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1. Introduction

Although literary critics have feasted on Victorian prose for over a century, this thesis endeavours to offer a novel perspective on three canonic works of Victorian literature; namely Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

By combining a close reading of the said texts with a theoretical and medico-socio-historical analysis of the concept of 'madness' and its relation to gender ideology, I strive to re-discover these favourites of literary criticism. The theoretical preliminary chapter attempts a brief survey of several aspects of Victorian society that will prove relevant to the ensuing text analysis; it considers its uptight morality and rigid gender roles in the context of the ideological milieu of that period. Given the prominent stance of female characters in this thesis, it is worthwhile to address notions of 'gender' in theory before analysing the repercussions of this concept in the historical context of the Victorian period and its literature. On this dual basis of 'historical givens' and (what might be clumsily summarized as) feminist theory, I elaborate on the Victorian understanding of 'madness', taking recourse both to the historical evolution of this concept and its implications for 'the weaker sex' – in the form of literary figures or beings of flesh and blood alike.

First and foremost, this study of insanity seeks an answer to two key questions: 'How was madness conceptualized in Victorian England?' and 'In how far do historical accounts of madwomen tally with the depiction of their fellow sufferers in literature?' Or in other words: 'What/how much can we infer from the 'real-life' Victorian madwoman when it comes to her portrayal in the literature of that period – and vice versa?' In answer to the first question, I focus on the premise that 'mad' behaviour was characterized as aberration from a patriarchal norm – predefined in a hegemonic power discourse. On this assumption, I investigate the Victorian understanding of the aetiology and pathophysiology underlying the genesis and progression of insanity. Once the 'nature' of the mad(wo)man has been established, it is relevant to understand on account of what behaviour

certain people were diagnosed as insane, whether it was thought possible to endeavour to cure the individual and, if so, which treatment was administered in what therapeutic setting. It is also of interest to ascertain the legal status of a person dubbed mad; what modes of suppressing and disempowering the individual were employed. When it comes to matters of class hierarchy, the question arises whether a person's social standing had an influence on the medico-social apparatus responsible for diagnosing, disempowering and disposing of the alleged insane. In the same breath, one may wonder how an individual's educational background or living situation affected people's perception of 'mad behaviour' and society's reaction to a mad(wo)man. Last but not least, the paradigmatic question remains whether or not all these factors worked different effects for a male or female lunatic – and if so, to what extent.

By reference to three archetypical Victorian novels, I want to investigate in how far upper-middle-class, i.e. bourgeois, female protagonists were particularly likely to be defamed as (morally) mad in the literature of that time. In my analysis of the respective female characters, I am especially interested in two facts: firstly, the alleged madwoman is characteristically denounced by her male statutory representative – frequently to further his own ends. Secondly, the 'evidence' of a person's insanity and the reasons occasioning her denunciation and consequent confinement often appear far-fetched to the contemporary reader, to say the least. With reference to the medico-socio-historical backdrop – against which these works of literature must be read – I demonstrate that the modern reader's alienation is rooted in the diverging understanding of 'madness' as either a symptom of moral degeneracy or a medical condition affecting a person's mind and psyche.

2. Theory

2.1. The construction of 'gender'

Although the concept of 'gender' has been under continuous discussion for decades, this aspect of life and literature continues to raise novel questions worth investigating. Throughout the period of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), as mirrored in the literature of that time, the concepts of male and female 'gender' were remarkably fixed – following a rigid protocol quite alien to the 21st century reader.

Before we may, however, hope to understand Victorian notions of 'gender' – of what qualifies as a prototypical man or woman – it is mandatory to establish a sound theoretical basis. When investigating the construction of gender by recourse to theories of literary criticism and philosophy, there arises a fundamental question: what enticed humanity to come up with this concept of gender in the first place? Whom could we better consult when troubled with questions of gender than Judith Butler, the symbolic 'mother' of *Gender Trouble*? Butler explains how women as the "source of mystery and unknowability for men" have troubled men since the outset of time by instilling desire – categorically perceived as trouble – and thus assuming agency; "the radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female 'Other' suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory", whence "trouble became a scandal" (Butler xxix-xxx). Naturally, the philosopher and philologist gives Simone de Beauvoir an honourable mention, whose widely-cited saying that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (Beauvoir 301) has laid the foundation for gender studies.

For my investigation into the socio-psychological depths of 'gender', I will rely heavily on Butler's famous work *Gender Trouble*, taking up her line of argumentation and retracing her critical discussion of the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray. In rare cases, I will venture to raise humble questions and objections. In order to point toward novel possibilities of understanding gender and sexuality, Butler sets out to challenge "a pervasive heterosexual assumption

[...] about the limits and propriety of gender” and criticizes feminist literary theory for “[restricting] the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity” (Butler viii). She refutes the idea that gender ought to be understood either as a natural consequence of a person’s sex or as a “cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise” (Butler xx-xxi). Furthermore, Butler warns that gender norms, congealed over time through relentless repetition and cultural re-enactment, pose the danger of assuming a prescriptive dimension of what will or will not be – or perhaps even, of what can or cannot be – understood as true, legitimate and real (Butler viii-xxxii).

The performative power of speech acts and terminology, as offering or imposing certain terms that can or cannot partake in a discourse, constitutes another reoccurring theme in Butler’s analysis. Even as a being ‘inside language’, one must not assume and affirm the fatalistic position that one is determined by language, its syntax, grammar or vocabulary. With regard to women, feminist theory postulates a language and vocabulary capable of faithfully representing ‘woman’ so as to ensure her participation in a political discourse; Butler explains that ‘woman’ must first be acknowledged as a ‘subject’ in order to meet the requirements for representation. In this spirit, she draws on Foucault, who is of the opinion that “juridical power inevitably ‘produces’ [the subjects] it claims merely to represent” (Butler 3); what is more, the juridical system meticulously regulates its produce to serve its own ends and covers all evidence of its involvement in the construction of ‘its subjects’. In this context, the theorist questions the value of putting a name-tag on a feminine pseudo-subject, who can only be represented as a ‘lack’ within patriarchal discourse, as an ‘absence’ in phallogentric linguistics, as that which is excluded from the normative male subject. The ‘feminine’ is excluded, because it cannot (or chooses not to) conform, but it is nevertheless essential in that it constitutes “the negative of man, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself” (Butler 13). This leads to Butler’s rejection of the category of ‘woman’, which she perceives as originating from and restrained by the very power structures feminism seeks to overcome. Besides, a stable ‘female subject’ – regardless of its embedding in a hegemonic patriarchal discourse – would relinquish its potential of development and its diversity of its own accord (Butler 2-8). Consequently, she also opposes

the notion of the 'universality' and 'unity' of womanhood, which runs the risk of levelling all differences between the diverse forms of oppression that women face in different cultural contexts (Butler 18-22).

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, [...] an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (Butler 22)

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, [...] the appearance of a naturalistic necessity. (Butler 45)

Butler takes this spiral of rejection one step further when she decries the binary understanding of 'gender' as rooted in our unquestioning acceptance of a binary 'sex'. What is more, only those identities featuring a 'coherent' relation between sex and gender are 'intelligible' within a phallogocentric framework, leaving all other 'discontinuous' genders voiceless and unrepresentable (Butler 22-24). Wittig goes even further and claims that in 'woman' sex is conflated with gender in the light of her overly evident reproductive ability, whereas "the 'masculine' [is not] a gender[, f]or the masculine is not the masculine, but the general" (Wittig 64 qtd. in Butler 27). In consequence, Wittig not only rejects the notion of a binary gender – where "one is one gender to the extent that one is not the other gender" (Butler 30) – but calls for the annihilation of the very concepts of sex and gender. Both Wittig and Butler perceive female homosexuality as the only practicable mode of liberating women from male domination by transcending sex and refuting heterosexual norms (Butler 26-33).

In order to deconstruct this problematic inference of a person's gender from their sex or sexual preferences, Butler takes to devaluating the 'scientific proof' of a truly male or female sex (cf. Butler 10-17,31-46). It is Butler's essential endeavour to prove this unconsciously fixed link between a person's sex or sexuality and their gender wrong. This aspect of her critical theory will be of paramount importance in my analysis of the primary texts; however, her line of argumentation when it comes to the deconstruction of the two sexes may be considered more controversial and less applicable to the interpretation of Victorian literature. Before I focus briefly on 'sex' and 'sexuality' rather than 'gender' in the following passage, I recapitulate once more Butler's central

statement on the variability of 'gender': there are not two genders – as cultural correspondents to binary biological 'sex' – but indeed an infinite number of genders that are constantly open to cultural re-conceptualization, indefinitely in a state of flux.

Especially from a natural scientific viewpoint, Butler's attempt to dismantle not only the binary 'nature' of sex but the very category of sex is problematic. She insists that sex cannot be thought of outside culture and hence cannot be said to exist 'before' culture; ergo sex is just another socio-political construct, which has as little 'substance' to it as the category of gender (Butler 47-52). It is undeniable that (wo)man, as a cultural being, 'makes sense of nature' and certainly does so 'within' a cultural context; from this does not necessarily follow, however, that sex – as a 'genetic/biological constant' – does not 'exist' prior to its cultural appropriation or cannot precede the patriarchal law "in the sense that it is culturally and politically undetermined" (Butler 50). In the same context, Butler criticizes Lévi-Strauss for his structuralist assumption of a nature/culture distinction, which perceives sex as the raw material upon which culture inscribes meaning, i.e. gender, and thus endows it with semiotic value. She is right to object to the portrayal of women in Lévi-Strauss' *Principles of Kinship* (478-497), where they feature as mere goods in a patriarchal marriage market that is exclusively set on ensuring the "reproduction of the name" (Butler 53). For the anthropologist, women's relevancy is further eclipsed by the fact that their sole acknowledged contribution to the upholding of this kinship-economy is their role as a 'catalyst', which enables a "symbolic intercourse between clans of men" (Butler 53). Again, while this bleak assumption may have substance in a Victorian framework, the dwindling importance attached to matters of kinship in the 20th and 21st century ought to prompt a reconsideration of its negative implications for contemporary women; Butler refuses to do so: "The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity, but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated patrilineal identity" (Butler 53).

Butler's critique of Lévi-Strauss gains further ground when read against the texts of Strathern (174-219) and MacCormack (1-21). The two anthropologists argue that the 'female' is typically perceived as earth-bound and close to nature,

whereas the 'male' is linked to culture and those aspects of human life that set it apart from animality. In order to support their line of argumentation, they come up with extensive lists of binary oppositions that can allegedly be ascribed either to the realm of woman or man; this catalogue of antipodes features among many others the poles of passive-active, innate-artificial, production-transaction, instinct-creativity. A related reasoning can be found in Kristeva's works when she analyses the maternal body as possessing non-discursive, 'natural' meaning prior to culture. According to Butler, Kristeva thereby "safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality[;... she thus precludes] an analysis of its cultural construction and variability" (Butler 109). But the existence of a meaning prior to culture does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of adding further meaning to this same discursive object – or of reinterpreting this 'inherent' meaning in a specific cultural context – once it has entered the cultural sphere. Kristeva has a point when she assumes that maternal drives may be attributed to a "biological destiny" and are therefore indicative of "a non-symbolic, non-paternal causality" (Kristeva 239 qtd. in Butler 120). Nevertheless, as Butler fears, by acknowledging such a 'biological destiny', it may easily be exploited to portray maternity as a woman's 'natural obligation'. However, the notion of a compulsory nature of motherhood is neither inherent in Kristeva's theory, nor does it any longer constitute a socio-cultural dogma in the 21st century. On another level, the implied hostility towards a woman's body as the site of procreation is unfortunate; I am of Beauvoir's opinion that "the female body ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence" (Butler 16). Whereas Butler's critique of Kristeva (107-127) is based on good grounds, Rubin's 'solution' to the dilemma of 'maternal instinct' challenges all biological and evolutionary reasoning (Rubin 1975:157-210). "According to Gale Rubin's reading of Lévi-Strauss, kinship effects 'a sculpturing of ... sexuality' such that the desire to give birth is the result of social practices which require and produce such desires in order to effect their reproductive ends" (Butler 123). On a more general level, however, Rubin is right in that, "[l]ike gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others" (Rubin 2006:180).

In a chapter entitled 'Concluding unscientific postscript', Butler ventures into the realm of genetic science – in an apparent attempt to render the above discussion redundant by disproving the 'scientific evidence' of sex: its genetic encoding in a person's karyotype. While for the greatest part of human history, one could only make an educated guess on the basis of physical examination, the decoding of the human genome (completed in 2003) allows for the correct determination of every human being's genomic sex. There are theorists, such as Butler, who refuse to acknowledge this 'definite nature' of sex; they cling to a pre-genetic understanding of sex as deducible from either a person's phenotype, their primary and secondary sexual characteristics or their hormone levels – which is therefore open to speculation. Butler herself cites an article by Page et al., published in 1987 in *Cell*, which reports the discovery of the testes-determining factor – a DNA sequence usually located on the Y chromosome – and which celebrates this gene as "the binary switch upon which hinges all sexually dimorphic characteristics" (Page 1091 qtd. in Butler 145). Given Butler's limited medico-genetic expertise and her feminist background, it is quite understandable that she takes offence at this phrasing which seems to frame woman, once again, as 'the lack' – this time as 'lacking' a testes-determining factor, or more correctly, as possessing a 'passive' (i.e. endogenetically inactive) version of this DNA sequence. It would lead too far afield to go into the details of endogenetics – or merely to explain the ubiquitous 'genetic lever' of a gene's active or dormant phase, which underlies virtually all embryogenic, biochemical and physiological processes of the human body. As an aside, however, one might wonder whether Butler would be pleased to know that during embryogenesis the rudimental sexual organs of all embryos are both male and female (Dadak 51-54).

Another problematic aspect is Butler's notorious critique of heterosexuality, paired with her 'dashing' portrayal of lesbianism. Butler, Wittig and Irigaray alike assume that heterosexual relations constantly re-affirm patriarchal supremacy by reifying the binary nature of sex. Heterosexuality is portrayed as being reduced to the service of a reproductive economy and thereby constituting an intrinsic assault on emancipation. While this notion of heterosexuality may not seem out of place within a Victorian framework, it not only cancels out the diversity of heterosexual practices of the 21st century but in fact insinuates that the

heterosexual couple is obliged to make use of its reproductive capacity. Whereas – for the time being – it is true that (genetic) reproduction is reserved to heterosexual couples, I consider it a ‘cum hoc ergo propter hoc’ fallacy that heterosexuality can or ought to be reduced to its inherent reproductive potential. In an attempt to relativize theorists’ fixation on the heterosexual nature and the ‘disruptive potential’ of homosexuality, one need only refer to the phenomenon of parthenogenesis, whereby procreation no longer requires the participation of a male specimen of the respective species (cf. Kearney et al. 316-324). Butler’s reasoning not only reinforces the very stereotype of a utilitarian, even exploitable, sexuality but also fails to take into account that sexuality has long since liberated itself from the shackles of ‘compulsory’ procreation – not least due to the development of the contraceptive pill 55 years ago (Junod White 118).

Butler briefly acknowledges that there is a host of theorists who are sensible of a paradigm shift both in the practice of sexuality and our understanding of it. She herself, however, refrains from entering into a serious discussion by dismissing these theories with a single scathing remark; she refers the reader to several relevant articles by means of a footnote (Rubin, Hollibaugh, Moraga): “This utopian notion of a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs, a sexuality beyond ‘sex’, failed to acknowledge the ways in which power relations continue to construct sexuality for women even within the terms of a ‘liberated’ heterosexuality” (Butler 40-41). In her reasoning, female homosexuality may well constitute woman’s sole disruptive weapon against patriarchy; nothing progressive or provocative can come of a sexual orientation that follows the conventions. In conclusion, any woman who chooses to ‘conform’ to heterosexuality simultaneously, and inevitably, condones and propels the suppressive hegemony it is embedded in. But the most ‘provocative alternative’ to heterosexuality, which bears the most subversive potential, is bisexuality and not homosexuality. Butler (78-106) does not tire of pointing out how heterosexual practices circumscribe a person’s potential for experiencing pleasures by restricting desire to the other sex. What Butler refuses to acknowledge, however, is the fact that homosexuality imposes similar restrictions: not only does homosexuality focus desire on one sex only, as is the case with heterosexuality, but it chooses its ‘own’ sex as the one that is desirable – and thus cancels out the existence of

an 'other' sex in its libidinous discourse. This excursus on homosexuality will be of particular relevance in my analysis of the lesbian connotations of Marian Halcombe's relationship with her half-sister Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White*, as well as Braddon's homoerotic portrayal of Robert Audley; I will show in how far these fictitious characters cast doubt on the revolutionizing potential of homosexuality, within a Victorian framework.

For any exposé on gender or sexuality to be considered comprehensive, reference to Michael Foucault's canonic work *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* appears mandatory. In relation to the present thesis, Foucault's focus on the inseparable link between sexuality and power is worth investigating in some detail. With recourse to Nietzsche, Foucault attempts a genealogical critique of the power formations responsible for the alleged genesis and maintenance of fundamental notions such as sex, gender or desire. He exposes phallogocentrism and imperative heterosexuality as the underlying institutional forces that originate those categories by which they feign to be caused; while, in fact, both terms can only be understood as relational terms (Butler xxxi). In accordance with many of the above cited theorists, Foucault opposes the notion of sex, which "made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and [which] enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (Foucault 1990:154). For Foucault, only the participation in a power discourse endows the previously 'un-sexed' body with a specific sex – a category which has been carefully naturalized to cover up its own discursive production. In consequence, he cannot fathom a pre-discursive 'maternal body' but understands this notion as "an effect or consequence of a system of sexuality in which the female body is required to assume maternity as the essence of its self and the law of its desire" (Butler 125). He argues that the notion of sex is a necessary prerequisite for the dominant (and dominating) power economy, as it serves three crucial ends (Foucault 1990:154-155): Firstly, it creates an artificial unity and univocity of various sexual functions, as the power economy sees fit, and facilitates the negation of those properties that are not included in the established categories. This assists the control and regulation of sexuality and ensures that society's

‘reproductive potential’ is exploited to its full capacity. Secondly, it assumes airs of scientific propriety by adopting a recognized vocabulary of anatomy and biology. This promotes the arbitrary stipulation of ‘normal’ versus ‘abnormal’ sexuality; it follows that the latter is both punishable and worthy of punishment. Thirdly, the concept of sex “made it possible to invert the representation of the relationship of power and sexuality, [...] the idea of ‘sex’ makes it possible to evade what gives ‘power’ its power; it enables one to conceive power solely as law and taboo” (Foucault 1990:155). The phantasm of sex as an autonomous agent must be relinquished. Instead, ‘sex’ must be recognized as the most effective tool for the deployment of sexuality by a hegemonic power economy, which produced and naturalized this category in the first place. Both the category of ‘sex’ and the practice of ‘sexuality’ are irrevocably enmeshed in the fabric of the power economy. While I do not wish to adopt Foucault’s views on the ‘constructed nature’ of sex, his notion of ‘sex’ does not necessarily contradict the affirmation of ‘genetic sex’ – although he would probably consider the latter as only one of those numerous sexual properties that have been arbitrarily grouped together to form the category of ‘sex’. Nevertheless, one might analyse Foucault’s understanding of ‘sex’ as the ‘cultural dimension’ of sex that is inscribed on the biological matrix through culture-specific processes of meaning-making, in order to be exploited by the power economy. In conclusion, Foucault’s concept of sexuality – with its intricate relation to the patriarchal power discourse – offers valuable insight into the romantic and sexual relationships portrayed in literary texts. Especially when considered in conjunction with Lévi-Strauss’s kinship theory, this theoretical basis sheds light on the subtle implications of matrimony, namely the empowering or disempowering consequences of legal and sexual alliances. Within a Victorian framework, it was usually the husband who gained power over his wife; however, the literature of that time also portrayed rather unconventional marriages, as in *Jane Eyre*, in which power was distributed (more) equally between the spouses. In this context, the union between Lucy and Sir Michael Audley may be interpreted as empowering the woman rather than the man. Furthermore, Foucault’s reasoning is particularly conclusive in view of unacknowledged, tabooed forms of sexuality; the ‘impotency’ of these Other sexual orientations will be discussed in the analysis of Collins’s and Braddon’s novels.

After this excursion on sex and sexuality, I return to the topic of gender with Lacan's theories on the 'phallus' and the difference of 'being' the phallus, as a woman, and 'having' the phallus, as a man.

For women to 'be' the Phallus means [...] to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to 'embody' the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through 'being' its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectic confirmation of its identity. (Butler 59)

Even though "'being' the Phallus is always a 'being for' a masculine subject" (Butler 61), Lacan argues that the "feminine position of not-having" (Butler 60) exerts considerable power over the bearer of the phallus in this dialectic. This masculine bearer of the phallus simultaneously denies and seeks this interdependency as it recalls to him the 'jouissance'. For Lacan 'jouissance' is the most exquisite of pleasures, now irrevocably lost, which man experienced only in a pre-individualized, Oedipal union with his mother prior to the 'paternal law', the incest taboo. Lacan concludes that woman must reject her intrinsic femininity to a certain degree in her attempt to 'be' the phallus – she must relinquish all characteristics that are not the exact antithesis of pre-established masculinity; "[i]t is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved" (Lacan 84). For Riviere, it follows that those women who aspire to a male position within the hegemonic power discourse try to veil their 'castrating' intentions under a guise of heightened femininity (Butler 59-71). This presumption is problematic on a variety of levels: It not only implies that the favoured position in any discourse is always that of the masculine subject, but also is woman perceived as exhibiting characteristically 'male behaviour' as soon as she takes the initiative in an attempt to assume power. In order to do so, she needs to disguise her 'masculine' ambition to participate in the power discourse, i.e. to assume a male subject-position. In a futile attempt to impersonate this desirable subject, the woman has to relinquish all authenticity – all that she herself perceives as truly 'feminine' – and imposes on herself an alien notion of 'femininity' that has been constructed for her within patriarchal discourse. As a consequence, the 'feminine' is reduced to a chimera, a disguise assumed only to prevent man from detecting the underlying 'masculine' traits, to which woman has no claim and for whose appropriation she would be penalized. Thereby the 'masculine' is reified as the dominant subject-position, as the only one that has true 'substance' to it. In a

second step, Lacan states that one need not bother to “draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’[, because] they are the same thing” (Lacan 38).

This reasoning is hardly practicable – as it would result in the conflation of two distinct notions whose existence and differences must be acknowledged if we endeavour to understand the suffering of generations of women, who were made to conform to patriarchal gender ideals contrary to their own, personal notions of femininity.

2.2. Victorian gender ideologies

It is indeed a historical oddity that a period during which a woman was in charge of the affairs of an entire nation should still be remembered today as a time when women were confined to the 'private sphere' in accordance with "scientific accounts of womanly incapacity in nearly all fields except the domestic" (Harris 22). Contrary to the theories presented in the preceding chapter, the Victorian period does not conceive of 'gender' as a loosely defined assemblage of character traits that is open to perpetual revaluation and reconceptualization. This section offers a brief introduction to the prevalent gender ideology of that time – with its clear-cut ideas of what designates a 'good', i.e. 'true', man or woman and its prescriptions for how he/she ought to conduct him/herself in (mixed) society. Given the scope of my thesis, the focus lies on the female gender. I refrain from elaborating on several crucial issues – such as the different conditions for working-class women or legal matters (e.g. laws regulating divorce, child custody, domestic violence as well as the right to hold property or to vote) – as they would be of little relevance for the analysis of those female protagonists that are portrayed in the novels in question.

Sweetness is to woman what sugar is to fruit. It is her business to be happy – a sunbeam in the house, making others happy. True, she will often have a 'tear in her eye', but, like the bride of young Lochinvar, it must be accompanied with 'a smile on her lips'.

(Hardy qtd. on <http://victoriaspast.com/LifeofVictorianWoman.html>)

According to the famous saying of Virginia Woolf (during a lecture to the Women's Service League in 1942), we need to "kill[...] the Angel in the House" (Woolf 151) if we seek liberation from conventional, fossilized gender roles. The phrase 'Angel in the House' can be traced back to Coventry Patmore's highly popular poem by the same name, published in 1854. This poem was the first 'cultural text' to put a name tag to pervasive male fantasies about a set of character traits said to represent the 'ideal woman'. Very much in line with the tenor of the introductory lines by the Reverend Edward John Hardy, Patmore's concept is one of complete self-annihilation on the part of the woman in her never-ceasing efforts to cater to her husband's every whim – for "[m]an must be

pleased; but him to please is woman's pleasure; down the gulf of his necessities she casts her best, she flings herself" (Patmore 41). As a subtext, Patmore's vision implies that a woman had better derive utmost pleasure from this self-less devotion. If she truly aspires to epitomize the iconic 'angel in the house', it is indeed only in serving others that she may attain her personal gratification. Should she ever fall short of frankly radiating with joy in her domestic confinement, it is a woman's duty to put on airs of cheerfulness and contentment. For she is not to trouble her hard-working husband with those unasked for emotions which arise in a mind unable to take absolute contentment in the role set out for her by her 'better half' and society in general.

A wife's practical duties in real life were quite distinct from the Victorian role of the angelic woman; they, of course, exceeded the romantic picture of creating an all-together charming domestic atmosphere. A real-life middle-class wife was not only the sympathetic sunshine of the household, but first and foremost its "Household General", as Isabella Beeton put it in her 1861 manual *Mrs Beeton's Book of the Household Management*. Not unlike the commander of an army in accuracy and intelligence, though with feminine grace and seeming ease, she was either to perform or to supervise all chores, to keep track of accounts and to see to the education of her children. Beeton was also quite explicit about a woman's duties when it comes to socializing as her husband's companion and advocate; a responsibility which also comprised the organization of parties and dinners so as to boost her husband's prestige and display her domestic skills (Beeton vii-xxx).

This brief glimpse at practical life allows for the conclusion that reality often fell short of the romantic ideal of passive femininity; this raises the question why patriarchal society was so bent on constructing, and maintaining, this delusion in the first place. According to Epstein Nord, society's effort to police and negate the instability of gender and sexual difference "betray[ed] patriarchal nervousness about new kinds of female power" (507). Besides detecting in it a blatant refusal of conformity and a transgression of the Paternal Law, Victorian psychology was interested in woman's display of 'masculine' violence or vindictiveness for a second reason: a desire for revenge was considered a desire to revenge the past – whereby vengeance was tied to madness in two respects: firstly, all passions –

and particularly a female display of vengefulness – were considered the consequence of insufficiently suppressed emotions and therefore synonymous with madness. Secondly, adherence to the past, i.e. being haunted by the past, was perceived as emblematic of insanity (Shuttleworth 105-118).

A topic that deserves special notice in the context of Victorian gender conceptualization is sexuality – also as linked to corporeality and particularly so when the female body and its reproductive functions are concerned. Mankind has perhaps never known a time more hostile towards the human body, its bodily functions or the pleasures one may derive from it. During a period when the term ‘leg’ was not fit for a respectable woman’s conversational repertoire (<http://www.victoriaspast.com/FrontPorch/victorianera.htm>), any ‘uncalled-for’ allusion to sexuality or an open declaration of personal sexual preferences and desires – especially on the part of a woman – was an absolute taboo in the middle and upper classes. If unaccustomed to the tightly regulated Victorian politics of sexuality, the contemporary reader is left to marvel at its hypocritical prudery; according to André Green (214-218), this hostility towards non-procreative sexual practices was rooted in the belief that immodesty in a person’s love-life did not only constitute a severe breach of the etiquette but was also symptomatic of a lack of self-control and thus indicative of insanity. What is more, insufficient self-restraint, i.e. self-willed control over one’s energies and mental faculties, was deemed not only a marker but also a cause of madness. A related approach – which linked emotional excess to physical turmoil - sought to ground madness in biological determinism, especially in the frequent cases of ‘hysterical women’ (Green 214-218). Within a Victorian framework, the ‘weaker sex’ was deemed particularly prone to lose control over their energies as a natural (and thus undisputable) result of their unfathomable, sexually loaded reproductive systems. The Victorian man lived in constant dread of both the sexually active and overly sensitive woman, who was perceived as more closely in touch with her emotions than man: This assumption was nicely captured by Chales Biquet: “La femme est faite pour sentir, et sentir c’est presque de l’hysterie” (Woman is destined to feel, and to feel is almost hysteria; my own translation) (qtd. in Tambling 69). Closely related to Freud’s ‘feminine concept’ of hysteria is the 19th century notion of ‘neurasthenia’, designating hypochondria in men. As the

'masculine' equivalent to hysteria, hypochondria perpetuates the stigmatisation of the female body by dubbing feminine traits in men symptomatic of madness. "Thus madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady" (Showalter 4).

In the light of such claustrophobic sexual morals, it appears quite needless to specify that the chief virtue of the Victorian angel was her undisputable purity and prenuptial chastity – paired with her complete submissiveness to male authority. In this context of hostility towards any form of sexuality that did not serve procreation, women pursuing 'the oldest profession in the world' were discriminated against in a most vehement manner. In allusion to mankind's fall from grace, woman's fall from innocence branded her as a 'Fallen Woman' and thus deprived her of her primary virtue and sole beauty: her pure innocence. This biblical metaphor can be pursued so that the expulsion from paradise can be said to mirror the individual's 'expulsion', or marginalization, from society. In an effort to control these 'unclean' women, the "First Contagious Diseases Prevention Act" was passed in 1864, which subjected 'suspicious' women to an involuntary, amateurish genital examination – taking public humiliation and deterrence to a yet unattained level. Though initially ascribed to prostitutes, the term 'Fallen Woman' was soon applied to any woman, whom society believed immodest or impure; possible reasons for her denunciation could be her entering into premarital sexual relations and/or giving birth to an illegitimate child or simply the faux-pas of openly expressing (sexual) desire and satisfaction. In short, anything exceeding the submissive endurance of her wifely duties was highly suspect of immorality and thus submitted to religious rectification and 'medical treatment'(<http://victoriaspast.com>).

At this point, it is necessary to bear in mind that there existed several legitimate settings which even encouraged people to lay bare their sexuality to the scrutinizing gaze of authority; Michel Foucault's groundbreaking work *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* affords valuable insight into the intricate issue of sexuality from the 17th century onwards. A note in advance: Foucault is of the opinion that sexuality is a priori enmeshed in the discourse of power and is therefore irrevocably linked and subjugated to the 'paternal law'; throughout history, power has always been exerted in the form of the law. "[A]ll societies without exception

[...] were subject to this rule of rules [...; i]f one considers the threshold of all culture to be prohibited incest, then sexuality has been, from the dawn of time, under the sway of law and right” (Foucault 1990:109-110). What is more, “sexuality owes its very definition to the action of the law: not only will you submit your sexuality to the law, but you will have no sexuality except by subjecting yourself to the law” (Foucault 1990:128). Therefore, if one seeks to follow Foucault’s reasoning about sexuality, it is mandatory to understand how he conceives of power: “power must be understood [...] as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which [...] transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; [...] in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies” (Foucault 1990:92-93). According to Foucault, resistance always follows power but can never be conceived of as existing ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ this power discourse.

The French philosopher, sociologist and historian relates the advent of capitalism to the bourgeois order of sexual repression, which brought a close to the comparative sexual ‘libertinism’ of the preceding centuries. The alleged ‘biological’ reasons for this strong sexual repression – particularly with regard to the Victorians’ ambivalent attitude towards the female reproductive system – will be subject to discussion in the course of the following chapter; this analysis will also disclose how sexual repression was embedded in the special scenario of medicalization. Foucault analyses how sexual “repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence” (Foucault 1990:4) and thus imposed a “triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence” (Foucault 1990:5). While the verbalization of sexuality decreased, the number of related discourses multiplied in reverse proportion during the 18th century – not out of curiosity but in order to maintain this novel power economy of the bourgeoisie.

First, there was medicine, via the ‘nervous disorders’; next psychiatry, when it set out to discover the etiology of mental illnesses, focusing its gaze first on ‘excess’, then on onanism, then frustration, then ‘frauds against procreation’ [...]; criminal justice, too, which had long been concerned with sexuality, particularly in the form of ‘heinous’ crimes and crimes against nature [...]; and lastly, all those social controls [...], which screened the sexuality of couples, parents and children [...] – undertaking

to protect, separate, and forewarn, [...] intensifying people's awareness of it as a constant danger, [...] calling for diagnoses, piling up reports, organizing therapies. (Foucault 1990:30-31)

Foucault argues that the increasing value attributed to discourses on sexuality did not change the fact that they were mere 'screen-discourses', which "never ceased to hide the thing [they were] speaking about" (Foucault 1990:53). Ironically, this refusal to 'lay bare' sexuality and its 'perversities', rendered the Victorian quest for the 'truth' about sex futile from the start – resulting only in the production of 'méconnaissance' (Foucault 1990: 56).

The foundation for this inquisition had been laid in the medieval realm of Christian confession, which underwent a metamorphosis from a mere recital of sexual promiscuities to a diligent practice of self-examination on the part of the individual. "[S]ex must not be named imprudently, but its aspects, its correlations, and its effects must be pursued down to their slenderest ramifications" (Foucault 1990:19); thus "the most important moment of transgression [was shifted] from the act itself to the stirrings [...] of desire" (Foucault 1990:19-20).

In the course of the 19th century, the tradition of religious confession found an ally in medical interrogation; by appropriating a 'scientific vocabulary' for its own purpose, the process of meaning-making laid claim to scientific proof and thus inviolable truth (Foucault 1990: 63-64). This medicalization of sexuality employed five major strategies: firstly, the setting of clinical interrogation fused the methods of confession and examination. Secondly, "there was scarcely a malady or physical disturbance to which the nineteenth century did not impute at least some degree of sexual etiology" (Foucault 1990: 65) – also in an attempt to justify the extensive interrogation. Thirdly, it was the general belief of the time that the 'truth' about sexuality was buried so deep in the unconscious that it could only surface through laborious repetition of the process of confession. Fourthly, once the 'rare data' had been extracted from the patient, the acquired information needed to undergo scientific interpretation; "[t]he one who was listening was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth" (Foucault 1990:66-67). Last but not least, it was necessary to veil the 'inquisitive nature' of confession by affirming its medical framework; people no

longer differentiated between what was right or wrong but what was healthy or pathological (Foucault 1990:63-67).

Thus confession and medical interrogation served as the ultimate tools for the discursive production of a 'truth' about sexuality, a comprehensive collection of what can be known about sex – a '*scientia sexualis*' (Foucault 1990:53-73). Foucault reveals this quest for the ultimate truth about sexuality as a quest for the truth about ourselves; "it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since the truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness" (Foucault 1990:77). It comes as a surprise that the working class managed to evade this 'deployment of sexuality' for a long time – despite their non-negligible reproductive capacity; this reveals the quest for truth to be a privileged practice of meaning-making reserved for the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Especially for the bourgeoisie, its sexual propriety served to reify class identity: "the bourgeoisie [...] looked to its progeny and the health of its organism when it laid claim to a specific body [...]; thus sexuality] has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another" (Foucault 1990:124,123). With reference to the value placed on a 'pure' blood lineage in aristocracy, Foucault argues that the "bourgeoisie's 'blood' was its sex" (Foucault 1990:124). Only around the eighteen-thirties, when the regulation and exploitation of working-class sexuality became an economic and political necessity, were attempts made at implementing the 'conventional family' among the urban proletariat (Foucault 1990:121-123). For Victorian society was not so much concerned with tolerating or condemning sexuality put endeavoured to 'manage' it – in order to ensure its efficient exploitation for demographic purposes. "In the eighteenth century, sex became a 'police matter' [...]: not the repression of disorder, but an ordered maximization of collective and individual forces: [...S]exual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention" (Foucault 1990:24-26).

At the turn of the century, public interest in the love-life of the 'legitimate couple' decreased – if they lived up to their procreative obligations; instead society exhibited a growing interest in sexual aberrations and in the sexuality of criminals or mad(wo)men. In contrast to the preceding centuries, these 'peripheral sexualities' were given a voice so that society may gain knowledge about

mysterious workings of aberrant sexuality (Foucault 1990:38-39). In accordance with the current trend, “they successively bore the stamp of ‘moral folly’, ‘genital neurosis’, ‘aberration of the genetic instinct’, ‘degenerescence’, or ‘physical imbalance’” (Foucault 1990:40). Whereas the like ‘offences against nature’ used to be a matter of jurisdiction, this responsibility was frequently deferred to the medical realm in the 19th century. In addition, the endeavour to ‘grasp’ and regulate sexuality was no longer restricted to the adult sphere; precocious sexuality in children and adolescents was thought to compromise the proper development of their mental faculties and future fertility. Consequently, they were subject to diligent observation and punishment at the hand of their families, nurses, teachers and physicians (Foucault 1990:27-31).

2.3. Conceptualizing ‘madness’

Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness. (Pascal qtd. in Foucault 1988: ix)

This chapter addresses the issue of ‘madness’ both as a social phenomenon and a medical condition; it builds on the preceding chapters in that it analyses the relations between bourgeois morals, the stance towards sexuality and the notion of madness. I start out with a brief theoretical introduction to the conceptualization of madness. Reference to Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* allows for a smooth transition from theory to history. I rely heavily on the work of Roy Porter for this historical introduction to insanity, the public perception and acceptance or denegation of this cultural phenomenon, and the different ways in which society saw fit to ‘treat’ its fellow mad(wo)men. In a brief excursus, I investigate the legal status of the insane and – what is even more intriguing – the unexpected clemency displayed by Victorian courts in their verdict on mad(wo)men. Towards the end of this chapter, I once more adopt a theoretical approach when analysing the representation of insanity in social interaction and art.

This chapter will hence establish a historico-theoretical basis for the ensuing textual analysis; for this purpose, it goes into greater detail about the Victorian understanding of insanity, the belief in the correlation of moral and mental degeneration and the biological reasoning as to woman’s intrinsic susceptibility to psychic imbalance.

To this day, the concept of ‘madness’ is controversial and manifold. Although present-day psychiatry and psychology strive to offer clear and value-free diagnostic criteria to go with non-discriminatory termini, the underlying mode of conceptualizing madness has not undergone significant alteration. In *Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality* Michael Warner explains that “the modern system of sex and gender would not be possible without a disposition to interpret the difference between genders as the difference between self and Other” (191). Similarly, the most powerful participant in a discourse constructs madness as the Other’s deviance from a subjectively, and therefore arbitrarily, defined normative

standard. A necessary prerequisite – for this isolation of all dreadful human characteristics in the form of the ‘in-sane’ Other – is our understanding of ‘difference’ (Warner 190-206). This self-awareness of difference, which puts an end to infantile fantasies of “psychological wholeness” (Gilman 5), goes back to the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’, where the child first conceives of him/herself as an individual entity. In hegemonic discourse, the threatening, because unfathomable, Other is ‘realized’ only as the binary opposition to the self-empowered leader of the discourse: As it represents only that which sets it apart from the dominant subject, i.e. its ‘difference’, the Other cannot be made sense of as an independent subject – it is marginalised and denied a voice. Foucault entertains the sinister idea that the insane is not only denied a voice but does not even have access to language:

The constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue [...]. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* [sic] madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. (Foucault 1988:x-xi)

[S]ilence was absolute; [...] the language of delirium can be answered only by an absence of language, for delirium is not a fragment of dialogue with reason, it is not language at all; it refers, in an ultimate silent awareness, only to transgression. (Foucault 1988:262)

There exist more optimistic views that would ascribe the status of an ‘independent’ counter-society to the marginalized position of the (mad)woman. Critics, such as Brandner (1-17) and Barta (1-8), would argue that woman emancipates herself from patriarchal discourse by going mad as she refutes hegemonic doctrines and displays an ‘ex-centric’ behaviour, which cannot be made sense of from a conventional perspective. Woman both liberates and reinvents herself. Although I sympathize with the urgency of their endeavour to invest the (Victorian) madwoman retroactively with a certain degree of power, I consider madness an illusory emancipation from patriarchal discourse. I would rather conceive of this concept as a sophisticated ‘tool’ which women may employ as a ‘smoke-screen’ for their illicit, (gender-)transgressive actions. If a woman succeeds in masking her offensive behaviour under the pretence of madness, she implicitly demonstrates her insight into this hegemonic system and her cunning exploitation of its power structure to serve her own ends. Or as Linda McDowell put it: “[S]peaking from the margins provides an alternative, more

grounded position from which to challenge conventional assumptions” (Dowell qtd. in Brandner 17). I will come back to this line of argumentation in my analysis of the female protagonist of Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*.

For the time being, let us begin at the beginning and consider the very process of ‘conceptualizing’ madness with recourse to Michel Foucault’s seminal work *Madness and Civilization*. According to Barker (20) Foucault’s principal aim was to analyse “the genealogy of the body as the site of disciplinary practices which bring subjects into being” and to consider such practices as the “consequences of specific historical discourses of crime, punishment, medicine, science and sexuality”. Foucault’s elaborations, however, also take into account the historical dimension of ‘constructing madness’: He highlights the social status of the court jester during the seventeenth century, who was still recognized as the ‘voice of truthfulness’ at that time; besides, he shows how the imbecile filled the discursive void of the ‘scape goat’ formerly occupied by the leper. On a more abstract level, Foucault delineates the ideological transition from the ‘excluded madman’ – who was left to roam the outskirts of society and its cities in comparative liberty – to the ‘confined lunatic’. From the eighteenth century onwards, ‘unreason’ was deemed too dangerous to be allowed to mingle with ‘reason’, even on the periphery of society. Consequently, the Classical Age came to be known as the period of the ‘Great Confinement’. Beyond this historical given, however, Foucault deconstructs the rise of the asylum as an administrative act of power under the thinly veiled pretext of humanitarian succour. The political motivation of ‘managing the mad’ is particularly blatant in the pinnacle of confinement: the Hôpital Général of Paris. Foucault deems it “not a medical establishment [... but rather a] semijudicial structure, an administrative entity [...; a] quasi-absolute sovereignty, jurisdiction without appeal, a writ of execution against which nothing can prevail – the Hôpital Général is a strange power that the King establishes between the police and the courts, at the limits of the law: a third order of repression” (Foucault 1988:40). Despite the state’s philanthropic interest in the wellbeing of the mentally disabled, asylums were encouraged to sustain themselves financially – in consequence, their inmates were put to work. As they were remunerated only a fourth of their work value, the keeping of such workhouses became profitable during economic crises. On humanitarian

grounds, asylums served as a sponge that absorbed pauperism and scoured society from all traces of “mendicancy and idleness as sources of all disorder” (Foucault 1988:57). As concerns the inmates’ medical care, patients were at the mercy of physicians – self-appointed experts on the germinal science of psychiatry – who were invested with indisputable, paternal authority as the ‘Father and Judge’ (Foucault 1988:159-198).

With the dawn of the ‘age of sensibility’ during the mid-eighteenth century, the picture of the female lunatic – still prevalent to this day – had replaced the initial notions of the male maniac and masculine melancholic. In the formerly masculine realm of the insane, woman had found her niche in religious fanaticism, which was deemed a characteristically female mental disturbance as early as the Middle Ages. As has been elaborated above, from the 17th century onwards, woman and her notoriously destabilizing reproductive organs were thrust into the limelight of a patriarchal discourse on madness. Not least through the turn of the century studies of Freud and Charcot on the hysterical woman, mental diseases became culturally encoded as intrinsically feminine – whereas somatic ailments appertained to the masculine sphere. Also in questions of moral degeneracy, woman’s immorality was hushed up in a mental hospital, while man went to jail for unethical tortious acts (Porter 1989:103-112).

Freud’s seminal work *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* offers a vivid description of the presumably characteristic assortment of hysterical symptoms, exhibited by Freud’s pet-patient Ida Bauer, aka ‘Dora’. Already at the age of eighteen, her conduct was perceived as emblematic of the upper/middle-class female of the fin de siècle: “nervous cough, general debility, migraine, *taedium vitae*, a disposition to flirt with suicide [...] she was ‘unmistakably neurotic’” (Porter 1989:113, his italics). Unfortunately, it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to give a comprehensive account of Freud’s understanding of hysteria; for the present purpose, it can be inadequately summarized as always rooted in sexual repression (often coupled with infantile masturbation) and, in most cases, as symptomatic of an unresolved oedipal struggle – often visualized in a (futile) attempt to break away from the unrequited love for the Father (Porter 1989:113-118).

In her introduction to 'hysteria', Harris gives a detailed account of the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, the leading neurologist of the Salpêtrière in Paris at the fin de siècle; he described hysteria as a psychic ailment with no 'morphological correlate', which did not, however, discredit the respective patients as simulators or malingerers. Not least due to his weekly public demonstrations to the curious bourgeois audience, Charcot – and his most prominent patients – gained considerable notoriety. Théodule Ribot, a disciple of the 'École de Nancy', which stood in marked opposition to Charcot, described the hysteric as possessing a very changeful, 'mercurial' personality; "[t]hey seemed to lack the crucial inhibitory mechanism necessary to subordinate emotional excess, sensual urges, and instinctual drives" (Harris 174). There was a mutual understanding between both écoles, however, that "less flamboyant varieties of hysteria [were] seen to contaminate the nervous systems of virtually all women"; this is the reason "why women were almost always deemed irresponsible for their acts" (Harris 207) and frequently acquitted of their crimes.

For the following historical introduction, I rely heavily on the seminal work of Roy Porter on the historical evolution of the concept of madness and the rise of psychiatry. The historian's analysis is of particular interest as he is believed to have 'pitched his oeuvre' against Foucault's canonic text *Madness and Civilisation*. A synthesis of their partly divergent theories will provide a rounded picture of the historical and ideological dimensions of insanity (Wilson 25). Their main difference lies in the perception of pathological anatomy as the underlying reason for insanity: Foucault portrays the 'birth of the clinic' as a momentous, disruptive event – a historical milestone which allows for the differentiation of 'a mythical/religious before and a scientific after'. In contrast, Porter is in favour of a more continuous approach – he understands the 'medicalization of madness' as a process rather than a revolution. In order to sustain his line of argumentation, he refers to an unbroken chain of historical personae, who conceived of insanity in more or less anatomico-physiological terms. A consensus of opinion can be found when it comes to the process of combining patho-anatomical knowledge of post-mortem dissection with the patient's symptoms during lifetime; both theorists share Marie François Xavier Bichat's conviction that one cannot make sense of the former without reference to the latter (Wilson 26-35).

Following this brief comparative excursus, I will return to Porter's historical account of insanity. As has been discussed above, he is convinced that the trend of 'medicalizing' madness is indeed not a new one. Au contraire, one may trace it back to antiquity and Hippocrates' 'humorism', which understands all illness as an imbalance of the four basic juices blood, chole, phlegm and melan-chole. In Classical medicine, there already existed clear-cut ideas about two primary manifestations of mental disturbance, namely melancholia and mania. These 'scientific' concepts differed, however, significantly from the romanticized notions held, for example, by Keats and his contemporaries (Porter 2002:34-43). Porter reports on the religious fanaticism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which were bent on detecting the work of Satan in any mental affliction. This was, however, also the time of the "witty fool' with his riddling truths and carnivalesque freedoms" (Porter 2002:76). The Renaissance period was succeeded by the similarly dark age of the 17th and 18th centuries, when the alleged insane were locked up in madhouses, which rivalled the prisons of their time with regard to catastrophic hygiene conditions, physical restraint and corporal punishment. Whereas the medieval tradition 'spiritualized' madness and detached it from bodily functions (except when insanity occurred as a punishment for an immoral, unchaste body), philosophers such as Descartes and Hobbes once more 'grounded' the mind in the body (Porter 2002:55-60). Contrary to a previously positive stance on 'insane creativity', the Augustan period was hostile towards the poetry of common people that was recited in bars and in the streets; Alexander Pope considered such 'lyrical effluvium' a "morbid secretion from the brain" (Pope qtd. in Porter 2002:79) as true poetry required an educated and healthy mind.

The humanitarian efforts of Tuke (England), Pinel (France) and Chiarugi (Italy) heralded a new era, when insanity finally (re-)entered a medical and (pseudo)scientific sphere and the afflicted were frequently treated with formerly unparalleled kindness and goodwill (Porter 2002:3-5). Through clinical observation and 'scientific' research, a more accurate understanding of the underlying anatomical and physiological basis of psychic diseases was established. Porter analyses the "politics of compulsory confinement [... in the face of] the rise and fall of the asylum ('a convenient place for inconvenient people')" (Porter 2002:7). In this context, he also makes reference to the epitome

of confinement: the Bethlem Hospital, generally referred to as 'Bedlam'; this gigantic 'palace of fools' was located at the edge of London and constituted the greatest and most (in)famous of all British asylum at the time (Porter 2002:71-73). As was the case at the Salpêtrière, the public was encouraged to visit the lunatics in their 'natural habitat'; this blatant voyeurism was intended as "edifying spectacles, object lessons [...] of the wages of passion, vice, and sin [...]; 'and from so humbling a sight we may learn to moderate our pride'" (Porter 2002:71-72). Porter points out that we must not conceive of Victorian asylums as places specifically constructed for psychiatric purposes, but rather understand the practice of psychiatry as having evolved in the 'favourable' setting of the asylum. One of the pioneers who recognized the curative potential of these institutions was the London physician William Battie: himself the owner of a private asylum, he did not share the pessimistic tenor of the majority of his colleagues but was convinced that "madness is as manageable as many other distempers" (Battie qtd. in Porter 2002:102). As early as the 1750s, he differentiated between 'original insanity' – deemed innate and therefore incurable – and 'consequential insanity', whose prognosis was more favourable as it was the result of stressful life events. He also found that traditional therapeutic methods, such as bloodletting or surgery, were of little avail to the psychiatric patient, who would benefit the most from therapeutic consultations and close contact with the psychiatrist. In his wake, the future generation of practitioners adopted a more positive view on the curability of insanity, especially in the light of the successful method of 'moral management' (Porter 2002:100-108). What is more, the doctors' attitude towards their patients changed decidedly in the course of the Enlightenment – so that practitioners now considered it "a supreme moral duty and medical obligation to respect the insane individual as a person" (Chiarugi qtd. in Porter 2002:104). Needless to say, this positive portrayal of 'moral management' cannot be taken at face value: the treatment of the insane was frequently less than humane and certainly not respectful; nevertheless, these changes – both in the physicians' attitude towards their patients and the care the latter received – constituted a vast improvement. Thanks to Robert Gardiner Hill and John Conolly, a non-restraint policy was enforced all over England in the 1830s; brutal physical restraint of all sorts was exchanged for constant, vigilant observation of the patients. The (surprisingly) successful therapy for psychiatric

patients consisted in their occupation, attention to their (hygienic) living conditions and kindness on the part of their attendants and doctors. Even though the French practitioner Pinel dispensed with chains, other forms of physical restraint remained in use as they facilitated the control of wayward patients (Porter 2002:105-108). Much in accordance with Jeremy Bentham's plans for the 'panopticon', a lot of attention was devoted to the architecture of asylums to allow for healthy living conditions as well as optimal security and visibility (Porter 2002:116). It was also a custom to keep the different 'types' of the insane apart – male and female, curable and incurable, harmless and aggressive were kept in separate parts of the building. In the course of the last third of the 19th century, however, the initial optimism concerning these 'modernized' asylums decreased in the face of stagnating cure rates and the accumulation of difficult-to-treat or incurable patients – so that "the asylum became a dustbin for hopeless cases" (Porter 2002:119). In the light of the disappointing outcome of 'moral management', psychiatrists were in search for an explanation for its failure, which they found in the concept of 'degeneration' suggested by familial clustering of mental afflictions. Little did they anticipate for what ideological purposes this 'degenerationist psychiatry' would be deployed in the course of the 20th century (Porter 2002:112-122).

Not only the 'management' of the insane but also the presumed aetiology of madness was subject to historical transformation. For a long time, excessive emotions and passions – characteristically originating from female reproductive organs – were held responsible for mental disturbances. On the basis of the philosophy of David Hume, William Cullen initiated a paradigmatic shift towards a more (neuro)physiological understanding of insanity around 1750; instead of the uterus, the central nervous system – especially the human brain – was now the aetiological site of madness (Porter 2002:123-133). Nevertheless, the patriarchal claim of woman's biological predisposition to insanity was retained by postulating a "sympathetic connection" of the reproductive and nervous system (Showalter 56). Few contemporaries considered the detrimental effects of woman's "imperfect and vicious education" (Browne qtd. in Showalter 60) – deemed to result in "mental atrophy" (Showalter 62) – a viable explanation for her liability to insanity (Showalter 55- 63).

Whereas we may verily speak of a mass phenomenon of confinement in France, it is mandatory to bear in mind that the political motives and socio-economic necessities were far less pronounced in Great Britain. In 1800, no more than 5000 out of approximately ten million Britons were confined in asylums – although an equal number was probably detained in workhouses, bridewells and jails (Porter 2002:92-100). By 1900, however, the total number of mentally disturbed patients – detained in asylums or similar institutions – reached nearly 100.000 in England. At first sight, it is indeed paradoxical that the increasing effort to provide adequate, humane treatment for the insane should be met with an unparalleled increase in their number – from 2,3 per 10.000 in 1807 to 29,3 per 10.000 in 1890 (Scull 337). Naturally, this insane epidemic fuelled society's fears of the virulent nature of mental diseases and the resulting 'unmanageable' mass of mad(wo)men; in a 1877 issue of *The Times*, public anxiety was put into the following words: "[I]f lunacy continues to increase as at present, the insane will be in the majority, and, freeing themselves, will put the sane in asylums" (*The Times*, 5 April 1877 qtd. in Scull 338). This ostensible dread of a 'mad' uprising is symptomatic of a society whose hegemonic subject feels threatened by its Other, who – all of a sudden – gains power at an astonishing and most alarming pace.

Various attempts were made at pinpointing the reason(s) for this sudden increase in insanity. Around 1840, more than 80 per cent of diagnosed lunatics were paupers and their number increased by 96 per cent over the following twenty years, while it rose 'only' by 24 per cent among the higher social ranks (Scull 337-338). It would be tempting to infer that the increase in pauper lunatics coincided with a general rise in pauperism; in fact, the reverse was true. According to Scull (334-339), it is more likely that the rising number of lunatics can be attributed to the improved living conditions and humane treatment, which resulted in a prolonged life expectancy of the inmates of asylums. Another popular hypothesis – formulated by Powell and supported by Halliday – was madness as the 'symptom' of increased stress levels, which strained the human nervous system in an advanced, industrialized civilisation (Scull 334-344). Furthermore, it was assumed that more sophisticated diagnostic methods allowed for the detection of subtler forms of insanity; this argument is relativized

by the actual circumstances under which a person was most likely to be decried as mad in Victorian England:

Relatives, not doctors or public authorities, usually made the first determination that an individual was insane. Their decision to commit did not follow from some objective measure of the patient's condition, but rather from an assessment of the family's financial and emotional resources to deal with the individual's mental disability. (Tomes 14 qtd. in Scull 351)

The decision to send a patient to the asylum was made on social as much as on medical grounds [...], asylum doctors had no control over admissions, never saw patients before they came in, and could only advise when a patient was well enough to be discharged. (Hunter 16-17 qtd. in Scull 351)

This precarious convention was open to – if not encouraging – exploitation; it does not come as a surprise that women were in greater danger of suffering arbitrary stigmatization at the hands of their male legal representatives. Thus, from an early stage, the asylum's "primary value to the community was as a handy place to which to consign the disturbing, the vaguely menacing, the unwanted, and the useless – those potentially and actually troublesome people who posed threats to the social order and to the business of daily living which were not readily subject to control by the legal system" (Scull 352). In other words: if you could not provide a sufficient legal lever against your irksome wife, you might still cart her off to a private asylum on grounds of insanity. Luisa Lowe's *The Bastilles of England* (1883) constitutes one of the few (autobiographical) records by contemporary women that called attention to wrongful confinement. Excerpts from similar accounts by 'mentally disturbed' women – and of their woes experienced during confinement – can be found in Rebecca Shannonhouse's anthology *Out of her mind: Women writing on Madness* (24-54).

While the (female) inmates of public asylums certainly suffered the greatest hardship, woman's disadvantaged positions in the discourse of madness and sanity was not confined to these psychiatric reformatories. In *A social History of madness*, Roy Porter (1989:103-124) explains that the primary object of psychiatric concern at that time was the presumably less 'troubled' woman – the 'nervous case' that still partook in society, though in her domestic sphere. As has

been noted above, Victorian society had elaborated rigid ideals of femininity, which attributed a special sensitivity and even moral superiority to women; as a consequence, woman was more apt – indeed only apt – to follow occupations in the domestic sphere, such as bringing up children. By implication, it was man's duty to protect woman's delicacy and sentimental refinement from the vile influence of public life. This social convention became medicalized in the course of the 19th century, resulting in the general belief "that the woman who trespassed beyond the domestic sphere would suffer psychiatric collapse" (Porter 1989:119). Of course, rather the reverse was true so that, for many an ambitious Victorian woman, the "cabined, cribbed and confined milieu of the 'doll house' itself became a madhouse of frustration and thwarted energies" (Porter 1989:119). To make matters worse and condemn these rebellious spirits to inevitable psychiatric doom, the 'medical treatment' proposed for such cases of 'unbecoming restlessness' was the 'rest cure': the depressed patient would be confined to bed and fed on a diet of cold rice pudding for weeks on end. Instead of 'curing' these patients by reposing their disturbed minds, they would generally suffer from severe depression and pangs of reflexive agitation upon dismissal (Porter 1989:118-124).

At least as far as legal matters were concerned, however, women found themselves protected by the Madhouse Act (1828). In theory, this bill served as a precaution against unjust slander, as it required two doctors to sign a certificate for the commitment of private patients. There was, however, a downside to this legal step as it prolonged both the process of admittance to psychiatric care and of discharge from an asylum; thus temporary treatment of the mentally disturbed became increasingly difficult (Porter 2002:108-110).

In *Murder and Madness – Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle*, Harris unravels a different facet of legislation: the mysteries of the courtrooms of that time – when it came to judging criminal acts committed by the alleged insane. She analyses the normative function of a pseudo-scientific, medical vocabulary and explains how jurisdiction sought recourse to woman's inherent pathological biology as both reason and excuse for her notorious susceptibility to the lures of crime. Harris shows how – as early as the 1820s – the 'anatomo-clinical' method endeavoured to pinpoint the organic lesion in a patient's nervous system which

resulted in the specific display of clinical symptoms (Harris 11-26). At the turn of the century, research intensified on the 'etiology' of madness with regard to potential physiological preconditions for mental disturbances; the greatest importance was ascribed to heredity, but cerebral traumas and infections, as well as an unbalanced diet or thyroid dysfunction were also considered possible risk factors (Harris 33-34). In the particular case of women, there was 'scientific consensus' on the detrimental influence of their instable biological lifecycle; while the greatest pathological value was set on the periods of pregnancy, birth and lactation, a woman's monthly menstruation was considered a sufficient 'source of irritation' to plunge her into "periods of insanity" or, at least, "of intense mental instability" (Harris 35). As women were perceived as 'victims' of their disturbing physiological processes, Victorian society and jurisdiction often showed lenience and sympathy for "womanly derangement" (Harris 35). This is why the majority of female criminals, even murderesses, were acquitted, because the judges simply could not find it in their hearts to hold them responsible for these "bouts of dangerous temporary insanity" (Harris 36). During these periodic outbreaks of distemper, mostly in the form of hysteria, "the higher capacities were 'swamped' by the more bestial qualities lurking beneath the surface of civilized behaviour" (Harris 41).

Apart from their biological vulnerability, women were also deemed particularly susceptible to the unconsciously manipulating influence of ruthless men – typically by means of hypnosis. This willingness to accept that women were acting under the detrimental influence of men, when they exhibited particularly consternating or 'unwomanly' behaviour, may be interpreted as society's refusal to acknowledge (the mere possibility of) feminine agency or bloodlust. Besides, people were alarmed at this seductively easy way of manipulating the human unconscious – quite often without the victims retaining any recollection as to what had happened (to them or at their hand) during their unconscious lethargy. Apart from the issue of moral and juridical liability for deeds allegedly committed under the influence of hypnosis, patriarchal society had to face an additional dilemma: how could the bourgeois husband be sure that his otherwise faithful wife would not give birth to the child of a (possibly working-class) scoundrel, who had taken advantage of her weak nature and 'magnetized' the beloved without her

knowledge (Harris 155-160,191)? Women's fear of being unwittingly exploited was also of relevance in the medical realm, where the patient's relationship to a trusted physician "was fraught with moral and sexual ambiguities which threatened to compromise the integrity" (Harris 169) of the doctor-patient relationship – particularly when narcotics had to be administered or during therapeutic hypnosis. Whereas Charcot warned that hypnosis may surface latent hysterical traits and thus provoke the 'decompensation' of a fragile psychic balance, the École de Nancy considered hypnosis a viable therapeutic tool for a number of psychic conditions (Harris 175).

Harris (208-242) reports that indicted women often sought refuge in the claim of hypnotic manipulation and put on the act of the pure, terribly wronged victim of male deception and thus appealed to the judge's benevolence. Other than feigning influence through 'magnetization' and hypnosis – or referring to her delicate psychic balance – a woman charged with murder could also plead guilty of a 'crime of passion' to be acquitted. The accused women were anxious to prove their impeccable sense of morality and present their deeds as arising from an unbearable offence against their honour and purity. These 'criminelles passionnelles' would lament the ordeals of public humiliation and cruel abandonment, their besmirched virginity or their husbands' infidelity; they would frequently conclude that they must have been in a state of temporary insanity when actually committing the murder (Harris 208-242). This melodramatic recital emulated the formulaic rhetorical style of classical drama, which served a strategic purpose: "[T]he particular manner of this self-representation was crucial in arousing genuine compassion while at the same time rendering a portrait of female irresponsibility" (Harris 218). "It often produced acquittal, but at the cost of appearing to collude in a generalized judgement of women as emotionally histrionic and irresponsible" (Harris 227). A woman's prospects were particularly bright if she could provide sufficient evidence that the man in question had promised her marriage or that she avenged her illegitimate child. The sentence was harsher, for the crime was greater, if a woman found herself "outside the 'code of honour'" (Harris 216). In 1843, the plea for insanity became controversial in Britain when a trial on the occasion of the murder of the Prime Minister had to stop on the grounds of unsoundness of mind (Porter 2002:154-155).

With recourse to Elaine Showalter's canonic work *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture*, I will now attempt a brief historical overview of the conceptualization of madness in the specific context of British Victorianism and its views on women.

HAMLET. 'Ay marry, why was he sent into England?'

CLOWN. 'Why because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there, or if he do not, it is no great matter there.'

HAMLET. 'Why?'

CLOWN. "Twill not be seen in him; there the men are as mad as he.'
(Shakespeare 135-136)

Paradoxically, 'madness' was considered both a cultural characteristic of British society – much in accordance with the melancholy climate – and a marker of advanced civilisation and its superior intellect, as it was less frequent in 'savage tribes' or among the slaves in the West Indies (Showalter 24). The much acclaimed society doctor George Cheyne went so far as to laud madness as "the by-product of English sensitivity, ambition, and intelligence", in which his contemporaries ought to "take pride [... as] their national heritage" (Showalter 7). This modification of the British stereotype of the melancholic sparked a most absurd 'fashion' for the "nervous, narcissistic valetudinarian" (Porter 2002:83). "[E]minent Victorians sank or wallowed in hypochondria (mainly male) and hysteria (essentially for the ladies). By the *fin de siècle*, it was trendy to be 'neurasthenic'" (Porter 2002:87, his italics). As a consequence of this epidemic madness, England became the leading European force in the management of lunatics, which is not only reflected in innumerable lunacy reforms but in its most (in)famous asylum, Colney Hatch. Whereas a growing number of asylums took the insane off their relatives' hands, the upper class often sought to avoid public humiliation by keeping their lunatics at home, commissioning private care or delivering them to secluded 'maisons de santé' on the Continent. "Among the wealthier classes, bizarre behaviour would be described as nervousness or eccentricity until the patient became unmanageable, suicidal or violent" (Showalter 26). This tendency to make light of mental illnesses among aristocrats and the bourgeoisie was in line with the general trend to euphemize (or in Showalter's words 'domesticate') madness. Victorian society attempted "a taming of the brutish lunatic, a reassimilation of madness into the spectrum of recognizably human experience" (Showalter 28). Whereas Victorians sought to

‘soften’ the image of insanity – from that of the raving madman to the melancholic, female lunatic – they simultaneously broadened the scope of ‘mental deficiency’ to comprise not only mental but also moral degeneracy. This concept of ‘moral insanity’ was coined by James Cowles Prichard in 1835, who understood madness as any deviance from socially accepted norms which did not necessarily entail reduced mental faculties or coincide with hallucinations. Obviously, such a ‘fuzzy’ definition of moral madness opened up ample opportunity for ‘generous interpretation’; patriarchal society was quick to detect this instrumental dimension of morality as linked to mental sanity. In addition to this new type of madness, Victorian psychiatry also ascribed ‘moral’ causes to the traditional repertoire of insanity. The contemporary doctor Granville put it this way: “[T]he causation of insanity everywhere, special organic disease apart, is an affair of three W’s – worry, want, and wickedness. Its cure is a matter of the three M’s – method, meat, and morality” (Granville 48 qtd. in Showalter 30). As insanity was no longer perceived as inherently aggressive or dangerous, Victorian doctors sought to apply more humanitarian methods of treatment; in this context, the most famous achievement, namely the abolition of mechanical restraint, has already been mentioned. In view of the British’s belief in their own cultural and moral superiority over other European nations, it is noteworthy that they prided themselves on being the only community to adopt such a strict non-restraint policy nationwide at that time. Ardent advocates of this ‘gentle’, moralizing therapy were convinced to have found in it the first therapeutic approach that may actually hope to ‘cure’ insanity; for Showalter, “[t]his therapeutic optimism had clear affinities with the mid-Victorian belief in progress; in a period of British prosperity and expansion, no conquest seemed impossible” (Showalter 33). By 1866, Professor G.E. Paget was convinced that the British asylum constituted “the most blessed manifestation of true civilization that the world can present” (Paget qtd. in Showalter 42). This progressive approach to madness was also reflected in people’s conduct on visiting the inmates of asylums; whereas these trips to the ‘loony bin’ were held to be excellent entertainment during the Augustan age, the public now officially inspected the insane and their habitat with scientific curiosity.

Nevertheless, those physicians who took an active interest in the care of lunatics and the nascent science of psychiatry often faced public scorn; on his entering the profession of a superintendent at Hanwell asylum, Conolly's acquaintances considered this move "the suicide of reputation and the confession of complete failure in life" (Maudsley qtd. in Showalter 45). Soon enough, however, the success of his humanitarian and religious approach to the management of the insane made Conolly the beacon of Victorian psychiatry. In the light of unprecedented 'cure rates', Conolly let himself be carried away by his own naïve enthusiasm so that he came to consider the asylum as the miracle answer to all kinds of petty problems such as "young women of ungovernable temper ... sullen wayward, malicious defying all domestic control; or who want that restraint over the passions without which the female character is lost" (Conolly qtd. in Showalter 48). In the midst of all this buzz, it must not be forgotten that 'all that glitters is not gold': firstly, the abolition of physical restraint was met with a remarkable increase in surveillance, so that patients were as much under the control of watchful eyes as they had formerly been bound by chains. Secondly, the economic profit generated from patients' allegedly 'therapeutic labour' suggests to the 21st century critic that many proprietors of public asylums were not so much interested in curing madness as in the "manufactory of chronic insanity" (Showalter 49). Thirdly, this new humanitarianism was deeply rooted in patriarchy so that the asylum came to mirror the hegemonic power structures of the Victorian family – with the physician as the benevolent and wise Father in charge of his minors, who were desperately in need of his therapeutic guidance. This repetitive power structure is also reflected in the predominance of female inhabitants, who were subject to surveillance and treatment by an almost exclusively male staff (Showalter 23-50).

For the purpose of this literary thesis, it is worthwhile to round off the historico-theoretical account of insanity with an excursus on the various modes of 'representing' the (mentally) diseased Other in art. Gilman argues that it is our need to localize, and thus render 'manageable', all deviance from normality, which prompts mankind to fix its Other in art. In order to protect ourselves against disease, we must distance ourselves from the diseased, who has been conflated with his/her affliction, and from all individuals considered 'more at risk'. At the root

of this fear of the diseased is their affiliation with dissolution, collapse and disintegration, which threatens not only (wo)man's bodily integrity but indeed the stability of human identity (Douglas 162). Because all change implies potential danger, mankind is said to yearn for rigidity and control over "the flux of reality" (Gilman 2). By representing and thus 'fixing' madness in art, we endow this discursive construct with a social reality given that art is acknowledged as a valid means of representing 'reality'. While it is true that "this relativism, present within all systems of representations, can tell us little about the underlying realities [... , it does reveal] much about the construction of our understanding of those realities" (Gilman 2). Gilman goes so far as to argue that even the diseased Other is fooled by the seeming validity of these realities and consequently acts upon, and acts out, social constructs (Gilman 6-7). Gilman points out that there are some anti-realist philosophers such as Thomas Szasz, who would even claim that (mental) illnesses do not have a 'true', biological correlate but are nothing more than social constructs. Insanity is deemed a mere metaphor, which has fossilized over time to form the pseudo-scientific basis for invalid assumptions on the part of a self-professed psychiatric authority (Szasz 137-159). I strongly agree with Gilman in that this approach is not only reductionist but disrespectful as it discredits the suffering of the diseased. It is more promising to conceive of mental illnesses "as realities mirrored in and conceptualized through the pressures of social forces and psychological models" (Gilman 9).

In our effort to distance ourselves from the mad Other, society defines certain 'external markers' which facilitate the detection of madness – be that matters of comportment, dress, physiognomy or (facial) expression. Particularly the latter two aspects were of considerable relevance for 19th century psychiatric practice. Already by the end of the 18th century, there was a pervasive belief that a person's physical appearance was indicative of his/her psychiatric tableau – indeed that each mental condition was characterized by a specific set of physiognomic abnormalities. This belief gave birth to a host of (pseudo)sciences such as 'phrenology' which saw a clear correlation between the size and shape of a person's skull and their "potential for insanity" (Gilman 33). This empirical trend in psychiatry also resulted in excessive portrayal of the inmates of asylums for scientific, didactic and clinical purposes – even though leading scientists such as

Philippe Pinel acknowledged the futility of attempting a 'systematic description' of insanity, which would allow for diagnostic generalizations. In the course of the 1850s, the tradition of portraying mad(wo)men experienced a technological breakthrough with the advent of photography. Even though long exposure times in calotype prints allowed only for equally fixed and static postures as were common in sketches and etchings, the bias of 'artistic freedom' was reduced in the portrayal of lunatics. Gilman is convinced that "the connection between the aesthetic and the medical modes of seeing the insane is retained" (Gilman 47) to this day, regardless of how much contemporary clinicians believe themselves emancipated from this historical legacy (Gilman 18-49). Brooks points out that photographic records were not restricted to the inmates of asylums – either living or as anatomical preparation – but often showed the madhouses themselves, making them a symbol of innovative psychiatry. The primary purpose was to 'show off' the (outward) splendour of these innovative masterpieces of architecture, which were thought to hold therapeutic potential. The exterior of the grand asylums, which looked half like a palace and half like a bastille, was also intended to convey a sense of security to the alarmed public; architecture was meant to suggest that patients were both effectively treated and securely kept at bay (Brooks 30-45).

Denise Jodelet is particularly interested in the 'social' aspect of representation, as she considers representation "an operating factor in the constitution of social orders and relationships, the shaping of collective behaviour and the transformation of the social world" (Jodelet 11). She analyses this practice of 'constructing social realities' in the light of its performative, ideological and semantic dimensions. Jodelet questions how the Other loses its 'alien' qualities once it has become the object of public representation; through repeated exposure to mad(wo)men, society familiarizes itself with insanity, whereby its characteristic otherness is naturalized. In other words: "Everyone gets used to it. [...] We don't notice it any more. [...] It's a question of custom" (Jodelet 48-49). Jodelet is also sensitive to the inherent danger of such 'neutralizing' tendencies; namely the assimilation of the Other into the dominant collective, which renders the insane 'invisible'. Due to society's habituation to insanity, the mad(wo)man's shocking otherness is no longer omnipresent and has therefore lost its

threatening qualities. Jodelet argues that this phenomenon is indeed a form of collective psychological hygiene, rooted in the safeguard mechanism of denial (Jodelet 48-66). If one chooses to take a more positive stance towards the naturalization and/or integration of madness within society, it can be interpreted as deconstructing stereotypes of an alleged 'otherness', which turns out to be not so different from actual 'normality'. As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint this difference that sets mad(wo)men apart from their fellow citizens, once their abundant existence is acknowledged (Jodelet 66- 72).

How much can you be thought of as insane? I don't know, the barrier between... It's like 'size', how tall do you have to be before you're of medium height, before you're tall? What criteria do you use to say a man is bad, or a little less bad? You can't define it! (Jodelet 66-67)

What is more, following this reasoning, madness is no longer a personal deficiency, a weakness of character, a just punishment for moral degeneracy or a condition that is certain to befall only Others: "Here they don't try to make it anybody's fault, they don't accuse you of being bad, they realize that you are ill [... and] that there are a lot of others who are mentally ill as well" (Jodelet 67).

As a contextual transition from theory to literature, I would like – once more – to draw attention to the importance of language and diction for the conceptualization and (often unconscious) reification of madness in literary discourse: "[T]he language used by many nineteenth-century novelists to discuss and demonstrate gender issues was couched in a vocabulary of insanity, since no other vocabulary seemed adequate to reflect the conflict and turmoil manifest in these personal issues" (Lange 1). Precisely because both femininity and insanity serve as the prerequisite Other of 'patriarchal reason', it is worthwhile to consider these concepts in conjunction when we "examine the ideological effects of the very production of meaning in the language of literature and in its critical exegesis" (Felman 26).

3. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

When embarking on a literary journey through the psychiatric landscape of Victorian England, Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* is the most intuitive starting point. Not least by featuring prominently in Gilbert's and Gubar's foundational text *The Madwoman in the Attic*, *Jane Eyre* has come to signify a stepping stone for feminist literary criticism, in general, and its analysis of woman's 'maddening Otherness', in particular. According to Gilbert and Gubar, "*Jane Eyre* is a work permeated by angry, *Angrian* fantasies of escape-into-wholeness [...] the young novelist seems here definitely to have opened her eyes to female realities within her and around her: confinement, orphanhood, starvation, rage even to madness" (336, their italics).

Brontë traces Jane's development from disobedient child to 'self-governed' adult and shows that behind her outward composure lies a continuous inner struggle to maintain this illusively stable appearance. Based on this insight into the heroine's perpetually 'self-governing' nature, it becomes quite clear that she cannot be sure of her happy-ending from the outset. As matrimony constitutes both woman's greatest self-fulfilment and her highest reward for gender-conforming conduct, Jane must first earn this 'treasure of treasures'. Although Brontë's principal character certainly does not blindly adhere to Victorian conventions, she learns to respect the cornerstones of patriarchal society: she must secure the victory of reason over her own passionate nature in a tightrope walk of testing, rather than transgressing, the boundaries of Victorian gender ideology.

Much has been written on the overt madness of Bertha Mason as the perhaps most lurid portrayal of feminine insanity in Victorian fiction. While I find myself (equally) enthralled by the refreshing 'Otherness' of this epitome of female madness, Brontë's novel offers too little substance to allow for the analysis of her character as a distinct persona. One could only hope to 'flesh out' this gothic spectre of female excess with recourse to appropriations of the 'Bertha theme' – in various (literary) adaptations and 'spin-offs', most notably Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For the purpose of the present study, however, this does not constitute a viable option: Firstly, an in-depth analysis of Rhys' rendition of

Bertha, aka Antoinetta, would exceed the scope of this thesis. Secondly, and more importantly, an interpretation of the fused characters of Antoinetta Mason and Bertha Rochester would no longer be faithful to Brontë's version; it would transcend precisely the historical and ideological framework whose repercussions in literature I made the topic of my thesis. For these reasons, I will analyse the elusive figure of 'the madwoman in the attic' primarily as the alter ego of the female protagonist – as a psychological metaphor for all aspects of Jane's personality which she must renounce in order to secure her own fairy-tale ending of matrimonial bliss. In this context, Macpherson accounts for Bertha as "the mystery that Jane must recognize and demystify in order to understand Rochester's marriage offer, and the nature of marriage itself" (13).

Mrs Reeds is furious with her husband for having wrung from her the promise to care for his orphaned niece, in his hour of death. Her charge might have been less troublesome, were she not left with this "bad animal" (Brontë 3), this forbidding image of "*virulent* passion" (Brontë 12, my italics). As the odd one out in the Reed household, ten-year-old Jane is constantly "humbled by the consciousness of [her] physical inferiority" (Brontë 1) in comparison to her pretty cousin Georgiana – "with her long curls and her blue eyes, and such a sweet colour as she has; just as if she were painted!" (Brontë 21) Besides, her relations want her to "acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition" (Brontë 1) and adopt a "more natural" (Brontë 1) manner, that is, to naturalize and internalize those qualities patriarchal society deems appropriate for children. While still a child, this transgressive aspect of Jane's character is particularly obvious; the full extent of her break with Victorian ideology as regards children's essential goodness will be analysed in the conclusion. In his anthology of Brontë's novels, Mike Edwards claims that "[t]o us as readers, [...] it is clear that Jane is being treated harshly and unreasonably, and by the end of the first page, Jane, surrounded as it seems by her enemies, has won in her readers an army of supporters in her lonely battle against oppression" (8). While Edwards's assertion is valid for a 21st century readership, I would not agree with it in relation to the novel's initial reception in 1847. For Jane's inability to conform – "Why could I never please?" (Brontë 9) – constitutes an attack on the Victorian belief in the original goodness and innocence of children, especially of girls. The protagonist's

rebellion is even more profound in that she deviates not only from the romanticized picture of childhood but from her role as a soon-to-be woman. Mrs Reeds, as a representative of the Victorian middle-class, is appalled by Jane's unfeminine self-assertiveness and her outspoken claim for fairness – for instance concerning the rampages in the Reeds' nursery, for which she is categorically held responsible (Macpherson 4-5). Jane is acutely aware that it is not only her difference in birth and her inferior social standing which make her the scape-goat of the nursery but her plain physiognomy: "if she were a nice, pretty child [like Georgiana], one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (Brontë 20). Mrs Reeds command – to "[b]e seated somewhere; and until [she] can speak pleasantly, remain silent" (Brontë 2) – foreshadows Bertha's fate of one who cannot, or chooses not to, conform to society's doctrines: Firstly, the culprit is separated from society and 'fixed' in space – forced to recede to a quiet, marginal corner, locked up in the symbolically charged 'red room' or in Rochester's attic. Secondly, she is denied a voice if 'her discourse' differs from and thus challenges the dominant, patriarchal discourse – in the guise of morality and convention.

A first climax is reached when the "mad cat" (Brontë 6) physically asserts herself in defence against her bullying cousin and must therefore serve a 'sentence' in the red room. For Gilbert and Gubar, this room "perfectly represents her vision of the society in which she is trapped [...]. 'No jail was ever more secure, [... and no jail] was ever more terrifying either'" (340). In retrospect, Jane concedes that she "was a trifle beside [her]self; or rather *out* [sic] of [her]self" (Brontë 6) at the thought of being locked up in this dreaded chamber. The reader sympathizes with this childish agitation on learning that Jane believes the room to be haunted by the ghost of her beloved uncle, who had breathed his last breath there. Jane is soon seized by genuine panic which is sparked by the reflection of her own spectre-like visage in the looking glass – "in that visionary hollow [wherein a]ll looked colder and darker [...] than in reality" (Brontë 8). Instead of taking her pleas seriously, Mrs Reed and her servants scorn Jane's display of violent passion until the child faints in "a species of fit" (Brontë 12). This decisive scene is rich in symbolic meaning in that it portrays the 'impotency' of a rebellious, single female, who finds herself at the mercy of her superiors – to be judged and

condemned according to the doctrines of a discourse in which she has no say. This episode can also be interpreted as foreshadowing the gothic ‘uncanny’ that characterizes Jane’s sojourn at Thornfield. Had she been merely two years older, I would have ventured an interpretation of the ‘red room’ as symbolizing Jane’s menarche and thus her entrance into womanhood. Her confinement in the red room, which she fears to be haunted by the absent ‘pater familias’, mirrors woman’s confinement in the reproductive ‘domestic sphere’ – where patriarchal doctrine is ever present in the subtext and inspires fear even in the man’s absence. On realizing that she cannot escape from this prison of her own accord and that she need not hope for help from beyond this ‘dreaded sphere’, Jane is left with a sole option: she ‘gothicises’ the oppressive nature of her confinement, whereby she simultaneously discredits and refuses the reality of her trapped existence. As a last resort – when even this transfigured version of her repression becomes unbearable – Jane suffers a nervous breakdown. She experiences a temporary spell of ‘madness’ and thereby blocks out a reality she refuses to adopt but has little means to fight. Her confinement in the red room has taught Jane a valuable lesson: If you yourself cannot sufficiently ‘govern’ your passions, society will ‘put you in your place’. If you do not resign to your fate betimes and gradually attune your character to this secluded space, the experience will come as shock that is likely to throw your delicate psyche off balance – a balance that will be arduous to recover. In this sense, Jane’s ‘sentence’ in the red-room constitutes both a psychologically traumatizing event, whose ‘maddening’ repercussions will be felt throughout her life, and a note of warning: if she fails to reform her passionate nature, this episode may well be the foretaste of a lifelong confinement in a lunatic asylum. On recovering from her fainting fit, Jane puts this experience into the following words:

It [...] gave *my nerves a shock*, of which I feel the reverberation to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful *pangs of mental suffering*. [...] I felt physically weak and broken down: but my worse ailment was an unutterable *wretchedness of mind*: [...] my *racked nerves* were now in such a state that *no calm could soothe*, and no pleasure excite them agreeably. (Brontë 14-15, my italics)

All dwellers of Gateshead dread Jane’s presence from then on in fear of the contagious nature of her mental disturbance; for, according to Victorian psychology, a (morally) mad person was apt to ‘infect’ sane people – especially

innocent children and naïve women – by his/her harmful example. As a consequence, Jane is virtually locked up in solitary confinement in the nursery – with Bessie to provide her with food and the occasional kind word. She is only summoned from her cell so that patriarchal judgement can be passed on her by the phallic authority of Mr Brocklehurst.

I looked up at – a *black pillar!* – such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the *straight, narrow*, sable-clad shape *standing erect* on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved masked, placed above the *shaft* by way of capital. (Brontë 27, my italics)

In the course of the reverend's didactic interview, Jane exhibits a quick-wittedness way beyond her age – most famously in her repartee on how to avoid the agonies of purgatory: "I must keep in good health, and not die" (Brontë 28). The reader is also struck by Jane's acute sense of (in)justice with regard to her malevolent aunt, who warns Brocklehurst of her niece's alleged "tendency to deceit [... and thus sows] aversion and unkindness along [her] future path" (Brontë 29). When matters are settled for Jane's speedy transferal to Lowood school, she is left alone with Mrs Reed; feeling "a passion of resentment forment[ing] now within [her]" (Brontë 31), she challenges her aunt's own deceitful nature like "an opponent of adult age" (Brontë 31):

'How dare I, Mrs Reed? How dare I? Because it is the *truth.*' [...] 'Jane, you don't understand these things: children must be corrected for their faults.' 'Deceit is not my fault!' I cried out in a savage high voice. 'But you are passionate, Jane, that you must allow'. (Brontë 32, her italics)

Once again, Jane's misconduct boils down to her passionate nature – "[a]lready Bertha is lurking somewhere in Jane's attic" (Macpherson 7); however, she has already internalized the crucial lesson that excessive emotions equal madness to such a degree that "half an hour's silence and reflection had shown [her] the madness of [her] conduct" (Brontë 33).

"Lowood and Miss Temple are the making of Jane Eyre: her education, the food for her soul, the means of her livelihood, and the key to Rochester's attraction to her" (Macpherson 95). Under the gentle and docile tuition of Ms Temple – and with her saint-like friend Helen Burns as a shining example – Jane not only becomes the 'governess' of her passionate nature but acquires all the feminine accomplishments necessary to sustain her screen-identity of a demure lady; by

presenting a respectable face to society, Jane simultaneously asserts her sanity. It is tempting to digress briefly on the symbolic quality of names: During her stay at Lowood school, Ms Maria Temple is to Jane both a salvific maternal figure – a ‘Mother Mary’ guiding her on the straight and narrow – and an icon of sobriety, self-reflection and tranquillity, a safe haven, where she will not be refused assistance, a ‘temple’ of docility and benevolence. Jane has equally profound reverence for her friend Helen – Greek for ‘shining light’ or ‘sun ray’. From the lot of this enduring, ‘silent’ sufferer, Jane learns that there exists an alternative to the ‘purgatory of patriarchal jurisdiction’ (as prophesied by Brocklehurst), namely: the gentle burning of cathartic “consumption” (Brontë 77), which is granted to those angelic women who already internalize man’s hegemonic doctrines in life.

‘[I]t would be your duty to bear it [...]: it is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear.’ (Brontë 52)

‘[W]ith this creed revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end.’ (Brontë 55)

Although Jane adores Helen and clings to her till her hour of death, she “[can] not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less [can she] understand or sympathise with the forbearance [Helen] expressed for her chastiser” (Brontë 52). What is more, Jane’s is a life-affirming character, who chooses not to stifle her active nature. Consequently, she refuses Helen’s resigned torpor, which I believe is rooted in religious fatalism and ‘tedium vitae’. In her yearning for death coupled with her affective flattening – “not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression” (Brontë 51) – one may recognize cardinal symptoms of an advanced stage of depression, according to modern psychiatry. Thus Helen Burns serves both as an instructive and deterring example of female submissiveness – an impressive case study of how ‘excessive’ virtue may lead to a life-denying, self-defeatist attitude. With regard to the strong influence that religion exerts on her character, Helen is not unlike St John Rivers, whose religious fanaticism will be addressed in the conclusion. Even though Jane eventually learns to ‘play by the rules’, she does so in her own way and never becomes insensible to the wrongs inflicted by patriarchal society. While she does not condone the double morality of her time and repeatedly asserts her right as man’s equal, Jane is apt to recognize those social situations ‘where it is not her

place to tell' – she has learned to probe but never truly break the codes of patriarchal hegemony. In short, "[w]hat she has learned from her two mothers is, at least superficially, to compromise" (Gilbert and Gubar, 347).

One last episode of Jane's time at Lowood deserves mentioning: her dreaded defamation as a liar by the patriarchal verdict of Mr Brocklehurst, the superintendent of this all-female assemblage of pupils and teachers. Even though she is publicly decried as deceitful, her good angel Ms Temple succeeds in clearing her of all charges; consequently, Jane may, after all, make a fresh start and will henceforth only be judged by her own actions. Although this idea of being absolved of any unjust accusation is comforting enough, I seriously doubt that this fairy-tale version of events reflects the social reality of Brontë's time. The label of a fallen woman or a madwoman was not likely to wear off easily – rather, it earned you a life sentence of exclusion from respectable society, frequently beyond recall.

Now that Jane has learned her lessons – "self-control is the key to self-improvement" (Macpherson 99) – she is ready to put her learning to the test in a less 'artificial' setting than Lowood school. A position as governess at Thornfield Hall offers this promising change of scenery; it grants her not only considerable financial independence but also more varied and stimulating company. Esther Godfrey's portrayal of Victorian governesses is decidedly less optimistic: "[t]hey were feminine and yet they were not feminine; they were sexual objects and gender subjects; they occupied a place simultaneously within and outside middle-class society [...] they contrasted and complicated [...] notions of femininity"(859).

When Jane is given a tour of her new home, where "nothing in short [is] wanting to complete the beau-ideal of domestic comfort" (Brontë 95), she wonders out loud about the third story having "the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory" (Brontë 105). To this Mrs Fairfax replies "one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt" (Brontë 105). This allusions to Bertha are affirmed when the governess is intrigued by a "curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless [...], as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any [she] ever heard" (Brontë 106-107); this sign of life appears strangely out of place

in the solemn attic, “black as a vault” (Brontë 106). In the following weeks, Jane has just enough time to become slightly bored with the task of educating Adèle – “a lively child, who had been spoilt and indulged, and therefore was sometimes wayward” (Brontë 108). In such moments, she recedes to the attic - symbolically approaching herself to Bertha – where she enjoys the ‘unbounded vista’ of life’s possibilities. In her frustration over the limits imposed on her own existence, she lapses into one of her most famous feminist soliloquies:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they *must have action*; and *they will make it if they cannot find it*. Millions [...] are in *silent revolt* against their lot. [...] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel *just as men* feel; they need exercise for their faculties [...] as much as their brothers do; they suffer from *too rigid a constraint*, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is *narrow-minded* in their more privileged fellow-creatures [...] to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than *custom has pronounced necessary* for their sex. (Brontë 109-110, my italics)

Jane’s outburst of indignation is highly interesting in that it not only demands a more equal treatment of men and women but also warns of the consequences of denying women their share of action – ‘for those who cannot find it will make it!’ It constitutes a both tragic and comic ‘coincidence’ that Bertha – the incarnate proof of Jane’s reasoning – should be within spitting distance at this moment. As concerns the reception of *Jane Eyre*, this “‘pervading tone of ungodly discontent’ [was thought to betray] not so much the defects of a woman’s lot [...], but rather a defect in the woman who is unable to appreciate these ‘simple duties and purer pleasures’. [...] Jane is perhaps the hungriest of all fictional heroines; she wants *everything*” (Mitchell and Osland 177, their italics). Gilbert and Gubar are convinced that “what horrified the Victorians was Jane’s anger. [...] For while the mythologizing of repressed rage may parallel the mythologizing of repressed sexuality, it is far more dangerous to the order of society” (338). In this context, the two critics draw a comparison between Brontë’s most celebrated novel and an earlier work, *The Professor*: in the self-assertive character of Jane, “the fiery image of Lucia, that energetic woman who probably ‘once wore chains and broke them,’ [...] becomes almost larger than life, the emblem of a passionate, barely disguised rebelliousness” (337).

Jane finds ample opportunity to exercise her wit and knowledge, as soon as the master of the house makes his dramatic appearance – virtually throwing himself at her feet and her mercy. Following this thrilling intermezzo with a seeming stranger – “which marked with a change one single hour of a monotonous life” (Brontë 115), Jane is reluctant to return to Thronfield – “[t]o pass its threshold was to return to stagnation” (Brontë 116). What a joy to find that the patriarchal master has finally returned to the domestic sphere, which he may now enliven with accounts of his worldly experience and knowledge – if he pleases. In the beginning, she is perplexed to find that she unwittingly assisted her master, who amuses himself by holding her responsible for his accident. In no time at all, however, Jane enjoys the company of her surly and moody master, in whom she finds her equal in spirit and whose “ease of [...] manners free[s her] from painful restraint” (Brontë 147). Rochester is likewise pleased and intrigued by Jane’s originality and quick-wittedness – “there is something singular about you. [...] It would please me now to draw you out – to learn more of you – therefore, *speak*” (Brontë 131,133 my italics). How contrary to convention! In Brontë’s time, it was surely not usual for a man of Rochester’s rank to interest himself in a plain, run-of-the-mill governess, his “paid subordinate” (Brontë 135). It appears even less commonplace that he should not “wish to treat [her] like an inferior [...] and would] claim only such superiority as must result from twenty year’s difference in age and a century’s advance in experience” (Brontë 134). It is indeed striking how Rochester, who would be expected to represent masculine predominance, breaks with patriarchal tradition by encouraging Jane to ‘speak’ her mind. What is more, he is delighted by her stepping outside the boundaries of “conventionally vague and polite” (Brontë 131) conversation – “[y]ou ought to have replied no such thing” (Brontë 132). Apparently Rochester hopes that this unconventional woman, this “breath of fresh Eyre” (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann), may soothe his “painful thoughts” (Brontë 127) and cure his wretched spirit, which “could not brook what he had to suffer [...] for the sake of making his fortune” (Brontë 128). The harmful, ‘maddening’ repercussions of Rochester’s rakish youth will be analysed more systematically in the

True to the Christian doctrine of (active) repentance, Jane will prove to him in word and deed that salvation cannot be ‘administered’ by his fairy saviour but will

only be granted at his own expense; only after he has done penance of his own accord, will Rochester be rewarded with his girl-bride. For the time being, however, Jane's mere presence has redeemed Thornfield, which he had "shunned [...] like a plague-house" (Brontë 143) – "there was something decidedly strange in the paroxysm of emotion which had seized him, when he was in the act for expressing the present contentment of his mind, and his newly revived pleasure in the old hall and its environs" (Brontë 146). Gilbert and Gubar argue that Rochester is unconsciously aware of his "need for her strength and parity" (353) which is given metaphorical expression when Jane shows (masculine) presence of mind and rescues her master from burning to death in his sleep. It does not come as a surprise that mutual esteem and affection soon kindle love where it is least expected – so that Rochester's rugged features become "the object [Jane] best like[s] to see" (Brontë 147). Through her rose-coloured glasses, Jane is even willing to account for "his moodiness, his harshness, and his *former* faults of morality [...] as the symptoms of] some cruel cross of fate" (Brontë 147, *her italics*).

In the midst of this blissful courting – when Jane first blows her cover of Quaker-like purity to reveal her passion and desire – Bertha Mason makes her appearance. As the incarnate evidence that "[f]emale passion has no place in Victorian marriage" [...], she] threatens to annihilate the romantic scenario" (Macpherson 23). It is telling that it is Jane who 'awakes' to the peril of their situation – "[a] dream had scarcely reached [her] ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough [...], a demoniac laugh" (Brontë 148). Gilbert and Gubar argue that by "acting out Jane's secret fantasies, Bertha does (to say the least) provide the governess with an example of how not to act, teaching her a lesson more salutary than any Miss Temple ever taught" (361). Owing to Bertha's note of warning, Jane 'comes to her senses' just in time to protect her mental health against the 'maddening' effect of her unorthodox libido. As will be discussed in the conclusion, an open display of sexual appetite on the part of a woman could only meet with severe patriarchal condemnation within a Victorian framework. In contrast, Rochester remains oblivious of the danger, until Jane has herself extinguished the flames (of her passion), which had significantly 'consumed' her master's bed – the very place where to play out her erotic

fantasies of 'consuming their love'. While Jane appears to have 'sobered up', it is Rochester's turn to assign a meaning to this incident - with a "strange energy [...] in his voice; strange fire in his look" (Brontë 151): "I knew [...] you would do me good in some way, at some time; – I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you: [...] they] did not strike delight to my very inmost heart so for nothing" (Brontë 151).

Following this more or less overt declaration of love in the 'steaming' atmosphere of their passionate love – extinguished just in time, and only for the moment – Rochester takes his leave and purports to chase after Blanche Ingram's skirt. What is woman to make of that? Again, Jane unconsciously trans'mutes' her aspirations in the comparatively harmless form of a prophetic dream: "billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy [...] and], wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne: but I could not reach it, even in fancy [...]. Sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion" (Brontë 152). In a cruel act of masochism, Jane makes sure that the message sinks in; she takes to painting two portraits – one of her plain self and one of the fabulous Blanche Ingram – to highlight the irreconcilable difference between herself and the alleged object of Rochester's desire. When Rochester returns with his female trophy, he rubs this lesson in: "[i]t does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is *madness* in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it" (Brontë 161, my italics). Apparently, Rochester greatly enjoys this charade, which is both an attempt to educe pangs of jealousy from Jane and a welcome opportunity to be flattered by Blanche, whose vanity makes her blind to her wooer's double-dealing. For her part, however, Jane considers Blanche "a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. [...] She was very showy, but she was not genuine [...; s]he was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own" (Brontë 186). Therefore, she is indignant to accept that her master's choice should fall on such an unworthy mate. Although she acknowledges Blanche's majestic beauty, the belle's self-conscious airs and "expression of almost insupportable haughtiness" (Brontë 172) convince her that "he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine; - I am sure he is, - I feel akin to

him" (Brontë 175-176). How could Jane help falling more desperately in love by the minute, when Rochester teases her "with eyes that reveal a heart full and eager to over-flow; in whose emotions [she] had a part" (Brontë 174), whose gaze insinuates that "a silent conquest [of his heart] may have been won" (Brontë 187)?

Rochester's game of cat-and-mouse culminates in his cross-dressing as a gypsy. The literary trope of the 'gypsy', per se, is thought to represent "escape, freedom, and 'aberrant femininity'" (Bardi 42) and thus challenges social roles and destabilizes gender ideologies. His cross-dressing allows Rochester temporarily to transcend Victorian gender binaries and thus "throw off the limitations of his maleness and his class in an attempt to penetrate the secrets of female discourse" (Bardi 47). By posing as a gypsy, he does, however, also transgress 'boundaries of propriety' in that he is 'intimate' with Jane, who believes herself to be in the unconstrained company of a fellow woman. In this disguise, Rochester not only puts an end to Miss Ingram's hopes of 'marrying a purse', but tries to edge on Jane to 'take initiative' in her quest for love! "[Y]ou are peculiarly situated: very near happiness; yes; within reach of it. [...] You are silly, because suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach; nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you" (Brontë 198). This forbidding masculine request for feminine initiative is open to twofold interpretation: Firstly, one may accuse Rochester of edging Jane on to "stir one step" beyond Victorian morality – to accept his fraudulent marriage proposal and thereby become his mistress. With Bertha as a lurid example of the fatal consequences of the victory of passion over reason, Jane is not prepared to "meet happiness where it waits" in a moral grey area – "I need not sell my soul to buy bliss" (Brontë 202). Instead, it will be up to Rochester to change the current circumstances, which would compel an honest woman to stray from the straight and narrow; for Jane is well aware that this transgression would cost her not only her virtue but eventually also her master's respect and love. Secondly, a more optimistic and indulgent view on Rochester may celebrate his request as a token of equality and respect – treating Jane as his equal, who is allowed just as much initiative as a man in matters of the heart. Literally 'sick of love', Jane has little patience for the gypsy's prattle – especially when asked on which topic she would like to consult this fortune-teller: "[o]h, I

have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme – courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe – marriage” (Brontë 200). A young woman who does not exult at the prospect of having all uncertainty resolved about her future marital status – or who at least feigns indifference seems an anomaly! As Jane grows increasingly piqued – “I came here to inquire, not to confess” (Brontë 201) – Rochester reveals the sham. In consequence, Jane names and shames this abuse of her confidence: “I believe you have been trying to draw me out – or in [...]. It is scarcely fair, sir” (Brontë 203).

Once again, the growing intimacy between Rochester and Jane calls Bertha into action: In the dead of the night, she attacks her brother, whose visit to his sister comes as a considerable blow to Rochester. And once again, Jane emerges as the saviour of her master and his well-protected secret. Rochester knows she is “no *talking* fool” (Brontë 151, my italics), for Jane is well aware of her subordinate position – when her patriarchal master orders silence, she obeys without question. Therefore, she can be trusted with the care of the wounded Mason – “she can be trusted to keep the (dirty) secret (of female desire)” (Macpherson 24) – while he is busy taking precautions to have Mason shipped off before his guests may ask unpleasant questions. This time, Bertha’s attack is not only more ferocious in its results, the culprit is also physically and metaphorically ‘nearer’ to Jane – who has, in turn, ‘approached’ Bertha by loosening the restraint on her passionate nature. Although Jane knows of the forbidden nature of her desires, she cannot put this sensation into words. She is afraid to give a name to her worries and thus endow them with a substantial reality that will prove fatal to her happiness – “[w]hat crime was this, that lived in this sequestered mansion” (Brontë 212). What is more, she is horrified to learn that this “crime” can “neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner” (Brontë 212); although she is the ‘master’ of her character, she is unable to rid herself of this passionate intruder. “What creature was it, that, *masked in an ordinary woman’s face and shape*, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?” (Brontë 212, my italics) Jane’s final remark shows her awareness that she is after all not the master in a house of reason, with ‘maddening’ passion as a temporary ‘trespasser’; on the contrary, her true nature is passion that only hides behind the mask of respectable femininity. Furthermore, the governess is conscious of the

imminent danger of ‘letting her guard down’ and revealing this “wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den” (Brontë 212), when she ponders on the “murderess hardly separated from [her] by a single door: yes – that was appalling – the rest [she] could bear; but [she] shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon [her]” (Brontë 211) or rather ‘out of’ her.

This scene illustrates the parallels between Grace Poole, featuring as the unreliable guard of Bertha, and Jane – the increasingly undependable ‘governess’ of her own feelings and desires. It is highly interesting that, for the greater part of the story, it is Grace – “the madwoman’s public representative” (Gilbert and Gubar, 350) – whom Jane holds responsible for Bertha’s crimes and her “shout of laughter [..., her] own goblin ha! ha! [...,] a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling” (Brontë 210). This allows for the inference that woman will be held responsible not so much for her inherently passionate nature – which she cannot help – but for her lack of ‘governing’ these emotions. Although “female desire is itself the crime incarnate” (Macpherson 26), woman will ‘only’ be punished for giving way to this passion – while she need not fear consequences if she successfully represses her nature and does not ‘let it show’. As Macpherson notes, each “woman must internalize a Grace Poole for her Bertha, because she, not her husband, is responsible for keeping her own house in order” (26). The scene where Jane finally comes face to face with her own dirty secret also fuels the premise of Grace Poole as Bertha’s marginally externalized ‘governess’: when Rochester asks Grace “[h]ow are you? and how is your charge to-day?” (Brontë 296), her answer does not discriminate between her own condition and Bertha’s but is phrased as a collective “*we’re tolerable, sir*” (Brontë 296, my italics). With recourse to religious mythology, Kate Lawson reads yet another meaning into Grace Poole’s character. She interprets ‘the pool of Grace’ as a redemptive double for the ‘berthesda’ – Aramaic for ‘house of grace and mercy’ or ‘he who grants recovery and revival’; in reality, this ‘berthesda’ is a cistern in Jerusalem, to which the (mentally) diseased make a pilgrimage to wash in the cleansing water of divine Grace (Lawson 46-49).

Reflecting Rochester’s visit to the Ingrams after Bertha’s first nightly visitation, it is now Jane’s turn to leave Thornfield so that tempers may cool. On the occasion of taking leave of her dying aunt Reed, Jane regains confidence in her powers as

the 'governess' of her emotions. She proves her marked character development by showing magnanimous forgiveness for her aunt's former ill-treatment – "I experienced firmer trust in myself and my powers [...]. The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished" (Brontë 229). Moreover, the pleasures and pangs of her budding love for Rochester have matured Jane's sensibility so that she now feels at ease in the presence of her condescending and unrelenting relatives. In her death throes, Mrs Reed discloses that she not only wished her niece dead but had also informed her only living (and wealthy!) blood relation to that effect – "[b]ecause [she] disliked [Jane] too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting [her] to prosperity" (Brontë 240). Jane does come off as a quite unearthly (and incredible) saint, when she nevertheless stoops to kiss the "[p]oor suffering woman" (Brontë 241) and absolves her: "[I]ove me, then, or hate me, as you will, [...] you have my full and free forgiveness" (Brontë 251).

Before Jane's absence, Rochester has still been in doubt on how to proceed; he asked her – seemingly asking her permission – whether you would be "justified in over-leaping an obstacle of custom – a mere conventional impediment, which neither your conscience sanctifies nor your judgement approves" (Brontë 219). His hesitations are at an end after a month's pining for his "fairy" (Brontë 247) and her declaration to be "strangely glad to get back again to [him]; and wherever [he is] is [her] home – [her] only home" (Brontë 248). Although Jane is aware that she "cherish[es] hopes [she] ha[s] not right to conceive" (Brontë 249), she falls victim to Rochester's final performance as a sadistic 'master of puppets', who takes the greatest pleasure in agonizing the one he purports to love. He teases her by painting a bright picture of his future as a married man – and her estranged role in it – while leaving her in the dark about the identity of his bride. At the same moment, he admits to "a nervous notion [that he] should take to bleeding inwardly" (Brontë 255) at the prospect of having to ship his Jane off to Ireland to have her out of the way of Mrs Ingram Rochester. Meanwhile, Jane feels the "vehemence of emotion [...] claiming mastery [...]; and asserting a right to predominate: to overcome, to live, to rise, and reign at last; yes, – and to speak" (Brontë 255). This, however, would be unbecoming for a lady! At this

precise moment, however, Jane seems to care little about appearances, when she rebels against Rochester's masculine egotism:

'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little [and one might add 'a woman'], I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as *much soul as you*, – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you through the medium of *custom, conventionalities*, or even mortal flesh: – it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if [...] we stood at God's feet, *equal*, – as we are!' [...]

'Jane, be still; don't struggle so, like a wild, frantic bird that is rendering his own plumage in its desperation.'

'I am no bird; and *no net ensnares me*; I am a free human being with an *independent will*; which I now exert to leave you.' [...]

'And your will shall decide your destiny.' (Brontë 255-256, my italics)

It is noteworthy that Jane's outburst of passion prompts Rochester to address her as a 'bird'; whereas animal metaphors are usually aggressive (as in the description of Bertha), he evidently believes that Jane – though passionate – is yet 'manageable', that he has not (yet) lost control over her and is therefore not threatened by her. Jane sets the record straight: even though she refuses his 'twee pet-name', she is indeed 'free (as a bird)' to leave Rochester, if he does not make her an honest offer. There is a certain comic element to Rochester's repartee, which precedes the actual proposal: He is positive that her decision to leave him would be to her disadvantage – as he "offer[s her his] hand, [his] heart, and a share of all [his] possessions" (Brontë 256). But at what price? A woman's greatest jewel: her virgin purity. In the end, it is Rochester who is made to suffer through Jane's departure and who is physically punished for his immoral proposal. The question of Rochester's retribution and its various metaphorical and ideological facets will be subject to further discussion – both in the course of this chapter and in the conclusion. In contrast, Jane's story is one of 'virtue rewarded': she can have her cake and eat it too. As regards the proposal per se, Rochester excels his Victorian contemporaries in his egalitarian intentions – "[m]y bride is here, [...] because my equal is here, and my likeness" (Brontë 257); however, he might have given more thought to the wording of his profusion of compliments – "you strange – you almost unearthly thing! – [...] poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are" (Brontë 257).

Of necessity, this whirlwind romance is ill-fated – for Jane must resist temptation and protect her virtue against Rochester’s cunning assault so as to be rewarded with the conventional happy ending. In the meantime, however, the lovers enjoy “a fairy tale – a day-dream” (Brontë 261), which yet appears “natural: it seemed genial to be so well-loved; so caressed” (Brontë 261). Few troubles cloud this blissful period. One issue that features prominently in Jane’s (second) thoughts is Rochester’s attempt to ‘doll up’ his girl-bride and bestow on her all the luxuries that would befit a lady of his own social standing. Jane, however, refuses to be “a jay in borrowed plumes” (Brontë 262) – instead of his fortune she demands his loyalty and trustfulness: “[w]hat do I want with half your estate? [...] I would much rather have all your confidence” (Brontë 264). She is even more resolute in her vehemence when Rochester fancies her “a very angel [..., his private] comforter” (Brontë 263): “I am not an angel [...] and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me – for you will not get it” (Brontë 263). What is more, Rochester becomes increasingly ‘possessive’ in his diction: While he wooed Jane with commonplaces – “I must have you for my own – entirely my own” (Brontë 257) – his anticipations of matrimony gain an increasingly threatening edge – “once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain” (Brontë 273). It is left to the reader’s imagination, how soon the bindings of Jane’s chains would be followed by her confinement in the attic – for “if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised” (Brontë 277). Nevertheless, Miss Fairfax’ scepticism is perhaps the nastiest blow Jane is dealt. Undoubtedly with the best of intentions, she points out the disparity in status, wealth and age and warns the governess that she “cannot be too careful” (Brontë 268); Jane would do well to “[t]ry and keep Mr Rochester at a distance” (Brontë 268) – her central message is, however, to “distrust [her]self as well as him” (Brontë 268).

The anacrusis to Jane’s disenchantment with romantic love takes place two nights before the wedding date in the form of Bertha’s third nocturnal visitation. As Jane is on the road to perdition, Bertha’s actions are invested with increasing symbolism and urgency – she even intrudes into the virgin’s chamber. In a grotesque farce evocative of a wedding ceremony, Bertha dons Jane’s costly bride’s veil – “with a sullen moaning sound” (Brontë 284) – before ripping it into

halves and trampling on it in contempt. Bertha's action may be interpreted in (at least) three ways: The most straightforward conclusion would be to assume that Bertha is inspired by a burning jealousy and wishes to frighten or even threaten her rival – Rochester's new 'girl-bride', who is to replace her as his wife and would thus erase her identity completely. I opt for the less obvious but more intriguing interpretation, which accounts for Bertha's nightly visitation as a note of warning – a charade whereby Bertha strives to enact and thus 'spell out' Jane's imminent danger of falling victim to a fraud. In 'sisterly compassion', Bertha is prepared to share her own disillusioning experience of wedlock in order to spare Jane a similarly dire fate.

Jane has everything to learn from Bertha about trickery, especially self-trickery, in courtship, about discontent and suppression and bitterness in marriage, and about the less glamorous motives of Rochester in relation to Bertha and perhaps even to Jane. (Macpherson 15)

At least on a conscious level, Jane appears deaf to Bertha's warnings; as if she had a premonition, however, the future bride refrains from fastening the new name-tags of 'Mrs Rochester' to her honeymoon luggage. As a slight variation of this second interpretation, Macpherson argues that "Bertha represents Jane's sexual initiation, that much is clear" (29). In this light, Jane is not so much worried to fall victim to a fraudulent and invalid proposal; quite the contrary, she has dark premonitions about wedlock per se: "Jane takes a look in *her* matrimonial mirror and sees [...] a nightmare version of herself" (Macpherson 33, *her italics*) – for "female sexuality almost inevitably included maternity and irreversible retreat into the female sphere. Jane has much more to lose than her virginity" (Macpherson 29). Gilbert and Gubar read the heroine's alter ego as a "threatening avatar of Jane" (359) that symbolically carries out those acts which she herself desires to perform but fails to do so. "What Bertha now *does* [...] is what Jane wants to do. Disliking the 'vapoury veil' of Jane Rochester, Jane Eyre secretly wants to tear the garments up. Bertha does that for her. Fearing the inexorable 'bridal day,' Jane would like to put it off. Bertha does that for her too" (Gilbert and Gubar 359, *their italics*).

On his return, Jane turns to Rochester for explanations, who interprets Jane's "almost delirious [...] hypochondria" (Brontë 288,283) along the same lines –

“[a]re you apprehensive of the new sphere you are about to enter?” (Brontë 283) Nevertheless, he makes an effort to sooth her “mental terrors” (Brontë 287) – once again, Grace Poole has to burden herself with Bertha’s ‘guilt’; in the same breath, he entreats his “[l]ittle *nervous* subject [to f]orget visionary woe, and think only of real happiness” (Brontë 285, my italics). Apparently “overexcited and over-fatigued” (Brontë 283), Jane’s “over-stimulated brain” (Brontë 287) is hardly satisfied with Rochester’s account of events, “but to please him [she] endeavour[s] to appear so” (Brontë 288): the charade of matrimonial consonance and half-truths has already begun. So much “over”, so much excess – what a nervous state! Evidently, Brontë’s recourse to stylistic extremities is indicative of Jane’s growing mental imbalance – her imminent break-down, or rather the ‘outbreak’ of her passionate madness (which a modern psychiatrist would perhaps diagnose as ‘obsessive-compulsive disorder’). It is of no use to assert that her “nerves were not at fault; the thing was real: the transaction actually took place” (Brontë 287). Although Rochester knows even better than Jane that Bertha is not the figment of her “over-stimulated” imagination, the patriarchal verdict of her overly excitable nerves – and, by implication, of her potential insanity – is pronounced. For what must not be cannot be – and consequently cannot be accounted for by the logic of patriarchal discourse: “since [Rochester himself] cannot [explain the mystery ...], it must have been unreal” (Brontë 288). Interestingly enough, Brontë’s descriptions of Rochester – whose “brain is on fire with impatience” (Brontë 290) – signals quite clearly that his is also a ‘troubled mind’; the “disquietude of his air, the somewhat apprehensive impatience of his manner” (Brontë 285) are neither characteristic of nor becoming to masculine reason.

When the solicitor Brigs breaks off the wedding ceremony, neither bride nor groom appear truly surprised – their “hopes were too bright to be realised” (Brontë 280-281). Although Jane’s “nerves vibrate to those low-spoken words as they never vibrated to thunder [...], she is] collected, and in no danger of swooning” (Brontë 293) as custom would suggest. Rochester, whose “face [is] colourless rock” (Brontë 293), is the image of stoicism when he makes out his case as the victim of ill-fate: in youthful ignorance and obedience to his father, he had been “cheated into espousing [...] a madwoman and a drunkard!” (Brontë

295) and has hence been “bound to a bad, mad, and embruted partner” (Brontë 295), whom he cannot divorce.

It is now time for the “mysterious lunatic” (Brontë 295) to make her appearance. In his complacent belief in Jane’s ‘helplessly’ immutable love, Rochester deludes himself that this voyeuristic freak-show will surely do the trick and clear him of all charges – at least in the eyes of his angelic saviour. According to Gilbert and Gubar, it is this “confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester’s mad wife, [which] is the book’s central confrontation, an encounter [...] not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned ‘hunger, rebellion, rage’, a secret dialogue of self and soul” (339). Bertha’s appearance leaves indeed quite an impression, but whether of a “beast or a human being” (Brontë 296) Jane finds hard to tell at first sight, given the “purple face [with ‘its’] bloated features” (Brontë 296): the “dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane” (Brontë 296), the “furrowed [...] eyebrows raised over the [rolling, fiery,] bloodshot eyes” (Brontë 287), the purple, swollen lips – in short the “ghastly [...] and] fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments” (Brontë 287). Significantly, this “bellow[ing] maniac” (Brontë 296) is clothed in a symbolic straitjacket – something “white and straight” (Brontë 286). In a chivalrous attempt to protect his lamb from this “clothed hyena” (Brontë 296), Rochester wrestles Bertha to the ground and binds her with cords. One might give Rochester credit for his comparative ‘gentleness’ in this struggle – “he would not strike: he would only wrestle” (Brontë 297). On the one hand, it is true that neither law nor custom would have thought of him any the worse for chastising his wife – all the more in a like situation. On the other hand, Rochester may have deemed it preferable to display clemency in the presence of his sensitive ‘girl-bride’, who might have otherwise feared to suffer similar treatment as his future companion. But who could compare “this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell” (Brontë 297) to “that fierce ragout [, whose ...] sole conjugal embrace” (Brontë 297) consists in her attempt to throttle her master? *“Female passion is literally attacking male protectorship of female purity”* (Macpherson 34, her italics).

Now that much has been said about ‘the madwoman in the attic’ as Jane’s alter ego, it is time to grant the character of Bertha Mason an appearance in her own right. Whereas I characterized Bertha as invested with an alluring ‘Otherness’ in

the introductory paragraph, I wish to correct myself at this point: “When she is stripped of all mystery (the essence of her symbolic power), Bertha’s all-too-prosaic powerlessness stands naked before us” (Macpherson 11). Most importantly, Bertha is denied a voice and thus all means of presenting or defending herself within the patriarchal power discourse of propriety, sexuality and sanity: “Bertha has no narrative” (Plyler Fisk 220). When Bertha is merely reported to have spoken, by her brother, Rochester shudders with “a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred” (Brontë 214) and tells Richard Mason to “be silent [...] and never mind her gibberish: don’t repeat it” (Brontë 214). Not only is Bertha excluded from conversation – the patriarch makes sure that no male representative acts as a mouthpiece for the silenced madwoman; if he dares to speak for her, he too is subject to the imperative of silence. Left voiceless, Bertha lets ferocious deeds speak for themselves – in an attempt to communicate in symbolical performances if not in words.

As Marta Caminero-Santangelo states quite plainly, *The Madwoman can’t Speak [this is] Why Insanity is Not Subversive!* Not least through Gilbert and Gubar’s famous interpretation of Bertha as “the *author’s* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage” (78, their italics), this stock character of Victorian literature has become the emblem of woman’s resistance and her subversive powers. There are a number of critics, such as Carrol Smith-Rosenberg and Hélène Cixous, who consider female madness an incarnate protest against hegemonic conventions – a creative mode of ‘expressing’ opposition. Oppenheimer went so far as to consider madness “a brave, even noble reaction to [female protagonists’] presence in a world they never made – and do not accept” (164 qtd. in Caminero-Santangelo 3). In the same tenor, Phyllis Chesler endows female insanity with the mythic dimension of an escapist vision – which culminates in Deleuze’s assumption that “‘going mad’ might be considered the only sane response to an insane world” (Donaldson 100). I side with Catherine Clément and Elaine Showalter, however, in their sobering judgement that “such protest was fundamentally ineffective and cost the protester much more than she gained” (Caminero-Santangelo 3). Furthermore, I agree with Donaldson (101) that it is impossible to draw a clear distinction between insanity as a medical condition and the metaphorical meaning attributed to the term ‘madness’ – even though

critics, notably Gilbert and Gubar, have repeatedly attempted to belittle the influence of medical reasoning on the metaphor of madness, and vice versa. As Donaldson points out, however, “[i]t is possible [...] to begin with the premise that mental illness as a neurobiological disorder and still remain committed to a feminist [...] agenda that fights discrimination, [...] seeks to dismantle ideologies of oppression [and] critiques medical discourses of mental illness” (112).

While it is true that the ‘idea’ of the madwoman is tantalizing enough, Brontë’s portrayal of Bertha’s persona seems somewhat flat and lacklustre – little more than a faithful rendering of the gothic stock character of the madwoman. In those rare scenes where the reader comes ‘face-to-face’ with Bertha, her character lacks authenticity in its blatant ‘constructedness’; even though markedly portrayed as aggressive, she appears bland – at times even lifeless. A 21st century reader might consider this one-dimensional portrayal an inherent critique of Rochester’s reductionist views on Bertha – after all, her character is presented to the reader almost exclusively through his descriptions. In the historical context of Victorian England, however, the author may simply not have been interested in realizing the full metaphorical potential of this insane persona. Her focus clearly lies on Jane and she thus develops Bertha’s character merely to the extent that the lunatic can serve as a hyperbolic reference framework against which she may set off Jane’s comparatively conformist and less alarming nature. From a modern perspective, I would nevertheless argue that this account of Bertha’s paradoxical vapidness lets Brontë off the hook too easily. Gridlocked in patriarchal literary tradition, the author appears unable, or unwilling, to present a ‘rounded’ character of female insanity that is imbued with authenticity. From a literary-historical viewpoint, Brontë’s portrayal of madness can be interpreted as either indebted to the tradition of Gothic horror or to the increasingly popular melodrama, which was to influence the rising genre of the ‘sensation novel’. Helen Small points out in how far Bertha’s figure is not only marginalized but virtually ‘outdated’ – “a strange incorporation of gothic theatricality into domestic fiction [...] or an equally ahistorical exemplum of ‘mythic’ representations of femininity” (140). Although Bertha is allowed to appear on the margins of the literary tableau, Jane’s mad Other must be reduced to the form of a gothic spectre, which may be easily dismissed by Rochester’s reasoning as a figment of Jane’s imagination – the

companion of a fanciful mind agitated by restless slumber. Her anachronistic portrayal of (female) insanity is strangely at odds with Brontë's marked interest in – and considerable knowledge of – Victorian medical theory and practice. The contemporary strand of realism is only evident in Bertha's 'respectable' doubles, namely Jane and Grace Poole, and the account of the lunatic's (un)timely death, which appears brutally realistic at least in comparison to the Gothic descriptions we have received hitherto. With regard to Grace Poole, Small points to the "overwhelming evidence of physiognomy [which ensures that] any apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived" (156) – Grace's unthreatening realism screens the madness of Bertha's disembodied laughter. In contrast, Bertha's insane 'body' is only endowed with 'non-gothic' realism once she no longer poses a threat to patriarchal hegemony – when she lies "smashed on the pavement [...] dead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered" (Brontë 436-437).

What little 'true substance' Bertha is granted is the epitome of counter-evolution – of woman's regression to a brute beast of threatening "virile force" (Brontë 297), whose 'struggle' with her patriarchal master is no longer of a figurative nature. True to the doctrine of his time, Rochester accounts for Bertha's degeneration in a twofold way: firstly, Bertha's genes predispose her to insanity as "she came of a mad family; - idiots and maniacs through three generations" (Brontë 295). Secondly, her "intemperate and *unchaste* [...] excess had prematurely developed the germs of insanity [...] so that] her vices sprang up fast and rank. (Brontë 310, my italics) According to Diane Hoeveler, "Bertha's crime apparently has been to enjoy the sexual aspects of marriage a bit too much for her husband's tastes" (qtd. in Plyler Fisk 220). In Rochester's eyes, her vices "were so strong, only cruelty could check them; and [he] would not use cruelty" (Brontë 310). Evidently, he is convinced that Bertha could only be mastered with cruelty and yet he refuses to treat her accordingly; this places him in an intriguing limbo between the outdated psychiatric practices of physical restraint and the nascent alternative of 'moral management'. More prosaically, one might also interpret his reluctance as an unconscious admission of guilt – that he was after all not such a passive bystander in the process of Bertha's degeneration from a "charming partner [...], the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty" (Brontë 295,309), to this raving

maniac of monstrous appearance – a “monstrous feminist joke about marriage and womanhood” (Macpherson 32). Although it is tempting to indulge in an analysis of the ‘slavery’ metaphor in Brontë’s text, this aspect would take me too far afield from the issue of female insanity. What is more, my reasoning on Bertha as Rochester’s ethnical Other would run parallel to the theories of her ‘role’ as his sexual Other. For the present purpose, it is worthwhile to note that not only Bertha’s Creole character but also Jane’s submissive ‘servitude’ as pupil, governess and nurse of an invalid would be open to an interpretation along these lines (Plasa 79-99). These various aspects of Bertha’s madness – and, by implication, Jane’s delicate mental balance – will be summarized in the conclusion.

To take up the narrative thread, let us return to Jane’s darkest hour when she resolves to leave Rochester with a determination that borders on the masochistic – “you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall, yourself, pluck out your right eye: yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim; and you the priest to transfix it” (Brontë 301). Unlike Rochester, Jane does not indulge in the illusion that somebody will do the dirty work for her – she is the architect of her own fortune and must not expect salvation at the hand of a redemptive saviour. Given that Rochester has just decried the passionate nature of his first wife, it comes as a surprise that he “would rather [Jane] had come and upbraided [him] with vehemence [than ...] shut [herself] up and grieve alone [... or] regard [him] with a weary, passive look” (Brontë 302) – “[y]ou are passionate: I expected a scene of some kind” (Brontë 302). It is equally astonishing that Jane’s magnanimity would grant instant forgiveness – or is it not? If Jane accepts Rochester’s version of events and sympathizes with his harsh verdict on Bertha’s sexual desire, how can she not condone his eagerness to trade Bertha for “something at least human” (Brontë 295).

Reader! I forgave him at the moment, and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and, besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien – I forgave him all: *yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart’s core.* (Brontë 302, my italics)

This afterthought is crucial! While Jane forgives Rochester in her heart of hearts, she cannot find it in herself to relinquish her virtue by following her romantic

inclination – much rather would she “cut off her right hand” than face an existence as a ‘fallen woman’ in becoming Rochester’s mistress. “[As] their entire relationship has been based on a mutual agreement to dispense with the formalities of convention, [...] Rochester had persuaded himself to believe that Jane would [accept his first marriage] as just another ‘obstacle of custom – a mere conventional impediment’” (Mitchell and Osland 185). Therefore, he will not hear of her “*madness* about parting from [him]” (Brontë 307, my italics): “Jane! will you *hear reason*? [...] because if you don’t, I’ll try violence” (Brontë 306, my italics). But Jane cannot be “composed [...] while he [is] in such a passion”; she will not “be reasonable” (Brontë 308) according to his definition. Even if he “shall again become frantic” (Brontë 308), Jane must remain true to her own ‘reasoning’ – for in this case, paradoxically, it would be ‘madness’ to yield to patriarchal reason. What is more, Jane sees right through Rochester’s plans of installing her in a “*white-washed* villa [where she] shall live a happy, and guarded, and *most innocent* life” (Brontë 307, my italics).

‘Never fear that I wish to lure you into error – to make you my mistress.’
 ‘Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical – is false.’ (Brontë 308)

Rochester must admit defeat: it is of no use to attempt to “white-wash” his proposal and euphemize Jane’s lot as his “innocent” companion. For he had himself unwittingly taught her a crucial lesson by disclosing the secret of Adèle’s mother, Celine Varens, and his “process of ruining [him]self in the received style, like any other spoony [in a] ‘grande passion’” (Brontë 141).

‘Hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading.’ [...] I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had been instilled into me, as – under any pretext – with any justification – through any temptation – to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. (Brontë 315)

The message is crystal clear: there is no pretext whatsoever under which Jane could accept Rochester’s immoral proposal – “to yield was out of the question” (Brontë 308). What is more, in losing her virtue Jane would eventually lose

Rochester's favour and esteem as well – for she could no longer be the pure redeemer of this “unfeeling, loose-principled rake” (Brontë 315). In view of Jane's “inferior position” as Rochester's paid employee, one may also interpret that she must first climb the social ladder. As the heiress of a small fortune, who is no longer obliged to work for a living, she will be a more suitable match for Rochester.

A parallel reasoning can be applied to the issue of woman's maddening passion: as much as Jane dreads to become one of Rochester's discarded mistresses, she is afraid to follow the footsteps of his first wife. Her fear is most palpable in her defence of Bertha as the victim of a diseased mind: “Sir, [...] you are inexorable for that *unfortunate lady*: you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – she *cannot help being mad*” (Brontë 305, my italics). All of a sudden, the animalistic lunatic is rehabilitated to a “lady” – an “unfortunate” one at that. Acutely aware of her own passionate nature, Jane is horrified at the thought of sharing Bertha's fate of patriarchal punishment – in the form of “medical men [who will] *pronounce* her mad” (Brontë 311, my italics). Furthermore, Jane is convinced that Rochester would repeat his “capital error [... –m]ind, I don't say *crime*; [...] my word is *error*” (Brontë 219, her italics) in his future treatment of her – just as he did wrong by his first wife. And who could hold him responsible if even she “would not ascribe vice to him” (Brontë 299)? He is eager to convince Jane of the contrary:

Your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still: if you raved, my arms should confined you, and not a strait waistcoat – your grasp, even in fury, would have a charm for me: [...] I should not shrink from you with disgust as I did from her: in your quiet moments you should have no watcher and no nurse but me; and I could hang over you with untiring tenderness; though you gave me no smile in return. (Brontë 305)

In the face of Rochester's lack of love and sympathy for Bertha, his ardent assertions are hardly convincing. For what is it that would set Jane apart from her raving sister if she were to fail as the ‘governess’ of her passion? In the conclusion, I will argue that the decisive difference between Bertha's and Jane's madness consists in the latter's awareness that she must not be open about her unfeminine sexual appetite. As Rochester may be interpreted as primarily

threatened by Bertha's 'insane' libido, he might experience less difficulty in relating to a chaste, helpless lunatic.

Nevertheless, the heroine is left with no choice – “only an idiot [...] would have succumbed now” (Brontë 321). And though Jane admits to be “quite insane” (Brontë 321) at the moment in her reluctance to part, she “will hold to the principles received by [herself] when [she] was sane, and not mad – as [she is] now” (Brontë 320). Cynthia Linder is impressed by Jane's “decision to put her trust in God and not to follow the dictates of passion” (33), which she rightly considers indicative of “the moral progress that Jane has made since her Gateshead days” (33). Jane's moral uprightness appears all the more formidable in that “she has neither family, friends, nor a place to stay” (Linder 33) – or as Rochester would have it, by implication: “Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?” (Brontë 320, her italics). In the light of my preceding analysis, I am somewhat less amazed at Jane's conduct for the simple – if cruel – reason that she is virtually left with no alternative course of action within the hegemonic framework of Victorian morality: “*I* care for myself. [...] I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by *man*” (Brontë 320, my italics except where in bold).

I will pass quickly over the period of Jane's lone wanderings, the “moral degradation” (Brontë 332) paired with physical and psychic hardship she has to endure – until she is stranded on St John River's doorstep. In the lovely company of Diana and Mary Rivers, Jane's overstressed nerves find rest and sympathy so that she is soon her old vigorous self – eager to keep herself and depend no longer on St John's charity. While the three women are perfectly at ease with each other, Jane senses that their brother lacks “that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every sincere Christian and practical philanthropist” (Brontë 356). I heartily agree with Macpherson, who describes St John River as “saintly to a fault, to such a moralizing and self-righteous degree that reading about his conflict and courtship with Jane is [a] tedious [...] exercise in self-punishment for the reader” (59). After the maddening folly of her whirlwind romance, Jane seeks refuge from the “insane promptings of a frenzied moment” (Brontë 365) under St John's tuition of self-discipline and selflessness. Whereas the Thornfield chapters centre on Jane's struggle with her passionate nature in

the presence of romantic temptation and sexual desire, her time at Morton mirrors a “daughter’s subordination to a patriarch of a father with a religious whip in his hands [...] and a stone of heart when it comes to Jane Eyre as a woman” (Macpherson 59). Macpherson is convinced that when “Jane’s male-rescue fantasy begins again (sigh) [her’s] is a pragmatic not an escapist solution” (62-63). Consequently, she is happy to accept the position as a teacher in St John’s school for peasant girls. “In truth it was humble – but then it was sheltered, and I wanted a *safe asylum*: it was plodding – but then [...] it was not ignoble – not unworthy – *not mentally degrading*” (Brontë 360, my italics). But St John is not ignorant of Jane’s “impassioned” (Brontë 360) nature: he knows that she will soon tire of this trivial task and seek a vocation more appropriate to her faculties - in short, he who “hides a fever in his vitals” (Brontë 361) finds in Jane his ally in ambition. While it is true that Jane lingers on her former happiness and present destitution, only the “dark night [is allowed to] witness the convulsion of despair [...] and the burst of passion” – much as Bertha’s visitations were endurable under the screen of night. Unbearable is the memory of Bertha’s presence in harsh daylight; therefore, Jane makes sure she is “tranquil, settled, prepared for the steady duties of the day” (Brontë 373), before she ventures into the presence of her fellow human-beings. Contrary to first appearances, St John turns out to be likewise a victim of masochistic self-denial and “repressed fervour” (Brontë 374) in his ‘irrational’ love for Rosamond Oliver – a sweet though “rather thoughtless” (Brontë 379) belle. At all times the master of his actions and sentiments, he “experience[s ...] a calm, unwarped consciousness, that she would not make [him] a good wife; that she is not the partner suited to [him]” (Brontë 380) – although he loves her “with all the intensity [...] of a first passion” (Brontë 380). As a fellow sufferer, Jane believes to see right through him: “[y]ou speak coolly enough; but you suffer in the conflict. You are wasting away” (Brontë 380). Upon which he corrects her: “I do not pity myself. I scorn the weakness [...]; a mere fever of the flesh: not, I declare, the convulsion of the soul” (Brontë 381). Jane begins to “fear that his wits [are] touched. If he were insane, however, his was a very cool and collected insanity” (Brontë 384). In St John River’s over-rational insanity, Brontë reverses the stereotype of ‘madness-as-unreason’ to which I shall return in the conclusion; in doing so, she re-affirms Jane’s balancing act as the only remedy against insanity. She is neither ensnared by temptation nor does

she succumb to cold reason – “[w]ith me [...] it is full as much a matter of feeling as of conscience” (Brontë 393).

Just as St John is willing to renounce passionate love, he demands of Jane to overcome her own notions of romantic love and put her life to His service by becoming a missionary’s wife. In a curious reversal of gender ideology, the patriarch encourages Jane to “look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys” (Brontë 398) – upon which she protests that these are the “best things the world has” (Brontë 398) and thus breaks with her otherwise ‘proto-feminist’ character. All the while, Jane is aware of St John’s attempt to “bend her to His will without breaking her spirit” (Macpherson 59) and she “[does] not love [her] servitude” (Brontë 405). It is frustrating to witness how he “acquire[s] a certain influence over [her] that [takes] away [her] liberty of mind” (Brontë 405):

I daily wished to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must *disown half my nature*, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, *force myself* to the adoption of pursuits for which I had *no natural vocation*. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach. [...A] cankering evil sat at my heart and drained my happiness at its source. (Brontë 405-406, my italics)

Nevertheless, Jane will not settle for an existence as a trained lap-dog, as St John’s obedient assistant in his quest for self-fulfilment – and she protests against his/His verdict that she is “formed for labour, not for love” (Brontë 409). Above all, she will not settle for marriage devoid of love – “such a martyrdom would be monstrous” (Brontë 412) – in short: “I scorn your idea of love. [...] I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer” (Brontë 415). What is more, Jane knows full well that were she to accept St John’s proposal – who “claim[s her] – not for [his] pleasure, but for [his] Sovereign’s service” (Brontë 409) – she would “go to premature death” (Brontë 411). Jane’s refusal of this all but romantic proposal of marriage confronts her with “the disappointment of an austere and despotic nature, which has met resistance where it expected submission” (Brontë 416). “[A]s a man, he would have wished to coerce [her] into obedience” (Brontë 416), but St John knows better than that; instead he names and shames her for transgressing the boundaries of gender and sanity: “[y]our words are such as ought not to be used: violent, unfeminine, and untrue. They betray an unfortunate state of mind” (Brontë 420). St John’s sisters, however, agree that it would be

“*madness!* [...]nsupportable – *unnatural* – out of the question [...] to be chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool” (Brontë 423,my italics). Or in Jane’s words: “[*k*]eep to common sense, St John: you are *verging on nonsense*. You pretend to be shocked by what I have said. You are not really shocked; for, with your superior mind, you cannot be either so dull or so conceited as to misunderstand my meaning” (Brontë 421,my italics).

Now that Jane has tasted the fruit of heartless reason and found it bitter to her taste, it is time for Rochester to send for her – or was it perhaps “a mere nervous impression – a delusion” (Brontë 430)? All doubts are dispelled, however, when she learns that Bertha has been conveniently disposed of in a cathartic fire, which consumed her gothic prison. This cathartic fire has also inflicted due punishment on Rochester – symbolizing the rake’s reformation; the Byronic hero repents:

I did wrong: I would have sullied my innocent flower – breathed guilt on its purity: the Omnipotent snatched it from me. I, in my stiff-necked rebellion [...] defied [His decree]. Devine justice pursued its course; disaster came thick on me. [...] Of late, Jane, [...] I began to experience remorse, repentance. [...] I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere. [...] I pronounced them with such frantic energy [...] he would have thought me mad. (Brontë 455-456)

“Many critics, starting with Richard Chase, have seen Rochester’s injuries as ‘a symbolical castration,’ a punishment for his early profligacy” (Gilbert and Gubar 368). Donaldson, however, argues that “Bertha’s disabling mental illness is transferred to the body of her husband as physical impairment and blindness” (108). With recourse to Sander Gilman, who recognizes the ‘absent hand’ as an iconographic token of melancholia, she decodes his physical affliction as signifying melancholy madness – just as Jane does: “[c]ease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live” (Brontë 444). “While Bertha’s madness is congenital and chronic, Rochester’s is coincidental and curable” (Donaldson 109). Jane will be “eyes and hands” (Brontë 444) to him and gradually her redeeming care will restore calm and reason: he will begin to ‘see clearly’ again. For the present, Jane is relieved that he should only be a blind invalid – “I had dreaded *worse*. I had dreaded he was *mad*” (Brontë 437,my italics) – for he had been reported to roam Thornfield by

night “as if he had lost his senses” (Brontë 436). Indeed, Rochester believes himself seized by “sweet madness” (Brontë 442) when Jane makes her unexpected appearance at Ferndean; she is eager to correct his mistake: “No delusion – no madness; your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy” (Brontë 443). Now that the tables are turned, Jane can enter into marriage on her own terms as “an independent woman” (Brontë 444) who sympathizes with the “powerlessness of the strong man” (Brontë 448). With Rochester as her dependant invalid, Wahl argues, Jane may adopt the maternal role of a caregiver – as her assistance is now free of all religious overtones as his redeemer (Wahl 48).

Mr Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life – if ever I thought a good thought – if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer – if ever I wished a righteous wish, – I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth. (Brontë 454)

The ‘perfect concord’ that she eventually finds with Rochester is in part a reflection of the peace she has made with herself, and also in part the end of a foundling’s quest to find a fulfilling vocation that is not simply ‘woman’s work’ [... or at least] does not *feel* like servitude – attending to Rochester’s needs is rather ‘to indulge [her] sweetest wishes’ [...] this is a small comfort to readers who have expected more of a [proto-feminist] heroine. (Mitchell and Osland 179)

Kari Conness argues that Jane’s strategy of self-assertion has never followed “a masculine fashion [nor did she] enter the public sphere” (130); on the contrary, she adhered to the feminine principles of honesty and forthrightness in accordance with “the gendered codes of propriety” (Conness 131). Unlike many of her literary sisters, she neither employs schemes nor does she spell doom for herself by venturing “beyond the realm designated to her by social order; rather, she looks for her freedom within [...] the realm of obedience, order and convention” (Conness 135). It is in her hopes concerning marriage – romantic love and harmonic consonance rather than “financial stability and security as the primary benefit” (Conness 137) – but not in her aspiration for wedlock that Jane differs from her contemporaries. In this light, Jane’s delight in domestic matrimonial bliss does not come as such a shock, as Mitchell and Osland would have it.

4. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*

The Woman in White is considered the first 'sensation novel' – "an enormously influential branch of Victorian fiction which fused the apprehensive thrills of gothic literature with the psychological realism of the domestic novel" (Sweet xiii). Consequently, Wilkie Collins's is a different notion of madness, which no longer haunts gothic castles, at a reassuring distance, but is played out in uncomfortable proximity to the middle-class readership – in "the secret theatre of home" (Collins qtd. in Sweet xiii), which the author turns into a "theatre of neurasthenia" (Miller 187). Following Brontë's rendition of 'Crazy Jane' and monstrous madness, *The Woman in White* offers an antithetical view on insanity; thus – like *Jane Eyre* – "Collins's novel continues to be not just thoroughly readable but eminently 'writable' as well" (Miller 188-189). Whereas Brontë's madwoman is invested with activity and animalistic aggressiveness, the 'insane' damsels that people Wilkie Collins's novel are the epitome of fragile femininity: they are silent sufferers from mental disturbances and passive victims of patriarchal oppression. While Bertha Mason poses an actual threat to Rochester, neither Laura Fairly nor Anne Catherick exerts true power over Sir Percival Glyde; they are thus doubly wronged by masculine (mis)judgement. Furthermore, *The Woman in White* is a literary testimony to the contemporary dread of wrongful confinement in lunatic asylums; Collins

expos[es ...] the terrifying permeability of diagnostic categories such as sanity and madness, the powerlessness of the subject under the tyranny of expert medical opinion; the ease with which identities could be obliterated or concealed, the vulnerability of women under a legal system that afforded them no status: the home's transformation into a place of life-threatening illness and danger. (Sweet xxiv)

Another innovative aspect of the novel is its narrative technique which mirrors a court trial in that a host of 'witnesses' is called to help Laura's 'case'. Ironically, 19th century jurisdiction and its male representatives prove sadly inapt to protect Laura or to 'clear her of all charges' once the damage is done. In his masterpiece, Collins performs an ideological balancing act: on the one hand, he manages to level (implicit) criticism at Victorian conventions; on the other hand, he caters to the tastes of his readership, to all appearances. In accordance with

the generic convention of the sensation novel, the author aims to ‘sensationalize’ his readers by “dismantl[ing] ... their] immunity” (Sweet xvii) and offering them a “queasy and neurotic” (Sweet xviii) pleasure in return. This ‘excitatory potential’ of sensational fiction prompted several contemporary critics to issue ‘health warnings’ about the detrimental effects of these ‘unnerving’ novels – especially with regard to the more impressionable minds of (young) women.

Walter Hartright is the first (and last) to have a say in this “story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and what a Man’s resolution can achieve” (Collins 9). This introductory line sets the mood for the entire novel: this will be a story of female passivity and male activity, of woman’s martyrdom as man’s puppet – as a pawn in the hands of masculine agency. To put it in another way, this is the story of Walter Hartright. Although various other central characters – both male and female, virtuous and villainous – are allowed to make an appearance and an impact on the plot development, it is the initially unobtrusive Walter Hartright who emerges victorious in the end. The ‘hero’ of this story is introduced to the reader as a twenty-eight-year-old teacher of drawing, whose position as a male governess leaves him “out of spirits, and, if truth must be told, out of money as well” (Collins 10).

Walter’s “harmless[ly] eccentric” (Collins 11) friend Pesca is “half-mad with impatience” (Collins 14) to assist Walter, to whom he is indebted for having saved his life. The Italian is portrayed as a walking freak show: firstly, he is “the smallest human being [Walter] ever saw, out of a show-room” (Collins 11). Secondly, as a political exile, he “shows his gratitude to the country which had offered him an *asylum*” (Collins 11, my italics) by means of the most ludicrous malapropisms in his effort to do justice to the English language. Thus Pesca is the first ‘eccentric’ of these pages, whose socially acceptable mental derangement ‘earns’ him a place in the great ‘asylum’ of England. He undertakes his own ‘moral management’ under the beneficial socio-cultural influence of the British Empire, where he takes refuge from the troubling memories of his past. British reason will hopefully ‘cure’ him of his excessive emotions, which are evident in his “flood of tears [and ...] the overflowing happiness [which] bursts out of [him]” (Collins 15). In *Gendered Geographies*, Elizabeth Langland explains the two conflicting meanings of the term ‘asylum’: “the country house can [either] be a place of

confinement [or, i]n its positive connotations, [...] a place of refuge from oppression, providing safety from threatening forces without" (65).

As if directed by a premonition that the events to come will "alter [him] to [himself] almost past recognition" (Collins 13), Walter feels ambivalent about Frederick Fairlie's summons to Limmeridge House. In his defence, he is "heartily ashamed of [... his] unaccountable perversity" (Collins 21) and takes Pesca's prophetic advice: "[g]o, my friend! When your sun shines in Cumberland [...], make your hay. Marry one of the two young Misses; become Honourable Hartright, M.P.; and when you are on the top of the ladder, remember that Pesca, at the bottom, has done it all!" (Collins 22) Little does the Italian guess at this moment that Walter's 'good fortune' will be indeed all his doing in the end. On his part, Walter is reluctant to indulge in Pesca's 'unreasonable' prophecy – he is unwilling to be indebted to a *madman*. To make matters worse, Walter's 'insane' aspiration as a social-climber can only succeed with the passive assistance of a *madwoman*.

His fate is sealed in the 'primal scene', where he first crosses the path of Anne Catherick – a fugitive from a private lunatic asylum. This nightly encounter is still invested with gothic elements, but its 'sensational' potential lies in the influence of dawning realism. This stylistic fusion is particularly evident in the 'gothicised' hyperbole of an otherwise realistic description of Walter's reaction to Anne's touch:

I [... enjoyed] the divine stillness of the scene, [...] my mind remained passively open to the impressions [...]; and I thought but little on any subject [...] – when, in a moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me. [...] There [...], as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments. (Collins 23-24)

In the midst of his idyllic walk – letting his guard of reason and reasoning down, with his 'passively open mind' open to attack – Walter is vulnerable to the touch of madness. Miller reads this brief physical contact as a contagious event – a trauma, which the novel "obsessively repeats [... in a need] to work through [... it and] rehearse the 'origins' of male nervousness in female contagion – strictly, in the woman's touch" (190). While he was merely "half-mad with curiosity" (Collins 14) before, he now develops a maniac obsession with the mysterious woman in

white and her secret. Lange argues that “Anne’s whiteness speaks where her voice fails or is gagged by others” (33). From a different angle, however, her whiteness can be equally interpreted as “a blank canvas on which anything could be painted [...] or the glaring, awesome potential ‘whatever women may be’” (Lange 33).

For a moment, Walter is not sure whether Anne is an evil apparition or a pure angel. When he looks into the “colourless, youthful face [...; into her] large, grave, wistfully-attentive eyes” (Collins 24), however, he feels that there is “nothing wild, nothing immodest” (Collins 24); in short, there is nothing ‘mad’ about her. As is the case with Lady Audley, Anne may perhaps be “capable of transient states in which ‘the beast within’ emerges [– when c]ontrol is lost, and inhibition abandoned[; in short] that behavioural state which society and the individual finds unacceptable” (Lange 35). For the moment, however, Anne appears “quiet and self-controlled [if] a little melancholy” (Collins 24). This introductory scene foreshadows the complexity of Anne’s madness; its various ramifications will be particularized in the conclusion.

First and foremost, “[t]he one thing of which [Walter is] certain [is], that the grossest of mankind could not have misconstrued her motive in speaking, even at that suspiciously late hour and in that suspiciously lonely place” (Collins 24). As the ‘woman in *white*’, Anne’s virtue is beyond question; she embodies virgin purity to such an extent that, when Walter interrogates her on the motives for her intense dislike for Sir Percival, the innocent creature is completely at a loss, “with the artless bewilderment of a child [...: w]hat other misfortune [than being shut up] could there be?” (Collins 101) This primal scene thus proves wrong all accusations of madness that are based on the conventional Victorian grounds of female impurity and sentimental excessiveness. It is only when Anne is afraid that Walter “suspect[s her] of doing wrong” (Collins 25) that she pleads her case as an honest woman “with *unnecessary* earnestness and agitation” (Collins 25, my italics). This attestation of ‘excessive’ behaviour is a man’s verdict – more precisely, it is the verdict of a stranger who is totally ignorant of Anne’s imminent danger and past woes. The first ‘true’ symptom of obsessive thought is her “loud and almost fierce” (Collins 27) refusal to reveal the scoundrel’s name – she “rais[es] her clenched hand in the air, and [shakes] it passionately” (Collins 27). In

the next moment, however, Anne regains control over herself and dutiful “want[s] to shut [her]self in” (Collins 29): she seeks the sheltering enclosure of the domestic sphere. Only there, at the hearth and home of Mrs Clements, may she find a safe ‘asylum’ – where she can take refuge from man’s ‘maddening’ verdict. When Walter learns that the woman he just saw safely off in a cab is a lunatic fugitive, he regrets his “ill-considered promise to *leave her free to act as she pleased*” (Collins 31, my italics). He wonders whether he “[a]ssisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonments [...] or cast loose [...] an unfortunate creature, whose *actions* it was [his], and every *man’s duty*, mercifully *to control?*” (Collins 31-32, my italics) In short, he muses whether he has been untrue to his masculine vocation of controlling and confining woman in a domestic ‘asylum’. For Robert Lange, it is clear that Walter’s decision constitutes both a symptom of ‘mad’, effeminate weakness and “a violation of the extant male code” (29). Walter’s weakness lies precisely in his feminine compassion for Anne, which falls short of the expectations held by patriarchal society concerning ‘appropriate’, male behaviour. As a representative of patriarchal hegemony, Walter fails to bring this fugitive woman to justice, who has managed to escape the sphere that masculine reasoning has allotted her.

But then, Anne’s conduct “suggested [...] that some recent shock of terror had disturbed the balance of her faculties” (Collins 31) and that, on recovering from this shock, she might “still [be] capable of *controlling her own actions*” (Collins 32, my italics). Could it be possible that Anne was not so weak (in her head) as to require male control? Could a woman be trusted to *behave sensibly* on her own accord?

With the picture of the ‘woman in white’ still vivid in his mind’s eye, Walter makes the acquaintance of her ‘dark counterpart’: Marian Halcombe. Although certainly in a different way, Walter is equally intrigued by this unorthodox specimen of womanhood as he is haunted by the ghost-like appearance of Anne. For Lonoff, Marian represents “the new kind of heroine who followed in the wake of Jane Eyre” (Lonoff 143 qtd. in Alleuthner 25); in any case, she constitutes the ‘true’ heroine of the plot and thus deserves to be introduced in extenso, through the masculine gaze:

I saw a lady [...] with her back turned towards me. The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the *unaffected grace* of her attitude. Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant *firmness*; her waist, *perfection in the eyes of man*, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle, it was *visibly and delightfully undeformed* by stays. She had not heard my entrance into the room; and I allowed myself *the luxury of admiring her* for a few moments [...]. The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. She left the window – and I said to myself, The lady is *dark*. She moved forward a few steps – and I said to myself, The lady is *young*. She approached nearer – and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), *The lady is ugly!* [...] Never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was *almost swarthy*, and the dark down on her upper lip was *almost a moustache*. She had a *large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw*; prominent, *piercing, resolute* brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unnaturally low on her forehead. Her expression – *bright, frank, and intelligent* – appeared, while she was silent, to be *altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete*. (Collins 34-35, my italics)

The pacing description of Walter's voyeuristic pleasure, which is checked so abruptly at the sight of the lady's mismatched face, allows the reader to partake in Walter's 'uncanny' revelation that "Marian lacks the lack" (Miller 206). It is highly interesting how the very person who was a second ago invested with so much erotic sensuality, can turn out to 'be altogether wanting in feminine attraction' – when measured 'at face value'. Whereas Walter exults in Marian's 'undeformed waist', he is uncomfortable in the presence of a woman 'unrestrained' by the corset of convention. The very masculinity of her features marks her as 'almost' his (sexual) equal – even his superior, if matters of class and social standing are taken into consideration. Barickman et al. argue that "[t]o call Marian's qualities 'masculine' is simply to expose the fact that male characters in the novel lay exclusive claim to strength and virtues that are preeminently [sic] embodied in a female character. The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' have become evasions rather than descriptions" (Barickman et al. 120 qtd. in Alleuthner 30). True to the Victorian pseudo-science of 'phrenology', Marian's threateningly virile character traits 'must out'. Walter is simultaneously repelled by and warned of the masculine potential which lurks in her comely

figure, when the threat is made 'visible' by such unfeminine facial features as the 'dark down on her upper lip'. Already in *Jane Eyre*, the importance of the expressions and lineaments of a face as the key to a one's personality is made explicit; for instance when Jane congratulates the 'gypsy' on reading her fortune in her face rather than the palm of her hand: "Destiny is [written ...] in the face: on the forehead, about the eyes, in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth.' [...] 'Ah! Now you are coming to reality, [...] I shall begin to put some faith in you presently'" (Brontë 199). Likewise Rochester casually refers to 'phrenology' when he 'diagnoses' Jane with "a good deal of the organ of Adhesiveness" (Brontë 252). As will be seen in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the Victorian readership deemed it a most unsettling state of affairs that crime and sin could (even temporarily) be hidden behind the angelic façade of Lady Audley's beautiful features and childish femininity.

For Robert Lange, Marian constitutes "a *form frustre* [...]:the embodiment of a] conflict between superficial unacceptability, and actual admiration [...]; the good Hyde, and the good Frankenstein monster. All the beautiful in soul and ugly in body repose in her" (31). No wonder that Walter should be positively indignant about this 'freak of nature', this empty promise of the paragon of female beauty – and more importantly, of female submissiveness. Furthermore, Marian makes no secret of the fact that she does not "think much of [her] own sex [; she even hints that] no woman does think much of her own sex, although few of them confess it as freely as [she does]" (Collins 36). This puts her in the intriguing position of a lady who refuses the questionable pedestal of woman's moral superiority – an assumption which is repeatedly contradicted by vile female characters such as the egoistic turncoat Mrs Catherick: "Of course, I knew it was wrong; but it did no harm to **me** – which was one *good reason* for not making a fuss about it. [...] If I had known [...] how the law punished [this crime], I should have *taken proper care of myself*, and have *exposed him* then and there" (Collins 530, my italics except where in bold). By refusing this sham distinction, which merely served as a pretext for excluding women from the public sphere, Marian also dismantles the dubious Victorian ideals of femininity – as exemplified in Mrs Vesey, "the personification of human composure, and female amiability [...]; an excellent person, who possesses all the cardinal virtues, and counts for nothing" (Collins

48,37). Not only is Marian well aware of the disadvantages and incapacities of her own sex, but she openly decries women's inability to live independently from men – or merely not to quarrel at the dinner-table without “a flitable, danceable, small-talkable creature of the male sex” (Collins 36) to supervise and guide them: “[w]e are such fools” (Collins 36). Barickman et al. are of the opinion that Marian's “antifeminist slurs [are] contradicted by her resolute, even authoritarian behaviour” (Barickman et al. 118 qtd. in Alleuthner 32); she herself thus serves as an example of female reason, which refutes her own masculine reasoning of woman's intellectual inferiority.

For Walter, it comes as a relief that Marian's half-sister, Laura Fairlie, is “in every respect as unlike [her] as possible” [...:] I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an *angel*; and I am – [...] finish the sentence, in the name of female propriety, for yourself” (Collins 37, my italics). Ann Gaylin reads this unfinished sentence as a refusal on Marian's part to attribute to herself the ‘logical’ antonym, namely the ‘devil’; she can thus be seen to “resist classification in binary terms” (125). Even though her character certainly challenges the rigid binary of Victorian gender roles, I would argue (with Butler) that Marian not so much refutes the notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ but obliges the reader to question the fixed link between a person's sex and gender. While her ‘virilised’ body cannot escape Victorian convention – in so far as it is compelled to hint at her ‘masculine’ traits – I consider Marian's rounded personality a successful example of ‘gender synthesis’, or even ‘gender transgression’. Collins's surprisingly positive portrayal of this transgressive female character – particularly with regard to her undisputed sanity – will be further discussed in the conclusion. Although the idea that Marian corresponds to the ‘devil’ may be the most obvious interpretation, I would argue that her sentence could also end in ‘I am a man’. This ties in with her ‘transgressive potential’ in so far as Marian, who embraces this ‘gender synthesis’, frequently excels those characters who cling to the illusion of a mono-dimensional gender. For if the patriarchal (d)evaluation of her ‘unfeminine’ features and demeanour were suspended or re-evaluated in accordance with a

'male' standard, Marian might perhaps come off 'better' than Walter or effeminate Mr Fairlie.

Particularly the landlord's masculinity – and by implication sanity – is doubtful not only in the eyes of his family or employees, but even in his own judgement: "I am nothing but a bundle of nerves *dressed up to look like a man*" (Collins 348, my italics). On this Marian trenchantly comments that nobody seems to know "what is the matter with him. We all say it's on the nerves, and we none of us know what we mean when we say it" (Collins 37). This statement is symptomatic of the "Victorian Craze" (Grigsby), which deemed all sorts of behaviour indicative of insanity and indiscriminately attested 'mental disturbance' in two out of three cases of 'eccentric' conduct. Much as Laura's "slight headache [is an] essentially feminine malady" (Collins 35), all afflictions of the nervous system were supposedly characteristic of the weak sex and de facto characterized as 'essentially feminine'. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Walter describes Fairlie's "beardless face [... and] effeminately small feet [... clad in] little womanish bronze-leather slippers [..., in short his whole] frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look [...as] unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man" (Collins 42). Madness is not acceptable in men, therefore the madman must be feminized in his portrayal to confirm the hypothesis of 'essentially feminine' madness. The landlord's reception is indeed evocative of a freak-show in its ludicrously exaggerated mannerism: the psycho-drama of a self-centred anchorite. Walter soon discovers "that Mr. Fairlie's selfish affectation and Mr. Fairlie's wretched nerves mean one and the same thing" (Collins 43); the 'wretched sufferer' himself freely avows that "the grand misfortune of [his] life [is] that nobody will let [him] alone" (Collins 338). Walter is, however, not only piqued by Fairlie's 'unpleasantly' feminine traits but is also uncomfortably reminded of his own dubious manliness – when Fairlie is "so glad to *possess [him]*" (Collins 43, my italics), just as he reigns sovereign over his niece Laura. This false compliment puts Walter in *his* effeminate place: namely that of a male governess, who is inferior even to the ladies of the house in fortune and rank. Compared to his neurotic employer, Walter can be interpreted as a 'reverse case' of madness: while Mr Fairlie must be portrayed as effeminate because he is mad, Walter must be somewhat mad because his powerless position befits a woman rather than a

man. By implication, his sanity is redeemed above suspicion once he has made his fortune and asserted his supremacy over the principal female characters.

Let us return to the topic of angelic Laura, who is likewise “rather nervous and sensitive [... though] in widely different ways” (Collins 39). Walter paints an angelic portrait of his fair pupil, whose beauty seems rather to belong to the artificial sphere of the arts than mundane reality (Small 198): she embodies the Victorian muse of femininity “so often sung by the poets, so seldom seen in real life” (Collins 51). With the (in)accuracy of a painter, Walter almost tenderly concedes that her beauty is not free from “its little natural human blemishes” (Collins 51), but her radiant purity outshines any trifling defects. In fact, they render her all the more likable and desirable as they ‘mark’ this celestial creature as a human-being, a woman of flesh and blood. In the midst of his raptures about “the charm of her *fair face* and head, her sweet expression, and *her winning simplicity of manner* [, Walter feels that there is] something wanting” (Collins 53, my italics).

It is only at a later moment that he becomes consciously aware of the fact that this apparent ‘lack’ is her startling yet incomplete resemblance to ‘the woman in white’: “[t]here stood Miss Fairlie, a *white figure*, alone in the moonlight; in her attitude, in the turn of her head, in her complexion, in the shape of her face, the *living image* [...] of the woman in white! [...T]his ominous likeness [...] seems [to] cast a shadow on the future of the bright creature” (Collins 62). At the sight of Anne’s dismal ‘replica’, her living ‘image’, Walter is seized by a gloomy foreboding. He is unable to compose himself, to master his sensation, and thus increasingly effeminate not only in Marian’s eye: “Mr. Hartright, you surprise me. Whatever women may be, I thought that men, in the nineteenth century, where above superstition” (Collins 62). When his hopeless infatuation with Laura assumes alarming dimensions, it is again Marian who assumes the role of a patriarchal surrogate, in the absence of a sufficiently male representative: “[w]ho else is left to you? No father, no brother – no living creature but the helpless, useless woman who [...] watches by you” (Collins 194). Unaccustomed to ‘see or hear reason’ from a female ‘guardian’, Walter is alienated by Marian’s “penetrating eyes [full of] suppressed anger [and] suppressed dread [...] whose look is] like *nothing*, in short, which [*he*] could understand” (Collins 68, my italics).

Bitterly aware that she is 'only a woman', Marian dedicates her life to the wellbeing of her angelic half-sister, who – like the celestial being that she is – is unfit to master life on her own. To spare Laura further misery, Marian proclaims him "guilty of weakness" (Collins 71) and appeals to male reason to quench his "thoughtless[...] attachment" (Collins 71): "[c]rush it! [...] Don't shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!" (Collins 73)

While Marian certainly acts as the mouthpiece of patriarchal reason, she may perhaps be accused of acting also in her own interest, namely as a jealous 'lover' of Laura. "My own love!" (Collins 194, my italics) This sexualized (re)interpretation also ties in with Valerie Pedlar's reading of the two half-sisters as doubles who each represent a complementary set of characteristics – "together they make a *whole*" (78, my italics). Furthermore, the hypothesis is strengthened when Marian appears 'unaccountably' unhappy about Laura's 'suitable' union with Sir Percival: "this deplorable marriage might prove to be the one fatal error of her life and the one *hopeless sorrow of mine*" (Collins 193, my italics). Miller notes, however, that the jealous lover rather "promot[es] this faint-hearted marriage to Sir Percival than the obvious love match with Walter" (207). Although Marian is eager to assert the contrary – "[p]utting [her]self and [her] own feelings entirely out of the question (which it is [her] duty to do, and which [she has] done)" (Collins 184) – she cannot bear the thought that "she will be **his** Laura instead of *mine*! **His** Laura!" (Collins 185, my italics except where in bold) Of course, she is clever enough not to openly antagonize the groom, who "stands very high [...and holds] – an eminent position, a *reputation above suspicion*" (Collins 118, my italics). Nevertheless, she cannot shake off the feeling that "writing of her marriage [feels] like writing of her death" (Collins 185). How happy they should be, were they allowed to spend the rest of their lives only in each other's company; and yet she herself "know[s] that thing *could not be*" (Collins 135, my italics). Marian is bitterly aware that there will be no more stolen glances at her sleeping love and that Laura herself will no longer "c[o]me and [creep] into [her] bed [...; for] no man tolerates a rival – not even a *woman rival* in his wife's affections" (Collins 187,185, my italics). As homosexuality must ultimately give way to heterosexuality, the cataclysmic potential of this transgressive love match appears negligible; at least within a Victorian framework, there seems to be no

room for Butler's sweeping vision of lesbianism as the formula for success in woman's emancipatory battle with patriarchal hegemony.

To further complicate the love triangles, Miller argues that Walter secretly desires Anne rather than Laura; his 'repetition compulsion', his "forbidden necrophiliac thrill" (Pedlar 78), his morbid desire for a morbid woman - all these 'aberrations' reveal Walter's own nervous disorder.

Laura Fairlie is **not** the first woman to quicken his pulses but rather the object of a *repetition compulsion* whose origin lies in his (sensationalizing, feminizing) first encounter with the Woman in White. [...] Accordingly, the Laura Walter most deeply dreams of loving proves to be none other than the Anne who has been put away. It is as though, *to be quite perfect*, his pupil must be *taught a lesson*: what is wanting – what Laura obscurely lacks and Walter obscurely wishes for – is *her sequestration in the asylum*. (Miller 202-203, my italics except where in bold).

Much as Laura can be seen to "sensationalize" Walter by "quicken[ing] his pulses", Miller believes that the protagonist breaks with patriarchal expectations and is consequently "feminized" when he assists Anne's escape. Be that as it may, the half-sisters' likeness is further underscored by Laura's dress, with its "broad alternate stripes of delicate blue and white" (Collins 51), which recalls Anne's white attire and (perhaps) simultaneously hints at Laura's superior social standing as a 'blue-blood'. A more audacious interpretation may even see a resemblance to a prisoner's garb, which may in turn stand for Laura's perpetual confinement – either in a literal lunatic asylum or in the supposedly protective asylum of the domestic sphere. For the present, it is indeed intriguing that Walter should perceive Laura as 'wanting' in comparison to the spectre of the woman in white, as he finds much more favourable words to describe the same hue of hair colour in Laura than in Anne: Laura's hair is not merely "pale, brownish-yellow" (Collins 24) but "*not* flaxen, and *yet almost* as light; *not* golden, and *yet almost* as glossy – that it *nearly melts*, here and there, into the shadow of the hat" (Collins 51, my italics). Again, his wording (in all its impressionistic vagueness) would be more appropriate to describe the portrait of a lady than a living human-being – Laura is fixed into art in her innocent perfection, so much so that her ghost-like half-sister appears ironically realistic in comparison. Like the submissive token of a patriarchal game of chess, Laura is petrified by the grievous love-sickness for her drawing master – although she dutifully accepts the impropriety of the match. "[I]n

the name of her sacred weakness” (Collins 126) and moral uprightness, she feels bound to a promise – for “she never broke a promise in her life” (Collins 139) – even though this particular promise was never actually given to her father. Laura is thus the picture of female passivity, daughterly deference and wifely submissiveness; accordingly, she is unable to accept Sir Percival’s selfless offer to withdraw, with all dignity and propriety, from their engagement.

While this tragic love-story evolves, the ominous figure of the woman in white looms in the background, hovering around the graveyard like a gothic spectre: “[w]as there no possibility to speak of Miss Fairly and [Walter] without raising the memory of Anne Catherick, and setting her between [them] like a fatality that it was hopeless to avoid? [...] Again, and yet again, the woman in white. There was a fatality in it” (Collins 74, 76; his italics). Little does Walter guess at that moment that it is Anne who removes all obstacles to their union, who is literally sacrificed on the altar of patriarchal ambition – and thus serves not only Sir Percival and Count Fosco but Walter in equal (if not greater) measure. For if it were not for their uncanny resemblance, Laura would never have fallen victim to Count Fosco’s ingenious plot and be left so destitute that even poor Walter could offer his humble help – and expect to be ‘royally’ rewarded. Walter’s attempt to ‘put Anne to good use’ becomes more evident in the course of their second encounter, after her anonymous letter has first raised hopes that he may discredit Laura’s husband-to-be, with her help. He has no regards for Anne’s constitutional “nervous sensitiveness, weakness and uncertainty [or the] maniacally intense hatred and fear” (Collins 104) triggered by his ruthless interrogation on the painful subject of her disputable ‘benefactor’, who so willingly bore the costs of her confinement. As has been hinted above, Walter’s reluctance to depend on Anne for his romantic and pecuniary aspirations may be symptomatic of his unwillingness to accept that (female) insanity is superior to (masculine) reason, in this case.

With regard to the ‘dear object’ of his desire and ambition, Walter is aware that “one sad change, in the future [is] all that [is] wanting to make the likeness complete” (Collins 97). Therefore, Anne’s and Laura’s difference is not so much one of beauty (or sanity) but of good *fortune*; if the same fate had befallen Laura from her earliest childhood on, she would likewise display more symptoms of

mental disturbance than “the little nervous uncertainty about her lips [...and] that childish restlessness in her fingers” (Collins 97,164). By implication, the extent of Anne’s condition must also be ascribed to ‘nurture’ rather than ‘nature’; she might after all have “grow[n] out of it” (Collins 60), just as the doctor predicted when Mrs Fairlie met that “poor little thing [...whose] intellect [was] *just not developed* as it ought to be at her age” (Collins 60, my italics). The detrimental, yet ‘instructive’, influence of confinement in a lunatic asylum, which was certainly not negligible in Anne’s progression of insanity, will be discussed in greater detail in my analysis of Laura’s character development; it will also feature prominently in the conclusion. With regard to Anne, the only factual evidence on this topic is Mrs Catherick’s apologetic, and thus biased, account of her ‘half-wit’ daughter:

The only drawback of putting her *under restraint* was a very slight one. We merely turned her empty boast about knowing the Secret, into a *fixed delusion*. Having first spoken in *sheer crazy spitefulness* [...], she was *cunning enough* to see that she had seriously frightened him, and *sharp enough* afterwards to discover that **he** was concerned in shutting her up. The consequence was that she flamed into a perfect *frenzy of passion* against him. (Collins 538, my italics except where in bold)

If Anne’s madness is re-evaluated under this premise, the reader is not only moved to compassion but may seriously doubt the gravity of her affliction: Anne was perfectly ‘sharp enough’ to recognize her confinement as Sir Percival’s punishment for her ‘cunning’ attempt to frighten him. What is more, it appears natural that she should feel intense, even passionate, dislike for this villain and attempt to harm him in the future. Her principal fault lies in the ‘delusion’ that she could exert power over Sir Percival and inflict harm – for example, by denouncing him to his affluent wife-to-be and thus nearly robbing him of all hope of easing his “serious money-embarrassment” (Collins 226) – without running the inevitable risk of inflicting even greater harm on herself. Given Anne’s ‘fixed’ devotion for Mrs Fairlie, however, one may give her credit for having selflessly issued that warning – in full awareness of her personal danger of antagonizing Sir Percival – in order to spare the daughter of her benefactress a similarly dire fate. Sure enough, a ‘sad change’ does come over Laura, once her husband has dispelled all romantic illusions of matrimony – or as Marian puts it: “I miss something [...] that once belonged to the happy, *innocent* life of Laura Fairlie, and that I cannot find in *Lady Glyde*” (Collins 211, my italics). When interpreting this description,

the reader must bear in mind the preceding analysis of Marian's own potential libidinal attachment to Laura. In this light, the 'something missing' may be Laura's virginity, which 'maiden Fairlie' sacrificed to become 'Lady Glyde'. After Laura's (hetero)sexual initiation, Marian "cannot absolutely say that she is less beautiful than she used to be: [she] can only say that she is less beautiful to [*her*]" (Collins 211, his italics). It is highly interesting how Marian's evaluation appears to mimic masculine ideals of desirable femininity, which prize a woman's virgin purity as her chief beauty. The 'intimate' relationship between the two half-sisters is further strained by the introduction of a "forbidden topic" (Collins 211): namely, Laura's married life or, in other words, the sphere of her own sexuality. The only morsel of marital wisdom that Laura is willing to share with Marian is her appraisal that the latter is "so much better off as a single woman – unless – [she is] very fond of [*her*] husband" (Collins 212). Echoing Marian's own 'possessive' love for her, Laura continues: "but you won't be very fond of *anybody but me*, will you? [...] It is selfish to say so, but [...] promise you will never marry, and leave me" (Collins 212, my italics).

On a different occasion, Laura "put[s] her lips to [Marian's], and kiss[es her:] '*My own love, [...] you are so much too fond of me and so much too proud of me, that you forget, in my case, what you would remember in your own*'" (Collins 164, my italics). This gentle reprimand could be interpreted in the following way: upon her heterosexual initiation, Laura imbibes and affirms the patriarchal laws of (im)propriety on the subject of (female) homosexuality. In her maiden days, she could not bear the thought of a temporary separation, as a wife, however, it is no longer becoming to display more than sisterly affection. The crux of Laura's speech lies in her assertion that Marian would feel the same if she were in the position of a married woman. As her half-sister has not entered into marriage – and probably never will – she cannot be expected to follow Laura's heterosexual(ized) reasoning: "[i]f you were married yourself, Marian – and especially if you were *happily married* – you would feel for me as *no single woman can* feel, however kind and true she may be. [...] Thank God for your poverty – it has made you *your own mistress*, and has saved you the lot that has fallen on *me*" (Collins 258, my italics except where in bold). Her afterthought on Marian's 'fortunate lot' affords two at least partially contradictory interpretations:

firstly, it stands in sharp contrast to her preceding claim that no (happily) married woman would long to return to her childish 'asexual' past – or perhaps her not so 'innocent' homosexual orientation – once she has tasted heterosexuality and dutifully pronounced it superior. Perhaps the reasoning hinges on "*happily married*"; but how could a woman of her time *not* be wrapped up in marital bliss? From a 21st century perspective, however, the reader may rather wonder how Laura could expect to attain happiness in this mercenary arrangement? Secondly, Laura's own unhappiness in marriage appears to suggest that Marian is better off in the outwardly 'asexual limbo' of spinsterhood, where she is at least 'her own mistress'. Curiously enough, Laura's character never before struck the reader as aspiring to this kind of autonomy for which her half-sister so obviously craves – "[if only] I had been a man, [b]ut I was only a woman!" (Collins 245) No wonder, then, that Marian should be equally taken by surprise at this unforeseeable change: "I held her away from me in astonishment. For the first time in our lives, we had *changed places*; the *resolution* was all on her side, the hesitation all on mine. [...] I hung my head in *silence*" (Collins 164, my italics). In wedlock, Laura has aligned herself with patriarchal, heterosexual hegemony; as a result, her own position – as a man's wife – has been passively invested with a fraction of masculine power: for she now has a man behind her. Whereas Marian was 'in charge' of Laura before, she must now admit defeat in the face of patriarchal dominance. Sir Percival basks in this turn of the tide when Marian "venture[s] to think that [she has] something to do with the matter" (Collins 245) of Laura's signature: "[t]he next time you invite yourself to a man's house, Miss Halcombe, I recommend you not repay his hospitality by taking his wife's side against him in a matter that doesn't concern you" (Collins 245).

It is time to introduce the man whose influence is so acutely felt in the lives of Laura and her two half-sisters: Sir Percival Glyde, "a most *prepossessing* man, so far as manners and *appearances* [are] concerned" (Collins 130, my italics). During his courtship of Laura, he is the picture of a gentleman whose "tact and taste [are] never at fault" (Collins 130), a ceremonious wooer, in short: a "*really irresistible man* – courteous, considerate, delightfully free from pride – a gentleman, every inch of him" (Collins 146, my italics). But just as the 'picture' of angelic Laura – the Victorian epitome of accomplished femininity – is not immune

to 'madness' in all her pure perfection, so does the 'picture' of Sir Percival as a gallant gentleman crumble and reveal a 'haunted' spirit. Once he can be sure of 'possessing' Laura and, more important still, her fortune (in the event of her untimely death), he shows "little or nothing of the ceremony and civility of former times" (Collins 214). Valerie Pedlar recognizes the blatant impotency of his position as a domestic tyrant: "Sir Percival may epitomize the oppressive husband, but he is unable to control Laura's thoughts and feelings [... or, for that matter,] all her money (86). Marian describes him as 'possessing' a "restless disposition" (Collins 229) and as 'possessed' of "a *mania* [..., unable] to shake off the *anxieties* [...] which now evidently *trouble his mind* in secret" (Collins 214,215, my italics): "[h]e *is* mad – mad with the terrors of a guilty conscience" (Collins 300, his italics). In accordance with the gender stereotypes of the epoch, Sir Percival's mind is troubled by very masculine motives, namely money (or lack of money) and social rank – whereas his wife appears to suffer from a 'broken heart'. His madness is of a restless, frantic nature – characterized by 'storms' and 'outbreaks' of his passionate temper – while Laura remains passive and inanimate even in her 'madness'. As this close reading has shown, even the most virile of men cannot be sure of his mental health; this aspect of madness will be further examined in the conclusion.

In comparison to Sir Percival, who perpetually loses his temper and is constantly on the verge of 'losing his head', his bosom-friend Count Fosco is the criminal mastermind of all plots. With regard to 'madness', this character is of particular interest in that he functions as the (male) 'authority' on that topic. As a person learned in chemistry and medicine, he not only undertakes the care of the sick – Marian and Anne – but is responsible for confining Laura in the lunatic asylum. It is he who evaluates people's sanity, in Laura's case, and who 'offers guidance' if his fellow *men*, notably Sir Percival, fail to 'see reason': he both embodies and exercises patriarchal judgment in the medico-juridical discourse on madness. While any boring stock character of a pompous psychiatrist would have done the trick, Collins creates for this purpose one of the most rounded villains that fiction has known to this day, who "combine[s] in [him]self the opposite characteristics of a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business" (Collins 607). Not only is the reader challenged by the discrepancies of his character, but s/he is charmed by the

Count's multi-faceted personality to such an extent that s/he is almost as unwilling to 'think ill' of him as Mrs Michelson: "he was not to blame [...], it was his *misfortune* and not his *fault*" (Collins 398, my italics) that he should have been drawn into this corrupt conspiracy. This sentence is reminiscent of Rochester's assertion that he committed 'an error – not a crime' (cf. Brontë 219); in the case of the Count, however, the villain is not even 'at fault'. With recourse to Fosco's own reasoning – "the wise man's crime is the crime that is *not* found out" (Collins 232, his italic) – one might indeed consider him the 'victim of ill-fortune', for "[w]hen the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police, in nine cases out of ten, lose" (Collins 233).

Although Count Fosco's glib reasoning is somewhat camouflaged by his eccentric personality and his preposterously massive appearance, Marian is instantly aware that he "looks like a man who could *tame* anything. If he had married a tigress, instead of a woman, he would have tamed the tigress" (Collins 217, my italics). Most readers agree with Marian that his "*management* of the Countess (in public) is a sight to see" (Collins 222, my italics); readers are, however, equally intrigued by the "*rod of iron* with which he rules her[, which] never appears in company – it is a *private rod*, and is always kept up-stairs" (Collins 222, my italics). Of course, it is tempting to interpret the "private rod" of iron as a sexual innuendo to the couple's sado-masochistic practices – in the 'privacy' of their bedroom "up-stairs"; their sexuality thus comes to mirror the hegemonic power structures of their relationship in general. If so, this match is exemplary for Victorian marriage wherein women were frequently made to suffer on two-fold grounds: firstly, a wife was expected to be chaste and have no personal interest in matrimonial intercourse other than to gratify her husband in the fulfilment of her conjugal duty. Secondly, women were often subject to domestic violence – in all the nasty implications of the term. Naturally, the 'forbidden subject' of (conjugal) sexuality was avoided in company for the sake of decorum; as it was her wifely duty to preserve appearances, a woman was thus deprived of all means of 'communicating' her misery and securing herself against 'spousal abuse'. Laura's marriage may be a similar case given her desperate and yet reserved account of it in Marian's presence: "[y]ou heard the words – but you don't know what they mean – [...y]ou don't know *how he has used me*. [...]" I

would tell you everything, darling, about myself, [...] if my confidences could only end there. But they could not – they would *lead me into confidences about my husband*, too; and, *now I am married*, I think *I had better avoid them*” (Collins 250,212, my italics). In public, the Count’s strategy for ‘mastering’ his wife – a formerly pretentious coquette – is a curious mixture of gentlemanly flattery and ‘training’ her like a lapdog: he “addresses her as ‘my angel’, [...] kisses her hand [...]and] presents her with sugar-plums [...], which he puts into her mouth playfully” (Collins 222) – and she thanks him with the “*mute submissive* [look ...] which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a *faithful dog*” (Collins 216, my italics). Her existence as an individual is completely erased and absorbed into the possessive identity of her husband when he decides that his wife is unable to perform the legal role of a witness: “we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine” (Collins 242). To all appearances, the Countess is perfectly content with this arrangement: “I wait to be instructed [...] before I venture on giving my opinion in the presence of well-informed men” (Collins 232). In the concluding chapter, the unfathomable character of the Countess will be analysed more systematically and compared with Clara Talboys who features in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.

His enormous appearance recalls the “Great Napoleon [...] in its] grandly calm, immovable power” (Collins 218), but the Count’s true influence lies in the “cold, clear, beautiful, irresistible glitter [of his] unfathomable gray eyes [...], which force [anybody] to look at him, and [cause ...] sensations” (Collins 218). Marian’s description of the Count’s ‘powerful eyes’ brings to mind the fashionable concept of ‘magnetism’ – the art of influencing, even controlling, individuals through sheer willpower via the hypnotic gaze of one’s eyes. She is ashamed to admit that the “man has interested [her], has attracted [her], has forced [her] to like him [...] – how he has worked the miracle, is more than [she] can tell” (Collins 217). Count Fosco himself offers a less fantastical explanation for his superior ‘mental powers’: man must “never accept a provocation at a woman’s hands. It holds with *animals*, it holds with *children*, and it holds with *women*, who are *nothing but children* grown up. Quiet *resolution* is the one quality the animals, the children, and the women all fail in” (Collins 323, my italics). As an aside, I consider Collins’s verbatim description of Laura as possessing considerable resolution –

even more so than her ‘butch’ half-sister Marian – an interesting detail. ‘Quiet resolution’: this is the Count’s refined formula for success whereby “a man can *manage* a woman” (Collins 323, my italics) without resorting to the brutal alternative of physical aggression; this is the advice he gives Sir Percival whose “mad temper” (Collins 323) threatens to jeopardize his complot.

How curious that the same man should share “the *innocent* taste of women and children” (Collins 289, my italics), for sweetmeats and ‘eau sucrée’, and be ridiculously fond of his private zoo of pet animals, on whom he dotes as if these little white mice were his offspring. What is more, his ability as the cool strategist of men’s fortune – “his look of unmistakable *mental firmness* and power” (Collins 219, my italics) – is strangely at odds with Marian’s observation that he “starts at chance noises as inveterately as Laura herself” (Collins 219) and shows such genuine compassion for animals “that [Marian feels] ashamed of [her] own want of tenderness and sensibility, by comparison” (Collins 219). In this light, the Count’s “eternal cigarettes” (Collins 229) “attest that even [in his case] nervousness is not so much missing as mastered, and mastered only insofar as its symptoms are masked “ (Miller 189). This ‘nervous habit – worse, this addiction – gives away that even Fosco is not “[b]orn without nerves” (Collins 354), as Mr Fairlie believes. As he is thus himself a partially effeminate character, it is arguable that the Count is not only a skilled mentalist but also a connoisseur of the female sex, who agrees with Marian that women “can resist a man’s love, a man’s fame, a man’s personal appearance, and a man’s money; but they cannot resist a man’s tongue, when he knows how to talk to them” (Collins 256).

He flatters my vanity, by talking to me *as seriously and sensibly as if I was a man*. Yes! I can find him out when I am away from him [...] – and yet, [...] in his company [...], *he will blind me again*, and I shall be flattered again [...]! He can *manage me*, as he manages his wife and Laura, [...] as he manages Sir Percival himself, every hour in the day [...]; smiling at him with the calmest superiority; [...] and bearing with him benignantly, as a *good-humoured father* bears with a wayward son. (Collins 222, my italics)

In all his preposterous obesity and ridiculously feminine and childish pleasures, the Count is thus still the most impressive example of a patriarchal master, a benignant pater familias – by all appearances – whose assiduous surveillance nothing escapes, who is always at the ready to intervene if his will is not obeyed.

This trans-gender aspect of his personality will be set in relation to Marian's transgressive character in the conclusion; in this context, it will be of interest why neither of them is pronounced mad for breaking with conventional gender-roles.

Jane Eyre possesses the principal characteristics of a female 'bildungsroman' and thus requires a chronological analysis of its protagonist – in synchronism with the formative events of the plot. In contrast, *The Woman in White* features less 'dynamic' individuals. For those literary figures that do undergo significant development throughout the book, it is possible to pinpoint a single decisive event on which the change in personality and appearance hinges. The following section offers a brief account of the respective plot and character developments which I consider of importance within the scope of this thesis.

It appears intuitive to start out with the character who lends her name to the novel: the 'woman in white', aka Anne Catherick. I would argue that the formative moment of her life is her naïve miscalculation concerning the possible repercussions of threatening patriarchal dominance. When Sir Percival hurts her strong sense of pride, Anne spitefully pretends to know more of his secret than she actually does and parrots her mother's threat: "I can ruin your life, if I choose to open my lips" (Collins 536). She makes him – and herself! – believe that she is intimate with his darkest secret, his greatest weakness; in short, she frightens him into believing that she holds a certain power over him. Tragically, she merely knows of the *existence* of this secret; Anne thus makes herself the target of his "raging, swearing frenzy" (Collins 537) without a fair chance to emerge the winner of this trial of strength. Instead of bettering her position – by transcending conventions of hegemonic power distribution – Anne seals her own fate when she 'speaks her troubled mind'. Although her former life offered few joys, she is definitely worse off in the lunatic asylum. Even when she contrives to escape, her mind is restless with "crazy spite" (Collins 537) against her 'gaoler'. To make matters worse, Anne is 'haunted by the past' – a phenomenon that is infamous for its maddening effects according to Victorian psychiatric theory. This calls for action on twofold grounds: firstly, to avenge the wrong Sir Percival has done herself; secondly, to protect the daughter of her beloved benefactress. As far as Anne herself is concerned, her untiring, saint-like endeavour to protect those whom she has no power to protect verges on masochistic self-abandonment.

When seen in context with the principal plot, however, Anne's seemingly superfluous self-sacrifice gains a deeper meaning and becomes virtually indispensable to secure Walter's (and Laura's) happy-ending.

To stay in the family, let Mrs Catherick follow her daughter. Although her change of 'character' is merely a façade, it is worthwhile to analyse her fake reform as it challenges two central Victorian assumptions about femininity: firstly, women were deemed morally superior to men and thus free from masculine vices such as greed and egotism. Secondly, and more important still, the female sex was considered incapable of 'staging' morality and goodness of heart. This Victorian unwillingness to accept that women may be just as false and scheming as men will be of paramount importance in my discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret*. In view of Lady Audley's strategy to hide behind the innocent beauty of her childish face, it is interesting to consider Mrs Catherick's method of covering her dubious past by the smokescreen of hyperbolic propriety. Collins doubtless sketches her as a vile character, the image of (un)feminine megalomania; she is a restless social climber who is "born with the tastes of a lady" (Collins 529) and willing to bend the laws and conventions of society to have them gratified. This said, from a more neutral and 'modern' perspective, the reader may sympathize with the villainess to a certain degree – as she can be understood to 'do as she is done by'. The power structures of patriarchal hegemony may, however, consider this an even greater misdeed, because, as a woman, she is certainly not entitled to take the law into her own hands. When the loose-principled Mr Philip Fairlie does not take responsibility for fathering Anne, Mrs Catherick is left with 'no option' but to trick her long-standing suitor into marrying her in order to make an 'honest woman' of herself. Significantly, Walter – as the representative of patriarchal society – shows marked indulgence for Mr Fairlie's immoral conduct, whom he describes as "a *notoriously* handsome man [...] the *spoilt darling of society*, especially of the women – an easy, light-hearted, *impulsive*, affectionate man; *generous to a fault*; *constitutionally* lax in his principles; and *notoriously thoughtless of moral obligations* where women were concerned" (Collins 553-554, my italics). It is easy to imagine how hedonistic Mrs Catherick fell for "generous" Mr Fairlie – even though the rake gave her 'fair warning' as he was equally well known for his loose principles as he was for his good looks.

Conveniently, the woman takes the entire blame; indeed, she deserves double blame for trying to make an 'honest man' undo the wrong of another man. What is more, "the spoilt darling of society" appears to be 'guilty' of nothing worse than 'generosity'; surely, the "affectionate" beau cannot be blamed for enjoying the 'favours' which women so willingly bestow in return for his magnanimous 'generosity'. When Mrs Catherick makes herself the accomplice of a second crime by assisting Sir Percival's fraud, she is not found out but pays a dire price all the same: Sir Percival puts her in 'solitary confinement' at Welmingham, the epitome of rural propriety, where he can be sure that "no virtuous friends would tempt [her] into dangerous gossiping at the tea-table" (Collins 533). This 'confinement' can be seen to foreshadow Anne's fate in the lunatic asylum. In contrast to her mother, who keeps Sir Percival's secret in her own interest, her 'half-wit' daughter cannot be trusted – as she is not as easily 'silenced' by a 'handsome allowance'. This spells the dubious moral that a naively virtuous woman, who will not screen male crime, will be more severely punished than a cunning, 'fallen woman', who partakes in (and profits from) patriarchal immorality. In this context, it is also noteworthy that – for whatever alleged reasons – Walter shows virile solidarity with Sir Percival, in that he does not expose his fraud, and thus desecrate the memory of a gentleman whose "character is established" (Collins 83). Mrs Catherick might be expected to eke out the remainder of her sinful existence in paralysed mortification; quite the contrary, she embarks on a personal vendetta against the inhabitants of Welmingham: "I came here a *wronged* woman. I came here *robbed* of my character and determined to *claim it back*" (Collins 487, my italics). With inexorable patience, she worms her way back into people's good books by turning herself into a farce of their own rural propriety, to all outward appearances. It is literally revolting to witness how she gloats over her diligently acquired respectability and how she wrests reluctant esteem from those very people that named and shamed her in her youth. Even the little consideration she shows for Anne – when insisting that she be put in a private instead of a public asylum – falls short of motherly love, as it boils down to her proud determination to 'maintain appearances': "I did *my duty*. Though *never over-fond* of my late daughter, I had a *proper pride* about her. No *pauper stain* – thanks to my firmness and resolution – ever rested on MY child" (Collins 537, my italics). In conclusion, Mrs Catherick certainly meets the contemporary

requirements to be diagnosed with ‘moral madness’ as she defies the conventions of Victorian society and thus, by implication, of patriarchal ‘reasoning’. As she is constantly living proof of her ‘mental capacity’ to make her way in patriarchal society, the dubious validity of this assessment casts doubt on Victorian psychiatry, in general.

Now that I have addressed the quite different forms of madness embodied by Mrs Catherick and her daughter, I turn to the man who must be held (at least partially) responsible for their ill-fortune: Sir Percival Glyde. His initially flawless character has already been duly noticed, just as I have hinted that he quickly ‘dropped the act’ of the gallant suitor and loving husband once he had secured himself a wealthy wife. Like Mrs Catherick, he has learned to present a respectable ‘face’ in society if it furthers his interests. Unlike this cunning lady, however, the baronet is not as gifted with feminine patience and frustration tolerance; when his temperance is put to the test, he ‘forgets his part’ – in other words: he lacks self-control and thus, by implication, sanity! While the reader – and possibly her fellow villagers – may suspect Mrs Catherick of dishonesty, she never gives herself away and thus remains immune to accusations. As Sir Percival’s cool reason fails him repeatedly, however, everyone can see through his ‘act’, when he mimics “the days of his probation [...and becomes, once again,] all kindness and attention” (Collins 228). As a married man, he has so completely fallen out of his former character that his sporadic attempts to be “amazingly attentive and kind to his wife” (Collins 228) surprise even the most stoic inhabitant of Blackwater Park: the Countess. While the baronet increasingly fails to hide his mercenary motives, he has trouble hiding his passionate nature, his ‘nervous unease’, in equal measure. In Sir Percival’s effeminate condition, “[a]ny woman who is sure of her own wits, is a match, at any time, for a man who is not sure of his own temper” (Collins 309). Fortunately, the baron can rely on the Count to “check [his] outbreaks of temper” (Collins 228) – to ‘bring him to reason’ and ‘talk some sense into him’ – when he is on the brink of ‘losing his mind’: “[c]ontrol your unfortunate temper, Percival” (Collins 244). The Count’s influence ‘works like a charm’: the baronet “*doggedly* look[s] down for a little while [...] and then [speaks], with the *sullen submission of a tamed animal*, rather than the becoming resignation of a convinced man” (Collins 246, my italics). At an early stage, the baron’s

“unfortunate” nerves thwart his scheme to have Laura sign over her fortune. Without the sobering influence of the Count at his side, who has left for London to set the final trap, Sir Percival becomes even more ‘unlike himself’. He appears “to be *almost as nervous* and fluttered [...] as *his lady* herself” (Collins 381, my italics): the patriarch rivals Laura in her mental unbalance! At the decisive showdown, he even excites the suspicion of his servants who “should never have supposed that his *health* had been so *delicate*, or *his composure* so *easy to upset*” (Collins 381-382, my italics): “[h]e declared that his master was quite *out of his senses* – not through the *excitement* of drink [...] but through a kind of *panic or frenzy of mind*” (Collins 396, my italics). Significantly, the ‘madman’ signs his own death warrant the moment he no longer follows the Counts’ ‘reasonable’ advice and insists on hunting Walter down by himself.

With regard to Laura, the supposed ‘heroine’ of *The Woman in White*, I have already gone into considerable detail on the subject of her relation to Marian and the change Miss Fairlie undergoes upon becoming Lady Glyde. I agree with Martina Alleuthner in that Collins “clearly criticizes the insipid Laura, who wins her ideal husband by simply sitting still and letting things happen to her, by juxtaposing her to the active, strong-minded and intelligent Marian” (26). Nevertheless, to do the principal role of this flat character justice, it is mandatory to consider a few other episodes of Laura’s dull life. The first time she is described as “altogether unlike herself” (Collins 129) – which constitutes one of Collins’s preferred stylistic devices to indicate incipient insanity – is still during her maiden days: when Laura becomes aware of her own ‘unfortunate attachment’ to her poor drawing-master, in view of her engagement to Sir Percival. This time, her change is one from childish light-heartedness to inconsolable distress and depression; this emotional turmoil mars her formerly radiant beauty with a ghostly pallor and supplants her innocent ease of mind by nervous convulsions. Moreover, Mr Gilmore describes her as “desperate[ly] clinging to the past which bode[s] ill for the future” (Collins 143); what her solicitor hints at – not in so many words – is the vulnerability of Laura’s mental faculties, because ‘reminiscences’ were considered a symptom of insanity. At a later moment, Laura is not merely ‘unlike herself’ but ‘*out of her character*’ when she stands up to her husband and requires him to “treat [her] as a responsible human being” (Collins 246). “This

strong *expression* of the most *open* and the most bitter contempt, was so unlike herself, so *utterly out of her character*, that it *silenced us all*" (Collins 247, my italics). The audience of her passionate outbreak is virtually thunderstruck – speechless with surprise – that gentle Laura should venture to ‘express’ her indignation against her husband ‘openly’; she does indeed ‘forget herself’ and thus breaks with her character as an obedient, lady-like wife.

Her true metamorphosis begins, however, when she finds her guardian half-sister sick with typhoid fever. Much as Anne’s madness can be understood as resulting (at least partially) from her detrimental emotional surroundings, Laura quickly develops cardinal symptoms of mental disturbance in this crisis: “she [is] much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe’s illness calmly” (Collins 358). All those readers who hoped to detect in Laura a change towards a more resolute disposition are sadly disappointed: “she [is] so dreadfully alarmed and distressed, that she [is] quite useless. [...] She only [does] herself harm, without being of the least real assistance” (Collins 357-358), once again. The reader must, however, give her credit for her vehement, if unwise, insistence to visit the sickbed: she “rallie[s] in the most *extraordinary* manner, and show[s] a *firmness and determination* for which I should never have given her credit” (Collins 371, my italics). It is hard to describe Laura’s reaction to Marian’s recovery in more favourable terms than ‘pathetic’ and incredible: “[t]he effect of the good news on poor Lady Glyde was [...] quite *overpowering*. She was *too weak* to bear the *violent reaction*; and [...] she sank into a *state of debility and depression*, which obliged her to keep her room” (Collins 372, my italics). Although common sense suggests that Laura should be relieved and calmed by this good news, she reacts as if her sister’s last hour had come. This scene once more emphasizes Laura’s excessive sensibility and its harmful, maddening effects on the female psyche. It seems therefore merely a matter of course that she should sooner or later exchange the comforting ‘asylum’ of her room for a virtual lunatic asylum. This change of location in Laura’s confinement is also anticipated when Sir Percival sees fit to lock her in her room to prevent further meetings with Anne; “[m]ale security [...] seems always to depend on female claustration” (Miller 199).

Wilkie Collins draws a narrative blank over Laura's experience as the inmate of an actual asylum; thus the "asylum remains a very black 'black box', the melodramatic site of 'the most horrible of false imprisonments', where the sane middle class might mistakenly be sent" (Miller 193). The reader is left to make an educated guess on the basis of her shockingly altered appearance and demeanour upon her rescue; as Walter had anticipated (and desired), the shock on her delicate nervous system has made the likeness between Laura and her half-sister Anne complete. Although Collins does not provide details about the gruesome 'management' Laura underwent, Marian is convinced that "a delay [of her rescue] might be *fatal* to her sister's *intellects*, which were *shaken already by the horror* of the situation" (Collins 422, my italics). When she attempts to interrogate Laura to shed some light on this complot, "her sister's confused and weakened memory [is] able to recall [... nothing but] fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other" (Collins 424). Unwittingly, Marian thus diagnoses Laura with a serious personality disorder which has already reached the aggravated stage of psychosis, where the patient is no longer capable of 'reality testing'. Laura's confinement in a lunatic asylum is also striking in that it shatters the reassuring illusion that only wayward and passionate women must fear patriarchal penalization. Laura is living proof that "the principles which enabled Jane Eyre to maintain her sanity are signally inadequate to save [all women] from the asylum" (Small 205). In the loving care of Marian and Walter, Laura supposedly recovers her former mental balance so that she "almost look[s] like the Laura of past days" (Collins 479); from a modern psychiatric viewpoint, her convalescence appears highly dubious, given the lack of appropriate therapy.

Marian's outstanding character has already been duly noted before: a "sensitive, vehement, passionate nature – a woman of ten thousands in these trivial, superficial times" (Collins 136). I will now trace her change from "the fearless, noble creature [...] with the strong, steady grasp of a man" (Collins 125,124) to her sad end as the "castrated, heterosexualized" (Miller 114) "good angle of [other people's] lives" (Collins 626). In Auerbach's words, 'reformed' Marian is not allowed "to stray an inch from the old maid's prescribed self-sacrificial role as Laura's solicitous protector" (136). The essentially feminine metaphor of tears is

particularly telling in consideration of the substantial change Marian undergoes in the course of the story. At the outset, her “tears do not flow so easily as they *ought* – they come *almost like men’s* tears, with sobs that seem to *tear [her]* in pieces, and that *frighten every one* about [her]” (Collins 164, my italics) – or if they flow, they are “burnt up in the heat of [her] anger” (Collins 182). The masculine restraint on her emotions and the violence of her passionate outbreaks – if she does fail to control them, for once – frighten a society that does not expect (or truly wish) a woman to be ‘in control of herself’. Even though Victorian convention dictates self-government, patriarchal hegemony would rather see woman as the passive object of its own regulative force – in the guise of psychiatry or the law. As the literature of that time frequently exemplifies, men must fear above all those women who are particularly gifted at adjusting themselves to the requirements of society (as compared to those who fail to gain sufficient control over themselves and are hence subject to patriarchal suppression).

In the face of Laura’s suffering, however, Marian reveals her feminine sensibility when “tears – miserable, *weak, women’s tears* of vexation and rage – start to [her] eyes” (Collins 181, my italics). The two sisters are so intimate that Marian fails to “hide for [Laura] the *betrayal* of [her] own weakness – *the weakness of all others* which [Marian knows Laura] most despise[s]” (Collins 181, my italics). Laura’s disgust at Marian’s feminine weakness may be indicative of her need for strong, masculine guidance and protection: even in their homosexual relationship, Laura depends on Marian to assume the male role. The fact that, even in homosexuality, Laura requires (what Butler would term) a ‘butch’ undermines their transgressive potential. In this light, Laura and Marian may be interpreted as merely a minor variation on the ‘heterosexual theme’ – with Laura as an overly feminine woman and Marian as her somewhat masculine partner; the balance still spells ‘heterosexual’ in the end. Beside these normative implications on her relationship with Laura, Marian proves to be not as immune to ‘female weaknesses’ as she generally makes believe. This comes as a shock to all her acquaintances, which is particularly evident in Mr Gilmore’s comment: “[i]f Mr. Fairlie had done it, I should not have been surprised. But *resolute, clear-minded* Miss Halcombe, was *the very last person in the world* whom I should

have expected to find shrinking from the expression of an opinion of her own” (Collins 135, my italics).

Nevertheless, at that point, Marian’s transformation is only at its beginning. It is not until she is ‘confined’ to bed with typhoid fever that she fails in her mission as Laura’s ‘guardian’ and forfeits her empowering, masculine character traits. I consider it no coincidence that Marian’s (mental) health should (be made to) suffer at this precise moment when she has just won her greatest victory: as the first female detective in English fiction (Auerbach 138), she has symbolically unsettled the hegemonic power discourse by spying on the factual ‘discourse’ between two representatives of patriarchal society, Count Fosco and Sir Percival. Even though she is merely a ‘private’ detective of the domestic sphere, who does not actually ‘penetrate’ into the public sphere of men (which admits only Walter), Marian’s case is one of female hybris. By the court of patriarchal supremacy, she is consequently punished for ‘not knowing her place’, for aspiring to gain access to the exclusive sphere of patriarchal discourse. As one who is acutely aware of the ‘rules of the game’, Marian anticipates her doom with a “sudden brightness and clearness, [... which came with] the feverish strain and excitement of all [her] faculties” (Collins 334). What is more, Marian even knows of the nature of her punishment: for locking horns with patriarchal reason, she forfeits her own – threateningly masculine – mental capacity. “My *head* – I am sadly *afraid of my head*. [...] I am afraid of the creeping and throbbing that I feel in my head. If I lie down now, how do I know that I may have *the sense and the strength to rise again?*” (Collins 335, my italics) Similar to Adam’s and Eve’s expulsion from paradise, upon tasting the forbidden fruit of ‘knowledge’, Marian is expelled from the realm of masculine reason. To this purpose her ‘reason’ is consumed in a ‘cathartic fever’ until the “poor lady [is] [...] quite *light-headed*, in a state of *burning fever* [... which brings with it] more or less *wandering of her mind*” (Collins 357,366, my italics). Moreover, Marian is right to doubt her ‘resurrection’ – her ‘sense and strength to rise again’ – once she has succumbed to patriarchal dominance. In the conclusion, Marian’s metaphorical castration will be interpreted as a ‘carte blanche’ which absolves her formerly transgressive character of all suspicions concerning her (moral) sanity.

Amazingly enough, Marian is not the only one to bewail her 'sickly condition'; it is Count Fosco who "condoles with her on the inevitable failure[, ...who] lament[s ...] the cruel necessity which sets [their] interests at variance, and opposes [them] to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy [he] should have been of Miss Halcombe – how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of [HIM]" (Collins 337, my italics). As concerns the heated argument at Marian's sick bed between the Count and an ignorant physician, it is unclear whether the mastermind truly loses "all the self-control which he had so judiciously presented on former occasions" (Collins 373); this uncharacteristic outbreak of fury may be likewise seen as another strategic act to rid himself of an unpleasant witness to his complot. The Count himself asserts that

the *one weak place* in [his] heart [... is n]othing but [his] *fatal admiration* for Marian [which] restrained [him] from stepping in to [his] own rescue [in her interest. ...] In brief, Fosco, at this serious crisis, was *untrue to himself*. Deplorable and *uncharacteristic fault*! Behold the cause, in my Heart – behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the *first and last weakness* of Fosco's life! (Collins 611, my italics)

One might argue that it amounts to 'madness' on the part of the Count to humour Marian in this critical situation; as I have analysed with reference to Laura, 'madness' begins where a character is no longer (true to) him/herself, where s/he 'forgets his/her part'. Obviously, these two masterminds engage in a battle of wits to the death; and even though it is Count Fosco's anonymous corpse that is laid out in a Paris morgue, I would argue that Marian's eventual fate is equally 'lifeless' and humiliating to the memory of her once powerful character. In a less straightforward re-interpretation of their relationship, one might recognize them not simply as enemies but as thwarted lovers, even soulmates. 'Under happier circumstances', theirs would have been a perfect love match; if only the Count had not already been married and, equally important, if he had not chosen 'business over sentiment'! In this light, Marian's passionate vengeance, which is so strikingly 'out of character' with her new, humbled self, could be reinterpreted as a personal vendetta against the man who has doomed her to eternal spinsterhood – instead of a punitive campaign in Laura's name. It appears equally plausible that Marian should wish Fosco dead in an (un)conscious attempt to eradicate all evidence of her own illegitimate attachment to this villain – whom she ought to abhor 'for Laura's sake' but who 'charms' her into loving

him all the same. “All the *woman* flushed up in Marian’s face [...] ‘Begin with the Count!’ she whispered eagerly. ‘*For my sake*, begin with the Count.’ (Collins 450, my italics) Contrary to his promise of assistance – “if [he] can ever be of any help again, at any future time” (Collins 124) – Walter is unwilling to grant disempowered Marian even this small favour. *Her* interests are no longer of any interest to him: “We must begin, *for Laura’s sake*, where there is the best chance of success” (Collins 450, my italics) for *him*.

The next time the reader lays eyes on Marian Halcome, her face is “changed, changed as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and *wild*, and looking at [Walter] with a *strange terror* in them. The face *worn and wasted* piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as *with a brand*” (Collins 410, my italics). Now that Marian has been ‘branded’ by patriarchal judgement, there are no more traces of her former energetic and self-assertive self. Instead she contentedly settles into the role of Walter’s housekeeper. At this point, she is so thoroughly ‘feminized’ that the mere prospect of wasting herself away as the nanny of Laura’s and Walter’s children brings “bright tears of happiness” (Collins 626) to the eyes of a once reasonable woman. In rare moments, Marian exhibits some of her former eagerness to ‘take an active part’ and piteously pleads with Walter: “Oh, Walter, for God’s sake[,...] let me go with you. Don’t refuse me because I’m only a woman. I must go! I will go!” (Collins 583). Now that the tables are turned and she has allowed Walter to ‘make Laura his own’, she has forfeited all power over him. As I will argue in my analysis of Walter, the patriarch cannot grant Marian her resurrection to activity; she must henceforth accept the conventional female confinements of the private sphere and affect to be content with her lot. Balée comments that, even though Collins “wanted to portray women as he really saw them – strong and capable – [...], he did not want to alienate his readers [...]; instead he opts for a conventional] happy ending [...] to disguise his real aim, social reform” (210).

I have chosen to analyse the twist of Walter’s fate – the novel’s supposed male ‘hero’ – at the end of this chapter, as his social climbing can be best understood when the reader is already familiar with the framework conditions which allowed for his upward mobility. I have already discussed his effeminate and ‘destitute’ position as a male governess and hinted that he will be doubly indebted to

madness for his change in 'fortune'. In the beginning, it is Pesca who places Walter at Limmeridge and advises him 'to make his hay while the sun is shining' (cf. Collins 22). In the end, it is again Pesca whom Walter can 'use' as a leverage to extract a confession from the Count. Thereby he not only re-establishes his wife's identity but conveniently rehabilitates her hereditary title, which, in turn, entitles him to return to Limmeridge as the master instead of the servant of this eminent estate. While Walter makes ample use of his friend's promise that "his life belong[s] to [his] dear friend, Walter, for the rest of [his] days" (Collins 15), this metaphorical 'possession' of Pesca's life turns into a matter-of-fact 'usage' of Anne's life. I have also noted that Walter is 'uneasy', to say the least, about the undeniable influence that this madwomen exerts on his existence: "[i]t seemed almost like a *monomania* to be tracing back everything strange that happened, everything unexpected that was said, always to the same hidden source and the same sinister influence" (Collins 81, my italics). Besides, I have already argued that – out of the three men who reaped a benefit from Anne's untimely death – only Walter truly lives to enjoy its 'blessing' effects. His character development hinges on Laura's loss of identity, her "death-in-life" (Pedlar 78), and thus, by implication, Anne's death. In all fairness it must be noted that his character does exhibit a tendency of his own for evolving from effeminate impotence to masculine power: "I had not wanted for practice [... during] my experience in Central America[;...] if any one man tried to stop me, I was a match for him" (Collins 511). On his mission to manhood, it is of paramount importance that he should not be rivalled by anybody in his patriarchal function as Laura's protector. Therefore, Marian, as Laura's former guardian, must lose her influence in equal measure as he gains power. In order for Laura to require a 'knight in shiny armour', he must also make sure that she should not 'rehabilitate' herself of her own accord. For only with a child-woman as his wife, can Walter be sure of his patriarchal supremacy; under these circumstances, "his passion for her, now become a part-parental, part-pedophilic condescension, no longer makes him feel like a woman" (Miller 204). This anxiety to keep Laura his submissive dependant is particularly striking when the convalescent first 'voices' her sincere wish to escape her "terrible mute helplessness [and be no longer ...] so useless – [...] such a burden" (Collins 478). Instead of taking her at her word – "Oh, don't, don't, don't treat me like a child!" (Collins 478) – Walter offers her nothing but a

fairy tale solution fit to comfort a child; he thus cheats her out of a fair chance to assume “her own little position of importance, to raise herself in her own estimation and in [his and Marian’s]” (Collins 479). Even when he assists her in asserting her identity, he refuses her a say in her own story; she functions merely as the prop of his hegemonic reasoning. (Pedlar 80) In his dealing with Marian, Walter exhibits equal reluctance to give a voice to Marian’s version of events; at least until everything is signed, sealed and delivered and no serious harm can be done. It is only when he is snugly settled at Limmeridge, with his infant son to be heir to the estate, that he purports to “let Marian end the story” (Collins 627) – now that he “has written all” (Collins 627) and thus already ‘fixed reality’. Hendershot argues that “Hartright lets Marian regain control of her discourse only after the story has finished. If Marian ends the story, she ends it with silence” (131-132). Marian anticipates her silence, even embraces it, “[b]ecause silence is safe – and we have need of safety in this house” (Collins 264); a house which may stealthily turn into a threatening rather than sheltering ‘asylum’, just as Blackwater Park did. In this context, it is noteworthy that neither of the two women is allowed to present an ‘eye-witness account’ in the third volume; their contributions are re-narrated, and presumably ‘rectified’, by Walter – the editor of this narrative of his own ‘career’. In this light, I would argue, Walter emerges not so much as the true hero but the ‘master’ of the plot – and its true winner: he not only achieves his financial and romantic goals but also lives to see all male rivals (in love or fortune) dead.

5. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

In the preceding chapters, the reader has witnessed the 'success stories' of Jane Eyre, a self-assertive young governess on her way to (a novel understanding of) womanhood, and of her male counterpart Walter Hartright, "a four-guinea-a-week male governess, a Jane Eyre in trousers" (Sutherland xxii qtd. in Alleuthner 118). In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon traces the infamous career of a heroine who appears to be wholly different from those female stock characters that are traditionally found in Victorian literature. Lady Audley's story may be understood as the very antithesis of a 'bildungsroman'; in other words, hers is the story of the dire fate of a woman who demands too much, who aspires too high, who becomes too active, who attempts to break out of the Victorian framework of patriarchal hegemony. Like Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Braddon's masterpiece belongs to the literary genre of the sensation novel and, as such, is indebted to the dramatic tradition of the 'melodrama'. This theatrical genre was imported from France and appropriated to the British taste: the "revolutionary fervour of the French models was transformed into a domestic context, in which rebellion was not against political leaders but against those representatives of authority that ordinary people might find themselves in conflict with" (Pedlar 71).

The author openly acknowledged that her novel not only forms part of the same literary genre but was greatly inspired by this particular novel, *The Woman in White*, as concerns central plot structures and themes. In the course of this chapter, I will include a comparison between the two novels and indicate those aspects of *Lady Audley's Secret* which I perceive as markedly different from its 'precursor'. I would argue that the most essential distinction lies in their antithetical portrayal of the female 'heroine'. Regardless of whether Laura Fairlie or Marian Halcombe is regarded as the 'true heroine' of *The Woman in White*, both women are essentially 'good' characters. While Laura lives up to the Victorian ideal of mute submissiveness to perfection, even her somewhat wayward half-sister – in all her disturbing, masculine potency – is morally upright and knows when it is time for her to step aside and let men take over. Despite Marian's rebellion – in personal appearance and character alike – against the

'claustrophobic' role that Victorian society has allotted to the 'weaker sex', her virtue and (virgin) purity go unquestioned. Collins's heroines thus stand in stark contrast to Braddon's multi-faceted villainess; 'my lady' transcends those immobilized women by 'virtue' of her moral degeneracy, which allows her to take an active role in the marriage market and thus to satisfy her 'lust for luxury'. Richard Nemesvari is convinced that the heroine's true offence lies in "her physical appearance and assumed personality, which so closely match the Victorian ideal of the angle in the house that they effectively cloak a wilful character ready to dare bigamy and attempted murder to get what she wants" (517). Needless to say, this female usurpation of masculine supremacy is of limited duration and the heroine will not go unpunished for breaking with Victorian convention. In the light of Lady Audley's pitiless penalization, I will argue how the undisputable virtue of Collins's (principal) female characters serves both to protect them from and confine them within the Victorian framework of patriarchal hegemony.

When the reader is first introduced to the 'heroine' of the story, she is the picture of childish innocence, female benevolence and angelic piety – Lucy Graham is indeed a virtual 'angle in the house'. It is however something more than her "amiable and gentle nature" (Braddon 7) that makes her fellow beings "burst out into senile raptures with her grace, her beauty, and her kindness" (Braddon 7).

For you see Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that *magic power* of fascination by which a woman can *charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile*. Everybody loved, admired, and praised her [...]; everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived. In her better fortunes, as in her old days of dependence, wherever she went she seemed to take sunshine and gladness with her. (Braddon 7,43, my italics)

At a later point, Lucy's "charm" is accounted for by reference to her child-like nature. Within a Victorian ideological framework, this childishness likens her to the divine state of innocence and 'artlessness' characteristic of children, which could not possibly be 'affected' and thus bears evidence of Lucy's pure character:

That very *childishness had a charm* which few could resist. The *innocence and candour of an infant* beamed in Lady Audley's face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. [...] Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy velvets and stiff rustling silks, till she looked like a *child*

tricked out for a masquerade, was as *girlish* as if she had but *just left the nursery*. All her amusements were *childish*. She hated reading, or study of any kind, and loved society; [... and in her new home that] the generous baronet had transformed [...] into a little palace for his young wife, [...] Lady Audley seemed as happy as *a child surrounded by new and costly toys*. (Braddon 43, my italics)

Above all, Braddon's heroine is a skilled actress who resolves – upon her rebirth as 'Lucy Graham' – to maintain a lifelong charade in her endeavour to escape her former existence: "[n]o more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations" (Braddon 12). Her act is so convincing that she manages to hide even this thriving motive – her anger and bitterness against "poverty and deprivation" (Braddon 188) – so that people deem her constitutionally "light-hearted, happy, and contented *under any circumstances*" (Braddon 7, my italics). Although Miss Graham herself praises her beauty as her chief weapon, I would argue that her (temporary) success is full as much due to her acting skills as to her "wonderful beauty" (Braddon 11).

It is not surprising that Sir Michael Audley should "fall ill of the terrible fever called love" (Braddon 8) – obviously an undesirable and unhealthy condition, painful to cure and potentially lethal (to one's venerable name) – when he is exposed to

the tender fascination of those soft and melting blue eyes, the graceful beauty of that [...] drooping head, with its wealth of showering flaxen curls; the low music of that gentle voice; the perfect harmony which pervaded every charm, and made all doubly charming in this woman; [he could not] resist his destiny. Destiny! Why, she was his destiny! (Braddon 7-8)

In his love-blind naivety, the baronet would never believe that his wealth and position might induce Lucy to accept his hand in marriage.

[H]e dismissed the thought [...] with a shudder. It pained him too much to believe for a moment that anyone so lovely and innocent could value herself against a splendid house or a good old title. (Braddon 8)

'I scarcely think there is a *greater sin*, Lucy, [...] than that of a woman who marries a man she does not love [...]; *nothing but misery* can result from a marriage dictated by any motive but truth and love.' (Braddon 10, my italics)

When Lucy prostrates herself before her suitor in passionate desperation, however, his noble speech is quickly forgotten; rather than losing the object of his desire altogether, he consents to enter into marriage on Lucy's terms.

'You ask too much of **me**! Remember what my life has been. [...] Do not ask too much of me, then. I *cannot* be disinterested; I *cannot* be blind to the advantages of such an alliance. *I cannot, I cannot!* [...] Don't ask too much of me, [...] I have been selfish from my babyhood.' [...]

Beyond her *agitation* and her *passionate vehemence*, there was an *undefined something in her manner* which filled the baronet with a vague alarm. [...]

'Well, Lucy, I will not ask too much of you. I dare say I am a romantic old fool; but if you do not dislike me, and if you do not love anyone else, I see no reason why we should not make a very happy couple. Is it a bargain, Lucy?' (Braddon 11, my italics except where in bold)

In her dissertation on the domestication of women, Kari Conness analyses *Lady Audley's Secret* against an economic backdrop. With recourse to Lovell, she argues that Helen/Lucy undermines patriarchal predominance by actively participating in its marriage economy: her "wry acceptance of the power of this world and women's dependence on it [...]" exists only to manipulate the system and advance her own purposes in the masculinely-determined marketplace" (Conness 63). Consequently, the self-assertive heroine not merely "take[s] great, capitalistic steps to reinvent herself" (Conness 68) but exhibits a masculine capability to succeed in the market exchange. Similar to a cool economist, Helen relies on her commercial intuition of how to 'sell' her assets to the highest bidder; by implication, she is willing to 'buy' her maid's loyalty – for she knows that 'there is no such thing as a free lunch'. By "demonstrate[ing] her mastery of the public sphere [..., however, she dismisses] the feminine codes of docility and passivity; it is for this that the novel must punish her and re-establish patriarchy" (Conness 70).

Apart from its mercenary implications, this introductory scene may be interpreted as Lucy Graham's first betrayal of her 'delicate mental balance' – of the "undefined something in her manner" which alarms her husband-to-be even though he cannot account for his premonition. This "vague alarm" and his prophecy that "nothing but misery" can result from such a match may account for the "strong emotion at work in his heart [upon his engagement; it is] neither joy, nor triumph, but something almost akin to *disappointment*; some stifled and *unsatisfied longing* which lay heavy and dull at his heart, as if he had carried a corpse in his bosom" (Braddon 12, my italics). A less superstitious interpretation may account for the baronet's sentiments as that of a "romantic old fool" who is

wounded by this disillusionment and consequently feels “disappointment” rather than ‘triumph’ and “unsatisfied longing” rather than ‘joy’; in short, this is the portrait of a naïve lover who mourns the figurative “corpse” of his romantic illusions. Worst of all, this ‘disenchantment’ is brought upon him by the very person whom he believed to be superior to all earthly temptations – in whom it pains him particularly to see the contemporary mercenary motive for wedlock confirmed. Once Lady Audley’s ‘secret’ has been disclosed, however, *Robert Audley believes* that his uncle ‘somehow knew it all along’; Sir Michael could not have been “really” surprised, for he was never able to shake off that initial, ‘vague feeling of something wanting’ throughout his wedded bliss.

I do not believe that Sir Michael Audley had ever **really** believed in his wife. He had loved and admired her; he had been *bewitched* by her beauty and *bewildered* by her *charms*; but that sense of *something wanting*, that *vague feeling* of loss and disappointment which had come upon him on the summer’s night of his betrothal, had been with him more or less distinctly ever since. (Braddon 279, my italics except where in bold)

In Robert’s shoes, it is of course mandatory to stress this point – to assert that Sir Michael cannot possibly have been ‘truly’ happy with this charming impostor for a wife. Otherwise, “how can [he] ever forgive [him]self? [...H]ow can [he] ever cease to hate [him]self for having brought this grief upon [his beloved uncle]?” (Braddon 290) At an earlier moment, however, when Robert still deliberates with himself whether he ought to reveal ‘my lady’s’ double-dealing, he himself refers to his uncle as “the man who has believed in her” (Braddon 201). Even in the hour of Lucy’s confession, the baronet himself appears unable – or unwilling – to face facts: “[w]hat was this story that he was listening to? *Whose* was it, and to what was it to lead? It *could not be his wife’s*; he had heard her simple account of her youth, and had *believed in it as he had believed in the Gospel*” (Braddon 277, my italics). Who can blame benevolent Sir Michael for never suspecting falseness behind the ‘charming’ façade of his “gentle, innocent, loving, little wife” (Braddon 16)? After all, he merely ‘judged’ her character according to the conventions of his time – when a woman’s candid face was considered sufficient proof of her impeccable character. Even Robert Audley “wondered sometimes, as it was *only natural* [he] should, whether [he] was not the victim of some horrible *hallucination*; whether such an alternative was not *more probable* than that a *young and lovely woman* should be *capable of so foul and treacherous a [crime]*” (Braddon 273-

274, my italics). “Are [not] women merciful, or loving, or kind in proportion to their grace?” (Braddon 217) While “this woman’s hellish power” (Braddon 217) may shake his firm belief in beauty’s essential goodness, Robert remains convinced that her “youth and beauty, [her] grace and refinement, only make the horrible secret of [her] life more horrible” (Braddon 215). Nevertheless, even after the barrister has found sufficient evidence for Helen’s double dealing, he experiences moments of doubt – when he is no longer sure of his own ‘reasoning’:

Why was it that I saw some strange mystery in my friend’s disappearance? Was it a monition or a *monomania*? What if I am wrong after all? What if this chain of evidence which I have constructed link by links is woven out of *my own folly*? What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crochets – the *nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor*? [...] Oh, my God, if it should be *in myself* all this time *that the mystery lies*. (Braddon 202, my italics)

Clearly, there is a guilty conscience at work in the barrister’s effort to disprove his own monomania and find ample evidence that his (self-)righteous actions served a ‘greater cause’. After Lucy’s confession, his uncle willingly grants Robert the absolution he so desperately needs in order to trust (again) in his own reasoning, to believe in his own sanity: “[n]o, no, Robert, you did right – you did right; I wish that God had been so merciful as to take my miserable life before this night; but you did right” (Braddon 290). In my analysis of Robert, I will return to this ‘greater cause’ – the defence of patriarchal hegemony against female agency – for which he is willing to inflict grief on a loved one and whose priority even Sir Michael acknowledges.

For the present, it is time to shed some light on the dubious past of this ‘charming fairy’, who instils in her gullible husbands “a yearning wish to have done with life” (Braddon 4) rather than see the lovely mask plucked off this vile bigamist. By her own account, ‘my lady’ was born into poverty and misery as the only-daughter of Captain Maldon – a spendthrift and drunkard – and of an incarcerated madwoman; (I shall return to her mad mother in my analysis of Helen’s/Lucy’s own alleged madness). When she is told, upon growing up, that she is “pretty – beautiful – lovely – bewitching” (Braddon 278), Helen – though ‘heartless’ by her own description – takes heart at her beauty: “in spite of the secret of my life [i.e. her hereditary madness] I might be more successful in the world’s great lottery

than my companions” (Braddon 278). So the belle puts herself on display and waits for the “rich suitor – the wandering prince” (Braddon 278) to come and elevate her to such wealth and fortune as her charming beauty may afford her. Although open allusion to such mercenary motives may have been frowned upon in respectable society, Helen is certainly no singular case at her time. After all, women were left with no alternative other than to secure themselves an affluent husband if they sought ‘to make their way in society’ – or in Helen’s case work her way out of poverty.

George Talboys’s view on this sell-out – of which he accuses only Helen’s father – once more presents him as a naïve, sentimental stock character who has neither the heart nor the brains to think ill of his “pretty little wife” (Braddon 16): “[Her father] was a drunken old hypocrite, and he was ready to sell my poor little girl to the highest bidder. Luckily for me, I happened just then to be the highest bidder; [...] and as it was love at first sight on both sides, my darling and I made a match of it” (Braddon 17). It is indeed ironic that George should simultaneously condemn the old man’s ‘base motives’ and rejoice in his ‘good fortune’ that he just so happened to meet these requirements. Like Sir Michael after him, the dragoon is anxious to take his prize at whatever price. The two husbands are also brothers in faith when it comes to their unwillingness – or inability – to scratch a woman’s charming surface; neither of them risks revealing the heroine’s limited capacity for love and its conditional association with wealth and luxury. For Helen/Lucy, this inseparable link between the mercenary and ‘romantic’ aspects of matrimony is of such paramount importance that she admits to a direct correlation between her lover’s fortune and the intensity of her love for him.

I think I loved him *as much as it was in my power to love anybody*; not more than I have loved you, Sir Michael; *not so much*; for when you married me *you elevated me* to a position he could never have given me. [... Yet] I loved him very well, *quite well enough to be happy with him as long as his money lasted*. (Braddon 279, my italics)

Once her husband’s pecuniary situation changes for the worse, however, Helen’s love for him cools quickly: she accuses him of having “done her a cruel wrong in making her [his] wife [...] if [he] could give her nothing but poverty and misery [...] until] her tears and reproaches [drive him] almost mad” (Braddon 18). With

recourse to Conness's metaphor of the market-place, Helen's indignation can be interpreted as a well-founded 'charge': after all, she 'bargained' for security and luxury in return for her charming beauty. So why should she not insist on her 'right to exchange' if the other party fails to 'deliver' as agreed? Although, in church, she certainly pledged to stay with her husband for better or for worse, Helen's economic reasoning considers herself the victim of a fraud. By declaring herself "an ill-used creature, deceived by the baseness of mankind, and the victim of unmerited sufferings in the way of poverty and deprivation" (Braddon 188, *my italics*), she puts up her defence. As she herself was 'basely ill-used' by *mankind*, who is to judge her if she pays them back in their own coin? Just as Helen was deceived by her first husband, who purported to be a 'good catch', Lucy deceives her second husband with her skilled performance of a virtuous woman. A 21st century reader might even consider 'my lady's' duplicity less cruel than George's pretence at providing for his family: after all, she did live up to the expectations she raised upon entering into marriage with Sir Michael. What is more, she openly confessed that he must not expect her to act nobly and disinterestedly; she even avowed that she could offer him her warm regard and gratefulness but not her love. Regardless of Lucy's numerable faults of character, she did stay true to this nuptial promise and "made the sunshine of [Sir Michael] life" (Braddon 223). Even when 'my lady' has played her game and lost it, she – as well as the reader – remains convinced that she "might have been a good woman for the rest of [her] life, if fate would have allowed [her] to be so" (Braddon 281). I will come back to this aspect in my analysis of Robert Audley when I challenge his fixed conviction that Lucy's secret must be revealed at all costs.

In contrast to Lucy's 'matter-of-fact' disclosure, George Talboys's nuptial promise is an empty one; the boisterous dragoon is indeed a 'fraud' in that he fails to provide for Helen, as a Victorian husband certainly ought to do. In his naivety, he lacks the insight that his own father will sever all (financial) ties upon his 'unsuitable' marriage. Instead of putting a real effort into securing employment – so as to support his little family – Talboys falls into a deep depression and wallows in apathetic self-pity. When she becomes 'infected' with her husband's melancholy, even a Victorian reader might have sympathized with poor Helen – if her own depression had not taken on such a dramatic scale upon the birth of her

son: "I did not love the child; for he had been left a burden upon my hands" (Braddon 280). A 21st century reader is probably aware of the high incidence of puerperal depression and its milder form, referred to as 'baby blues'. Based on this knowledge, s/he will not condemn this woman, who has difficulties in relating to her new-born in (what is deemed) a 'normal way'; instead, s/he will take the detrimental circumstances of Helen's existential fear into account and sympathize with her. It is therefore exceedingly difficult to grasp the extent of Helen's gross 'crime against maternity' from a Victorian perspective. I have repeatedly stressed the sentimental value Victorians attributed to this 'sublime state' which was the sole acceptable answer to female aspirations for self-fulfilment; as a mother, and only as a mother, the Victorian woman pursues her true vocation. Within a Victorian framework, maternity was considered not only a culturally and socially desirable condition. As I have explained in detail in the introductory chapter on Victorian gender ideologies, woman's desire to give birth to and care for her offspring was indeed viewed as a biological fact, a constitutional drive that was rooted in her reproductive system. In this light, it is 'madness' in a woman to antagonise this inner kernel of her female nature. By rejecting the child who embodies her poverty and desperation, Helen thus commits an unpardonable sin against patriarchal ideology and Victorian gender stereotypes. Helen is well aware that she 'flies in the face of reason'; she forestalls the patriarchal judgement and pronounces herself mad.

My baby was born, and the *crisis* which had been fatal to my mother arose for me. [...] I became *subject to fits of violence and despair*. At this time I think *my mind first lost its balance*, and for the first time I crossed that *invisible line* which separates reason from madness. [...] I escaped; but I was *more irritable* perhaps after my recovery; less inclined to fight the hard battle of the world. [...] At last these *fits of desperation resolved themselves* into a desperate purpose. I determined to run away from this *wretched home* which *my slavery* supported. (Braddon 280, my italics)

This passage is loaded with innumerable footholds for interpretation. Firstly, it casts Helen as a passive sufferer, an unfortunate weakling on whom her hereditary burden of madness wreaks havoc. Thereby, she seeks to absolve herself of all responsibility for her dubious actions – she was merely the puppet of an irresistible force. Besides, Helen did not bring upon herself this stroke of fate by immoral behaviour but had unwittingly inherited this taint of insanity; she had

innocently “sucked [it] in with [her] mother’s milk” (Braddon 132). Most importantly, even the vile determination to desert her child was a product of those “fits” of desperation – *they*, not she, “resolved themselves” into this “desperate purpose”. In this respect, Helen seeks refuge in the contemporary notion of madness as an overpowering force, especially in the case of women; this aspect will be further explained in the conclusion where it will be shown to feature particularly prominently in the work of the male author. In contrast, Helen/Lucy – as the figment of a *female* imagination – exploits this masculine concept; she is thus living proof that an (allegedly) insane woman may not only ‘master’ her disease but may even ‘use’ it to her advantage.

Much as she purports to be a ‘slave’ to her insanity, she describes her former existence as virtual ‘slavery’: upon her husband’s desertion, she drudged hard to support her infant son and her good-for-nothing father, who would take away her humble income and spend it in public houses. This hyperbolic language is reminiscent of the tradition of melodrama to which I have alluded at the beginning of the chapter. In this context, the reader may also recall my account of contemporary lawsuits against criminal women and the motives for their melodramatic pleadings, in chapter 2.3 (Conceptualizing ‘madness’). Helen’s sentimental speech assaults Victorian ideologies in yet another respect: when she expresses her wish to leave her “wretched home”, she desecrates the sacrosanct illusion of domestic bliss. As in *The Woman in White*, hearth and home obviously fail to serve this woman as an ‘asylum’, as a comfortable shelter against the vicissitudes of public life. Quite on the contrary, the ‘little housewife’ is made to feel the repercussions of her husband’s failure in the public sphere. At the same time, she herself is not allowed to try her hand as a breadwinner as this would bring dishonour to her husband and threaten his position as the pater familias. Once George has deserted her, however, Helen feels free to assume the precarious position of a governess – this awkward social limbo which grants women limited access to public life at the dire price of entering into an often tedious servitude. At first, Helen thus merely exchanges one form of ‘slavery’ for another; for “what labour is more wearisome than the dull slavery of a governess?” (Braddon 280)

Before I go into greater detail on Lucy Graham, it is worthwhile to give some thought to the framework conditions which both ‘necessitated’ and allowed for the heroine’s ‘rebirth’ as a meek governess. While I have already characterized her selfish father as a vain, self-centred drunkard, I have so far only alluded to the abrupt departure of her husband. As George himself explains to a fellow passenger on his return to England, he “left [his] little girl asleep, with her baby in her arms, and with *nothing but a few blotted lines* to tell her why her faithful husband had *deserted her [...]* – ‘*Deserted her!*’ exclaimed the governess. ‘Yes. [... I] ran out of the house, declaring that I would *never enter it again*” (Braddon 17-18, my italics). In his misery, George comes close to committing suicide so that Helen’s father should be obliged to take her back under his wings; he is “*half out of [his] mind*, and [feels] a strong inclination to throw [him]self into the sea, so as to leave [his] poor girl free to make a better match” (Braddon 18, my italics). His hurried farewell letter informs Helen that he is “going away to *try [his] fortune in a new world*; and that if [he] succeed[s he] should come back to bring her plenty and happiness, but that if [he] fail[s he] should never look upon her face again” (Braddon 19, my italics). Especially with his ‘incapacity in mind’ to “get anybody to believe in [his] capacity” (Braddon 18), George’s attempt to make a fortune in some obscure, far-off land appears ill-fated. By his own account, the “dashing, reckless, extravagant, luxurious, champagne-drinking dragoon” (Braddon 19) would not have braved poverty, starvation and illness if it had not been for the “purifying influence of [his] love” (Braddon 19). This masculine need for the ‘purifying influence’ of women – for women’s moral guidance and gentle correction of men’s rakish habits – is a central motif of *Lady Audley’s Secret*; it is played out in two juxtaposed couples: George Talboys and Helen Madlon, Robert Audley and Clara Talboys. Robert and Clara embody the success of such ‘moral management’ and thus reaffirm the Victorian stereotype of woman’s superior morality and her beneficial effect as a paragon of virtue. In contrast, Helen’s ‘true’ character scarcely correlates with this charming fairy tale; the fact that her husband nevertheless feels her ‘purifying influence’ proves this Victorian myth to be a sham. This motif of woman as man’s virtuous redeemer features also prominently in *Jane Eyre*. Helen, or rather her husband, initially fosters this Victorian myth – only to deconstruct it all the more forcefully in a second step. In contrast, Jane refutes this sentimental idea from the outset when she refuses to

indulge Rochester's passive salvation fantasies. Instead, she explains to him that everybody must work out their own salvation if they hope to find true peace of mind. Only once Rochester has learned this lesson and done penance in his own way, Jane can return to him; even then, however, she consents to be his "comforter [but not his] rescuer" (Brontë 321-322). A variation of this motif can also be found in *The Woman in White*, because Walter Hartright's development from an effeminate servant to a prosperous landlord relies on his quest to protect and 'earn' his beloved Laura. It is only under the wise guidance of Marian – and with her lovely half-sister as the virtuous trophy for his efforts – that Walter overcomes his former "extravagance [... and] manage[s his ...] resources as carefully" (Collins 10) as reason dictates.

Let us return to *Lady Audley's Secret* and consider whether Helen's first husband might not guard the same secret which she so willingly reveals in the moment of (apparent) truth: her madness. For George's existential crisis seems to have addled his brains; from a modern psychiatric viewpoint, the fervid description of his toil and trial verges on psychotic delusions:

Through all the dreary time of that probation, wasn't her pretty hand beckoning me onwards to a happy future? *Why, I have seen her* under my wretched canvas tent, sitting by my side, with her boy in her arms, *as plainly as I had ever seen her* in the one happy year of our wedded life. (Braddon 20, my italics)

Given this bleak prospect, one is inclined to agree with Helen that, after three and a half years, "[she has] a right to think that he is dead, or that he wishes [her] to believe him dead" (Braddon 181). Who is to blame a deserted wife – in all probability a widow by that time – when she decides that "his shadow shall not stand between [her] and prosperity" (Braddon 181)? Victorian society does. As will be analysed more systematically in the conclusion, Helen is labelled '(morally) mad' because of her unfeminine decision to leave hearth and home – worse, to desert her son – so as to gain entrance to the public sphere of patriarchal power economics.

Other than her husband's abrupt departure, Helen has another reason for resenting her 'prince charming': "I recognized a separate wrong done me by George Talboys. His father was rich; his sister was living in luxury and

respectability; and I, his wife, and the mother of his son, was a slave allied for ever to beggary and obscurity" (Braddon 280). It is indeed hard to believe that a loving husband and father would rather abandon his little family for an indeterminate period in order to embark on such a hopeless quest, when he might instead appeal to his affluent father. As Helen usually had "a peculiar right to have every whim and fancy of her innocent heart indulged" (Braddon 17), it is even more surprising that her husband should refuse this most sensible of all her requests: "[n]o my pretty one; it is easy to starve but it is difficult to stoop" (Braddon 146). Even if Talboys Junior was unwilling to swallow his pride and 'beg for money', his father might have put in a good word for him and found him a position in England. For although Talboys Senior makes an example of George in that he publicly excoriates and disowns him – "I must ask you to remember that I have no longer a son" (Braddon 151) – he would certainly much rather know him safe and sound in England instead of wrestling for life or death in the new world. I believe the father's refusal to consider George's disappearance as a cause for concern may be interpreted as evidence of his sincere concern for his only son. For Talboys Senior would much rather believe his son a treacherous strategist, who tries to tug at his heartstrings by staging his own death, than face the possibility of George's premature demise. Despite his outward composure, the sour old man cannot bear the thought of George's death – perhaps all the more because he refused to be reconciled with his son, whereby he might have broken the fatal chain of causality.

When George comes home to find his wife dead and buried, to all appearances, he winces under the reproach to have "deserted her so cruel [sic], and left her with her pretty boy upon her poor father's hands" (Braddon 34); all of a sudden, he eagerly contradicts himself: "'I did not desert her,' George cried out" (Braddon 34). In the naïve ignorance that is so characteristic of him, he is not prepared to find his girl-bride altered even in one twist of her golden ringlets: "it is only three years and a half this very month since I left England. What can have happened in such a short time as that?" (Braddon 16). As the Victorian 'angle in the house' he believes her to be, "she was hardly likely to have left her father's house" – to have aspired higher than the idyll of the domestic sphere, however wretched its reality may prove in the cold light of the day. As his own "life has been all action,

privation, toil, alternate hope and despair; [he has] had *no time to think* upon the chances of *anything happening to my darling*. What a *blind, reckless fool* I have been! [...] Heaven above! What may not have happened?" (Braddon 20, my italics) It is particularly ironic that it takes a woman to make George Talboys see reason: "I swear to you, Miss Morley, [...] that till you spoke to me tonight, I never felt one shadow of fear" (Braddon 21); so much for male intellect, so much for a caring husband.

When "that sick, sinking dread at [his] heart" (Braddon 21) is at last confirmed, George Talboys exhibits all the sensibility that is typical of a sentimental lover: he "blanch[es] to a deadly whiteness, [...] to a sickly, chalky, greyish white, and [reads her obituary] with an awfull [sic] calmness in his manner" (Braddon 31) before he passes out. In the context of modern psychiatry, his demeanour may also be characterized as an 'acute stress reaction'. In retrospect, this episode marks the onset of George's 'posttraumatic stress disorder': "the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror" (American Psychiatric Association 467). This disease is further characterized by chronic emotional numbing and persistent avoidance of any reference to the traumatic event; otherwise the sufferer will experience "intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event" (American Psychiatric Association 468). In addition, the patient simultaneously shows a "restricted range of affect [– coupled with a] feeling of detachment or estrangement from others [... – and an] exaggerated startle response [that can be linked to] irritability or outbursts of anger" (American Psychiatric Association 468). A close reading of Braddon's text finds evidence of all these symptoms in George Talboys's conduct. Following his 'acute distress', he lapses into a melancholy lethargy and loses all interest in life:

'I shall be better when I've put half the world between me and her grave.'
 [...] What did it matter? [...] One place was the same to him as another, anywhere out of England; what did he care where? [...]
 The quiet form which his grief had taken after its first brief violence left him as submissive as a child to the will of his friend; ready to go anywhere or do anything, never enjoying himself, [...always in] a hopeless, quiet, uncomplaining, unobtrusive resignation peculiar to his simple nature. (Braddon 38,39,42)

In his relationship to Robert Audley, on which I will go into greater detail in my analysis of this 'hero', there is evidence of the above described "estrangement" from a person that once was near and dear to him. Upon the night of his disillusionment, which scenic mimesis is reflected in the turmoil of a thunderstorm, George suffers a second crisis; again, he turns "white and haggard, with [his] great hollow eyes staring out at the sky as if they were fixed upon a ghost" (Braddon 59). As stated in the textbook, he suffers "intense psychological distress" when confronted with a "cue" that brings back these agonizing memories of his 'lost wife'.

What exactly is it that George Talboys discovers when he penetrates into 'my Lady's' penetralia – the innermost, secret and hidden parts of Audley Court that are both shrine, recess as well as sanctuary to her (wiktionary.org)? To all appearances, George merely gazes at the portrait of Lady Audley, which Alicia describes as "unfinished, but wonderfully like" (Braddon 54). Nevertheless, both the spectator and the reader are aware that George's voyeuristic gaze reveals more than a fair-haired belle: he sees through the exaggerated craftsmanship of the Pre-Raphaelite painter right into 'my lady's' tormented soul. At a later point, Lucy laments this voyeuristic rape, the unlawful appropriation of her innermost secrets: "my secrets are everybody's secrets. You know all about it, no doubt" (Braddon 238). After Robert has overcome all obstacles that she has put in his way in order to prevent him from entering her rooms and discovering her secrets, Lucy feels that her secrets are laid bare to the eyes of the public. In this symbolic, voyeuristic moment, Robert's role as the representative of patriarchal society is particularly obvious.

To Robert's eyes, "those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold, [... the] lurid lightness of the blonde complexion, and [the] strange, sinister light [of those] deep blue eyes" (Braddon 57) signify a deep meaning – a meaning at which others may only guess when puzzled by "that pretty pouting mouth [... with its] hard and almost wicked look" (Braddon 57). In view of her subsequent '(pyro)maniac episode', it is worthwhile to consider Lucy's 'fiery' portrayal, which is obviously endowed with metaphorical meaning, similarly to the prophetic storm:

It was like and yet so unlike it [i.e. her face]; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before. [...] Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of colour as if out of raging furnace. Indeed, the crimson dress, the sunshine on her face, the red gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (Braddon 57-58)

Whether out of filial intuition or feminine antipathy, Alicia accounts for this perplexing portrayal in the following way: "I think sometimes a painter is in a manner inspired, and is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally a part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes. We have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture; but I think that she could look so" (Braddon 58, *her italics*). When George looks upon the painted replica of this "beautiful fiend" (Braddon 57), the patriarch comes 'face to face' with his darkest fears: for upon the revelation of Helen's falsehood, he not merely writhes in agony as a disenchanted lover. More importantly, this representative of patriarchal hegemony is forced to look on helplessly while the ideological foundations of his existence collapse like a house of cards.

This episode constitutes more than a moment of revelation for George and a voyeuristic delectation for Robert: the unexpected 'penetration' of the masculine gaze into Lucy's 'intimate' chambers, which she carefully locked and thus believed safe from intrusion, may indeed be interpreted as a metaphorical rape:

[I]f you don't mind crawling upon your hands and knees, you can see my lady's apartments, for that very passage communicates with her dressing-room. She doesn't know it herself, I believe. How astonished she'd be if some black-visored burglar, with a dark lantern, were to rise through the floor some night [...]! (Braddon 55)

If the men are willing to squeeze into this narrow passage, which no (living) man has entered before, they may circumvent Lucy's precautions to protect her virtue – they may 'take her by force'. Much as a respectable girl would be ruined upon her defloration, 'my lady' is no longer safe once her first husband has 'taken possession' of her secret. It is Robert, however, who has roughly torn down the protective baize, who has robbed her of this hymen-like tissue that guards her (virgin) innocence and savoured this first assault on his aunt's character. As the

two men share this voyeuristic pleasure, their violation of Lucy Audley's privacy may be considered a metaphorical gang rape. Again, there is a prophetic quality to this aggression as Lucy will suffer at the hands of both men – united, they seal her fate.

This sexualized interpretation of events may be seen to tie in with Robert's affected 'confession of love': "I feel like the hero of a French novel; I am falling in love with my aunt" (Braddon 46). There must be some hidden truth behind this deliberately ridiculous speech, because Alicia, who is herself not disinterested in Robert, remonstrates with her cousin:

[T]his sort of thing will never do: you are falling over head and ears in love with your aunt. [...] He is in love with my stepmother's wax-doll beauty [...]. He's just the sort of person to fall in love with his aunt. [...] I should have given him up long ago if I'd known that his ideal of beauty was to be found in a toy-shop. (Braddon 68,209)

I will touch upon the topic of Alicia, her hopeless infatuation with Robert and the question of why her cousin does not reciprocate her feelings when I go into detail about Robert Audley and his amorous ties with the Talboys clan. Before I turn to the hero of the story, it is necessary to tell Helen's/Lucy's story up to the point when their paths first cross. The reader may perhaps be intrigued why I have chosen to withhold this matter-of-fact account of the heroine's fate and have so far merely hinted at her infamous career from a deserted wife to the mistress of Audley Court. I have preferred to give an extensive account of the framework conditions in advance in order to plead the case of a woman who cannot hope to escape the harsh punishment of Victorian society. Likewise, Braddon chose to reveal Lucy's antecedents bit-by-bit – no doubt also to retain narrative tension – in an effort to win the reader's sympathy for this "wretched, helpless creature who dropped her mask for a moment" (Braddon 116).

So let me briefly summarize the events of the protagonist's change in fortune from her doleful existence to a life in luxury and splendour. Upon her husband's desertion, Helen tries to make ends meet as a piano teacher; instead of providing for his daughter, however, Captain Madlon takes what little money she can earn and spends it on alcohol. After a while, Helen grows so desperate that she resolves to make her escape, to "seek another home and another fortune"

(Braddon 198). She leaves her infant son in her father's hands and finds a position as junior teacher in London under the assumed name of Lucy Graham. The little charmer makes herself very agreeable to Mrs Vincent so that her employer willingly recommends her as a governess of a country-surgeon's daughters.

Her accomplishments were so brilliant and numerous, that it *seemed strange* that she should have answered an advertisement offering *such very moderate terms of remuneration* as those named by Mr Dawson: but Miss Graham *seemed perfectly well satisfied* with her situation, and she [...] walked through the dull, *out-of-the-way* village to the humble little church three times on Sunday, *as contentedly as if she had no higher aspirations* in the world than to do so all the rest of her life. (Braddon 6-7, my italics)

This passage is highly interesting in that it, once again, stresses Helen's/Lucy's fascinating acting skills: people would think it strange in anybody else to 'sell herself at less than fair value', but Lucy Graham puts on such a convincing show of contentment that the gullible villagers buy her 'comedy of manners'. Or does one do Lucy Graham an injustice by accusing her of insincerity in this particular matter? Perhaps the grief-stricken woman is indeed content to have found this "out-of-the-way" place where she may hope to evade detection and is so warmly welcomed by her fellow beings? Could it be that the same woman who resolved to win "the world's great lottery" (Braddon 278) would, all of a sudden, have "no higher aspirations" than the "dull slavery of a governess" (Braddon 280)? This favourable – because humble – interpretation of Lucy's motives is strengthened by her first reaction to Sir Michael's wooing:

Lucy Graham dropped the brush upon the picture and flushed scarlet to the roots of her fair hair; and then grew pale again, far paler than Mrs Dawson had ever seen her before. [...] 'I had no idea of this. It is the last thing that would have occurred to me.' She [clasped] her hands over her face [and] seemed for some minutes to be thinking deeply. [...] Once or twice, while she sat silently thinking, she removed one of her hands from before her face, and fidgeted nervously with the ribbon [round her neck], clutching at it with a half-angry gesture, and twisting it backwards and forwards between her fingers. 'I think some people are born to be unlucky, Mrs Dawson, [...] it would be a great deal too much good fortune for me to become Lady Audley'. [...] After this conversation they often spoke upon the subject, and Lucy never again showed any emotion whatever when the baronet's admiration for her was canvassed. (Braddon 9-10)

If one is inclined to show clemency, Lucy's demeanour can be interpreted as testifying to her genuine surprise. Not only does she exhibit physical evidence of her agitation, she also draws unnecessary attention to the tell-tale object – her first wedding ring – that is fastened to her neckband. Furthermore, it is striking that she loses her countenance only on this occasion – and this once to such a passionate extent – but henceforth “shows no emotion whatever”. A more suspicious reader may, however, find evidence to the contrary in this passage and congratulate her on – or condemn her all the more harshly for – her thespian abilities. Although it is difficult to imagine that one could colour and pale so convincingly on command, Lucy does hide her face and thus prevents Mrs Dawson from looking upon this ‘mirror’ of her soul; for Victorians considered a person's eyes the window to their souls. This raises a crucial question: what does Lucy try to hide from her interlocutor? Is the hand before her face an innocent gesture to regain her composure or does it screen the more sinister attempt to mask her exultation? Does Lucy hide her guilty conscience – the proof of which metaphorically suffocates her? Or is she more afraid to betray her glee? Would her face give away her vain satisfaction that her plan worked out – that she did not position herself before the eyes of Sir Michael for nothing – that she was right to content herself with Mr Dawson's “very moderate terms of remuneration” (Braddon 6) because her patience would eventually ‘pay off’ nicely? It is utterly impossible to give a final answer to these questions. On the one hand, it does appear highly probable that Lucy should resent having ‘drawn a blank’ at the first attempt and would thus try to re-enter “the world's great lottery” (Braddon 278). On the other hand, it seems equally farfetched that Lucy should have known of this wealthy widower when she applied for the position as a governess in this particular village.

So whether out of sheer luck or by sophisticated design, the penniless governess “made one of those apparently advantageous matches which are apt to draw upon a woman the envy and hatred of her sex” (Braddon 6). Alicia, who “had reigned supreme in her father's house since her earliest childhood” (Braddon 6), resents to hand over her power to this “irretrievably childish and silly [person about whom] Papa is perfectly absurd” (Braddon 40). Other than her step-daughter, however, everybody is charmed by Sir Michael's girl-bride and

considers it “a magnificent match” (Braddon 9). Nobody thinks ill of her for embracing this golden opportunity; her former employer, Mr Dawson, would even “have thought it something *more than madness* in a penniless girl to reject such an offer” (Braddon 10, my italics). This serves as a striking example of the Victorian double standard: although people publicly disparaged a woman for her mercenary motives, they would privately doubt her common *sense* if she let such a golden opportunity pass.

Just when Lucy is comfortably settled into her new position, she learns that her first husband, whom she presumed dead, is about to return to England – with his pockets full of gold and his heart brimming over with joyful anticipation. The heroine is trapped: as Helen Talboys, she is expected to welcome back her lost husband and love him all the more dearly for the hazards he faced on her behalf; as Lucy Audley, however, she would lose her face, her position and her fortune if she abandoned Sir Michael; what is more, she might face charges of bigamy. In financial terms, it would amount to “something more than madness” to relinquish her position as the mistress of Audley Court to return to her first husband. Not only are George’s twenty thousand pounds no match for Sir Michael’s assets, but he has already proven in the past that he is incapable of managing his finances or of obtaining a situation once his pampered wife has squandered his money. A more indulgent view on Lucy may take into consideration that her second husband appears to love her more sincerely and shows more concern for her wellbeing. Even after he has learned of her bigamous double-dealing and suffered terribly from this “cruel blow [...], this] great grief” (Braddon 201), Sir Michael is anxious to know her safe and well-cared for: “you will not be cruel – you will remember how much I loved – [...] I need scarcely tell you that those arrangements [...] for the future comfort of the person I committed to your care [...] cannot be too liberal” (Braddon 292,316). So while George Talboys trusts to fate to provide for his wife and infant son and has “no time to think upon the chances of anything happening to [his] darling” (Braddon 20), Lucy’s second husband does not desert her even when she has brought shame and sorrow upon him. One must, however, take into consideration that the benevolence of the Audley clan is self-serving to a considerable degree. While it is true that the Audleys need not have chosen such a luxurious ‘*maison de santé*’, there is no

doubt that the family would have been obliged to pay for the 'gilded cage' that was to prevent Lucy from bringing further disgrace upon the name of Audley. Although Robert would have Lucy believe that she 'got off cheaply', she knows that she was 'sold at less than fair value': "[h]as my beauty brought me to *this*? Have I plotted and schemed to shield myself, and lain awake in the deadly nights trembling to think of my dangers, for *this*?" (Braddon 311, her italics) In all objectivity, it is indeed patriarchal supremacy – represented by Robert Audley – which reaps the benefit of the "hush [(up)] that succeeds the tempest" (Braddon 285). The heroine is well aware that the patriarch's kindness is not genuine and that she has indeed been brought as low as the Audleys themselves could suffer her to sink:

'You see I do not fear to make my confession to you [...] for two reasons. The first is that you dare not use it against me, because you know it would kill your uncle to see me in a criminal dock; the second is, that law could pronounce no worse sentence than this, a life-long imprisonment in a madhouse. You see I do not thank you for your mercy, Mr Robert Audley, for I know exactly what it is worth" (Braddon 313).

In this context, Miller argues that the "madwoman finds a considerable part of her truth [...] in being juxtaposed to the male *criminal* she is never allowed to be. If, typically, *he* ends up in prison or its metaphorical equivalents, *she* ends up in the asylum or *its* metaphorical equivalents" (Miller 200, his italics).

Even though her ambitious plans were ill-fated from the outset, a cold and calculating economist would still have acted just as Helen/Lucy did: firstly, s/he would have chosen Sir Michael over George Talboys. Secondly, s/he would have done everything in his/her power to cover up the fraud – even if this cover-up involved some unpleasant business such as the exchange of a dying for a prosperous person, the abandonment of one's infant, the bribing of one's own father or the cynical belief in the changefulness of men's hearts:

Dear me, [...] this is very strange! I did not think men were capable of these deep and lasting affections. I thought that one pretty face was as good as another pretty face to them, and that when number one with blue eyes and fair hair died, they had only to look out for number two with black eyes and hair, by way of variety. (Braddon 69)

The heroines true 'fault' appears to lie in her 'passionate nature', which she is able to conceal so well under normal circumstances but which gets the better of

her in rare moments of crisis. This brings me to the supposed core of 'Lady Audley's Secret': her alleged madness. While it is true that her mother eked out the best part of her existence in a lunatic asylum, the heroine herself confesses that the madwoman did not at all resemble the gothic stereotype that haunted Victorian literature and people's minds. Instead of a raving lunatic after the fashion of Brontë's Bertha Mason, Helen Madlon's mother is the picture of childish innocence and the spitting image of the heroine, at least in outward appearance.

I had exaggerated ideas of the horror of her situation. I had no knowledge of the different degrees of madness; and the image that haunted me was that of a distraught and violent creature, who would fall upon me and kill me if I came within her reach. [...] I saw no raving, strait-waistcoated maniac, guarded by zealous gaolers; but a golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature, who seemed as frivolous as a butterfly, and who skipped towards us with her yellow curls decorated with natural flowers, and saluted us with radiant smiles, and gay, ceaseless chatter. (Braddon 277-278)

By the example of Helen Maldon and her mother, Braddon not only challenges contemporary stereotypes of insanity and physiognomy; what is even more exceptional, she draws attention to the social inequity in the 'treatment' of mad(women): Helen claims that her father "would have willingly sacrificed his life to [her mother], and constituted himself her guardian" (Braddon 177) if sheer necessity had not compelled him to pursue his profession. "So here again I beheld what a bitter thing it is to be poor. My mother, who might have been tended by a devoted husband, was given over to the care of hired nurses" (Braddon 177). As we have seen with *Jane Eyre*, those who could afford to care for their mad relations themselves may still have been glad to hire nurses and have the burden taken off their hands. Braddon, however, clarifies that the lower classes were often obliged to send their loved ones to public asylum whereas well-to-do families were free to choose from a variety of 'therapeutic settings'.

Let us return to the heroine and her controversial mental balance. Speaking with Miller, I am convinced that

the text leaves ample room for doubt on the score of Lady Audley's 'madness'. Her acts, including bigamy, arson, and attempted murder, qualify as crimes in a strict legal sense, and they are motivated [...] by impeccably rational considerations of self-interest. [...] The 'secret' let out

at the end of the novel is not, therefore, that Lady Audley is a madwoman but rather that, *whether she is one or not*, she must be treated as such. (Miller 200-201, his italics)

When Robert summons a psychiatrist to have the verdict of insanity pronounced upon 'my lady', even the expert concedes that hers is a peculiar case. It is remarkable how the doctor performs a volte-face in his diagnosis. At first, he finds

no evidence of madness in anything that she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left it in the hope to find a better. There is *no madness* in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is *no madness* there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she *did not grow desperate*. She employed *intelligent means*, and she carried out a conspiracy which required *coolness and deliberation* in its execution. There is *no madness* in that. (Braddon 299-300, my italics)

Being an expert on the human psyche, the psychiatrist senses that he is expected not so much to evaluate as to validate Robert's own 'reasoning' concerning 'my lady's' state of mental health:

'You would wish to prove that this lady is mad, and therefore irresponsible for her actions, Mr Audley?' [...] 'Yes, I would rather, if possible, think her mad. I should be glad to find that excuse for her.' 'And to save the *esclandre* of a Chancery suit, I suppose.' [...] 'Yes,] I ask you to save our stainless name from degradation and shame' (Braddon 299, 301, her italics).

By some mysterious change of heart, the psychiatrist is willing to humour Robert after his brief interview with Lucy:

'I have talked to the lady [...] and *we understand each other very well*. There is *latent insanity!* Insanity which *might never appear*; or which might appear only once or twice in a lifetime. It would be **dementia** in its worst phase perhaps: acute mania; but its duration would be *very brief*, and it would only arise *under extreme mental pressure*. *The lady is not mad*; but she has the *hereditary taint* in her blood. She has the *cunning of madness*, with the *prudence of intelligence*. I will tell you what she is, Mr Audley. *She is dangerous!*' (Braddon 301, my italics except where in bold)

To the modern reader, the doctor's 'diagnosis' describes not so much a lunatic but a fairly 'average person' who acts 'on impulse' in stressful situations, who is apt to commit crimes 'in the heat of the moment'; even in court, Lucy could nowadays plead for 'mitigating circumstances' in view of the "extreme mental pressure" she suffered during these brief spells of insanity. In the light of ma's account of 19th century jurisdiction (cf. chapter 2.3, Conceptualizing 'madness'), a

melodramatic account of her intense emotional turmoil and a rueful admission of her feminine incapability for making (sensible) decisions would probably have led to her acquittal.

In moments of crisis, Helen/Lucy herself tries to mitigate people's verdict by admitting to her alleged madness – “[y]ou should forgive me, for you know *why* I have been so. You know the *secret* which is the key to my life” (Braddon 198, her italics). While it is true that the heroine may be of an irritable disposition, I consider it possible that her supposed “cunning of madness” is indeed nothing but the “prudence of intelligence” – her knowledge of the social and legal codes by which sane and insane people are judged. In this light, ‘Lady Audley’s *true secret*’ may be her *sanity* rather than her insanity! Indeed, the mirage of hereditary madness serves as an ideal smoke screen for her all too reasonable ambitions, which would be unpardonable both in the estimation of society and the law. Consequently, Conness considers this ‘confession of madness’ Lucy’s “final and most triumphant act as a performer in the marketplace [... as she] exchanges her claim to sanity in order to spare her life and her reputation” (81). In this light, it appears possible that Lucy and the doctor may have come to an understanding – as they “understand each other very well”. Perhaps Lucy has charmed him into pronouncing her sufficiently mad to be confined in an asylum so as to ward off an even greater evil – such as the public humiliation that comes with a prison sentence.

Despite his efforts to have her medically and legally ‘pronounced mad’, Robert himself appears unconvinced that ‘my lady’ is not ‘playing with a full deck’ – that she should truly be insane. On the contrary, he pays homage to her ‘poker face’ that ‘played a lone hand’ but played it well – if she only had not underestimated the hegemonic power of her patriarchal opponent.

The game had been played and lost. I do not think that my lady had thrown away a card, or missed the making of a trick which she might by any possibility have made: but her opponent’s hand had been too powerful for her, and he had won. (Braddon 295)

Lucy Audley does indeed pull out all the stops: when Robert has her cornered and she knows that this will be a battle to the death for Sir Michael’s confidence, she “prepar[es] the ground” (Braddon 222) for an ingenious counter-attack. In her

childishly innocent manner, Lucy ‘confesses’ to her alarmed husband that his nephew “has made [her] quite hysterical” (Braddon 226) with his unfounded accusations. At first, Sir Michael, who “[mistakes] laziness for incapacity” (Braddon 224), doubts that Robert “has brains enough for madness” (Braddon 226). When his charming wife insinuates, however, that – according to Robert – any blame for George’s mysterious disappearance should fall on *her* delicate shoulders, Sir Michael is convinced that “he must be mad!” (Braddon 230) With gentle vehemence, Lucy expounds the symptoms of incipient madness – when “the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action; and perpetual reflection upon one subject resolves itself into monomania [... until the lunatic] looks upon a common event with a vision that is diseased [...] and] distorts it into a gloomy horror engendered of his own monomania” (Braddon 228). Robert is aware that the vile charmer has obtained “so complete a dominion [...] over her devoted husband [...] that his] uncle would rather think [him] mad than believe her guilty” (Braddon 45,218). Despite her seemingly childish nature and feminine beauty, it is Lucy who wears the breeches; in this aspect, *Lady Audley’s Secret* differs drastically from Collins’s novel where even wayward women such as the Countess are awed into submission by their husbands. In contrast, neither of Helen’s/Lucy’s husbands is ‘a match for her’. Although she is wise enough to mime the angel-in-the-house and make men believe in her fragile nature, she is never truly tamed by marriage.

Let us return to Lucy’s ‘scientific reasoning’ about insanity, which constitutes a verbatim echo of the hero’s own darkest fear: his inconsolable grief for his lover might have unsettled his mental faculties and distorted his ‘reality testing’.

Why was it that I saw some strange mystery in my friend’s disappearance? Was it a monition or a *monomania*? What if I am wrong after all? What if this chain of evidence which I have constructed link by links is woven out of *my own folly*? What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crochets – the *nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor*? [...] Oh, my God, if it should be *in myself* all this time *that the mystery lies*. (Braddon 202, my italics)

It is at this point, when his own sanity is called into question, that the patriarch takes the initiative and confronts his uncle with the ‘fatal chain of circumstantial evidence’ which he has laid about ‘my lady’s’ delicate neck. I will return to

Robert's self-serving attempt to protect his own sanity by exposing Lucy's alleged insanity in the concluding chapter.

Now that Lady Audley's background has been outlined in detail, it is time to introduce Robert Audley and consider in how far the male and female heroes of this story serve as reciprocal catalyst for their character development. As I have already mentioned, Lucy's tale may be interpreted as an 'anti-bildungsroman' and I will analyse how Robert Audley contributes his fair share to her moral and mental decline. To the same extent that Robert seals the fate of this charming social climber, the male hero is ironically indebted to his childish aunt for his belated maturation.

When the reader first lays eyes on Robert Audley, he is a "handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty, [... who is] supposed to be a barrister [... but generally] exhaust[s] himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels [... and] would tell grave benchers that he had knocked himself up with overwork. [...] A man who would never get on in the world; but who would not hurt a worm" (Braddon 27). At the outset, the bachelor appears perfectly content with his parasitic existence and is free from all sincere concern for his fellow human beings – if they do not interfere with his tranquil, idle lifestyle: "I hope [Alicia and my lady] won't quarrel in the hunting season, or say unpleasant things to each other at the dinner table: rows always upset a man's digestion" (Braddon 28). His ritual stay at Audley Court for the hunting season gives further proof of his effeminate nature for "nothing was further from his thoughts than any desire to be in at the death" (Braddon 28). Instead, he prefers to take a quiet cup of tea in my lady's boudoir, listlessly surveilling the progress of her needlework, and leaves the virile joys of the hunt to his "pretty, gypsy-faced, light-hearted, hoydenish cousin" (Braddon 28). Consequently, the other "visitors at Audley Court looked upon the baronet's nephew as an inoffensive species of maniac" (Braddon 92). Although Alicia has a soft spot for her cousin (or, out of spiteful jealousy, perhaps for this very reason), even she characterizes him as an "eccentric [...], lazy, selfish Sybarite, who cares for nothing in the world except his own ease and comfort" (Braddon 220).

Robert's phlegmatic existence draws to a close when he bumps into George Talboys upon the latter's return to England. Minutes after he learned that his old bosom-friend is now a married man, he becomes witness to George's moment of crisis: his beloved wife lies dead and buried at Ventnor. His great grief leaves George "as helpless as a baby; [so that] Robert Audley, the most vacillating and unenergetic of men, [finds] himself called upon to act for another" (Braddon 33). Without further ado the matter is settled: the two men henceforth share bed and board – at least metaphorically speaking; Robert, at any rate, appears to take great pleasure from this cohabitation which reminds him of "those good old times when they were together at Eton" (Braddon 29). I have already mentioned that this blow has made George 'as submissive as a child to the will of his friend'; so when Robert decides to pay Audley Court a visit, George obediently trots along. Little do the men anticipate to what extent this recreational trip to the countryside will change their lives and affect those who are near and dear to them. Even though Lady Audley takes great pains to keep her nephew and his bothersome friend at bay, Robert exhibits a striking obstinacy to obey to his cousin's summons, which appears out of character for this nonchalant bon vivant: "[m]y lady's airs and graces shan't keep us out of Essex for all that" (Braddon 42). This change in character insinuates that Robert thrives on antagonism (on the part of a woman); the more he senses unorthodox agency in Lucy, the more active the patriarch gets in his witch-hunt. The 'conquest' of my lady's rooms and the voyeuristic defilement of her portrait in her absence serve as particularly meaningful examples of Robert's increasing audacity and restlessness in the pursuit of Lucy's secret. Once this noble cause – namely the protection of patriarchal supremacy – has spurred him into action, Robert reflects upon his former existence and "begin[s] to think that [he] ought to have pursued [his] profession, instead of dawdling [his] life away as [he has] done" (Braddon 81).

At the beginning, Robert is just as smitten with the mistress of Audley Court as everybody else: "for once in his life, Robert was almost enthusiastic. 'She's the prettiest little creature you ever saw in your life, George, [... s]uch blue eyes, such ringlets, such a ravishing smile, such a fairy-like bonnet'" (Braddon 46). Accordingly, Alicia laments with surprise and indignation: "[o]h, of course! Now, she is the first woman of whom I ever heard you say a civil word, Robert Audley.

I'm sorry to find you can only admire wax dolls'" (Braddon 46). After the mysterious disappearance of his beloved friend George, Robert's infatuation cools off quickly. At the smallest inconsistency in Lucy's behaviour, he becomes suspicious and lets her sense that he is onto something: "you make me quite uncomfortable by the way in which you talk of Mr Talboys. [...] My lady tells little childish white lies; [...] I am sure my lady must tell white lies [...] for I cannot believe the story" (Braddon 71,72). Before I delve into a blow-by-bow account of several decisive encounters between the two heroes of the story, I will give some thought to the peculiar attachment that Robert feels to George. The hero himself appears surprised at his sincere concern for his old friend:

If anyone had ventured to tell Mr Robert Audley that he could possibly feel a strong attachment to any creature breathing, that cynical gentleman would have elevated his eyebrows in *supreme contempt* at the *preposterous notion*. Yet here he was, *flurried and anxious, bewildering his brain* by all manner of conjectures about his missing friend, and, *false to every attribute of his nature*, walking fast. (Braddon 67, my italics)

At this, one recalls Alicia's despondent conviction that nobody may hope to stir the torpid emotional life of her cousin into something resembling love:

As to his ever falling in love, [...] *the idea is too preposterous*. If all the divinities upon earth were ranged before him, waiting for his sultanhip to throw the handkerchief, he would only lift his eyebrows to the middle of his forehead, and tell them to scramble for it. (Braddon 46, my italics)

It is striking that both Alicia and Robert consider the mere possibility of his amorous engagement with a fellow human being a 'preposterous' idea; this coincidentally identical choice of words is even more interesting if one remembers that Robert made use of the same wording to voice his surprise that George should be married: "[t]he idea of you having a wife, George; what a preposterous joke" (Braddon 30). What both fail to see – or choose to deny – is the fact that it is merely the idea of Robert loving a *woman* which is 'preposterous', which is against his homosexual nature. For throughout the story, Robert is living proof that he is perfectly capable of loving George Talboys – so much so that he is himself astonished "that it is possible to care so much for a fellow!" (Braddon 72) Upon the widower's disappearance, Robert is not only grieved and worried but vexed that his intimate friend should desert him – much as he deserted Helen – and not even bid him goodbye in person – again, just as

he treated his wife: “[i]t isn’t kind of George Talboys to treat me like this. [...] And to think that I should care so much for the fellow!” (Braddon 75,76) According to Rebecca Hazell’s reading of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the “strongest, most compatible, and most devoted partnership is between Robert Audley and George Talboys. The success of this homoerotic romance is held in contrast to the dysfunctional, passionless, and even bigamous heterosexual relationships” (1).

When it comes to his cousin Alicia, “I fancy that the tender passion would, with him, have been so vague and feeble a sentiment that he might have gone down to his grave with a dim sense of some uneasy sensation which might be love or indigestion” (Braddon 50). Evidently, in Robert’s heart, no spark of passion but only brotherly feelings are evoked by this

young lady who was sole heiress to a very fine estate [...] and whose partiality seemed to other men] rather well worth cultivating; but this did not so occur to Robert Audley. Alicia was a very nice girl, he said, a jolly girl, with no nonsense about her – a girl of a thousand; but this was the highest point to which enthusiasm could carry him. (Braddon 28)

Indeed, Robert appears slightly uneasy in Alicia’s presence; he considers her a “nuisance. ‘She’d like me to marry her, I know: and she’ll make me do it; I dare say, before she’s done with me. But I’d much rather not; though she is a dear, bouncing, generous thing, bless her poor little heart’” (Braddon 165). It is only when he can take Alicia’s mind off her amorous quest, by entrusting Sir Michael to her filial care, that Robert seeks to embrace her; but his embrace is “of a brotherly or paternal character, rather than [a] rapturous proceeding” (Braddon 291). Therefore, it does amount to pointless cruelty when he encourages Alicia’s hopeless infatuation: “don’t marry the fox-hunting baronet, if you like anybody else better; for if you’ll *only be patient*, and take life easily, and *try and reform yourself* of banging doors, bouncing in and out of rooms, *talking* of the stables, and *riding across country*, I’ve no doubt the person you prefer will make you a very excellent husband” (Braddon 101, my italics). Seen from a different angle, this passage is indicative of Robert’s stereotype ideal of femininity to which he contrasts his boyish, non-conformist cousin:

[T]o fly at a fellow without the least provocation! *That’s the consequence of letting a girl follow the hounds!* She learns to look at everything in life as she does at six feet of timber or a sunken fence; *she goes across country*

– *straight ahead, and over everything*. Such a nice girl as she might have been [...]! If ever I marry, and have daughters (which remote contingency may Heaven forfend!), they [...] shall *never go beyond the gates till they are marriageable*, when I will take them *straight* across Fleet Street to St Dunstan's Church, and deliver them *into the hands of their husbands*." (Braddon 94, my italics)

To the modern reader, this hymn of praise to domesticity may indeed be revolting – particularly in combination with the blind equation of female agency and woman's undesirability on the marriage market. The patriarch's reasoning echoes Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship, where women merely function as commodities which can be 'delivered' and passed from one man to another in this masculine kinship-economy. Besides, Robert never second-guesses the reason for his cousin's wayward disposition – which may be easily accounted for by her father's overindulgence – but finds ample cause for it in her un-ladylike pursuits. It will not do to let a woman have her way, to raise her free from the ideological constraints that dictate what is becoming for a young lady – if you will not 'see reason' (as a parent), you will have to bear with the peculiar result of this unorthodox upbringing. Robert opposes her active nature and her masculine view on life, which she allegedly developed 'on horseback' and which makes her see clearly what all men fail to see: that her stepmother is "a practiced and consummate flirt. [...] Not content with setting her yellow ringlets and her silly giggle at half the men in Essex, she must needs make that stupid cousin of mine dance attendance upon her. [...] You [i.e. Sir Michael] think her sensitive because she has soft little white hands, and big blue eyes with long lashes, and all manner of affected, fantastical ways, which you call fascinating. Sensitive! Why, I've seen her do cruel things with those slender white fingers, and laugh at the pain she inflicted" (Braddon 83,84). It is open to interpretation to what extent Alicia owes her scrutinizing insight to her extraordinary, unfeminine character or to her all too feminine jealousy.

In his patriarchal quest for idealistic femininity, Robert need not wait for Alicia to 'reform herself'. In the person of Clara Talboys, he finds the very woman he would have fashioned for his own purposes. Under the strict, unloving tuition of Mr Talboys Senior, Clara has ripened into a model of propriety and female submissiveness – to all appearance. A mere mirror of patriarchal fantasies, this is a woman that suits Robert's taste, this is a woman he can safely love. The

character of Clara Talboys cannot be understood as the mere incarnation of Victorian gender ideologies. Like Jane Eyre and Marian Halcombe, Clara has simply developed a keen sense to detect those situations which oblige her to play by the rules of society – or when she may venture to voice her own thoughts and act for herself. While she is the picture of filial obedience one moment, she discloses her passionate feelings for her brother in the next. Her sisterly love for George and her physical resemblance to him are of paramount importance if one seeks to solve the mystery of why this particular woman succeeded where so many have failed: how did she capture Robert's heart? I would argue that Clara serves Robert as a substitute object of love in the absence of his true lover – “she was like George Talboys. [...] She had eyes like George's. [...] If poor George were sitting opposite to [him], - or even George's sister – she's very like him – existence might be a little more endurable” (Braddon 149,156,166). As Robert views Clara rather as the ghost of his male lover than as a female individual, he does not require her to be free from masculine traits in order to be able to love her (as would be the case with Alicia): ““Oh, let me speak to you, [...] let me speak to you, or I shall go mad. [...] I shall go mad unless I can do something – something towards avenging his death.’ [...] Now this girl, this apparently passionless girl, had found a voice, and was urging him on towards his fate” (Braddon 157-159). Like Jane, Clara demands equal opportunities as a man to ‘voice’ her desperation and assume agency – otherwise she ‘shall go mad’. I would go one step further and contend that it is especially this masculine aura of his lost lover, which Robert himself attributes to this woman, that makes her ‘lovable’ to the closet homosexual. In his eyes, Clara – though in a way the perfection of womanhood – is primarily a substitute for the man he loves and believes dead; thus Robert makes Clara transgress the boundaries of gender and, ironically, loves her all the better for it. In *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White*, I have seen little evidence of the cataclysmic power of homosexuality defined by Judith Butler. While *Lady Audley's Secret* cannot break away from its Victorian framework, the gender-neutral or rather ‘trans-gender’ character of Clara Talboys can be interpreted as heralding the dawning revolution of gender ideologies. It is true, the hero dutifully marries the woman instead of her brother, but even in marriage he need not fully renounce his homosexual nature: his lover is allowed to share the marital bliss in a ‘ménage-à-trois’ which recalls the fate of

Laura Fairlie (and Marian Halcombe). Whereas the reader is convinced that Laura has 'outgrown' her homosexual tendencies in her second marriage – once she is united with her 'true' lover – I am less convinced that Robert Audley has truly 'gone to the other side'.

An audacious interpretation may consider this 'ménage-à-trois' a gratification not only of Robert's homosexuality but also of Clara's incestuous desire for her brother – with George as the true object of love of both spouses. They are united in their love for George Talboys – in their obsession to avenge his death, in their desperate hope to restore the object of their mutual love. Even while Robert is about to propose to Clara, his heart goes out to George. The fact that Robert mentions his noble intention of bringing back her lost brother may be regarded as further proof that the hero is aware of this love-triangle: he knows that he may win Clara's heart only through her love for Robert. "Shall we both go, dearest? Shall we go together, my dear love, and bring our brother *back between us*?" (Braddon 350, my italics) It is tacitly agreed that the motive for their marriage is to bring George "back between them", to unite themselves in a marriage of convenience in order to restore the object of their mutual love. In this respect, Clara's incestuous love is a monument to the negative repercussions of a repressive education: if a (wo)man is not allowed to experience his/her natural feelings, these harmless emotions may pervert and assume alarming dimensions. The (potentially) detrimental effect of excessive repression will be illustrated in the conclusion by comparing Clara and the Countess. Far from being revolted, however, the patriarch considers Clara's pathological 'sublimation' of her illicit emotions 'sublime':

'I have *grown up in an atmosphere of suppression*, [...] I have stifled and dwarfed the *natural feelings* of my heart, until they have *become unnatural* in their intensity; I have been allowed neither friends nor lovers. [...] I have had no one but my brother. All the love that my heart can hold has been centred upon him. [...] L]ead me to the murderer of my brother, and let mine be the hand to avenge his untimely death!' Robert Audley stood looking at her with awe-stricken admiration. Her beauty was elevated into *sublimity* by the *intensity of her suppressed passion*. She was *different* to all other women that he had ever seen. (Braddon 159, my italics)

Robert's admiring gaze does indeed endow Clara with a sublime – almost divine – quality. Even before the reader is introduced to her, her powerful presence is

ubiquitous; at their first meeting, Clara's mad desire for vengeance 'infects' the male hero so that he professes to be no longer master of his own actions. Perhaps Clara has inherited this uncanny power which she exerts over Robert from her father, whom Robert describes as a skilled practitioner of the art of magnetism: "[i]t seemed as if he had known it by some social magnetism peculiar to himself; it seemed [...] as if he had eyes in the back of his head" (Braddon 149).

If I **could** let the matter rest; if – if I could leave England for ever, and *purposely fly* from the possibility of ever coming across another clue to the secret, I would do it – *I would gladly, thankfully do it* – but I **cannot**! *A hand stronger than my own beckons me on.* [...] Why do I go on with this? [...] How *pitiless* I am, and how *relentlessly I am carried on.* *It is not myself;* it is the hand which is beckoning me further and further upon the dark road whose end I dare not dream of. (Braddon 137,136, my italics except where in bold)

Robert takes great pains to stress the involuntary nature of his quest: *he* would be "glad" and "thankful" to "fly" from this obligation. But he cannot! The mesmeric influence of "pitiless" Clara Talboys cannot be broken; he is doomed to follow this dark road "in [his] helpless ignorance, in [his] blind submission to the awful hand of fatality" (Braddon 162). By accrediting Clara with masculine potency, this explanation serves Robert as a convenient absolution from responsibility and guilt; *he* would have been happy spare his uncle, but

[what is he] *in the hands of this woman*, who has [*his*] *lost friend's face* and the manner of Pallas Athene? She *reads* my pitiful, vacillating soul, and *plucks the thoughts* out of my heart *with the magic of her* solemn brown eyes. How *unequal the fight* must be between us, and how can I ever hope to conquer against the *strength of her beauty and her wisdom*? (Braddon 205, my italics)

From this moment forth, Robert comfortably hands over the responsibility for his actions to the passive mastermind of this scheme of revenge. His conscience (re)lapses into the complacent languidness that befits his former personality and he is, again, free to lament the absurdities of life – women, can't live with them, can't live without them:

What a world this is, and how these women take life out of our hands. Helen Maldon, Lady Audley, Clara Talboys [...] – all womankind from beginning to end. [...]

If [women] can't agitate the universe and play at ball with hemispheres, they'll make [...] social storms in household teacups. [...] To call them the weaker sex is to utter a hideous mockery. They are the stronger sex, the noisier, the more persevering, the most self-assertive sex. They want freedom of opinion, variety of occupation, do they? Let them have it. [... But i]magine all the women of England elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality; superior to crinoline; [...] above taking pains to be pretty; above making themselves agreeable; above tea-tables, and that cruelly scandalous and rather satirical gossip which even strong men delight in; and what a dreary, utilitarian, ugly life the sterner sex must lead. (Braddon 188, 165,177)

Now that Robert's relationship to George and Clara Talboys has been expounded, it is time to return once more to the two heroes of *Lady Audley's Secret*: Their relationship undergoes considerable change: at the beginning, my lady's beauty has its usual beguiling effect on her young nephew. All too soon, however, Lucy must learn that Robert is able to resist her charms – that her “pretty musical prattle” (Braddon 70) fails her in his case. At one point, Robert even gives Sir Michael his “word of honour that [he is] steeled against my lady's fascinations. She knows that as well as [he does]” (Braddon 173). While the young barrister prefers to attribute his un-virile ‘immunity’ to the keen intellect and attention to detail that come with his profession, I would argue that he does not succumb to Lucy's feminine charms simply because he does not desire women. ‘My lady’ may beat her lashes at him, but her efforts will be to no avail; unlike ‘trans-gender’ Clara, she has no (sex) appeal for the homosexual. Consequently, Robert feels hardly any qualms of conscience on her behalf: not only is she female and thus undesirable in his eyes, she threatens to usurp patriarchal hegemony – on the marriage market and thus, by implication, in society in general. For the various reasons stated in the course of this chapter, Robert feels obliged to do justice to his uncle's (and his own!) honourable name – for *he does not think* “that the woman who bears [his] uncle's name is worthy to be his wife” (Braddon 175). At the thought of the inconvenient consequences of his actions – namely Sir Michael's broken heart – the barrister repeats his guilt-ridden mantra over and over again, in an obsessive manner: “[w]hy doesn't she run away while there is still time? I have given her fair warning, I have shown her my cards, and worked openly enough in this business, Heaven knows. Why doesn't she run away?” (Braddon 200) Once he has made the acquaintance of Clara Talboys, however, Robert's mission to satisfy her lust for vengeance assumes paramount

importance: “[h]eaven help those who stand between me and the secret [...] for they will be sacrificed to the memory of George Talboys” (Braddon 161).

In conclusion, there is not the shadow of a doubt that Robert Audley acted to the best of his knowledge and belief in his relentless persecution of ‘my lady’s’ secret. As the male ‘hero’ of a Victorian sensation novel, he is left with no alternative but to fulfil his duty as a representative of patriarchal hegemony. For this end, he must stop at nothing in his effort to preserve the sacrosanct – but not inviolable – power structures which governed Victorian society. From a modern perspective, however, one may picture an alternative ending to Helen’s/ Lucy’s sad story – one in which Robert values the happiness of his uncle higher than his own patriarchal pride, one in which a deserted wife is not doomed to passive endurance, one in which the Victorian double standard of morality is finally dismantled.

6. Conclusion

In the three preceding chapters I have endeavoured to remain as close to the literary works as possible – so as to illustrate my interpretation by reference to the primary texts. In order to round off my analysis, I will now give a comparative summary of the various ways in which the characters of these novels transgress boundaries of gender and sanity.

Charlotte Brontë's transgression and triumph in *Jane Eyre* was to include much of the bad girl in her heroine and then redefine and redesign her into a new good woman, and to give gothic expression to all the rest that could *never* be made acceptable. Jane Eyre as heroine and Charlotte Brontë as writer rewrite Victorian Woman into a whole, to include intellect *and* feeling, passion *and* reason, rebellion *and* propriety, transgressive desire *and* virtue. (MacPherson 9, her italics)

In the course of her character development, Jane perpetually probes the boundaries of gender-conformity; and while she is punished for her marked transgressions she is, ironically, rewarded for her minor offences against patriarchal hegemony. Jane's 'bildungsroman' is a story of success precisely because the heroine manages this ideological balancing act so well. As a child, Jane experiences considerable difficulties in suppressing her passionate temper and repressing her indignation when she considers herself ill-used and unfairly treated. Consequently, her self-assertive nature, paired with her strong sense of justice, repeatedly get the better of her. This unorthodox behaviour challenges the Victorian ideal of a child's essential goodness; small wonder, therefore, that her relatives "look darkly and doubtfully on [her] face, as *incredulous of [her] sanity*" (Brontë 7, my italics). Although little Jane senses that she makes matters merely worse for herself, she yet lacks the self-control to channel her passions into a less offensive, and hence more productive, demeanour. When the heroine comes to realize the 'maddening' and punitive effect of her outbreaks, she recognizes the need to protect her delicate mental balance *against herself*: a change of *Eyre* is required.

It is at Lowood school, with Miss Temple and her saint-like friend Helen Burns as idealized role models, that Jane becomes the 'governess' of her temper. In the

eyes of her fellow human beings and even to the reader, the once wayward child appears changed almost beyond recognition. Although she has retained her ambitious nature and her sharp tongue, Jane is now wise and learned enough to maintain appearances where required. The charm of her character, however, lies in the fact that her hard schooling has made her 'fit for society' without depriving her of her keen intellect and her insight into human nature or crushing her opposition against the Victorian double standard of morality.

At the age of eighteen, Jane has turned herself into a self-governed yet quick-witted lady; she is 'rewarded' for her singular character with the genuine love of her master, who chooses plain Jane over the simpering belle that convention would dictate for a Victorian hero. Rochester's remorseful allusions to his philandering past – and to the fallen women at his side – issue a clear warning to the heroine: if she does not wish to lose her lover's sincere affection and respect, her virtue and purity must remain unimpeachable. Equally important, despite their evident sexual attraction, *Jane* must not be open about *her* passionate longing and libidinal desire. Although she openly rejects the myth of women's domestic self-fulfilment, the heroine learns that she must perpetuate the stereotype of women's lack of sexual appetite – otherwise she would threaten and thus antagonize the patriarch. To ensure that her passionate nature does not interfere with her good fortune, Jane takes repression to a new level: it is no longer safe to hide her transgressive thoughts and emotions deep inside herself – these dangerous, 'maddening' character traits must be externalized, projected onto another person and thus made 'manageable'.

In my analysis of *Jane Eyre*, I have expounded how Bertha Mason can be interpreted as an alter ego of the heroine. As the incarnation of Jane's ostracized emotions and desires, Bertha simultaneously serves as an 'experimental site' – in relation to which Jane can safely evaluate her own actions – and as a cautionary tale, a prophetic warning of the bitter fate that awaits those who openly defy the laws of patriarchal society. According to Brontë's (and Jane's) description, this embodiment of women's transgressive desire, of their 'insane Otherness', is a fearful spectre, indeed. The hyperbolic, gothicised portrayal of the madwoman renders it enticingly easy to find fault with *her* rather than with the constricting, narrow-minded gender ideologies of her time – by which she is simultaneously

evaluated and shaped into this monstrous being. Bertha Mason is made the scapegoat for every facet of femininity that challenges patriarchal reasoning and transgresses the pre-defined boundaries of her gender. In the end, this insane aspect of Jane's character must be metaphorically immolated in order to remove all matter-of-fact obstacles to the heroine's conventional happy ending. Considered purely on its own merits, the character of Bertha Mason takes up the issue of hereditary madness and fuses it with the Victorian concept of 'moral madness': while she is doomed to insanity because of her mother's tainted blood, the rapid progression of her mental disease is accounted for by her immoral and voluptuous lifestyle. As Brontë's madwoman is an exotic Creole, Bertha's insanity must be considered not merely in relation to her *sexual* Otherness but also with regard to her *ethnic* Otherness.

There are not merely female protagonists, however, who can be said to transcend conventional gender roles; the ostensible representative of patriarchal hegemony, in the person of Edward Rochester, exhibits several subtle – but decisive – differences from the proverbial Byronic hero. Although his past experiences with women have soured his outlook on life and love, he has retained his readiness to give each woman a fair chance to change his opinion for the better. Despite the fact that he feels ill-used by several representatives of the opposite sex, he does not paint every woman with the same brush. It is even more surprising that the master of Thornfield Hall should exhibit the same open-mindedness when it comes to his penniless employee, who is not merely half his age and knows so little about the pleasure and pain of the public sphere. Against all odds, he finds his soul mate in this plain, strong-minded woman – when he might just as well have opted for a mindless belle. Thus Rochester's ideal of femininity stands in stark contrast to the Victorian stereotype of a desirable woman. What is more, he actively encourages Jane to be his equal, to redefine the conventional role allocation between men and women – differences in position, fortune and gender notwithstanding. Nevertheless, there are clear limits to Rochester's open-mindedness regarding women; while he enjoys and allows for Jane's 'eccentricities', he cannot handle female sexual desire – the very voluptuousness of his first wife made him dread her and pronounce her (morally) mad. By his own account, he would not shrink from Jane if she were to suffer

from a mental disorder – for it is not madness per se but passionate sexuality which he fears in a woman.

Before Rochester may hope to find true peace of mind and happiness in his union with Jane, he must come to terms with his rakish past, with his own mental imbalance. For the repercussions of his thoughtless youth continue to haunt him to this day; he suffers from episodes of severe depression and is generally of a passionate, impatient and ill-humoured disposition. In consideration of his formerly dissolute lifestyle, the hero's mental afflictions may be interpreted as 'moral madness'. Although he does not openly admit to a guilty conscience – about his less than gallant behaviour towards his first wife and his insincere marriage proposal with regard to Jane – the memory of his immoral deeds may, nonetheless, weigh heavily on him. In view of the Victorian belief in the 'contagious' nature of (moral) madness, it would also be possible to hold Bertha accountable for his mental disturbance: the mere memory of her deviant, unchaste sexuality and his filthy participation in it – worse, perhaps, his guilty enjoyment of the act – may suffice to drive the patriarch to insanity. While it is true that he must work out his own salvation, it is the purifying influence of his virgin lover that first inspires him with the noble desire to reform himself and be done with his rakish past. In a way, Jane may be truly considered his saviour, for she protects him from corrupting his 'greatest treasure' – her pure character – which would lose its charm if Jane consented to lower herself in the eyes of patriarchal society – and thus, by implication, in his own opinion.

Another form of madness is embodied by Jane's second suitor: St John Rivers. While Rochester may be guilty of a passionate, 'maddening' temper, his rival's insanity can be best described as religious fanaticism. In another manner, Brontë illustrates how excessive suppression of one's desires and passion may exert an equally 'maddening' effect on the human psyche as a lack of self-control; the same applies to the character of Helen Burns. Modern psychiatry would probably consider St John 'athymic' – a condition where the person suffers from 'affective flattening', i.e. s/he is no longer in touch with his/her emotions. In St John's case, this apathy and indifference towards his own emotions is achieved by the sublimation of his (sexual) desire into a 'higher purpose'. As he cannot accept his guilty passion for a woman, he must shield himself against temptation by

devoting his life to charity and choosing a partner who will not lead him into temptation.

A close reading of *The Woman in White* is apt to raise suspicions concerning the mental balance of almost all principal characters. Against the literary tradition of madwomen, and contrary to the first impression, Collins's novel can be read full as much as a survey of male insanity as it can be (mis)taken for a clichéd reiteration of female madness.

Of course, the most overt case of madness is the eponym of the novel – the woman in white, i.e. Anne Catherick. After all, she is the fugitive inmate of a lunatic asylum and it is under her name that her half-sister Laura meets the same fate. The fact that the seemingly sane Laura passes for her allegedly insane half-sister Anne casts doubt on the validity of psychiatric diagnosis. What is more, it exemplifies how easily a person's intellect may err "a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity" (Braddon 274); besides, it illustrates that madness was deemed a frequent phenomenon in Victorian England: "how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad today, and sane tomorrow, mad yesterday and sane today" (Braddon 163). There is little doubt that Anne has been somewhat (mentally) retarded since childhood; at that point, however, the doctor was of the opinion that she "will grow out of it" (Collins 60). Once the mystery of Anne's and Laura's uncanny resemblance is solved, the two half-sisters serve as an example for the great value Victorians placed on the appropriate upbringing of their children. While both women apparently inherited the 'seeds of madness', loving care and suitable occupations prevented those seeds from growing rank in Laura's case. In contrast, Anne was not so fortunate: not only did her mother lack the warm devotion of a dutiful caregiver, she also neglected her daughter's education and set her an immoral example by her own 'seedy' lifestyle. When Laura is no longer sheltered from harmful influence and stressful life events, the reader witnesses how quickly her own mental balance is disturbed. Contrary to Braddon, Collin chooses to visualize this change in personality, or mental health, in his characters' faces. While Lucy's immoral conduct in *Lady Audley's Secret* does not blemish her innocent mien or her radiant complexion, grief and suffering show themselves plainly on Laura's faded face.

[O]ne sad change, in the future, was all that was wanting to make the likeness complete, which I now saw to be so imperfect in detail. If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of one another. (Collins 97)

The characters of Laura and Anne can thus be interpreted as case studies of insanity with regard to the impact of 'nature' and 'nurture' on the course of mental diseases. In the subtext, there is yet another meaning to Anne's and Laura's madness, which may be paraphrased as *man's* 'original sin': for "[t]he sin of the fathers shall be visited on the children." [...] With what unerring and terrible directness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by the father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child" (Collins 554-555). In this respect, their hereditary taint of insanity is not merely of a genetic nature but also reflects the Victorian notion of 'moral madness'. While their rakish father is never held accountable for his morally corrupt behaviour, divine justice metes out *his* punishment to his innocent daughters – like the passive sufferers that they are by sex/gender, the virtuous women cannot 'rebel' against their accursed nature.

To round out this family portrait of madness, it is worthwhile to refer to Mr Frederick Fairlie – the neurasthenic uncle of Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick. Although this effeminate creature is certainly the most neurotic and blatantly 'nervous' character of the novel, nobody would ever recommend *him* to psychiatric care. By his wealth and social position, the landlord – as the sole male representative of his clan – is free to turn Limmeridge House into his own private asylum. Instead of subjecting himself to one of the doubtful therapeutic approaches of his time, the nervous wreck has contrived his very own 'cure' for the "wretched state of [his] nerves" (Collins 43): he lives off the family fortune in comfortable seclusion, with nothing to worry about except the polishing of his coin collection and the noise level produced by the closing of doors. Although he would certainly never admit to it, he gives the impression of being tolerably content with his solitary living conditions – if only his relatives would stop bothering him with their petty worries and his "servants [were not] such asses" (Collins 45). With a little imagination, Robert Audley can be said to resemble Mr Fairlie to a certain degree – at least in the beginning: both are described as

'eccentric', effeminate characters that lead a parasitic existence and care for nobody and "nothing in the world except [their] own ease and comfort" (Braddon 220).

Although no one rivals Mr Fairlie in nervous eccentricities, he is not the only male character who possesses a delicate nervous system. In the beginning the very model of self-possession, Sir Percival loses his self-control after his marriage and thus reveals his passionate and restless disposition. In this respect, Sir Percival can be interpreted as a 'pale imitation' of Lady Audley: while Braddon's heroine is able to maintain her charade to the bitter end, the baronet throws caution to the wind after his marriage. The more he is plagued by existential fear, the more prone he becomes to outbursts of fury and brainless, rash actions. If it were not for the Count, who brings him to reason when he loses his temper, the patriarch might have been out-witted by Marian – or driven to insanity by his monomania. For much as Anne Catherick is under the delusion that she is privy of his secret, the baronet is possessed by the fixed idea that both Anne and Laura are in on the secret.

It is indeed interesting that not all characters are defamed for their blatant transgression of gender boundaries and labelled 'mad' – since deviant – for their unconventionally masculine or feminine traits. On the contrary, the two most fetching – and by far most interesting – characters are living proof that their transgender personalities constitute a fruitful synthesis which empowers rather than encumbers them. Although both Count Fosco and Marian Halcombe play crucial roles for the plot development, Collins feels obliged to bring them to book in the end – so as to preserve appearances and cater to the tastes of his readership. While Fosco's corpse is literally put in the pillory, Marian suffers a more subtle punishment: when she has aspired too high and penetrated too far into the masculine sphere, her illness makes her undergo a metaphorical castration of her 'masculine intellect' so that she may, after all, fit snugly into the storybook ending.

Like its predecessor, *Lady Audley's Secret* is particularly interesting for a 21st century reader as it sheds light on the medico-legal corollaries faced by those who were diagnosed with mental diseases in Victorian England. Whereas *The Woman in White* problematizes the negative repercussions that this stamp

entailed, Braddon illustrates how ‘madness’ at times served as a ‘carte blanche’ for female criminals, which spared them from comparatively greater harm. Moreover, she presents insanity as a socially accepted phenomenon – something that was known to happen in the best families. Consequently, unpleasant family members could be easily hid away in a private asylum under the pretext of madness as people would more likely commiserate with the responsible than doubt his noble intentions.

The character of Helen/Lucy constitutes a virtual conglomeration of different Victorian notions on the subject of madness and its numerous aetiologies. While the heroine is certainly no innocent lamb, I would not consider her a classic case of ‘moral madness’. Instead of moral corruption as a ‘fertilizer’ for those “germs of insanity” (Brontë 310), Helen’s mental disturbance is precipitated by her unhappy personal circumstances (similar to Anne Catherick) and brought into full bloom by the birth of her child. This aspect of puerperal madness ties in nicely with the Victorian belief in the pathogenic influence of women’s reproductive organs. As with Bertha Mason and the daughters of Philip Fairlie, hers is a case of hereditary madness. In this particular instance, however, the genetic predisposition is only felt when combined with the mentally destabilizing events of pregnancy and parturition. Helen’s/Lucy’s insanity is, however, more than an “essentially feminine malady” (Collins 35); I would argue that her sparks of madness resemble the desperate deeds of a cornered and mortally wounded animal. Apparently, the heroine is not so much (constitutionally) mad as ‘driven mad’ by circumstance: for the first time, when George Talboys vows to move heaven and earth to denounce her; for the second time, when his faithful lover follows in his footsteps. Although Robert leaves the psychiatrist in the dark about ‘my lady’s’ attempts at murder, I am positive that the physician would find “no evidence of madness [in her conduct. ...] She committed the crime [...], because by that crime she [secured] fortune and position. There is no madness there” (Braddon 299). In this context, it is interesting that Lucy’s reputation is never rehabilitated once it becomes clear that neither George nor Robert has died at the hands of the alleged lunatic. This reconfirms what I have expounded in the preceding chapter: the heroine is not punished for a profane breach of the law; her crime is far more substantial: she has challenged patriarchal hegemony and nearly got

away with it. On balance, the heroine is neither insane nor angelic; perhaps she is simply human – just as Marian, she is a woman of flesh and blood instead of an angel, like Laura.

Helen/Lucy is not the only character to admit to a certain mental imbalance; her male antagonist exhibits symptoms of madness in his own way. In the beginning, he is described as a ‘harmless eccentric’, an effeminate parasite who dawdles away his time in careless anticipation of a handsome inheritance. Apart from the hero’s open reference to his episodes of monomania and self-doubt, Robert Audley may be accused of a particular form of moral madness: his deviant sexual orientation. The reader may recall that the first display of ‘uncharacteristic’ behaviour coincides with the disappearance of George Talboys; it is this excessive worry about his intimate friend which makes Robert uncomfortably aware of his deep, unorthodox attachment to another man. Only when he has found an alternate outlet for these illicit emotions in the transgender person of his lover’s sister, is he again master of the situation – only then is he able to regain dominance (over Lucy) and assume his ‘rightful’ position as a patriarch. In the end, Robert is cured of his moral degeneracy – of his laziness and, by all appearances, of his homosexuality; hence, the hero need no longer fear for his mental health.

To a certain degree, Clara Talboys recalls the Countess, whose “present state of suppression may have sealed up something dangerous in her nature, which used to evaporate harmlessly in the freedom of her former life” (Collins 216). In the case of the Countess, her husband is “the magician who has wrought this wonderful transformation [...], who has tamed this once wayward English woman till her own relations hardly know her again” (Collins 217). In Clara’s case, it is her father, another representative of patriarchal repression, who has worked this miracle. As neither of the two characters is particularly likable, I would argue that both Collins and Braddon intended them as an implicit critique on the contemporary ‘therapeutic fashion’ referred to as ‘moral management’. The Countess is turned into a submissive slave that carries out her husband’s vile bidding without questioning his motives. In his famous confession, the Count blames society for her unreflecting conduct – she has been deliberately trained to obey her husband:

I ask, if a woman's marriage obligations in this country, provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand, here, on a supreme moral elevation; and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. (Collins 612)

Although Mr Talboys' dominion over Clara is not so absolute and she has retained her ability of self-reflection, her smouldering passion and her obsession with vengeance cast doubt on her mental health.

Further analysis of these and other Victorian novels would yield many more fascinating insights since the literature of this period abounds in innumerable toeholds for the discursive analysis of 'gender' and '(in)sanity' and of the construction of these concepts within the historical and ideological framework of Victorian England. Unfortunately, a more extensive treatment of this topic cannot be pursued within the confines of this thesis. As I have attempted to show by reference to these three novels, the transgression of gender boundaries was frequently conflated with mental aberration and 'treated' accordingly – both in literature and in real life.

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9. Appendix

German Abstract

Ausgangspunkt dieser Diplomarbeit ist die Frage inwiefern in viktorianischen Romanen das Abweichen von klassischen Geschlechterrollen mit dem Abdriften in den Wahnsinn gleichgesetzt wird. Besonderer Fokus liegt dabei auf der benachteiligten Position vieler weiblicher Romanfiguren, deren (Geschlechter)grenzen überschreitendes Verhalten besonders häufig Anlass zu psychiatrischen (Schein)diagnosen gibt. Als literarische Referenz dienen drei Klassiker dieser Epoche: Charlotte Brontës *Jane Eyre*, Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White* und Mary Elizabeth Braddons *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Diese drei Romane werden vor dem historischen und ideologischen Hintergrund des viktorianischen Zeitalters beleuchtet. Der Textanalyse gehen drei einführende Kapitel voraus, in welchen die theoretischen Grundlagen der späteren Interpretation erarbeitet werden. Zu Beginn erfolgt eine Einführung in die 'gender' Thematik, in welcher ausführlich Bezug genommen wird auf Judith Butlers bahnbrechendes Werk *Gender Trouble*. Ergänzend finden unter anderem Jaques Lacan und Michael Foucault Erwähnung, wodurch der Fokus erweitert wird, um auch wesentlichen Konzepten wie Sexualität und der 'sex/gender' Dichotomie Raum zu geben. Im Anschluss werden diese Kernthematiken im historischen Kontext des viktorianischen Englands diskutiert, wobei besonders auf die häusliche Rolle der Frau sowie auf die damaligen Wertvorstellungen eingegangen wird. Das darauffolgende Kapitel befasst sich mit dem historischen Wandel des Konzepts 'Wahnsinn' – sowohl unter ideologischen als auch pragmatischen Gesichtspunkten. Besonderes Augenmerk gilt in diesem Zuge auch dem (begrenzten) viktorianischen Verständnis von Geisteskrankheiten in punkto Ätiologie und Therapie.

Im nächsten Schritt erfolgt eine eingehende Analyse der drei Romane im Hinblick auf die zuvor erläuterten Aspekte; die Interpretation bleibt nahe an den Primärtexten, um möglichst eindrucksvoll zu verdeutlichen wie reich diese Werke an subtilen Anspielungen auf das Thema 'Wahnsinn' sind.

In *Jane Eyre* kontrastiert Brontë Berthas Scheitern an den Ansprüchen der viktorianischen Gesellschaft mit Janes gelungener Adaptation an die Spielregeln des Patriarchats. Anhand von Janes Werdegang verdeutlicht die Autorin von welcher großer Bedeutung die Selbstbeherrschung einer Frau für ihre geistige Gesundheit und ihr gesellschaftliches Vorankommen ist. Während die Protagonistin anfänglich Schwierigkeiten hat ihr feuriges Temperament im Zaum zu halten, entwickelt sie sich zusehends zu einer wahren Meisterin der Selbstbeherrschung und wird dafür reichlich belohnt. Die Faszination von Jane macht jedoch die gelungene Synthese von Anpassung und Authentizität ihres Charakters aus. Zum einen hat die Heldin ein sicheres Gespür entwickelt, welches ihr hilft die schützende Fassade der fügsamen Frau aufrechtzuerhalten. Zum anderen beweist diese selbstbewusste Person in Schlüsselmomenten stets, dass sie nicht der passive Spielball männlicher Erwartungen und Wünsche ist sondern ihres eigenen Glückes Schmied. Im Gegensatz dazu verkörpert Bertha den unentschuldbaren Bruch mit der patriarchalen Gesellschaft. Ihre offen gelebte Sexualität und ihr 'unsittlicher' Lebensstil stellen die stereotypen Vorstellungen ihrer Zeit in Frage – ein Vergehen, das die patriarchale Gesellschaft mit dem Urteilsspruch 'Wahnsinn' ahndet. Bei genauer Lektüre, bleibt jedoch auch der Geisteszustand des männlichen Protagonisten nicht über alle Zweifel erhaben.

Wilkie Collins zeichnet ein zeitgemäßeres Bild vom Wahnsinn und seinen verschiedenen Ausprägungen; an die Stelle des 'Gothic horror' tritt eine (pseudo)wissenschaftliche Darstellung von Geisteskrankheiten und Nervenleiden. Anhand des Geschwisterpaares Laura und Anne illustriert der Autor den wesentlichen Einfluss von Lebensumständen und traumatisierenden Erlebnissen auf die psychische Gesundheit im Allgemeinen sowie auf die Progression vorbestehender Geisteskrankheiten im Speziellen. Die teilweise merkliche Mystifizierung des Wahnsinns schwächt Collins sonst über weite Strecken authentische Darstellung von Angst- und Panikattacken sowie nervösen Ticks. Selbst die hereditäre Komponente des Wahnsinns erhält im biblischen Kontext eine symbolische Dimension und kann somit gleichermaßen dem viktorianischen Konzept von 'moral madness' zugeschrieben werden. Anhand von Frederick Fairlie karikiert Collins die absurden Auswüchse, welche die

viktorianische Obsession mit Nervenleiden bisweilen hervorbrachte. Am Beispiel der trans-gender Persönlichkeit Marian Halcombe zeigt sich wiederum die patriarchale Tendenz nicht gender-konformes Verhalten durch (symbolische) Entmündigung zu strafen; während diese starke Frauenfigur anfangs vielen männlichen Charakteren die Stirn bietet, ist sie nach ihrer metaphorisch bedeutsamen Krankheit lediglich ein Schatten ihres früheren selbst. Auch in *The Woman in White* teilen einige männliche Charaktere das Schicksal geisteskranker Frauen. Zwar fällt die Darstellung ihres Wahnsinns meist weniger melodramatisch aus, doch sind auch sie nicht vor den korrumpierenden Auswirkungen eines unmoralischen Lebensstils gefeit.

Lady Audley's Secret zeigt einen weiteren, nicht minder faszinierenden Fall von Wahnsinn auf. Die augenscheinlich engelsgleiche Protagonistin ist nicht nur erblich prädisponiert, sondern auch ihr zielstrebig und folglich unmoralischer Lebenswandel liefert Grund zur Besorgnis um ihre psychische Gesundheit. So mag es nicht verwundern, dass Lucy bereit wäre über Leichen zu gehen, um die Früchte ihres Betrugs weiterhin ungestört genießen zu können. Das Unkonventionelle an Braddons Heldin ist aus viktorianischer Sicht die frappante Diskrepanz zwischen ihrem unschuldigen Auftreten – gepaart mit ihrer bestechenden Schönheit – und ihrem skrupellosen Kalkül. Unfähig die Beweggründe dieses totbringenden Engels nachzuvollziehen, entledigt sich die patriarchale Logik dieses Problems auf 'elegante' Weise: diese Frau *muss* wahnsinnig sein, denn anderenfalls würde sie das gesamte viktorianische Weltbild ins Wanken bringen. Robert Audley, der Vertreter der patriarchalen Hegemonie, sorgt somit für den Fortbestand der Grundfesten dieser Gesellschaft, indem er diese bezaubernde Betrügerin einer psychiatrischen Anstalt überantwortet. Vielleicht versucht der Protagonist dadurch intuitiv alle weiteren Anschuldigungen ihrerseits zu diskreditieren, nachdem Lucy in seinem eigenen Verhalten Anzeichen für Wahnsinn orten möchte. Schließlich stellt seine kaum verhohlene homosexuelle Orientierung einen drastischen Bruch mit viktorianischen Moralvorstellungen dar und würde seine Zeitgenossen wohl ebenfalls an seiner geistigen Gesundheit zweifeln lassen. Eventuell rührt daher Roberts manische Entschlossenheit diese unkonventionelle Frau ihrer 'gerechten' Strafe zuzuführen.

Im abschließenden Kapitel wird Resümee gezogen über die verschiedenartigen Formen von Wahnsinn, welche in den drei Romanen thematisiert werden. Im Hinblick auf die anfängliche Fragestellung lässt sich nach eingehender Analyse der Texte mit Gewissheit sagen, dass die Grenze zwischen unorthodoxem Verhalten und Wahnsinn häufig fließend ist; wie angenommen, trifft dies besonders auf die weiblichen Charakter zu.

Curriculum Vitae

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■ **Persönliche Daten**

Staatsangehörigkeit	Österreich
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■ **Schulbildung**

1993 – 1998	Volkschule 2 Vöcklabruck
1998 – 2006	Bundesgymnasium Vöcklabruck Abschluss: Matura (mit Auszeichnung)

■ **Studium**

2006 – 2013	Humanmedizin, Medizinische Universität Wien
2010 – 2011	Erasmus Universität René Descartes, Paris V
2006 – 2013	Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Wien (Beurlaubung 2010-2011)

■ **Praktische Erfahrungen**

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Februar 2009	Famulatur Pathologie, LKH Vöcklabruck
Juli 2009	Famulatur Augenheilkunde, LKH Vöcklabruck Famulatur Neurologie, LKH Vöcklabruck
August 2010	Famulatur Notfallmedizin, AKH Linz Famulatur Unfall, LKH Vöcklabruck
September 2011	Famulatur Herz-/Thoraxchirurgie, AKH Linz Famulatur Allgemeinchirurgie, LKH Vöcklabruck
Seit Jänner 2013	Übersetzungsarbeiten für die Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften

■ **Weiterführende Ausbildungen**

- Akupunktur Diplom,
Österreichische Wissenschaftliche Ärztesgesellschaft für Akupunktur
- Westliche Heilkräuter & TCM Diplom,
Wiener Schule für Traditionelle Chinesische Medizin (in Ausbildung bis 2014)

■ **Sprachen**

- Englisch & Französisch fließend in Wort und Schrift