

MELANCHOLIA, DIASPORA, AND MADNESS IN CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

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Introduction: Historical Figures and Themes of Female Madness

Mental illness is a highly complex: it is impossible to explain what exactly leads to a break from reality or a descent into clinical depression. The intricacy of madness makes it difficult to understand completely, although attempting to analyze its representation instead of its etiology allows it to become more comprehensible. Gendered madness signals a history of pervasive themes that repeat themselves in the literature of the twentieth century and beyond, including in Caribbean-authored texts. In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* (1982), two female protagonists battle with demons that haunt their psyche. As Antoinette and Juletane are forced to define their social and cultural identity, they become increasingly disassociated from the world. Rhys and Warner-Vieyra take conventions of female madness from earlier representations in the century and transpose them to a postcolonial context. Although the two protagonists embody vastly different experiences, they mirror each other's ultimate refusal to be confined by stereotypical racial and gendered representations of the past.

The pressures of migration, racial conflict, and misogyny attempt to pin Antoinette and Juletane down into singular and restrictive categories of identity. When the two texts are read side by side, the diversity in experience and the tenacity of mental illness is evident. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Antoinette is a white creole woman who inhabits a socially changing environment. As a resident of Coulibri and the daughter of a slave-owning family, she is forced to confront racial tension as the island transitions into an era of emancipation out of a history of colonialism and slavery. Her migration to England and back—as well as her marriage to her British husband—contributes to her delusion and psychosis. In *Juletane* (1982), Juletane is a black West Indian woman raised in France. She parallels Antoinette as she migrates across the Atlantic with her newly-wed husband to an undisclosed African country. Despite the differences in their narratives,

they are remarkably similar in the way they subvert previous narrative conventions of female madness.

They both embody the figure of the madwoman in the attic, trapped physically and metaphorically. Torn apart as society attempts to suffocate their complex identities, they inhabit conventions of women's madness but repurpose their meaning. By each novel's climax, both women refuse to be contained any longer. Their similarities lie in their descent into madness and their enclosure, but also in their psychological "break" at each novel's end. Rhys and Warner-Vieyra demonstrate how Antoinette's and Juletane's frustrations reveal their complexity of identity. As postcolonial women, Antoinette and Juletane embody many of the tropes associated with female madness from the past, but they also expand upon and complicate these typical representations. Antoinette and Juletane experience loss and melancholia, the pressures of domesticity, and rejection from their communities. Rhys and Warner-Vieyra illustrate the domestic and cultural parameters that contribute to Antoinette and Juletane's progressions of madness in each respective novel, leading to their ultimate explosive acts of violence—Juletane's murder of her sister-wife's children and Antoinette setting fire to Thornfield Hall.

The Complexity of Intersectional Identities

Antoinette and Juletane are burdened by madness and occupy an intersectional identity. Their identity incorporates gendered, raced, and national differences among other constructs that shape their character. Additionally, they decline into madness as they slowly but surely embody paranoia, psychosis, and depression. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge define intersectionality as "a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences" (Collins & Bilge 25). Juletane and Antoinette embody intersectionality in their race, gender, migratory status, and childhood experiences. Collins and Bilge write, "[a]ttending to how

intersecting power relations shape identities, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural representations and ideologies in ways that are contextualized and historicized introduce[s] a level of complexity into everything” (203). All of these intersecting factors characterize and shape Antoinette and Juletane’s experiences of mental illness. They also subvert and expand upon European tropes associated with madness in literary history. As Edward Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, Caribbeanness is “[a]n identity on its guard, in which the relationship with the Other shapes the self without fixing it under an oppressive force” (Glissant 169). When examining colonial and postcolonial women’s literature, it is important to recognize the complexity in identity for white creole and black West Indian women. Women of the Caribbean occupy many intersections of race, culture, and gender. The mentally ill are already often marginalized by society, but as postcolonial women of the Caribbean, Juletane and Antoinette are forced to experience their madness in an environment that confronts them with social and cultural hurdles concerning these factors.

As diasporic women of the Caribbean, Juletane and Antoinette complicate tropes of women’s mental illness. It is therefore helpful to examine previous representations of madness beginning in the nineteenth century that are relevant to both *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and *Juletane* (1982). These representations serve as precursors to more contemporary depictions of women’s madness, impacting how female madness has been seen historically through images and classifications.

A History of Women’s Madness in the 19th Century

Elaine Showalter surveys female madness in *The Female Malady* (1985). In it, she tracks the perception of madness and mental illness as a distinctly feminine disorder since the 19th century. In particular, she focuses on the Victorian view of madness being metaphorically

symbolic of femininity and therefore distinctly gendered. She presents the two distinct patterns of thought when it comes to the gendering of madness: first, that “[t]here have always been those who argued that women’s high rate of mental disorder is a product of their social situation, both their confining roles as daughters, wives, and mothers and their mistreatment by a male-dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession” (Showalter 3); and second, that “women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind” (3-4). Dismissing the debate as to whether women actually experience a higher rate of mental disorders, or whether it is masculine discourses and male institutions of power that exacerbate this perception, she argues that mental illness—in both men and women—is socially gendered over time, as are its representations in literature, art, and folklore.

At the start of 18th century there was a transition from seeing the mad as “brutes” and “ferocious animals” who needed to be controlled and contained—metaphorically with discourse and physically with straitjackets—to understanding madness as a disease that needed to be cured medically. This shift was followed by the creation of asylums that were used to monitor and surveil these individuals. Around 1870, the asylums previously put in place as a solution to cure mental illness were failing to fulfill their supposed purpose. This was mostly due to “overcrowding, underfunding, and understaffing” that “made the Victorian enterprise of domesticating madness a purely nominal technique” (Showalter 18). As domestication was popularized, and the asylums closed, many patients were enclosed in the home instead. This seclusion of madness to the private sphere of the household worked to further restrict women and define madness as a female illness. Furthermore, the domestication of women is often associated with the restriction of their economic and social independence. Treatment for madness worked to target female patients, as the rise in

psychoanalysis in the late 19th century and early 20th century and Sigmund Freud's research focused primarily on female subjects and on developing theories on the sexual origins of neurosis, such as dream analysis and free association. This is important in particular when reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Juletane* whose protagonists seem affiliated with Freud's theory of melancholia. Even treatment for madness in men, in particular "shellshock" at the time of the World War I (1914-1918) used women as "prime subjects of shock treatment, psychosurgery, and psychotropic drugs" (19). The debilitating stress of war and the consequences that followed were characterized as feminine, and the treatment options were practiced primarily on women as the test subjects.

Narrative Conventions in Representations of Female Madness

Wide Sargasso Sea and *Juletane* primarily rework three figures associated with madwomen, some of which Showalter identifies in *The Female Malady* (1985). The first is a depiction of loss and melancholia. The theme of loss associated with women's madness is represented by the figure of Crazy Jane, characterized as "a docile and harmless madwoman who devoted herself single-mindedly to commemorating her lost lover" (13). Originally written to exist in a ballad by the Gothic novelist Matthew Lewis in 1793, she became a recurring figure in Sarah Wilkinson's chapbook, *The Tragical History of Miss Jane Arnold, Commonly Called Crazy Jane, and Mr. Henry Perceval, Giving an Account of Their Birth, Parentage, Courtship, and Melancholy End, Founded on Facts* (1813). In this case, the madwoman is associated with feminine romance and vulnerability and serves as a reminder of "female dependency upon male affection" (13). What defines her best is perhaps her harmless demeanor, wistful and mournful as she is pictured wandering to the places she used to walk with her late husband, Henry. This is the most subservient of the madwomen representations, as even in her madness, Jane harms neither

herself or those around her. Female madness here is seen to derive from a lack of male affection, support, and reliable presence.

The counterpart to Crazy Jane is Lucy from Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). She is a bride who on the night of her wedding, is found covered in blood, having stabbed her betrothed to death. She therefore "represent[s] female sexuality as insane violence against men" (14). Madness is associated with violence, particularly against husbands and lovers. Virginia B. Morris writes that "when women murdered in Victorian fiction [...] their victims were usually their husbands, lovers, or children; their crimes almost always occurred a domestic setting" (Morris 1). Women's madness therefore also became associated with violence and irrationality, often targeting members of the home. These images that Showalter describes portray the gendering of madness as an inherently feminine disorder, one clearly defined by the conventions of romance, violence, and weakness. These representations persist beyond their initial publications, shaping conventions of female madness in literary culture.

The third figure of madness that *Juletane* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* recreate is the figure of the madwoman in the attic. Jean Rhys purposefully rewrites Bertha's narrative from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) while Myriam Warner-Vieyra takes a less obvious and distinctive approach while still replicating this gendered typecast. *The Madwoman in the Attic* is a 1979 monograph by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, where they examine Victorian literature from a feminist perspective. In it, they link women's madness to the occupation of space and being tied to captivity. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that women writers desire to create their own authority in literature and to expand upon the restrictive binary of either angel of the house or monster, which typifies many female characters in literature.

Gilbert and Gubar interpret the pervasiveness of mental illness in many female characters in the nineteenth century; mad women protagonists are doubles—or representatives—of women who are marginalized in literature. They write, “[it is] through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double’s violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained” (85). In this account, mad women are manifestations of frustrations that female authors and characters possess.

The localization of this madness to the attic represents another female predicament—the exclusion of women to the private sphere and the stigmatization of mental illness. Gilbert and Gubar also suggest that women’s enclosure and entrapment as a sign of agoraphobia, a pervasive and intense irrational fear. They write that “nineteenth century culture seems to have actually admonished women to *be ill*” (54). By attempting to limit women to the private domain and attach their value to things associated with this sphere—marriage, children—women may develop a fear of the public and the scrutiny associated with it. Instead of a literal phobia, madness is a consequence of the active attempt to restrict women to the home. This leads to images that metaphorically transform the attic into a cage, echoing representation of the asylums that enclose the mentally ill. Gilbert and Gubar write that “it seems inevitable that women reared for, and conditioned to, lives of privacy, reticence, domesticity, might develop pathological fears of public places and unconfined spaces” (54). The attic hence represents a space that attempts to control women by physically entrapping them in the private sphere.

Both Antoinette and Juletane become prisoners of their households. Confined in an attic and a hospital, respectively their frustrations become most evident in these spaces and explode in the climax of the plot. The enclosure of their bodies and the limitation of their potential escalates

in mental illness. Unable to escape society's desire to define their identities in fixed categories, they retaliate violently. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Juletane* translate the multiple narrative conventions of women's madness in Caribbean authored texts. The madwoman in the attic is one of the ways that captures how the stereotypes of domesticity that Gilbert and Gubar speaks of come to life in literary tradition.

But it is also important to consider the ways in which the characters' racialized bodies contribute to the way their madness is represented, and how the interpretations of these Victorian images might vary substantially and in revealing ways. Although both women experience madness, they are also women subjected to stereotypes of race and the pathologies associated with it. Rhys and Warner-Vieyra engage with historicized representations of race and madness and their corresponding assumptions.

Racialized Pathologies

Wide Sargasso Sea and *Juletane* demonstrate how racial identity becomes tied to madness for specific reasons. Sander Gilman has noted that "the power of this mythic association between pathology and racial identity was so great, based to no little degree on the need to distance the Other as dangerous, that the linkage of the two images was maintained even under radically different social conditions" (147). After fleeing the Caribbean, Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* must grapple with her love for the Caribbean and the whiteness that is pushed upon her. Her identity as a creole woman emerges through her racialization by the British. She feels inherently different from her husband, especially on her return to the Caribbean. In Warner-Vieyra's novel, Juletane feels the need to justify her blackness after her migration to Africa from Paris. She is associated with European whiteness due growing up in France, despite her Afro-Caribbean roots. Both of these women engage in lives where their racial identity is complicated. Neither are defined

by the color of their skin or the place they were raised; they are characterized as the “Other” by the societies they live in and face exclusion as a result.

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha, the madwoman who inhabits Mr. Rochester’s attic, is often metaphorically symbolic of the darkest inhibitions and fears that Jane herself experiences. Gilbert and Gubar write: “Bertha [...] is Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead” (Gilbert and Gubar 360). She is also highly racialized, recreating the historical tropes that connect race and pathology. Sander Gilman illustrates how race and pathology become intertwined in the canon established by many white, and often male, authors of the past. In referring to historical representations of blackness and madness, he writes, “it is specifically the physiology of the blacks which predispose them to mental illness [...] An uncommon potential for madness is inherent in the nature of the black” (Gilman 139). In *Jane Eyre*, Jane depicts Bertha as terrifying and distinctly unnatural: “Fearful and ghastly to me—oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discolored face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!” (Brontë 2.10.73-81). If madwomen serve as manifestations of female frustrations, madness can be understood through a social and cultural lens. Racialized women in particular are subject to the coupling of their madness and their Otherness. In colonial and postcolonial texts such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Juletane*, it is the hybridity of migratory identities that appear to complicate madness itself. Gilman notes, “The merging of the concepts of blackness and madness, even though it arose from historically understandable confusion of abstractions, reflects the protean nature of the Other” (Gilman 149). Jean Rhys and Myriam Warner-Vieyra generate characters who experience madness when they feel suffocated by their

identities, causing them to implode at the climax of each novel. Their madness and race are no less intertwined with each other.

Rhys and Warner-Vieyra draw upon these histories of representations in their respective novels. Antoinette and Juletane's experiences of loss and yearning for love suggests a similarity to Crazy Jane; their violent actions at the end of their narratives emulate the unforgiving nature of Lucy; their entrapment in the attic echoes Bertha's captivity. Antoinette and Juletane are complex women, so it is not surprising that they complicate representations of madness from the past. In this thesis, I will deconstruct the many ways that these characters are stifled and made to feel othered, contributing to their descent into madness. Their disassociation from the world and their ultimate refusal to play their prescribed roles reveals their need to remain in control of their own lives. Although trapped physically in the attic, they reclaim agency in their darkest and most psychologically fraught moments of the text. Reflecting on their narratives, Rhys and Warner-Vieyra draw on conventions of women's madness and demonstrate their impact in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Juletane*. Antoinette and Juletane therefore embody intersectional identities as postcolonial women that complicate typical racial and gendered representations of the past.

Chapter 1: Juletane's Well of Misery

"Oh, how I long to fall asleep too, to have a long, restful night!

To wake up in another world where mad people are not mad, but wise and just."

– Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Juletane* (78)

Juletane tells the story of a woman who migrates from France to Africa with her husband in the 1950s via a woman who reads her diary decades later called H  l  ne. It is a narrative of a postcolonial female experience. Eternally haunted by her colonial history and racial identity, Juletane loses herself in hysterics as she becomes slowly but surely detached from the world around her. H  l  ne becomes engrossed in Juletane's diaries and her psychological breakdown, as she herself is on the cusp of marriage and an imminent move, intrigued by Juletane's suffering and hopelessness. H  l  ne is taken aback by the way in which race, gender, and misfortune breaks Juletane's soul until she fades away in weariness and disenchantment with life. Juletane's madness is charted by Myriam Warner-Vieyra via a series of events, most notably her mourning of life and love, her physical and metaphorical displacement, and her ultimate violence and frustration. As a young West Indian black woman, Juletane grapples with her desire to feel accepted and integrated into the community of Africa to which she migrates. Unable to move beyond her history of loss, Juletane becomes stagnant in the present and stuck in a madness that defines her future.

Juletane is born and raised on a small unnamed island in the Caribbean before she migrates to France following the death of her parents. Once her godmother also passes away, she meets and falls in love with Mamadou Moustapha, a Muslim African man in Paris. He marries Juletane and takes her back to his home country in Africa. On their journey across the ocean, she discovers that he is previously married to another woman, Awa, and that he also has a young daughter. Juletane maps out these details of her life retrospectively in order to contextualize her battle with mental

paired with her sense of loss and grief—contribute to Juletane’s decline into depression, madness, and her final acts of violent retribution.

Melancholia and Expanding the Scale of Loss

Juletane’s earlier life explains why she finds it so difficult to accept her life in Africa and her eventual sorrow and madness. Before the climax of her madness, Juletane seeks an ideal domesticity. Raised for much of her life without a mother and father, she is obsessed with creating a family of her own and finding acceptance and love. Her mother dies during a hurricane, swept away by a tidal wave soon after Juletane’s birth. Her father passes away when Juletane is just ten years old. Her isolation is a consequence of her parentless childhood. Raised in France for much of her adolescence and orphaned by two dead parents, she is forced to reestablish herself in the world at a young age. Her relocation from the Caribbean to France, and then from France to West Africa leaves her as neither a true member of one community or another. She mourns the loss of her homeland, family, and filial ties. *Juletane* expands on the scale of loss associated with women’s madness in Victorian literature of the 18th and 19th centuries—most commonly lost love due to a partner’s death or infidelity—by incorporating a history of collective loss experienced by a black diasporic protagonist.

In “Mourning and Melancholia”, Sigmund Freud asserts that melancholia is the pathology of mourning. Those who experience melancholia exist indefinitely in a purgatory state of grief, unable to specify what exactly it is they mourn for. Freud writes that “the distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (Freud 153). The prevailing sense of unworthiness

establishes melancholia as a pathology that inhibits the formation of the ego. By incorporating this grief into one's sense of self, the melancholic interprets her identity as useless, misplaced, and despondent. Juletane becomes a recluse over the course of the novel and defines herself as "an intruder, out of place, lost" upon her arrival to Africa, once she is confronted with the unexpected news of her husband's first wife, his first child, and his large expectant family (Warner-Vieyra 15). Juletane loses interest in the lives of those around her, isolating herself and dwelling on her feelings of worthlessness.

Freud's theory of melancholia echoes throughout Juletane's narrative. In particular, Juletane exhibits the symptom in which "the patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost [...] even when the patient was aware of the loss giving rise to melancholia, that is, when he knows whom he has lost but not what it is he has lost in them" (Freud 155). Juletane writes in her diary, as she becomes increasingly mentally ill, that "the one thing that was real, this suffering which I could not understand, unbalanced my mind, gave everything I put to my lips the taste of earth and made my stomach turn over like a ploughed field" (Warner-Vieyra 37). The images of the earth and the "ploughed field" demonstrate how her loss of homeland is implied by images of land. She cannot understand or name what she mourns for, or how she has arrived at this moment of excruciating anguish. Juletane's preoccupation with familial acceptance and the loss of her homeland exacerbates her sense of grief, which parallels her development madness in her narrative.

Melancholia in a racialized context is a complex and contentious issue. Anne Cheng writes about the way in which raced subjects experience melancholy, stating: "racial melancholia as I am defining it has always existed for raced subjects both as a sign of rejection and as a psychic strategy in response to that rejection" (Cheng 46-47). The melancholic therefore feeds on the loss of the

object, the ego, as a coping mechanism of rejection. Cheng also writes that “[a]n understanding of melancholia as experienced by the raced subject must extend beyond a superficial or merely affective description of sadness to a deep sense of how that sadness—as a kind of ambulatory despair or manic euphoria—conditions life for the disenfranchised and, indeed, constitutes their identity and shapes their subjectivity” (54). The way in which Juletane feels ostracized and rejected from her community exists in racialized and gendered ways. She is neither accepted as an African in the country she expected would welcome her, nor accepted as a woman and wife, as she contends with the unfamiliar nature of a polygamist community. Juletane’s identity itself is composed of feelings of otherness the moment she steps off the boat in Africa. Her life before Mamadou conditions her to yearn for something to fill the void of what she feels is lost. In particular, she tries to compensate for the sadness that constitutes her identity through domesticity and marriage.

Trapped in the apartment with her godmother at a young age, Juletane is already physically restricted to a version of “the attic” before she becomes mad. The narrow space of her home, coupled with her desire to flourish in the private domain as a mother and wife, exacerbate her idealized view of family. Juletane experiences an unconventional family dynamic in her childhood, and therefore feels a need to reestablish the traditional domestic life she has missed out on. Juletane begins her diary entries with her moment of birth and the legacy of that moment, which consequently determine the course of her life:

Born on twenty-fifth of December, a day of rejoicing, in a small village on a little island in the Caribbean, I was, by virtue of this fact, conceived one night in Lent, a period of fast and abstinence. Contrary to popular belief, which attributes a definite ascendancy to the signs of the zodiac prevailing at the time of one’s birth, in my case, it was the date of

conception which must have influenced my personality trait and the course of my life. My father, in paying homage to his young wife, had flouted tradition, and begot me with all the condemnation of the village church. At birth, then, I was already a victim of the elements, not to mention three centuries of our people's history which my frail shoulders were to inherit. (Warner-Vieyra 2)

From the beginning, Juletane is burdened by the choices of her father and the colonial history of her ancestors. She believes she has been damned from the start; the weight of her parentage and the tradition of colonial exploitation weighs heavily on her mind from childhood. The legacy of colonialism and slavery simultaneously contributes to her sense of resentment and frustration at the course her life has taken since birth.

Juletane spends much of her adolescence without her mother and father whilst physically removed from the Caribbean: "I knew nothing about my own homeland...At ten after my father's death, I had left my island to go and live in Paris with my godmother who took her role very seriously" (10). Her parents' absence during her formative years leaves Juletane wanting to reestablish her identity through familial ties. She is not a sister or a daughter and feels isolated. Although she lives with her godmother in France, she is displaced to a new home—a life that is quickly ruptured years later with more tragedy. The loss at this stage of Juletane's life is most notably her homeland—she knows nothing of it and the most direct link to her cultural heritage is severed by the death of her parents. Her melancholic grief is composed of mourning the death of her mother and father whilst simultaneously mourning a lost identity of culture, race, and shared historical suffering.

After moving to Paris, Juletane's life is particularly sheltered as her godmother coddles and shields her from the outside world: "From then on I was almost completely cut off from my

island home and from other young people my age...Apart from going to school, I never went out, except with my godmother” (11). Isolated from this world apart from one maternal figure, she is at a loss once this figure passes away. She is “seized with sudden anguish” and “[she] suddenly felt all alone in a hostile world” following her godmother’s death (11). This abandonment leaves Juletane with a void. Her childhood and adolescence are repeatedly marked by the deaths of her mother, father, and godmother. Living a new life in Paris alone, she must collect the remnants of how she previously understood herself. She is therefore already in a place of crisis and insecurity of the ego before she meets Mamadou Moustapha.

The mourning and melancholia evidenced in Juletane’s narrative can also be linked to the Crazy Jane archetype that Showalter describes in *The Female Malady* (1985). Jane is “a docile and harmless madwoman who devoted herself single-mindedly to commemorating her lost lover” (Showalter 13). The figure represents a madwoman’s preoccupation with her late lover. Warner-Vieyra departs from this figure in characterizing how Juletane’s madness is associated with loss: instead of the loss of a romantic partner, Juletane mourns the loss in kin and family. This reflects a loss of both history and futurity, expanding upon the death and mourning of an individual to that of a collective.

Dependent on the authority figures in her life, Juletane feels complete abandonment once they disappear. When her grandmother dies, Juletane notes, “her absence weighed heavily on me” (Warner-Vieyra 11). Juletane wakes in the night, “thinking [she] had heard her [grandmother] calling [her]” and that she “had seen the shape of a body in her bed” (12). These figures are symbolic of her homeland that she mourns; their deaths insinuate the loss of ancestry. It is not surprising that she leans into the comfort of domesticity and the formation of her new family in Mamadou so quickly after her life is splintered. As Juletane herself observes, “I had no relatives,

few friends, so Mamadou became my whole world” (13). Mamadou is a symbol of what she never had, the family and home she was deprived of throughout her childhood.

One of the most shocking moments for Juletane in the novel is the discovery that her husband had previously married another woman in Africa, Awa, before marrying her. That unsettling revelation disrupts the trust she has in him and fills Juletane with despair. Informed of this when she is already on the boat to Africa, she has no choice but to face the harsh reality at the other end. Having centered her entire identity around her husband, she admits, “I transferred to him all the filial affection which was overflowing in me as well” (15). Once again, she feels the loneliness and isolation in being an orphan. Her return to Africa, instead of being a comforting return to the familial roots of her ancestry, becomes instead a confrontation of anxieties and dislocation. She identifies the ways in which her return contrasts sharply against the dream she imagined:

This homecoming to Africa, the land of my forefathers, I had imagined it in hundred different ways, and it had become a nightmare. I no longer wondered how Mamadou’s family would receive me: I knew I would be an intruder, out of place, lost. The other woman who was with her daughter, surrounded by family who had chosen her and protected her. And I, I was there, absurdly alone to face them, I was the stranger... (15)

Juletane must face a mysterious opposition on the other side of this voyage, one displacing her physically and symbolically. This transatlantic movement uproots her life, and it seems that only the hope of a potential new family has kept Juletane invested in her future. She knows little about the predicament she is in, and being lied to by her husband at the beginning of her marriage instills mistrust between them. The journey that should hypothetically ground her or return her to a shared cultural heritage is simply another displacement into an unfamiliar landscape. Juletane

characterizes herself as “absurdly alone” and “out of place” as she voyages across the ocean. As her melancholia proliferates, she must confront the conflicts embedded in her migration and displacement to a new and ambiguous space.

Sam Durrant reflects on the theme of mourning, writing that the “postcolonial narrative, structured by the tension between the oppressive memory of the past and the liberatory promised of the future, is necessarily involved in a work of mourning” (1). Juletane mourns the loss of her idealized vision of tomorrow as it mockingly dissipates from sight. Warner-Vieyra integrates an important racial and gendered framework into the existing conventions of representation by characterizing Juletane’s mourning as particular to a diasporic woman of color. Juletane mourns her disconnectedness from her filial and maternal needs and desires. Her preoccupation with domesticity is a consequence of her seclusion to the home in her childhood and adolescence, which when paired with her migration to Africa, evokes questions about her racial identity in a culturally ambiguous context. It is therefore when the promise of the future is stripped of Juletane—namely through her miscarriage and subsequent infertility—that her melancholia consumes her entirely. Unable to maintain her grasp on the potential of a better future, her madness and depression become more invasive and insurmountable.

Fertility, Motherhood, and the Death of Futurity

One brief respite from Juletane’s suffering in Africa takes place during her brief pregnancy where she becomes a valued member of the family, insofar as she fulfills the roles of a caregiver and mother in the private sphere. Ostracized from her marriage and unwilling to share her polygamist husband, she feels a part of the family only when she carries his child. As she first surveys her husband’s community in Africa, Juletane remarks, “[n]either could I understand this sort of segregation where women seemed to have no importance in a man’s life, except for his

pleasure or as the mother of children” (23). Despite this claim, she, too, falls into the same role as an expecting mother. She leans into the comforts of domesticity and the privilege this gives her in the community. This part of Juletane’s narrative reflects the social and sexual pressures of reproduction and motherhood. Becoming pregnant centers her life, allows her to gain Mamadou’s affection, and gives her a sense of purpose. Yearning for a way to be integrated in this community, she realizes that this is the best thing that could happen to her: “[k]nowing that I was to be a mother changed my whole way of looking at things. My baby. Nothing else mattered to me more. Mamadou had never been so attentive” (33). This shift is a break from the anxiety that Juletane feels the moment she steps foot on the boat to leave for Africa, although her respite ends just as quickly as it began.

The accident causing the miscarriage is jarring to Juletane and the reader. As happy as Juletane is during her pregnancy, she becomes just as depressed after her miscarriage. She writes: “Afterward I heard that I had been knocked down by a car. The driver wasn’t going fast but I was looking at the sky as I stepped out into the street. I was out of danger, to be sure, but I had had an operation and I had lost my baby...I was overcome with weeping and despair” (34). The loss of the unborn child is the catalyst that breaks her: “I withdrew completely into my sorrow, spending days and days without going out, without eating, turning over and over the same thoughts, harking back to the same old story, endlessly, until I became numb, distraught” (36). Her melancholia is at its most intense when she grieves for her lost child and everything it would have stood for—most notably the potential of the future and a way to build a kinship in Africa.

The knowledge that she is no longer capable of having children diminishes any hope she may have of a family of her own. Following the accident and her recovery, she recounts, “The doctor who examined me told me I was fine but remained very evasive when I asked about another

pregnancy. It was then that Mamadou admitted that the doctor had told him that there was no chance that I would ever have another child” (35). This sends Juletane into a state of despair: she is no longer important to Mamadou as a wife, while also losing the potential to be a mother. Symbolically, the loss of her fertility suggests the loss of her future. Juletane already mourns her past—her homeland, her family—and now she must mourn the loss of futurity. She writes, “This confession was like a death-knell to my hopes of happiness, to my zest for living” (35). Not only does the accident signify the death of her child and fertility, but it also reflects the death of any potential happiness. Juletane remarks that the future is nothing but a “dream” to her in her present state: “For a few moments, I can dream that I am young and beautiful, that the future belongs to me” (49). It is only in her dreams that her future is flourishing, optimistic, and under her control.

Juletane feels no alliance to her husband, her sister-wives, or any other child. She is completely disconnected from her deepest desire: to be loved and be surrounded by family. What is evident in her account of these events is the significance of loss and its consequent mourning, aggravating her descent into madness and depression. As a consequence of the death of her past and future, Juletane is forced to reclaim space in the present. Previously restricted and marginalized in her early life, she reclaims agency by giving new meaning to the figure of the madwoman in the attic.

Diaspora and the Freedom of “The Attic”

Space is liminal to Juletane as a West Indian woman long before she enters Mamadou’s house. As a diasporic woman, she is constantly on outsider looking in. James Clifford writes that often “diaspora women are caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts, and futures” (314). He insists that diaspora consciousness is “constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion” (311). Juletane must grapple with her racial identity being undermined by those around

her, particularly by Ndeye—Mamadou’s third wife—who actively attempts to discredit her. This racial conflict occurs the first moment they meet:

And here I was, as far as she was concerned crazy, and what was just as annoying to me, ‘European’ or toubabesse. She was quite simply identifying me with the white wives of the colonials. She was even stripping me of my identity as a black woman. My forefathers had paid dearly for my right to be black, spilling their blood and giving their sweat in hopeless revolts to enrich the soil of the Americas so that I might be born free and proud to be black [...] I would never have imagined that on African soil I would have been called a white woman. This insult wounded me deeply and increased my antagonism towards Ndeye. (Warner-Vieyra 42-43)

La Toubabesse is a direct insult to Juletane, who is already ostracized by the others in the village. Juletane had never envisaged that her return to Africa would result in a devaluation of her blackness, or her exclusion from the community. She is stripped of her identity as a black woman, white-washed, and snubbed by Ndeye. Ndeye’s insult is an example of one of the ways in which Juletane’s ego slowly disappears as her melancholia from her displacement intensifies.

The landscape of the countries she inhabits does little to encourage her belonging. Juletane is subject to many pressures as a postcolonial West Indian woman of color, and as much as she may try to escape the hole she has been abandoned in, it is difficult to do so. The “well of misery” Juletane speaks of “where [her] body has been lying for years,” (5) reflects typical representations of space in depictions of female madness; Juletane characterizes herself as trapped, unable to escape despite her best attempts. Warner-Vieyra utilizes Juletane’s experience with diaspora to reshape the trope of the madwoman in the attic. The postcolonial context of *Juletane* complicates the how the attic is typically a depiction of entrapment. Warner-Vieyra illustrates how space

exacerbates Juletane's disassociation from the world both metaphorically and literally, and how she also reclaims space in the novel, effectively embracing her madness.

Shalini Puri acknowledges the complexity of Caribbean identity, remarking that "the Caribbean has had to negotiate its identities in relation to Native America; to Africa and Asia, from where most of its surviving inhabitants came; to Europe, from where its colonizing settlers came and to the United States of America, its imperial neighbor" (Puri 2). While this hybridity does not define every inhabitant of the Caribbean, it certainly has significant effects on how multiple nationalities constitute Caribbean identity. Juletane perhaps knows this complexity best, since her return to Africa illuminates how she has never truly been grounded, making it difficult for her to claim a culture and continent that defines her racially. Being surrounded by black women who see her as white diminishes her racial identity. It disregards her migratory identity as constituted by many different parts, and binds her instead to a single classification of whiteness.

Like Myriam Warner-Vieyra herself, Juletane's cultural and racial identity is located in a variety of countries. In an interview with Mildred Mortimer, she says: "I am not one hundred per cent Caribbean because I left Guadeloupe at the age of twelve. I am not African because I arrived here at the age of twenty-two. I'm not French. I'm all of the above" (Mortimer 114). Black diasporic identity situates itself in many different places. Juletane embodies the same hybridity that Warner-Vieyra describes. The consequence of this identity is that claiming spaces of belonging for Juletane is a complex endeavor. Such diaspora leaves her feeling listless, rejected, and hopeless:

I am frustrated, depressed,

I have no home,

I am an exile, an alien,

They say I've lost my mind.

I am a wreck, drifting in the wind

I have lost all my illusions. (Warner-Vieyra 60)

Juletane confesses that her frustrations and depression are intricately linked to her lack of a home, leaving her feeling ostracized and disillusioned. As an “exile” and an “alien”, she is marked as foreign to those around her—always excluded and rejected. Her proclamation that she is a “wreck” that drifts in the wind alludes to her migratory identity as an outsider in Africa. She feels aimless and lost, grounded in no one place or reason for living. Juletane has no purpose to her life and therefore allows her madness to spiral. Space most often works against Juletane in its diasporic displacements. It is only once she resigns herself to her madness that space becomes a reprieve from the lack of agency that Juletane experiences everyday.

Juletane's diary entries begin long after she has relocated her life to the private bedroom at the top floor of her family's house in Africa. She embraces the privacy of physical space by removing herself from her husband's shared bedroom. It is in this personal space that she begins to record her narrative, retroactively tracking how she arrived at her present depression. Her movement to this room is literally and metaphorically significant. When she ultimately refuses the life that her husband Mamadou attempts to offer her—as his dutiful wife and Awa's sister—she relinquishes hope for a future. She discontinues her desperate efforts at happiness, as she wallows in the discomfort her unmoored existence. She writes: “I decided I would no longer share Mamadou's bed and I moved into my present room, which had originally been for the children. I cut off all my hairs and put on mourning clothes. It was a way of finally crushing any hope that was still left within me” (37-38). She cuts herself off from any sexual relationship with her husband and refuses the potential life available to her. She rejects the role of a compliant wife, and instead

she actively claims the role of the madwoman of the attic. When she confines herself to her own private room, she begins to eat less and speak to others sparingly, becoming indefinitely isolated.

It's also the first and only instance in which she is given psychiatric care, although this does nothing to alleviate her depression: "Mamadou took me to a psychiatrist and I had an electroencephalogram. The doctor, a man this time, apparently understood nothing about my problem. He talked mainly with Mamadou, prescribed medication, rest, quiet, and a nutritious diet" (38). The male doctor barely speaks to her before giving a diagnosis and course of treatment; this reveals his misogynistic and gendered practice of medicine. Warner-Vieyra illustrates how Juletane's madness is viewed as a distinctly feminine disorder that only a man can fix. The treatment of her depression fails as a consequence. Left alone in her misery, trapping herself in her room, Juletane's madness spirals exponentially.

Juletane writes that she "no longer took part in activity outside of [the] room" (38), refusing to interact with the outside world. Warner-Vieyra depicts her movement to the private room as a moment of transition. She traps herself and her madness is slowly and surely tied to the physical space of her husband's house. Juletane remarks, "My madness is the private property of Mamadou Moustapha's house" (62). The house transforms into a representation of her madness and is the embodiment of her hopelessness and defeat.

Nonetheless, Juletane also transforms the figure of the madwoman in the attic—she is not forcibly closed up in an asylum, but effectively chooses to close herself in the private space of her home. Mamadou even attempts to have her leave the home if she wants to, but she has lost all hope of other potential lives. The agency in this choice—although it leads to her lowest and most depressing moments—complicates how physical space is represented in a woman's narrative of madness. Instead of the attic being a space of enclosure, Juletane uses it as a space of liberation

and catharsis. It is where she begins writing, a therapeutic process that helps her cope. Juletane comments, “Writing does me good, I think, for once, I have something to keep me occupied” (46). Rhys facilitates a juxtaposition between the external male perspective of madness in Juletane’s psychiatrist with a first person account in Juletane’s diary. She returns to her room to write and ruminate on her entire life, from her childhood to the present. Claiming a room of her own is a response to the spatial diaspora that Juletane has experienced in the past. Her migration from the Caribbean to France, and from France to Africa, locates her identity in multiple places. Juletane finds comfort in calling the room a space of her own and using it as a refuge when needed. Warner-Vieyra recreates the madwoman in the attic, but changes its significance. Instead of being a space of constraint, it is a space in which her madness can exist freely and that Juletane reclaims the remainder of her narrative.

Juletane’s Violence in the Moustapha Household

Juletane enacts violence against others, and these actions embody her frustrations with the world and conclude her diary entries. Juletane both consciously and unconsciously hurts those who inhabit her home, although she is uncertain about her actions during these events. Her violence is a transformation of typical gendered representations of female madness once again—her violence is not specifically directed at her husband as in the case in Walter Scott’s *Lucy* but, instead, directly and indirectly harms every single member of her family. The first and most shocking act of violence is the death of the children from Mamadou’s first wife, Awa. It is implied they have been poisoned by Juletane. She writes in her diary:

On Sunday the twenty-seventh at supper, we had a meal of boiled millet, prepared by Awa.

She ate, then got up from the table, leaving me alone with the children. Did I pour the

content of the medicine bottle into the children's drinking cup? Or did I leave the bottle where they could reach it? I don't remember anything...

I had taken the bottle intending to swallow a few drops, as I sometimes did to have a quiet night. I found it empty in the pocket of my dress, the next day, the day after the children's death. (74)

The uncertainty of this moment is unsettling to both Juletane and the reader alike. Is she capable of this violence, in particular to the children whom she had professed to love? Before the children die, Juletane admits, "I love Awa's children, they are the children I would like to have had" (40). If she did murder them, does this have anything to do with her inability to have children of her own and her unconscious resentment of that? Warner-Vieyra clouds this event in ambiguity to allow the reader to question if and why we assume she is the perpetrator. In many ways, Warner-Vieyra draws on the Lucy representation that Showalter writes about in *The Female Malady* (1985). The Bride of Lammermoor is found over the body of her betrothed, covered in his blood. However, Juletane's victims are not only her lover, but innocent children; the perpetrator is not found over the dead bodies, but is nowhere to be seen upon the discovery of the dead bodies. If she has killed Awa's children, Juletane also indirectly causes Awa to commit suicide. Awa's brother tells the family that "Awa threw herself into the well in our field last night" (65). In her sorrow and mourning for her children, Awa takes her own life. Juletane's culpability is not direct, but Awa's own suicide may have been caused by Juletane's actions that fateful night.

Juletane's violence against Ndeye is clear. Juletane writes, "Did I know that the children and Mamadou's wife were dead? Yes, I knew, but I did not know what had brought about their deaths. Had I thrown oil on the third wife? Where that was concerned, I remembered everything" (76). What's more, Juletane has a strong desire to see Mamadou suffering or dead because of the

hurt he caused her. She writes, “To get revenge, I imagine him dead, nothing but a fine stinking corpse, on which I spat” (39). Juletane’s desire to hurt those in her household is both conscious and unconscious, and it spares no one. Juletane’s violence against Ndeye is what allows her to be hospitalized. It is only when she is in the facility, and once Mamadou dies in a car accident, that Juletane dies from a “weary heart” that “stopped beating” (79).

The violent retribution that Juletane enacts is not restricted to a betrayal of love or lust. Her scale of loss extends to both family and racial identities; her violence is triggered by so much more than masculine infidelity. The melancholia and disintegration of her ego elevates the loss and frustration she experiences in her life, from her childhood to her adulthood. The violence is directed at those who reside in the Moustapha home, as if she yearns to destroy anything that reminds her of the domestic life and belonging she has been excluded from throughout her life. Myriam Warner-Vieyra reveals how a postcolonial and migratory narrative, including constraints of race and gender, reshapes tropes of madness. *Juletane* incorporates historical representations of women’s madness, but changes the severity and scale at which they manifest.

Chapter 2: Antoinette's Fragmented Reflection

"Have all beautiful things sad destinies?"

— Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (78)

In contrast to Myriam Warner-Vieyra's work, Jean Rhys's literature is more widely read and established in the literary canon of Caribbean women's literature. Replicating a particular archetype visible in her other novel's like *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), Jean Rhys's women protagonists are riddled with depression, mental illness, disillusionment, and psychosis. It is, however, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) that postcolonial issues are foregrounded, which is perhaps why it became the novel that earned Jean Rhys such popularity among readers and critics alike. The protagonist, Antoinette, rewrites the story of the madwoman in the attic who is trapped upstairs in Thornfield Hall by Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847). The novel serves as a reclamation of her experience. Its narrative follows a similar journey to that of Juletane in Warner-Vieyra's novel, tracing the protagonist's timeline and climaxing in a final explosive break in sanity. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is therefore ideal to read in conjunction with *Juletane*. As a Caribbean postcolonial novel written by a white creole woman, it reveals another unique representation of how madness develops in a racialized female protagonist. Like Juletane, Antoinette demonstrates feelings of melancholia and loss, contributing to her complicated inability to acclimatize to a new country and culture. Rhys also uses violence and madness as a way of seizing agency in the novel's explosive conclusion, when Antoinette leaps from the burning Thornfield Hall she has set alight. Although there are just as many differences as there are similarities between the two novels, the protagonists' disintegration of mental capacity and consciousness is remarkably alike and follows a systematic pattern of marginalization, disillusionment, and a crisis in identity.

Antoinette begins her childhood in the Caribbean, raised on the Coulibri estate, a few years following the Emancipation Act of 1833. She is forced to leave the country as a young girl once her home is pillaged and set on fire by recently emancipated slaves who resent her family because of their history of slave ownership. Exiled, she lives at a convent school in England during her formative years until adulthood; this is where Antoinette's depression worsens substantially. Once she is married off by her step-father, Mr. Cosway, she returns to the Caribbean for her honeymoon, this time to Granbois, the Cosways' estate in Dominica. Over the course of the novel, she becomes increasingly unhinged and depressed. Her husband, who remains unnamed through the entire novel but is clearly an allusion to Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, becomes slowly convinced of her madness. He belittles her, ignores her, and antagonizes her. At the novel's conclusion, he traps her in Thornfield Hall in England, renaming her Bertha, and hiding her away from the world's view. She sets fire to the house whilst experiencing delusions, needing to escape the attic she is confined in.

Antoinette's migration, coupled with her detachment from her family, reinforces her feelings of exile in every country she inhabits. She mourns the loss of the island of her childhood which has gone through great social and cultural upheaval during her lifetime. Antoinette also mourns her white family who, in one way or another, remains absent in her life. Her father dies having drunk himself to death; her mother struggles with her own battle with mental health; and her sickly brother dies following the fire at the estate. Antoinette's attempts to assimilate into the black slave culture that raised her—via her nanny Christophine—consistently ends in rejection. The world has become so unreal to Antoinette that she fails to distinguish between what is reality and what is fabricated. It is only by burning Thornfield down and jumping from the window, as she does in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, that Antoinette feels she can exercise agency and escape from a life of torment. *Wide Sargasso Sea* therefore reshapes previous representations of women's

madness in literary history. In particular, Antoinette mourns her loss of identity due to the shifting dynamics in colonial power during which her narrative takes place. She, like Juletane, seeks violent retribution following her desperate attempts to feel accepted by two worlds—one black and one white—neither of which she can claim as her own.

Melancholia, Double-Consciousness, and Rejection

Antoinette experiences her own unique state of melancholia in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She has a crisis in identity, causing her to lose her sense of who she truly is. Freud writes on melancholia that “In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort, and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised” (155). Antoinette comes to resent herself, and mourns the potential of her life, wishing she could be accepted by her white family and the black community of the Caribbean. This manifests in her growing madness and instability. Antoinette’s identity and melancholia are linked to the broad and expansive Sargasso Sea, signifying both her diasporic status and hybridity as causes for her developing insanity.

Kuldip Kuwahara remarks that the title of the novel itself “depicts the inward, contractive rhythm of mourning” that Antoinette experiences (182). She claims that the postcolonial context of the novel destabilizes Antoinette, making the attempt to locate herself impossible with the “collapse of racial boundaries and shift class structures” (181) redefining how individual and society operate together. The legacy of colonialism and changing institutions of power contribute to the tension between the black workers of Coulibri and Antoinette’s white family. In the historical context of the novel, racial and colonial tensions are at a high, as slavery is abolished by Britain and France and the existing structures of power are contested and reevaluated. The British Empire abolished slavery in all of its Caribbean colonies in 1834, followed by the French in 1848.

This period following emancipation challenged many hierarchies of power, instituting economic, social, and cultural changes for ex-slave holders and newly-liberated slaves. Antoinette is “[c]aught between two cultures, connected to both black and white but belonging to neither” (183). Being a white creole woman and a descendant of slave owners, Antoinette sees Coulibri as her home, yet is shunned and forcibly exiled from it. Her childhood friend, a young black girl named Tia, tells her: “[r]eal white people, they got gold money. They didn’t look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger” (22). This is the first time when Antoinette is alerted to her creole identity, complicating her perspective of herself. Her identity is an oxymoron, as it is black and white at the same time. The disintegrating institutions of power following emancipation result in a shift of class structures that previously subordinated the black slaves to their white masters. Antoinette’s migration to England during her adolescence, following her home being set on fire, brings about a mourning for what she once had. She is neither accepted by the black workers of Coulibri because of her family’s entanglement with slavery and colonialism, or the British who associate her with a dirtied whiteness. It is this key feeling of loss that fuels Antoinette’s eventual insanity. Her inability to fully identify with her black servants or her white husband, paired with her mother’s rejection and absence, displaces Antoinette and makes elusive the desire for acceptance that she yearns for. It is the boundless and expansive Sargasso Sea that represents the internal manifestation of these conflicts.

Paul Gilroy writes about hybrid identity in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and its existence at the intersection of blackness and whiteness. In particular, he theorizes how black diasporic people are forced to see themselves through not only their own lens, but through others’ perspectives at the same time. He draws upon W.E.B. DuBois who writes, “It is a particular sensation, this double

consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (DuBois 215). Gilroy theorizes that this double consciousness forces people of color in Britain to see themselves as less "British" than their white counterparts. Although Antoinette is a white woman, she embodies a hybrid identity as a creole person. Her identity manifests as a kind of double consciousness, although she certainly has much more privilege as a wealthy white woman in contrast to the emancipated blacks at the estate. Her hybrid identity is fostered by her childhood in the Caribbean and her British nationality. Frantz Fanon gives an example of Du Bois' theory of double consciousness: "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself...[H]is customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (Fanon 110). I suggest that Antoinette must also use double consciousness to interpret her hybrid racial identity, as it occupies a space between races. In the process of looking through the perspective of others and finding rejection, she descends into madness and depression.

Charlotte Bruner states in *A Caribbean Madness: Half Slave and Half Free* that: "Rhys implies that [Antoinette's] frustration is the real basis of her madness. Although she belongs to the ruling class of her society, Antoinette cannot enter the slave culture surrounding her. If she tries, she is rejected. When she is little, her one supposed black friend stones her. Her brother leaves her by death. Her mother deserts her, driven mad by the loss of her son and the burning of the plantation" (Bruner 243). These rejections all contribute to the loss that defines Antoinette's melancholia and the death of her ego. As a child, Antoinette views her mother as cold and distant. Her mother experiences her own bouts of mental illness, characterized by her walking up and down the *glacis* speaking aloud to herself. Everyone who sees her in this state laughs and stares in

ridicule. Antoinette describes that “[l]ong after the sound was far away and faint [her mother] kept her eyes shut and her hands clenched. A frown came between her black eyes—brows, deep—it might have been cut with a knife” (17). When she “touche[s] [her mother’s] forehead trying to smooth it,” her mother rejects her, pushing her away “calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that [she] was useless to her” (18). Having a mother who is so consumed with her own demons that she rejects her child has serious consequences on Antoinette. Raised to believe she is useless, Antoinette has an emotional burden stemming from her earliest years.

By taking Christophine, her family’s black servant, as her adoptive maternal figure, Rhys illustrates conventions of intimacy in a slave-holding household. When Antoinette visits her mother following the fire in Coulibri, she states, “I had insisted that Christophine must be with me, no one else” (43). But when Antoinette reunites with her mother, the interaction is vastly different and unloving, particularly because of the death of her young brother, Pierre:

I put my arms round her and kissed her. She held me so tightly that I couldn’t breathe and I thought, ‘It’s not her.’ She looked at the door, then at me, then at the door again. I could not say, ‘He is dead,’ so I shook my head. ‘But I am here, I am here,’ I said, and she said, ‘No,’ quietly. Then ‘No no no’ very loudly and flung me from her. (44)

In the moments when Antoinette’s mother cannot be there for her, Christophine takes her place. As a young girl, she waits for Christophine each night, “for [she] liked to see her last thing” (33). Antoinette projects her expectations and filial needs on a woman who is obligated as a servant to play the role of her mother. The disparity in racial identity between them complicates how Antoinette understands herself; she feels more Caribbean than English despite her racial ancestry and appearance.

Antoinette must grapple with the fact that she is neither a true member of her white creole family, nor that of the emancipated slaves who work on the estate. This racial conflict is evident as Antoinette reflects on being tormented for her race by both black West Indians and the white British. An upsetting song from her childhood follows her into the present: "It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you and me I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 93). Antoinette may not have a tragic history of slavery, abuse, and exploitation weighing on her shoulders. This notwithstanding, she remains racialized in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the British, marked as "other" wherever she goes. Edward Kamau Brathwaite states that "White creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can...meaningfully identify or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea" (Brathwaite 38). At the same time, Antoinette's whiteness is invalidated by her childhood in the Caribbean. She has no country she feels full allegiance to, forcing her to question who she is at all, and how she can exist with no kinship or roots to ground herself. This is the primary way in which Antoinette experiences the melancholia of loss. Her racial identity is distributed in so many places and invested in so many people who reject her that she cannot fathom her place in the world and the meaning of her life. The ego effectively dies and the scale of her loss expands to reflect the complexity of her hybrid identity. Once again, like Juletane, Antoinette's role as a racialized woman in the Caribbean complicates romantic conventions of love and loss, and what it means to exist in a postcolonial and transnational narrative.

Antoinette's Shattered Reflection

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's reflection is not clearly visible. It is composed of broken fragments that represent her. Jean Rhys uses Antoinette's reflection as a direct symbol of her identity. The mirror is shattered during the fire of the estate, and continues to elude her for the remainder of the novel. Antoinette's physical and psychological dislocations threaten her sense of self and render her disoriented and unstable. Jacques Lacan has written about the mirror stage of psychological development, observing that at the age of around six months, a child "can already recognizes his own image as such in a mirror" (93). This stage is instrumental in developing "relationships between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates—namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him" (93). Antoinette loses the ability to perceive her true self in her reflection—she sees no holistic representation of her identity in the mirror. The motif of Antoinette's reflection reveals her crisis in identity, and the means by which it shatters into pieces. She has difficulty recognizing her own reflection in her mirror as herself, contributing to her lack of identity.

Antoinette's reflection is first broken in the last moments of the estate fire as her childhood friend, Tia, assaults her:

I saw Tia and her mother and I ran for her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face

crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers.

It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (41)

Tia is a mirror image of Antoinette, one that becomes fragmented and broken. She clearly sees herself as part of the culture that rejects her, having been raised by Christophine and having playmates like Tia throughout her childhood. When Tia throws the rock and breaks the glass—a symbol of her identity—Antoinette’s journey into madness and disillusionment effectively begins. Lacan writes, “[t]he function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of *imagos*, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality” (78). Antoinette cannot establish the difference between what is real and what is not. The mirror should establish a relationship between Antoinette and the world around her, but as it is shattered, she cannot make the distinction between the two. All hope of holding onto Coulibri is lost, and she is violently rejected by a symbol and reflection of herself. Unable to manage her feelings of isolation and trauma, she internalizes them in order to continue with a life that unsettles her. Antoinette cannot manage the fragmentation of her reflection, and her perception of herself is constantly challenged for the novel’s remainder.

When Antoinette reaches England and enters the convent school, she no longer has a reflection to inspect. She observes, “We have no looking glass in the dormitory” (51). The inability to view her reflection suggests that Antoinette has little to no insight into herself during this time. At the convent, she becomes suicidal, losing hope that her life means anything, and states, “I soon forgot about happiness” (51). It isn’t long before the nuns, the prayer, and the dullness of Britain, send her into a further depression. In mourning her life and identity in the Caribbean, she idealizes suicide, yearning for the ecstasy of death and enlightenment:

Everything was brightness, or dark. The walls, the blazing colors of the flowers in the garden, the nuns' habits were bright, but their veils, the Crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black. That was how it was, light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell, for one of the nuns knew all about Heaven and the attributes of the blessed, of which the least is transcendent beauty. The very least. I could hardly wait for all this ecstasy and once I prayed for a long time to be dead. Then I remembered that this was a sin. It's presumption or despair, I forget which, but a mortal sin. (52)

The imagery of black and white, sun and shadow, and heaven and hell allows no mixing of identities to foster hybridity. The duality of the convent demonstrates the psychological dilemma in Antoinette's mind and her failure to lay claim to either the culture of black West Indians in Coulibri or of her white family in Britain. It is the process of constituting a hybrid identity that eludes her, as she struggles to manage her sense of self in the midst of transition. As Gilroy writes, creolisation "from the view point of ethnic absolutism, [would] be a litany of pollution and impurity" (2). The sharp contrast between light and dark in the convent reproduce this purity of racial identity, and complicates Antoinette's ability to accept her creoleness. There is also a clear-cut morality and purity associated with the separation of black and white at a religious institution. Antoinette's adolescence at the convent teaches her to see hybridity as a form of contamination. She does not accept British culture, but her desire to die reveals her reluctance to claim the creolity that defines her and the conflict that comes of it. A victim of her circumstances and continually passive in the novel's series of events, Antoinette is not accepted for the amalgamation of both her Caribbean childhood and her adolescence in Britain.

Once Antoinette reaches England again, after her marriage and a brief time spent at the Cosways' estate, she is trapped in the attic of Thornfield hall. Now officially trapped in the attic by her husband, she says:

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us – hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (Rhys162)

In line with the theory of double-consciousness, Antoinette views herself through two lenses. She is herself and not herself, clearly disassociated from her identity. As a woman of the Caribbean, Antoinette's reflection is constituted of fractal patterns of glass, creating a barrier to the image of hybridity. The glass between Antoinette and her reflection splits the two selves from each other, demonstrating the rupture in consciousness. The social and cultural divisions between the two most significant parts of her identity highlight her rejection by those surrounding her. Although not a subject of the Black Atlantic, she nevertheless embodies the hybridity of identity that stages this cultural clash. Her madness is the result of this migratory racial and gendered conflict. It is not only her racial identity that defines her experience as a madwoman, but also her gender. Rhys shows how social conventions of gender contribute to the racialized pathology that Antoinette experiences.

The Entrapment of Domesticity

Space operates primarily as a means of entrapment and control over Antoinette. Insofar as Antoinette is a woman in the nineteenth century, the private space of domesticity and the home is intrinsically tied to her value as a woman. She is forced to marry and play the role of a submissive

wife. This means that the home itself is transformed into a restrictive space. Gilbert and Gubar write, “The distinction between male and female images of imprisonment is—and always has been—a distinction between, on the one hand, that which is both physical and metaphorical, and on the other hand, that which is social and actual” (Gilbert and Gubar 86). Antoinette is both a victim of patriarchy and the structures of colonialism in her marriage. This has substantial consequences on her life, both physically and metaphorically. When she is told that she is to marry, she insists, “a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me [...] Say nothing and it may not be true” (Rhys, 54). Antoinette is reluctant to enter the prison of matrimony, already feeling confined by her inability to be accepted as a creole woman. She is financially dependent on her husband, as all her assets now belong to him. When she considers leaving him, she insists, “He will not come after me. And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him...that is the English law” (69). Unable to support herself, she is taken by her husband to inhabit the attic in England, becoming more insane by the day.

Antoinette is also othered as a racialized creole woman. Her husband, the double of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, sees her as not truly European and therefore more likely to embody pathologies of madness and race. For example, Rochester observes that “[Antoinette] never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (61). He is unsettled by her madness, but more notably, he can sense a difference in her eyes. Sander Gilman comments on the pathology of mental illness, writing: “[o]f all the models of pathology, one of the most powerful is mental illness. For the most elementally frightening possibility is loss of control over the self” (23). It is obvious to others that Antoinette feels alien to the British, whom she rejects. Nevertheless, this “alien” quality to her eyes becomes increasingly evident as the novel unfolds, particularly when Antoinette returns to

the Caribbean. Nothing is real to her; she is so removed from reality that space becomes dreamlike and ethereal. Despite the genuineness of her disassociation and depression, Antoinette's husband clearly associates her insanity with her racial identity. Gilman writes that "blacks are the antithesis of the mirage of whiteness, the ideal of European aesthetic values" which "strikes [readers] as an extension of some "real," perceived difference to which the qualities of "good" and "bad" have been erroneously applied. But the very concept of color is a quality of Otherness, not of reality" (30). Antoinette's creole identity precedes and characterizes her madness—her husband rejects her, having the distinct impression that she is inherently mad, and that her insanity is a result of her otherness.

Beyond the home and spaces of domesticity, Rhys also illustrates that landscapes, whether in England or the Caribbean, are alienating to Antoinette. When space is not directly symbolic of entrapment, it is dreamlike, suggesting Antoinette's growing psychosis and disconnection from the real world. Antoinette is so centered on her island that England feels illusory and fabricated, unconnected to reality. This is evident in her conversation with her husband, as they dispute over the differences between Dominica and England:

"Is it true," she said, "that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up."

"Well," I answered annoyed, "that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream."

"But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?"

"And how can millions of people their houses and their streets be unreal?"

"More easily," she said, "much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream." (73)

Her disconnect from England reveals how out of touch she feels towards it, particularly following her return to the Caribbean. Rivers and mountains embody reality to her, but man-made things such as buildings in a carefully constructed city feels foreign. Her desire to ‘wake up’ reiterates her sense that she does not occupy the in the same consciousness as others, that her identity tied to England is nightmarish in its coldness and darkness. Although she feels deeply connected to the landscape of her childhood in the Caribbean, she is rejected by many of its black inhabitants. Unable to reconcile the differences between them—especially given her husband’s annoyance at her psychological deterioration—Antoinette and her husband fall into antagonism.

Antoinette has no choice but to marry the “Mr. Rochester” character—she has no family to shelter and provide for her other than her unreliable step-father. When she tries to reject his proposal, stating, “I’m afraid of what may happen” (71), she is conscious of their differences and the pressure accumulating to the moment of their union. The change in narrative perspective from Antoinette to her husband allows the reader to understand her husband’s estrangement from Antoinette and the island itself. This parallel is revealed as her husband observes that “[the island] was all very brightly colored, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry [...] I played the part I was expected to play” (69). Used for monetary gain, Antoinette feels no love in this relationship. The falsity of Rochester’s actions towards her is another example of a white character refusing to care for her. She is so concerned with remaining a product of Coulibri that she rejects the hybridity that in part defines her. Her migration to England during her childhood is disruptive, but her return to the Caribbean is just as jarring. Without a system of support, she mourns the life she had envisioned for herself.

The Two Fires and Antoinette's Ultimate Emancipation

An integral event of Antoinette's childhood is the fire at her home in Coulibri, after which she is forcibly removed and exiled to England. It is the first of two fires that take place in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and each marks two points of transition in Antoinette's life. The first, notably, is a moment of rejection. She describes the many people who gather to protest outside her home: "we could not move for they pressed too close round us. Some of them were laughing and waving sticks, some the ones at the back were carrying flambeaux and it was light as day" (38). This event is violent and stems from a profound hatred between the freed slaves and their previous white owners. The fire itself is destructive not only of the Estate, but also metaphorically of the childhood that Antoinette knows:

The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not be stolen or burned. (41)

The burning of these memories changes the significance of Coulibri profoundly. Already caught between two countries, two cultures, and two races, Antoinette must grapple with her own version of dislocation and disruption. Caught as a child in the crossfires of political and social conflict, she is weakened in her sense of who she is and where she can be accepted. The destruction of beautiful things—such as the flowers and elegant furniture—can be read as the demolition of what makes Coulibri home. The memories erased leave only the empty and charred house, forever altered by the fire itself.

One of the symbols of Antoinette's decline into crisis is the family's pet bird, Coco. This bird previously foreshadows the madness and paranoia that Antoinette experiences in its repetition of the phrase, "Qui est là? Qui est là?" (Who is there? Who is there?), to which the bird answers itself, "Ché Coco, Ché Coco" (It is Coco, it is Coco) (38). As her home burns to a crisp, Antoinette observes that "everyone was looking up and pointing at Coco on the glaciis railing with his feathers alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire" (39). A figure for Antoinette herself, the parrot attempts to escape its suffering, only to fail because of its clipped wings. Notably, the wings are clipped by her step-father, Mr. Mason: "After Mr. Mason clipped his wings he grew very bad tempered, and though he would sit quietly on my mother's shoulder, he darted at everyone who came near her and pecked their feet" (38). The symbols of cages and confinement reproduce the captivity that awaits Antoinette in Thornfield by the novel's conclusion. Antoinette is a passive agent in her own life, her wings clipped before she ever has the chance to escape.

The two fires are similar as moments of catalyst in Antoinette's life—but by setting the fire herself the second time, she is choosing to claim her madness and let it run freely. The attic itself in the final section is represented as colorless and bleak. It certainly replicates the image of a prison. Antoinette observes that "[t]here is one window high up – you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room" (161). She is trapped, unable to escape the room or see out any windows to the countryside. It is only when her attendant, Grace Poole, a woman who sleeps in her room and watches Antoinette, falls asleep after several drinks that Antoinette can steal her keys and go roaming around the house. On one of her walks, Antoinette insists, "It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it before somewhere, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that

has no light in it” (162). Insofar as color is associated with creole hybridity, this lack thereof is hence associated with the antithesis and rejection of her identity. The house is also “made of cardboard” and severely lacking any light. Antoinette views the manor as fragile and weak. She has lost all optimism for life and is resigned to her empty life of captivity by her husband’s hand.

Gilbert and Gubar write, “Confined within uncomfortable selves as well as within uncomfortable spaces, [Charlotte Brontë’s] heroines cannot escape the displaced or disguised representatives of their own feared impulses” (443). The trope of entrapment and of the madwoman in the attic is prevalent in Rhys’ retelling of *Jane Eyre*. One night, Antoinette embraces her feared impulses and takes action repudiating the consistent rejection of her identity. She notes, “Suddenly I felt miserable in that room” (169). At this point, in the midst of her delusions and psychosis, she sets alight to the manor, refusing to be silenced any longer.

In contrast to the first fire of the Coulibri estate, the final scene in where she sets fire to Thornfield Hall is a means of escape enacted through violence. Like Juletane, Antoinette uses violence as a means to find peace and claim agency. Antoinette’s room in the attic is just like the cage of a bird, suggesting her similarity to Coco, the family bird from the beginning of the narrative. With no way to leave the room, the only way she can escape is through the fire. The final scene demonstrates the peak of her delusions and disassociation:

“There were more candles on a table and I took one of them and ran up the first flight of stairs and the second. On the second floor I threw away the candle. But I did not stay to watch. I ran up the stairs and along the passage” “Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora’s patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree

ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and the book and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. (170)

While the first fire in Coulibri is destructive, the fire at the manor is a symbol of liberation and redemption. The imagery of color in the final scene—the red carpet, the gold and silver ferns, the green moss—symbolizes a celebration of creole identity. As Antoinette previously established, she associates the Caribbean with vibrant color, whereas England is colorless, dull, and lifeless. And just as the workers of Coulibri originally set the first fire in response to their emancipation, Antoinette sets her own fire for the same cause. She refuses to be restricted, quelled, or rejected any longer. Antoinette feels liberated, as her hair “streamed out like wings” behind her, the manor lit red in light.

Antoinette therefore draws upon but also alters previous European representations of female madness. She experiences melancholia due to the scale of which her loss exists, namely that of her homeland, family, and culture, which results in a fragmented identity. As a creole woman, she is racialized and rejected by those around her, including her white husband who vehemently reinforces the irrevocable difference between them. Antoinette, like Juletane, suffers from existing in between identities and feeling exiled from communities that she exists in. Jean Rhys demonstrates how race and gender produce a vastly different experience from those of white European women, exploding the previous representations of loss, violence, and madness in a postcolonial narrative set in the 1800s.

Conclusion

There are many preexisting perceptions surrounding madness, particularly for women. A long history of images of hysteria, irrationality, and deviant sexuality permeates the representations of madwomen, real and fictional. Showalter writes about madness in the Victorian era: “Women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in the conduct of their lives” (Showalter 7). Although women are not predisposed to madness simply because of their gender, it is important to analyze how different social and cultural factors, including institutionalized misogyny and racial tensions, impact the development of madness. Showalter demonstrates how female madness has been historicized and represented in a Victorian context. Figures like Lucy of Lammermoor, Crazy Jane, and Bertha in *Jane Eyre* persist in the motifs they continue to evoke—namely women’s madness in association with loss, violence, and racialized pathologies.

Jean Rhys and Myriam Warner-Vieyra show how postcolonial women of the Caribbean expand upon historical representations of female madness, particularly from the Victorian era. Although Antoinette and Juletane inhabit in vastly different circumstances—one a white creole woman inhabiting the Caribbean and England, and the other a black West Indian woman occupying France and Africa—they replicate many of the same themes that overlap between female madness and postcolonial identity. Antoinette and Juletane’s complexity and hybridity place their identities in liminal spaces, and the constant rejection they face makes their assimilation into the communities they live in particularly challenging.

Their insecurity of self stems from their experience of melancholia—both Antoinette and Juletane experience a scale of loss much larger than most individuals. They embody the emptiness of the ego that Freud theorizes about in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) as they mourn the

disruption and disconnection to their own identities. This melancholia proliferates as they travel across the Atlantic and migrate to new communities, and to new lives.

Antoinette and Juletane also embody the figure of the madwoman in the attic in their entrapment and enclosure in the home. They replicate historical tropes of racialized pathology as those around them attribute their madness to race. The attic is transformed into a space of liberatory agency in varying ways, but it continues to limit them to the domestic sphere. The acts of violence that Antoinette and Juletane commit, although not always moral, demonstrate a reclamation of their agency. They refuse to remain trapped in the cage composed of the many expectations pressed upon them. While no two women are the same, Juletane and Antoinette illustrate how and why madness recurs so frequently in postcolonial female narratives. Although certainly not representative of all postcolonial women, Juletane and Antoinette reveal some ways in which diasporic women are disenfranchised as racialized women. They demonstrate how intersecting factors of identity determine the course that madness takes, and how female madness is even more complex in a postcolonial context.

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