“A Document in Madness:”

Reading the Persistence of the Madwoman Through Her Appropriations

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the adaptations and appropriations of two iconic "madwomen" in literature: Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* and Ophelia of *Hamlet*. Literary and artistic interpretations of these characters contrasts with, and contributes to, the more modern interpretations of literary madwomen as feminist icons found on social media. The madwoman has unfinished business as a feminist symbol which I investigate by returning to key moments within their adaptive histories, beginning with their source text and ending with popular interpretations of characters, as witnessed through the newer form of social media.

The first chapter examines the character of Bertha Mason both within Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (her hypotext or source text) and within appropriations of her character. Bertha Mason, through her adaptations, is posed as a woman who should be reviled. I argue that Bertha's many appropriations reveal the relationship between female madness and social abjection; these appropriations include Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's critical adaptation in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. This section draws on the idea, as asserted by Jean Rhys, that adaptations seek to update, through humanizing the figure of the madwoman, their source texts.

Chapter two explores Ophelia's long history of adaptation and appropriation through the issue of voicing Ophelia. Within *Hamlet*, Ophelia's voice is heavily filtered through the systems of repression she experiences and subsequent appropriations include a bid for revoicing Ophelia, most notably Paul Griffiths' *let me tell you*. I contrast Ophelia's depictions in these adaptations to those of Bertha Mason: where Bertha is reviled, Ophelia is often fetishized, a contrast that suggests mixed reception of the figure of the madwoman prior to the twentieth century. This fetishization presents through various adaptations and appropriations of Ophelia's character, including pre-Raphaelite paintings and literary adaptations. This chapter also highlights the similar critical and cultural receptions of Ophelia and Bertha, suggesting that, beginning sometime in the mid-1900s, the figure of the madwoman follows a similar cultural pattern to redemption and understanding.

In my conclusion, I engage with representations of both Ophelia and Bertha in a few objects from contemporary pop culture, but also the broader madwoman concept in order to negotiate the terms of an ambivalent relationship with madwomen and feminism, who serve, in contemporary terms, as feminist icons. Focusing on the depiction of madwoman throughout the thesis illustrates the complex, centuries-long, relationship between society and its treatment of madwomen. Here, I also track what I believe to be the next steps in the adaptive history of the literary madwoman.

Keywords: adaptation, appropriation, madwoman

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Introduction

I. The Literary Madwoman

Robert Lowell, in his introduction to Sylvia Plath's posthumously published poetry collection *Ariel* (1966), states that in the last months of her life, Plath "becomes herself."[1] "Herself," in the case of Plath, is a particularly tricky thing to nail down; Lowell posits that Plath, or "this character," as he refers to her just a single sentence later, is "hardly a person at all, or a woman," qualifying that this non-person non-woman is someone who writes in a manner which mimics a "controlled hallucination."[2] Her poems, which Lowell sums up as "personal, confessional,"[3] are "playing Russian roulette with six cartridges in the cylinder, a game of 'chicken,' the wheels of both cars locked and unable to swerve."[4] In short, Lowell heavily associates Plath's poems with someone – or something – obsessed with purposeful self-destruction. Even Plath's poems are thought to be suicidal.

Lowell's depiction of Plath draws on conventions we might associate with the depictions of "madwomen," a term that has morphed over time, initially describing female insanity, but eventually becoming a literary trope, and then a feminist touchstone. I begin with Plath not because *I* think she is a madwoman. Sylvia Plath, insofar as she was a real person who lived and breathed, and perhaps suffered from mental illness, certainly is not a madwoman. That is because "madwoman" describes a myth or type, a literary trope. In popular culture and memory, Plath has, following her infamous death by suicide in 1963, taken on the mythic characteristics of the madwoman, a figure interestingly bound up with feminist uses of Plath to express rage at the

[1] Robert Lowell, introduction to Ariel (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), vii.
[2] Lowell, introduction, vii.
[3] Lowell, introduction, vii.
[4] Lowell, introduction, viii.

patriarchy. In what writers have called "the Plath Myth,"[5] Plath's life (read: her suicide) has been collapsed into her writing, and the image of the mythic Plath madwoman has almost entirely eclipsed Plath as a Person. She has become what Lowell described her as in 1966, a woman whose mental illness and suicide have become confused with her writing prowess. Plath has been dehumanized by Lowell's (as well as others), but in the process has gained a feminist power.

In this thesis, I will be studying the figure of the madwoman in several of its guises, focusing on the two most iconic madwomen in the literary canon: Bertha Mason, originally appearing in Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and adapted by Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and Ophelia, from the hypotext (or source text) of *Hamlet* (1603) by William Shakespeare and adapted in *let me tell you* (2008) by Paul Griffiths. The term "madwoman" began as a pejorative term, with the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of a "woman who is insane,"[6] but by 1966, when Lowell wrote his introduction on Plath, has become a figure which can be used to sensationalize and celebrate a body of work.

The use of the word "madwoman" in this thesis warrants a short discussion. While many words could have (and have been) used to describe the actions of the characters studied, I have elected in this thesis to primarily refer to them as madwomen. Bertha Mason and Ophelia have both been designated "mad" within their respective texts by other characters.[7] In this, we can understand that their authors, one in the nineteenth century, one around the beginning of the 17th century, wanted audiences to think of them as "insane, crazy; mentally unbalanced or deranged."[8] Overwhelmingly, cultural and critical responses to these characters have centered upon their

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[5]Sandra M. Gilbert, "'A Fine, White Flying Myth': Confessions of a Plath Addict." *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 3 (1978): 588. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088890, 588.

[6] "madwoman, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112102?redirectedFrom=madwoman

[7] Ophelia is never directly referred to as a "madwoman" within the text, however, several characters suggest the word "mad" to describe her behavior, and thus it seems an appropriate descriptor.

[8] "madwoman, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112102?redirectedFrom=madwoman

perceived madness and "mad" actions.[9] This includes physical violence in the case of Bertha and seemingly nonsensical ramblings in the case of Ophelia; both characters also die in ways that could be construed as suicide. Many of the "symptoms" that Ophelia and Bertha exhibit likely would result in a modern diagnosis of mental illness; however, the authors of the hypotexts do not construct or approach these characters' "madness" with modern sensibilities. I elect to use the term "madwoman" here to evoke the outdated, harmful attitudes toward women that construct the idea of their "madness" in these two texts.

While "madwoman" might once have been used as a pejorative indicating lunacy, its meaning shifts toward the positive over time. Feminist texts such as *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and *Women and Madness* by Phyllis Chesler (1972), that seek to articulate how women and madness have been thought together focused on the possibilities that women's 'madness' might be expressions of anger. This effected a shift in the connotations of the term and trope that we see underway even in Lowell's attempt to portray Plath's mental illness as a kind of power. It is these ideas that influence the popularity of the madwoman figure to this day. That "madwoman" was once a negative, even insulting term seems almost necessary to the modern reclamation of the term, while the language used to portray a madwoman negatively continues to be co-opted in modern feminist contexts, an issue that I will explore in my conclusion.

Madness, within all the texts studied in this thesis, acts as a function of power, a tool used to maintain a status-quo. The Oxford English Dictionary has two definitions for the adjective "mad:" one simply means "insane; crazy; mentally unbalanced or deranged," the second introduces the social slightly by referring to the mad person as "uncontrolled by reason or

[9] See: *The Madwoman in the Attic*, so named for Bertha and every visual representation of Ophelia choosing to highlight her madness (either through the atypical for-the-period disheveled, long hair, or through the much more literal mode of her suicide).

judgment." While authors such as Shakespeare and Brontë may have written with the intention of portraying the first type of "mad" (though it is impossible to know exactly), when I ascribe the term "mad" to a character, I am interested in how that character may shed light on the second definition. In appropriations in which madwomen appear, characters perceive the madwoman as acting without reason rather driven by impulse inscrutable to the average sane person. This second definition inadvertently highlights the fact that the epithet "madness" is always a function of power. The "mad" person is understood to depart with reason and steps outside the bounds of the social. The madwoman is inscrutable, perhaps, because she rails against a form of oppression or constraint imperceptible to those not subject to it.

In order to accurately evaluate the madwoman in my hypotexts and their reiterations, I will be performing close readings of both the hypotext and the adaptations. In this way, I am able to analyze the representations of Ophelia and Bertha Mason within changing understandings of the term, and in specific historical contexts. My close readings show that these adaptations function as critiques of their source texts. In this, the adaptations reveal the changing connotations of the madwoman, who was once reviled but grew into a figure of female rebellion and resistance. This intertextual reading method highlights the evolving role of the madwoman. As a figure, it seems that this woman is outdated, reflecting a time where women had unequal power to men . However, it seems that the madwoman has unfinished business as a cultural symbol addressed to power.

My first chapter explores Charlotte Brontë's representation of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's later representation of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Jane Eyre*'s original publication date was in 1847; Rhys' adaptation came over a century later, in 1966, the same year Robert Lowell penned his reductive introduction to Plath's *Ariel*. A reading of hypotext and

appropriation together reveals a cultural shift in the perception of the madwoman. No longer is she a violent, thoughtless monster, Rhys' return to the figure allows a deeply reflective victim of an oppressive society to emerge. Further, I will analyze Rhys' own positioning of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a criticism of *Jane Eyre*, which I argue illustrates the persistence of Bertha culturally and critically. Specifically, *Wide Sargasso Sea* aims to rationalize Bertha's actions: as a Creole woman herself, Jean Rhys felt that Bertha's depiction in *Jane Eyre* was ill-representative of the Creole people, and thus aimed to clarify Bertha's madness within *Jane Eyre*; within *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys offers a more nuanced view of Bertha that allows readers to understand her anger and violence toward her husband within the hypotext. Rhys's adaptation invites readers to extend their sympathy and understanding toward the monster in Brontë's work. I also turn to Gilbert and Gubar's iconic feminist criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), to suggest how adaptations of the madwoman have served varying agendas. The chapter examines Gilbert and Gubar's critical adaptation of Bertha in conjunction with Rhys' to examine the shift in the meaning of madwoman to something oddly empowering.

In my second chapter, I explore multiple representations of Ophelia, beginning with the Pre-Raphaelites of the mid-nineteenth century and ending with Paul Griffith's adaptation of Ophelia in *let me tell you,* written in 2008. I analyze the pre-Raphaelite fascination with Ophelia, considering the painters' obsession with depicting Ophelia in her off-screen death. Griffith's adaptation, *let me tell you* (2008), is written with an Oulipian constraint, a type of writer-imposed restraint on the writing: it is narrated by Ophelia using only the 483 words that Ophelia speaks in *Hamlet*. Through Griffith's work, and his effort to give voice to Ophelia in "her own words," I will explore the place of voice in the adaptations of Ophelia– when she is reimagined, who is exerting control over her narrative?

Much has been written about the literary madwoman, and much has been written about the topic of adaptation, but very little scholarship has focused its attention on the adaptations of Ophelia and Bertha in conjunction. To do so is a move, I argue, which allows us a vivid look at how the madwoman is reimagined in contemporary culture.[10] In my conclusion I will reflect on the historical persistence of madwomen in adaptations, exploring the fascination which Bertha Mason and Ophelia have induced for centuries. I will also briefly examine a few examples of the figure in very contemporary media and writing: what does it mean that these canonical madwomen are still being adapted and written about, far removed from outdated cultural conceptions of violent attic dwellers and incoherent ramblers?

II. Literary Adaptation and Appropriation

The novels studied within this thesis fall under a specific adaptation category known as appropriation. An adaptation is, broadly defined by Julie Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, a piece of media that "signals a relationship with an informing source text,"[11] such as a movie based on a book. An appropriation, as outlined by Julie Sanders, "affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain."[12] In short, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *let me tell you* move away from their source text by taking a familiar character, their respective madwomen, into a new environment, a time prior to the events of the hypotext. However, Sanders also asserts that the concepts of adaptation and

[10] In regards to the literary madwoman, Susan M. Gilbert and Sandra Gubar's landmark book *The Madwoman in the Attic* offers a comprehensive look at the role of madness and the female literary imagination. Carol Thomas Neely's *Distracted Subjects* provides a feminist analysis of Early Modern portrayals of gendered madness. *The Female Malady* by Elaine Showalter explores the prevalence of gendered madness in Victorian society. *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon and *Adaptation and Appropriation* Julie Sanders both offer a great wealth of information on the topic of adaptations and appropriations.

[11] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, (New York: Routledge, 2006) 26.

[12] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.

appropriation "intersect and interrelate," allowing for theorizing on adaptation to be applied to appropriations as well.[13] The word hypotext, meaning a source text, originates from *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* by Gerard Génette. It was offered as an opposite to "hypertext," here called an appropriation.

I will be moving forward with this thesis under Linda Hutcheon's assertion in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* that an adaptation is a repetition of the hypotext, "but repetition without replication."[14] For the adaptations examined here, the "repetition" represents the themes of the work, and, perhaps, an interest in understanding the cause of their subjects' descents into madness. This interest demands a reexamination of the character; both Rhys' and Griffiths' texts adopt modern lenses that allow for them to offer nuanced explanations of their madwomen. Vaguely outlined characters take center stage, filling gaps which the narrative (and the narrator) had originally left unreferenced.

Like Hutcheon, I am also uninterested in the fidelity of the adaptations to their hypotexts, though the adaptations analyzed in this paper do follow their hypotexts closely, electing to fill in the gaps in a character background rather than change any tangible element of the original story. Indeed, the adaptations examined rarely contest or even reference the plots of the hypotext. In this way, these texts escape the derogatory label of being "parasitic,"[15] which Laurence Lerner, in his piece "Bertha and the Critics" (1989) applies to an adaptation in which "a reading of the work without the host will be incomplete, perhaps incomprehensible."[16] Lerner goes on to claim that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is indeed parasitic in this way, because its relationship to *Jane Eyre* adds additional meaning. Though I agree that the relationship between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane*

[13]Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.
[14]Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012): 7.
[15]Laurence Lerner, "Bertha and the Critics," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 44, no. 3 (1989): 277.
[16] Lerner, "Bertha and the Critics," 277.

Eyre can further emphasize themes which are present in the appropriation, I believe that the presence of the adaptation comes with its own set of responsibilities and goals, such as Hutcheon's assertion that adaptations exist to create repetition. Furthermore, the word "parasitic," obviously negatively connotated, implies that appropriations are damaging to a hypotext. I reject this line of thinking, instead interpreting appropriations as a useful tool to determine cultural interaction with an aspect of literature. As such, I will read adaptations in this thesis as separate but connected stories to their hypotexts, a repetition of the character of the madwoman adapted to more modern sensibilities and fascinations.

As for the figure of the madwoman, she has occupied a complex place in the literary canon. Until recently, she often escaped much literary criticism, particularly the figures of Ophelia and Bertha Mason. Prior to the beginning of feminist criticism, critics and readers alike deemed the madwoman as metaphorically and narratively unimportant, with prominent figures such as Jacques Lacan referring to Ophelia as merely a "piece of bait"[17] whose most interesting characteristic is her relationship to the penis.[18] And yet, for all the reduction that was happening to her character, Ophelia did serve as a point of interest for many, as witnessed through her numerous depictions in paintings and the infamy which often followed the actresses who played her on stage. With the beginning of the feminist criticism movement in literature, the place of the madwoman evolved. Madwomen were no longer viewed critically as simply mad or insane, rather, often they were considered to be subversive, their madness allowing for an escape from the patriarchal rule imposed on them.[19]

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[17] Jacques Lacan, as quoted by Elaine Showalter in her piece "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the importance of feminist criticism" 77.
[18] Lacan, in the same talk on psycho-analytics in which he referred to Ophelia as a "piece of bait" also insisted Ophelia has its etymological origins in "O-phallus."
[19] Marta Caminero-Santangelo, "The Madwoman Can't Speak: Postwar Culture, Feminist Criticism, and Welty's 'June Recital,'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15, no. 1 (1996): 123.

Chapter I: Bertha Mason

I. An Introduction to Bertha

In over four hundred pages of *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is present for about twelve. She does not speak a single word. She is the "mad"[20] first wife of Edward Rochester, the love interest and boss of governess Jane Eyre, haunting the narrative from the third floor of Thornfield, the gothic mansion Rochester and Jane inhabit. Very few of her appearances in the novel even refer to her by name; instead she is referred to, as Dennis Porter describes it in his article "Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre"* (1976), "in terms of degenerate heredity."[21] This heredity is often implied to be that of a monster: in the novel, she is referred to as a "vampyre,"[22] a "goblin,"[23] and "a witch."[24] Her name only appears in the novel seven times, and three of these times occur within a single paragraph. And yet, Bertha is a main plot device. It is she who prevents the marriage which Jane Eyre desires so badly; it is her homicidal actions which eventually make Jane and Rochester's union possible; and it is her maniacal laughter which drives the plot at Thornfield.

Jane Eyre positions Bertha as a madwoman, or, perhaps more directly, a monster, who must be reviled. What explains her "madness" (or even what madness means, exactly) is kept shadowy, but the novel makes it clear, once we know the madwoman in the attic is Bertha, and Jane sees her directly, that she is not fit for society. Despite this negative depiction and narrative marginalization, Bertha has critically and anecdotally piqued audience interest due to her

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[20] I have included here quotations around the word "mad" because this is not a descriptor which I am ascribing to Bertha. This word comes from Jane Eyre, but also, perhaps even more prevalently, her critical and popular reception. In future uses of this word, I will not be including quotation marks, but this does not indicate an acceptance of the "mad" label for Bertha.

[21] Dennis Porter, "Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre." *The Massachusetts Review* 17, no. 3 (1976): 540–52. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088673, 541.

[22] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016): 255.

[23] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 256.

[24] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 380.

complicated relationship to the patriarchy, the ambiguity of her hypotextual depiction, and, most importantly and recently, her status as a madwoman. Bertha exists within her original context to illuminate other, more important (to Brontë) themes and actions, but the information provided in *Jane Eyre* is just enough, while also not too much, to have led readers and critics to imagine a rich, meaningful life for Bertha outside of Brontë's narrative. The fact that Bertha is a relatively abstract character has made her ripe for adaptation; what little the novel does reveal about her has compelled writers in various ways. Though the two adaptations of Bertha I consider have differing purposes, both *The Madwoman in the Attic* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* have moved the category of madwoman from one of disdain to an emblem of feminist power.

At the start of the novel, Jane Eyre is an orphaned child, unloved and considered bothersome to the aunt with whom she resides. After a rightful outburst over her ill treatment, Jane's aunt sends her away to boarding school, where Jane grows up to be a perfectly calm, rule-abiding, God-fearing young woman seeking employment as a governess. She arrives at Thornfield, meeting the much-older, but very rich, Edward Rochester, with whom she eventually falls in love. When the two try to get married, they are stopped; Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife, is still alive, residing on the third floor of the Thornfield mansion.

The reader gets a late introduction to Bertha though she has been active throughout; Jane, a first-person narrator, does not even know she exists until Chapter 26. Prior to that, Jane privately suspects that Grace Poole, another servant within the household, is responsible for actions which will later be revealed to be Bertha's doing. Grace, we later learn, has been implicated by her proximity to Bertha, the real perpetrator, as Grace cares for Bertha on the third floor. Bertha's "demoniac" laugh has thus been attributed to Grace, who takes the blame for creeping about the house at night, setting fire to Mr. Rochester's bed, and for destroying Jane

Eyre's wedding veil.[25] These are the acts that index "madness"; by nineteenth-century standards, such actions would only be undertaken by someone who had lost their mind and thus required removal from society.

And the novel affirms that "madness" is, in those nineteenth-century terms, a sign of the subject's being less-than-human. Indeed, even before Bertha's identity is revealed, when the audience (and Jane) implicate Grace Poole in these actions, she is dehumanized. The laughter heard is frequently described as "goblin-like," and Jane seems to believe that Grace has been "possessed with a devil,"[26] based on the sound of her laugh alone. The madwoman in the attic is not even given, at this point in time, the grace of being compared to something of this world. Even prior to setting the room on fire, Bertha (or the madwoman) has been relegated to the status of a monster, stripped of all womanhood or personhood.

The novel's depiction of madness to be less than human also intersects with faintly racializing terms, as in a later incident, shortly before Jane and Rochester's marriage, when Bertha (though Jane does not know that it is Bertha) breaks into Jane's bedroom, wears Jane's veil, and then rips it in two and tramples it. When Rochester presses Jane for a description of what she has taken to be a ghost, Jane claims the face was "fearful and ghastly" with "blackened inflation of the lineaments."[27] When Rochester points out that ghosts are typically pale, Jane recants, suggesting that the figure instead resembled a "Vampyre."[28] Here, this association with the supernatural takes on a particularly jarring tone. When Jane has clearly seen Bertha's face, she notes that her features are dark; not only are her lineaments "blackened" but she is also described as a "savage" with "thick and dark hair."[29] These descriptions further demonize Bertha

[25] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* 135.
[26] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* 135.
[27]Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 254.
[28]Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 255.
[29]Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 254.

by participating in the racist, dehumanizing terms of Brontë's time. Bertha's status as a potentially mixed-race woman intersects with her madness, perhaps creating an additional axis on which Bertha is threatening to a white, patriarchal social order.

When the particularities of Bertha's existence are finally revealed, in a dramatic outburst from a lawyer immediately before the couple at the altar will say "I do," Jane has little reaction. Even when she comes face-to-face that same day with Bertha, Jane still reflects that the morning had been "quiet… enough,"[30] the brief encounter with the "lunatic"[31] (a term used to refer to Bertha more often than her own name), seems to have little bearing on Jane, whether it be concern for Bertha's health or Rochester's character. When Jane is face-to-face with Bertha, neither woman says anything, but Jane does describe her as being impossible to identify as either a "beast or a human being," as Bertha "grovel[s]... on all fours; … snatch[ing] and growl[ing] like some strange wild animal."[32] She takes no issue with Rochester's confinement of Bertha, except to briefly wonder if Rochester would lock Jane up as well if she were mad. Jane only leaves him because he is already married, as their romantic relationship would violate church doctrines. Jane treats the issue of Bertha with complete ambivalence, except for how it may affect her and her relationship with Rochester. Even then, Jane expresses no concern with how Rochester treats his first wife.

Rochester's attitude toward Bertha is anything but ambivalent. Speaking to those in the church during the nuptials, including Mr. Wood, a priest, Mr. Briggs, Mr. Mason's lawyer, and Mr. Mason, Bertha's brother, Rochester depicts Bertha as an abominable inconvenience:

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[30]Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 265.

[31] As a note, though the word "lunatic" and madwoman technically have slightly different definitions (a lunatic is someone with a severe mental illness and a madwoman is a *woman* with severe mental illness), they will be used interchangeably within this section, as Bertha is referred to by both terms.

[32] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 263.

> I have been married, and the woman to whom I was married lives! You say you never heard of a Mrs. Rochester at the house up yonder, Wood; but I daresay you have many a time inclined your ear to gossip about the mysterious lunatic kept there under watch and ward... I now inform you that she is my wife, whom I married fifteen years ago,—Bertha Mason by name... 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!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. I had a charming partner—pure, wise, modest: you can fancy I was a happy man. I went through rich scenes! Oh! my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it! But I owe you no further explanation. Briggs, Wood, Mason, I invite you all to come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole's patient, and *my wife*! You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human.[33]

This is both the audience's and Jane's introduction to Bertha. Rochester's vitriol here is obvious– he feels "cheated" out of the wife he was promised, he views her family as useless due to their purported madness and alcoholism and is clearly ashamed of her. Bertha's madness remains largely undefined, despite it being the center of the passage. Rochester depicts madness as something which is "copied," suggesting a deliberate decision to mimic the condition of her family, but also genetic, and therefore unintentional. Rochester also does not take this opportunity to elaborate on what "madness" is exactly, only stating alcohol consumption as a symptom (or, even, a catalyst for madness). Despite Rochester's insistence, there is no real

[33] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 261-262.

evidence that Bertha was mad before Rochester had her locked in the attic. Rochester also explicitly removes Bertha's humanity in this passage; she is not even "at least human."

II. *The Madwoman in the Attic*– Bertha and the Female Psyche

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979)[34](named in reference to Bertha herself) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine nineteenth-century women's writing through a feminist lens to identify "many distinctively female anxieties and abilities"[35] to argue for the existence of a larger literary imagination belonging only to women writers. Their reading of *Jane Eyre* explores Jane's character, particularly her desires and how they manifest in her life. Gilbert and Gubar primarily regard Bertha as a vehicle for or aspect to better understand Jane's characterization; they, like Brontë herself, focus on Bertha only to the extent that she brings out this narrative about Jane. Gilbert and Gubar begin with an analysis of Jane in her childhood, identifying the rage which Jane felt as an outsider both in her childhood home and at boarding school. Through these initial incidents, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane realizes three ways in which she can escape repression: through fleeing, starvation and dying, or, as she chooses in the initial scene of the novel, madness. They note that Jane's patriarchal anger is critical to the story, making it unbearable to its Victorian readers, because the "woman who yearns to escape entirely from drawing rooms and patriarchal mansions obviously cannot" be tolerated within society. That is, she'd be considered "mad."[36] Following this realization, Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane's

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[34] I would also argue that the title itself adds to Bertha's notoriety– the phrase "madwoman in the attic" is never used within Charlotte Brontë's narrative, but modern discourse often uses the phrase to refer to Bertha. In fact, Brontë only uses the word "madwoman" once, within Rochester's initial introductory speech to her. Furthermore, this phrase seems to be most heavily adopted outside of academic literature, further suggesting the pervasiveness of Gilbert and Gubar's work. Critics have also noted Bertha's newfound notoriety in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly Laurence Lerner in his piece "Bertha and the Critics."

[35]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979): xii

[36] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 338.

experience with Bertha is the central confrontation of the novel, one which allows Jane to complete her coming-of-age journey by accepting her role as Rochester's wife.

They posit that Bertha represents "the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress."[37] In this reading, Bertha is a function of Jane's psyche, a kind of shadow self who acts on the un-ladylike *feelings* that Jane has but cannot admit to. All of the negative emotions that Jane experiences as a result of her status as a woman are, they argue, bottled up within her. However, they are not for Bertha, and Gilbert and Gubar read Bertha as having sacrificed her womanhood for her insanity. In so saying, Gilbert and Gubar imply that womanhood is one of the repressions from which madness allows an escape. Thus, their reading lends to madness a kind of positive, feminist power. When Jane expresses alienation over her "'robed and veiled' bridal image," Bertha breaks free of the attic, appearing in Jane's bedroom wearing the veil, which she then stomps and tears apart.[38] Bertha, in this episode, is literally the Mrs. Rochester that Jane hesitates to become; Gilbert and Gubar note that she even looks like a bride here, wearing a "white and straight" dress. And, of course, her existence prolongs Jane's wedding day waiting, allowing for her to grow more comfortable with the idea. When Bertha dies, it is as if the "agent of Jane's desire" dies as well.[39] With Bertha dead, the anxieties and alienation which began earlier in the novel disappear, and Jane can marry Rochester and fulfill her coming-of-age destiny. Implicitly, Gilbert and Gubar argue, Bertha also shows Jane what not to do; as Adrienne Rich, another feminist writer and critic, also argues, Bertha is "curbing [Jane's] imagination at the limits of what is bearable for a powerless woman in the England of the 1840s."[40] Bertha allows the rage Jane, or any woman, might feel toward

[37]Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 360.
[38]Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 360.
[39]Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 360.
[40]Adrienne Rich,"Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979): 469.

the patriarchy to be expressed; in this way, the book becomes a representation of the female psyche and the Jane/Bertha pairing a metaphor for women's lives under a patriarchal system that demanded limited and often degrading paths to survival for women.

This analysis, though groundbreaking in its day, does not come without its flaws. Gilbert and Gubar have, in a way, followed in Brontë's footsteps, relegating Bertha's position in the narrative as accessory to Jane's story, which is the main plot. Gilbert and Gubar position Bertha as a device which entirely serves the reading of Jane's psyche, a move that renders Bertha not entirely human. In their reading, Bertha does not rip apart Jane's wedding veil due to her own trauma, but rather because Jane *wishes* (subconsciously) that she would. Rather than being relegated to the background due to Rochester's wishes, she is (critically) subjected to Jane's needs. Bertha is read as being but a tool by which readers better understand Jane, and as something she must confront in order to reach the self-actualization toward which the novel aims. Relevant here is each woman's positionality– Jane, though not wealthy, is a white, English woman, while Bertha is a Creole woman, who could conceivably be black, with a sizable dowry.

If we move to regard the circumstances of Bertha's story as more than accessory to Jane's plot, the inadequacy of Bertha as Jane's double becomes apparent.[41] From what the reader can glean from Bertha's past, it is clear that the terms on which Bertha and Jane entered into marrying Rochester are not equivalent, crumbling the Bertha/Jane/marriage as a manifestation of patriarchy undergirding Gilbert and Gubar's argument. The financial and geographical circumstances of the two marriages differ. Jane is not wealthy, was born and raised in England, and is entering a marriage based on love and compatibility: during the marriage proposal, Jane addresses Rochester not "through the medium of custom… [but as] equals" and Rochester refers

[41]Carine M. Mardrossian's article "Double [De]colonization of and the Feminist Criticism of 'Wide Sargasso Sea'" does not directly critique *The Madwoman in the Attic*, but it does detail how reductive 1970's attitudes towards Bertha's race and ethnicity place incorrect equivalency on Jane and Bertha's experiences.

to Jane as his "second self."[42] Rochester has no financial incentive to marry her, a fact which both Jane and Rochester are aware of. Bertha, meanwhile, is very wealthy, which is implied to be one of Rochester's main motivations in marrying her, and is not from Europe at all: Bertha was "already courted" for Rochester, a result of her "fortune of thirty thousand pounds."[43] When Bertha is viewed as a character in her own right, as someone who is married (at least partially) for financial gain and forced to leave her homeland, Bertha's anger does not convincingly serve as a double for Jane's. As a Jamaican, marrying Rochester, an Englishman, guarantees Bertha a loss of cultural identity (and, if one chooses to read Bertha as mixed-race, this loss is two-fold). By contrast, as Rich so eloquently puts it, "Jane can become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity."[44]

Though Gilbert and Gubar do not present Bertha as fully Bertha, neither is she fully subsumed into Jane. There is a gray area produced by their argument that, one could argue, subtly moves Bertha toward becoming a character with human sentiments and motives. Bertha's association with Jane as posed by Gilbert and Gubar exists in tension with much of what Brontë tells us about Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, but this association with Jane, even just as an aspect of her psychology, does liken her to something human, which cannot be said for Brontë's depiction. Though Gilbert and Gubar still limit Bertha's character as accessory to Jane's, their construction of her character moves Bertha from the space of an essential plot device and source of horror to an aspect of Jane's (and, perhaps, a wider female) psychology. *The Madwoman in the Attic* draws Jane and Bertha together as victims of a patriarchal society and thus, to some extent, humanizes Bertha. The frustration and anger on which Bertha acts is posed as normal in its relationship to Jane, coming to seem less animalistic and more like a reasonable human reaction

[42] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 227-228.
[43] Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* 273.
[44] Rich, "The Temptations of a Motherless Woman, 474.

to constraints of the patriarchy.[45] The possibility of Bertha's own frustration is validated by the pains of Jane's early years, with the aforementioned outburst toward her aunt signifying the rage Jane felt at being marginalized and ignored as a child.

That said, Bertha, even as interpreted by Gilbert and Gubar, lacks much of what would make her a full character in her own right. To fully understand Bertha and her motives, readers would need a perspective beyond Rochester's perspective on her past, one capable of more fully explaining her state in *Jane Eyre* and how she arrived there, something which Brontë only provides through Rochester's perspective. Though Bertha does not appear much within the hypotext, Brontë does provide some vital details via Rochester with which to imagine this past, many of which Gilbert and Gubar ignore. While Gilbert and Gubar's analysis may be fruitful on its own terms, it leaves the novel's (and their own) use of Bertha lacking. Even within the realm of the critical, Bertha's abstractness makes any act of imagining more of her an act of adaptation. What information is given of Bertha– her wealthy upbringing in Jamaica and supposed hereditary madness– is quite complex and highly specific: these conditions are nearly exactly the opposite of those which Jane experienced and therefore do not map neatly onto Jane's own motivations. Thus, any handling of that information that is not extremely careful results in an incongruous image of Bertha which cannot accurately be projected critically onto other characters in the novel Bertha, through the combination of her abstract representation in the hypotext and her ambiguous "madness," is ideal for interpretation far beyond what Brontë allowed in her hypotext.

[45] This is, of course, based on a more modern perception. When *Jane Eyre* first came out, much ink was spilled over just how *angry* Jane herself is. Bertha is my focus in this chapter, but I feel I would be remiss if Jane's own anger went unnoted. Many of these reviews are quoted on page 337 of *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

III. An Introduction to Antoinette (*Wide Sargasso Sea*)

Bertha's madness in *Jane Eyre* is posed as a fault of genetics, her "germs of insanity" exacerbated by her consumption of alcohol.[46] Jean Rhys, in her 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, does not adopt this attitude towards Bertha's condition, choosing instead to highlight that Bertha's "monstrosity" and "madness" are symptoms of an oppressive colonial system. In the words of Kristy Butler, discussing the intertextual relationship of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, "what proves to be truly monstrous is the heritage of systems that create monstrosity while claiming to despise it."[47] Rhys highlights not the familial, genetic inheritance of Bertha's so-called madness, though she does not neglect the fact put forward by *Jane Eyre* that Bertha's mother was considered mad as well, but rather credits the agents of patriarchy, imperialism, and racism that have shaped Bertha's condition.

Bertha Mason has been reimagined as Antoinette Cosway in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Rhys' adaptation of *Jane Eyre* largely aligns with what we know of Bertha: Bertha's mother is depicted as "mad" (Rhys adds that she becomes fully so after the death of a child); Bertha is married off to Edward Rochester and transported to England, a place which bears no resemblance to her native Jamaica. The main aim of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to show that Bertha, as suggested in the hypotext, did not just inherit madness genetically, as part of some random curse. Rhys' retelling presents her as *driven* mad by a variety of oppressive factors inflicted upon her by a white, patriarchal, Western imperial society. In a way that Gilbert and Gubar don't imagine, Bertha's madness is given its own story here, not rendered an aspect of "all women" and thus subordinated to Jane's specific situation. Rhys' purpose in writing Wide Sargasso Sea, is, in fact,

[46] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 275.
[47]Kristy Butler, "Kristeva, Intertextuality, and Re-imagining" The Mad Woman in the Attic"." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 47, no. 1 (2014):139.

to argue against this sort of subordination, and portray Bertha as a victim suffering at the hands of complex institutional systems.

Of the few details that Rhys changes from *Jane Eyre*, only one is glaringly apparent to the casual reader: Bertha's[48] name.[49] In the choice of Antoinette as a first name, which is Bertha's middle name in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys symbolizes Rochester's oppressive effect on her. Once she has married Rochester, he begins to refer to her as "Bertha," despite her insistence that that is not her name. She accuses him: "You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name!"[50] This is a reasonable assertion, one with which Rochester does not argue, and yet Antoinette feels the need to defend herself. He ignores Antoinette's pleas, calling her Bertha for the rest of the novel, an insistence which reflects that Antoinette must, as Dennis Porter in his article says, "conform her conduct to the name he bestows her."[51]

The changes Rhys does make to Bertha's story are all relatively minor; however, this does not mean that they have not gone unmentioned by critics. In his piece "Bertha and the Critics" (1989), Lawrence Lerner asserts that the changes' "general direction is to remove Jane from the story and to make Antoinette more of a helpless victim."[52] Neither of these assertions truly makes sense, especially when viewed within the context of both stories. To acknowledge his first point briefly, Rhys does not have to do much to "remove" Jane from Antoinette's story, which is, in effect, a prequel, focused on Bertha, to the events of *Jane Eyre*. Much of the story occurs prior to Jane meeting Rochester or any inhabitants of Thornfield; Jane is, obviously, not

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[48] For the sake of clarity, from this point on, Bertha will refer to the character of Brontë's creation from Jane Eyre, while Antoinette will refer to Rhys' character.
[49] Other changes are a bit more subtle, if one has not paid close attention to the hypotext– Rochester is not present for Bertha's attack on her brother, said brother is not her blood relation, and the housekeeper is more aware of Bertha's situation than she was in *Jane Eyre*. In short, nothing which is particularly noteworthy for the purposes of this essay.
[50] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999): 88.
[51] Porter, "Of Heroines and Victims," *The Massachusetts Review* 17, no. 3 (1976): 550.
[52] Lerner, "Bertha and the Critics," 277.

present for Antoinette's childhood and young-adulthood in Jamaica, and the narrations from England are of incidents that do not involve Jane at all. Even so, Antoinette's narration is not presented as the most reliable at this stage, as she not only does not remember her attack on Richard Mason, but also seems unconcerned with other basic knowledge, such as the passage of time in the attic.

As for Lerner's suggestion that Rhys makes Antoinette "more of a helpless victim," the only change that emphasizes Antoinette's "victim" status (though I would hesitate to call her a "helpless" one), is that of her name. While the name change is a succinct metaphor for much of the cultural repression Antoinette experiences at the hands of Rochester, it is hardly the most extreme form of cultural repression she endures. The name change provides readers with a succinct metaphor for her treatment at the hands of Rochester, a somewhat in-your-face assertion of his attempts to mold Antoinette into an English housewife, despite her protestations. In forcing the name change, Rhys insists we see Rochester asserting his patriarchal and colonial power over Antoinette. Giving Bertha the French name Antoinette allows Rhys to insist (in counterforce to Rochester's and the British imperial power he represents) on Antoinette's Creole roots, as the areas in which she lived were primarily colonized by the French. This both posits that Rochester had wished to deny Antoinette of her Creole roots while simultaneously reminding us of the still longer, violent colonial history of her region.

Rhys emphasizes the power of men by emphasizing their effects on Antoinette, but also on her mother, Annette. As Rochester mentions in *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette's mother is mad, as well. Rhys depicts this madness, and, interestingly, explicitly justifies it:

> They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad… But no kind

> word, no friends, and her husban' he go off, he leave her. They won't let me see her… They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end… she give up, she care for nothing.[53]

This passage, spoken to the Rochester figure by Christophine, a slave owned by Annette since her first marriage, explicitly identifies many of the social structures which are to blame for Annette's madness, thus suggesting madness is less an asocial atrocity, or a mysterious animality, and more a reasonable response to grief and cruelty. It also supposes that the disparaging, damning accusation of "madness," here seemingly invoking the "uncontrolled by reason" definition– "they tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad" results in mistreatment and neglect that results in Annette's indifference, an indifference that might be read as "mad." The other people, in this quote, view Annette as not acting in a way which is controlled by their own perception of reason, and thus she is mad. Christophine implicates Annette's husband, much as the narrative implicates Antoinette's husband. This passage stands in direct contrast to Rochester's claim of hereditary madness. Annette is mad as well, but not due to flawed genetics; rather, it is the shared experiences of womanhood that drives both women mad. Further, the grief and anger that she feels are mismanaged by society– rather than being able to seek help through social interaction, she is deemed mad and thus isolated, further adding to her mental distress.

Patriarchy is not the sole system through which Antoinette (and Annette) is driven to madness. Even before meeting Rochester, young Antoinette occupies an unsure position in Jamaica. Antoinette is, in Carine M. Mardrossian's terms, "not simply colonized… a particular set of oppressions is responsible for a person's [Antoinette's] subordination, another grounds her privilege over other groups."[54] She is the daughter of former slave owners in a time post-slavery;

[53] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 94.
[54] Carine M. Mardrossian, "Double [De]Colonization and the Feminist Criticism of 'Wide Sargasso Sea,'" *College Literature* 26, no. 2 (1999): 82.

as such, she and her family are reviled by both the freed black population and the elite white population. Antoinette is isolated, subject to ostracism by all groups. She is, in the words of Mardorossian in her article "Shutting Up the Subaltern," "ensnared by the colonialist assumptions,"[55] but unable to truly fulfill them. The family's status as white former slave owners causes them to be referred to as "white cockroaches"[56] by the black population, but their status as Jamaican causes white women to refer to the family as "white n—--."[57]

Adaptations of the madwoman from *Jane Eyre* play crucially into constructing the figure of the madwoman. In both adaptations and the hypotext, Bertha/Antoinette suffers at the hands of men. I argue in my next chapter that Ophelia continues and expands on the figure of the madwoman, through her suffering at the hands of men, but also through the eventual reclamation of the term "madwoman" that *let me tell you* represents. Rhys' representation of Antoinette as a victim tie into questions which arise in my next chapter, in which I will explore the issue of voicing Ophelia, both in the hypotext and in her adaptations.

[55]Carine M. Mardrossian, "Shutting up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea," Callaloo 24, no. 4 (1999): 1071
[56] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 13.
[57] Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 14.

Chapter II: Ophelia

I. An Introduction to Ophelia

Hamlet is Shakespeare's longest play, with a total of 29,551 words. Of these nearly 30,000 words, Ophelia speaks only 1,174, and of these only about 480 of these words are original (that is, not repeated by Ophelia at other points in the play). And yet Ophelia lives a life far beyond the reaches of Shakespeare's play; she is reimagined seemingly endlessly through paintings, music, and, of course, play and film adaptations. Throughout the play, Ophelia is explicitly subject to the cruelties of the patriarchy, as explained by Martha C. Ronk in her article "Representations of Ophelia" (1994), through "her father and brother and Hamlet who set aside her statements about herself and revise her into submission."[58] Often, these "revisions" place an

[58]Martha C. Ronk, "Representations of Ophelia," Criticism 36, no. 1 (1994): 21.

emphasis on Ophelia's sexuality, which translates into the play making implicit connections between female sexuality and female madness.

Many similarities exist between Ophelia and Bertha. Beyond their "madness", both characters fall victim to the patriarchy, with an emphasis placed on their sexuality. However, beyond the hypotext, Ophelia, unlike Bertha, grows into a sort of saint, who, at the whim of the artist, could be virginal (and therefore a tool for showing women how to behave) or not. This difference could be explained by their respective roles within their hypotexts; Bertha is depicted as explicitly married, with the understanding that that marriage had been consummated at least once, whereas Ophelia is a maiden, with only slight reference to the fact that she may not be a virgin.

Ophelia has also enjoyed more of an explicitly positive afterlife than Bertha has. Both characters are endlessly adaptable due to their scant presence in their respective pieces, but characters within *Jane Eyre* view Bertha largely as a monster, one who cannot be helped. Ophelia, on the other hand, occupies a (somewhat) more positive representation in *Hamlet*. She is subject to the oppression and dehumanization that are inherent in her status as a woman, is true of Bertha, but Ophelia differs in that she conforms to these demands. (It is worth noting that there is little evidence of Bertha's response to oppression before her "madness" in the hypotext, but her actions and descriptions of her suggest rebellion, though it is impossible to know.) Bertha and Ophelia are both appealing characters for the same reason– they are both oppressed on the basis of their womanhood and go "mad" as a result of this oppression– but they are, particularly in the Victorian period, interpreted and adapted differently based on their hypotextual representations.

In this chapter I follow the assertion put forward by Elaine Showalter in her piece "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism" that the true work of feminist criticism on Ophelia is to study her representations through time. Amongst discussion of Ophelia's relatively minor presence within the play, as I have noted above, Showalter argues that "Ophelia *does* have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story… but rather the *history* of her representation."[59] This history, Showalter argues, "changes independently of theories of the meaning of the play… for it depends on attitudes towards women and madness."[60] Shifts in cultural perceptions of "madness" affect how Ophelia is read, and, while Shakespeare's representation of Ophelia provides some interesting ideas regarding the relationship of madness and women,[61] even more interesting work can be done by analyzing Ophelia's adaptations and appropriations. These adaptations focalize the issue of perspective in retelling Ophelia's story, allowing for investigations into whose voice is being prioritized within an adaptation. Within Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia is allowed to speak, but this speech is heavily filtered through patriarchal ideals, creating an interest in adaptations to reclaim what limited language Ophelia is allowed.

This history of Ophelia's representation, of course, begins in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where Ophelia begins as a demure, obedient daughter who transforms into an openly bawdy, loud madwoman. This contrasts with Bertha's depicted "madness," in which Bertha is depicted as not speaking, only uttering laughs and inhuman growls and snarls. Ophelia's "mad scene" becomes the time when Ophelia is least inhibited in speech; within this scene she speaks nearly half of all that she will speak in the play. However, similar to Bertha, the ballads which Ophelia

[59] Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism," in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Patricia Parker (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1986): 78.
[60] Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 91-92.
[61] Carol Thomas Neely, in her book *Distracted Subjects* talks at length about Shakespeare's feminizing of madness through Ophelia, citing that Ophelia's madness is real while Hamlet's is feigned.

recites during this scene are suggested to be unintelligible or unimportant to other characters; the gentlemen who announces her entrance in this scene claims that Ophelia acts in a way which would "make one think there might be thought / though nothing sure."[62] The speech of the mad scene is, nevertheless, mostly sung and rambled, with Ophelia switching between multiple ballads which highlight grief and sexuality.

The effects of the patriarchy on Ophelia are apparent from her first appearance in the play; throughout her first scene, Ophelia's father and brother exhibit concern over Ophelia's relationships and sexuality and place boundaries on what she is and is not allowed to do. The first line uttered by Ophelia in the play is a question, "Do you doubt that?,"[63] in response to Laertes reminding her to write to Laertes while he's away in Paris. He does not answer her, opting instead to offer his (unsolicited) advice on her relationship with Hamlet. This interaction illustrates much of Ophelia's experience within the play, where many of her attempts to communicate with other characters are thwarted by male characters' concern for her sexual status. These concerns serve to stifle Ophelia and her voice, making it so Ophelia is not allowed to speak without preoccupations regarding Hamlet becoming the center of conversation and therefore her character.

When Ophelia asks another question, Laertes answers, because the question concerns a relationship with another man; Laertes asserts that Hamlet's love for Ophelia would last "no more" than a minute, to which Ophelia replies, "No more but so?"[64] Laertes replies in the affirmative, that Hamlet's care for Ophelia will last only a minute, perhaps because it is related to the more fleeting sexual desire than actual love. That Ophelia's second question is answered but not her first is telling; Laertes exhibits no interest in discussing familial love at length, but

[62] *Hamlet* Act IV, Scene V, lines 15-16
[63] *Hamlet*, Act I Scene III, line 4
[64] *Hamlet* Act I, Scene III, line 11-12

Laertes is concerned that Ophelia will act foolishly in regard to sexual and romantic decisions. One could argue that this is a familial concern; Laertes does not want Ophelia to become dishonored, either through the embarrassment of a rejection by the prince or through the loss of her virginity. Tying virginity and honor together in this way further restricts Ophelia's agency, in a way that does not apply to the opposite sex.[65] This double standard is especially prominent considering Ophelia's next lines, in which she reminds Laertes, "Do not, as some ungracious pastors do, / Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven"[66] and then fail to follow that path himself. Laertes is aware of the hypocrisy of his actions, as her attempt to reprimand him in return is met with a "O, fear me not,"[67] a dismissal of Ophelia's attempt to critique gender roles and patriarchal society, and, therefore, a dismissal of her voice. Laertes is aware of how male sexuality and romance can negatively affect a woman and her place in society but is unwilling to examine how this implicates his own behavior. The initial interaction between Ophelia and Laertes illustrates the sexual parameters that will be maintained through the rest of the play– men, nearly all men, strictly police women's sexuality, with little attention paid to their role in the supposed sexual indiscretion.

Polonius, Ophelia's father, continues to restrict Ophelia's social and sexual freedom, linking her romantic relations even more explicitly with her sexuality. After Laertes departs in Act 1, Scene 3, Polonius restates Laertes' warning to Ophelia. Polonius, unlike Laertes, does associate Ophelia's actions with his own honor, claiming that her actions are not those which "behooves my daughter and your honor," indicating that, while Laertes may have some interest in preserving Ophelia's feelings, Polonius does not.[68] In fact, he demeans Ophelia multiple times

[65] What's particularly puzzling about this, and perhaps intentional on Shakespeare's part, is that, in other plays, he seems to be at least somewhat aware of patriarchal rule over young women. Many of his heroines (Juliet Capulet may be the most famous example of this) exert their authority and agency within their love lives.
[66] *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III, lines 50-51
[67] *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III, line 55
[68] Hamlet, Act I, Scene III, line 102.

within the conversation, calling her a "green girl,"[69] a "baby," who should allow Polonius to "teach" her how to act, rather than exercising her own independent thought.[70] He is clearly much more concerned with the court's perception of his family than with fatherly care. This concern for Ophelia appears particularly insidious when, amongst court concerns over Hamlet's mental state, Polonius poses Ophelia to run into Hamlet and return tokens from the couple's relationship. Within this interaction, Polonius aims to prove that Hamlet is "mad from [Ophelia's] love"[71] but places Ophelia in a position to be berated and demeaned by Hamlet. When Ophelia allows Polonius to "teach" her how to act around men, he uses the power to place Ophelia in a situation that could be uncomfortable for her to achieve his own motives.

Hamlet also imposes, rather forcefully, his own patriarchal order on Ophelia. Hamlet treats Ophelia both as a sexual object he desires, while also expressing revulsion at the idea of Ophelia being sexually active. Like Polonius, he is concerned with Ophelia's purity, and yet unlike Polonius, he does not have a vested interest in her purity. No matter how Ophelia expresses her sexuality (or does not) it is the wrong way, while Hamlet's contribution in her sexuality is not critiqued directly. He frequently speaks in unprompted sexual language to Ophelia; when Hamlet goes to sit next to Ophelia at a court play, he asks "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?" to which Ophelia refuses.[72] He repeats himself, as does Ophelia, to which he responds that, surely, Ophelia did not think he meant sexual intercourse, to which Ophelia responds that she "think[s] nothing."[73] Here, there are limited options to how Ophelia can react. Social convention dictates that she cannot publicly engage in this sexual language, but Hamlet's repeated innuendos do not allow Ophelia to easily escape the situation. Even her insistence that

[69] *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III, line 106.
[70] *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III, line 110.
[71] Hamlet Act 2, Scene I, line 86.
[72] Hamlet Act 3, Scene II, line 104-105.
[73] Hamlet Act 3, Scene II, lines 108-109.

she "think[s] nothing" is met with harassment; Hamlet insists that "nothing," Elizabethan slang for female genitalia, "is a fair thought to lie between maids'legs."[74] Hamlet ignores Ophelia's attempts at deflecting the conversation to a more appropriate topic, steamrolling her (reasonable) objections to his sexual suggestions while also mocking her for potentially interpreting the situation as sexual. He places Ophelia in a double bind– she cannot express discomfort with the overt sexual comments while also not being able to acknowledge that Hamlet is making the situation overtly sexual.

Ophelia's sexuality, and the confusion that it invokes in Hamlet, also appear when Hamlet famously tells her to "get thee to a nunnery."[75] The implication in this demand is twofold: Ophelia should be de-sexualized and institutionally (and religiously) prevented from engaging in sex, but also that she is a whore, for reasons which remain unclear to the audience. Hamlet sees the nunnery as a way to thwart Ophelia's sexual life: if Ophelia were to go to a (literal) nunnery, he says, she would not "be a breeder of sinners."[76] At the same time, as scholars including Gabrielle Dane have argued, Hamlet "might mean either a convent or a house of prostitution."[77] Hamlet demonstrates that the actual reality of Ophelia's virginity is not particularly important, whether she is a virgin or a whore can be conveniently condemned with one word, and that either status can be used in an insulting way against her.

Ophelia, in some ways, has found her voice in her "mad scene." Of Ophelia's nearly 1,200 words, 60 of those words are some variation of "my lord," an address she uses in reference to Polonius and Hamlet. And yet, by the fourth act these references to men have disappeared. After the fourth act has begun, Ophelia does not refer to a single man as "my lord," nor does she

[74] Hamlet Act Scene II, lines 110.
[75] Hamlet Act III Scene I, line 130.
[76] Hamlet Act III Scene I, line 131
[77] Dane "Reading Ophelia's Madness" 411

explicitly discuss Hamlet any further. In fact, the only direct, proper, respectful address present in Ophelia's "mad scene" is her entrance declaration, demanding "Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?"[78] Her "madness"[79] has freed her from the constraint of addressing men in respectful manner, allows for her, as Dane states, to be released "from the enforced repressions of obedience, chastity, patience, [and] liberates her from the prescribed roles of daughter, sister, lover, subject."[80] She still makes references to Hamlet, but they are free of the patriarchal constraints which have tainted her previous references and interactions. Her reference to Hamlet is no longer one of necessity, it is now that of a woman who has lost her family and her sanity due to his actions. She does not need to refer to him in the respectful manner she once did, and, in this way, it seems that her madness is liberatory.

This liberation comes at great expense; the exact cause of Ophelia's madness is heavily debated, but even so, nearly all critics agree it has been due to the actions of the men in her life. Laertes explicitly blames the murder of Polonius for her affliction, but critics, particularly Caroll Camden in his article "On Ophelia's Madness" (1964), have attributed her erratic behavior to the cumulative effects of all the men in her life. The fact that Hamlet, who has been a source of frustration for Ophelia throughout the entirety of the play, murders Polonius makes the death of Ophelia's father that much more maddening.

Despite the mad scene being Ophelia's wordiest portion of the play, the words are not entirely her own; nor are they entirely Shakespeare's. Ophelia's speech becomes much less inhibited in her madness, but her "speech" is not really speech at all, it is mostly portions of ballads which she sings in her mad scene. The first ballad of the mad scene, in which Ophelia

[78] Act IV, Scene V, line 26
[79] The cause of Ophelia's erratic behavior has gone by many names; at times her behavior has been aligned with female hysteria, and perhaps now it would be called mental illness. "Madness" is the term used by Laertes to describe Ophelia's behavior in Act IV, Scene V and thus will be used to describe her affliction, in an attempt to avoid extreme anachronism.
[80] Dane, "Reading Ophelia's Madness," 412.

sings "How should I your true love know / from another one,"[81] possesses the words and tune from the "Wasinghame Song," a well-known ballad of the time.[82] This snatch of ballad also clearly sets up a major theme in her distress– her lover, Hamlet. While Ophelia has been liberated in her madness from patriarchal court customs, such as referring to men as "my lord," she has not been liberated from the distress which these actions have caused her and spends much of her "mad scene" seemingly preoccupied by the trauma of their actions.

The other ballads which Ophelia sang were "likely familiar," at least in tune, to Shakespeare's contemporary audience.[83] While there is no proof that Shakespeare borrowed these other ballads from outside sources (but there is no proof to the contrary), he is sourcing at least tunes from the English tradition of ballad-singing. Ophelia's voice becomes even further from her own in this way, as the ballads are not, likely, understood to be her own words, both by audiences of the play and by the characters themselves. This results in distance being placed between the words which Ophelia is speaking and the feeling which she may (theoretically) be feeling. Further, Ophelia is drawing on conventions that are common in ballads, which we see explicitly through her interactions with other characters. At one point, Ophelia instructs those around her to sing along: "You must sing 'A-down, a-down'; and you 'call him a-down-a.'"[84] This action implies a pre-written ballad or perhaps a convention which she is copying in her madness, further suggesting that this ballad is not entirely her own.

Also notable within the play is the conflation which happens between the only two female characters, which further confuses the abstractly represented Ophelia. Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, marries Hamlet's paternal uncle at the beginning of the play, shocking the

[81] *Hamlet* Act IV, Scene V, lines 23-24
[82] Bialo, 301.
[83] Bialo, "Popular Performance, Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness" 298.
[84] *Hamlet,* Act IV, lines 172-173

grief-stricken Hamlet, whose father had died less than two months prior. Often, this anger at Gertrude translates into at least a vague sort of anger towards Ophelia (or at least she would have reason to feel it is directed at her); when Ophelia asserts that a play's prologue is brief, Hamlet replies that it is "Like a woman's love."[85] While this comment likely refers to Gertrude's hasty remarriage after her husband's death, Ophelia lacks the context that would allow the audience to come to this conclusion. Ophelia understands Hamlet as calling her, and all women's, fidelity into question, which further draws Ophelia and Gertrude together through their shared oppression through patriarchy. Mistakes, particularly those regarding sex, made by one woman result in punishment, through snarky comments, for all women.

In order to track similar history and perception between madwomen, I now briefly turn to Carol Thomas Neely's interpretation of Ophelia, like Bertha, representing a sort of "dark double" for Hamlet in her book *Distracted Subjects.* Neely argues that Ophelia's madness contrasts with the act of madness put on by Hamlet, thereby "emphasiz[ing] the difference between feigned and actual madness, melancholy, and distraction."[86] Other critics, like Sandra Fischer, have also acknowledged Ophelia as a "feminine counterpoint" to the feigned madness of Hamlet.[87] This is a less far-reaching conclusion than that made by Gilbert and Gubar, and one which has less of an impact on our perception of Ophelia's own humanity. Neely makes no suggestion that Ophelia simply exists as an aspect of Hamlet's own psyche, but rather a different experience which pulls Hamlet's experience into clearer perspective. Regardless of this distinction, critics have often viewed Ophelia as a subsidiary to Hamlet, thus potentially contributing to the urge to rewrite her.

[85] *Hamlet*, Act III Scene II, lines 173-175
[86] Neely 53-54
[87] Sandra K. Fischer, "Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in 'Hamlet,'" *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 14, no. 1 (1990): 2.

This interpretation further emphasizes the implied relationship between women and madness, as Hamlet is simply faking madness, while Ophelia is living through madness.

II. Ophelia and the Pre-Raphaelites

Ophelia is revisited repeatedly in the Victorian era, when the original Bertha Mason was conceived. Within this culture, Bertha and (adapted and reimagined, often) Ophelia coexist as influential cultural depictions of madwomen. It is also this point in time when Ophelia's influence begins to leave the stage and page, creeping into paintings and popular culture at large. This popularization was present not only through media depictions, which I analyze here, but also through the real-life experiences of "mad" women, as often "asylum superintendents… imposed the costume, gestures, props, and expression of Ophelia upon" their female patients.[88] The figure of the madwoman ceased to be a trope which served literary and thematic purposes, but a model of real life, which was imposed on real women.

I now turn to pictorial depictions of Ophelia, in which painters, particularly John Everett Milais, create their own fictitious spaces for Ophelia to occupy, imposing a voice which is entirely unique to the Pre-Raphaelite movement and makes moves to separate itself from the Shakespearean stage depictions through their representation of off-stage events. Ophelia is, very likely, Shakespeare's most heavily painted heroine, with many of these representations emerging from the Pre-Raphaelite tradition.[89] In order to adhere to social norms emphasizing purity in women, throughout much of the nineteenth-century, many playhouses redact from nearly all performances of Hamlet most of the description of Ophelia's death by drowning. The entirety of

[88] Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 86.
[89] Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 78.

Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning have been included here, but the Victorians typically cut the speech beginning with "Her clothes spread wide:"[90]

> There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
> Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke;
> When down her weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide
> And mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
> Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and endued unto
> that element. But long it could not be
> Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
> Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
> To muddy death.[91]

This monologue was believed to be incongruent with the "pathetic innocence" the Victorians ascribed to Ophelia.[92] The lines evoked, for the Victorian audience, "sordid associations with fallen women… who transgressed sexually and committed suicide usually by drowning."[93] Ophelia's clothing "spread[ing] wide" suggested "sexual abandon and dissolution" and her description as "mermaid-like" evoked images of the "a fantastical and unnatural creature" which the Victorians considered to be "decadent."[94]

Fig. 1, Millais, John Everett, *Ophelia*, 1851-52, Tate

Most famous is John Everett Millais's interpretation of Ophelia (pictured left), a depiction of her at-the-time controversial death by drowning. In the image, Ophelia floats down a small river, surrounded by greenery and flowers, rife with symbolic meaning, nearly all of which are described in the original Shakespearean text.[95] Notably, in Shakespeare's text, this scene is not acted out on stage, marking the image's departure from previous depictions of Ophelia. Millais focuses on the natural environment she inhabits, choosing to make no reference to the fact that this is typically performed on a stage.[96] Millais here exercises creative control over Ophelia, creating an imaginary world which is entirely distinct from that depicted in performances of Shakespeare's play. Millais' painting represents a reclamation of Ophelia, in which she is depicted precisely as Shakespeare describes her. In doing this, Millais eschews the virtuous projecting upon her that was popular in his time, but also, in his fidelity to Shakespeare's text, she is depicted in a way that no other painter or actress has depicted her.

Ophelia represented a perfect subject to a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an English society that emphasized Romantic ideals of "emotional honesty, physical beauty, affinity with nature, and untimely deaths,"[97] that would encapsulate all that the Brotherhood loved. However, it is important to note that the "sane" Ophelia, that is the Ophelia who appears in every scene prior to Act IV, does not fit this ideal. It is specifically the mad Ophelia, who sings bawdy ballads and drowns in a river, that lives up to the pre-Raphaelite ideal for women as tragic subjects. This explains the flood of Ophelia paintings that came out around the same time, including by Dante Gabriel Rosetti (who returned to her likeness twice), Arthur Hughes (who also returned to Ophelia twice), and John William Waterhouse (who painted Ophelia on three separate occasions over the course of twenty-one years, from 1889, 1894, and 1905). The

[95]Remediating Ophelia with Pre-Raphaelite Eyes
[96] Rhodes, *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture,* pg. 89
[97] Rhodes, *Ophelia in Victorian Visual Culture*, 90.

Pre-Raphaelites re-invented Ophelia, or, perhaps, they revived her. No longer was her death able to be ignored for purity purposes; rather her death became her character. This recapturing of her off-stage death, as in the Millais painting, reaffirms a new, fictive world for Ophelia to inhabit, in which the painters have total creative control. Through their fidelity to the Shakespearean text, the Pre-Raphaelites depicted an Ophelia that encapsulates the complexity she was written with.

Ophelia's hypotextual complexity is emphasized by Pre-Raphaelite paintings; artists often chose to depict her in an imagined state immediately prior to her death. Dante Gabriel Rosetti, a contemporary of Millais who drew Ophelia rather than painted her, is one of the few artists who depicted Ophelia as she appears in the play, within a building, interacting with other characters.[98] The majority of other interpretations depict Ophelia, alone, outside, and/or dying. In the words of Elaine Showalter, "the English Pre-Raphaelites painted her again and again, choosing the drowning which is only described in the play, and where no actress's image has preceded them or interfered with their imaginative supremacy."[99] In this sense, the Pre-Raphaelites construct Ophelia's femininity, or their idea of it, in relation to nature and death – the main focus in their paintings.

In the artists' rush to paint her, to represent her connections to nature and femininity and dying, they exert a new kind of patriarchal control over her. The Pre-Raphaelite reclamation of Ophelia demonstrates the beginning of Ophelia as a symbol operating beyond Shakespeare's intentions. The Pre-Raphaelites adapted Ophelia into a representation of their own artistic values while also re-orienting her character, placing emphasis on the moments immediately preceding her drowning. Showalter's analysis sheds light on another aspect of Ophelia's popularity: her lack of representation in *Hamlet* allows for extended artistic freedom.

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[98] Rhodes, *Ophelia in Victorian Visual Culture*, 101.
[99] Showalter, "Representing Ophelia:" 84.

III. Revisiting Ophelia, In Her "Own" Words

Paul Griffiths, in his novel *let me tell you* (2008), utilizes the 481 distinct words spoken by Ophelia in *Hamlet* to retell and extend Ophelia's story, quite literally in her own words. In the novel, a character called Ophelia recounts several subjects alluded to in *Hamlet*, primarily concerning her relationships with other characters. *let me tell you* includes only slight overlap with the actions of the play: the reader is informed that when its action begins, it has been two months since the king has died (also true in the play) but Griffiths' work does not explicitly depict Ophelia's descent into madness, nor Polonius's death. The novel ends on a vague note: as Ophelia contemplates leaving Elsinore, she stops and contemplates whether she should stay or go, then simply states "I choose."[100]

Griffiths' work acts as a perfect appropriation of Ophelia in the context of this chapter. When a female character is so continually adapted and appropriated, it is important to return to what we know of her. *let me tell you* reclaims Ophelia's voice, allowing for her, arguably for the first time, to speak for herself. Griffiths' manages to complete a series of cohesive vignettes, some of which can be described as anachronistic, but maintains the throughline of Ophelia's confusion of her own self. *let me tell you* also works in a critical way similar to *Wide Sargasso Sea*; through his use of only words Ophelia speaks in the hypotext, Griffiths creates an argument for what Ophelia *could* have said with the limited space she was permitted.

let me tell you, in its experimental form, often, as reviewer Daniel Green states in his review of the book, "straddles the line between narrative fiction and poetry."[101] Additionally,

[100]Paul Griffiths, *let me tell you*, *let me tell you*. (Hastings: Reality Street Editions, 2008): 139

[101]Daniel Green, "Paul Griffiths-Let Me Tell You," Accessed March 5, 2023. https://www.thereadingexperience.net/tre/paul-griffiths-let-me-tell-you.html

Griffiths often plays with form in the novel, with small portions of the narrative written in the format of a play or a sonnet. The constrained nature of the novel does contribute to certain motifs being repeated; Ophelia frequently references memories which occur on a mountain.

Griffiths often poses Ophelia, cleverly, as both restrained by the patriarchy and by her source text. Ophelia recounts feeling as though "it rained words in my head– words given me by some other, as if I had no hand in what I say, as if all I may do is give speech…and whilst they go on I cannot say what I would truly wish to say."[102] One interpretation of this passage is the literal acknowledgement that Ophelia's words are not her own, of course, they are Shakespeare's. However, as a product of the hypotext, Griffiths' may also be referring to the stifling which occurs to Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Without ascribing any undue intent to Ophelia, she may, theoretically, wish to disobey the wishes of Laertes and Polonius and continue her romantic relationship with Hamlet, the obedient daughter is forbidden to do so.

Ophelia's perception that "it rained words" also conflates her experiences as a character and a woman with her experience of madness. As posed by Jerome Mazzaro in his article "Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and King Lear'" (1985), *Hamlet* sets up Ophelia's madness as something which "interrupts memory's contact with both the sensitive soul and one's will."[103] Madness, within the hypotext, represents a separation between accurate, clear speech and Ophelia's wishes, though symbolic meaning can be gleaned from her mad scene. Ophelia, in this way, is being fed lines not only from Laertes, Polonius, and Hamlet (and the patriarchal society at large) but also from her madness, furthering the connection between Ophelia's treatment by men and her eventual madness.

[102] Griffiths, *let me tell you*, 12.
[103] Mazzaro 100

One word is notably missing from the narrative, which Ophelia does say in the hypotext: Hamlet. This echoes the convention put forward by Rhys in refusing to name Rochester. Ophelia chooses to simply refer to Hamlet by "he." This lack of acknowledgement could, as in Rhys' novel, be a reclamation of power, but, in Griffiths' narrative, this appears to be only partially the case. To begin with, Ophelia only refers to Hamlet in the hypotext by name when he is not present, and only one time. Otherwise, she is bound by court convention and must refer to him as "my lord." The "lord" epithet is used for Hamlet only once within let me tell you, to orient the reader. Rather, Hamlet's name does not make an appearance because, even before much of the hypotext's actions have transpired, there is an alienation between the pair.

While *let me tell you* does not obsess over Ophelia's death as the Pre-Raphaelites do, it cannot fully avoid the issue of Ophelia's suicide. Through Griffiths' attempt to assign Ophelia further agency, her suicide has been de-emphasized. "Ophelia" and "death" have become so interconnected since the Pre-Raphaelites depicted her, the novel cannot avoid acknowledging it. Because she is the narrator, she does not narrate her death; instead, a character referred to simply as "the maid" foretells many of the events of the play, including Ophelia's death. She states that Laertes and Hamlet will be "at a grave" that Ophelia knows, without being told "will be my grave."[104] Even within her own story, before many of the actions of the play have transpired, Ophelia knows that there is "no way out," indicating a loss of agency.[105] Even before much damage has been done, Ophelia acknowledges her own helplessness in the course of events, perhaps representing a belief in destiny. However, when read in conjunction with the hypotext and her adaptations, this move illustrates the depth of Ophelia's helplessness as a woman in the court.

[104] Griffiths, *let me tell you*, 42.
[105] Griffiths, *let me tell you*, 43.

Reading Ophelia's adaptations further elaborates the figure of the literary madwoman, building on conventions put forward through Bertha's adaptations. This is present both in Neely's critical adaptation, but also in the sympathetic reimagining which Griffiths creates. As a character in what is, possibly, the most popular of all Shakespeare's plays, Ophelia has a wide audience, and thus has served as many audiences' introduction to the figure of the madwoman, allowing her adaptations to proliferate to a wider audience. In many ways, the patterns of her adaptations and appropriations, and therefore her place in a wider literary imagination, mimic that of Bertha (with the notable exception of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings). Both characters are represented abstractly in the hypotext, with emphasis placed on sexuality and their relationships to men. Critically, their "madness" has been used to illuminate other aspects of their story. And, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, writers like Rhys and Griffiths began imagining a life and story for Bertha and Ophelia. When looked at individually, this is merely happenstance. If we read the history of representation of the two characters in conjunction, this appears to be a pattern.

Coda

Madwomen have captivated audiences for centuries, through both literary works, such as the hypotexts and appropriations explored in this thesis, but also through critical engagement and visual media. Throughout the past four hundred years, depictions of madwomen have absorbed broad statements of women: in the case of Ophelia, virginity and modesty can be touted as the ultimate aspiration for women, and, as is more often the case for Bertha, monstrous sexual beings as the ultimate failure for women. The two characters, so sparsely present in the hypotext, offer themselves up to endless interpretation, in which it seems that the original intent of the character is lost.

I am not the only one entranced by Ophelia and Bertha. Though Bertha seems to be less popular than Ophelia (likely because she is just an older character), she has still earned her spot in popular culture. On the literary front, *Reluctant Immortals* (2022) recently sought to reimagine

Bertha Mason (as well as Lucy Westenra, of *Dracula* fame) as vampires in the twentieth century, seeking revenge on the men who wronged them. *Ophelia* (2006) by Lisa Klein, which was later adapted into a movie, reimagines the ending of Hamlet, creating a universe in which Ophelia survives the final act of the play and lives to tell her own story. I mention these because, while I chose to focus on appropriations which do not change the endings of the hypotexts, many writers have chosen to imagine a happier, redemptive ending for Bertha and Ophelia.

The two madwomen live in the imaginations of non-academic essays as well. "Bertha Mason is Sacred" (2016) by Vanessa Zoltan details a young, mixed-race woman on a journey to read *Jane Eyre* as a sacred text, which the author defines as "acting as if it could teach me and that if I kept working with it, it would keep teaching me more and more."[106] During this exercise, Zoltan realizes that she had been reading a book in which the death of Bertha (who Zoltan reads as mixed-race) "enables her good, white husband to become a humbled, pious spouse to his good, white wife."[107] This realization leads to a reconnection with Bertha wherein the author "see[s] Bertha everywhere" and decides that, as the title asserts, Bertha Mason is sacred.[108] Zoltan approaches Bertha Mason with a sympathy which echoes that of Jean Rhys and a reverence which recalls the Pre-Raphaelite movement's for Ophelia.

This near-religious devotion is not reserved for only Bertha; "The Unified Theory on Ophelia: On Women, Writing, and Mental Illness" (2015) by B.N. Harrison explores the author's relationship to the character Ophelia, particularly as a young woman. Religiosity plays into this essay, much in the same way it does in Zoltan's: Harrison became invested in Shakespeare after deconverting from Christianity and one of the most memorable lines of the essays states that:

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[106] Vanessa Zoltan, "Bertha Mason is Sacred," Harvard Divinity Bulletin, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Summer/Autumn 2016, https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/bertha-mason-is-sacred/.
[107] Vanessa Zoltan, "Bertha Mason is Sacred."
[108] Vanessa Zoltan, "Bertha Mason is Sacred."

"Women seemed to invoke her [Ophelia] like a patron saint; men seemed mostly interested in fetishizing her flowery, waterlogged corpse."[109] Harrison, like Zoltan, recounts that "everywhere I looked, I seemed to glimpse her [Ophelia] in poetry, art, music, and films." Harrison concludes that Ophelia, in her madness, has "become devastatingly powerful."[110] Ophelia, to Harrison, "explodes the myth of the melodramatic teenage girl," as Harrison imagines that in Ophelia's mad scene, the characters complicit in Ophelia's demise realize that they all "fucked up *bad*."[111] It seems that the most revolutionary bit about Ophelia, to Harrison, is her ability to illuminate the issues of patriarchy and mental health for both the characters of the play, but also for centuries worth of readers.

Most interestingly, and originally, madwomen seem to be taking on a life of adaptation on social media. These casual, short adaptations of sorts take the limited short form of social media and often utilize internet content trends animated by aspects of the character. Searching the term "Ophelia" or "Bertha Mason" on popular platforms such as Pinterest, TikTok, or even the music streaming app Spotify, reveals just how present the two characters are in the cultural conscience of—mostly-- young women. One music playlist entitled "mad wife" includes a description which reads "bertha antoinette cosway mason, you deserve the world."[112] The playlist is five hours long, including songs that elevate the figure of the supernatural seductresses– "Witchy Woman" by the 1970s group The Eagles– but also yearning love songs– with titles like "I Wanna Be Yours." It is fascinating that this playlist exists at all as an exhibit of textual engagement, but its portrait of Bertha is even more interesting. The description itself implies an admiration of Bertha,

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[109] B.N. Harrison, "The Unified Theory on Ophelia: On Women, Writing, and Mental Illness," The Toast, March 3, 2015. https://the-toast.net/2015/03/03/unified-theory-ophelia/#:~:text=I'll%20be%20as%20thin,story%20that%20condemns%20and%20reproaches.

[110] Harrison, "The Unified Theory on Ophelia."

[111] Harrison, "The Unified Theory on Ophelia."

[112] Adelaide Dave, "mad wife," Spotify. https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0xdN4y9eObxNxLGLTmPfat?si=97a01199c92c4070.

continuing Rhys's tradition of empathizing with the figure of the madwoman. The complex portrait of Bertha that the songs paint mirrors the complexity of character that that adaptations of Bertha have offered; she is both a monster with seductive qualities and a woman in love, fantasizing about a lover.

Searching "Ophelia" on TikTok, a popular video sharing app geared towards children and teenagers, yields hundreds of results. One such video depicts various photos of actresses who have played Ophelia with the caption "she's just like me f[or] r[eal]."[113] Here, the issue of short form engagement with the figure of the madwoman emerges: what, exactly, does the creator mean when identifying with Ophelia? Does the creator identify with Ophelia's oppression under patriarchy? Or, more sinisterly, does she identify with Ophelia's method of escaping the patriarchy– suicide? The constrained mode does not allow for elaboration, creating a potential for misinterpreting that could be dangerous to more impressionable viewers.[114] Regardless of intent, the original poster is not alone; the first comment on the video reads "i think about her everyday im not joking she is me i am her we are one in the same etc" and numerous other comments affirming kinship with Ophelia.[115]

Young women on social media are also adopting characteristics of the figure of the madwoman outside of explicit references to Bertha and Ophelia. On "Book-Tok" (referring to the "book side" of the TikTok app), many women recommend books for those who experience "feminine rage,"[116] for women who are "literally insane,"[117] or "for girls approaching the insanity

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[113] @virginmartyr, "she's just like me fr," TikTok, September 22, 2022. https://www.tiktok.com/@virginmartyr/video/7146313942707539246?_r=1&_t=8aftDdwtgBH.
[114] Jennifer Hulbert, in her book *Shakespeare and Youth Culture* (2006), attempts to dissect teenage fascination with Ophelia, deciding that young women identify with her due to her "desire to please others" and the strain of patriarchal pressures on Ophelia.
[115]@virginmartyr, "she's just like me fr."
[116] @miss_ipkiss_reads, "feminine rage reading list," TikTok, March 8, 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR7fUTdH/.
[117] @zoes_reads, "when she's literally insane," TikTok, March 30, 2022, https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR7fXVs9/.

of womanhood."[118] Here, the first definition of "madwoman" is invoked; these creators are referencing the idea of insanity and, further, explicitly gendering the idea.[119] These creators are not referencing an inclusive experience of insanity which anyone could experience, they are drawing on previous rhetorics of "insanity" (whatever that may mean, creators seem to view this as a term which will be instinctively known to their audience) that is gender specific. Not only are audiences invoking established rhetoric of the madwoman, but they are also applying it to books they are reading, thus creating more literary madwomen.

One TikTok does explicitly mention the conditions which would make a woman "feral" and "unhinged."[120] The creator then provides "hyperspecific" situations which an audience may have experienced in order to be deemed "unhinged:" "fear[ing] the stifling constraints of gender roles," "still feel[ing] keenly the pain of teenage girlhood," and being "disillusioned by modern dating" to name a few.[121] Again, this creator evokes the language of the madwoman. The word "feral" recalls the animalistic behavior of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, suggesting behavior that is uncivilized and maybe even violent. "Unhinged" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as something which has been "thrown into confusion; unsettled, disordered,"[122] which evokes the language of the madwoman who is **"**uncontrolled by reason or judgment." Additionally, the creator even cites the issues which plague the literary madwoman and have been investigated in this thesis. Both Ophelia and Bertha feel stifled by the constraints of womanhood in their

[118] @plagiarisedgirl, "more media recommendations for girls approaching the insanity of womanhood," TikTok, April 13, 2022, https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR7fa553/.
[119] While "feminine rage" is not explicitly referencing "insanity"/"madness" in the way that the other two terms are, the creator of the video referenced, @miss_ipkiss_reads, defines feminine rage as "the rage that women experience when they are met with a limitation placed upon them by society– two notable forces being capitalism and patriarchy." These themes are also present within the hypotextual narratives of both Ophelia and Bertha, and thus I have decided to classify "feminine rage" as a modern extension of the figure of the madwoman. @miss_ipkiss_reads, "what is FEMININE RAGE?," TikTok, May 19, 2022. https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR7Peosc/.
[120]@cybrgloss.jpg, "hyperspecific book recommendations for feral, unhinged women," TikTok, January 26, 2023. https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR798Psq/.
[121] @cybrgloss.jpg, "hyperspecific book recommendations."
[122] "unhinged, adj.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/214196?rskey=vzbT7u&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed March 13, 2023).

hypotexts and adaptations. Ophelia and Bertha, in some ways, even have trouble regarding the concept of dating (and men)– both Hamlet and Rochester are the source of many of the madwomen's problems. And, while "the pain of teenage girlhood" is a vague descriptor, the figure of the madwoman does experience difficulty in concepts which are related to coming-of-age, and so "pain" might be an accurate way to put it.

It was through these social media depictions that I was drawn to the figure of the madwoman. What I have analyzed here is only the tip of the iceberg; entire subcultures seem to be popping up that invoke the figure of the madwoman. The figure of the madwoman here has become something almost algorithmic in content– rage, particularly at men, defining her character– but also algorithmic in spread. TikTok videos recommending unhinged (which, in its vagueness, could mean *anything*) female characters do not discriminate. If a young woman, or teenager, is particularly impressionable, and these videos are being fed to her without critical commentary, will there be repercussions? The feminist inheritance which encourages female rebellion here may prove to be dangerous: can the madwoman continue to proliferate in this new short form context without creating copycats of her, at times, dangerous behavior? When young women invoke Ophelia or Bertha on social media, will it be entirely clear that they are invoking their rebellion against the patriarchy, and not the suicide that they committed to escape such restraints?

The madwoman's presence on social media attests to her overall persistence as a figure in the cultural consciousness. Bite-sized bits of the character continue to circulate, piquing the interests of more madwoman adaptors. Given the current standards of representation for Bertha and Ophelia on social media, anecdotal evidence suggests that the madwoman is moving towards a space of feminist martyrdom, in many ways. However, this martyrdom could quickly go

wrong, especially when reverence for madwomen figures conflate their "madness" and their "power," or, as in the case of Sylvia Plath, their notoriety and talent.

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