

Literary Madness
in British, Postcolonial,
and Bedouin Women's
Writing

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By

Shahd Alshammari

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INTRODUCTION

MADWOMEN AND EMPIRE, MADWOMEN AND PATRIARCHY

“Revolution is born from the womb of tragedy” (Qabbani 2013)¹

Women, having always been identified with ‘emotion’ and the body, rather than reason, have a certain power to threaten and disrupt universal ideologies that are constantly working to re-enforce women’s subjugation. This book aims to investigate literary representations of madwomen figures who protest against their respective societies and environments. When we think of the figure of the “madwoman” we immediately think of the madwoman in the attic, the crazy, grotesque figure that haunts Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. In a sense, she is the prototype of the “madwoman” figure. This study considers other representations and meanings of the “madwoman”, using the Victorian prototype as a stepping stone. I examine other experiences of female madness by placing the Victorian madwoman alongside the Postcolonial and Bedouin madwoman, by placing East/West alongside each other, and attempting to displace the dichotomy that divides them. Eastern women, colonised women, and Bedouin women share the same dichotomous subjugation as Western women. This is not to undermine or ignore their specificities and differences, but instead to evoke a wider perception, and not a narrow vision, rather a multifaceted madwoman trope. This study is primarily based on textual analyses that emphasise the ways in which the

¹ Qabbani was a Syrian poet who wrote for and about women, criticized oppressive political regimes, and attempted to liberate women’s bodies. The poem is concerned with how Beirut has been taken advantage of, raped, and killed. The motherland also symbolizes a woman’s body, and Qabbani insists that revolution is only born from the womb of grief. My usage of the quotation here is to emphasize the significance of the womb, the maternal – the feminine. All of the madwomen figures protest and attempt their own individual revolt because of tragedy, grief and oppression. See: *On Entering the Sea: The Erotic and Other Poetry of Nizar Qabbani*. 2013.

madwoman trope cuts across national and literary boundaries. What emerges instead of a dichotomy of the Western madwoman/Eastern madwoman is a bridge that enables connections and serves as a reminder of common female experience; experience that is the result of the British Empire's ideologies, colonial relations with the other, and patriarchal oppression within the domestic space.

This book takes a transnational feminist approach, focusing on establishing common links between the literary texts and the manifestations of female subjugation, cutting across national frontiers and cultures. The network of texts I have chosen works together to emphasize human commonality rather than difference. By reading these texts as interrelated and parallel to each other, oppositional structures of East/West, and Eastern women versus Western women are dislocated. There is a common oppression shared across these borders and boundaries, and this commonality challenges the dichotomous thought that has (ever since colonialism and imperialism) separated and elevated the West and the Western woman above her Eastern counterpart. That is not to say that there is a universal status of the "madwoman" or woman, but rather, it is crucial to consider a new terrain of different madwomen whose experiences are, at the end of the day, comparable to each other, despite geographical, historical, and cultural differences. The Victorian madwoman who is locked up, then, is not altogether different from the Postcolonial and/or Bedouin madwoman, who is confined not in the attic or a Victorian bourgeois home, but rather, a tent, a room, an asylum, and most significantly, a space of confinement that is the result of both colonialism and patriarchy. The confinement is not limited to the attic or any other physical space, but rather, it is limitless. The confinement is culturally and imperially constructed; it is an enslavement that women struggle to break free from. The journey they embark upon is a journey away from patriarchal and Empire ideologies, specifically a journey into the self. The female protagonists retreat into their inner worlds, their psyches, and an internal domain that offers an alternative to the externally oppressive environments that they suffer in.

The othering of women has happened throughout history, across different national, geographical, and cultural borders. This othering process has no doubt written itself on both women's minds and bodies, regardless of race, culture, or social class. As such, madness is experienced by different classes of women, different cultures, and in different ways by different women. In their difference, there is sameness, as the dichotomy of same/different must also be called into question, must also be deconstructed, and reveal the inextricable interconnectedness of

the two oppositions. This study pluralizes the images of madwomen, considering cultural and geopolitical specificities under the umbrella of sameness or commonality. The chapters of this book consider a selection of texts from different literary periods, different cultures, and authors of different backgrounds: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* (1996), and Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1996). The range of texts examine the experience of the madwoman, re-investigate and re-invent the "madwoman in the attic" paradigm in order to encompass the experiences of the "other" madwoman, focusing on different cultures and spaces of confinement. The selection of these texts has been made on the basis of two important principles. First, all of the texts are written by women and centre on a strictly female experience of living, and of course, the experience of madness and exclusion. Second, the texts are taken both from canonical works (Victorian fiction) and established as well as emerging writers.

The narratives that I have chosen deal with different types of madness and disability as portrayed in literature. In *Madness: A Brief History*, Roy Porter claims that "all societies judge some people mad: any strict clinical justification aside, it is part of the business of marking out the different, deviant, and perhaps dangerous" (Porter 2003, 62). In a sense, women who aim to break down cultural, ideological, and social structures are labelled as "mad." Whether they are actually clinically mad or merely stigmatized as mentally inferior is a question that shall be addressed by referring to textual representations of "madwomen" in literature. How do writers portray this "madwoman?" She is not always condemned to the attic, as in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; rather she is a moving being, always in a state of being and becoming. She is a Western woman, she is an Eastern woman, she is a colonised woman, she is a Victorian woman, and she is a daughter, a wife, a mother. Some of the female protagonists are deemed "mad" because their behaviour is considered aberrant and/or deviant. We see this in the case of Ammu in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is considered a "bad" woman, and in this case, bad becomes a synonym for mad. Another example occurs in Al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, where madness becomes synonymous with the bodily experience of disability. Fatima is considered a mad invalid, different from the norm of accepted femininity; her immobility renders her unwomanly; a grotesque figure. In all of the texts I have chosen to work with, the female protagonists are socially marginalized or excluded, *considered* mad, and are thus abjected from society.

The theme of madness and madwomen protagonists is a textual strategy, one that makes use of fragmentation and unsettles the readers. The texts do not provide a sense of completeness or closure; they are fictions of fragmentation, of gaps and inconsistencies, multilayered discourses of otherness, and a sense of disintegration. There are multiple tensions that must be reconciled within the madwomen's volatile environments and their inner consciousness. The protagonists are not 'normal' in any sense, they are different and deviant, and their endings are culminated in madness and/or death. This textual strategy of employing madness is used by women writers to speak out against both patriarchy and Empire, and it is the madwomen protagonists who are able to embody agency.

The madwomen figures are embodied agents, whether through their experience of madness or physical disability. In fictional texts, madness and disability cannot be ignored; they are potent forces that shed light on discourses of race, gender, and otherness. I am concerned with the experiences of madness, invalidism and disability in literary narratives because of their potential to disrupt any discourse of normalization. Lennard Davis's work on disability is significant in the field of Disability Studies. In *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism and Other Difficult Positions*, he argues that disability is a discursive category, and examines the relationship between disability and normality in the light of postmodern theory. He claims that disability is a "new category...seen as continuous, running the gamut from physical impairments to deformity to monstrosity to madness" (Davis 2002, 57). Ideas of disability and who falls into the category of the 'disabled' remain unclear and fluid; disability encompasses an extraordinary range of physical, psychiatric, and cognitive attributes. As such, my madwomen figures in literary narratives are part of a larger scope of deviant figures that are excluded from the discourse of normalcy. The fictional madwoman figure is either mentally deranged, has a bout of madness which then manifests itself physically, or is *both* mad and physically disabled.

The *Bildungsroman* has been conceptualized in different works that examine fictions of female development. The pattern of the female *Bildungsroman* has accommodated different forms of individual growth. Instead of the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman*, the narrative concludes differently. Gender is integrated with the traditional genre, observing what the female experience of growth is, thus redefining the genre's strict definitions of plot and the protagonist's successful integration into society. Growth is not a linear process, but rather, it is fragmented, and on the protagonists' own terms, given their respective

societies and environment. Maturity is negotiated within multiple tensions and sites of trauma, most significantly the terrain of Empire ideologies and patriarchy.

The influence of race and gender on the madwoman trope and the *Bildungsroman* genre is intrinsic to this study. The literary representations of madwomen figures help bring the shared experiences of gender and racial oppression to the surface. By re-examining Victorian representations of madwomen figures, the chapters highlight the ways by which Victorian culture was oppressive in its class, gender, and racial politics. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in her acclaimed essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”: “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (Spivak 1986, 262). The Victorian texts accentuate the racial and gender politics that subjugate and eventually annihilate women. I place two of the canonical works of the Brontës next to Postcolonial and Bedouin fiction. Postcolonial and Bedouin fiction usually present oppressed female characters who are subjected to both patriarchal and colonial rule. The works discussed in the chapters share similar themes, but also, they evoke images of madness as resistance to both Empire and patriarchal ideologies. In the Victorian texts, there is no mother figure. Both Catherine and Jane do not have mothers; they are orphans, dealing with patriarchal relations at home. The British Empire and its imperial ideologies facilitate patriarchal relations; in a sense, the Empire comes to stand in metonymically for white male supremacy, the father figure who introduces imperial ideologies of class and race, controlling both the public and the private sphere. In striking contrast, the female heroines in *The God of Small Things*, *Pillars of Salt*, and *The Tent* have mother figures and strong mother-daughter relationships. Mother figures feature in these texts as a form of female solidarity, and typically they encourage a revolt against patriarchal oppression. Of course, there are some exceptions. Some female characters appear as the agents of patriarchal oppression, but it is evident that they suffer from the worst type of oppression, whereby the oppressed becomes the oppressor. Generally though, the mother figure also symbolizes the motherland, the land that fights against the British Empire, and resists colonial contact. The mother figure, then, is an important mechanism in the Eastern texts, exemplifying a crucial difference from the metropole. Other themes are repeated across the different texts, across different time periods and cultures. There is an undeniable central theme of madness and the madwoman as a figure of protest. Subthemes are also repeated, such as patriarchy, marriage,

domesticity, mothering and child-bearing. External factors pressure and threaten to annihilate any female subjectivity and/or sense of self.

Intertextuality is necessary for reading the network of texts this book explores. The idea of relationality between texts poses one way of understanding the way in which texts speak to each other, regardless of historical and literary time periods. Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* outlines some of the major theorists' work on intertextuality, including M.M. Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Harold Bloom.² I make use of the term intertextuality because "it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness, and interdependence in modern cultural life" (Allen 2002, 5). Weaving the texts I have chosen together, I take the idea of intertextuality to foreground how texts from different cultures and historical periods can be read together, and in fact, repeat similar themes. As Allen notes: "However it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy" (Allen 2002, 6). My use of intertextuality here argues that Bedouin writing ought to be taken into consideration in order to maintain the "wholeness" of Postcolonial literature. Works of literature are influenced by each other and continue to repeat similar tropes, and that is to say, there is no absolute uniqueness to the English madwoman, but rather, there is a commonality to all Anglophone post-nineteenth-century literature that features madwomen figures.

The recurrent theme of madness in literary works written by women in the English and American traditions poses multiple questions. In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that madness in nineteenth century literature was a theme that women writers adopted, as well as "dramatizations of imprisonment and escape....we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period" (Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar 2000, 85). Like Gilbert and Gubar, I argue that there is something very distinctively "female" in the writings of the women writers I have selected, and that perhaps a new tradition is in order, one that encompasses the "other madwoman" and brings the Victorian madwoman closer to her Eastern counterpart. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that:

²Allen asserts that poststructuralist critics "employ the term intertextuality to disrupt notions of meaning, whilst structuralist critics employ the same to locate and even fix literary meaning" (2). Allen recognizes that the term itself is flexible and is used differently by different theorists, including feminist and postcolonial theorists.

It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters. Recently, in fact, social scientists and social historians like Jessie Bernard, Phyllis Chesler, Naomi Weisstein, and Pauline Bart have begun to study the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally (Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar 2000, 53).

In the same vein, this book aims to find the parallel connections that “make women sick” while expanding the madwoman paradigm to include different texts and cultures, that still resonate with the Victorian madwoman trope. A study like Gilbert and Gubar’s was Eurocentric in its approach, but nevertheless, remains indispensable for women’s literary history.

It is crucial to historicize the emergence of madness and its repercussions. Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* is considered one of the most influential works on mental illness, a great contribution to the sciences and the arts. Foucault argues that madness is not necessarily a biological or natural state, but is socially constructed and sustained by oppressive societies which aim to control, regulate, and monitor human behaviour. Foucault has studied the institutionalization of madness and humankind’s fear of “the bestiality of the madman...The mentally ill person was now a subhuman and beastly scapegoat; hence the need to protect others” (Foucault 1988, vii). Perhaps the biggest downfall of Foucault’s work is its preoccupation with the West’s views on madness, yet it remains indispensable to the study of madness.

For Foucault, madness and sanity are mutually constructed. He speaks of the “man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart, are not yet disjunct...Here madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist” (Foucault 1988, x). Sanity and insanity are dualistic oppositions, but for Foucault, they are coexisting. The question of madness in Foucault’s text deals with Western notions of reason and unreason, what constitutes both, and how society had perceived those who failed to behave within the reason framework. Western culture went through a series of reactions to madness, or what was deemed as “unreason.” At the end of the Middle Ages, “madness and the madman [became] major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men” (Foucault 1988, 13). The madman, so to speak, was able to enunciate reality and reason through his utterances of unreason. He was able to provide, or speak, “love to lovers, the truth of life to the young, the middling reality of things to the proud, to the

insolent, and to liars” (Foucault 1988, 14). Perhaps even more so is the madwoman, who in her madness is able to threaten the patriarchal order. In the selections of texts I have chosen, the madwoman figure is a figure of protest that almost always speaks out against the hegemonic order, and uncannily is the voice of wisdom. Her voice is the voice of true reason, the voice that the author employs to critique society and women’s subjugation.

In the four texts in the following chapters, madness is the gateway to an individual revolution. Only through madness are the madwomen able to access a different reality. Sufism, for example, calls for the breakdown of the ego, demolishing boundaries of selfhood, in order to find a larger, universal truth of being and existence. Madness is sacred in Sufism because it entails a loss of self for a higher purpose. Karen Armstrong suggests that this state of annihilation, which is called “*fana*” in Arabic, is the end of the experience of separation, and leads to “a sense of absorption into a larger, ineffable reality” (Armstrong 1999, 268). Perhaps what these fictional madwomen do is an act of “*fana*” and a protest that does dissolve the self in order to find, or call for a better reality. Divine madness for the Sufi is a state of existence that requires an act of surrender and a breakdown of the ego. The reward goes beyond the ‘average’ understanding of sanity/insanity and everyday life. Madwomen characters in the four texts reach a state of annihilation that is enlightening, producing an epiphany (although not religious in any sense) that calls for change.

As a consequence of European imperial and colonial rule, the Western psychiatric profession was able to manage women’s minds in both the East and the West. As the coloniser brought along Victorian ideologies to the colonised, the Master was able to write the Slave, the West was able to write the East, and to use Edward Said’s term, orientalise the East and Eastern women. As such, there has always been a desire to control, colonise, tame, and conquer beastly Eastern women, who in more ways than one represent the colonised land. With all their allure and “mysteries” Eastern women became doubly oppressed, doubly marginalized, and doubly feared. As with all ideological and cultural hierarchies, the West was placed above the East, the Western men above Eastern men, Western women above Eastern women, and so on. The list is endless. What concerns me is the idea of Western women as occupying as superior to Eastern women. Only in a false dialogue between East and West building on an ideological construction of absolute difference does this hold. When we focus on First World Feminists and the Western woman’s experience, or the specificity of Third World Women’s experiences, our perspective becomes limited, even though the initial aim of these theoretical practices

is to be specific and adequate. There must be an emphasis on comparative perspectives to be able to interpret together different experiences in order to arrive at a human commonality. This includes looking at different works of literature and placing them alongside each other and establishing a dialogue between them and a common language.

Consequently, by looking at various representations of Eastern and Western women in different cultures and histories, we grasp a more “truthful” knowledge of the falsity of the dichotomy and the ultimate need for deconstruction of the difference and superiority presumptions. Chandra Mohanty offers a compelling and convincing argument:

So in this political/economic context, what would an economically and socially just feminist politics look like? ... It would require recognizing that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions of rule and thus often lead to hatred of women and (supposedly justified) violence against women. The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen to be (Mohanty 2003, 3).

Part of the “violence” against women that is “justified” is through the image of the madwoman, as in, for example, Bertha Mason’s image. However this violence extends beyond the limits of “hatred.” It stems from a patriarchal, racist, misogynistic fear of women, no matter where they come from and which national frontiers they are limited to. Mohanty stresses the importance of highlighting the differences between First World and Third World women, and she urges a plurality of female identities: “In other words, systems of racial, class, and gender domination do not have identical effects on women in Third World contexts” (Mohanty 2003, 55). Mohanty upholds the idea of difference and the importance of citing these differences between women so as not consciously to ignore or overlook specific differences of cultural and historical arenas. As the chapters move along, I remain aware of such differences and I do not claim there is one madwoman, or one experience of madness, but instead, I argue for a multifaceted image of the madwoman, one that includes, rather than excludes the Eastern madwoman.

Oppositional structures and dichotomies uphold borders and boundaries between Self/other, male/female, West/East, mother/daughter, culture/nature, abled/disabled, and many other sets of binaries. In *Mappings* Susan Friedman asserts that “Borders have a way of insisting on separation at the same time as they acknowledge connection. Like bridges. Bridges signify the possibility of passing over...Borders also specify the liminal space in

between...the site of interaction, interconnection, and exchange” (Friedman 1999, 3). Dichotomies rely on borders and boundaries but they are also permeable and can be understood as bridges of connection. Friedman notes that feminism is now concerned with “the geopolitics of identity” and acknowledging differences between cultures and women’s identities. At the same time, it is imperative to remain aware of connections and similarities, rather than simply difference. There is a great fear of falsely universalizing experience and consequently obliterating difference and specificity, so much so that any notion of commonality is now looked at cautiously and questionably. This book forges a bridge, a new understanding of a specifically female commonality, which has been overshadowed by feminist debates upholding difference.

There has been a constant stress on the idea of difference and uniqueness, which ultimately has subordinated the idea of sameness. Diana Fuss takes up the debate between essentialists and social constructionists in ‘The Risk of Essence’ in *Essentially Speaking*. She recognizes the tension between the two polarities and the division amongst feminists:

It could be said that the tension produced by the essentialist/constructionist debate is responsible for some of feminist theory’s greatest insights, that is, the very tension is constitutive of the field of feminist theory. But it can also be maintained that this same dispute has created the current impasse in feminism, an impasse predicated on the difficulty of theorizing the social in relation to the natural, or the theoretical in relation to the political. The very confusion over whether or not the essentialist/constructionist tension is beneficial or detrimental to the health of feminism is itself overdetermined and constrained by the terms of the opposition in question (Fuss 2007, 665).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the debates between Essentialists and Anti-Essentialists have been a major concern for feminism. Feminists rejected Essentialism, afraid of any universal claims that might overlook specificity and ethnic minorities; in a sense the fear of being politically or racially oppressive continued to haunt feminists. In 1988 Denise Riley’s ‘*Am I That Name?*’ argued that “feminism must ‘speak women’, while at the same time, an acute awareness of its vagaries is imperative” (Riley 1988, 113). For Riley, if we are to accept the category of ‘women’ then this is not altogether limiting, and we can at least suggest a shared commonality and identification among women. She claims that “the troubles of ‘women’ ...aren’t unique. But aren’t they arguably peculiar in that ‘women’, half the human population, do suffer from an extraordinary weight of characterisation?” (Riley 1988, 16) Even when we remain vigilant about the importance of not homogenising women’s experiences,

and paying attention to specificities and differences, eventually we end up with the category of ‘women.’

By the 1990s, Anti-Essentialist feminists found no common ground or position that women could share. In 1988, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes” first appeared in *Feminist Review* and questioned ethnocentric beliefs about the universality of women. She stresses the importance of difference between women and their experiences. While Mohanty’s argument is necessary in avoiding a monolithic view of women, it also focuses extensively on articulating differences between First World and Third World Women. She remains wary of assuming a shared oppression between women:

The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. Thus, for instance, in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression...Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis on gender; it must be formed in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis (Mohanty 1988, 262).

Mohanty is concerned with how Western feminists construct and stereotype the experiences of Third World women. Her argument speaks against cultural and racial assumptions and calls for specificity. Yet the polarities remain – the borders between First and Third World women remain rigidly fixed and upheld. I argue that we need to look beyond the sameness/difference debates. In any society, there are systems of race, class, and sex oppression, varying degrees of female subjugation, but they remain a shared reality.

I argue that the idea of difference tends to forget that no culture and/or literary work stands alone. Influence is everywhere. That is the precise significance of drawing connections and finding parallels. This book adds Bedouin literature to the category of Postcolonial literature, calling for an integration of Bedouin writing into the field, in order to stretch the bridge of connections and add to the wholeness of literature written in the aftermath of British imperial ambitions and attempts at colonization in the Middle East and Arab world.

Organization of Chapters

The first chapter focuses on re-reading *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as examples of the forces of patriarchy and racism that were a part of imperial ideology and beliefs.

Victorian ideology and culture were particularly oppressive and sexist – not to mention infested with racial discrimination and intolerance. That very same ideology paved the way for the legitimization of British colonialism abroad. As such, English women’s suffering bears a striking similarity to postcolonial or Eastern women’s. In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine loves the “other”, Heathcliff, who is victim to the social restraints and racist ideologies of Victorian culture. He is branded as “dark” and “other” at the very beginning of the novel and denied any human traits, until the reader begins to regard him as the villain of the novel, rather than merely a product of discrimination. Catherine is driven mad because of patriarchal dominance and Victorian white-male ideology that ultimately leads Catherine down a path of self-destruction and self-annihilation. Heathcliff’s suffering comes into play as the supremacy of social class prevails over his sense of self, his own dignity and humanity. The circle of racial, ideological, and social hatred exemplifies a never-ending cycle of gruesomeness and viciousness that remains a dominant feature of the text. The couple’s desire for each other becomes a transgression in itself, yet society separates them, and Catherine is unable to keep that part of herself which she so cherishes: Heathcliff. Catherine’s bout of madness is mitigated by an emotional death and subsequently a literal, physical death. Her rebellion begins very early on, through her choice of lover, and ends with her will to write her own ending.

Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is read alongside Jean Rhys’s rewriting of the text, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. When considering *Jane Eyre*, sexual and racial politics are immediately at hand, along with the treatment of illness and disability within the text. I read Jane’s journey, like Catherine’s, as a *Bildungsroman*. Jane and Bertha, or Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are almost always read as each other’s doubles or opponents. This part of the chapter outlines the major readings of both texts, the debates surrounding the two characters, and proposes a reading that focuses on both their experiences with the same man, Mr. Rochester. Like her predecessor, Jane is, in a sense, controlled and manipulated by Mr. Rochester. However, Jane is able to fit into his beliefs and inscriptions of femininity and sanity. Undoubtedly, Bertha is exiled and shunned to make room for the heroine Jane – but not before challenging and disrupting all notions of femininity inscribed upon her by patriarchal and more importantly, colonial ideologies. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a subtle exploration of the damages inflicted by Empire and colonialism on the colonised psyche. In this portion of the project, I aim to underline how madness emerges as a product of colonialism. For Antoinette, the issue of public politics versus private politics is necessary to examine how she is, in a sense, a symbol

for all those who are enslaved by the White master. Indisputably, her mind does deteriorate, but it is only through this deterioration that she reclaims her body, as no longer another's property, and consequently, there is a reclaiming of her identity, an identity that Mr. Rochester has attempted to erase all along. Like Catherine, Bertha/Antoinette is confined in a Victorian imperial culture that allowed no room for resistance.

The second chapter addresses the ways by which colonialism and its effects have harmed the postcolonial nation and psyche, specifically the female subject's sense of identity in a chaotic process of failures to decolonise. By focusing on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, a novel of political and personal turmoil, the book attempts to shed light onto the damage that colonialism and the British Empire inflicted upon the personal and the political, within the domestic and public spheres. Patriarchal relations and the caste system of India add fuel to the effects of colonialism. Nickolas Dirks's *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* suggests that British colonialism helped create the caste system as it has come to be. The Ipe family (*The God of Small Things*) suffer from what I term "assimilation madness", a desire to merge with, and become, the coloniser, while rejecting one's own native identity. Ammu is a mother, and even more specifically a divorced mother – she represents the motherland, the mother who is now divorced from the British Empire and colonialism. She embodies the postcolonial state, and she is the "madwoman" in the text, a figure of protest, a voice that critiques colonialism, assimilation, and the loss of identity. She is a rebellious figure who chooses, like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, to be with an Untouchable, Velutha, someone who is excluded from society. Like Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship, Ammu and Velutha's affair threatens society, and both private and public spheres. Ammu, like Catherine, is considered a wild woman, even more so, a "bad" woman, someone who is unfit to be a mother, and eventually her sanity is questioned. Ammu eventually becomes extremely ill. Also like Catherine, her body fails her, and the trauma of the mind writes itself onto her body. Ammu's children, Rahel and Estha, suffer from their mother's choices, the loss of the mother, and also follow in her footsteps.

The third chapter pursues a new angle on the "Madwoman" by considering Bedouin culture and society and calling for the integration of the Bedouin madwoman into the category of postcolonial feminist fiction. This chapter introduces Bedouin culture, history, and family politics. Bedouins are a distinct group that have been neglected and overlooked in fiction. There are a few fictional works that deal exclusively with Bedouins and Bedouin culture, and I have selected two: one from Jordan

and one from Egypt, both of which deal with the subject of the Bedouin “madwoman.” Fadia Faqir is an Anglophone writer who is interested in Jordanian Bedouin culture and its diaspora. She is originally from Jordan, born into a Bedouin family, and left for England to earn her degree in Creative Writing. Her novels include *Nisanit* (1988), *Pillars of Salt, My Name is Salma* (2007), and finally *Willow Trees Don’t Weep* (2014). The first, Fadia Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*, explores the colonial and postcolonial pressures during and after the British Mandate. Two women tell their different stories and how they have ended confined to a room in a mental institution. The main protagonist, Maha, is a Jordanian Bedouin woman originating from the lineage of an aristocratic tribe. Similarly to Ammu, Maha must face the oppressions of a tribal, colonised/postcolonial society. Ruled by both native patriarchy and British colonisers, there is very little possibility of resistance. Maha’s brother, Daffash, like Ammu’s brother Chacko, is a British puppet, attempting to assimilate and win the coloniser’s approval. Daffash confines Maha to a mental asylum, in the same way that Bertha/Antoinette is confined to the attic, Ammu and Catherine to their bedrooms, and Fatima to a room in the tent. Maha’s story intersects with that of her fellow inmate at the asylum, Um Saad. Both Maha and Um Saad’s stories deal with issues of patriarchal and colonial/postcolonial domination, social and psychological pressures, as well as distorted perceptions of their bodies and inscriptions that are written on them. They are labelled as dangerous, different, and abnormal. Although Maha is a peasant and Um Saad is a city dweller, in their difference, there is sameness. They form a sisterhood both against the men in their lives and against the English doctor treating them, as they try to resist everything which continues to subjugate them.

In the fourth chapter, the scene is shifted from the Bedouins of Jordan to Egyptian Bedouins. Egyptian writer, Miral Al-Tahawy, is interested in Bedouin culture and identity, having been born to a Bedouin father. Her first novel *Al-Khibaa (The Tent)* came out in 1996, followed by *Al-Badhingana al-zarqa (The Blue Aubergine)*, *Naqarat al-Zibae (Gazelle Tracks)* and recently *Brooklyn Heights* (2012). Al-Tahawy’s *The Tent*, like Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt* is concerned with what colonialism and imperialism have done to Bedouin culture. The novel is a *Bildungsroman* that ends tragically, with no conflicts solved. Madness is the final culmination of events, as in all of the texts I have examined. At the beginning of *The Tent*, the protagonist is a child, Fatima, who speaks of her mother, who is locked away because she cries all the time. Fatima’s mother is a madwoman in the tent, rather than in the attic. She is confined and restrained, and is unable to give birth to sons, which in a Bedouin culture implies that she is

“abnormal” and even “evil.” When Fatima’s mother dies, she is taken to live with a foreign Orientalist, Anne, who offers to educate her in exchange for Fatima’s horse. Fatima’s oppression is doubled at this point in the novel. Her sense of identity and self is shattered as she spirals downwards into an ending similar to her mother’s: madness and confinement. Fatima is both mentally and physically disabled at the end of the novel, a symbol of her existence outside the accepted “feminine” framework. Fatima, like the female characters in Roy’s and Faqir’s work, is constantly subjugated by both patriarchy and colonial relations. It is no coincidence that Fatima’s leg is amputated by Anne; the relationship between East and West is poisonous to Fatima. The text, like Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*, explores the inextricable links between patriarchy and colonialism, and madness is featured as both a consequence of and a reaction to the oppressing environment.

The conclusion draws together the main arguments in the chapters and re-visits the madness trope. The many themes I have analysed include the patriarchal and colonial relations within the domestic space and the public space, culture-specific factors that accentuate the “madwoman’s” condition, the *Bildungsroman*, the mother-daughter relationship in postcolonial texts, abjection and trauma, loss, self-annihilation and alienation, and madness as a breakdown as well as a breakthrough. Madwomen figures speak, but are not heard. Ironically, their words are usually words of wisdom; they have an uncanny ability to diagnose the failures of their societies and criticize the oppressive forces of Empire and patriarchy. There is a paradoxical power of madness that threatens to unravel and vocally criticize previously sanctioned ideologies of oppression. As such, the madwomen are silenced, shunned, and abjected.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM IMPERIAL TO POSTCOLONIAL: THE MADWOMAN IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*, *JANE EYRE*, AND *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

Representations of madness and mad female characters in Victorian fiction have been a subject of scholarly interest and research for decades. There have been seminal studies and texts which examine the correlation between the mad female heroine and her surroundings. *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar is an indispensable aid to approaching this haunting figure of the madwoman and the heroine's (as well as the author's) struggle against patriarchal oppression. Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the anxiety that female authors faced, at a time when literature and writing was "physiologically as well as sociologically impossible" for a woman, because the pen was seen as a metaphorical penis: "If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power" (Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar 2000, 8). As such, female writers had to create heroines who seized this supposedly inherent otherness and lack in order to recreate meanings of otherness, monstrosities; female characters who turned lack into power. In *Women's Oppression Today*, Michèle Barrett emphasizes that the term "patriarchy" ought to be used with caution. Early radical feminist uses of the term, she argues, "invoke an apparently universal and trans-historical category of male dominance...they also frequently ground this dominance in a supposed logic of biological reproduction" (Barret 1988, 12). Barrett also claims that it is "possible to frame an account of patriarchy from the point of social, rather than biological, relations" (Barret 1988, 13). I use the term patriarchy to refer to patriarchal relations and "patriarchal ideology" without dismissing different historical, race, class, and socioeconomic factors (Barrett 1998, 19). Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* not only reveal imperialist assumptions and racist ideologies, but also, that they are three texts that feature three madwomen and their strikingly similar narratives of

female selfhood, desire, and madness. The three texts emphasize Victorian oppressive culture and society, sexism, class hierarchies, and racial/colonial ideologies that reinstate gender and class subordination. British women were mentally and emotionally colonised and othered, much like their Eastern counterparts. This chapter aims to consider these madwomen in relation to British colonialism and imperialism, racial and sexual politics, and their highly volatile environments; surroundings that harm one's sense of self and psyche. Madness, then, is not a symptom exclusive to the other/the East, but it also affects Victorian women/the West. Both the psyche and the body are traumatized; illness features as predominantly psychosomatic, desire and death are inextricably linked, and madness, at least partially, becomes an escape from the circle of oppression.

In "Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel" Deirdre David considers the British Empire's obsessive preoccupation with race and racial hierarchization, stressing its ample evidence in Victorian fiction. An awareness of racial others infiltrated the work of Victorian writers; whether consciously or unconsciously, the Victorian writer created characters that embodied everything alien, other, and at times, grotesque. David traces the emergence of this theme in the novel:

As British imperialism gathered steam, fuelled in part by the technological developments of the industrial revolution, empire and the related subjects of race and slavery became increasingly visible in the novel, principally for two reasons: the growing significance of Britain's geopolitical power in the lives of ordinary Victorian people and the formal commitment of the novel to social realism (David 2005, 86).

Victorian writers, then, were "unconscious agents in the complex, always changing interaction between political governance and cultural practice" (David 2005, 89). The imperial century (1815-1902) as David specifically relays, effected the production of Victorian fiction and writers' understanding of racial hierarchies. In the same vein, class and social hierarchies were already components of Victorian society and culture; thus, racial politics only sustained and reinforced distinct divisions between humanity.

Similarly, Patrick Brantlinger's "Race and the Victorian Novel" examines the trope of race and the effect of racial politics in a Victorian context. He considers characters that have been marked as racially other in Victorian fiction and concludes that those characters are "far more likely to be either comic stereotypes or figures of monstrosity meant to repel rather than to evoke sympathy" (Brantlinger, P and William B Thesing 2002, 160). Brantlinger notes that the Monster in Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein is deemed as other, and in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the “demonic characters...are often, at least, implicitly, racial others...In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is likened to a vampire, a ghoul, and a cannibal – the last, a gothic metaphor that associates him with the ‘dark races’ of the world” (Brantlinger, P and William B Thesing 2002, 161). Thus, all characters that were considered deviant or dangerous were significantly marked as other; and the other was almost always racially inferior. As the British Empire came into contact with foreign or other cultures, it emphasized its superiority and Englishness.

The texts in this chapter fall under the genre of the female *Bildungsroman*. This genre has been considered by various critics as almost counter-narratives; the process of finding one’s self or becoming a woman is by no means a linear or clear process of formation. Ambiguity and ambivalence are factors that this process of being/becoming relies on. For instance, Susan Fraiman’s *Unbecoming Women* reconsiders the traditional male *Bildungsroman* in light of a more female-oriented novel of development. The title itself interrogates this process of becoming, focusing instead on disintegration and de-formation in Georgian and Victorian texts written between 1778 and 1860. Fraiman argues that it is necessary to reformulate different understandings of the *Bildungsroman* in order to encompass and include different female subjectivities and experiences. To do so is to “locate...multiple narratives within a larger, cacophonous discourse about female formation” (Fraiman 1993, 12). There are multiple voices to be recognized, not one, singular, female voice or one site of oppression. As such, there is no unified, monolithic, sense of self either. The question, then, that arises, is what is this sacred self, this ‘selfhood’ that is to remain ‘stable’ and unified? How are we to arrive at a “uniform” fiction of female development/success, when there are multiple meanings embedded in all social categories and definitions? These fictions of female development are written in such a way that they call into question the stability of the self, the necessary passage and journey into maturity and success.

For the female protagonist, there was no journey outside the home, no interaction with the public sphere, unlike her male counterpart. The female heroine struggled between her innermost desires and social repression, trying to find her own space between the two disparate spaces of private and public. There is a never-ending battle against society, as well as against the self. Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the endings of the texts I have chosen culminate in either madness and/or death. This termination of the heroine’s journey is necessary for the development of the *Bildungsroman*. The journey simply ends, usually with a tragic ending. However I wish to read these ‘tragic’ endings, if you will, as not

necessarily tragic. There is a pattern in nineteenth-century literature, a female *Bildungsroman* that spirals downwards, usually culminating in madness and/or death. The aim of this chapter is to read these tragic endings as successful to a certain extent, rather than as failed attempts of psychic and social reconciliation. In light of a male *Bildungsroman*, these endings may be read as unsuccessful and represent the heroine's failed journey, because of the *Bildungsroman's* support for heterosexuality and social success. As these texts celebrate the female heroine's complex journey and create a feminine space for development, then even simple terms such as progress are questioned and redefined.

This feminine space for development is mostly limited to the domestic space, the private sphere. Female heroines were to interact with their environments mainly at home, their closest relations, the men they lived with, and negotiate their own sense of self within the framework of private and public life. In *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*, Susan Meyer locates the metaphor of race and imperialism in Victorian women's fiction and emphasizes the reappearance of this metaphor in different texts, "linking white women with those of nonwhite races" (Meyer 1996, 6). Meyer focuses on this metaphor in Victorian women's narratives and examines the domestic space, which she argues, "evokes the literal dwelling, the lineage of the family that inhabits it...The domestic space of the home is at once an individual domicile and suggestive of the domestic space in a larger sense, the domestic space of England" (Meyer 1996, 7). Confined at home, British women still dealt with subordination and oppression by white men. Meyer contends that: "The claim to European racial supremacy is based primarily on a claim to greater intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacities...The nature of European gender ideology put white women in an ambiguous position in the racial scale" (Meyer 1996, 20). Because white women occupied a problematic position on both racial and gender hierarchies, they struggled to find a place amongst the two oppressive ideologies. Similarly, Meyer argues that British women writers also occupied difficult positions as writers, especially in relation to imperialist ideology. Meyer pays attention to the writers' position in terms of gender and class, asserting that this very positioning "produced a complex and ambivalent relation to the ideology of imperialist domination...It was precisely the gender positioning of these women writers...in combination with their feminist impulses and use of race as a metaphor, that provoked and enabled [a]...questioning of British imperialism" (Meyer 1996, 11). This literary questioning of British imperialism through nineteenth century literature by women is managed through the use of race as a metaphor. In the case of Catherine and

Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, I choose to read them as doubles, as self/other, and like Meyer, I see their pairing as necessary for the race metaphor. Unlike Meyer, I also see their pairing as necessary for a gender metaphor, a way by which Brontë shows the instability and fluidity of gender binaries.

The two Victorian texts and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* deal with passion, illness, and madness, against the backdrop of racial and sexual oppression. The heroines of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* all become ill, either mentally and/or physically, and as such, become labelled 'invalid' women as Diane Herndl employs the term in *Invalid Women*. Herndl's study centres on American fiction and culture during the mid- and late nineteenth century. The main question that Herndl raises is how effective is the invalid woman's plight, and does she retain any power, or is she utterly powerless in the face of patriarchal oppression and negative connotations of femininity? Herndl emphasizes the dual connotations of the 'invalid' woman in literature:

The figure of the invalid woman insists on a reading that focuses on the play of power and desire in the narrative, the family, and the culture. The woman who becomes sick is portrayed as a figure with no power, subject to the whims of her body or mind, or a figure with enormous power, able to achieve her desires through the threat of her imminent death or her disability (Herndl 1840, 4).

I read the figure of the 'madwoman' or the 'invalid' woman as a powerful figure, able to threaten society's sanctions of normativity, sanity, and purity. The madwoman and/or the invalid woman gains power in all three texts, even when death enters the picture, and her story ends tragically. The plot is continuously spiralling downwards; it is non-linear, non-progressive, and resistant to heteronormative and racial ideologies. Herndl insists that it is "patriarchal culture [that is] potentially sickening for women and...defining women as inherently sick, especially when they resist its norms" (Herndl 1840, 7). Protagonists are affected by their environments and in turn, *react* to their circumstances, and it is this action/reaction, that is marked as dangerous and threatening. For the protagonist, the distinction between the private and the public space rests on domesticity and domestic ideology. Domesticity, like other oppressive ideologies, including race, class, and gender distinctions, further sets women apart from their male counterparts, and provides little room for social or political emancipation. Domesticity also managed to have women believe in their claim to the private space, to the idea of the home being theirs, and otherworldliness being theirs as a reward. There are obvious

contradictions and manifestations of domesticity, just like the invalid's actions may be seen as paradoxical: "Such contradictions could have themselves encouraged a retreat into 'illness', where all these virtues could appear to be resolved: the invalid is naturally dependent, so any act of self-determination, however small, seems an act of independence" (Herndl 1840, 49). As such, even the formulation of the figure of the madwoman and/or the invalid necessarily constituted an examination of contradictory forces and ambiguous positions. She is neither fully passive nor an entirely successful active agent.

A counterargument to women's supposed inferiority is articulated by Nancy Armstrong, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. She examines the rise of the domestic novel and female power and authority in fictional narratives. Armstrong is specifically interested in sexual relations between male and female characters and the ideologies of power that constituted this interaction. Armstrong sees British women writers as agents of history and culture, but even more notably, agents of the politics of desire. She claims the following:

If one gives credence to the notion of a history of subjectivity and to the priority of writing in constituting subjectivity as an object of knowledge, then it is a relatively simple step to see the Brontës as agents of history. We can assume their fiction produced – and continues with each act of interpretation to produce – figures of modern desire...The Brontës indeed saw their work as a reaction against the tradition of domestic fiction exemplified by Jane Austen (Armstrong 1987, 191).

The Brontës constructed female characters who had a voice, power, and resisted patriarchy and used desire as a form of socio-political revolt. Catherine and Bertha are powerful female characters, with the potential to break repressive Victorian ideologies. Both novels offer subjectivities that provide us with knowledge of social and power relations between men and women, between self/other, and racial relations with the other.

Insofar as racial politics are concerned, Athena Vrettos's *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* provides an exemplary study of the way the Victorians constructed the mind and the body, health and illness ideologies and images, relying heavily on dichotomization of man/woman, mind/body, self/other. Vretto asserts that the English/Victorian body became a symbol of all that is Victorian and 'pure'; and as such superior to other races and/or lower classes. Maintaining a healthy, clean, and proper body represented an ideal Victorian racial, social, and cultural identity. Vretto explains: "The somatic fictions through which the individual body became a measure of national identity and imperialist power were, at least in part, produced by literature that emphasized ideals