be removed from him and his duty done" (Braddon 375). Controlling Lady Audley is considered to be Robert Audley's "charge," "burden," and "duty," insinuating that men have the responsibility of restraining women. A similar sentiment is expressed by Walter Hartright in *The Woman in White*, who understands it "my duty, and every man's duty... to control" the actions of the "madwoman" Anne Catherick, who has escaped from the asylum (Collins 31-2). Robert Audley as "judge" and "jailer" emphasizes his authority to decide and determine Lady Audley's freedom and movement.

However, Robert Audley is not the only man within the novel possessing the power to police and confine women; once George Talboys' father learns of his daughter-in-law's confinement, he is described as having "an earnest wish that my lady had been his wife, and that he might thus have had the pleasure of making a signal example of her" (Braddon 425). Lady Audley as "a signal example" implies that her behaviour would be used as a "warning" to control and influence the behaviour of other women (OED). Mr. Talboys desires to punish Lady Audley for her behaviour, as he argues "I can only remark that, had the lady fallen into my hands, she would have been very differently treated" (Braddon 425). As Robert Audley and Mr. Talboys discuss the treatment of the madwoman, they situate men as superior to and responsible for women. Ultimately confining Lady Audley to a Belgian madhouse, Robert Audley even determines her identity, informing his aunt, "Your name is Madam Taylor here" (Braddon 383). Ridding Lady Audley of her name both denies her agency and erases her identity; in the asylum, "Lady Audley" does not exist.

“Lady Audley” arguably dies when Robert Audley disposes of her within the asylum and ensures that “Madame Taylor” cannot be associated with Audley Court. He concludes that “the dark story of ... [George Talboys’] wicked wife had been finished in the Belgian mad-house” (Braddon 407). The madwoman’s life as “finished” by the asylum is forewarned by Dr. Mosgrave. Providing Robert Audley with the address to the Belgian asylum, he summarizes: “From the moment in which Lady Audley enters that house ... her life, so far as life is made up of action and variety, will be finished.... If you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations” (Braddon 373-4). To save the Audley’s from degradation, Lady Audley must be “shut from the world and all worldly associations,” preventing her from exposing their name to madness. To dispose of a “madwoman” within the asylum metaphorically ends her life, as she is isolated from “the world and all worldly associations.” Robert Audley instructs Alicia Audley to “naturally avoid all mention of Lady Audley’s name” once he removes her from Audley Court, treating his aunt as if she had died (Braddon 356).

The asylum, however, literally ends Lady Audley’s life, as well. After a year of confinement, Robert Audley receives a letter announcing “the death of a certain Madame Taylor, who had expired peacefully at Villebrumeuse, dying after a long illness, which Monsieur Val describes as a *maladie de langueur*” (Braddon 436). Lady Audley’s “long illness” translates to listlessness and inactivity, suggesting that her treatment within the asylum resulted in her death. Lady Audley’s confinement to the asylum is arguably justifiable; however, Charlotte Brontë’s definition of madness, as it encompasses sin, is applicable to Lady Audley’s immoral and criminal behaviour which she herself attributes to her madness.

The madhouse in *Lady Audley's Secret* effectively silences and disposes of madwomen.

As Robert accompanies Lady Audley to the madhouse, the narrator recounts the moment “my lady” realizes where she has been brought:

One of the windows was shrouded by a scanty curtain of faded red; and upon this curtain there went and came a dark shadow, the shadow of a woman with a fantastic head dress, the shadow of a restless creature, who paced perpetually backward and forward before the window. Sir Michael Audley's wicked wife laid her hand suddenly upon Robert's arm, and pointed with the other hand to this curtained window. ‘I know where you have brought me, she said. ‘This is a MAD-HOUSE.’ (Braddon 379)

The woman Lady Audley “pointed” to is indistinguishable behind the “curtained window.” She is understood as “a dark shadow” “of a woman” and “a restless creature.” This imagery associates darkness with madness, as darkness connotes an “absence of moral or spiritual light” (OED). Moreover, she is merely a “shadow” of a woman, suggesting that she has no identity and is therefore nonexistent. Her movements are defined by indefinite restlessness and inactivity, as she “paced perpetually backward and forward before the window.” The “madwoman” behind the curtain symbolizes Lady Audley’s existence within the asylum, as it is described by Dr. Mosgrave and evinced in the description of her death.

Lady Audley recognizes that men are in charge of confining and silencing women, as she identifies Robert Audley as her incarcerator. Monsieur Val, the proprietor of the asylum in Villebrumeuse, Belgium, is entertaining “Robert and his charge, when madam rises suddenly, erect and furious, and dropping her jeweled fingers from before her face, tells him to hold his tongue. ‘Leave me alone with the man who has brought me here,’ she cried, between her set teeth” (Braddon 383). Lady Audley’s “fury,” connoting raging madness, toward Robert Audley emphasizes her frustration and vulnerability regarding patriarchal policing. She demands to be left “alone with the man who has brought me here” and refuses to quietly accept her confinement. She accuses Robert Audley of bringing “me to my grave,” arguing that “you have

used your power basely and cruelly, and have brought me to a living grave” (Braddon 384). Lady Audley discerns Robert’s “power” and her powerlessness, as she has been confined “to a living grave,” allusively describing her own death.

She then announces to Robert Audley that ‘George Talboys treated me as you treated me... He swore that if there was but one witness of my identity, and that witness was removed from Audley Court by the width of the whole earth, he would bring him there to swear to my identity, and to denounce me. It was then that I was mad” (Braddon 386). Lady Audley argues that her madness is initiated by men. Just as George Talboys claims that he will “denounce” his wife, Robert Audley terms himself “the denouncer of this wretched woman” (Braddon 375). Both men desire “to declare” Lady Audley “to be wicked or evil” (Braddon 375, OED). Denouncing Lady Audley implies that they determine her punishment and control, which Lady Audley defies on each occasion, as she becomes raging mad.

Criminality and madness are linked in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as in *Jane Eyre*. Lady Audley describes how madness is afflicted by “temptation” and “craving” of “violence and horror:”

People are insane for years and years before their insanity is found out... Sometimes a paroxysm seizes them, and in an evil hour they betray themselves. They commit a crime, perhaps. The horrible temptation of opportunity assails them; the knife is in their hand, and the unconscious victim by their side. They may conquer the restless demon and go away and die innocent of any violent deed; but they *may* yield to the horrible temptation—the frightful, passionate, hungry craving for violence and horror. They sometimes yield and are lost. (Braddon 283-4)

As Lady Audley arguably chronicles her own experiences with madness, she associates immorality with madness and argues that crime *is* madness. Lady Audley’s “evil hour” occurs in the lime-walk at Audley Court, when George Talboys threatens that “he would bring” someone who could “swear to” Lady Audley’s identity as Helen Talboys and “denounce” her. “The horrible temptation of opportunity assails” her, as she confesses to Robert Audley: “it was then

that I was mad, it was then that I drew the loose iron spindle from the shrunken wood, and saw my first husband sink with one horrible cry into the black mouth of the well” (Braddon 386).

When Robert Audley discovers the incriminating evidence connecting Lady Audley with “last night's deed of horror,” or the attempted murder and the arson at Mount Stanning, he denounces her:

If I have wondered sometimes... that a young and lovely woman should be capable of so foul and treacherous a murder, all wonder is past. After last night's deed of horror, there is no crime you could commit, however vast and unnatural, which could make me wonder. Henceforth you must seem to me no longer a woman, a guilty woman with a heart which in its worst wickedness has yet some latent power to suffer and feel; I look upon you henceforth as the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle. (Braddon 340)

The criminality of Lady Audley's actions leads Robert Audley to denounce her. The attempted murder confirms to Robert that Lady Audley is “capable” of the supposed “foul and treacherous” murder of George Talboys. Lady Audley's immorality transforms her from “a young and lovely woman” into “the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle.” The “vast and unnatural” crimes she is charged with determines her to be equally unnatural. Robert Audley dispossesses Lady Audley of her femininity and subjectivity; she becomes the embodiment of evil and the antithesis of woman. Henceforth, Lady Audley is termed both “wicked” and “wretched,” emphasizing her moral depravity. As utilized by Edward Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Robert Audley's employment of the supernatural (“unnatural,” “demoniac incarnation,” and “evil principle”) to describe Lady Audley connotes her madness.

Lady Audley's criminality additionally distinguishes her from her double within the narrative, Phoebe Marks, Lady Audley's maid. Described as being alike “inwardly as well as outwardly,” the narrator explains:

There were sympathies between her and [Phoebe Marks], who was like herself, inwardly as well as outwardly—like herself, selfish, and cold, and cruel, eager for her own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance; angry with the lot that had been cast

her, and weary of dull dependence. My lady... clung to this pale-faced, pale-haired girl, whom she thought neither better nor worse than herself (Braddon 296).

However, Lady Audley's criminality differentiates her from Phoebe Marks, the woman is who understood to be equally as "selfish, and cold, and cruel" as herself. The "sympathies" between the two women emphasize Lady Audley's madness and criminality as unforgivable, as the woman who resembles Lady Audley denounces her for her crimes. When Phoebe registers that Lady Audley started the fire at Mount Stanning, she "fell upon her knees, clasping her uplifted hands, and appealing wildly to Lady Audley. 'Oh, my God!' she cried. 'Say it's not true, my lady, say it's not true! It's too horrible, it's too horrible, it's too horrible!'" (Braddon 321). For the first time within the narrative, Lady Audley's selfishness is "too horrible" for Phoebe Marks, emphasizing her shock and repulsion. Lady Audley, who has attempted to rid herself of the men who threaten her advancement, is too "wicked," even for Phoebe Marks (Braddon 321). Significantly, it is Phoebe Marks who provides Robert Audley the information connecting Lady Audley to the fire at Mount Stanning. She admits to aiding in the confinement of Lady Audley, as she addressed Robert: "You know what I told you when I found you safe and well upon the night of the fire... I told you what I suspected; what I think still" (Braddon 403). Phoebe Marks who is equally duplicitous, self-seeking, and eager for her own advancement, allows for Lady Audley's madness and criminality to be restrained and confined.

Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), in contrast to *Jane Eyre* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, constructs a male fantasy madwoman. Exposing the corruption of medical men and the allowance for improper confinement, Collins posits Laura Fairlie, the young orphaned "heiress to the estate [of Limmeridge], as the victim of a male conspiracy between her husband, Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco, who together falsely confine her within a private asylum for her inheritance (Collins 148). The novels begins: "This is the story of what a Woman's patience can

endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve" (Collins 9). The narrator is Walter Hartright, a young drawing teacher and Laura Fairlie's lover, who obsessively endeavors to expose both Sir Percival and Count Fosco for their crimes against Laura. Walter additionally authoritatively assembles the novel's storyline, as it is narrated through various characters, to publicize these crimes. Walter's opening statement establishes women (Laura) as passive and subordinate and men (himself) as active and authoritative. Contrasting "patience" with "resolution" and "endure" with "achieve," he feminizes suffering and constructs bravery as masculine. Both of the women confined within *The Woman in White* are confined because they threaten the reputation of Sir Percival Glyde. Perceived as both inconvenient and uncontrollable, "madwomen" are silenced and disposed of within the asylum.

Like Laura Fairlie, Anne Catherick is confined to the asylum by Sir Percival Glyde. He describes Anne as being "just mad enough to be shut up, and just sane enough to ruin me when she's at large" (Collins 330). Existing as Laura's doppelganger, Anne Catherick's escape from the asylum and sudden death allows for Sir Percival and Count Fosco to confine Laura as Anne. Unlike Laura, various characters consider Anne to be mad; however, like Laura, Anne is confined for reasons other than her madness. Anne Catherick has learned from her mother that Sir Percival is an illegitimate child, or at least Sir Percival has convinced himself that Anne is in possession of his "Whole Secret" (Collins 537). Merely repeating her mother's own words, Anne threatens Sir Percival after he calls her an "idiot." She asserts, "beg my pardon, directly... or I'll make it the worse for you. I'll let out your Secret. I can ruin you for life if I choose to open my lips" (Collins 536). Despite Mrs. Catherick's protestations, Sir Percival is convinced that he must silence her daughter. Mrs. Catherick explains:

It ended, as you probably guess by this time, in his insisting on securing his own safety by shutting her up... I referred him to other queer ways of hers, and to his own

experience of the vagaries of half-witted people—it was all to no purpose—he would not believe me on my oath—he was absolutely certain I had betrayed the whole Secret. In short, he would hear of nothing but shutting her up. (Collins 537)

Sir Percival funds Anne Catherick's committal to the private asylum to "secure his own safety."

Unlike Anne's mother, who he has blackmailed into keeping his secret, Anne cannot be controlled by him. He instead decides to confine her to the asylum, which he and Mrs. Catherick astutely term "shutting her up," as the asylum ensures Anne's silence.

Similarly, once Anne Catherick escapes and informs Sir Percival's wife, Laura Fairlie, that she is in possession of her husband's "full secret," he then is convinced that Laura, too, is aware of his forgery of his parents' marriage records. Sir Percival, now burdened with confining two women, conspires with Count Fosco. They enact "the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one with the other—the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Sir Percival's secret" (Collins 600).

Count Fosco explains the reasoning behind their convention:

Large sums of money, due at a certain time, were wanted by Percival... and the one source to look to for supplying them was the fortune of his wife, of which not one farthing was at his disposal until her death... I knew ... Anne Catherick, was hidden in the neighbourhood, that she was in communication with Lady Glyde, and that the disclosure of a secret, which would be the certain ruin of Percival, might be the result. He had told me himself that he was a lost man, unless his wife was silenced, and unless Anne Catherick was found. (Collins 600)

Sir Percival's paranoia leads to the improper confinement of two women. Just as Anne Catherick needed to be "shut up" within the asylum, Laura must be "silenced." The silencing and "shutting up" of women is designated to the insane asylum. Similar to both *Jane Eyre* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, women are "shut up" to preserve a man's reputation.

The details of Anne's confinement, however, are never illuminated to the reader, nor is the length of her confinement prior to her escape specified. Laura Fairlie's recollection of her

confinement only slightly illuminates treatment within the asylum. Walter states that she survives eighty-one days “under restraint” (Collins 428). Laura’s recollection of the asylum barely extends beyond the following description: “She came to herself suddenly in a strange place, surrounded by women who were all unknown to her. This was the Asylum” (Collins 428). Laura’s amnesia suggests that the asylum successfully silences women, as she claims: “They have tried to make me forget everything” (Collins 414). Walter Hartright justifies Laura’s shaken “faculties:”

From [the twenty-seventh of July] until the fifteenth of October (the day of her rescue) she had been under restraint, her identity with Anne Catherick systematically asserted, and her sanity, from first to last, practically denied. Faculties less delicately balanced, constitutions less tenderly organised, must have suffered under such an ordeal as this. No man could have gone through it and come out of it unchanged. (Collins 428)

The “sanity” of Laura Fairlie is “practically denied” within the asylum and Walter Hartright contends that “no man could have gone through it and come out of it unchanged.” The brief account of Laura Fairlie’s confinement insinuates that sane persons’ intellects and faculties shall be intensely affected by the asylum. Marian, once she rescues her sister, similarly recognizes that “her sister’s intellects... were shaken already by the horror of the situation to which she had been consigned” and so she “abstained from pressing her with any inquiries relating to events in the Asylum— her mind being but too evidently unfit to bear the trial of reverting to them” (Collins 422, 428). Within the narrative, Sir Percival and Count Fosco are presented as successfully silencing Laura Fairlie, despite Laura not possessing Sir Percival’s secret to communicate them upon her release.

As both Anne and Laura are confined by men, the novel situates confinement as a masculine endeavor. Similar to *Jane Eyre*, women are designated as patients and are controlled and restrained by men. At the novel’s opening, Walter Hartright learns that Anne Catherick, the woman he just assisted into a carriage in London, has escaped from an insane asylum. He then

questions: “what had I done? Assisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonments to escape; or cast loose on the wide world of London an unfortunate creature, whose actions it was my duty, and every man’s duty, mercifully to control?” (Collins 31-2). Walter understands that it is “every man’s duty” to control madwomen, implying that they cannot control themselves. Anne as “madwoman” acknowledges the self-control she required to successfully escape the asylum; she claims that “it was easy to escape, or I should not have got away. They never suspected me as they suspected the others. I was so quiet, and so obedient, and so easily frightened” (Collins 99). Anne’s silence, obedience, and fright suggests that she is submissive to authority, allowing her to escape without being suspected. Sir Percival similarly asserts that Anne “was the best-behaved patient they had—and, like fools, they trusted her” (Collins 330).

While Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie are confined wrongfully within *The Woman in White*, both women are considered to be “mad” when they refuse to control and deny themselves. Laura Fairlie is first described as “hysterical” by Marian when her self-restraint gives way to uncontrollable passion and sexual desire. Laura, in love with Walter Hartright but engaged to Sir Percival, has just admitted to the latter “if she must give herself in marriage... she cannot give her love,” expecting Sir Percival to sever their engagement (Collins 171). However, he responds that he will “gratefully accept your faith and truth” (Collins 172). Laura, then alone with her half-sister Marian, must prepare for her marriage to Sir Percival. She announces: “I must submit, Marian, as well as I can... My new life has its hard duties, and one of them begins to-day” (Collins 172). This “hard duty” is to “part from everything that reminds” herself of Walter, referring to “the album that contained Walter Hartright’s drawings” (Collins 172).

She hesitated for a moment, holding the little volume fondly in her hands—then lifted it to her lips and kissed it. ... ‘If I die first, promise you will give him this little book of his

drawings, with my hair in it. . . . And say—oh, Marian, say for me, then, what I can never say for myself—say I loved him!’ She flung her arms round my neck, and whispered the last words in my ear with a passionate delight in uttering them which it almost broke my heart to hear. All the long restraint she had imposed on herself gave way in that first last outburst of tenderness. She broke from me with hysterical vehemence, and threw herself on the sofa in a paroxysm of sobs and tears that shook her from head to foot. (Collins 172-3)

Significantly, Laura, while considered to be sane, is frequently described in the discourse of madness, as is Jane in *Jane Eyre*. Laura momentarily indulges her passionate love for Walter, which she must completely deny after her marriage. Marian describes Laura’s outburst as “hysterical vehemence,” suggesting that female sexuality is madness. Hysteria as a female epidemic in nineteenth-century England linked the female reproductive system with producing a specific kind of madness. Hysteria as a diagnosis, arising from the Greek *hysterika* meaning womb, assumed that women were particularly vulnerable to succumb to madness (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 12). Laura significantly is completely overtaken by her hysteria. Marian explains: “I tried vainly to soothe her and reason with her—she was past being soothed, and past being reasoned with. . . . When the fit had worn itself out she was too exhausted to speak” (Collins 173). Marian additionally argues that Laura was not “composed and like herself” until the following morning (Collins 173).

A similar outburst of passion is exhibited by Anne Catherick, who is met by Walter Hartright at the grave of Laura’s mother. Mrs. Fairlie had once “taken a violent fancy” to eleven year old Anne Catherick, who briefly attended Mrs. Fairlie’s school after being brought to Limmeridge House by her mother (Collins 60). Over a decade passes before Anne returns, as she delivers a letter to “save” Laura Fairlie from her fiancé (Collins 104). Walter finds Anne in the graveyard to reproach her, declaring “It was wrong to send such a letter, it was wrong to frighten Miss Fairlie” (Collins 103). Anne responds:

‘Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with *you!*’ Her lips murmured the words close on the grave-stone, murmured them in tones of passionate endearment, to the dead remains beneath. . . . I heard her lips kissing the stone—I saw her hands beating on it passionately. The sound and the sight deeply affected me. I stooped down, and took the poor helpless hands tenderly in mine, and tried to soothe her. It was useless. She snatched her hands from me, and never moved her face from the stone. (Collins 103-4)

Anne’s “passionate endearment” for Mrs. Fairlie cannot be “soothed” by Walter. Anne both refuses to control herself and denies Walter’s attempt to control her. As she refuses to restrain herself, Walter asserts that her behaviour could justify her being confined:

Seeing the urgent necessity of quieting her at any hazard and by any means, I appealed to the only anxiety that she appeared to feel, in connection with me and with my opinion of her—the anxiety to convince me of her fitness to be mistress of her own actions. ‘Try to compose yourself, or you will make me alter my opinion of you. Don’t let me think that the person who put you in the Asylum might have had some excuse——’ (Collins 104)

As Walter previously asserts that “it was my duty, and every man’s duty... to control” the actions of the madwoman, Anne Catherick, he now understands “the urgent necessity of quieting her at any hazard and by any means.” Arguably, controlling and “quieting,” or silencing madwomen, are synonymous, evinced in the language of confinement, where Anne and Laura are both “shut up” and silenced in the asylum.

Similar to Bertha Mason, whose madness intensifies around Edward, and Lady Audley, who is driven to madness by George Talboys and Robert Audley, Anne’s madness is provoked by Sir Percival Glyde. Walter explains:

The next words died away on my lips. The instant I risked that chance reference to the person who had put her in the Asylum she sprang up on her knees. A most extraordinary and startling change passed over her. Her face, at all ordinary times so touching to look at, in its nervous sensitiveness, weakness, and uncertainty, became suddenly darkened by an expression of maniacally intense hatred and fear, which communicated a wild, unnatural force to every feature. Her eyes dilated in the dim evening light, like the eyes of a wild animal. She caught up the cloth that had fallen at her side, as if it had been a living creature that she could kill, and crushed it in both her hands with such convulsive strength, that the few drops of moisture left in it trickled down on the stone beneath her. (Collins 104)

Walter experiences Anne's visage change as she is reminded of "the person who had put her in the Asylum," Sir Percival Glyde. Walter describes that "at all ordinary times," Anne's face possesses "nervous sensitiveness, weakness, and uncertainty" suggesting that these qualities are natural to her. Walter finds Anne's natural deficiencies "so touching," meaning that which is inherently feminine in Anne is deserving of sympathy because it associates femininity with both pity and misfortune. Anne's madness, however, is associated with the supernatural. Anne's face "darken[s]," and "every feature" becomes "wild, unnatural." Described similarly to Bertha Mason, "wild" suggests "not under, or not submitting to, control or restraint; taking, or disposed to take, one's own way; uncontrolled" (OED). Her power arises from her "hatred and fear" of Sir Percival, which is described as "maniacally intense," conveying a very high degree of "madness, particularly of a kind characterized by uncontrolled, excited, or aggressive behaviour" (OED).

Significantly, the only mention of Anne as "mad" is a direct reaction to Sir Percival. At his mention, Anne "sprang up on her knees," once again evocative of a wild animal. The power Anne possesses is expressed as both physical and mental. She has the ability to "catch," "crush," and "kill" "the cloth" in her hand, symbolizing a living creature, as "the few drops of moisture," symbolize blood. These changes in Anne, most significantly described as "maniac," are produced by Sir Percival. Anne Catherick, described similarly to Bertha Mason, is understood to be "mad" in relation to her incarcerator. Her "mad" behaviour, while portrayed as violent and dangerous, is revengeful and irrepressible because of the behaviour of Sir Percival.

The doubling of the "madwoman" and the "sane" woman in *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and *The Woman in White* (1860) defines the dualities of sanity and insanity. However, the only defining aspect of madness the three Victorian novels clearly establish through the doubling of women is the instability of female madness. The doubling of

Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks, Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, and Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre reveals that within each double, the madwomen is not quite “mad” and the sane women is not quite “sane.” For the madwoman to be considered the double of a sane woman, madness is softened, impermanent, and conditional. Nevertheless, neither the instability of madness nor the doubling of sanity and insanity allows for the “madwoman” to remain unpunished. The doubling of the two women, which defines difference and madness, uncovers Victorian anxieties surrounding feminine transgressiveness. The “madwoman” defies conventional femininity through her assertiveness and agency, becoming “masculine” in comparison to the sane woman. Thus, in each of the three novels, the “madwoman” is punished (first confined and then killed, a permanent confinement, for her transgressions) to restabilize and reduce anxiety regarding Victorian gender ideology. The doubling of the madwoman and the sane woman allows for femininity to be both defined and policed by men.

The women in each of these three novels are made dependent upon one another and consequently, are made in opposition to each other. Evidently, only one woman can remain sane and, apparently, only one woman can remain alive. Even if Bertha Mason’s madness exists as a narrative device, she commits suicide and remains a violent, criminal madwoman, erased throughout the narrative by her husband and deemed inhumanely “the Creole” and “a wild beast” (Brontë 338, 328). Even if Anne Catherick is merely the victim of false incarceration, never actually requiring confinement, she remains unidentified, buried below a tombstone displaying the wrong woman’s name, eventually to be granted “one line only” (Collins 619). Additionally, if Anne “had not died when she did,” Count Fosco admits that he would “have opened the door of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release” (Collins 612). Even if Lucy Graham “is not mad” and only “has the

hereditary taint in her blood,” her “dark story” is “finished in the Belgian mad-house,” where, under a false name, she “expired peacefully... dying after a long illness... described as a *maladie de langueur*” (Braddon 372, 407, 436). The madwoman who defies gender, who is both violent and beautiful, or childish and assertive, is punished with confinement, subjected to passivity, anonymity, and silence. Lucy Graham, Anne Catherick, Laura Fairlie, Bertha Mason, and even Jane Eyre are “shut up” (both physically confined and silenced) within private madhouses, windowless cells, and locked rooms for being irrepressible, uncontrollable, and for humiliating and threatening men.

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