

**‘Divinest Sense’:
the construction of female madness and the
negotiation of female agency in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell
Jar*, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Margaret
Atwood’s *Surfacing***

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that

‘Divinest Sense’: the construction of female madness and the negotiation of female agency in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*

is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledge by means of complete references.

S. de Villiers

Date

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine the representation of female madness in *The Bell Jar*, by Sylvia Plath, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, and *Surfacing*, by Margaret Atwood, with a particular emphasis on the depiction of madness as a form of revolt against the oppression of women in patriarchal societies. I focus specifically on the textual construction of female insanity in three twentieth-century **women's texts** and offer a reading of these depictions in relation to an influential contemporary example of Western psychological discourse, namely R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960). Drawing on the work of Western feminist scholars such as Elaine Showalter and Lillian Feder, I engage with the broader questions of the female malady and **the social construction of madness in Western patriarchal contexts as a particularly 'female' dilemma**. I pay attention not only to the various tropes, metaphors and images which are employed in the representation of madness, but also give attention to the explanations of madness that are offered in each text as well as the ways in which the various stories of madness are resolved. In the introduction, I offer an overview of the history of madness (and female madness in particular) and consider the importance of Laing and the antipsychiatry movement in challenging conventional definitions. In Chapter 1, I explore the depiction of madness in *The Bell Jar*, with the focus on the protagonist, Esther, whose madness, I argue, is represented as a conflict between female creativity and mid-twentieth century feminine ideals. In Chapter 2, I discuss *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel which gives a voice to the madwoman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. I argue that **the protagonist's madness is not represented as hereditary, but rather that a particular construction of madness – that of the stereotypical wild madwoman – is imposed upon her**. In addition, I argue that her madness is presented as the result of being abandoned and cast as insane by her husband, whom she marries as part of an economic exchange. In Chapter 3, I explore the ways in which, in *Surfacing*, **the unnamed narrator's** madness is attributed both to her abortion as well as to the realisation of her own complicity in the patriarchal oppression of women and nature. In all three novels, I suggest, female madness is represented sympathetically as a reaction to, and revolt against patriarchal oppression. In addition, I argue that each novel makes a contribution to an emancipatory feminist politics by suggesting several routes of transcendence or escape. In my concluding chapter, I draw on the

previous discussion of the various ways in which madness is figured in the novels in order to show how, in contesting stereotypical views, the three authors must create new vocabularies and metaphors of madness, thus engaging with patriarchal language itself. In this way, they not only contest normative constructions of the female malady but also bend patriarchal language into new shapes.

KEY TERMS

Sylvia Plath, Jean Rhys, Margaret Atwood, R.D. Laing, *The Bell Jar*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Surfacing*, Female madness, Female agency, Constructions of madness, Metaphors of madness, Divided selfhood, Feminism, Patriarchal oppression, Patriarchal language

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INTRODUCTION

Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightaway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain –
– Emily Dickinson (Ferguson, Salter & Stallworthy 2005:1121)

Emily Dickinson's poem 'Much Madness is divinest Sense –' (first published in 1890) deals with a subject that is familiar, well known, and has myriad connotations. In the past, Western definitions of madness tended to refer to mental illness and the loss of sanity. Over time, however, madness also came to be associated with foolish or abnormal behaviour – all of which could be applied to Dickinson's poem. The poet argues that if you – most likely a woman – do not act in a manner deemed appropriate by society, you are mad, dangerous, and need to be locked up. The poet also argues that madness and insanity are 'divinest Sense'; in other words, madness is regarded as an appropriate reaction to patriarchal oppression. Paradoxically, she argues that it is sensible to become insane if, for example, you are forced into a marriage you do not want, if you are forced to perform 'womanly' duties you do not wish to perform, or if you are excluded from the world of intellect and learning. Written and published in the United States in the nineteenth century, the poem refers to nineteenth century expectations of women, and although these expectations have changed, the response to behaviour that differs from the norm has not changed all that much. Even in contemporary Western society, if a woman's behaviour is deemed abnormal, it is very likely that she will be labelled as mad, insane, mentally ill, and often dangerous.

The question of female madness has been of concern to Western feminist critics as one of the means to interpret and understand the oppression of women under patriarchy. This is due to the fact that madness has been, and still is, considered to be a predominantly female condition.

Arguments have also been made that madness in women can be viewed as being a result of, or even as a reaction to oppression. However, as Elaine Showalter (1987) has argued, female madness should be viewed as part of a complex cultural and historical construction of femininity and the female role in Western society, and not simply be taken at face value. In other words, because madness is a social construct, the cultural, familial, and historical situation should be taken into account when female madness is considered. There is no denying that historically more women have been diagnosed with some form of madness than men – especially the kind of madness that seems inexplicable or irrational, such as hysteria, paranoia, schizophrenia, and depression. This is because ‘deviant’ behaviour – different from the masculine norm – is usually labelled as ‘mad’ behaviour. That is not to say that men do not suffer from mental illnesses or conditions. It was simply more common for madness in men to be ascribed to a physical ailment, whereas madness in women was demonised as something unnatural or wicked. Because this dissertation deals with the discursive construction of female madness, my focus is on how madness became defined as a predominantly female malady, and how such female madness has been both demonised and romanticised.

In this dissertation I engage with the broad question of the cultural construction of madness by critically examining the representation of female madness in selected works of fiction, giving particular attention to the depiction of madness as a form of revolt against the oppression of women in patriarchal societies. The texts I have chosen for this enquiry are *The Bell Jar*, by Sylvia Plath, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, and *Surfacing*, by Margaret Atwood, all of which appeared between 1960 and 1975. I consider the various fictional inscriptions of female insanity which are offered in these novels, placing particular emphasis on the narrative structures and trajectories that are employed, the dominant tropes and images used to represent madness, the rationalisations and explanations that are presented and the resolutions or forms of ‘redemption’ which are offered. In addition, I give attention to the depiction of the broader social context in which ‘madness’ presents itself and the extent to which these texts offer a reading of female madness as a form of feminist resistance. Furthermore, I offer a comparative reading of these texts in relation to the construction of madness (and schizophrenia in particular) in an influential example of contemporary psychological discourse, namely R.D. Laing’s *The Divided Self*.

Published in 1960, *The Divided Self* explores a number of case studies of schizophrenic patients and thus provides a definition and explanation of madness which has been culturally influential. I aim to explore not only the ways in which madness is constructed and narrated in Laing's text but also to consider to what extent the various novels under discussion draw on, extend or renegotiate the version of madness which is offered by Laing. It is not clear whether the authors of my chosen texts read *The Divided Self*, but his theory was certainly widely known. *The Divided Self* thus provides an important discursive framework against which to explore and assess the particular construction of madness to be found in each novel. I do not approach Laing's work as an example of expertise on the subject of madness or schizophrenia. Rather, Laing's work is an object of study in its own right as it forms part of the broader cultural milieu within which the three primary texts were written. Therefore, I use Laing's work not to explain what schizophrenia is, but to explore the manifestations of madness in each text.

MADNESS IN HISTORY

Madness is not new to contemporary Western civilisation, and can be traced back to ancient times. This is evident in the numerous representations and narrative constructions of madness in ancient mythology. In ancient Rome and ancient Greece, madness was not necessarily seen as a condition or disease of the mind, but rather as punishment from supernatural deities. In ancient Greek mythology, mortals are at the mercy of their fickle and vengeful gods, and disobedience leads to punishment. These gods, for any number of reasons including jealousy, anger, and even spite, also cause one another to descend into madness. For example, Cassandra, a Trojan princess, is cursed by the god Apollo, son of Zeus. In his efforts to seduce her, Apollo gives her the power of prophecy but, when she rejects him, he curses her so that her prophecies would never be believed, despite being true (Schein 1982:12). Her curse causes her to be considered a liar, and eventually it drives her insane. In his study *Madness in Civilization* (2015:23), Andrew Scull argues that narratives of Greek mythology should not, however, be perceived as true accounts of history. Although these narratives are rooted in the reality of the time and concern the beliefs and religious practices of the ancient Greeks, the narrative plots were created for the

stage, which formed an important part of everyday life. What we can infer from these myths and tales is something of the way in which the Greeks viewed the world, and by extension, conditions such as madness. In addition, whether or not these myths were believed, the Greeks certainly believed in the gods that populate these narratives, as well as in the influence these gods had over mortal beings. Scull writes that it was widely believed that the origins of madness lay in **supernatural interference, because the ‘gods were everywhere for the Greeks, from the shrines to Apollo, Hecate and Hermes that greeted everyone arriving at the threshold of the dwelling, to the acknowledgment of a multitude of deities scattered throughout the house’ (2015:24).** Despite the **absence of women’s rights in the Classical period, there does not seem to be much gender disparity when it comes to ancient Greek mythology; gods and goddesses alike were worshiped, and men and women alike suffered (or prospered) under their influence.**

It is only in the collected works of Hippocrates that gender disparity comes to the fore in terms of the causes of madness and mental illness, as well as of physical disease. The Greek physicians associated with Hippocrates and the Hippocratic Collection looked for the origins of mental illness in the body, instead of in supernatural forces. It is in the Hippocratic Collection that we first come across the idea of the four humours that were considered to make up the body, namely phlegm, yellow bile, blood, and black bile; according to this claim, any illness of the body (or mind) is rooted in an imbalance of these humours (Scull 2015:28). For example, one explanation of madness is **‘abnormality of the bile, which, when it breaks out, provokes uncontrollable anger in the patient’ (Perdicoyianni-Paléologou 2009:314).** Because Hippocrates and his followers sought for the origins of maladies in the body, women were seen as more vulnerable or susceptible to mental diseases because of their biological sex differences. According to Scull, the **belief was held that women’s bodies were ‘more readily deranged’ by their reproductive functions. It was ‘from these notions, reworked by Galen (c. AD 129-216) and other Roman commentators, and for the most part later re-entering the West from Arabic medicine, along with other Hippocratic ideas, that Classical accounts of hysteria were constructed’ (Scull 2015:29).**

Hippocrates first diagnosed women with hysteria, a view which was based on their reproductive systems, **but it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the term ‘hysteria’** – derived from the Greek term for womb, *hysteria* (Felman 1975:2) – became an acknowledged scientific disease. Since it was attributed to the female reproductive system, hysteria was a condition suffered only by women; in this way it became linked to dominant constructions of femininity. Jane M. Ussher writes that examining the eighteenth and nineteenth century construction of **‘madness provides insights into the cultural construction of what it means to be a “woman” and “man”, as madness is often defined as deviation from archetypal gender roles’** (Ussher 2011:13). Therefore, a woman diagnosed with hysteria was often seen as disturbed for not behaving in a manner deemed appropriate for a respectable Victorian woman. She was either not feminine enough, and exhibited qualities seen as masculine, such as wanting to be independent or having her own, differing, opinion; or, she was too sexual, which was seen as inappropriate, as well as dangerous to her own constitution. The result was that she was locked up or hidden away by her family – usually under the authority of a male figure – or she was sent to an insane asylum.

Before the existence of insane asylums, institutions for the criminally insane were created during **the seventeenth century, in a process Michel Foucault refers to as ‘The Great Confinement’** (Foucault 1967:38). In 1656, the first of these houses of confinement, the Hôpital Général in Paris, was founded to house poor and unemployed men. The institution, and others following its example, aimed to prevent idleness and did not simply confine **‘those out of work, but [gave] work to those who had been confined’** in order to make them contribute to the welfare of the entire nation (Foucault 1967:51). Foucault writes that these houses of confinement were a failure and, as a result, were substituted by asylums for the insane. This was because although it was not the first time that **madmen were locked up in the seventeenth century, ‘it was in this period that they began to [be confined], along with the entire population with whom their kinship was recognised’** (Foucault 1967:58). These madmen were, however, seen and treated as animals, and were often chained to walls and beds, and displayed to the public in cages.

The treatment of the mad as animals was not restricted to men, however, and women were not necessarily treated any better; for example, **in the madhouse named ‘Bethlehem’, also known as**

Bedlam, 'violent madwomen were chained by the ankles to the walls of a long gallery' (Foucault 1967:71). The asylums themselves resembled an animal's cave, or, as Foucault writes, 'a menagerie' (1967:72). The more humane treatment of madwomen was to lock them away – serving the double purpose of confinement and of preventing scandal. The most well-known description of such a case is that of Charlotte Brontë's fictional Bertha Mason, Mr Rochester's mad wife in the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), who is locked up in Rochester's attic. Showalter writes that Brontë's depiction of Bertha presents a period 'when it was common for crazy women to be kept hidden in homes (there were numerous legends of such women in Brontë's native Yorkshire), or to be treated like wild beasts in cruel asylums' (1987:67). Bertha is described as grovelling, snatching, and growling 'like some strange wild animal ... [with] a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, [hiding] its head and face' (Brontë 2010:362). This animalistic description of Bertha, referred to as an 'it' instead of as a human being, is similar to the romanticised figure of Romantic invention in the sense that they both share the status of victim. In this sense, the wild-eyed madwoman is linked to Shakespeare's Ophelia or Crazy Jane, a female figure originally created by Matthew Gregory Lewis in 1793. Crazy Jane is 'a poor servant girl who, abandoned by her lover or bereft of him through death, goes mad as a result' (Showalter 1987:11). Both Ophelia and Crazy Jane are traditionally portrayed with wild, loose hair that is decorated with garlands of flowers. Showalter argues that the 'woman with her hair down indicated an offense against decorum, an improper sensuality. Ophelia's flowers, too, came from Renaissance iconography of female sexuality ... [and] her death by drowning has associations with the feminine and the irrational, since water is the organic symbol of woman's fluidity' (1987:11). This romanticisation of madness, however, could not be true in real world cases, as actual madwomen were not displayed to the world. They were, like Brontë's Bertha, locked away in attics and, with the rise of insane asylums, confined to hospitals for the insane.

In the Victorian age, the number of women admitted to insane asylums increased until they outnumbered the admission of men. Showalter (1987:54) writes that there were those who claimed that this was not due to gender disparity, and that the increase of the female population in asylums could be attributed to the longer life expectancy of women. However, the 'prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all

along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control' (Showalter 1987:55). Women were seen as deficient and more susceptible to madness purely due to biological differences, and women diagnosed with hysteria were not merely locked up in insane asylums, but needed to be reminded of their place in society. In Western patriarchal society, women were expected to be submissive to the men in their lives – fathers, brothers, and husbands – and the failure to conform very likely resulted in a diagnosis of hysteria. Therefore, although many women were admitted to insane asylums due to nervous breakdowns, some were committed for seemingly insignificant violations of conduct, such as disagreeing with a male figure. There were also women who were committed because they showed little or no interest in their female duties, turning instead to matters deemed to belong to the masculine sphere. The result of this was that one of the primary aims of insane asylums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to 'reinforce conventional sex-role behaviour' (Showalter 1987:82). Not only were female inmates expected to care about their appearance, but they were given tasks of a supposedly feminine nature, such as 'cleaning, laundry, and sewing' (Showalter 1987:82).

Due to the patriarchal nature of eighteenth and nineteenth century Western society, the physicians and psychiatrists who dealt with madwomen were male, and women were not given voices. This meant, of course, that psychiatrists consulted with the husbands or male figures who had control over the lives of those designated mad. The result of this was that many of the women committed to insane asylums were not necessarily in need of medical treatment, and that some were locked up simply for their husbands to be – conveniently – rid of them. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman*, originally published in 1792, chronicles the life of such a woman, Maria, who is wrongfully incarcerated in an asylum by her husband who has also taken her child away. When such women were confined in asylums, the repercussions were not limited to prescriptions of physical labour, such as laundry. Some of the more sinister and questionable methods used to cure female insanity included rest cures and clitoridectomies. What makes these supposed cures even more nightmarish is that, as Showalter writes, while physicians and psychiatrists blamed the reproductive organs, women writing in journals or secret diaries at the time 'suggested that it was the lack of meaningful work, hope, or companionship

that led to depression or breakdown' (1987:61). In other words, women became mad not because of their 'wandering wombs', but because they were seen and treated solely in terms of their female duties and not as human beings with hopes, fears, feelings, and opinions of their own.

The recognition that there is more to madness than biological factors surfaced during World War I, when soldiers began to show symptoms of trauma, often similar to those of women diagnosed with hysteria. At first, the term 'shell shock' was applied to soldiers with head wounds caused by shrapnel, and their symptoms – including nightmares, nervousness and hallucinations – were attributed to an organic cause. However, growing numbers of 'soldiers who had been close to detonation without receiving a head wound presented at casualty clearing stations with puzzling symptoms. They suffered from amnesia, poor concentration, headache, tinnitus, hypersensitivity to noise, dizziness, and tremor but did not recover with hospital treatment' (Jones, Fear & Wessely 2007:1641). Men who suffered psychologically, but who had not experienced physical injuries were seen as deserters, pacifists and cowards. This was especially true because of the understanding of hysteria as an exclusively female affliction: men who suffered from 'male hysteria' were shamed as being feminine, since men were not supposed to display any sign of weakness. However, it soon became apparent that these symptoms were not caused by weakness, shell shock or 'male hysteria'. It became clear that madness was not necessarily or simply a product of biological problems, and that the psyche of the mad person needed to be investigated. According to Showalter, this 'would force a reconsideration of all the basic concepts of English psychiatry' (1987:167). This not only meant that the effects of war on frontline soldiers had to be re-evaluated, but the causes of female hysteria as well. Showalter also writes that female hysteria declined after World War I, and that it was 'believed that women had become stronger and less vulnerable to mental breakdown when they were faced with real crises and when they were given meaningful work' (1987:195).

Women's rights in Britain did not improve much during the war, even though the London City Council mental hospitals began allowing the employment of female doctors in 1927 (Grogan 2014:81). The majority of psychiatrists were still male and, with the absence of a feminist

movement, female psychiatrists or psychoanalysts ‘in the British Psycho-Analytical Society assumed roles within the discipline and the profession that were extensions of their prewar feminine roles, and that were not a threat to the Society itself’ (Showalter 1987:201). This meant that, even though women were allowed into the institution of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, they were not given the same power as men. In fact, their duties resembled those of the traditional female in Western society. Therefore, the presence of female professionals did not provide women patients with a voice, and they did not have any noteworthy effect on psychiatry or on the treatment of female patients. Without a voice or a **movement advocating for women’s rights**, the female malady did not decline either, and instead, ‘no longer linked to hysteria, [it] assumed a new clinical form: schizophrenia’ (Showalter 1987:203).

First referred to as dementia praecox by German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, the clinical term ‘**schizophrenia**’ was only adopted when Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler renamed it thus in 1908. According to David H. Barlow and V. Mark Durand, Kraepelin used the term dementia praecox to unify the ‘symptoms of insanity that [had] usually been viewed as reflecting separate and distinct orders: catatonia (alternating immobility and excited agitation), hebephrenia (silly and immature emotionality) and paranoia (delusions of grandeur or persecution)’ (2005:455-456). In her study *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry: Schizophrenia in Clinical and Cultural Theory*, Angela Woods writes that Eugen Bleuler ‘psychologized dementia praecox [by] renaming it schizophrenia and broadening the analytic possibilities for its diagnosis and treatment’ (2011:46). She further notes that Bleuler’s ‘account of schizophrenia hinges upon the idea that the normal mind works by unifying psychic functions, drives and processes. In schizophrenia, these become “split off” from each other, and the psyche is fragmented by the dominance or impotence of various incomplete processes’ (Woods 2011:48). Neither gender nor gender differences were of primary concern to either Kraepelin or Bleuler in their studies of schizophrenia, and it was only after the World War I that schizophrenia became a female malady – not because schizophrenia is seen as a female disorder like hysteria or depression, but, as Showalter argues, because ‘the schizophrenic woman has become as central a cultural figure for the twentieth century as the hysteric was for the nineteenth’ (1987:204).

Men also suffered from madness and schizophrenia, but, as Phyllis Chesler writes in *Women and Madness*, towards ‘the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, the portraits of madness executed by both psychiatrists and novelists were primarily of women’ (1974:33). Furthermore, women were still incarcerated and sent to insane asylums to be treated and ruled over by patriarchal male psychiatrists. Labelled as schizophrenic or neurotic, instead of hysteric, twentieth century female patients of mental asylums were not necessarily treated any better than those confined in Victorian asylums. Chesler argues that these asylums ‘closely approximate[d] the female rather than the male experience within the family’ (1974:34). This implies that the gender roles of the patient were still considered an important factor in her mental health, and that women were still thought to be insane if they rejected traditional female roles. The result was that the treatments to which women were subjected in mental asylums or psychiatric hospitals were still designed to reinforce traditional female behaviour, in order to remind the female patient of her proper place in society, as well as to subdue any rebellion.

Whereas physical labour was thought to cure or subdue the insane during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the twentieth century saw myriad experimental treatments for insanity. Andrew Scull writes that ‘across Europe and North America, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the introduction of a quite remarkable array of somatic treatments designed to root out madness and restore the lunatic to sanity’ (2015:308). The underlying argument behind the use of somatic treatments is that there must be a biological explanation for madness, and that the patient can be cured by administering treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), insulin therapy, lobotomies and cold baths, to mention only a few. ECT was one of the most commonly prescribed treatments for schizophrenic patients, especially women, and ‘originated in the belief that the grand-mal convulsions of epilepsy were biologically antagonistic to schizophrenia, and that one disorder could be prevented or cured by inducing the symptoms of the other’ (Showalter 1987:205). The benefits of ECT are decidedly questionable, and the link between ECT and improvement of a patient’s health was never clearly established. Furthermore, patients were not given a say in the matter, because they were seen as ‘somehow less “human” than either medical patients or criminals’ (Chesler 1974:34). Patients who resisted treatment were threatened or forced to undergo ECT, based on the belief that, since they were insane, they were

not fit to make their own decisions. In the administration of insulin therapy, on the other hand, ‘schizophrenic patients were given injections of insulin to reduce their blood-sugar level and to induce hypoglycemic shock, which produced convulsions or a coma’ (Showalter 1987:205). Patients who underwent insulin therapy gained a lot of weight and experienced memory loss, often permanently. Showalter notes that the treatment had strong associations with the traditional female role, and that along with insulin injections – administered by female nurses – ‘the daily hot baths, the personal attention, the diet of sugar and starch ... suggested surrogate mothering’ (1987:206). Patients were not only reminded of their female duties, but were also infantilised in the process.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, madness, schizophrenia, and the feminisation associated with treatments such as ECT and insulin therapy ‘were given a particular interpretation in the very extensive English women’s literature dealing with madness, institutionalization and shock ... [and] schizophrenia became the bitter metaphor through which English women defined their cultural situation’ (Showalter 1987:210). In 1947, Mary Jane Ward wrote a semi-autobiographical novel called *The Snake Pit*, wherein the protagonist, Virginia Cunningham, is diagnosed with schizophrenia and as a result undergoes electroconvulsive therapy. In 1948, the book was made into a film in which ‘electroshock was portrayed sympathetically to a vast audience, and presented as vital to speeding the recovery of Virginia Cunningham’ (Scull 2015:317). In the novel, however, the protagonist views her treatment as a punishment, and wonders what she has done to be subjected to such horrors. She refers to the doctors who administer the treatments as ‘jailers’ (Ward 1947:164), and in her description of ECT compares the treatment to the ancient practice of lowering ‘insane persons into snake pits’ in order to drive them back to sanity (Ward 1947:209). Similarly, Sylvia Plath’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) chronicles the protagonist Esther Greenwood’s suicide attempt and subsequent stint in a psychiatric asylum, where she undergoes electroconvulsive as well as insulin therapy. Plath’s Esther, like Ward’s Virginia, experiences ECT as a form of punishment and, after her first treatment, states, ‘I wonder what terrible thing it was I had done’ (Plath 1966 [1963]:138). Throughout the novel, ECT is equated to electrocution – the ultimate form of punishment. What this implies about the treatment of madness and schizophrenia is that the disorder itself is

not something that needs to be cured, but something for which the patients need to be punished. In other words, the disorder, and by extension the cause, is viewed and constructed as a transgression of some sort. The patient needs to be punished for deviating from the norms of Western patriarchal society.

LAING AND ANTIPSYCHIATRY

The 1960s saw the start of the antipsychiatry movement, led by psychiatrists R.D. Laing and David Cooper. Angela Woods writes that ‘antipsychiatric thinkers challenged the clinical pictures of psychosis offered by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, suggesting that schizophrenic symptomatology is not baffling, bizarre, or otherwise unfathomable, but on the contrary rich in meaning’ (2011:125). Antipsychiatry, named thus by David Cooper, rejected the use of treatments such as insulin therapy and electroshock therapy, and claimed that mental illness occurred as a result of the patient’s cultural and familial situation. Therefore, antipsychiatrists aimed to examine mental illness within the patient’s personal and cultural situation and, specifically, to ‘look at the person who has been labelled schizophrenic in his actual human context and to enquire how this label came to be attached to him, by whom it was attached, and what it signific[d] both for the labellers and the labelled’ (Cooper 1967:x). Antipsychiatry, although not necessarily engaging with feminist theorists or critics, provided women with a tool to fight oppression, since antipsychiatrists argued that ‘mental illness had to be examined in terms of its social contexts: the emotional dynamics of the family and the institution of psychiatry itself’ (Showalter 1987:221). Therefore, antipsychiatry was important for second wave feminists, since what they wanted was to create a new female identity that was not reliant on patriarchal ideals of gender roles and expectations. In conjunction with this, antipsychiatrists aimed to consider and examine schizophrenia not as a disease, but as a product of social, cultural, or familial oppression. Although Cooper uses the pronoun ‘he’ when he refers to the schizophrenic patient in his book *Psychiatry and Antipsychiatry* (1967) – reflecting the conservative gender assumptions of the period – the majority of patients examined by antipsychiatric theorists were women.

Cooper coined the term ‘antipsychiatry’, but R.D. Laing was the frontrunner of the movement, despite having reservations about the term itself. In his study *The Divided Self* (1960), Laing explores a number of case studies of schizophrenic patients, wherein, as Woods argues, he ‘seeks primarily to render schizophrenia intelligible’ (2011:126). His aim was to prove that schizophrenia did not have organic causes, but could be explained as a reaction to an ‘unlivable situation’ (Showalter 1987:221). The focus of Laing’s investigation of mental illness in *The Divided Self* is therefore on the schizophrenic patient’s experiences and surroundings. Laing’s central argument relates to the notion of the ‘split self’, which can be traced back to Bleuler’s initial theories on schizophrenia. Of particular interest in Laing’s theorising of madness are some of the dominant tropes he deploys: the trope of the split psyche or the ‘divided self’ and the related concepts of the ‘true’ self and the ‘false’ self, and the portrayal of schizophrenic experience as social revolt, of madness as granting a kind of freedom. The notion of the ‘split self’ is that a schizophrenic patient typically experiences a split in the psyche, resulting in a ‘true’ and ‘false’ self. There is a rent in the patient’s relationship with reality; the patient’s ‘true’ self retreats and withdraws from the world, while the ‘false’ self occupies the reality of the patient’s body and world. Laing argued that this split was the result ‘of women’s repression and oppression. Madness itself became intelligible as a strategy ... [and] schizophrenia could be seen as a form of protest against the female role. Laingian therapy not only listened to the woman’s words, as psychoanalysis had done, but also attended to her social circumstance’ (Showalter 1987:222).

Laing not only examined the patriarchal oppression of the father and the male oppressor, but also explored the influence of what he refers to as the ‘schizophrenogenic’ mother. He argued that the patient’s family situation, and specifically the ‘schizophrenogenic’ mother ‘may impede rather than facilitate the [patient’s] capacity to participate in a real shared world, as self-with-other’ (Laing 1960:205). Laing’s focus in *The Divided Self* is primarily on the schizophrenic patient but his theory also has relevance to the idea of madness more generally. His argument that madness can be understood in terms of the patient’s cultural and social context offers valuable insights into the occurrence of madness in women and provides a useful framework for a construction of madness that emphasises its potential as a form of resistance against the oppression of women in patriarchal societies. As Showalter writes, Laing’s examination of schizophrenia in women ‘gave

feminists important ammunition in their analysis of women's oppression' (1987:223). However, it must be noted that despite the validation that Laing's work offered second wave feminists, ultimately 'antipsychiatry had no coherent analysis to offer women ... [because like] other radical movements of the 1960s, antipsychiatry in practice was male-dominated, yet unaware of its own sexism' (Showalter 1987:246). The female's role in the antipsychiatric movement was still that of patient, and the male's role that of psychiatrist, therapist, or doctor. However, since there was little validation or social support for feminists to be found elsewhere, Laing's theory offered an attractive explanation for the occurrence of madness in women oppressed by patriarchy.

'Madness' in history, as I have argued, suggests a close link between female madness and patriarchal definitions of 'acceptable' or 'normal' behaviour. Another aspect of the cultural construction of madness that I would like to highlight here is the tendency towards dualistic responses. As Woods explains, when an illness 'is viewed as inexplicable and impenetrable, people tend to react to it with one of two extremes: either they *stigmatize* the illness or they *romanticize* it' (2011:15, italics in original). Laing, especially towards the latter part of the 1960s, tended to offer a romanticised view of schizophrenia. In *The Divided Self*, Laing tries to comprehend and understand the causes of schizophrenia, and although he manages to construct a model of schizophrenia that could be explained as a result of oppression, his theory remained controversial and was not accepted by those who did not belong to the movement of antipsychiatry. The problem with the inability to interpret schizophrenia's aetiology is that the condition is raised to the sublime. In fact, as Woods writes, the antipsychiatric interpretation of schizophrenia 'oscillates between rejecting and reinforcing schizophrenia's sublimity. R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* is the exemplary text here: although its existential-phenomenological account of schizophrenia seeks primarily to render schizophrenia intelligible, something of the "essential mystery" of psychotic experience is preserved as its defining characteristic' (2011:126).

If the objective of *The Divided Self* was to comprehend madness, Laing's later study, *The Politics of Experience* (1967), takes up the earlier romanticising tendency in his work by explicitly reading schizophrenia and madness as an experience of the sublime. Showalter writes that *The Politics of Experience* was 'published at the height of the 1960s utopian euphoria ... [and in it] Laing

argued that far from being a form of mental illness, schizophrenia was a mode of insight and prophecy' (1987:229). For Laing, madness is not merely a disease, but a form of divine knowledge. In *The Politics of Experience*, he writes that madness 'need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death' (Laing 1984:133). Therefore, Laing's view in *The Politics of Experience* was that the schizophrenic must undertake a quest or 'an ecstatic voyage into inner space' (Woods 2011:141). However, this was not necessarily a journey to improvement, but rather a journey to find divine knowledge within the experience of madness. Despite its controversy, the text still managed to become one of the most well-known psychiatric texts of the 1960s.

The theory of the schizophrenic experience as a voyage or heroic journey is akin to the epic hero's journey, described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Laing's description of the schizophrenic's journey specifically has parallels to the epic hero's journey into the underworld and his return, armed with a special weapon or superior knowledge. Campbell writes that at this stage of the journey, called 'the Belly of the Whale', the hero 'is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died' (2004:83). If the hero has died, even if this is only a metaphorical death, then it stands to reason that he must be reborn in order to continue his journey. Through death and rebirth, the hero goes through a metamorphosis and emerges from the 'belly of the whale' armed with a special weapon, or with divine knowledge that would aid him in his quest. Woods writes that in Laingian theory, the schizophrenic patient goes through the same kind of journey; after entering the unknown 'inner space', the schizophrenic experiences 'a transcendent loss of self followed by the recovery of authenticity, an essential form of being unmarked by modernity and techno-scientific rationality' (2011:141). In other words, Laing believed that the schizophrenic patient was not a madman or -woman in need of treatments to bring him/her back to sanity. Rather, the patient needs to go through a 'spiritual death and rebirth' (Showalter 1987:230), and the therapist's role is 'to act as the patient's guide in a metanoiac, or transforming, journey that is archetypally epic, heroic, and masculine, a psychic pilgrimage more exotic than the voyages of Ulysses or Kurtz' (Showalter 1987:230). Laing was, however, disappointed in his own quest to guide a patient through such a transformation, and even he 'became anti-Laingian in the 1970s' (Showalter 1987:245).

However, Laing's work was so well-known and widely read, especially by women who felt that he was describing the story of their own lives, that, as Nick Crossley notes, 'nobody could carry on as before after antipsychiatry' (2006:123).

REPRESENTING MADNESS IN LITERATURE

With the popularity of antipsychiatry and women's liberation movements permeating the United States and Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, it is little wonder that books written during and after this period deal with issues of female oppression, as well as with the idea of madness as an appropriate reaction to such oppression. This includes fictional representations of female madness, as well as psychological studies dealing with female madness as a reaction to the social or cultural environment. For example, in *Women and Madness* (1974), Phyllis Chesler, through interviews with women suffering from several kinds of mental illnesses, examines conditions of female madness and concludes that they have their provenance in societal expectations of women. Of equal importance for the study I undertake here is the substantial body of scholarship on the representation of madness in fictional texts. For example, in her study on female madness in literature, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (1978), Barbara Hill Rigney explores *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, *The Four-Gated City* by Doris Lessing, and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, all of which depict female madness as a result of the division between societal expectations of women and their sense of authentic identity. Rigney examines the manifestations of madness in these four texts in relation to both the fictionalised patriarchal societies they depict and to the sexual politics that ascribe to women certain female roles. Also important is Lilian Feder's *Literature in Madness* (1980), a work which examines depictions of madness in literature written by women and the way in which literary representations of insanity differ from, as well as reflect, real life interpretations of mental illness. In similar fashion, Shoshana Felman's article 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy' (1980) examines the extent to which women must accept traditional female norms in order to be considered mentally healthy. By analysing Chesler's *Women and Madness*, Luce Irigaray's *Speculum de l'Autre Femme*, and Balzac's *Adieu*, Felman considers the dualisms of man/woman and reason/madness and examines the absence of women's voices in critical discourse dealing

with madness. One of the most influential studies in this area is of course Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (1985). In this groundbreaking study, Showalter explores the cultural construction of madness in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, and shows how these constructions are influenced by the broader socio-political context. Taking a slightly different focus in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), feminist critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explore the works of well-known women writers of the nineteenth century. Drawing on *Jane Eyre's* 'madwoman in the attic' for the title, Gilbert and Gubar's study examines the limitations imposed on Victorian female authors, and their struggle to accurately represent women in their work. Their argument revolves around the notion that Victorian women writers depict women either as angelic or as monstrous (or mad), and that these inaccurate representations were influenced by the ways in which male writers represented their female characters. In this dissertation, I make a contribution to existing studies on the representation of madness in literature by exploring the manifestation of madness in three fictional texts, all written by women, in the sense that I investigate not only the ways in which madness is depicted in fictional texts but also how it is represented as potentially advantageous to women oppressed by patriarchy. To this end, I consider the construction of female madness in *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys, and *Surfacing* (1972) by Margaret Atwood. I read these texts in relation to R.D. Laing's influential construction of madness placing particular emphasis on his foregrounding of the social contexts of female psychosis and his construction of the female malady as a form of empowerment, as a means of assisting the female schizophrenic to regain agency in a society dominated by males.

Chapter 1 examines *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical novel, published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in 1963 and which appeared a few weeks before she committed suicide. The novel is Plath's account of the summer she spent working for the magazine *Mademoiselle*, her suicide attempt thereafter, and her subsequent stay in a psychiatric hospital. Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of *The Bell Jar*, is a college student in the 1950s who is faced with the pressures of a society where women are expected to become housewives and mothers. She cannot, however, reconcile this with her wish to have a career and to become a famous

writer. As a result, she attempts to commit suicide and is committed to an asylum where she is treated with shock and insulin therapy. The focus of this chapter is on the construction of madness in *The Bell Jar*, and the ways in which this construction works as a revolt against patriarchy and the traditional female role in 1950s America. Therefore, the discussion includes an examination of the patriarchal society presented in the novel, as well as the tropes and ideas used to illustrate the protagonist's experience of madness. In addition, I explore the ways in which the novel offers a reiteration or re-negotiation of R.D. Laing's influential theories of schizophrenia, and to what extent it may be said to draw on similar tropes. Finally, I explore how, as in Laing's work, the protagonist's escape into madness is presented as a strategy of revolt against patriarchal oppression, as well as how the protagonist's schizophrenic journey can be said to draw on Campbell's epic hero and the journey into the underworld.

Chapter 2 examines *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, published in 1966. The novel was written as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), specifically to provide a back story for the madwoman in the attic, Rochester's wife, Bertha (Antoinette). The novel concerns Antoinette Mason, a Creole woman in the Caribbean, who is married off to an Englishman. Her husband, threatened by the hostile environment of the colonial setting, as well as aware of the history of madness in Antoinette's family, casts her as insane and renames her Bertha. He takes her back to England and locks her in his attic, which results in her burning down the house, and herself along with it. The focus of this chapter is on the representation of Antoinette's madness, and the way in which it can be said to function as a revolt against patriarchal and colonial oppression. Therefore, the discussion includes an exploration of the broader socio-political context of the novel, and an examination of Antoinette's marriage as representative of the colonial system. In addition, I discuss Antoinette's madness as it is presented in the novel, as well as the tropes and ideas used to illustrate it. In doing so, I make reference to Laing's theory of the 'split psyche' and the 'divided self'. I also offer an examination of the intertextuality between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, with the focus on *Wide Sargasso Sea's* function as a critique of Brontë's depiction of the madwoman in the attic. Lastly, I discuss the construction of madness as a form of rebellion against patriarchal oppression, and as a rejection of Bertha's function as a narrative tool in *Jane Eyre*.

Chapter 3 examines *Surfacing*, by Margaret Atwood, published in 1972. The novel follows an unnamed Canadian woman, the protagonist, who returns to her childhood home in Canada to search for her missing father. On a rural island with her lover and a married couple, the protagonist becomes plagued by her past, and by the destruction of the environment caused by modern society. When she finds her father's corpse in the lake, she mistakes it for her aborted foetus. It is then revealed that she is not a married woman who has left her husband and child. Instead, what emerges is that she had an affair with her art professor, who persuaded her to have an abortion. Upon finding her father's corpse, she comes to face the truth and, as a result, descends into madness. As in the previous chapters, the focus of this section is on the construction of madness in the novel, and its treatment as a revolt against patriarchal oppression. As part of this discussion, I explore the way in which Canadian patriarchal society is depicted in *Surfacing*. The novel's engagement with the broader socio-political context also forms an important part of the discussion, as the novel offers a depiction of the harm done to the natural environment as a correlative to the protagonist's psychological breakdown. In addition, I discuss the construction of madness as a reworking of Laing's notion of the 'split psyche', which is presented in the form of the protagonist's neck in the sense that she sees the neck as a barrier between her mind and the rest of her body, instead of as a connection. Furthermore, I discuss the depiction of the protagonist's relationship with her parents, as well as how her memories of them contribute to the depiction of her madness. Lastly, I discuss the extent to which female madness is presented as a strategy of revolt against the oppressive patriarchal society in *Surfacing*, and the ways in which the protagonist's descent into madness can be viewed as akin to the epic hero's descent into the underworld.

In my concluding chapter, I bring together the main features of the construction of female madness in each of the novels I have discussed, looking at similarities and differences in the use of tropes, images and narrative structures as well as the kinds of rationalisations and resolutions that are provided. Looking in particular at the attention given to social/familial context as 'explanation' in each text, I consider the extent to which each novel represents female madness as 'divinest sense', namely as an appropriate reaction to an oppressive patriarchal society and I

explore the degree to which this reaction is presented as successful. In my concluding remarks, I discuss the ways in which the writers use new vocabularies of madness to engage with patriarchal language in order to contest stereotypical patriarchal constructions.

CHAPTER 1

‘Read COSMOPOLITAN from cover to cover,’ writes Sylvia Plath in her journal on the 13th of June 1959. ‘Two mental-health articles. I must write one about a college girl suicide. THE DAY I DIED. And a story, a novel even. Must get out SNAKE PIT. There is an increasing market for mental stuff. I am a fool if I don’t relive, recreate it’ (Plath 2001:495). The ‘college girl suicide’ is a reference to Plath’s suicide attempt at the age of twenty; after working for the magazine *Mademoiselle* as a guest editor, Plath, disenchanted by her experience, attempted to end her life by drinking a bottle of sleeping pills and crawling underneath her mother’s house. She was found by her brother and, subsequently, spent time in psychiatric care where she underwent electroconvulsive and insulin therapy. Plath’s wish to recreate her experience of mental illness resulted in *The Bell Jar*, the semi-autobiographical novel that was published a few weeks before she succeeded in committing suicide in 1963. She published the novel under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, which she believed, according to her mother Aurelia Plath, ‘would fully protect her from disclosure’ (Plath 1975:483). Plath knew that in writing about her mental health experiences, she was writing for the popular market, an audience that would read magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. Therefore, her use of a pseudonym would distance her from her ‘potboiler’ (Plath 1975:490), and the novel would not be associated with her more serious literary efforts. Furthermore, she would have wanted to protect the people on whom characters in the novel are based. This proved necessary since her mother wanted to keep the book from being published in the United States of America, and ‘experienced the book as a bitter and ungrateful attack on those she knew and loved’ (Gill 2008:93).

The Bell Jar has become an American literary classic, but the novel has been dwarfed by Plath’s poetry, as well as by the sensational details surrounding her failed marriage to Ted Hughes and her ultimate suicide. Where *The Bell Jar* is examined, it is often in an attempt to discover biographical details about Plath’s life. Jo Gill writes that *The Bell Jar* is often read ‘with a view to the insights it might offer into the working processes of the poet, and as though this were the real, authentic voice of the now-dead author communicating from beyond the grave’ (2008:74). It is inspected as a literal account of a trying period in her life and investigated in an attempt to

diagnose Plath with a mental illness such as schizophrenia. Even though the novel is based on real experiences, *The Bell Jar* – like her poetry – should not be read as ‘confessional’. In an interview with Peter Orr, Plath said the following about her poetry:

I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathise with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind. I think that personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and sort of mirror looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be *relevant*, and relevant to the larger things, the bigger things, such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on. (Orr & Plath 2012)

Therefore, informed as it might be by her life and experiences, Plath's work should not be read as an exact account of her feelings or experiences. As Judith Kroll writes about her poetry, it ‘is not primarily literal and confessional. It is, rather, the articulation of a mythic system which integrates all aspects of her work, and into which autobiographical details are shaped and absorbed, greatly qualifying how such elements ought to be viewed’ (2007:2). Similarly, *The Bell Jar* should be considered as a piece of fiction, and the protagonist's mental condition should be investigated as a particular textual construction of madness, written by an author who was aware of the fact that she was manipulating and controlling the experiences about which she wrote. Kroll argues that there is ‘danger [in] missing the meaning of her poetry in regarding her themes and imagery as illustrations of pathological symptoms, as if what is of significance in her poetry were reducible to the presentation of a case history’ (2007:5). This can also be applied to a reading of *The Bell Jar* that focuses on the events as illustrating Plath's mental state, and thus misses the significance of her writing. Plath also admits that she would have been a fool not to take advantage of the growing market for novels on mental illness, and her wish was not necessarily to write the novel as a form of catharsis. Rather, she wanted to write a novel that would be relevant and important, such as Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit* (1947), a novel that was also based on the author's personal experiences with mental illness.

Even as an eighteen-year-old, Sylvia Plath knew that any kind of writing – even literal accounts about one's own experiences – is a construction that is influenced by the writer's emotions, views,

and writing ability. In a journal entry in 1950, she writes that ‘some things are hard to write about. After something happens to you, you go to write it down, and either you over dramatize it or underplay it, exaggerate the wrong parts or ignore the important ones. At any rate, you never write it quite the way you want to’ (2001:10). Because we do not have access to Plath the person, what we do know about her psycho-biography comes from her journal entries and letters. In her discussion of Plath’s letters and journal entries in *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath* (2008), Gill argues that the self or ‘the “I” is constructed in the process of writing the letters and is produced by, rather than reflected in, the epistolary exchange’ (2008:94). Furthermore, Gill writes that in her letters, as well as in her journal entries, ‘Plath self-consciously constructs a personal identity’ (2008:104). Like her poetry and prose therefore, Plath’s letters and journal entries are subject to similar processes of construction and should not be investigated as literal accounts of her experiences or feelings. In this chapter, I take up Plath’s own suggestions, embarking on an analysis of *The Bell Jar* which considers the particular ways in which madness is constructed and inscribed. To this end, I investigate aspects of language, imagery, tropes and narrative form, paying attention to the ways in which these various stylistic devices contribute to the particular reading of madness offered in this text. I consider the extent to which the construction of madness in *The Bell Jar* can be said to function as a revolt against an oppressive patriarchal society – that of 1950s America, where women are expected to become wives and mothers. I consider this construction of madness in relation to the work of R.D. Laing, particularly his theories on the notion of the ‘divided self’.

The similarities between Plath’s life and the events recorded in *The Bell Jar*, however, cannot be ignored completely. Writing the novel might have been a calculated decision to take advantage of a market for novels about madness, but there is no denying that the protagonist’s experiences are based on real events from Plath’s life and that most characters are based on real people. As I have mentioned, *The Bell Jar* is based on the summer Plath spent in New York working for the magazine *Mademoiselle*. In June of 1953, with just a semester left to finish her degree at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Plath was chosen to work as a guest editor for the magazine. It was a difficult and busy month for Plath, and in an undated letter to her brother in June 1953, Warren, she wrote, ‘I think it will not be until I have meditated in peace upon all the

things I have learned and seen that I will begin to comprehend what has happened to me this last month. I am worn out now with the strenuous days at the office and the heat and the evenings out. I want to come home and sleep and sleep and play tennis and get tan again ... and learn what I have been doing this last year' (Plath 1975:117). When she arrived home after her guest editorship, a tired Plath was informed by her mother that 'she had not been accepted in Frank O'Connor's summer school writing course at Harvard' (Bloom 2001:12). Plath, who was a top student and a perfectionist, was devastated by the news. In the commentary on Plath's letters, her mother writes about Plath's downward spiral: 'From that point on, I was aware of a great change in her; all her usual *joie de vivre* was absent. ... At home, she would sunbathe, always with a book in hand, but never reading it. After days of this, she finally began to talk to me, pouring out an endless stream of self-deprecation, self-accusation. She had no goal, she said' (Plath 1975:123). Plath had trouble reading, and with her mother's help, she tried to learn shorthand in order to do something useful during the summer break. Her handwriting, however, was not suited to shorthand, and she gave it up. This added to Plath's feeling of failure and, in an impulsive moment, she cut her legs, telling her mother that she had only wanted to see if she could do it (Plath 1975:124).

A worried Aurelia Plath took her daughter to see their local general practitioner, who referred them to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist recommended shock therapy, a terrifying experience for Plath, and one that would haunt her work. She did not improve and, on the 24th of August, Plath left a note addressed to her mother, saying that she had gone for a long walk and would be back the next day. Her mother called the police, and search parties were sent out to look for the missing Plath. Her mother, already sick with worry, became even more anxious when she realised that a bottle of her sleeping pills was missing. Three days after Plath's disappearance, her brother, Warren, heard a moan coming from the basement. According to Aurelia Plath, he 'had found his sister, returning to consciousness in the crawl space beneath the downstairs bedroom, the entrance to which had always been blocked by a pile of firewood. A partially empty bottle of sleeping pills was by her side' (Plath 1975:125). Plath had drunk too many sleeping pills, and had vomited them all up. She was taken to hospital and, according to her mother, she was admitted to the psychiatric wing of the 'Massachusetts General Hospital, where association with

other patients much more severely disturbed than she caused her to regress' (Plath 1975:126). Plath's scholarship sponsor, Olive Higgins Prouty, financially assisted the Plath family during this time, since 'she had herself suffered a breakdown' (Plath 1975:126) and understood what Plath was going through. Plath was transferred to Mclean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, where she underwent insulin therapy and, under the guidance of a new psychiatrist, whom she trusted completely, Plath 'submitted to a series of shock treatments toward the end of her stay' (Plath 1975:128). Plath made a full recovery, and in February 1954, she returned to Smith College where she completed her degree, and graduated *summa cum laude* in June 1955. Almost a decade after her recovery, *The Bell Jar* was published.

The Bell Jar is preoccupied with similar problems as Plath's poetry, such as the death of the speaker/protagonist's father. The protagonist in *The Bell Jar* and the speakers in Plath's poetry are also preoccupied with a crisis of identity, and a division of the self. The novel, however, was intended for a different, more commercial audience than Plath's serious, more 'literary' poetry. Therefore, the narrative voice in the novel is distinctly different to the voices and personas that occur in her poetry. According to Gill, the narrative 'voice of *The Bell Jar* has often been compared to that of Holden Caulfield, the hero of J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye*' (2008:79). Esther and Holden, both protagonists and narrators in their respective novels, have similar preoccupations. Like Salinger's Holden, Plath's protagonist's problems arise out of a crisis of identity and – considering that *The Catcher in the Rye* is an American classic – it is little wonder that Esther Greenwood's narrative voice emulates that of Holden Caulfield's. In her article "Recognition is a Form of Agreement": The Workings of Self-Narration in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Invisible Man*, Stefanie Schäfer writes that Holden's idiosyncratic narrative style is full of 'run-on sentences, simple syntax, and a kind of discourse that resembles oral speech' (2012:610). Similarly, Esther's style of narration mimics verbal speech, and is simple in terms of her use of syntax – especially when compared to Plath's more complex use of language and imagery in her poetry. In *The Bell Jar* for example, after her first shock treatment, Esther describes the terrifying event by alluding to a memory of being shocked by her father's lamp. Her description is fairly simple: '[S]omething leapt out of the lamp in a blue flash and shook me till my teeth rattled, and I tried to pull my hands off, but they were stuck, and I screamed, or a

scream was torn from my throat, for I didn't recognize it, but heard it soar and quaver in the air like a violently disembodied spirit' (Plath 1966:139). Despite the use of poetic imagery in this description, it is nevertheless easy to understand, and the sentence construction is relatively simple. In contrast to this, the speaker in Plath's poem 'The Hanging Man' also describes shock or electrocution in the opening lines: 'By the roots of my hair some god got hold of me. / I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet' (Plath 1981:141). Whereas the description in *The Bell Jar* is a realistic depiction of being shocked by a lamp, the poem is much more complex. In both the text and the poem, however, the shock is viewed by the narrator/speaker as an experience of punishment. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther states, 'I wonder what terrible things it was that I had done' (Plath 1966:138). In the poem, however, the punishment is represented as being of divine origin; in her study *Plath's Incarnations: Woman and the Creative Process*, Linda K. Bundtzen writes that punishment by a god 'implies selection; she must be guilty of something or chosen, like Jeremiah, for some oracular task' (1983:176-177). The poem, then, dealing with the same autobiographical event as the text, takes this event and transforms it into something mythical and divine.

Shäfer also argues that Holden's narrative style in *The Catcher in the Rye* is entertaining to readers, and in his engaging style of narrating, he 'tries to make his audience sympathize with him' (2012:615). Similarly, Esther's casual, colloquial style of narrating is entertaining to some extent and, standing in juxtaposition to the dark subject matter, might also arouse sympathy in the reader. Moreover, the conversational style is also more suited to the more commercial, popular audience for whom Plath was writing. Esther, however, is also 'a less reliable narrator than at first appears' (Gill 2008:79). Throughout the text, it becomes clear that she is fond of lying; for example, on a night out in New York, Esther lies about her name and origin, calling herself Elly Higginbottom and saying she is from Chicago. This makes the reader wonder how much truth lies in her narration. Tracy Brain argues that early 'transcripts of *The Bell Jar* demonstrate Plath's intention that her readers should distrust her narrator, and learn little about what happened to Esther after her breakdown' (2001:153). The unreliability of the narrator is indicative not only of Esther's identity crisis, but also of her wish to distance herself from her problems and the story she narrates.

In *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* (1990), Steven Gould Axelrod explores the intellectuals who influenced Plath's work, and writes that during her university years at Smith College, and later at Cambridge University, Plath was introduced to the writings of a wide variety of scholars and intellectuals, mainly male, and 'wrote essays on W.H. Auden, Jacques Barzun, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Erich Fromm, Hardy, Mann, Milton, Nietzsche, ... Dylan Thomas, Robert Penn Warren, and Yeats' (1990:34). The bulk of Plath's reading at university may have centred on the work of white males – she only wrote three essays on women while she was studying at Smith College (Axelrod 1990:34) – but her creative writing was influenced by a few prominent women writers such as Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf. Brain writes that 'Woolf's writing haunts that of Plath's ... [and that] there is a strong presence of Woolf's texts in Plath's own' (2001:142). Furthermore, Brain argues that Plath was preoccupied with the same societal concerns as Woolf, and that the two writers 'shared a strong ambivalence about the effects of marriage on a woman's potential creativity' (2001:145). Axelrod in turn argues that Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is *The Bell Jar*'s mother text (1990:116). In a journal entry on the 20th of July, 1957, Plath wrote, 'Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible' (2001:289). Brain also discusses the influence of Brontë's writing on Plath's work, arguing that 'the numerous underlined and annotated passages of Plath's own copy of *Villette* ... [show that] Brontë's novel is yet another template for Plath's works and concerns' (2001:155). Both Brontë and Plath, Brain writes, investigate 'social and economic systems whose values and materials are not equally distributed, and [show] how such a system invariably pits women against one another' (2001:159).

Plath was also well-read in terms of psychology and psychoanalysis. According to Kroll, she was 'familiar with literary and psychoanalytic archetypes and symbols, both through the psychotherapy she had undergone and through her readings, which included Jung, Frazer, Rank, Freud, and Graves' (2007:14). After reading Freud's essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) in 1958, Plath wrote of the essay in her journal: 'An almost exact description of my feelings and reasons for suicide' (Plath 2001:447). Moreover, her undergraduate thesis concerned 'the theme of the double in two works by Dostoevsky' (Steinberg 2004:44-45). She was also interested in

schizophrenia, since the bibliography of her honours ‘thesis included an article on schizophrenia by Edward Lazell and ... she again associated doubling with schizophrenia in her BBC broadcast of fall 1962’ (Axelrod 1990:229). Furthermore, much of Plath’s poetry – especially the poems she wrote towards the end of her life – is preoccupied with a division of the self. Even though it is not clear whether or not Plath actually read R.D. Laing’s *The Divided Self*, she would have known about the text and about Laing’s ideas. According to Axelrod, her ‘texts of 1962-63 almost certainly reflect Laing’s eloquent evocation of mental illness, employing his metaphors to suggest the dimensions of her own creative crisis’ (1990:229).

As I have mentioned, in *The Divided Self*, Laing offers an account of madness that draws on the notion of psychic splitting, a process that results in the formation of a true and false self. According to Laing, this process tends to occur as a result of the patient’s inability to deal with an oppressive situation. This division of self is a defence mechanism leading to the withdrawal of the true self from the world. Plath employs similar tropes of the divided or dislocated self as a means of articulating states of psychic instability or madness. Axelrod argues that in Plath’s poetry this division of the self is manifested in a speaker whose ‘authentic, creative “deep self” [is] trapped in an inauthentic, material self’ (1990:228). In *The Bell Jar*, Plath employs metaphors and images related to Laing’s notion of the divided selfhood in order to illustrate the protagonist Esther’s experience of mental illness, which is rendered persistently as a crisis of identity and belonging. In the very first sentence of the novel, Esther says, ‘I didn’t know what I was doing in New York’ (Plath 1966:1). A few paragraphs later, she states, ‘I knew something was wrong with me that summer’ (Plath 1966:2). According to Laing, the loss of identity plays an important role in the psychotic development of the schizophrenic. He writes that for the schizophrenic patient, the ‘I’, or the self ‘has not ceased to exist, but it is without substance, it is disembodied, it lacks the quality of realness, and it has no identity’ (Laing 1960:186). Furthermore, the loss of identity – as a result of the true self’s withdrawal from the world – causes the ‘inner self’ to ‘develop an overall sense of impoverishment, which is expressed in complaints of the emptiness, deadness, ... desolation, [and] worthlessness of the inner life’ (Laing 1960:96). In addition to the depiction of Esther’s self-withdrawal, she stops eating, sleeping and, for three weeks, she neither washes her clothes nor her hair: ‘It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the

next. It made me tired just to think of it' (Plath 1966:123). In keeping with the notion of the split self, Esther is depicted as having no incentive to do normal, everyday things when her future glares 'ahead of [her] like a white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue' (Plath 1966:123). This of course also implies that her madness is a result of a seemingly hopeless future – quite possibly due to a crisis of identity. Esther does not seem to know who she is, or rather, as her boss Jay Cee says of her, 'She wants ... to be everything' (Plath 1966:97).

The loss of self, or a loss of 'realness' is further depicted when Esther, who has returned home from New York, makes a phone call: 'I dialled the Admissions Office and listened to the zombie voice leave a message that Miss Esther Greenwood was cancelling all arrangements to come to summer school' (Plath 1966:115). Later in the novel, telling a psychiatrist that she cannot read or sleep, she states, 'I tried to speak in a cool, calm way, but the zombie rose up in my throat and choked me off' (Plath 1966:121). In popular culture, the zombie is portrayed as a corpse risen from the grave, roaming the earth while feasting on humans. The zombie of popular culture is the living dead: simultaneously dead and alive. While the zombie originated in West Africa, the figure 'surfaced on the small island of Haiti early in its independent formation in the nineteenth century' (Thomas 2010:2). The Haitian zombie was created through a process called 'zombification', where innocent individuals were 'raised in a comatose trance from their graves by malevolent Voudoun priests ... and forced to toil indefinitely as slaves' (Davis 1983:85). Zombification can take two forms: either a person who is already dead is raised by a priest, or a person who is alive is poisoned and, seemingly dead, loses all mental faculty while still able to work as a slave. In *The Bell Jar*, the image of the zombie becomes an important metaphor for the division of the self and the loss of a coherent identity, an idea which also accords with Laing's view that the schizophrenic 'turns the living spontaneity of his being into something dead and lifeless' (1960:120). Esther, disillusioned by her experiences in New York and unsure of her future, struggles to experience anything as 'real'. For example, while out with a friend, she states that her drink, 'wet and depressing' tastes 'more and more like dead water' (Plath 1966:15). Furthermore, if her true self is dead, then she cannot have control over the false self. Like the Haitian zombie who works as a slave for the Voudoun priest, so the true self becomes a slave to the false self, unable to control the actions of the false self.

The fragmentation of the self is further depicted using various literary devices. Even before Esther begins to show signs of ‘psychotic development’ she is depicted as becoming more and more detached from her body. On a night out with her friend Doreen, Esther tells Lenny, a man they meet, that her name is Elly Higginbottom, and that she is from Chicago: ‘After that I felt safer. I didn’t want anything I said or did that night to be associated with me and my real name and coming from Boston’ (Plath 1966:11). Although this can be interpreted as common sense, as an act of protecting her identity from strange men, there is a sense of detachment from the persona she takes on. While pretending to be Elly Higginbottom, watching Lenny and Doreen dancing, she starts to feel herself ‘shrinking to a small black dot’ and ‘like a hole in the ground’ (Plath 1966:15). What this metaphor implies is that, as the persona takes over, the true self withdraws further and Esther feels herself ‘melting into the shadows like the negative of a person [she has] never seen before’ (Plath 1966:9). Although Plath is influenced by Laing and the metaphors he employs to explain schizophrenia, she adds complexity to his notion of the divided selfhood. She develops her own vocabulary of madness by using images of shrinking, disappearing, and burial to illustrate mental breakdown. The complexity of image is further evident in Plath’s rendering of Esther’s frustrations with her inability to react and her feeling of being ‘very still and empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo’ (Plath 1966:2-3). There is a sense of stasis in the comparison of Esther’s inability to react with being in the ‘eye of the tornado’. There is also a sense of foreboding and impending danger, and that eventually the ‘hullabaloo’ will not simply surround Esther, but engulf her. This is representative of the division of the self in the sense that the true self – having detached itself from the body – is unable to interact with the outside world. In addition, what is foregrounded in this image of a tornado is a sense of danger in the splitting of the self, in that it cannot be a permanent solution to the patient’s problems.

The trope of the split self is also apparent in Plath’s use of mirrors and photographs, and in the depiction of Esther’s inability to recognise herself. On her way back to her room in the hotel, Esther sees a reflection of herself in the mirror of an elevator: ‘Then my ears went funny, and I noticed a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman staring idiotically into my face. It was only me, of

course. I was appalled to see how wrinkled and used up I looked' (Plath 1966:16). Later on, she says the reflection of her 'face in the mirror look[s] like a sick Indian' (Plath 1966:108).

According to Axelrod, the general belief is that a man's soul is in his reflection, but that 'Plath generally uses the mirror reflection in the more modern fashion, as a fatal omen. The reflection is not the soul exposed to danger, it is the danger itself' (1990:209). If Esther's reflection is a symbol of the false self, then the false self is dangerous to the inner self. All interaction with the world is delegated to the false self, and as the false self becomes more and more autonomous, the inner self begins to lose control over both the false self and the actions of the body. Furthermore, seeing her reflection in the train's window, she states, 'A wan reflection of myself, white wings, brown ponytail and all, ghosted over the landscape' (Plath 1966:108). There is the sense that her true self disappears as the false self takes its place, causing Esther to gradually become a complete stranger to herself. This is illustrated in Plath's use of images of 'cultural deviance to express alienation from the body' (Sélei 2003:143). The racialised descriptions, comparing herself to an 'idiotic', 'smudgy-eyed Chinese woman' or a 'sick Indian', are problematic, but they seem to indicate a wish to emphasise the extent of the character's alienation, her distance from an 'authentic' self. Not only is Esther's reflection that of a stranger, but it looks like someone from a completely different culture.

In addition to the use of the mirror motif to illustrate the division of the self, Plath employs the motif of photographs as a means to give concrete form to the notion of the false self. Towards the end of her internship at *Ladies' Day*, Esther has to be photographed for the magazine. She does not want to get her picture taken because she feels as though she will cry. She is given a rose with which she must pose but, before the photographer can take her picture, the 'salt tears and miserable noises that had been prowling around in [her] burst out into the room' (Plath 1966:98). By this stage of the novel, Esther is already shown to be disillusioned with New York and depressed about the future. The photograph, as a symbol of the false self, is seen as dangerous and threatening. When the photographer leaves, Esther states, 'It was a relief to be free of the animal' (Plath 1966:98). More than presenting the threat of capturing Esther's misery in a photograph, the camera – referred to as an 'animal' – represents a threat to Esther's identity, to the true self. Elaine Showalter writes that the 'act of photographing is an act of appropriation: a

capture of the subject' (1987:97). The images of capture and related ideas of the theft of the soul are suggested in the sense that the camera 'seemed to have taken [Esther's] spirit with it' (Plath 1966:98). Like the mirror, the photograph also symbolises the false self. When Esther compares a photograph of a dead 'starlet' to a photograph of herself, she states that the two 'matched, mouth for mouth, nose for nose. The only difference was the eyes. ... But I knew if the dead girl's eyes were to be thumbed wide, they would have the same dead, black, vacant expression as the eyes in the snapshot' (Plath 1966:141). The photograph reveals the false self instead of the real self that has been cut off from the seemingly lifeless body pictured in the photograph. The unreality of what has been captured by the camera is further depicted when Esther brings her eyes close to the black and white photograph of a man who attempted suicide: 'I brought the newspaper close to my eyes to get a better view ... [but] the smudgy crags of George Polluci's features melted away as I peered at them, and resolved themselves into a regular pattern of dark and light and medium grey dots' (Plath 1966:131). The use of the photograph to depict states of alienation, dis-ease, fragmentation and disintegration is akin to Laing's reading of the schizophrenic's loss of identity, where the true self, isolated from reality, 'loses what precarious identity it already has' (1960:152).

The metaphor of the bell jar of the novel's title adds further nuance to Plath's depiction of Esther's psychic state, particularly her feelings of being cut off from reality and, in Laingian terms, the death of the true self. The scientific function of a bell jar is to act as a vacuum, and is often used to demonstrate 'the role of a medium in sound propagation ... [where] a sound source, usually a bell, is made to ring while air is pumped out of the jar' (Caleon, Subramaniam & Regaya 2013:247). The experiment is used to demonstrate that air is needed for the transmission of sound, and – if effective – sound will diminish as air is pumped out of the bell jar. Furthermore, a bell jar can also be used to protect whatever specimen is kept inside from harmful particles in the air, ultimately preserving the specimen. In the novel, Esther compares her feeling of being cut off from the world to being inside a bell jar: 'If Mrs Guinea had given me a ticket to Europe, or a round-the-world cruise, it wouldn't have made one scrap of a difference to me, because wherever I sat – on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok – I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air' (Plath 1966:178). If

Esther is depicted to be underneath a bell jar, then not only has ‘all the life-giving air [been sucked] out of her environment’ (Gill 2008:108), leaving her with stale, ‘sour’ air, but no fresh air can enter the vacuum. Furthermore, if the bell jar is equated to a vacuum that reduces sound, the image of the bell jar depicts the difficulty she experiences in seeking help. What is suggested in this image is that there is a barrier between Esther and the world; she is cut off from reality, resulting in feeling dead, and she cannot communicate with the outside world. The use of the bell jar as the title also indicates something about the purpose of the novel, as more than the simple narration of a young girl’s depression and madness, but as something of a scientific experiment. Gayle Whittier writes that ‘*The Bell Jar*’s title implies a subject who is a specimen, someone at once utterly exposed and finally enclosed by the same glass wall’ (1976:128). Early in the novel, Esther indicates that she likes ‘looking on at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby pickled in a laboratory jar for me to look at, I’d stop and look so hard I never forgot it’ (Plath 1966:12). The image of the ‘baby pickled in a laboratory jar’ is similar to the image of Esther ‘pickled’ in the stale air of a bell jar, and therefore the narrator – and by extension the reader – is looking in on Esther’s experience of madness.

The novel is not just preoccupied with Esther’s madness and recovery, but also acts as a commentary on the society presented in the novel – one that plays a pivotal role in Esther’s breakdown. Plath pays attention to the social context of madness, which suggests an understanding of madness as a social or cultural construction. In this respect, once again, *The Bell Jar* shows the influence of Laing, who argues that the schizophrenic’s condition is influenced by the patient’s social and cultural situation, and that the division of the self into a true and false self occurs as a defence mechanism against what he/she perceives as a threatening environment. Laing argues that in a study of schizophrenia it is necessary to look at the patient in relation to others: ‘no matter how circumscribed or diffuse the initial complaint may be, one knows that the patient is bringing into the treatment *situation*, whether intentionally or unintentionally, his existence, his whole being-in-his-world’ (1960:24, emphasis added). According to his theory, schizophrenia does not have an organic cause, but rather occurs as a result of an oppressive or threatening situation from which the patient cannot physically escape. In similar fashion, Elaine Showalter writes that a study of madness ‘must investigate how, in a particular cultural context,

notions of gender influence the definition and, consequently, the treatment of mental disorder' (1987:5). Therefore, the oppressive patriarchal society – as depicted in *The Bell Jar* – must be investigated in order to understand the construction of madness in the novel.

Sylvia Plath was aware of the oppression inherent in patriarchal, mid-century Western society. Axelrod writes that Plath, who read very few women authors during her university career, 'discovered that in patriarchal culture, figurative language, like analytical language, putatively belongs to men' (1990:13). Showalter makes a similar point when she argues that 'within [Western] dualistic systems of language and representation, women 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 (1987:3-4). For the female artist, these constructed views of femininity are not only oppressive, but also 'imprisoning' (Axelrod 1990:32). In patriarchal society, creativity is seen as a trait of masculinity, and women who want to be creative or intellectual instead of nurturing, child-rearing housewives, are perceived as somehow defective. Plath also suffered under the demonising of creativity in women, and felt that 'male poets of the canon paralyzed her creativity' (Axelrod 1990:38). The result of this oppression is that women are denied the kind of autonomy that men enjoy, since women are not given a voice.

In *The Bell Jar*, Plath depicts a society where women are oppressed by patriarchal norms and ideals. If Esther's madness is triggered by a disappointing month in New York – as well as her feeling of failure at not being admitted to a prestigious creative writing course – it is also clear that much of the cause relates to the experience of being a woman in an oppressive male-dominated society. Esther's feeling of being trapped and suffocated by societal expectations of women is explored through the image of a fig tree, which portrays Esther's inability to choose between all the things she could possibly be:

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig-tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America ... and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs

I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest. (Plath 1966:73)

As this passage suggests, Esther is unable to reconcile the different forms of femininity presented to her and, unable to choose just one ‘fig’, feels as though she will starve. According to Caroline J. Smith, it is significant that Plath uses fruit as a metaphor for Esther’s crisis, arguing that ‘in *The Bell Jar*, Plath [consistently] expresses Esther’s anxiety through food moments’ (2010:4). Esther often refers to herself as ‘starving’ (Plath 1966:22, 46, 174), and her descriptions of food are rich and detailed, as she claims to ‘love food more than just about anything’ (Plath 1966:22). Gill writes that this indicates ‘the importance of food ... to [Esther’s] sense of self’ (2008:77). If eating and overindulging are linked to Esther’s sense of self and identity, then starving represents the loss of such a self. The fig tree is also representative of Esther’s inability to reconcile her creativity with normative ideas of the feminine, and as a result the metaphor also represents a loss of selfhood. Nóra Séllei argues that the ‘choice between being a wife-and-mother and being a female creator’ (2003:128) is what leads to Esther’s madness and, unable to reconcile the two choices, Esther becomes paralysed and ‘starves to death’. As Séllei writes, the ‘most well-known symptoms of schizophrenia [are] passivity, depersonalisation, disembodiment, and feelings of fragmentation’ (2003:128). What drives Esther to passivity is the knowledge that she lives in a male-dominated society, and therefore no matter which ‘fig’ she chooses, she will still have to contend with the oppression of society. Throughout the novel, Plath depicts various forms of femininity presented to Esther as options, but in each case she must contend with patriarchal notions of what a woman in 1950s America should be.

The novel explores the notion of patriarchal oppression by offering vignettes of ideal feminine as well as masculine types. One of these social ideals is that a woman’s priority should be to find a respectable man she can marry, and to become a housewife and the mother of his children. This form of femininity is depicted in Mrs Willard, the mother of Esther’s one serious boyfriend, Buddy. Mrs Willard herself does not appear in the novel, and what we learn about her is through Buddy’s quoting of her speeches and sayings. This is significant because, despite Mrs Willard’s sympathetic views of patriarchy, it is still a male character who imparts these views to Esther. Mrs Willard, quoted by Buddy, believes that ‘What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants

is infinite security' (Plath 1966:67). More tellingly, her views about gender roles are emphatically oppressive of women: 'What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from' (1966:67). This view of gender roles, shared by the majority of American society in the mid-twentieth century, is an assertion of males as active and progressive, and of women as passive nurturers and caregivers. Moreover, women are defined as relative creatures as well, with their duties and their use to society arising from the needs of men. The woman's place is in the kitchen, in the home, providing her husband with the support and comfort he needs in order to be successful in his intellectual endeavours. Mrs Willard's views of a woman's place is one that tires Esther (Plath 1966:67), and one that is depicted as limiting to women. After a date with Constantin, an interpreter for the United Nations, Esther says, 'I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the coloured arrows from a Fourth of July rocket' (Plath 1966:79). Esther does not want the monotonous life of a housewife, and would rather live a life of excitement, even if – like a rocket or fireworks – that life is short-lived and self-destructive. What this image of a rocket suggests is that Esther's ambition to achieve something worthy in her life cannot be reconciled with what is expected of her by society.

Another feminine ideal explored in the novel is that of women who mindlessly behave according to the norms of society, an idea that is depicted in the character, Dodo Conway. After Esther has returned home from New York, she feels depressed because she did not get into a prestigious creative writing course, and spends a lot of her time hiding out in her room, where she has a view of the street below, watching Dodo 'wheel the youngest Conway up and down' (Plath 1966:113). Dodo's entire existence seems to revolve around raising her children in a house surrounded by the 'sprawling paraphernalia of suburban childhood' (Plath 1966:112). Furthermore it is portrayed as one of her proudest achievements that she gets 'a special discount from the local milkman' (Plath 1966:112). Whereas Mrs Willard has hard-set views of femininity, Dodo Conway's name serves to portray the foolishness of women who do not think for themselves, and who have no ambition: the term 'dodo' is after all used as slang for a foolish person, or a 'simpleton', because the extinct birds were supposedly stupid, 'tame and easy to

catch' (Soanes & Stevenson 2008:422). As Marjorie G. Perloff argues, Dodo 'is little more than a mindless misshapen animal' (1972:514), who never questions her purpose, and who spends her life devoting herself to 'baby after fat puling baby' (Plath 1966:213).

The negative depiction of societal expectations of women is further illustrated in Plath's subversion of the stereotypical views of childbirth. Buddy Willard, who is a medical student, takes Esther to a hospital where they watch a woman giving birth. This is not, however, the stereotypical, 'magical' scene of a mother, 'dead white ... from the awful ordeal, but smiling and radiant, with [her] hair down to [her] waist, and reaching out for [her] first little squirmy child and saying its name' (Plath 1966:63). Instead, the woman, called Mrs Tomolillo, is drugged with ether and lies on what looks like 'an awful torture table, with these metal stirrups sticking up in mid-air at one end and all sorts of instruments and wires and tubes ... at the other' (Plath 1966:61). Perloff argues that Plath 'forces us to forget about all the clichés about incipient motherhood, and to take a good hard look at the process itself' (1972:516), one that makes Esther wonder if 'there were any other ways to have babies' (Plath 1966:63). While giving birth, Mrs Tomollilo makes an 'inhuman whooping noise' (Plath 1966:61) and, according to Buddy, she is unaware of the pain because she is in 'a kind of twilight sleep' (Plath 1966:61). While Buddy is enthralled by the efficiency of the medical treatment, Esther is not impressed and, when told about the drug, she thinks that 'it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent. Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been' (Plath 1966:62). What Esther disapproves of is that the use of the drug removes the woman herself from the entire experience. As Bundtzen argues, Plath's problem with this form of childbirth is that by using ether as anaesthetic, and with male doctors in control of the situation, 'men have usurped the privilege of giving birth to women' (1983:124). Throughout giving birth, Mrs Tomollilo is never aware of what is going on around her, and cannot even react when she is told her baby is a boy. Instead of being the natural, magical experience Esther had always imagined, 'childbirth seems to be a frightening ritual in which a "dark fuzzy thing" finally emerges from a "split shaven place" between the woman's legs' (Perloff

1972:516). Mrs Tomollilo is depicted as a passive vehicle, cut and sewed up by male doctors, simply fulfilling her womanly duty of reproducing and becoming a mother.

It is not only passive, defeated, and servile women who are presented as possible, although limiting, models of femininity in this novel. Plath also includes a number of female role models who are intellectual and creative. What the narrative suggests, however, is that the women – like Esther’s boss Jay Cee – whose lives are not devoted to raising children are still dictated by patriarchal views of femininity. Jay Cee is married, but she is not a housewife devoted to her husband’s needs. Esther categorises her among the ‘weird old women’ (Plath 1966:211) she seems to attract, and in her description of Jay Cee, says that she ‘wasn’t one of the fashion magazine editors with the fake eyelashes and giddy jewellery. Jay Cee had brains, so her plug-ugly looks didn’t seem to matter’ (Plath 1966:5). Esther likes her boss, and it seems that Esther values intellect above physical appearance, but her description reveals oppressive patriarchal notions of femininity. It is possible to argue, therefore, that Esther is to some extent complicit in patriarchal definitions of the feminine. In this view, femininity and creativity are viewed as mutually exclusive, and therefore a woman who is creative, intellectual, or ambitious has transgressed the feminine norm by not paying enough attention to her appearance. Jay Cee, ‘ugly as sin’ (Plath 1966:5), is contrasted to the fashion editors who seem to put a lot of effort into their physical appearance. Similarly, when Esther describes one of the apprentices to a fashion editor, she states that she is ‘set apart from the more literary ones’ (Plath 1966:26). Séllei writes that juxtaposing female appearance and femininity with intelligence suggests an ‘impossibility of reconciliation, or [of] any harmony between the female body and the creative mind’ (2003:128). Therefore, if Esther decides to pursue an intellectual or creative career, she would have to do so at the expense of social acceptance.

Through characters such as Jay Cee the novel details the experience of women who do not conform to the societal expectations of women. A female Russian interpreter, who is never named, is another example of this. Esther describes her as ‘stern [and] muscular ... with no make-up’ (Plath 1966:70). Like Jay Cee, she is not valued for her physical appearance; instead, her value lies in her use to society. She is, as Esther states, a ‘little pebble of efficiency’ (Plath

1966:71), and she is represented as a functional social tool. In addition, Esther wishes that she 'could crawl into [the Russian translator] and spend the rest of [her] life barking out one idiom after another' (Plath 1966:71). Kate A. Baldwin argues that Esther is drawn to the girl's 'unknowable language' and that there is an 'alarming lure of a particular kind of speech, speech as empty speech' (2004:31). On the one hand, Esther seems to long for an escape into a mediocre life of usefulness and efficiency. On the other hand, the Russian girl is representative of the patriarchal silencing of women. She rejects 'American femininity, rebuking make-up and wearing a dull, outré double breasted suit' (Baldwin 2004:31). Therefore, because she is a functional tool to society, she remains outside of the acceptable bounds of the feminine. More tellingly, the words she speaks are not her own, but translations of another language into Russian – which Esther does not understand. Her words are that of the presumably male speakers for whom she must translate and are meaningless to Esther. She ceases to exist as a human being: rather, she is a tool of 'efficiency', silenced not only by the fact that she remains unnamed, but also by her function as an interpreter.

Through Esther's story, the novel reveals the tension between men and women, as well as the struggle of finding an identity as a female in a male-dominated society. In patriarchal society, where creativity is seen as a masculine trait, women writers are denied the 'subjectivity that the pen represents' (Gilbert & Gubar 1980:814). The woman writer, as an 'other', can only write by using the language of men, and her own voice is silenced. In *The Bell Jar*, the silencing of women is depicted in the fashion editor, Hilda. Esther does not understand Hilda, a fashionable girl who makes her own hats, and is 'six feet tall, with huge, slanted, green eyes and thick red lips and a vacant, Slavic expression' (Plath 1966:26). Esther is not even sure if Hilda can read, and describes her as 'mov[ing] like a mannequin' (Plath 1966:95). Séllei argues that the term 'mannequin' has several meanings, including 'connotations of the dwarf' due to its origins in French, and connotations of 'the fashion model displaying new kinds of clothes' and of 'the life-size dummy of the human body' (2003:137). Her argument is that all three meanings are combined in Hilda and that she becomes what Baudrillard refers to as the hyperreal, and therefore 'she wants to root her existence in the image reflected in the shopwindow: if one sees oneself in the shopwindow from the outside, one's figure appears inside ... and thus, as if a medical dummy, it represents its

own visuality that lacks its origins in reality' (Séllei 2003:137). Taking this argument even further, I would argue that Hilda must stare 'at her reflection in the glossed shop windows as if to make sure, moment by moment, that she continued to exist' (Plath 1966:96) not just because of her hyperreality, but because her existence is dictated by patriarchal definitions of femininity. After all, the only phrases she utters in the novel are expressions concurrent with 'the dominant discourse of power' (Séllei 2003:137), of patriarchal ideology. Speaking about the electrocution of the Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were falsely accused of spying for the Soviet Union, Hilda says, 'It's awful such people should be alive' and 'I'm so glad they're going to die' (Plath 1966:96). Hilda does not express an original opinion about the Rosenbergs, since her voice is silenced by dominant discourse. This is signified by the fact that when Hilda speaks, she sounds like a girl 'possessed by a dybbuk, and when the dybbuk spoke from her mouth its voice sounded so cavernous and deep you couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman' (Plath 1966:96). Hilda, as a female and a human being, then ceases to exist: she is merely a mannequin or a 'dummy compiled out of various fragments and perspectives' (Séllei 2003:137) of patriarchal society. She is both hyperreal and unreal.

As the above discussion intimates, Esther's breakdown is presented as a legitimate response to the absence of choice. As Showalter argues, Esther 'enters a depressive spiral in which none of the alternatives available to educated women seems satisfactory' (1987:216). Each of the different forms of femininity presented to Esther has advantages, but they are all problematic in terms of the oppression and silencing of women in patriarchal society. The utter 'division between [Esther's] creativity and her femininity is the basis of her schizophrenia. And her frustration precisely reflects the values endorsed even by liberals for intellectual women in the mid-1950s' (Showalter 1987:216). The depiction of the inability to reconcile creativity with being female, coupled with her feeling of failure, the novel suggests, is directly related to Esther's schizophrenic experience. The specific details of the way in which psychic breakdown is narrated in the novel are also pertinent to this discussion. Central to this breakdown, the novel suggests, is the loss of writing. After returning home from New York, and finding out that she did not make the creative writing course, Esther's states, 'the writing course had stretched before me like a bright, safe bridge over the dull gulf of summer. Now I saw it totter and dissolve, and a body in a white

blouse and a green skirt plummet into the gap’ (Plath 1966:110). Plath herself feared failure, and this caused her to stop trying to write: ‘[I]t is a last ditch defense, not quite the last - - - the last is when the words dissolve and the letters crawl away’ (2001:471). The fear of failure can also be argued not just to be the fear of failing as a writer, but as a *female* writer. Gilbert and Gubar argue that women writers had to choose between trying to prove themselves to be as good as men, and admitting that they were merely women. Esther, feeling like a failure, as well as feeling overwhelmed by having to choose between irreconcilable alternatives, loses her ability to read or write, and therefore she becomes an embodiment of the silencing of women by patriarchal oppression.

Two key elements are evident in the narrative of psychic breakdown that ensues, namely the figure of the male doctor and the depiction of electroshock therapy. When Esther, who has already lost the ability to read and write, stops sleeping, her mother takes her to a family doctor, who refers her to a male psychiatrist, Doctor Gordon. The psychiatrist is presented as ‘young and good-looking, and [Esther] could see right away he was conceited’ (Plath 1966:124). Instead of the ‘kind, ugly, intuitive’ (Plath 1966:123) psychiatrist Esther hoped for, Doctor Gordon typifies the male doctor who ‘conforms to the masculine standard for his society, while his patient must *become* socially acceptable as a “woman” if she is to be deemed well’ (Whittier 1976:141). On his desk is a photograph of the typical American family, showing a ‘beautiful dark-haired woman ... smiling out over the heads of two blond children’ (Plath 1966:124) and what might be a golden retriever. Esther comments on the fact that the photograph is half turned towards her, as though Doctor Gordon wants to make sure she does ‘not get any funny ideas’ (Plath 1966:124). The photograph, according to Marjorie Perloff, serves to depict the doctor as a “normal” American male, dwelling in a world of suburban lawns, cute children, and golden retrievers’ (1972:517). The photograph, depicting societal norms, is juxtaposed with Esther’s ‘otherness’, which indicates that her madness is a result of deviating from such norms. This is further illustrated in the way Doctor Gordon approaches her problem. His first statement to her seems to be a dismissal of anything serious about her condition: ‘Your mother tells me you’re upset’ (Plath 1966:123). When Esther does not answer, he takes a different approach by asking her what she thinks is wrong, of which Esther angrily wonders, ‘What did I *think* was wrong? That made it

sound as if nothing was *really* wrong, I only *thought* it was wrong' (Plath 1966:124). Doctor Gordon addresses Esther as if she were a child and as if she must know exactly what is wrong with her – that she is not conforming to the norms of her gender. After Esther does tell him about her inability to sleep, eat, and read, he does not respond, but asks her about her college. He dismisses her problems, while reminding her of her 'sexual place' (Whittier 1976:142) in society when he states, 'My, they were a pretty bunch of girls' (Plath 1966:126). The depiction of Doctor Gordon is an indication of the general beliefs of patriarchal society – that what is *really* wrong with her is that she does not conform to societal expectations of young, 'pretty', college girls.

The experience of electroshock therapy is a significant element in the narration of Esther's mental breakdown, and is likened to electrocution. Doctor Gordon recommends shock therapy at his private hospital, where Esther is unnerved by how normal the house seems from the outside, even though she knows 'it must be chock-full of crazy people' (Plath 1966:135). The normality is just a façade, however, as Esther finds when she follows Doctor Gordon to the back of the house where the windows are barred, 'and everything that opened and shut was fitted with a keyhole so it could be locked up' (Plath 1966:137). The description of the inside of the psychiatric hospital – of locks, window bars, and keyholes – creates a sense of foreboding of the experience that awaits the protagonist. Esther is offered no explanation of what electroconvulsive therapy will be like, and is only given the briefest assurance not to worry while a nurse prepares her for the treatment. Doctor Gordon, in his role of the dominant male, rolls out a machine reminiscent of a torture device, and fits metal plates on the sides of Esther's head, buckles 'them into place with a strap that [dents her] forehead, and [gives] her a wire to bite' (Plath 1966:138). Esther describes the shock itself as shaking her 'like the end of the world' (Plath 1966:138). More significantly, she wonders 'what terrible things it was [she] had done' (Plath 1966:138). The experience of shock therapy is not depicted as something that will cure madness, but rather is presented as a form of punishment for being mad. In addition, it is significant that a male doctor, the figure representative of 'normal family man', is the one administering the shock, and therefore shock therapy is depicted as Esther's punishment for deviating from what society expects of her. The novel begins with the sentence, 'It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer

they electrocuted the Rosenbergs' (Plath 1966:1), setting the scene for what is to come in the novel. Shock therapy is imagined as an assault on the nervous system, and images of burning reinforce the idea of shock therapy as a form of violence: Esther wonders what it must feel like to be 'burned alive all along your nerves' (Plath 1966:1) and, under Doctor Gordon's supervision, she does find out. Gill argues that Ethel Rosenberg becomes a kind of double figure for Esther. Not only is Ethel Rosenberg's full name, Esther Ethel Greenglass Rosenberg, similar to Esther's full name, but the two women both 'suffer for their nonconformity to the feminine ideals which dominated Cold War America' (Gill 2008:79). Furthermore, 'Ethel's crime, like Esther's, lies less in what she has done than in who she is. It is her interpretation (or misinterpretation) of femininity which is perceived to be at fault' (Gill 2008:80). Ethel Rosenberg is electrocuted for this crime and, similarly, Esther must be punished for hers.

In keeping with the idea of madness as response to social contexts, the narrative also highlights the negative role of the mother. After the experience with shock therapy, Esther decides not to go back to Doctor Gordon again. Tellingly, her mother replies, 'I knew you'd decide to be all right again' (Plath 1966:140), echoing Doctor Gordon's sentiment that Esther's behaviour – something she should be able to control – is the problem. Therefore, as Perloff argues, the mother, who should be a role model to Esther, negates the problem and is unable to assist her (1972:512). Without the help or comfort that she needs, Esther's madness intensifies, and she spends her time reading 'scandal sheets' and 'abnormal psychology books' (Plath 1966:153), the only things she can read. Esther, who believes that her case is 'incurable', says 'It was as if some slim opening had been left, so I could learn all I needed to know about my case to end it in a proper way' (Plath 1966:153). Suicide seems to be the only option Plath offers for her protagonist and, on numerous occasions, Esther attempts to kill herself. Her first attempt is to cut her wrists open in the bathtub but, she says, '[W]hen it came right down to it, the skin of my wrist looked so white and defenceless that I couldn't do it. It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get at' (Plath 1966:142). She is equally unsuccessful in her attempts to drown and hang herself: 'I saw my body had all sorts of little tricks, such as making my hands go limp at the crucial second, which would save it, time and

again, whereas if I had the whole say, I would be dead in a flash' (Plath 1966:153). In Esther's failure to commit suicide, there is a distinct reinforcement of the earlier trope of the division between mind and body. Esther almost feels betrayed by her body when it does not allow her to take her own life. This is evident when she says, 'I would simply have to ambush it with whatever sense I had left, or it would trap me in its stupid cage for fifty years without any sense at all' (Plath 1966:153). Esther's sense of self is completely divorced from her body, referred to as 'it' and as a 'cage'. Her body is no longer part of her identity, and the only way in which, she believes, she can free herself from the entrapment in the false self is through suicide.

The narrative of psychic breakdown in *The Bell Jar* is clearly modelled on the trope of the hero's journey, as outlined by Joseph Campbell, specifically the hero's descent into 'The Belly of the Whale'. Laing also regarded schizophrenia as a voyage into the patient's consciousness and, in *The Politics of Experience*, writes that while the explorer of the world is respected, it 'makes far more sense to [him] as a valid project—indeed as a desperately and urgently required project of our time—to explore the inner space and time of consciousness' (1984:127). A similar construction is to be found in *The Bell Jar*: Esther steals a bottle of sleeping pills from her mother's strongbox, crawls into the crawlspace beneath the house, and swallows the pills 'swiftly, between gulps of water, one by one by one' (Plath 1966:163). When she regains some consciousness, she feels as though she is being 'transported at enormous speed down a tunnel into the earth' (Plath 1966:164). According to Campbell, when the epic hero descends into 'The Belly of the Whale', he 'is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died. ... But instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again' (2004:83-84). Esther physically goes underground in her attempt to commit suicide and, unsuccessful, the attempt is symbolic of her journey into 'The Belly of the Whale'. Still half unconscious, Esther says, 'I began to think I must be in an underground chamber' (Plath 1966:164). Esther, in her suicide attempt, goes through a metaphorical death and, in order to finish her journey into 'inner space', she must go through a metaphorical rebirth. As Linda K. Bundtzen argues, through the way in which Esther attempts to take her life, she 'retreats into a womb and returns in a fetal state' (1983:142). The description of the crawlspace is reminiscent of the inside of a womb; Esther says that the darkness feels 'thick as velvet' (Plath 1966:163), that

cobwebs touch her ‘face with the softness of moths’ (Plath 1966:163) and that the silence is as smooth as ‘black water’ (Plath 1966:164). These descriptions create a sense of comfort and can be associated with nurturing motherhood. The trope of rebirth and the pain associated with rebirth and transformation are evident in the description of Esther’s waking up: ‘A chisel cracked down on my eye, and a slit of light opened, like a mouth or a wound, till the darkness clamped shut on it again. I tried to roll away from the direction of the light, but hands wrapped round my limbs like mummy bands’ (Plath 1966:164). Furthermore, she hears a voice – her own – crying, ‘Mother!’ (Plath 1966:164), as though she has just emerged from her mother’s womb.

Returning to Laing’s rendition of mental illness, a key factor is the connection between madness and spiritual epiphany. For Laing, as Woods writes, the schizophrenic experience is ‘analogous to religious and mystical revelation ... [that] even eclipses sanity as the preferred mode of being’ (2011:141). Along with his antipsychiatric colleagues, Laing believed that somatic treatments such as ECT and insulin therapy would only hinder the schizophrenic in his journey into ‘inner space’, and that the therapist’s role is to act as a guide in a journey of ‘spiritual death and rebirth’ (Showalter 1987:230). Plath’s depiction of Esther’s journey, however, subverts this romanticised view. In Laing’s version, the patient is ‘female, and the woman’s role [remains] that of patient rather than doctor’ (Showalter 1987:231). Therefore, what Laing envisions is the male doctor acting as heroic guide, while the schizophrenic woman must simply follow his lead – or rather, is led by the doctor. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther does go through a journey of metaphorical death and potential rebirth, but she is not led by a male doctor, and she does not achieve divine knowledge. When Esther is rescued after her suicide attempt, she is taken to a psychiatric hospital where she is faced with a choice: finish her metaphorical journey and become reborn or die. The psychiatrist who aids Esther is, significantly, not a man. Esther is surprised when a ‘slim young woman’ (Plath 1966:179) introduces herself as Doctor Nolan: ‘I didn’t think they had woman psychiatrists’ (Plath 1966:179). Doctor Nolan, however, does not play the role of the guide on a pilgrimage and, significantly, ‘the only wholly admirable woman in the novel, [she] is also the only woman whom Esther never longs to imitate or resemble’ (Perloff 1972:521). Instead, she helps Esther in the sense that she is ‘the instrument whereby Esther learns to be, not some other woman, but herself’ (Perloff 1972:521). Significantly, she is able to do so in an environment

where recovering means accepting your proper place in society. Esther's treatment at the private hospital includes insulin therapy which, according to Showalter, parallels the 'pseudopregnancy of the rest cure' (1987:205). The only way in which the insulin therapy seems to affect Esther is in her weight gain: 'Already I filled the new, too-big clothes my mother had bought, and when I peered down at my plump stomach and broad hips ... I looked just as if I were going to have a baby' (Plath 1966:184). Insulin therapy and the personal attention Esther receives are also suggestive of 'surrogate mothering' (Showalter 1987:206): 'And when Mrs Bannister held the cup to my lips, I fanned the hot milk out on my tongue as it went down, tasting it luxuriously, the way a baby tastes its mother' (Plath 1966:193). Insulin therapy, with no effect on Esther's mental state, seems to be designed to reinforce Esther's femininity. Séllei argues that through her insulin treatment, Esther 'becomes what she flees from: on the one hand, she assumes the image of the fertile and pregnant woman she otherwise rejects ... [and] on the other hand, in this context regression into childhood evokes exposure, dependency, and obedience' (2003:149), since the milk is given to Esther as a reward for being good. The treatment serves as a reminder of Esther's place in society, as a female who is subordinate to the authority figures, namely the male oppressor.

In Plath's text, recovery is presented as a reconciliation between what Esther is told she must be and what she wants to be. Significantly, it is through her second bout of electroshock therapy that Esther's recovery – her metaphorical rebirth – occurs. There are a few distinct differences between Esther's experience with shock therapy under Doctor Gordon's administration and under that of Doctor Nolan. In the second bout of shock therapy, a woman administers the process and, whereas Esther was awake the first time, she is unconscious during Doctor Nolan's shock therapy. Doctor Nolan, however, does deceive Esther; when Esther first comes to the private hospital she makes her psychiatrist promise to warn her should she have to undergo ECT. Doctor Nolan agrees, but does not tell Esther about the shock treatment until right before the treatment. She tells Esther that she did not tell her the previous evening because she thought 'it would only keep [Esther] awake' (Plath 1966:203). Doctor Nolan's betrayal serves to distance her from Esther, allowing her to make the recovery on her own, to find her identity by herself. Instead of a patriarchal male ascribing a cure to her, Esther must choose recovery for herself.

Furthermore, whereas Doctor Gordon's treatment is experienced as a form of punishment, Esther's shock therapy under Doctor Nolan's care seems to help cure Esther: 'All the heat and fear had purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air' (Plath 1966:206). Through her second experience with electroconvulsive therapy, Esther is reborn. According to Showalter, Plath identified shock therapy with purgation and rebirth because ECT imitates 'a death and rebirth ceremony. For the patient it represents a rite of passage in which the doctor kills off the "bad" crazy self, and resurrects the "good" self' (1987:217). In Plath's poetry, the theme of death and rebirth in relation to the divided self is a prominent one; in the evolution of her poetry, the false self must be killed off in order for a rebirth of the true self to occur. Similarly, in *The Bell Jar*, through the experience of shock therapy, Esther's false self – 'the hated parts of the self [are] annihilated—literally electrocuted' (Showalter 1987:217) while her true self emerges and recovery can occur.

The difference between the two experiences of shock therapy in the novel necessitates investigation. The question is why Doctor Nolan's prescription of shock therapy works when Doctor Gordon fails. Firstly, Doctor Gordon's treatment occurs as part of patriarchal oppression – serving as punishment for Esther's deviation from gender norms. Secondly, under Doctor Nolan, despite the doctor's deception, Esther chooses recovery and rebirth. Séllei argues that Esther chooses to be subjected to ECT because she is 'unwilling to fit in and conform to Belsize standards, the section of the institute where women make up their face, read women's magazines, and are "properly" dressed' (2003:148). In other words, Esther would rather go through an experience she fears than conform to society's ideals of femininity. Therefore, she chooses to kill off the 'bad crazy self', represented by Esther's fellow patient, Joan. Joan, a lesbian girl whom Esther knows from college, is admitted to the psychiatric hospital after attempting suicide, which she did after reading about Esther's suicide attempt. Gill argues that Joan acts as the most important double figure in the novel. Joan arrives at the hospital when Esther is starting to recover a little, but her arrival heralds a decline in Esther's mental health. Gill writes that the two are in competition, where 'it seems that only one of these two women can win and Joan ... must be sacrificed to ensure Esther's survival' (2008:82). Esther says of Joan, 'Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and

feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own' (Plath 1966:209-210). What Joan comes to represent are the 'bad' parts of Esther's selfhood – the false self. This is further depicted when Esther wonders 'if [she] had made Joan up' (Plath 1966:210). We already know that Esther is an unreliable narrator, and therefore we only have Esther's word that Joan is indeed a real character and not a figment of the protagonist's imagination. Whether Joan is real or not, however, does not matter, since she seems to be the recipient of Esther's projections of what needs to be killed off in order for her to survive. In going through with the ECT, Esther chooses to be a survivor and it is only then that the bell jar can be lifted. The evening Esther is discharged from the hospital, Joan hangs herself and so 'Esther's graduation must come at the price of her feminist double's death' (Showalter 1987:218). Esther survives while Joan, symbolic of the protagonist's false self, must die.

The novel ends on a hopeful, but ambiguous note. Esther has gone through a metaphorical death and rebirth, a painful experience in which she learns to be herself. In this sense, the narrative of madness is plotted on similar lines to the hero's descent into the underworld. As Séllei argues, only 'when Esther recognizes that she will never be a Jody, a Jay Cee, a Doreen, or a Mrs Guinea, that she will never marry a Buddy Willard, a Constantin, or a Doctor Gordon, that she wants no lesbian affairs with a Joan ... does the bell jar lift, letting Esther once again breathe' (1972:521). The narrative suggests that it is only when Esther rejects patriarchal notions of what she should be, and decides to be herself, that she can be reborn. She does not, however, know that someday 'the bell jar, with its stifling distortions wouldn't descend again' (Plath 1966:230), but for the moment she is reborn. Finally, there is an indication of the ability to reconcile female identity and creativity in the narrative itself. Early on in the novel the narrator, speaking about the presents that came with her editorship in New York, says, 'I use the lipsticks now and then, and last week I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with' (Plath 1966:3). Whittier argues that the reader is 'meant to discover early in the book that Esther has conformed, at least in physical experience, to the womanly ideal of her society' (1976:131) by being depicted as a mother. Esther, in the role of narrator, is illustrated as both feminine and creative. She does – partly, at least – conform to societal norms of femininity, but, perhaps her 'dual role as writer

and parent may indicate the resolution of the artist-woman conflict Esther Greenwood so painfully experiences' (Whittier 1976:132).

In the narrative of Esther's psychic breakdown, Plath presents madness through a variety of metaphors, images, and ideas related to the notion of the split self. Esther, who at the beginning of the novel is unable to react, seems to experience a loss of identity similar to Laing's notions of the schizophrenic condition. Esther is unsure of what she is doing in New York and is insecure about her future, and where she fits in in patriarchal society. Plath, however, adds nuance to Laing's theory of the split self by presenting the division of the self through images relating to shrinking, disappearing, burial, fragmentation and disintegration. Furthermore, Plath uses the motifs of the mirror and the photograph to illustrate the false self: Esther almost never recognises herself in a mirror, indicating that the reflection is of the false self, while her true self has been cut off from reality. The two key metaphors in relation to the depiction of psychic breakdown in the novel, however, are those of the bell jar and the fig tree. Whereas the image of the bell jar serves to reinforce the idea that the experience of madness is like being cut off from the rest of the world, the fig tree serves to indicate that madness has a social origin – the result of living under the oppression of patriarchal society. The idea of madness as a social phenomenon is further explored in Plath's illustration of conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity, and how these constructions are defined by patriarchal notions of gender norms. Through Plath's depiction of various characters, it becomes clear that in patriarchal society creativity and femininity are viewed as mutually exclusive. In the novel, it is Esther's inability to reconcile her creativity with prevailing feminine norms that is presented as a contributing factor to her spiral into madness.

In terms of the narrative trajectory of madness presented in the novel, Esther's psychic breakdown is depicted as similar to the hero's descent into the underworld, and this journey to recovery is explored through the image of the male psychiatrist – representative of societal gender norms – as well as the experience of electroshock therapy. Under the administration of a male doctor, the experience of ECT is likened to electrocution, and depicted as a form of punishment. Under the administration of a female doctor, however, ECT is presented as an aid to Esther's

recovery. What the narrative suggests, however, is that recovery is possible in this instance not only because it is *Esther's choice* to undergo the treatment but also because she decides to be herself in a society that demands that she *conform to societal notions of femininity*. *Esther's journey reflects the hero's journey into the unknown: she physically goes underground in her suicide attempt, and through her experience in the psychiatric hospital – undergoing insulin shock therapy and electroshock therapy – she goes through a metaphorical death and rebirth.* Ultimately, Plath suggests that patriarchal oppression is at the root of female madness and that it is only through a rejection of patriarchal notions of femininity that rebirth can occur, and that *Esther can say, 'There should be a ritual for being born twice – patched, retreaded and approved for the road' (Plath 1966:233).* There remains, of course some ambiguity not only because of what *Esther's words imply about the need to conform* but also because the novel does not offer a clear happy ending. What is more certain, however, is the notion that both sanity and the rejection of patriarchal oppression require a conscious choice.

CHAPTER 2

‘I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now.’ These words are spoken by Antoinette, the madwoman in the attic, towards the end of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Antoinette, locked up in an English country house, is propelled towards a future that has been set out for her by Bertha in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). *Wide Sargasso Sea*, written by Jean Rhys, was published in 1966 as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), a Bildungsroman about the eponymous orphan, Jane, who finds herself working for Mr Rochester, with whom she falls in love. There is, however, an obstacle that stands in the way of Jane and Rochester’s happiness: Bertha Antoinetta Mason, Rochester’s lunatic Creole wife, who is locked in the attic of Rochester’s country house, Thornfield Hall, for the majority of the novel. Towards the end of the novel, Bertha burns down the house and herself along with it, allowing Jane and Rochester to end up in happy union. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, written more than a century after Brontë’s canonical text, Rhys provides Bertha with a history and a voice. The novel chronicles the life of Bertha, renamed Antoinette, growing up on a Caribbean island, as well as her marriage to an Englishman who remains unnamed but who, the reader infers, is Brontë’s Rochester. Antoinette is married off to her new husband as part of an economic exchange but he becomes threatened by the hostile environment of the colonised Caribbean island and, as a result, casts his wife as insane. He renames her Bertha and takes her to England, where he locks her in the attic of his country house. Antoinette, having descended into madness, burns down the house and herself along with it.

In popular culture, it has become common in the twenty-first century for well-known and even canonical texts to be rewritten. Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for example, has been rewritten into the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016). In addition, technological advances have given way for the rise of fanfiction, ‘a genre in which writers borrow settings, characters, events and/or concepts from books, movies, ... to craft their own stories’ (Moore 2005:15). A well-known example of this is the popular novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), which developed from fanfiction based on Stephenie Meyer’s young adult series, *Twilight*. Fanfiction

has become an acceptable genre of literature, albeit falling into the category of popular culture instead of high literature, since it can ‘harness ‘the power of pop culture and the power of the Internet (as a grassroots publisher) to generate an automatic fanbase’ (Moore 2005:17). In the 1960s, this would have been unheard of and, therefore, Jean Rhys’s rewriting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was not only new, but quite radical. However, Rhys’s rewriting of *Jane Eyre* does not conform to the conventions of fanfiction as we know it today. Rhys does not change the outcome of the plot as presented in *Jane Eyre*; rather, by providing a history for Brontë’s Bertha, Rhys changes the reader’s perception of the marginalised character. Asked about *Jane Eyre*, and what attracted her to Brontë’s Bertha, Rhys responded, ‘I had always wanted to write about her ... I was annoyed about the poor lunatic West Indian, she’s not a character at all, unlike Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, so I wrote her life. Jane and Mr Rochester come completely to life in *Jane Eyre*, she doesn’t, she’s just such a horrible character’ (Rhys & Burton 1970:108). Rhys – who was brought up on the West Indian island, Dominica, and lived there until she was sixteen (Rhys & Burton 1970:105) – believed that Bertha is inadequately presented as a character, and that her narrative is incomplete. Bertha is largely absent in *Jane Eyre*, since the novel’s focus is on Jane, who is appointed as a governess to Rochester’s ward in his country house, Thornfield Hall. Jane and Rochester fall in love but their wedding ceremony is interrupted by a man claiming to be the brother of Rochester’s wife. Rochester then reveals his ‘lunatic’ wife (Brontë 2010:363) to Jane who, horrified at the revelation, flees and only returns after Bertha has set fire to Thornfield Hall and committed suicide.

In this chapter, I continue my investigation into the cultural constructions of madness in literary texts by focusing on Rhys’s treatment of the subject in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As in other chapters, I focus on the language, metaphors and images used to figure this condition, making particular reference to the trope of the split psyche. I will also consider the narrative structures and trajectories that are employed, the resolution which is provided and the various explanations or rationalisations of madness that are suggested. Because Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a prequel to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the novel should be explored in intertextual terms, as an echo of and engagement with the original representation of female madness. In both texts, female madness is depicted in terms of the prevailing social constructions and notions of female psychosis. Brontë’s

influential construction of madness is one that can be seen as damaging to women. As Elaine Showalter writes, the depiction of madness in *Jane Eyre*, specifically Bertha's 'violence, dangerousness, and rage, [and] her regression to an inhuman condition ... became such a powerful model for Victorian readers, including psychiatrists, that it influenced even medical accounts of female insanity' (1987:68). Rhys's depiction of madness, however, stands in contention with the construction of madness offered by Brontë; therefore, my discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* will include an investigation into the ways in which Rhys's treatment of madness can be read as a critique of Brontë's. As in the Chapter on *The Bell Jar*, my discussion of the novel will also include an exploration of the broader socio-political context and the extent to which it is treated as an important causal factor. The novel is set in newly-emancipated Jamaica, and therefore I will discuss the ways in which the social climate – the end of slavery, the legacy of colonialism and the influence of patriarchal norms – inform the depiction of madness in the novel. I will pay particular attention to the depiction of Antoinette's marriage to her husband as representative of the colonial system, as well as how the dynamics of their marriage are presented as a contribution to her madness.

Part of the reason for Rhys's critique of Brontë's Bertha is that Bertha is not allowed a voice or any semblance of humanity in *Jane Eyre*. In the single chapter of the novel where the reader is given a glimpse of the 'lunatic' in the attic, Bertha is described as grovelling, snatching, and growling 'like some strange wild animal ... [with] a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, [hiding] its head and face' (Brontë 2010 [1847]:362). She is denied any kind of humanity, not only by being compared to a wild animal, but by being referred to as an 'it'. In Brontë's text, the madwoman is illustrated as animalistic and dehumanised, echoing the views of the insane in Victorian society, as well as the treatment of the mad as animals – locking them up and often chaining them to walls and beds. The negation of Bertha's humanity is further illustrated by the fact that she is not permitted to speak for herself. The implication is that the mad must be spoken for, which suggests that a mad person lacks any basic reasoning capacities. Rochester is the one who explains the situation to Jane and her sympathies, as well as the reader's, lie with Rochester instead of with Bertha. According to Rochester's story, he was tricked into the marriage with Bertha, without being told about her family's history of mental illness. He tells

Jane that Bertha's mother, a 'Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard' and Bertha, 'like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points' (Brontë 2010:360). What is suggested here is that in *Jane Eyre*, madness is defined both in terms of gender (a line of female madness), but also in racial terms as a consequence of 'mixed blood'. This implies that madness is not understood as the result of external circumstances but, rather, presented as hereditary. According to Rochester's story of Bertha's psychic deterioration, madness is not viewed as the result of a gradual unravelling but as something lurking beneath the surface, able to surface instantaneously. This is an essentialist argument in keeping with Victorian assumptions about female madness and gender roles. As Showalter writes, Bertha's madness 'echoes the beliefs of Victorian psychiatry about the transmission of madness: since the reproductive system was the source of mental illness in women, women were the prime carriers of madness' (1987:67). Furthermore, Brontë does not allow Bertha to defend herself and, therefore, the reader is not given access to her side of the story. Bertha is also conveniently removed from the novel in order for Jane and Rochester to end up together. Bertha, who is both marginalised and silenced, functions as an obstacle which Jane and Rochester must overcome. Unhappy with this representation of the West Indian character, Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to supply Bertha with a history and a voice – renaming her Antoinette. Furthermore Rhys, as Ellen G. Friedman writes, 'reimagines Brontë's text—glossing and subverting, reversing and transforming it—writing it into her own time and into her own frame of reference' (1989:117). Rhys not only rewrites Bertha's history, but places the narrative within the setting of colonisation and tells the story 'from the perspective of the subjectified colonial' (Mardorossian 1999:80). Part of Rhys's rewriting of Bertha's history is to provide an alternative narrative of madness where insanity is presented as a legitimate response to an unbearable situation.

In keeping with these Victorian constructions of women as irrational, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's husband takes up a rationalist position, while he casts her on the side of irrationality. In Chapter 1, I referred to Showalter's argument that an alliance between women and madness is linked to the fact that, 'within our dualistic systems of language and representation, [women] are typically situated on the side of irrationality ... while men are situated on the side of reason' (1987:3-4). The husband states that Antoinette 'was undecided, uncertain about facts – any facts'

(Rhys 2001:52). Therefore, he – within the patriarchal view of man as superior to woman – takes up a position against his wife, wherein he constructs her as irrational and lacking reason. When he speaks to Antoinette about her family's history, he asserts that he will do so '[only] if [she promises] to be reasonable' (Rhys 2001:81). The suggestion here is that lacking reason is indicative of an unstable mind. Furthermore, using discourse of truth versus falsehood to distinguish between sanity and madness, he uses her supposed irrationality to place her in a position he can dismiss. When Antoinette tells him about her childhood, he states, 'I began to wonder how much of this was true, how much imagined, distorted' (Rhys 2001:84). The implication here is that the husband dismisses what he cannot believe and, because for him there is no grey area between fact and fiction, between rationality and irrationality, or between sanity and madness, he pushes Antoinette into the corner of irrationality and, by extension, madness.

As in *The Bell Jar*, the broader social context of *Wide Sargasso Sea* informs a reading of the construction of madness in the novel. As scholars of Rhys's work have argued, the narrative of Antoinette's madness can be seen to echo the struggles of the colonial subject in the colonised West Indies. According to Jenkins, Rhys set 'out to show in her novel how the first Mrs Rochester may have been driven to madness by the patriarchal and colonial systems' (2001:xii). The emergence of the Caribbean and its colonisation by European powers such as the Dutch, the French, and the British, occurred as a result of the Atlantic slave trade; the land was fertile and rich for crops, and attractive to European imperialists, who imported slaves from Africa to work as labourers. The West Indian islands were colonised by Western powers who oppressed the slaves as well as the descendants of these African slaves. Seri Luangphinit writes that colonialism, both bureaucratic and ideological 'is legitimated and enforced through the rational identification of various elements in society and in the institutions that are created to recognize the differences among those elements' (2004:61). Therefore, the colonial subject's place in society – as an oppressed source of labour – is legitimated through the identification of his/her difference to that of the Western powers. In the colonial schema, the race and culture of the colonial subject is rendered inferior to that of the imperial slave owners. The consequence of the oppression of the colonial subject is the annihilation of the individual consciousness: the slave is not seen as an individual human being with thoughts and feelings, but as part of a collective

workforce existing for the benefit of the oppressor. The identity crisis that occurs as a result can lead to a kind of madness; the identity of the West Indian colonial subject is fragmented, influenced by the colonial power of Europe and haunted by the nostalgia for the past in Africa, while individuality is negated by the Western oppressor. As Luangphinit writes, both madness and the colonial identity are ‘bound, often fused, within discursive productions of imperial states; therefore, any discussion of insanity within the colonial scenario must recognize the accompanying creation of social positions, which are also subject to differences of class, color, and heritage’ (2004:61).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is not only the black natives whose identities are bound to the narrative of colonialism, but also that of Antoinette. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ‘Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism. Antoinette, as a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native’ (1985:250). This lack of a solid identity is posited as part of the reason for Antoinette’s madness. As a Creole, she belongs to neither the native Jamaicans, nor to the white Europeans. On one hand, she is rejected by the natives of her birthplace and on the other hand she is seen as a ‘white nigger’ by the English (Carr 2003:39). The novel’s beginning immediately establishes Antoinette and her family’s place in society – that they do not belong: ‘They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks’ (Rhys 2001:3). The proper ‘Jamaican ladies’ – in other words, those not tainted by ‘mixed blood’ – do not approve of Antoinette’s mother who, they feel, is too young for Antoinette’s father, ‘and, worse still, [is] a Martinique girl’ (Rhys 2001:3). These opening lines indicate a refusal of the English to extend any kind of empathy toward Antoinette or her family, a stance which is conditioned by the ‘particular biases inculcated by the colonial system in the West Indies’ (Su 2003:160). Furthermore, her family is also rejected by the black natives who laugh and jeer at her mother, ‘And no one came near [her or her family]’ (Rhys 2001:3).

Madness as linked to colonialism is first suggested in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the story of Antoinette’s mother, wherein madness is presented as a reaction to grief. The solitary life that has

been imposed on Antoinette's family does not seem to trouble her but, as she grows older, the growing antipathy from both sides of the cultural divide has an impact on the sanity of both Antoinette and her mother. After their house is set on fire by some of the ex-slaves, killing Antoinette's brother Pierre, her mother Annette descends into a madness from which she never recovers. After this incident, Antoinette is taken away to her aunt, while her mother is taken to the country to rest where she is looked after by a coloured man and woman. When Antoinette visits her mother, it is clear that Annette is consumed by grief over the death of Pierre. When Antoinette recounts the events to her husband in Part II, she says of Annette, 'But she – she didn't want me. She pushed me away and cried when I went to see her. They told me I made her worse' (Rhys 2001:85). Antoinette's description of Annette is synchronous with the stereotypical Victorian madwoman: 'I remember the dress she was wearing – an evening dress cut very low, and she was barefooted' (Rhys 2001:85). Her improper dress places Annette in the position of madwoman, a position which is further reinforced by her seemingly irrational actions; she drinks, for example, an entire glass of rum before she 'took the glass and laughed and threw it over her shoulder' (Rhys 2001:85). She is also depicted as hallucinating, speaking to Mr Luttrell, a man who has died. Eventually Annette dies, although Antoinette is not told how she passed away. Even after her death, rumours about Annette's madness follow Antoinette: 'People talked about her, they would not leave her alone, they would be talking about her and stop if they saw me' (Rhys 2001:85).

In the portrayal of Antoinette's own psychic deterioration, madness is posited not as the result of grief but rather as arising from her liminal position between two cultures. Although this occurs much later, she follows in her mother's footsteps and also becomes mad. This occurs in part because of her inability to fully identify with any one culture and because of the hostility and abuse to which this lack of definition leads. She explains this to her husband: '[There] was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. ... And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you and me I often wonder where do I belong and why was I ever born at all' (Rhys 2001:63). As in *The Bell Jar*, what is described in the novel is a kind of identity crisis, albeit one which is inflected with the dynamics of race. Like *The Bell Jar* too, the crisis of identity as a contributor to Antoinette's madness bears affinities with R.D. Laing's views on identity and the

loss of identity as playing a central role in the psychic breakdown of a schizophrenic. Antoinette's madness is a fictional construction and, therefore, a psychological study of the depiction of insanity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not possible. In other words, because Antoinette is not a real person, we cannot 'diagnose' her with schizophrenia. However, as Elizabeth Abel argues, 'Laing's insistence that schizophrenia is a legitimate and not uncommon response to certain interpersonal interactions provides a clue to understanding Rhys's heroines' (1979:157) and the particular treatment of madness that is offered in this text.

Part I of the novel, which chronicles her childhood, is narrated by Antoinette in the past tense, which indicates that she is 'speaking from the perspective (place and time) with which her narrative closes' (Mezei 1987:199), and is looking back on the events. Therefore, an exploration of the narrative necessitates an investigation into the ways in which the narrator focuses on the events that cause and lead up to the climactic event of the novel – in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's madness and ultimate suicide. In the first part of the novel, there are incidents and scenes which hint at Antoinette's fragile psyche, as well as her position as an outcast. For example, after an incident where Tia steals Antoinette's dress, Antoinette, in order to avoid other people, takes another road 'past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years' (Rhys 2001:11). She also begins to discover abandoned and wild parts of town, 'where there was no road, no path, no track' (Rhys 2001:11). Scenes of abandonment and desolation could be seen as objective correlatives for Antoinette's psyche, suggesting states of fragility and loss. She has been abandoned by her friend, as well as by her own mother who pushes Antoinette away 'without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that [Antoinette] was useless to her' (Rhys 2001:5). As a result, Antoinette becomes more and more isolated and begins to identify with the natural environment, saying that the ants, the snake, and the rain are all 'better than people. Better. Better, better than people' (Rhys 2001:11). Furthermore, she states, 'Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer' (Rhys 2001:11). In addition to this depiction of her fragmented identity, she displays a loss of feeling. After the burning of their house and her mother's psychic breakdown, Antoinette describes going to visit Annette: 'I remember the dull feeling as we drove along for I did not expect to see her. She was part of

Coulibri, that had gone, so she was gone, I was certain of it' (Rhys 2001:25). Antoinette's inability to feel anything is strongly reminiscent of the depiction of Esther's inability to react in *The Bell Jar*. In the sense that this occurs after a traumatic event – the conflagration of Coulibri, as well as the death of her brother – the loss of affect can be read as a defence mechanism to protect herself. What we can see here is that Antoinette's situation – abandoned by her mother and hated by the natives – is one that is unstable and indicative of her vulnerability.

Images of fragmentation and disintegration permeate the narrative of Antoinette's childhood, especially in the descriptions of the natural environment. The sense of disintegration is clearly depicted in Antoinette's description of their garden:

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky-looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. ... The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it. All Coulibri had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery – why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous. (Rhys 2001:4-5)

The description of the garden, drawing 'upon the Judeo-Christian image of Eden' (Su 2003:162) is a highly ambivalent one. There is a clear contradiction between comparing the garden to the biblical Garden of Eden and what the garden has come to. Instead of the pristine garden that is home to 'the tree of life', the garden has gone wild – just as the Garden of Eden would have gone wild after the fall of Adam and Eve. Gail Fincham writes that 'Antoinette's focalization of Coulibri depicts a paradise in which death and life, beauty and treachery intermingle' (2010:19). The smell of dead flowers mixes with that of the 'fresh living smell', while the beautiful descriptions of the orchids are juxtaposed with the danger they seem to present. The sense of danger evident in the description can be linked to prevailing views of the madwoman as wild and animalistic, a portrayal of madness which echoes the descriptions of Brontë's Bertha. Bertha – in her state of madness – is described in terms similar to the garden going wild and the sense of being unkempt; she is portrayed as a maniac, parting her 'shaggy locks from her visage, [gazing] wildly at her visitors' (Brontë 2010:362). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the husband – who is

uncomfortable with Antoinette's familiar connection with nature – echoes Brontë's portrayal of Bertha in his own depiction of his wife. He describes Antoinette's hair as 'uncombed and dull', her eyes as 'inflamed and staring', and her face as 'flushed and ... swollen' (Rhys 2001:94), which is similar to the descriptions of *Jane Eyre's* Bertha's unkempt hair and 'purple face ... those bloated features' (Brontë 2010:362). The depiction of the garden becoming wild can then also be seen as foreshadowing Antoinette's eventual madness – since in Part III she transforms into the madwoman that precedes her in the earlier text. Furthermore, the description of the garden as wild and post-Edenic has associations of death, and therefore foreshadows Antoinette's eventual death. John J. Su argues that the use of the Biblical metaphor is also an indication of loss that is implicitly connected to Antoinette's own narrative. He writes that from 'the first moments in the garden, when the ban of death is placed upon Adam and Eve, the biblical narrative conceives of postlapsarian society as the inevitable *telos* of humankind. In a similar way, Antoinette's own narrative suggests the inevitability and naturalness of her loss of place, of her exile and death' (2003:162).

Taking a slightly different view, one could argue that the descriptions of wilderness can also be seen in a more positive light, thus representing a departure from the wholly negative associations of 'wild' in *Jane Eyre*. In the description of the garden, and the entire estate having 'gone wild ... gone to bush' (2001:5), there is a suggestion of the positive reclamation of space by nature, as well as intimations of an affinity between Antoinette and the natural environment. Fincham writes that all the women in the novel are linked to nature, and that '[h]erself "run wild", Antoinette does not fear the "green light" and "tree ferns" that so threaten [her husband]' (2010:19). The positive relationship between Antoinette and the natural environment, as well as the positive depiction of nature as reclaiming Coulibri, can be linked to the more sympathetic treatment of Antoinette's madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, specifically the role of madness as a form of revolt against patriarchal oppression. The garden has gone wild due to the end of slavery, indicating that the slaves were the ones who kept the garden in pristine condition. With the end of slavery – the supposed end of the oppression of the natives by the colonial powers – the upkeep of the garden stops, and nature takes over the estate. If we link Antoinette to the positive reclamation of nature, her madness is no longer seen as the result of a defect, but rather as a

legitimate response to her situation. She has been married off to a stranger who becomes threatened by the natural environment, and by extension, afraid of her, and he reacts by trying to destroy her. She, in turn, reacts by becoming mad.

In the first part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the relationship between Antoinette and Tia, a young black girl, is an important one in terms of the narrative treatment of the fragmentation of Antoinette's identity. It also suggests links between Antoinette's story and that of the schizophrenic's division of the self. As a child, Antoinette identifies with Tia but, in their interaction, it is clear that there is a social and cultural divide between the two which is linked to the cultural fragmentation evident in Antoinette's ambiguous ethnicity. After the ex-slaves have burnt down Coulibri, Antoinette sees her friend: 'I ran to 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' (Rhys 2001:23). Antoinette, who has been neglected by her mother, seems to project her need to belong somewhere onto her friend. Ronnie Scharfman argues that Antoinette's 'need to identify and to belong is so powerful that she would gladly change color if she could, feeling as close a bond ... to her little friend Tia as she will to anybody' (1981:101). Her need to identify with her friend, however, is cruelly denied: 'When I was close I saw the jagged stone in [Tia's] hand but I did not see her throw it. ... 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' (Rhys 2001:23). The violent attack serves as an indication of the differences in position between the two girls. Su writes that up to this point, 'Tia perceives her relationship in terms of the colonial economy—she is a black child striking against the white child of former slave-holders' (2003:161). Therefore, because Tia is an 'other', it is not possible for Antoinette to identify with her. Antoinette recognises herself in Tia however and, as Elizabeth Abel argues, throughout the novel, Tia functions 'as [Antoinette's] mirror image' (1979:174). What Antoinette recognises in Tia, then, is herself as an 'other' that cannot be reconciled with her position as the white daughter of former slave-owners. This notion links to the idea of madness as a legitimate response to colonial racism and othering. Lee Erwin argues that the mirror image Antoinette sees in Tia splits 'into its own reversal infinitely, as the identity Antoinette claims is also simultaneously the recognition of an unbridgeable difference. That is,

even as she claims to be seeing “herself,” she is simultaneously seeing the other, that which only defines the self by its separation from it, in this case literally by means of a cut’ (1989:144-145).

Unlike *The Bell Jar*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not explicitly draw on the trope of the split self as a means of characterising Antoinette’s madness. However, the metaphor of the looking-glass suggests a similar kind of fragmentation in the protagonist’s identity. As in *The Bell Jar*, the trope of the mirror or looking-glass in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is used to depict a kind of false self, or a self that is detached from Antoinette’s identity. When she tells her husband a story about once waking up to see two rats on her window sill, she says, ‘I stared at them and they did not move. I could see myself in the looking-glass on the other side of the room, in my white chemise with a frill round the neck, staring at those rats and the rats quite still, staring at me’ (Rhys 2001:48). Although the story, which has a dream-like quality, is about the rats, there is a sense of detachment in Antoinette’s **reference** to her reflection, as though she is describing someone else staring at the rats. The division in her psyche becomes much more evident in Part III of the novel, at which point Antoinette – who has suffered psychic deterioration and is locked up in her husband’s attic – has assumed the position of narrator: ‘I remember watching myself [in the looking-glass] ... 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’ (Rhys 2001:116). Although Antoinette recognises herself in the reflection, she is detached from it. Furthermore, due to the loneliness that accompanies the sense of abandonment that permeates Antoinette’s childhood, the reflection in the mirror almost becomes a companion.

As in *The Bell Jar*, a key idea that is presented in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the notion that the deterioration of Antoinette’s psyche occurs as a result of external circumstances. This is illustrated in the trope of the looking-glass that reappears in Antoinette’s dream towards the end of the novel. Antoinette has been locked up in her husband’s country house in England and is preoccupied with trying to remember her past in another novel – the plot set out by Brontë’s Bertha. In the dream where Antoinette remembers that plot, she comes across a looking-glass: ‘I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her – the ghost.

The woman with the streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her' (Rhys 2001:122). Again, there is a sense of detachment between Antoinette and her reflection. In contrast to *The Bell Jar's* Esther who does not recognise herself in her reflection, for Antoinette there is recognition. What she recognises, however, is a 'ghost ... with streaming hair', which indicates that the reflection is not true to the person looking into the mirror. Instead, her reflection conforms to the construct of madness that has been imposed on her by others. What Antoinette sees in her reflection is the madwoman into which she has transformed, or been transformed into. She recognises that it is not a reflection of her true self, but of the false self that has been imposed on her both by her husband and by her predecessor in *Jane Eyre*. What she then recognises is herself as other, as Brontë's Bertha, who must go through with the plot set out for her in *Jane Eyre*.

The trope of the zombie is also significant in the portrayal of Antoinette's madness. As in *The Bell Jar*, the image of the zombie acts as a metaphor for the loss of identity that is associated with the psychic split of the schizophrenic. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the image of the zombie – spelt zombi – is linked to the process of zombification. As I explained in Chapter 1, the process of zombification involves raising a person from the grave, or poisoning people in order for them to work as slaves. This figure of the zombi as a slave without autonomy is used to present Antoinette's madness as a kind of loss of identity and agency. Significantly, after the husband has read a letter confirming his suspicions about his wife's madness, the servant Amélie tells Antoinette, 'Your husban' he outside the door and he look like he see zombi' (Rhys 2001:61). This implicitly connects Antoinette's madness with the image of the zombi – a 'dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead' (Rhys 2001:66). This is further illustrated when Christophine tells her, 'Your face like dead woman' (Rhys 2001:73). The suggestion is that, like the zombi who loses his/her identity, Antoinette has lost something of herself in the marriage; while the zombi has lost the quality that makes it human, Antoinette seems to have lost her sanity. The use of the zombi as a metaphor for madness is apt since, as Carol Morrell writes, zombification has been analysed 'as a social punishment decreed by the secret societies for transgression of the community's values' (1996:216). Antoinette is cast as insane for her own

transgression of Western values: in concurrence with Victorian views of women who deviate from societal norms, she is labelled as mad.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this figure of the zombi is also significant in the sense that it is connected to *Obeah*, practiced by Christophine, a Martinique woman who acts as a surrogate mother for Antoinette. When Antoinette's marriage is failing, she turns to Christophine to aid her with a love potion and, throughout the novel, there are hints of the woman's practice of 'black magic': 'I knew [Christophine's] room so well. ... yet one day when I was waiting there I was very much afraid. I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly' (Rhys 2001:13). Although these all have connotations of Voodoo and *Obeah*, Christophine is not depicted as evil or threatening in the novel. Rather, she becomes a mother figure to Antoinette and is the only one who stands up to the husband when he begins to reject Antoinette: 'You want her money but you don't want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. ... She will be like her mother. You do that for money? But you wicked like Satan self!' (Rhys 2001:104). What is suggested here is that the husband's treatment of Antoinette – influenced by the broader socio-political situation and the patriarchal culture – is part of the reason for Antoinette's madness, which is then portrayed as a response to that treatment. As Morrell writes, Christophine 'explodes [the husband's] putative Christianity by accurately describing his intentions and assigning him his actual moral status' (1996:211).

As suggested earlier, the notion of the 'other' and the wider context of racial oppression plays an important role in terms of the depiction of Antoinette's madness; this is illustrated in her marriage, where she is not only 'othered' by her husband, but where her identity and her autonomy are denied and negated. Furthermore, the dynamics of the marriage, wherein the husband represents the settler who exploits the colonised environment for its resources, become a reflection of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonial subject. The husband's treatment of Antoinette can therefore be explored as a metaphor depicting the power relations between the settler and the colonial subject – both the colonised people and the colonised environment. Within the marriage, as illustrated in the novel, Antoinette has no autonomy. She

is married off to a stranger as part of an economic exchange, and has little power in the marriage itself. In his account of the marriage, the husband affirms Antoinette's lack of power or agency: 'The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to)' (Rhys 2001:39). Therefore, Antoinette, without any 'provisions' for herself, who has 'no money of [her] own at all, [because] everything [she] had belongs to him' (Rhys 2001:68), becomes entirely dependent on her husband for survival. Because the marriage occurs as part of an economic exchange, the person with the money is the one with the power. As Elizabeth Abel argues, 'in this context women become like children who are torn between developing an independent sense of self and complying with the demands of people who control their livelihoods' (1979:170). And yet, although the husband is the one with the power, he is acutely aware of the fact that he has acquired his money through the marriage: 'I have not bought her, she has bought me' (Rhys 2001:39). Therefore, as Su writes, the husband's 'attitude towards his "mad creole" wife in *Jane Eyre* retroactively appears as the insane possessiveness of a man ... determined to forget that his social status is sustained by his dowry' (2003:164). As a result – so that he does not lose this dowry – the husband seems to deny his wife any autonomy. Antoinette's lack of agency in the marriage not only reflects the powerlessness of women in patriarchal societies but is also reflective of the colonial subject's lack of control; when the Western settler invades the colonised environment, the native people have no say in the matter. They become oppressed by the coloniser, as well as dependent on their oppressor for survival.

The power dynamics in the marriage are further illustrated in the shifting narrative voices. The novel is divided into three parts, and each part has a different narrator. Fincham writes that 'Rhys fragments gaze and voice so that the reader is subjected to a kaleidoscope of impressions mediated by different protagonists' (2010:18). While Part I is narrated by Antoinette, the majority of Part II, the account of the marriage and Antoinette's psychic breakdown, is narrated by the husband. In this narrative, the husband is portrayed as the one with the power in the marriage, one who also controls the narrative trajectory of Antoinette's madness. By providing the reader with his perspective of the marriage Rhys, as Elaine Savory notes, moves 'Rochester out of the realm of the Gothic romance and explain[s] his capacity for cruelty' (1998:133), while

providing an explanation for Antoinette's madness. Unlike Brontë, who only provides one side of the story concerning Bertha's madness, Rhys provides both sides and, because the husband is allowed to speak for himself, he is the one who shows his cruelty instead of the blame being cast on him. The first sentence of his narrative reads, 'So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations' (Rhys 2001:36). There is a sense of hostility and threat in his description of the courtship with Antoinette. It is significant that he uses the vocabulary of war instead of courtship, which foreshadows the outcome of their marriage, as well as the dynamics of the marriage itself. From the very start of their relationship, it is clear that the husband displays a certain amount of animosity towards his wife, indicating that there will be no happy ending. This is further illustrated in the name of the village where Antoinette and her husband stop right after the start of the marriage, on their way back to Coulibri. 'So this is Massacre,' the husband states, 'Not the end of the world, only the last stage of our interminable journey from Jamaica, the start of our sweet honeymoon' (Rhys 2001:36). Not only does the name 'Massacre' have connotations of death – foreshadowing the end of the marriage, as well as Antoinette's eventual death – but the juxtaposition between the name and the phrase 'sweet honeymoon' indicates that for the husband there is little sweetness in the prospect of a honeymoon.

As noted earlier, the husband places Antoinette into the role of an 'other', which is part of the reason for the animosity he displays towards her. The 'othering' of Antoinette is also depicted as part of the reason for her madness. The notion of the other – specifically the colonial subject as other – is evident throughout the novel. Antoinette's mother recognises this when she tells Mr Mason, Antoinette's stepfather, that he does not 'like, or even recognise the good in [the natives] ... and [he] won't believe in the other side' (Rhys 2001:14). The natives of the Caribbean are those on 'the other side', which means that the colonised subject is seen as inferior to the white, Western coloniser. Put differently, the other does not share the desirable qualities of the ideal self. The implication is that the otherness in the other is a threat to the identity of the ideal self. Accordingly, if the other and the self cannot be reconciled, the other must be alienated, oppressed, or eradicated. In his narrative of the marriage, the husband states that 'the woman is a stranger' (Rhys 2001:39). He immediately posits Antoinette as an other, by referring to her as 'the woman' and by calling her a 'stranger'. Furthermore, the suggestion is that her otherness is a

result of her ethnicity: 'She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which were too large and can be disconcerting. She 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' (Rhys 2001:37). Not only does he alienate her because of her ethnicity, but he also emphasises the fact that she is *not* English and *not* European. He places her, therefore, in the same category as the oppressed, colonised other. Furthermore, because Antoinette is a Creole – a person of 'mixed blood' – there is the sense that she is unhealthy or aberrant. Her 'dark alien eyes' are abnormal, which is unsettling to the husband because he cannot categorise her. Furthermore, the use of the word 'stranger' to describe his own wife, as well as the husband's use of vocabulary of war, indicate that there is no hope of reconciliation for Antoinette. The husband's view of the marriage is that of the self versus the other and, to protect himself from her otherness, he cuts off any feelings he might harbour for her and ultimately attempts to destroy her. 'As for the happiness I gave her,' he states, noticeably refusing to call her by her name, 'that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did' (Rhys 2001:56). Once again, the husband asserts that his lack of love for Antoinette is because of her otherness, because she is not like him – the Western ideal. What this suggests is that for the husband there is no possible reconciliation between the self and the other.

The husband's inability to reconcile himself to the otherness in Antoinette is illustrated in her failed attempt to communicate with him and to make him understand: "Will you listen to me for God's sake," Antoinette said. She had said this to me before and I had not answered' (Rhys 2001:80). The husband exerts power over his 'mad' wife by refusing to answer her, but this also links to the Victorian discourse of othering women as inferior and lacking rationality. The husband therefore exerts power over Antoinette because he views himself as sane, and because he views himself as superior to her. As a result, the narrative of Antoinette's madness is configured not merely as a response to race othering, but also to the othering of women. Because the husband views Antoinette in opposition to himself there is no room for communication: he refuses to listen to her, to listen to the other side. When Antoinette tries to persuade her husband not to believe slanderous stories about her, to listen to the other side, he asks, 'Is there another

side?’ (Rhys 2001:81). This question places the husband in the role of both patriarch and settler who does not take the other side into account. Antoinette’s reply is that ‘There is always the other side, always’ (Rhys 2001:81). This sentiment is one that permeates the entire novel. As Su argues, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys prioritises Bertha’s ‘suffering over Jane’s personal growth’ (2003:157), and explores ‘how [a] narrative can refigure our tendencies to validate particular claims of suffering and not others’ (2003:158). The shifting of narrative voices is also indicative of the importance of listening to the other side. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is denied a voice, and therefore the other side is ignored. Rhys, however, not only provides a voice for Antoinette, the marginalised other, but also for the husband. In his narrative, we see that he too is a victim of the patriarchal system; as the younger of two sons, he is not entitled to any of the inheritance that his brother receives and his only recourse is to make do with marrying for money. Furthermore, Rhys emphasises his position of victim by denying him ‘the Name of the Father, or the patronymic’ (Spivak 1985:252). In spite of his position as a victim of the ‘patriarchal law of entailment’ (Spivak 1985:251) and Rhys’s sympathetic depiction of this, however, Antoinette is the one who must suffer the consequences.

Because the husband has power over the narrative trajectory of madness, we can discern that his characterisation of Antoinette – not just of her madness, but of her as a person – influences her psychic stability. In terms of the plot development, this suggests that in the narrative treatment of madness, Antoinette’s psychic deterioration is attributed to causal factors rather than being represented as innate. As I have suggested above, one of these causal factors is racial othering. Antoinette’s ambiguous ethnicity is not just something that her husband cannot reconcile with; she is also acutely aware that her ethnicity, her ‘mixed blood’, places her in an inferior position to her Western husband. After her mother marries Mr Mason and the family begins to eat English food, Antoinette states, ‘I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine’s cooking’ (Rhys 2001:16). Even as a child, she displays the knowledge that being English is more desirable than being Creole. As Frantz Fanon writes in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967 [1952]), ‘Every colonized people ... finds itself face to face with the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s standards’ (1967:18). Antoinette,

who is identified with the colonial subject of the Caribbean, is therefore aware that adopting the cultural standards of the English will allow her to rise above her present status. However, she misses the local dishes because she is not English and cannot become English by eating English food; her behaviour is therefore presented as forced and going against her inclinations. Her husband, who is also aware of the differences in his status versus that of his wife, attempts to change her into the proper English wife that he desires. It pleases him when she acts the part of **the proper wife**: ‘Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank’ (Rhys 2001:40). He ‘demands [that] she fit his image of the proper English girl’ (Abel 1979:172), and is mollified when she complies. However, because she is not what he wants her to be, the husband begins the process of casting her as insane.

In taking up the position that there is an irreconcilable binary of sanity versus madness and rationality versus irrationality, the husband also places Antoinette on the side of nature. The husband is representative of the Western settler, who is incompetent in the strange environment and threatened by the natives and, as a result, begins to experience nature as hostile which, in a process of transference, he associates with Antoinette. His descriptions of nature all evoke images of being swamped, flooded, and invaded. He feels vulnerable in the face of **the ‘extreme green’ environment**, ‘[n]ot only wild, but menacing. Those hills could close in on you’ (Rhys 2001:39). Furthermore, he uses exaggerated and intensified descriptions in his references to nature: ‘I looked up at the mountains against a very blue sky’ (Rhys 2001:40); ‘There was a very strong scent of flowers ... and the noise [of crickets and frogs], subdued in the inner room, was deafening’ (Rhys 2001:47); ‘Not night or darkness as I knew it but night with blazing stars, an alien moon – night full of strange noises’ (Rhys 2001:53). There is the sense that the natural environment is too much for the husband, and that it becomes progressively more overwhelming. This is especially true in terms of the association he makes between Antoinette and nature: ‘I woke up in the dark after dreaming that I was buried alive, and when I was awake the feeling of suffocation persisted. Something was lying across my mouth; hair with a sweet heavy smell. I threw it off but still I could not breathe’ (Rhys 2001:87-88). In this extract, Antoinette is implicitly connected with the threat that the natural environment poses; it is her hair that lies across his mouth and she is now the one whose smell is too heavy, and too much.

For the husband, Antoinette becomes hostile and, as representative of the settler who exploits the colonised environment for its resources, he attempts to obliterate the threat by trying to destroy her. In an effort to negate the threat posed by her, he labels her as mad.

The moment where the husband confirms Antoinette as mad is an especially important one in the text, providing insight into the novel's critique of patriarchal processes of labelling women as mad. When the husband receives a letter from a man claiming to be Antoinette's brother Daniel Cosway, telling him that Antoinette is a madwoman, he is not surprised: 'It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it' (Rhys 2001:60). The letter, therefore, only serves as confirmation about what he has already decided. He does not question the validity of the claims and he does not listen to Antoinette's side of the story. Instead, he chooses to believe the story that corroborates his own feelings about his wife. Furthermore, Cosway tells him that Antoinette's family has a history of madness and that he should ask her stepbrother, Richard Mason, whether madness runs in Antoinette's family. Significantly, Cosway says that Richard Mason will tell 'a lot of nancy stories, which is what we call lies here' (Rhys 2001:60). The husband, in his rationalist position, chooses to believe what is presented as fact and, as in *Jane Eyre*, believes that such madness is hereditary. As I have mentioned, presenting Bertha's madness in *Jane Eyre* as hereditary is synchronous with Victorian assumptions about madness, which includes the belief that madness is transmitted from mothers to their daughters, but also that madness is the result of deviation from societal norms. This also reveals Victorian notions of gender roles: Jane M. Ussher writes that blaming female madness on their reproductive systems 'provides insights into the cultural construction of what it means to be a "woman" and "man", as madness is often defined as deviation from archetypal gender roles' (2011:13). Women who are too passionate or too sexual are, therefore, labelled as mad. The woman's place was in the home and it was abnormal for women to want or to enjoy sex: sexual excess in women was not only considered to be inappropriate, but also dangerous to the female constitution. These notions are convenient for Antoinette's husband in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, since they absolve him of the role he plays in his wife's madness. By being provided with a seemingly factual, reasonable reason for his wife's madness, he is able to portray her as the wild madwoman we see in *Jane Eyre*.

Even though the husband in *Wide Sargasso Sea* posits Antoinette's madness as hereditary, Rhys does not present this as the reason for her madness. Therefore, there are two conflicting depictions of the root of Antoinette's madness in the text – the one presented by the husband, which corresponds to the depiction of madness offered in *Jane Eyre*, and the one presented by Rhys's narrative. As such, Rhys provides alternative reasons for both Antoinette's and her mother's madness. As Rigney notes, Antoinette's 'mother has suffered a series of atrocities during a native uprising' (1978:27), while Antoinette's madness is attributed to her husband's 'prudish and cruel rejection of her passion for him' (Rigney 1978:27). In his depiction of Antoinette, she is portrayed as (too) passionate and irrational which, as I suggested earlier, echoes Brontë's portrayal of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's narrative, however, suggests that Antoinette does not go mad because her mother was mad; rather, she reacts to her situation – one where she is portrayed as a madwoman by her own husband. 'Do you know what you've done to me?' Antoinette asks him, trying to make him listen to her side. 'I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else where I have been unhappy' (Rhys 2001:95). Antoinette's reaction, therefore, is that of an outsider who has tried to find love, and has been cruelly rejected by the very person who was supposed to love her.

Importantly, the narrative of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also includes an instance of renaming. Because Antoinette does not fit into the role he desires from a wife, the husband attempts to reconstruct her, 'in part by changing her name to Bertha' (Abel 1979:172). He does this in order to change her identity, as well as to assert his authority over her by appropriating her. When Antoinette asks him why he calls her Bertha, he responds, 'Because it is a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha' (Rhys 2001:86). He renames her to represent what he thinks she ought to be and, because she has little power in the relationship, she must comply: 'Of course,' he tells her, 'on this of all nights, you must be Bertha' (Rhys 2001:87), to which she replies, 'As you wish' (Rhys 2001:87). Because Antoinette loves her husband and is dependent on him for economic survival, she attempts to become his ideal English wife. Significantly, he renames her because her own name is phonetically similar to her mother's name, Annette: 'He never calls me Antoinette now,' Antoinette tells Christophine, 'He has found out it was my

mother's name' (Rhys 2001:70). This is, of course, indicative of the husband's tracing the cause of his wife's madness to her genes. The act of renaming is also representative of the colonial settler because, as Carine Mardorossian argues, his perceptions and values 'are identified as a reflection of the European systems of imperial control' (1999:81). The coloniser tends to rename places and landmarks of the colonial environment in order to exert power over the colonised country, as well as to establish a new way of life under the authority and law of the coloniser. Abel writes that the result of the husband's attempt to change Antoinette's identity is that she becomes 'split between the image thrust upon her and her own knowledge of herself' (Abel 1979:172).

Although Antoinette has little choice but to comply with her husband's renaming of her, she is resistant towards his attempts to appropriate her. 'Bertha is not my name,' Antoinette tells her husband. 'You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by that name' (Rhys 2001:95). In the last part of the novel, speaking about her jailer's name, Antoinette asserts, 'Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass' (Rhys 2001:116). This indicates the sense of identity that is attached to a name: in the husband's renaming of her, Antoinette loses more than just her name but also her sense of identity. Scharfman writes that the denial of Antoinette's real name is the husband's 'way of obliterating any sense of self which Antoinette may have salvaged from her insufficient relationship with her mother, and of proving the truth of the mother's madness by also imposing it on the daughter' (1981:103). He not only casts her as insane, but – because he is threatened by her passionate and seemingly irrational nature – he attempts to silence her and to change her identity to that of the madwoman depicted in *Jane Eyre*.

In Part III of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel moves to England and into the realm of *Jane Eyre*. Significantly, it is the madwoman who has taken over the power of narration at this point. What this indicates is that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the madwoman, Antoinette, is allowed to tell her own story instead of being spoken for. The narration in this section has a disjointed, fragmented quality that seems to mimic Antoinette's frame of mind. The narrative, for example, moves from

descriptions of her room to her memories, and is interspersed with what would seem to be the ramblings of a madwoman. For example, Antoinette states, ‘Looking at the tapestry I recognised my mother dressed in an evening gown but with bare feet’ (Rhys 2001:116). It is not clear whether Antoinette sees her own reflection in a mirror and mistakes it for her mother, or whether she is hallucinating. What is significant is that these descriptions – seemingly irrational, and almost dreamlike – are quite lucid. There is, therefore, a kind of juxtaposition between Antoinette’s lucidity and the madness that is depicted in the narrative itself. There is the sense that Antoinette is caught between her own narrative and that of *Jane Eyre*, and therefore the two versions of madness that are offered in each text. She, for example, follows the plotline from the earlier novel, but does not remember the actions of ‘Bertha’: ‘One morning when I woke I ached all over. Not the cold, another sort of ache. I saw that my wrists were red and swollen. Grace said, “I suppose you’re going to tell me that you don’t remember anything about last night”’ (Rhys 2001:117). What Antoinette cannot remember is recounted to her by Grace Poole: ‘This gentleman [Antoinette’s brother] arrived suddenly and insisted on seeing you and that was all the thanks he got. You rushed at him with a knife and when he got the knife away you bit his arm’ (Rhys 2001:118). This act of violence is implicitly related to her psychic instability, since violence is not only associated with the mentally unstable, but also with the irrational. Violence, therefore, is an indication of Antoinette’s lack of rationality, which could then be read as a kind of vindication for the husband’s treatment of his wife. It is significant, however, that Antoinette does not remember her fits of violence, in the sense that this points to the contention found between Antoinette’s narrative and the narrative told that *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha exercises over the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette’s narration is quite lucid and rational, but her inability to remember attacking her brother, for example, illustrates the fact that she is acting out a plot that is not her own.

In the novel’s treatment of madness in this text, as I have suggested, emphasis is placed on the madwoman’s experience of displacement and inauthenticity. For example, Antoinette insists that everything is made out of cardboard: ‘This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England’ (Rhys 2001:117). In this sense, madness is narrated as an experience of unreality. Furthermore, the phrase ‘cardboard house’ is indicative of Antoinette’s experience of madness is represented as

one of entrapment. Trevor Hope argues that in this extract the ‘house is a pure literary conceit (hardbound between “cardboard” covers), one founded upon well-known (and specifically gothic) precedents ... in which Antoinette’s future is re-echoed to her and even proleptically prescribed for her’ (2012:65). An added difficulty is Antoinette’s consciousness of the parallel narrative (of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*) unfolding in another text. This conflict between the two narratives is evident in the instances where Antoinette is unsure of what her role is: ‘I get out of bed and ... wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it I must do?’ (Rhys 2001:115). She is trapped in a plot where she has no agency, and her only way forward is to remember what the plot of the previous novel dictates: ‘I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now’ (Rhys 2001:121). Until she remembers, she will be trapped between two plots – each vying for dominance over the other.

The novel’s depiction of alienation (as a precursor to madness) is given further nuance through the attention it gives to the character’s experience of colour. In Part I, Antoinette’s descriptions, especially of nature, are filled with rich colours, such as orchids that are a ‘bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see’ (Rhys 2001:5). In contrast to this, the colours used to describe the English setting are dull and depressing: ‘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’ (Rhys 2001:116-117). Again, this is an indication of the contention between the two narratives (that of Bertha and that of Antoinette), as well as an illustration of Antoinette’s psychic fragmentation. Whereas dull colours are associated with her incarceration in England and her role as Brontë’s Bertha, the colour red, as Gail Fincham writes, becomes ‘Antoinette’s colour, the marker of her identity, linking her with the Caribbean past’ (2010:20). In the last part of the novel, there is the sense that in her madness Antoinette is losing her identity to Bertha. As noted earlier, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there are suggestions of a divided selfhood, wherein there is a kind of split between Antoinette’s true identity and the identity of the madwoman that is imposed on her. In the last part of the novel, references to red point to what we could refer to as Antoinette’s true self. For example, after the visit of her brother, Antoinette asks, ‘Have you hidden my red

dress too? If I'd been wearing that he'd have known me' (Rhys 2001:119). The suggestion is that because Antoinette was not wearing her red dress, what Richard sees is the madwoman, Bertha, and not his sister, Antoinette. Antoinette's concern with her red dress, 'the colour of fire and sunset ... of flamboyant flowers' (Rhys 2001:119), is therefore an attempt to assert her identity, and to fight the plot of the madwoman that is imposed on her. This is further illustrated in the first part of the novel, where Antoinette is cross-stitching in a classroom, and says, 'I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, née Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839' (Rhys 2001:29). The reference to fire can be read as foreshadowing her eventual death, but also points to the notion that it is Antoinette who will set fire to Thornfield Hall instead of Bertha. The choice to follow through with the plot set out by *Jane Eyre*, however, provides Antoinette with the agency that Bertha lacks. Su writes that when Antoinette sets fire to Thornfield Hall, 'her arson becomes her "writing"—not an act of madness, as *Jane Eyre* will cast it, but an act of resistance against the history of colonialism' (2003:169).

As suggested above, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* reworking of *Jane Eyre* presents Antoinette's conflagration of Thornfield Hall not as an act of madness, but as one of defiance. She does not set fire to Thornfield Hall as the madwoman, Bertha, but as Antoinette – the woman who has suffered under the oppression of her husband and who is reacting to it in an act society would conceive of as mad. Towards the end of the novel, Antoinette has a dream that reminds her of Bertha's actions in *Jane Eyre*.

Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. ... The wind caught up my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped on these hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. (Rhys 2001:123)

Significantly, Antoinette 'experiences the moment in terms of her own past and not that written by *Jane Eyre*' (Su 2003:169). The suggestion here is that Antoinette's causing the conflagration of the house is an act of agency, and that she has control over her actions. Fincham writes that Antoinette's causing the conflagration of the husband's house is 'inescapably an act. Where at Coulibri Antoinette and her mother were passive victims, now Antoinette is an agent, or potentially an agent, if her dream is to be translated into reality' (2010:20). It is also noteworthy

that in her dream Antoinette remembers Tia, who appears in the ‘pool at Coulibri’ as a reflection, and that Tia is the one who beckons her to jump. According to Su, within Antoinette’s ‘imagination, Tia does not exist as an independent entity but as the remnant of something Antoinette has lost’ (2003:161). Perhaps what Antoinette recognises in her reflection is her own otherness, the very otherness that caused her to be rejected and cast as insane. Therefore, by jumping into that reflection she, as Abel argues, ‘rejects a false reflection of her nature in the mirror and plunges toward the externalized image she desires’ (1979:174).

The novel ends with Antoinette, who has woken from her dream, stealing her jailer’s keys and walking out with a flickering candle, presumably to fulfil her role in the plot set out by *Jane Eyre*. Significantly, after waking up, Antoinette speaks in the present tense as opposed to the past tense used in the description of the dream itself: ‘Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I must do’ (Rhys 2001:123). Abel writes that this reveals a sense of identity, and that ‘Rhys draws us to see her active choice of death over the prolonged decline of madness and imprisonment ... as a liberating form of self-assertion’ (1979:174). Rhys allows Antoinette to make the choice to commit suicide and, by doing so, she changes the reader’s perception of Antoinette’s death. She is no longer the silent madwoman, but the active agent who frees herself, both from her confinement in the attic, and from her reputation in *Jane Eyre*. Just as the husband tries to change her identity by renaming her, Antoinette now changes the identity of *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha. Brontë’s Bertha commits suicide so that Rochester and Jane can have their happy ending. Rhys’s Bertha commits suicide in order for a metaphorical rebirth of Antoinette to occur. The narrative of madness therefore ends not in defeat, but in resistive agency.

In the narrative of Antoinette’s psychic deterioration in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, madness is presented as an act of resistance both against the patriarchal and colonial oppression of women, and the presentation of the madwoman, Bertha, in *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is depicted as the stereotypical raving madwoman who is wild and animalistic. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys critiques this depiction of the madwoman by providing Bertha/Antoinette with a voice, rationality and an alternative reason for her madness, aside from gender and ‘mixed race’. In the reworking of the narrative of madness, the novel establishes the colonial Caribbean as a central narrative focus in

order to suggest connections between **Antoinette's madness** and the struggles of the colonial subject. As a Creole, of 'mixed blood', she is depicted as an outcast because of her liminal position between two cultures which, in turn, is presented as a contribution to her deteriorating psyche. As a critique of Victorian views of madness, where madness in women is viewed as both hereditary and inherently female, **Antoinette's madness is depicted as** being the result of external circumstances. She is married off to a man who, uncomfortable with her affinity to the natural environment and threatened by her seemingly irrational nature, casts her as insane. In addition, he renames her Bertha, an act which the novel presents as an attempt both to assert his dominance over her, and to change her identity.

As in *The Bell Jar*, the story of madness is presented through various tropes and ideas relating to the notion of a split or fragmented selfhood. Central to this metaphoric depiction is the trope of the zombi which, reworked in this context, suggests the loss of identity attendant upon an unhappy marriage. The trope of the looking-glass is also used to depict this fragmentation or **split in Antoinette's identity; in her references to the looking-glass**, there is a sense of detachment between the onlooker and the reflection. In addition, the looking-glass is used to portray the **disconnection between Antoinette's true identity and the image of the madwoman that is imposed on her**. The suggestion is that Antoinette seems to be split between two identities: her own true identity, and that of *Jane Eyre's* Bertha. This is further depicted through the use of colour, where the colour red becomes a marker of Antoinette's true self, and dull, morbid colours are used in reference to her incarceration in England. In the last part of the novel, where **Antoinette is locked up in the attic of her husband's house, she** re-assumes the power of narration. In this way, Rhys contests Brontë's denial of Bertha's voice by allowing the madwoman to tell her own story. Antoinette's experience of madness is depicted as one of dislocation; she does not remember her actions, and she experiences everything around her as inauthentic and unreal. This points to the two conflicting narratives of madness – madness as an understandable response, even resistance to, oppressive and damaging circumstances (Antoinette) and madness as hereditary and inherently female, a narrative which is grounded in tropes of the bestial and the less-than-human (Bertha). The novel ends with the suggestion that Antoinette will follow through with **Bertha's plot by setting fire to the house and jumping from the**

battlements. This act, however, is not depicted as one of defeat, but rather as an act of defiance. By allowing Antoinette to remember Bertha's actions, Rhys provides her with the agency that Bertha lacks in *Jane Eyre*. The resolution of the narrative of madness, therefore, lies in a double act of revolt: first against the misleading and damaging narrative portrayal of the 'madwoman' in a canonical British text and second, against the patriarchal social construction of women (and the 'mixed race' women in particular) as inherently vulnerable to dysfunctional mental states.

CHAPTER 3

'I'm not sure when I began to suspect the truth,' says the narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, 'about myself and about them, what I was and what they were turning into' (2009 [1972]:95). The novel, published in 1972, follows the unnamed protagonist, who is also the narrator, as she returns to her childhood home in Northern Canada in search of her father, who has disappeared in mysterious circumstances. On the rural island in Quebec with her lover Joe and a married couple, Anna and David, the narrator is confronted both with memories of her past, and the destruction of the natural environment. While searching for clues that might lead to her father, the narrator-protagonist provides details of her past, which include growing up in semi-isolation close to a rural French village, her failed marriage, and the abandonment of her child. Eventually, she finds her father's corpse in the lake, but mistakes it for her aborted child and, as she surfaces from the lake, she is accompanied by her repressed memories. At this point, what becomes apparent is that the narrator was not, in fact, married with a child, but that the story of the failed marriage is a fictionalised narrative by means of which the narrator deflects attention from or represses the truth. Instead of abandoning her fictional husband and child, the narrator had an affair with her art professor, who persuaded her to have an abortion when she fell pregnant. After the confrontation with her past and the truth of her own actions, the narrator experiences a psychotic episode where she attempts to discard her human identity and to merge with the natural environment.

Surfacing was published in 1972, right after the decade that saw the beginning of second wave feminism, a period where women in the West fought for gender equality, and the right to create female identities that are not prescribed by patriarchal notions of gender roles. Some of the issues confronted during second wave feminism include equality in the family and the workplace, equality in terms of sexual identities and female reproductive rights. Novels written by (mostly Western middle-class) women during this period, therefore, deal with these issues and are often investigated in terms of patriarchal oppression. Since *Surfacing* deals with a narrator living in a patriarchal society where women are not seen as equal, the novel has also been variously explored in terms of the way in which Atwood speaks to the problems middle-class women face in

Western, patriarchal society. Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, for example, writes that it is ‘understandable that *Surfacing* should be interpreted as one more book about the victimization of women’ (1974:319). Furthermore, Erinç Özdemir writes that among Atwood’s ‘novels, *Surfacing* is the one that embodies the sharpest and most comprehensive critique of modern Western culture and its constitutive myths’ (2010:57). In other words, the novel provides a feminist critique of patriarchal society. Furthermore, as a Canadian text, the novel is also often investigated in terms of Canadian society in the 1970s, and ‘within the question of what was specifically Canadian about Canadians’ (Murray 2015:1). While existing scholarship on *Surfacing* deals extensively with ideas of national and female identity, in this chapter I examine *Surfacing* in terms of the narrative inscription of madness, focusing on the various metaphors of madness which are deployed as well as looking at the particular story of madness that the novel presents – its origins, causes, development and resolution. As in other chapters, I consider the ways in which the narration of female madness serves not only as a critique of patriarchal society and the dominant cultural construction of female madness but also as a contribution to a female emancipatory politics. As part of this discussion, I will explore the Canadian society depicted in the novel, specifically the ways in which this society can be seen as oppressive to women. I also give attention to the novel’s depiction of psychological breakdown in relation to the destruction of the natural environment, since images of the domination of nature by humans persist throughout the novel. In relation to this, I will argue that the novel acts as a critique, not just of the oppression of women, but also of patriarchal domination over nature.

As in *The Bell Jar* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Surfacing* depicts the broader socio-political environment in terms of the patriarchal oppression of women. It is precisely this context, the novel suggests, that contributes to the narrator’s deteriorating psyche. Canadian society is presented in the novel as clearly divided along lines of gender, one where men hold positions of dominance and where women play a subservient role. The idea of the male as the dominant gender is illustrated in the roles ascribed to certain characters such as Anna and David, whose relationship is depicted as a fight for control or power. The novel also illustrates the importance of marriage as a means of locating women within the social order. An example of this can be seen when the narrator speaks to her father’s friend, Paul, and he asks her if her husband has come

with her: 'What he means is a man should be in charge; Joe will do as a stand-in. My status is a problem, they obviously think I'm married' (Atwood 2009:24). There are two implications worth noting in this statement. Firstly, Paul's question indicates the dominance of men over women: when it comes to important matters such as looking for the narrator's missing father, a man should 'be in charge'. In other words, women are not viewed as capable and perhaps there is an underlying belief that, as a woman, the narrator is too emotional or irrational to handle the situation. Secondly, the narrator's marital status indicates that an 'unattached' female is viewed as both vulnerable and meaningless. It is therefore not seen as proper for a woman not to be married, or worse, to be divorced. In accordance with this belief, the narrator states that she did not inform her parents of her supposed divorce, because 'It isn't part of the vocabulary here' (2009:24). Western society's views on marriage are further typified by the symbol of the wedding ring. The narrator, who wears a gold ring, states that it makes her 'safe' (Atwood 2009:24), since it creates the illusion that she fits the mould expected of her. Marriage is therefore an indication of normality according to society's standards and expectations of women. In addition, motherhood is viewed as the height of womanhood: 'A lady was what you dressed up as on Hallowe'en ... or it was what you said at school when they asked what you wanted to be when you grew up, you said "A lady" or "A mother," either one was safe' (Atwood 2009:115). Throughout, the novel offers a critical perspective on women's madness through a sardonic and critical view on gender relations, assumptions, and roles, and positing the two sets of social norms as interrelated.

The novel gives extended attention to patriarchal attitudes, all of which are rendered as causal factors in the protagonist's psychic distress. According to Özdemir, '[p]ower structures which extend to matters of gender can be seen as the basic determinants that undergird a patriarchal society' (2010:57). This notion is illustrated in the narrator's fictional husband's views on her career: 'For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important woman artists' (Atwood 2009:63). This is significant because, as we find out towards the end of the novel, the fictional husband is really the narrator's art professor. The implication here is that, according to the views of the narrator's male professor, women are not seen as capable of the

same professions as men. As in the depiction of gender roles in *The Bell Jar*, creativity and the realm of intellectualism are seen to belong to men. What we find in the society depicted in the novel, is not only that distinctions are made between the capabilities of men and women, but also that the feminine is placed in opposition to the masculine. This idea of binary opposition is typified by the narrator's brother, who as a child distinguishes between what he deems to be the 'good kind' of leeches and the 'bad kind', believing that there has 'to be a good kind and a bad kind of everything' (Atwood 2009:43). These distinctions are not based on any scientific or empirical evidence, and yet this binary system influences the way in which the leeches are treated; the good kind are allowed to be left alone, while the narrator and her brother torture the bad kind by throwing 'them on the campfire when [their] mother wasn't watching' (Atwood 2009:169). Barbara C. Ewell argues that for the brother, 'the category alone is sufficient justification for his actions, despite its groundlessness in the real character of leeches' (1981:188). This binary system of distinguishing between good and bad can also be observed in the dualistic patriarchal system, where, without scientific proof, men are viewed as superior and women 'are seen as objects that must be dominated' (Serpa 2004:140).

The domination of women by patriarchal society is depicted in various scenes and characters throughout the novel. Set in the early 1970s, where women are depicted as educated and in control of their own bodies and reproductive systems, the novel illustrates the double-sidedness of women's supposed freedom. In the period of second wave feminism, Western women fought for their rights to have control over their own bodies and, although much progress was made in terms of gender equality, women's freedom remained an issue even after the 1960s. J. Brooks Bouson writes that Atwood 'contests the discourse of "liberated" sexuality in *Surfacing* by exposing the exploitative male scripts encoded in the 1960s and 1970s ideology of sexual emancipation' (1993:41). This is made explicit in the novel when both the narrator and Anna stop using birth control because of the side effects. Anna develops a blood clot in her leg and the narrator's vision is affected: "I couldn't see," I said. "Things were blurry. They said it would clear up after a couple of months but it didn't." It was like having Vaseline on my eyes' (Atwood 2009:100). The narrator's loss of vision indicates that women are subject to a complex double-bind: by trying to control one part of her body, she loses control over another. The fact that birth

control methods have side effects suggests that it is unnatural to control your reproductive system: both the narrator and Anna's health is compromised by their attempt to control their ability to conceive children and therefore they must choose between the possibility of becoming pregnant and the risk birth control poses to their physical health. Furthermore, this choice speaks to the broader social assumption that choosing not to become a mother – in other words, choosing not to conform to societal gender norms – is both unnatural and dangerous.

What these examples suggest is that the female body and the ways in which it is figured in the text play a key role in the narrative of madness inscribed in this text. As we can see in the issue of birth control, women's bodies can be seen as a site for control or dominance. In the narrative of the protagonist's psychic breakdown, the novel makes a clear link between madness and control over the female body, suggesting that a lack of control over the body represents an important psychological threat. The control of women's bodies is linked to notions of the female body as lacking or incomplete. As Angela Carter explains, '[W]oman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning' (1979:4). What this suggests is that women are dependent on the meaning ascribed to them by men and that the female body becomes a metaphor for a woman's worth. If a negative meaning is ascribed to a woman's body, the intimation then is that she has no value in society.

If the female body is presented as a site for control, the novel depicts patriarchal relationships as the site for the fight for that control. As Özdemir writes, in *Surfacing*, Atwood explores 'the ways in which individuals become implicated in power relationships that often manifest themselves in the form of domination and victimization' (2010:57). This is illustrated in the power dynamics portrayed in David and Anna's relationship. Initially, the narrator perceives their marriage to be successful, asserting that they know the 'secret trick' (Atwood 2009:56). However, when she asks Anna how they make it work, Anna's answer is an indication of the superficiality of their seemingly intimate relationship: 'We tell a lot of jokes' (Atwood 2009:56). Throughout the novel, the narrator bears witness to these jokes. As Özdemir writes, their joking, 'consisting

mostly of verbal power games, is a show they put on for an audience – in this case for the protagonist and Joe’ (2010:64). The narrator comes to realise that what sustains Anna and David’s relationship is a precarious balance of power and domination. David asserts his domination over Anna by constantly denigrating her by means of verbal and emotional abuse. For example, when the narrator tells David that he can use his own fishing rod, he says, ‘Lie down Anna ... I’m gonna use my own rod’ (Atwood 2009:77). In addition to his sexual innuendos and intimations of rape, David enforces his domination over Anna by objectifying her body and, comparing her to the narrator, informing her of her physical shortcomings: ‘I like it round and firm and fully packed. Anna, you’re eating too much’ (Atwood 2009:125). This not only indicates Western feminine ideals of what a woman should look like, but points towards David’s own expectations of his wife. This is illustrated in the way in which Anna strives towards these ideals. Anna is constantly aware of her physical attributes; she does not wear jeans for fear they would make her look fat, and she is constantly touching up her makeup. When the narrator tells Anna that it is not necessary to wear makeup since no one will see her on the isolated island, Anna says, “He doesn’t like to see me without it,” and then, contradicting herself, “He doesn’t know I wear it” (Atwood 2009:52). According to Ewell, ‘Anna has reduced herself to a function ... whose only substance is the pre-fabricated notion of what a woman should be’ (1981:194). The narrator takes note of the ‘subterfuge this must involve ... Maybe David is telling generous lies; but she blends and mutes herself so well he may not notice’ (Atwood 2009:52). The choice of diction in describing the act of applying makeup – blending and muting – is significant in the sense that it describes Anna’s role in the marriage and the version of femininity that she has adopted: she mutes her own desires in accordance with this and thus has no voice in her marriage. The words also hint at the absence (or loss) of fixed boundaries, thus carrying suggestions of the loss of a fixed identity and that by accepting her role in the marriage, Anna loses an identity independent of her relationship. Furthermore, she must comply with David’s ‘little set of rules’ (Atwood 2009:156) in order to remain the object of his desire. As the narrator notes, Anna is ‘desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight: she was fighting for him because if she even surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere’ (Atwood 2009:196). The diction of warfare

indicates that the marriage is adversarial and, as a result, can only end with a clear winner and loser.

As in both *The Bell Jar* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Surfacing* returns to the trope of the mirror (and the related idea of fragmented or split selfhood) as a means of illustrating a distressed psychic state. In this version, the image functions as an indication of the problem of patriarchy and patriarchal objectification of women. In the narrator's descriptions of Anna applying her makeup there are references to Anna's 'gilt compact' (Atwood 2009:213) and the cabin's 'wavery yellow mirror' (Atwood 2009:51). Using the word 'wavery' to describe the mirror is significant in the suggestion that the reflection is distorted. In accordance with this, Barbara Hill Rigney notes that 'one's reflection functions like a kind of negative doppelgänger. Presumably, the mirror provides a distorted image of the self, thus stealing one's sense of a real or complete self, robbing one of identity' (1978:94). In my discussion of the trope of the mirror in *The Bell Jar*, I mention that there is a general belief that the soul can be found in a person's reflection. Similarly, in *Surfacing* the narrator asserts that 'Anna's soul [is] closed in the gold compact' (Atwood 2009:228). The word 'closed' suggests that there is a barrier between Anna and her reflection and, in effect, that she has lost her identity to her mirror. As the narrator states, 'She opens [the compact mirror], unclosing her other self' (Atwood 2009:213). This is also significant because she uses the mirror to change her features, 'performing the only magic left to her' (Atwood 2009:213). Her desire to remain young, beautiful, and desirable in David's eyes causes her to attempt 'to conform to the eroticized and commodified images of women promulgated in the mass culture' (Bouson 1993:44). Accordingly, David Ward observes that 'Anna's reflection in the make-up mirror is submission to the magical capture of herself by her own image, an inversion of the narcissistic constitution of a specular self in the mirror image' (1994:113). In other words, the notion of beauty inspired by the commercial world encourages a kind of invention of another self, one that conforms to societal views of women as objects to be judged based on their external appearances. In the depiction of the narrator's psychosis, the narrative points to a recognition of this, which causes the narrator to reject the mirror: 'I must stop being in the mirror' (Atwood 2009:227). What this suggests is that, since madness is depicted as a rejection of the patriarchal oppression of women, there must be a rejection of this invented self that, like Anna's 'other self', can become

trapped in the mirror. The narrator is illustrated as rejecting the conformity to patriarchal expectations of women and, in choosing to do so, she ‘reverse[s] the mirror so it’s towards the wall, [so that] it no longer traps [her]’ (Atwood 2009:228).

The most significant scene that illustrates patriarchal domination in the novel is when David humiliates Anna by persuading her to undress for the movie he and Joe are shooting, called ‘Random Samples’, ‘a collection of anecdotal images of domination collected in the course of their journey’ (Murray 2015:13). Throughout the novel, David and Joe take ‘shots of things they come across [and] ... When they’ve used up their supply of the film ... they’re going to look at what they’ve collected and rearrange it’ (Atwood 2009:7). After shooting ‘random samples’ such as three stuffed moose, a dead heron, fish guts, and themselves chopping wood, David and Joe decide that they need a nude woman:

“Come on, we need a naked lady with big tits and a big ass,” David said in the same tender voice; I recognized that menacing gentleness, at school it always went before the trick, the punchline. ... “Don’t think I don’t know what you’re trying to do,” Anna said, as though she’d guessed a riddle. “You’re trying to humiliate me.” “What’s humiliating about your body, darling?” David said caressingly. “We all love it, you ashamed of it? That’s pretty stingy of you, you should share the wealth; not that you don’t”. (Atwood 2009:172)

David goads her and, after threatening that he will remove her bikini for her and throw her in the lake, Anna gives in. She undresses and, sticking ‘her middle finger in the air’ (Atwood 2009:174), jumps into the lake. This scene is emblematic of the dynamics of David and Anna’s relationship; he is the physically strong male with power over his wife who, as the victim, must submit to his domination if she is to survive. David’s insistence that Anna should ‘share’ her body suggests an understanding of the female body not only as an object, but as belonging to others. Furthermore, David suggests that it is good for Anna to be proud and generous, even if that ‘object of pride’ is her own body. The implication here is that the female body has become a kind of commodity. This scene portrays what Bouson refers to as ‘the masculinist culture which reduces woman to a voyeuristic, pornographic spectacle’ (1993:50).

What is significant about this scene is the violence articulated; it is through violence – both physical and emotional – that David is able to assert his dominance over Anna. As Özdemir argues, David’s perception of his role in the marriage is ‘power-over’, using ‘Anna’s femininity against her to uphold his sense of masculine superiority by putting her down, [while] Anna uses her own body and sexuality as her sole resource to keep David’ (2010:64). Their marriage, therefore, is depicted as a kind of microcosm for a masculinist culture in which men assert their authority through violence, while women must be submissive and accept their inferiority. Anna’s acceptance of her place in the marriage is illustrated when the narrator destroys the film by releasing it into the lake: ‘I study her to see if her release has made any difference, but the green eyes regard me unaltered from the enamel face. “They’ll get you,” she says, doleful as a prophet’ (Atwood 2009:215). In her refusal to participate in this act of rebellion, Anna becomes a representation of the oppressed but colluding woman in her role as victim. David, on the other hand, is described as ‘a pastiche, layers of political handbills, pages from magazines, *affiches*, verbs and nouns glued on to him and shredding away, the original surface littered with fragments and tatters’ (Atwood 2009:195). In other words, David is representative of the broader masculine, oppressive culture – a culture where violence, ‘the convulsive form of the active, male principle, is a matter for men, whose sex gives them the right to inflict pain as a sign of mastery’ (Carter 1979:25). Just like Anna is depicted as having adopted a certain kind of femininity, David is presented as having adopted a certain ideology of masculinity. More significant in this extract, however, is the sense that David’s identity is made up of bits and pieces of this ideology, as well as the notion that this is disintegrating. The sense of fragmentation in the description of his identity is indicative of the harm caused by this patriarchal ideology, not just to women, but to men as well.

A key representation of oppressive Western patriarchal culture in *Surfacing* is the novel’s exploration of the harm done to the natural environment. In addition to Anna and David’s relationship, *Surfacing* offers a depiction of the destructive nature of patriarchal society in the trope of the Americans. The narrator believes that the environment is becoming increasingly diseased. From ‘the first lines of the novel,’ Murray argues, ‘the unnamed narrator’s discourse constructs a depleted, diseased, corrupted world’ (2015:3). For example, when the narrator

describes a welcome sign that is used for target practice by the hunters, she says that no matter how often the sign is replaced, the bullet holes reappear, like ‘a kind of inner logic or infection, like mould or boils’ (Atwood 2009:9). Furthermore, she speaks about a ‘disease ... spreading up from the south’ (Atwood 2009:3), while ‘trees will never be allowed to grow that tall again, they’re killed as soon as they’re valuable, big trees are as scarce as whales’ (Atwood 2009:55). The destruction the narrator describes throughout the novel is the destruction of nature that occurs as a result of industrialisation. She blames this destruction on the ‘south’, on the Americans, who come to symbolise ‘the pervasiveness of male power ... [and] who stand in the text as an embodiment of the masculine principle of conquest and wanton destruction’ (Bouson 1993:48). This obliteration of nature culminates in a scene where the narrator and her friends come across a dead heron strung up to a tree:

Why had they strung it up like a lynch victim, why didn’t they just throw it away like the trash? To prove they could do it, they had the power to kill. Otherwise it was valueless: it was beautiful from a distance, but it couldn’t be tamed or cooked or trained to talk.
(Atwood 2009:149)

Just like David asserts his authority over Anna to show his power, so do the Americans assert their authority and domination over nature. Kapuscinski argues that the heron, ‘which stands most powerfully as a testament to the potential victimhood of nature, ... suggests how violence against the natural world is no longer a matter of survival or indifference but a manifestation of the human desire to inflict torture and suffering and the willingness to end life in order to satisfy one’s own appetite for destruction’ (2007:111).

A significant feature in the novel’s depiction of the natural environment is the narrator’s feeling of complicity in its destruction. This is illustrated when she realises that the men who killed the heron are not Americans after all, but Canadians. What she comes to see is that what makes humans cruel is not their nationality, but their actions: ‘It doesn’t matter what country they’re from, my head said, they’re still Americans, they’re what’s in store for us, what we are turning into’ (Atwood 2009:165). The narrator’s feeling of ‘sickening complicity’ (Atwood 2009:167) is an indication of her recognition ‘that violence is not approaching but is already present in her ... [and] that the dichotomies of good and evil rarely exist in their unadulterated forms in

individuals or in nations' (Kapusinski 2007:109). When the narrator describes her and her brother's cruelties – gnawing the 'fingers, feet and nose off [their] favourite doll' (Atwood 2009:166) – she acknowledges that cruelty is innate: 'It wasn't the city that was wrong, the inquisitors in the schoolyard, we weren't better than they were; we just had different victims' (Atwood 2009:169). Significantly, she does not excuse her and her brother's actions by blaming them on child's play. This is because even though the doll is not alive, she asserts that 'children think everything is alive' (Atwood 2009:167). The narrator's realisation of her own complicity is further illustrated when, upon finding her father's drowned body, she comes to face the truth about her abortion: 'Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allow it' (Atwood 2009:183). As Serpa writes, the 'killing of the heron presents a sort of ecological parallel to the narrator's personal experience ... [since she also] takes part in the destruction process' (2007:143). Although the narrator makes it clear that her lover persuaded her to get the abortion, she takes responsibility for her actions, stating that it 'made [her] one of them too, a killer' (Atwood 2009:185). As Özdemir writes, the narrator comes to understand 'that involvement in a power structure often entails some degree of internalization of the ideology that supports that structure, and that individuals are collaborators in the perpetuation of the assumptions that define their society' (2010:57). Key to the argument that I am elaborating here is that the story of psychosis inscribed in this text is presented as causally related to the narrator's realisation of her collusion in the harm done to the natural environment.

Although the narrator's psychosis only manifests towards the end of *Surfacing*, the narrative of psychic deterioration is set up early on in the various intimations of madness that surface in the text. The narrative as a whole is structured in terms of a quest – a journey of self-discovery and a search for the truth. According to Serpa, the narrator 'undergoes a deep process of self-analysis throughout her quest. Using the search for her father as an excuse, she sets off on an inner journey to, in the end, find herself' (2004:140). The novel presents the narrator's inner journey as a result of being cast as an outsider. As noted in the introduction, madness is often a label ascribed to women whose behaviour is viewed as abnormal and, throughout *Surfacing*, there are indications that the narrator does not conform to society's views of what constitutes 'normality'.

For example, when the group arrives at the cabin on the island where the narrator grew up, Anna says that it ‘must have been weird ... Cut off from everything like that’ (Atwood 2009:40). Although the narrator’s answer is ‘no’, to herself she thinks, ‘To me it felt normal’ (Atwood 2009:40). In other words, there is a disjuncture between the narrator’s definition of normality and those of her companions and, therefore, the very notion of normality is called into question. This is further depicted in the narrator’s insecurity about normal activities; for instance, she is ‘awkward’ during job interviews, unsure of what to say or what clothes to wear (Atwood 2009:62). Furthermore, as a child her habits were found amusing by other children, due to the fact that her father ‘split [them] between two anonymities, the city and the bush’ (Atwood 2009:71). This means that the narrator’s childhood was spent in isolation and that she was never able to fit in with the other children; significantly, she states that being ‘socially retarded is like being mentally retarded, it arouses in others disgust and pity and the desire to torment and reform’ (Atwood 2009:89). What this indicates is that even as a child, the narrator is acutely aware that being different is wrong and that those who deviate from societal norms become outcasts. Ewell writes that as ‘an outsider in a society whose admitted patriarchalism has shaped the structures of self-knowledge, the narrator keenly experiences the inadequacies of this one-sided perspective and seeks to remedy them’ (1981:186). She is constantly trying to be normal, whether by proving her normality by getting a boyfriend, or by consoling herself with the fact that her job ‘has a title though, a classification, and that helps: I’m what they call a commercial artist’ (Atwood 2009:62). The suggestion is that by conforming to behaviour deemed acceptable and by fitting into a societal classification, she asserts her status as ‘normal’ and, therefore, not mad. This is a project, the novel suggests, which is unlikely to succeed, illustrated in the fact that throughout the novel, the protagonist remains unnamed. As Özdemir observes, ‘not having a name ... is surely also an indication of her sense of alienation. Having grown up partly in the wilderness and partly in the city, she has always been a halfway-outsider to the destructive civilization she is repulsed by’ (2010:68).

As in *The Bell Jar* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the construction of madness in *Surfacing* bears similarities to R.D. Laing’s template of schizophrenia and the associated ideas of the split self. Throughout the novel, the narrator is preoccupied with her inability to feel the kinds of

emotions she believes she should be feeling. As in *The Bell Jar*, this is depicted as a form of repression or a defence mechanism which is explored in relation to the fictionalised narrative about her past, in which the narrator suffers the guilt of abandoning her family. The novel suggests that it is the creation of false memories which serves as a means of protecting the narrator from her real memories and the trauma associated with them. Murray writes that ‘since the memory of her abortion remains inaccessible to the heroine for two-thirds of the narrative, she is at pains to understand why she has so little feeling in relation to others, why her desire has gone flat’ (2015:9). This lack of affect is evident in her inability to feel any real emotion towards her lover, Joe: ‘I’m trying to decide whether or not I love him. ... When he suggested we should live together I didn’t hesitate. It wasn’t even a real decision, it was more like buying a goldfish ... because you happen to be in the store and you see them lined up on the counter’ (Atwood 2009:49). This indicates that the narrator’s relationship with Joe is based on practicality more than on her emotional attachment to him. As the narrator says, ‘he’s good in bed ... he’s moody but he’s not much bother, we split the rent and he doesn’t talk much, that’s an advantage’ (Atwood 2009:49). Furthermore, by equating the decision to move in with Joe with the buying of a goldfish, the narrator links the relationship to consumerism. In other words, the relationship is presented as a means of acquiring goods, since her decision to move in with Joe is not based on her feelings for him, but on the benefits it holds for her. In addition, Özdemir suggests that the trauma of the narrator’s abortion and the ‘sense of victimization in her relationship with her former lover leads her to reject heterosexual romance both emotionally and physically ... [and that] she has become masculine in her present relationship to Joe in order to protect herself’ (2010:73). Throughout the novel, Joe is depicted as the one with the emotional attachment, while the narrator states that she does not ‘know how to love’ (Atwood 2009:175), and that she must ‘rehearse emotions [by] naming them ... and memorizing [them]’ (Atwood 2009:142). This calls into question the consequences of patriarchal constructions of femininity and related notions of female madness. The protagonist of *Surfacing* does not conform to societal views of women as the more emotional gender, and her rejection of this construction of femininity is rendered as a prelude to her madness.

In *Surfacing*, as I have argued, psychic disturbance is presented in the form of detachment and remoteness in which the subject, the narrator, must pretend to have normal human responses and emotions. This is also depicted in the narrator's detachment from her family and friends. When, for example, the narrator speaks about herself and her family, she uses a third person pronoun; however, she says, 'That won't work, I can't call them "they" as if they were somebody else's family: I have to keep myself from telling that story' (Atwood 2009:13). The suggestion here is that she has completely detached herself, not only from her family, but also from her own memories. This is further depicted when she states, 'I have to be more careful about my memories, I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people telling me how I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them' (Atwood 2009:90). Here, there is both the sense that the narrator is acting out the plot of someone else's life and is in danger of losing her sense of self.

As suggested earlier, the narrator's emotional detachment is presented as a form of self-defence. With the insertion of the fictionalised narrative of the narrator's past, the novel suggests that the feelings of guilt associated with her abortion are what prompt the process of repressing the truth. The narrator states:

I couldn't accept it, that mutilation I'd made, I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories as fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I'd lived in it until now. (Atwood 2009:184)

The metaphor of the 'paper house' suggests that the narrator constructs a version of herself that conforms to ideas of the normal. The act of aborting a child is depicted as unacceptable and, since madness is related to actions that cannot be accepted by society, the fictionalised narrative can be seen as a response to the danger of being outcast as 'mad'. As Ewell writes, the narrator's fabricated past 'is both rational and irreproachable, or at least socially acceptable' (1981:190). In other words, the fictionalised narrative is presented as a defence mechanism against feelings of guilt about an act that is presented as morally reproachable, suggesting a complex moral and philosophical terrain. In addition, the image of the 'paper house' is an indication of the fragility

of this process of self-defence, indicating the insubstantiality of the fictionalised narrative. The suggestion then is that since the fiction is a response to the ‘mad’, it also becomes a causal factor in the narrator’s madness: if the paper house disintegrates, there is no defence against madness.

In addition to ideas of emotional detachment, the use of metaphors and images relating to splitting, fragmentation, and amputation are also prevalent as offering a further means to explore psychic breakdown. As children, the narrator and her brother inspect an abandoned river boat and find pictures of genitals drawn on the walls, of which the narrator states, ‘I was shocked, not by those parts of the body, we’d been told about those, but that they should be cut off from the bodies that ought to have gone with them’ (Atwood 2009:152-153). Not only is the narrator troubled by the lack of wholeness that these drawings represent; the abstracted body parts also fit clearly into larger processes of patriarchal objectification. This is depicted when the narrator explains that the sailors who drew the pictures of genitals did so because people ‘draw on the wall what’s important to [them], what [they are] hunting’ (Atwood 2009:153). The implication is that what the sailors are ‘hunting’ is sexual gratification (and women). The abstracted genitals therefore, detached from the rest of the body, become objectified tools for sexual satisfaction. In the patriarchal culture depicted in the novel the body, specifically the female body, becomes a commodified object of consumption, and these body parts become objects to be conquered.

Images of amputation are also in evidence in statements referring to the narrator’s abortion: ‘A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled’ (Atwood 2009:57). This description equates amputation to ideas of loss, as well as physical pain and violence. In the same vein, the narrator’s fictionalised narrative can be viewed as an attempt to ‘cut off the memory of her abortion—that is, sever the memory of something being severed from her body. It had seemed she was able to excise it and replace it with other memories, prosthetic memories, so to speak, to substitute for the ones that were diseased and had to be amputated’ (Connolly 2010:83). Images of violence, wounding, and amputation contribute to the idea of madness as a kind of fragmentation of the psyche. Not only does this point to the violence of the patriarchal culture that is depicted as contributing to the narrator’s unravelling state of mind, but also to the narrative’s preoccupation with a search for wholeness. Furthermore, the narrator says,

‘I was emptied, amputated; I stank of salt and antiseptic, they had planted death in me like a seed’ (Atwood 2009:184). The juxtaposition of ‘death’ and ‘seed’ is important in terms of the depiction of madness, denoting the idea of being simultaneously dead and alive. In other words, there is the suggestion that the event causes part of the narrator to die along with her foetus: ‘The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal’ (Atwood 2009:138). This view is echoed in Özdemir’s characterisation of the narrator’s story: ‘Through the traumatic experiences of abortion and separation from her lover she came to feel amputated. Her true self left her body, becoming trapped in her mind. Her body in turn became unfeeling’ (2010:67). The references to amputation also illustrate the narrator’s sentiments about the abortion. She does not agree with her lover, who would have her believe that it is the right thing to do. Instead, the narrator’s experience of the abortion is shown to be similar to the experience of losing a limb or an organ.

The notion of the fragmented selfhood is also invoked in *Surfacing* through Atwood’s use of the trope of the photograph. Similar to the threat that the camera poses to Esther’s identity in *The Bell Jar*, in *Surfacing* the photograph represents the narrator’s lost self. When the narrator describes a school photograph, she says, ‘I could find myself always, I was the one smudged with movement or turning the other way’ (Atwood 2009:137). As with the narrator’s rejection of the commodified image presented in the mirror’s reflection, the ‘smudged ... movement’ in the photograph suggests a denial of normative ideas of the feminine and feminine beauty. There is also a sense of unreality about the photographs, in that the camera ‘falsely capture[s] people in ... [a] distorted form’ (Özdemir 2010:70). In contrast to *The Bell Jar*, where photographs reveal Esther’s false self, in *Surfacing* it is the true self that is revealed in the photographs:

I watched myself grow larger. Mother and father in alternate shots, building the house, walls and then the roof, planting the garden. Around them were borders of blank paper, at each corner a hinge, they were like small grey and white windows opening into a place I could no longer reach. I was in most of the pictures, shut in behind the paper; or not me but the missing part of me. (Atwood 2009:137)

There is clearly a division between the narrator looking at the photographs and the person captured in them. That her ‘missing part’ – in other words, her true self that has metaphorically

died along with her aborted foetus – is ‘shut behind the paper’ suggests a state of entrapment. As Schaeffer argues, ‘the photographs she finds in old albums are [of] her former self, her “real self,” the person looking at them, something dead, irrelevant as a severed thumb’ (1974:323).

Furthermore, there is the sense that she is looking in on someone else’s life. Just like the detachment depicted when she refers to her family as ‘they’, there is a kind of disconnection between the narrator and the person she was in the past. However, because it is the past, she cannot go back to her former self. She states that in the photo album, ‘successive incarnations of [her are] preserved and flattened like flowers pressed in dictionaries’ (Atwood 2009:84).

Therefore, she seems to realise that people cannot be ‘immortalized’ in photographs, as her father attempted to do (Atwood 2009:84). There is a sense of stagnancy in these descriptions of her photographs, indicating the kind of stagnancy that might occur in a state of madness. The suggestion is that for the mad person there can be no future without some form of healing.

The most prominent trope of a split or fragmented selfhood in the novel is to be found in the narrator’s view of the neck acting as a barrier between the head and the body. She states that her problem is ‘in the knob at the top of our bodies. I’m not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate’ (Atwood 2009:95). Özdemir writes that the neck becomes a symbol of the ‘illusion of the duality of mind and body, which in turn alienates people from their bodies and the instinctive part of themselves’ (2010:68). What he suggests is that the neck is used to represent the narrator’s emotional detachment. This is because the novel depicts the narrator’s mind as cut off from the rest of her body or, in Laingian terms, her true self is cut off from the false self that has control over her bodily motions.

Significantly, in the same way that Plath develops her own vocabulary of madness in *The Bell Jar*, Atwood develops her own metaphors of psychic deterioration rather than drawing on more well-known or stereotypical metaphors of madness. For example, she states, ‘At some point my neck must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my head; since then everything had been glancing off me, it was like being in a vase, or the [French-speaking] village where I could see them but I could not hear them because I couldn’t understand what was being said’ (Atwood 2009:134). This description of psychic disturbance is presented as a moment of rupture or trauma, specifically through the use of metaphors of freezing and closing. The image

of a frozen wound suggests that the wound has not been healed, but rather temporarily stopped. The implication is that should the wound thaw, it would open up again, which indicates a sense of **stagnancy in terms of the narrator's** present psychic condition. In addition, the metaphor of **'being in a vase'** is used to represent the detachment associated with madness as presented in the novel. Similar to the image of the bell jar in *The Bell Jar*, the image of the vase in the above description of psychic disturbance suggests that there is a kind of barrier between the narrator and the outside world. She is depicted as being cut off from the rest of the world and, as a result, is unable to communicate with anyone. This metaphor is given nuance by the simile of being in a village where a different language is spoken. The suggestion is that there is a kind of solitude in madness in the sense that the mad person is cut off from the rest of the world and communication between the sane and the insane is difficult if not impossible.

A further significance of the metaphor of the neck acting as barrier between head and body is that the narrator is presented as identifying with the mind. As Serpa argues, the head is **'traditionally [seen as] a masculine element'** while the body, like nature, is viewed as **'a feminine element'** (2004:142). As I discussed in Chapter 2, the masculine element is also usually associated with logic and rationality, while the feminine element is associated with irrationality and madness. Throughout the novel – because she identifies with the mind – the narrator is depicted as striving towards the masculine element of logic, which she associates with her father, who had **'always been logical'** (Atwood 2009:128). However, what the narrative suggests about the process of healing is that in order to become whole, the masculine and the feminine elements must be united. The narrator states that if the **'head extended directly onto the shoulders like a worm's or a frog's without that constriction ... they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die'** (Atwood 2009:95). In other words, neither the masculine element nor the female element can be mutually exclusive and the implication is that neither can survive without the other. In these description of amphibians as whole, such as the narrator referring to a fish as **'a neckless headbody'** (Atwood 2009:153), the narrative deploys notions of wholeness and integration, suggesting that the possibility exists of achieving psychic wholeness. As Tristanne Connolly writes, a **'devolution to amphibian being is necessary to mend the mind-body split'** (2010:82). The implication is that the binary system of mind versus body,

masculine versus feminine, and logical versus irrational must be rejected in order for a reclamation of the body – ‘often animalized, naturalized, and feminized, in order to be viewed as inferior’ (Serpa 2004:142) – to occur.

The failure of integration in society is also figured in the text as a failure of language in the sense that the words used to describe the self already imply division and splitting. While the novel depicts the narrator’s abortion as the cause of her divided selfhood, the narrator blames language: ‘The language is wrong, it shouldn’t have different words for [the head and body]’ (Atwood 2009:95). As suggested above, the narrator would prefer to be like an amphibian, an animal without a neck dividing its head from its body. The narrator’s problem with the vocabulary of human language is that by separating head from body, it also separates what she identifies as the male principle from the female principle. As Özdemir argues, ‘*Surfacing* questions the language of Western culture as a major site of gender duality and inequality’ (2010:58). Since the male element or principle is associated with logic and rationality, the realm of creativity and language also belongs to men. In Chapter 1, I discussed the problem that this poses for women, especially women writers, and the fact that in their writing they must use male language and metaphors. In *Surfacing*, the problem with male language is depicted in the destruction of the environment by patriarchal culture. When the narrator realises her complicity in the harm done to the environment, she states, ‘If you look like them and talk like them and think like them you are them, ... a language is everything you do’ (Atwood 2009:165). In other words, if you use the language of a male-dominated culture, in a sense you have incorporated the ideologies of that culture and, as a result, you become complicit in the acts of domination and oppression that defines patriarchal society. Murray argues that ‘the language of Western culture as experienced by the protagonist is a language determined by the desire to dominate’ (2015:12). As a result, the narrator’s quest to find her father and her attempt to achieve wholeness also involves, as Coral Ann Howells writes, a ‘quest to find an appropriate language in which to write about her changing perceptions of her own identity as Canadian and female’ (1996:12). When David attempts to seduce the narrator, she has to ‘concentrate in order to talk to him, the English words seemed imported, foreign; it was like trying to listen to two separate conversations, each interrupting the other’ (Atwood 2009:193). Furthermore, when Joe wants to know if the

narrator loves him she, who views heteronormative relationships as part of patriarchal oppression, states, 'It was the language again, I couldn't use it because it wasn't mine' (Atwood 2009:135). In other words, the difficulties the narrator experiences are presented as the difficulties which arise from androcentric language systems. Therefore, the narrator searches for a language 'that would allow non-destructive relationships with others and nature. Such a language would preclude the reductive and alienating relationships of domination and subordination' (Özdemir 2010:58). The struggle for sanity in *Surfacing* is therefore presented as, in part, linguistic, having to do with language and the limitations and exclusions of patriarchal language.

The narrative of psychic breakdown culminates in the narrator's final attempt to find her father and, finally, in a psychotic journey in which she attempts to reject civilisation and merge with nature. As a last attempt to find out what happened to her father, the narrator follows the clues she believes he had left her: drawings of rock paintings and their locations. With the knowledge that some of the paintings must be underwater due to a flood, she goes diving next to a cliff in order to find one of these paintings. On her fourth try she finds what she is looking for, 'but it wasn't a painting, ... it was something [she] knew about, a dead thing, it was dead' (Atwood 2009:182). Mistaking her father's corpse for her aborted foetus, she remembers the real events of the abortion, and comes to a realisation about 'what [she] was and what [her companions] were turning into' (Atwood 2009:95). In *Surfacing*, madness is presented as being the result of the narrator's feeling of complicity – in her abortion, the destruction of the environment, and the oppression of women in patriarchal society. Having found her father's clue, she now begins to search for what she believes her mother would have left her: 'It would be right for my mother to have left me something also, a legacy' (Atwood 2009:191). She finds this in a drawing she made as a child, of 'a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out' (Atwood 2009:202). According to Rigney, the narrator 'interprets the message of the drawings as an instruction: in order to be alive and whole she must replace, resurrect, the part of herself which she has killed' (1978:110). Following these instructions, the narrator seduces Joe: 'He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me' (Atwood 2009:209). Her 'lost child' however, is not just the aborted foetus, but is also 'metaphorically her lost self, the childhood of her being, the mythical pre-fallen self that she feels divided from'

(Murray 2015:12). Having begun to heal her divided selfhood, the narrator goes through a kind of psychotic journey in an attempt to completely cleanse herself, not just of the guilt of her abortion, but of her complicity in the oppression inherent in patriarchal society. When her companions are picked up on the last day, the narrator hides from them and stays behind on the island, with the plan to reject civilisation entirely and to become ‘a natural woman’ (Atwood 2009:248).

The narrator’s attempt to cleanse herself of her guilt is presented as a kind of journey where madness is depicted as a deviation from rationality. The narrator states, ‘From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view’ (Atwood 2009:219). Since rationality is associated with men and their cruelty and domination over women, the narrator’s rejection of rationality is also a rejection of patriarchal society’s ideologies. In her rejection of the ideology of domination over women and nature, the narrator also rejects the language of Western culture and instead must ‘immerse [her]self in the other language’ (Atwood 2009:203). According to Murray, ‘in order to escape the language of patriarchal civilisation ... the [narrator] takes up a radical refusal of language. ... Only outside of language does she imagine that she will be able to approach the part of herself which she values, which is related to the supposed integrity of the organic world’ (2015:12). Therefore, this ‘other language’ is a language of the wilderness of the island, indicating that in her rejection of patriarchal culture, she identifies herself with nature. What she believes is that in the natural environment there is ‘a level of language largely unregarded by man, one which might be said to exist around or beneath the elaborations of a human dialect’ (Ward 1994:99). This is illustrated when the narrator discusses experiments done on children, shutting them up, away from normal civilisation: ‘[T]hey found that after a certain age the mind is incapable of absorbing any language; but how could they tell the child hadn’t invented one, unrecognizable to everyone but itself?’ (Atwood 2009:96). The suggestion here is that language is constructed by cultural notions of normality and, in her rejection of societal norms that are shaped by the ideology of patriarchal society, she chooses what would be viewed by such a society as insanity by attempting to become part of the natural environment. As Schaeffer argues, the narrator’s ‘last escape is into insanity, [into] the irrational’

(1974:327). In other words, madness is presented here not just as an appropriate response to trauma, but as having value in itself.

In her attempts to merge with nature, it is not only the language of patriarchal culture that the narrator rejects, but the entire culture itself. Murray writes that in the narrator's rejection of patriarchal culture, 'she attempts to "enter" this other [natural] world ... by symbolically destroying all traces of civilization on the island' (2010:13). She burns, among other things, her drawings, her fake wedding ring, her father's drawings of the rock paintings, and maps: 'Everything from history must be eliminated, the circles and the arrogant square pages' (Atwood 2009:229). In the destruction of everything 'civilised', the narrator attempts to reject the past and begin a new future. She also burns the photo albums, stating that her own 'faces curl, blacken, the imitation mother and father change to flat ashes. It is time that separates us, I was a coward, I would not let them into my age, my place' (Atwood 2009:229). In this extract, healing is figured as a recognition of the harm done through attempts to immortalise people and, by burning the photographs, the narrator is depicted as letting go of her past. After the rejection of everything from Western culture, the narrator attempts to become part of nature as a kind of animal-spirit. Özdemir writes that becoming part of nature is an effort to enter a 'space outside the dichotomy of subject and object [where] she intuits that she must isolate herself totally from human society in order to go through the ritualistic process of healing necessary for her' (2010:65).

The earlier image of the false self is reinforced when, after destroying everything 'civilised', the narrator washes herself in the lake, saying that she is 'leaving [her] false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy' (Atwood 2009:231). The image of clothing as a 'false body' acts as a symbol of the false self that the narrator discards in her attempt to become an animal-like creature. Significantly, in the depiction of her merging with nature, the narrator comes to resemble the stereotypical madwoman, 'a creature neither animal nor human, furless, only a dirty blanket, shoulders huddled over into a crouch, eyes staring blue as ice from the deep sockets; the lips move by themselves. This was the stereotype, straws in the hair, talking nonsense or not talking at all' (Atwood 2009:248). As in the depiction of Brontë's Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, the

narrator is presented as animalistic in her insanity. Furthermore, there is the suggestion that women who have an affinity to nature are inherently mad. Bouson argues that although this image of the 'natural woman ... subverts the cultural construction of an eroticized, commodified femininity ... [it also] provides a graphic description of the female self-in-crisis, the self as angry monster, the self in desperate need of rescue' (1993:58). In other words, although the narrator's attempt to merge with nature is depicted in a positive light, there is the suggestion that it is not sustainable and a return to civilisation is needed if she is to become whole again.

The resolution of madness in *Surfacing* is presented through a psychotic journey of self-discovery, where the narrator is depicted as attempting to become whole. As in *The Bell Jar*, this journey is modelled on the epic hero's journey into 'The Belly of the Whale', as outlined by Joseph Campbell. As Özdemir writes, this journey is a 'process of entering *the other world*, or inner space and time' (2010:70). Like the hero who must descend into the underworld in order to meet a metaphorical death and be reborn, the narrative of madness in *Surfacing* suggests that a descent into the subconscious is necessary for the narrator: 'Heroine of a thousand faces, she descends, like Persephone, into the world of the dead; she tests, like Perseus, the extreme limits of human endurance; she finds her ultimate vision in the self-enforced solitude' (Gray 1978:133). Whereas *The Bell Jar's* Esther begins her psychic journey by literally going underground, *Surfacing's* narrator's journey is depicted as beginning when she dives into the lake to find her father's corpse and, more importantly, when she remembers the memory of her abortion. While Campbell's hero's journey into the underworld is characterised by a death and rebirth, for the narrator in *Surfacing*, the journey of death and ultimate rebirth takes the form of a descent into her own subconscious before she can 'surface' with the knowledge she needs in order to heal.

As I have previously mentioned, the narrator attempts to become pregnant after discovering her father's corpse and her childhood drawings, an act which is followed by an attempt to become part of nature. In this sense, her descent into her subconscious is characterised by a kind of loss of the self. Discarding her clothes and, prohibited from going back to the cabin, she 'proceeds to acquire the self-knowledge that rational language alone could not provide. Her ritual fast ... supplies her with the visions that she requires to be whole' (Ewell 1981:200). In a state of

hallucination, her ‘body boundaries [seem to] dissolve and she has a vision of becoming vitally connected to the earth’ (Howells 1996:30). She states, ‘I’m ice-clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh, the ribs are shadows, the muscles jelly, the trees are like this too’ (Atwood 2009:235). Although this fusion with nature is depicted as a positive event for the narrator, the image of transparency indicates a kind of disappearance of the self. Despite her attempt to reject humanity and civilisation, the narrator realises, as Howells argues, that becoming part of nature ‘would mean the loss of her individual identity as a human being’ (1996:31). Her instinct is to reject such a loss of identity, and therefore she states that she is ‘not an animal or a tree, [she is] the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow’ (Atwood 2009:236). With this realisation, the narrator sees the ghosts of her parents. The vision of her mother appears in front of the cabin:

[S]he is turned half away from me, I can only see the side of her face. ... She turns her head quietly and looks at me, past me, as though she knows something is there but she can’t quite see it ... and then she’s gone. (Atwood 2009:236-237)

The vision of her father appears and disappears in a similar fashion:

He is standing near the fence with his back to me, looking in at the garden. ... He turns towards me and it’s not my father. It is what my father saw, the thing you meet when you’ve stayed here too long alone. (Atwood 2009:242-243)

It is significant that the narrator has visions of both parents, indicating the need for the feminine and the masculine elements to be united in order for her split psyche to be made whole again. Furthermore, neither apparition looks at the narrator directly, which indicates, as Murray writes, that they ‘cannot be the object of [their] daughter’s regressive desire for oneness’ (2015:15). Instead, the only way of achieving ‘oneness’ is to come to terms with herself as a human being.

An important aspect of the epic hero’s journey is the necessity of his return to the mortal world in order for him to finish his quest. Similarly, the mad person going through a psychic journey must make the choice to recover in order to avoid physical or mental death. In *Surfacing*, the narrator is presented as facing the choice between returning to civilisation as a healed, whole human being and ending up in ‘the hospital or the zoo, where [they] are put, species and

individuals, when [they] can no longer cope' (Atwood 2009:248). As Rigney writes, 'for the protagonist the descent into madness ... must be temporary and therapeutic, rather than permanent' (1978:115). In order for healing to occur, the narrator must recognise that she is a human being and, therefore, cannot join her parents by becoming part of nature. Instead, the visions of them 'have gone finally, back into the earth, the air, the water, wherever they were when [the narrator] summoned them' (Atwood 2009:245). The spell broken, the narrator returns to the cabin, where the narrative gives an indication of what the better choice might be: 'To prefer life, I owe them that' (Atwood 2009:245). Significantly, the realisation that she must choose to return to civilisation is accompanied by an awareness that a return to that society means a return to human language as well. The narrator states that to 'have someone to speak to and words that can be understood ... [is] their definition of sanity' (Atwood 2009:248). According to Howells, the novel depicts an awareness 'that words are a human necessity, for to be alienated from words is to be alienated from one's fellow human beings' (1996:31). The narrator's realisation of this is depicted when she says about her unborn child, 'Word furrows potential already in its proto-brain, untravelled paths' (Atwood 2009:249). What is suggested by this phrase is that human beings have an instinctive predisposition towards the use of language to communicate. Furthermore, as Murray points out, the syntax of the sentence is related to its meaning: the word 'furrows' is at first read as a noun that must be followed by a verb; however the word 'potential' follows which, in retrospect, indicates that 'furrows' is the verb (2015:16). What this phrase indicates then, is that the narrator is aware that her child is 'condemned to language, [but that] language is not a dead thing ... [and that hope] is permitted both for the future represented by the possible child, and for the woman who is no longer in a state of guilt' (Murray 2015:17).

The novel, like *The Bell Jar*, ends on a hopeful, but ambiguous note. The narrator, who has been alone on the island, hears a motorboat and realises that Joe and her father's friend Paul have come back to look for her. The novel ends before the narrator makes a choice about whether she will return to civilisation or not, but there are indications that a return would be possible. Significantly, the narrator makes an assertion that indicates a kind of empowerment: 'This above all, to refuse to be a victim' (Atwood 2009:249). In other words, the narrator asserts that a return

to the patriarchal culture where women are oppressed by the same ideologies that caused her madness, would need to be accompanied by assuming responsibility for herself and her actions. Furthermore, in her consideration of a future with Joe, she states, 'If I go with him we will have to talk ... we can no longer live in spurious peace by avoiding each other, the way it was before, we will have to begin. For us it's necessary, the intercession of words' (Atwood 2009:250). This reveals an awareness that, in order to return, 'she must resort to the old language, to logic and discourse. But her return is marked by a new understanding of its incompleteness and the dangers of its exclusiveness' (Ewell 1981:201). In other words, a return to language and to patriarchal culture does not have to mean giving in or giving up. What the narrative of madness presents is that a revolt against such oppression needs a return to civilisation, but that this must be done with an awareness of both Western culture and Western language's potential for oppression. The narrator states that she and Joe 'will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That's normal, it's the way it happens now' (Atwood 2009:250-251). However, she also recognises that Joe 'isn't an American ... and for that reason [she] can trust him' (Atwood 2009:251). In other words, there is the suggestion that language and communication, despite the possibility of being inadequate, are tools to bring people together and, with this knowledge, the narrator comes to a realisation that she is not alone.

As I have argued, in the narrative of psychic breakdown in *Surfacing*, madness is presented as a journey of self-discovery. The narrator returns to her childhood home in the wilderness of northern Canada with three companions in order to search for her missing father. In her search, the narrator, plagued by memories of her childhood and her supposed failed marriage, begins to show signs of a damaged psyche. As in *The Bell Jar* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her madness is depicted in the form of a divided selfhood, illustrated in metaphors and imagery relating to amputation, splitting, and fragmentation. The narrator, for example, feels that her neck acts as a barrier between her head and body and that her divided selfhood is manifested in a split between the head – representative of the masculine, logical element – and the body – related to the feminine, natural element. The novel also pays attention to the broader social context, positing the patriarchal environment as an important causal factor in the narrator's deteriorating psyche. In other words, the novel presents madness as contextual and socially-based; the narrator's

madness is described as a reaction to a male-dominated society where, as a woman, she is expected to become a wife and mother. Furthermore, the narrator identifies her victimhood with the harm done to the environment, placing the blame on the Americans, who come to represent the oppressive and destructive patriarchal culture. However, the novel suggests that there is no merit in placing blame and that a recognition of your own complicity in the oppressive culture is needed in order to reject or revolt against such a culture. For the narrator, this recognition occurs when she realises that the men who killed the heron are not American, but Canadian, as well as when she comes to face the truth about her abortion. It is at this moment that the narrator, in similar fashion to Esther in *The Bell Jar*, begins her journey of self-discovery. The novel presents this journey as similar to Joseph Campbell's epic hero's descent into the underworld, which is characterised by the hero's death and rebirth. In *Surfacing*, however, the narrator's journey is presented as a descent into her own subconscious where, instead of literally dying and being reborn, she is depicted as experiencing a kind of loss of the self as she attempts to reject civilisation and become part of nature. Significantly, in the depiction of the narrator's descent into her subconscious, she also comes to resemble the stereotypical madwoman, which suggests that merging with nature is not a sustainable solution to her crisis. Therefore, the intimation is that the narrator would have to choose between insanity and a return to Western civilisation in order for her own journey to be successful. However, the novel resolves the contradiction through a recognition that a return to civilisation does not have to mean a return to the lifestyle wherein the narrator would remain complicit in her own destruction. Instead, there is the possibility of redemption through the narrator's choice not to become a victim. The end of *Surfacing* suggests that with the knowledge of the divisiveness of patriarchal culture and language, as well as an awareness of the oppression of that culture, the narrator would be able to revolt against it by refusing to be a victim.

CONCLUSION

Gone mad is what they say, and sometimes *Run mad*, as if mad is a different direction, like west; as if mad is a different house you could step into, or a separate country entirely. But when you go mad you don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in.

– Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (1997:37)

In Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, the protagonist makes an important assertion about the way in which madness has been presented in particular historical contexts, as well as what stereotypical metaphors of madness reveal about how madness is generally perceived by the sane. According to denotative definitions, such as to be found in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, to be mad means to be 'mentally ill ... [or] extremely foolish or ill-advised' (Soanes & Stevenson 2008:855). In the extract from *Alias Grace*, however, Atwood's protagonist places emphasis on the connotative meaning of the phrases 'go mad' and 'run mad', indicating that in these metaphors, madness is often defined in terms of movement, specifically movement away from something. The implication is that in becoming mad, there is a movement from sanity towards madness and, therefore, someone who has 'gone mad' has deviated from what is deemed by society's standards as sane. As Lilian Feder argues, madness is a label applied to someone who has deviated 'from some norm of thought or feeling whether as a threat, a challenge, or a field of exploration which must yield revelation' (1980:xii). When women are labelled as 'mad', it is usually as a result of '*being* "female", as well as for desiring or daring *not* to be' (Chesler 1974:15). As the extract from Atwood also suggests, madness is frequently rendered in spatial terms (a 'house', a 'country'), suggesting that madness is seen as somewhere you 'can step into' or even a different 'country', with words such as 'different' and 'separate' implying a radical 'otherness'. From these definitions, it is possible to infer that the mad person should be able to choose whether or not to 'step into' madness. However, as the phrase 'you stay where you are ... [while] somebody else comes in' implies, the mad person is represented as a passive victim who has no control over his/her madness.

As suggested above, dictionary definitions (as well as literary texts) also provide insights into the social construction of madness in Western patriarchal contexts. According to the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of English*, someone who is mad ‘has a mind that does not work in a normal way’ (Sinclair 2012:914). *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, on the other hand, defines the word ‘mad’ as characterising wildly impractical or foolish ideas, actions, etc’, mad as suggestive of ‘senselessness and excess’ (Flexner & Hauck 1987:1153). What is striking about many of the dictionary definitions of madness is the extent to which they draw on figurative language such as metaphors and similes. The implication is not only that madness is difficult to define but that it has no essence outside of its construction in language. In this sense, madness is always defined in relation to something else. In a rare study exploring the metaphorical depiction of madness in popular psychological narratives in the US – with particular reference to Joanne Greenberg’s *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964) – Kary K. Wolfe and Gary K. Wolfe draw attention to the ubiquity of metaphors of madness. According to these theorists, Western metaphors of madness ‘often represent not only an attempt to communicate the emotional quality of the illness, but to some extent its structure as well’ (1976:899).

Many of the standard dictionary definitions of madness can be categorised as spatial metaphors. For example, *The Universal Dictionary of the English Language* defines madness as being ‘Out of one’s mind’ or ‘temporarily out of one’s senses’ (Wyld 1932:696). These metaphors are significant not only because of the spatial shift they imply but also for what they suggest about the self – that there is something beyond the mind from which the mind itself can be split or separated. Other spatial metaphors used in reference to madness include ‘descending into madness’ and ‘to fall into madness’ which, like to ‘go mad’ and ‘run mad’, suggest that in the act of becoming mad, there is movement away from sanity and into madness. The inference is not only that a return from madness to sanity is possible but also that madness is involuntary, implying a lack of control.

Metaphors related to notions of loss and/or fragmentation have also been important in the popular characterisation of madness. These metaphors include phrases like ‘to lose one’s mind’,

‘to lose one’s senses’, ‘to lose touch with reality’, and ‘to lose one’s marbles’. According to *From the Horse’s Mouth: Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*, the phrase ‘to lose one’s marbles’ ‘probably originated as early 20th-century American slang. The underlying reference is apparently to the children’s game played with multicoloured glass balls’ (Ayto 2016). These glass balls were, apparently, of great value to children and therefore would have caused great distress if lost. *A Standard Dictionary of the English Language* defines loss as ‘To part or be separated from so as to have no knowledge of the whereabouts of; part with unintentionally; ... To be deprived or bereaved of’ (Funk, et al. 1898:1051). The suggestion in metaphors relating to loss, then, is that in becoming mad, the mad person is parted from the quality of sanity, without which the person cannot function in society. Furthermore, there is the intimation that the mad person is a passive victim to such a loss and, without knowledge of the whereabouts of the quality of sanity, is unable to return to sanity. The metaphors of madness relating to ideas of fragmentation also include phrases like ‘to suffer a nervous/psychic breakdown’ and ‘to have a screw loose’. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines mental breakdown as ‘a sudden collapse in mental health’ (Soanes & Stevenson 2008:171). This characterisation of mental illness is significant as it implies sickness and is associated with physicality. This definition also implies that there is a connection between sanity or mental health and wholeness which suggests that the mad person either lacks wholeness or is broken or faulty in some way. In other words, the implication is that the mad person cannot function properly. This is further depicted in the phrase ‘to have a screw loose’, which is defined as being ‘slightly eccentric or mentally disturbed’ (Soanes & Stevenson 2008:1293). This metaphor compares the mind to a machine of sorts which, if a part were to loosen, would cease to work. Therefore, the suggestion is that the mad person ceases to be able to function as society expects him/her to be able to function.

One of the most common formulations of madness has been made famous by Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, and can be categorised as a simile: ‘Mad as a hatter’. According to the *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, the phrase ‘mad as a hatter’ is mistakenly assumed to refer to hatmakers’ use of mercury in their trade, which supposedly caused them to go mad. Instead, ‘*hatter* is really a variant form of Anglo-Saxon word *atter*, meaning “poison.” *Atter* is closely related to “*adder*,” the venomous spider whose sting was thought to cause insanity’

(Morris & Morris 1977:367). The intimation is that madness is seen as the result of external factors, such as poisoning. Another simile made famous by Lewis Carroll is the phrase ‘Mad as a March hare’. According to *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language*, this metaphor is an ‘old English saying derived from the fact that March is the rutting time of hares, when they are excitable and violent’ (Neilson, Knott & Carhart 1936:1477). The suggestion is that mad persons are seen as violent and volatile, as well as lacking control over their actions which could become primal in nature.

If the dictionary definitions discussed above give a sense of the more conventional definitions of madness in Western societies, what is revealed in the reading of literature? As with the more popular definitions of madness, *The Bell Jar*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Surfacing* make frequent recourse to figurative language in their attempts to describe and evoke this state. In addition, however, as I have shown above, the authors also employ a range of unconventional and at times **unexpected metaphors in order to offer a reading of madness as ‘divinest sense’** – as an appropriate reaction to an untenable situation. In the three novels explored in my dissertation, madness is not only treated sympathetically but is shown to be the result of social and cultural circumstances. It is therefore not treated as hereditary or as **the result of ‘mixed blood’**. In particular, the novels contest ideas of madness as an inherently female condition, thus suggesting that madness should be understood as a response to oppressive Western patriarchal cultures. In addition, the explanations of madness offered in the novels suggest that madness is not only a response to social or cultural situations, but also that madness can also be constructed in certain social contexts.

In *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing*, the protagonists are creative middle-class women living in patriarchal societies where creativity is seen to belong to the masculine realm. *The Bell Jar’s* Esther is an aspiring writer who is unable to reconcile her creativity with mid-twentieth century Western ideals of the feminine. The novel also illustrates society’s expectation that women become wives and mothers by presenting creative, intellectual women as masculine and somehow lacking. The novel illustrates Esther’s problematic situation through the trope of the fig tree, where each fig represents a possible form of femininity from which Esther must choose. These

possibilities, however, are presented as mutually exclusive and, unable to choose just one possibility, Esther foresees herself as starving to death. In *The Bell Jar*, unlike the other two novels, there is a much greater preoccupation with different forms of available femininity in Western patriarchal societies. It is Esther's confrontation with these irreconcilable forms of femininity – represented by the fig tree – which is represented as a causal factor in her madness, thus providing a basis for the novel's particular critique of 1950s North America.

Similar attention to dominant social constructions of femininity is to be found in *Surfacing*. In this case, however, they relate to the anomaly of the woman artist as the unnamed female narrator's artistic ambitions are seen as silly by her male art professor. Instead, marriage is what is expected of her; unmarried – or worse, divorced – women are seen as incapable and defective. Furthermore, in the depiction of birth control methods as posing a risk to the health of women, the novel presents the female body as a site for domination. The suggestion is that a woman's worth is dependent on the meaning ascribed to her by men. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys's social critique is grounded not only in the history of women's oppression but also in the history of colonialism. In this sense the novel contests the idea of the woman, in particular women of 'mixed race', as inherently susceptible to madness by providing a depiction of madness that is advanced by various forms of colonial and patriarchal violence. In the story of madness in the novel, Antoinette's madness is illustrated as a result of both her liminal position between two cultures and her marriage. As a 'Creole', Antoinette belongs to neither the native Jamaicans nor to the white Europeans, and is rejected by both. Furthermore, and more importantly, the novel represents Antoinette's madness as being a result of her lack of autonomy within her marriage to her unnamed, English husband. The marriage thus acts as a microcosm of the broad socio-cultural context, wherein the husband represents the white settler and Antoinette the native colonial subject. The husband has married her as part of an economic exchange and, because he is threatened by the natural environment – and by extension, her – he imposes insanity on her. What is presented by the narrative of madness, then, is a woman who is rejected by everyone she loves, who reacts by becoming mad.

In the novels, madness is presented through a wide variety of images and metaphors in order to depict and contest conventional social constructions of madness but also to give emphasis to the experiential, subjective dimensions. In varying degrees, as I have shown, the three novels draw on R.D. Laing's views on schizophrenia, specifically the trope of a split or fragmented self, a literary 'borrowing' which suggests the profound influence of Laing's ideas at this time. According to Laing, schizophrenics become mad due to harmful experiences or unbearable situations; therefore, his analyses of madness focus on the patient's cultural and social circumstances. The theory he advances is that the schizophrenic experiences a metaphorical split in the psyche, resulting in what he refers to as a 'true' self and a 'false' self. In other words, the mad person experiences a loss of identity or of a true self, and is left feeling as though a false self inhabits the body. The result is that, because the patient's true self has disappeared or died and the false self is in control of the body, he/she becomes detached from reality, experiencing a loss of feeling. For the true self to be reborn from its metaphorical death, the false self would have to be killed off. Each of the three novels draw on the trope of the split self to some degree, an idea that takes shape in the protagonists experiencing a loss of feeling, as well as becoming detached from their immediate environments. *The Bell Jar's* Esther loses all motivation to do even basic things such as eating or sleeping while, in a process of self-protection, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* Antoinette and *Surfacing's* protagonist experience a loss of emotion. Antoinette feels empty and dull when she visits her mother, while the protagonist in *Surfacing* is unable to feel the emotions she believes she should be feeling for her lover, Joe. In all three cases, there is a sense of detachment from the protagonists' immediate environment, resulting in this loss of affect.

An important metaphor that illustrates the division of the selfhood in *The Bell Jar* is the bell jar. The scientific use of a bell jar is to act as a vacuum or as a form of protecting a scientific sample against harmful elements in the air outside the jar. The result is that air is pumped out of the jar for the former purpose, or that no air can get inside for the purpose of the latter. Therefore, the metaphor of Esther feeling trapped underneath or inside a bell jar compares the experience of madness to an inability to breathe. This is illustrated when Esther refers to being inside a bell jar as 'stewing in [her] own sour air' (Plath 1966:178). What the metaphor suggests is that madness is experienced as a metaphorical death because, while the oxygen has been pumped out of her

environment, she does not really die. Therefore, the metaphor is indicative of the death of the true self, as Laing would put it. This also points to the unsustainability of madness as a reaction to an untenable situation. While the novel presents madness as a legitimate response to patriarchal oppression, the depiction of the bell jar as cutting off Esther from her source of life indicates that prolonged madness can be harmful. In scientific experiments, the bell jar is used to demonstrate that sound needs air to travel; as air is pumped from the bell jar, the sound of a source that has been placed inside the jar diminishes. With this in mind, the image of the bell jar suggests that there is a barrier between Esther and the outside world, and that in her madness, she is unable to communicate. This idea is also depicted in *Surfacing*, where the narrator's feelings of being cut off from the rest of the world is compared to being inside a vase. As in Esther's case, the suggestion is that the barrier between the narrator and the rest of the world hinders her from communicating with anyone outside the vase. This idea is reinforced in the comparison of being in a French-speaking village where she cannot understand the villagers. This points to the difficulty of communication between the sane and the insane, as well as indicating the solitude experienced in madness.

In the narratives of madness in the novels, the authors employ metaphors of madness not only to depict the experience of the condition itself, but also to depict the fragility of the protagonists' mental states. This accords with the generally more sympathetic treatment given to the fictional characters who are regarded as insane. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther compares her situation, her incapacity for emotion, to being in the eye of a tornado, 'very still and empty' (Plath 1966:2). This metaphor not only suggests that there is a loss of affect, but also that the situation in itself poses a threat to Esther; although calm inside the eye of a tornado, the storm itself causes chaos and damage which could destroy her should the eye contract. Exploring further, the metaphors depicting mental fragility in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Surfacing* make use of images that suggest impending collapse. The narrative of Antoinette's childhood is filled with images of fragmentation and disintegration, such as the description of the garden overtaking the estate at Coulibri. In addition, when Antoinette is incarcerated in England, she refers to her husband's country house as made of 'cardboard' (Rhys 2001:117), while *Surfacing's* protagonist refers to her false memories as a 'paper house' (Atwood 2009:184). These images are indicative of fragility

in the sense that neither cardboard nor paper is durable and, therefore, any structure made of these materials would be brittle and could easily collapse. Aside from fragility, these metaphors are also suggestive of confinement; for Antoinette, the cardboard house is a representation of her imprisonment in Thornfield Hall, as well as an indication of her captivity in the plot of *Jane Eyre's* Bertha. In other words, Antoinette feels trapped inside a construction of madness that has been imposed on her both by her husband and by the hold that *Jane Eyre's* plot has over the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For *Surfacing's* narrator, the image of a paper house is a symbol of her fictionalised narrative and, therefore, becomes a metaphor for her feelings of entrapment in a particular construction of femininity that is acceptable by society's standards. The alternative to the 'paper house', however, is madness. Consequently, the 'paper house' is indicative of the fragility of the defence mechanism of creating false memories. The 'paper house' is always in danger of collapse or disintegration.

In *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing*, metaphors comparing psychic instability to bodily harm are used to illustrate the subjective experience of madness as one that is painful and damaging. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther feels as though she is shrinking, and compares the feeling to being 'a hole in the ground' (Plath 1966:15). The image of shrinking suggests a kind of disappearance of identity, and therefore illustrates Esther's experience of madness as a disappearance of her true self. This is further emphasised by the image of burial, indicating that not only has the self disappeared, but also that the experience of madness can be linked to death. In *Surfacing*, the comparison between madness and death is also made evident in the narrator's assertion that death has been 'planted in [her] like a seed' (Atwood 2009:184). This metaphor – used to describe the abortion, which the narrator credits as one of the causal factors in her mental breakdown – serves to illustrate the notion of being simultaneously dead and alive. Put differently, in her experience of mental breakdown, the narrator feels as though part of her has died. This idea is further explored in the novel through images and metaphors relating to splitting, wounding and amputation. In the description of drawings of genitals, the narrator seems bothered by the idea that the genitals are not attached to any bodies. These drawings, drawn by lonely sailors, come to represent patriarchal objectification of body parts; parts of the body become abstract objects, tools of sexual gratification. Furthermore, the narrator's reaction points to the idea (and ideal) of psychic

stability as wholeness, which is further illustrated through references to amputation. The narrator compares her abortion to amputation, suggesting the idea that the event – and by extension, her mental breakdown – is experienced in terms of loss as well as physical pain. Therefore, these images of shrinking, splitting, and amputation are suggestive of the experience of madness as a fragmentation of the self. While these metaphors draw on conventional notions of loss, Wolfe and Wolfe argues that narratives of madness in psychological literature are often ‘metaphors of darkness and confusion: fog, mazes, labyrinths, tunnels, pits, water, caverns, fire and ice’ (1976:899). In addition to images of amputation, *Surfacing’s* narrator experiences the fragmentation or split in her psyche as a split between head and body, suggesting that the neck acts as a barrier between the two. She feels that her neck is like a frozen wound, and that this causes her to be shut inside her head. This metaphor is not only suggestive of a division in her psyche, but also points to madness as a moment of trauma, in which her true self is cut off. Furthermore, because the narrator identifies the head as belonging to the masculine element, while the body is associated with the feminine, the notion of the neck acting as a barrier between the two is suggestive of the problematic duality between the male and female principles in society.

In the depiction of the experience of madness as a split or fragmentation of the self, the novels employ the tropes of the mirror and the photograph in order to illustrate such a fragmentation. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther’s reflection in the mirror is unrecognisable to her, and the descriptions of her reflection sound like descriptions of strangers. The suggestion is that in a state of divided selfhood, the false self is unrecognisable to Esther precisely because it is not a reflection of her true self. The disconnection between protagonist and reflection is also prevalent in references to looking-glasses in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the instances where Antoinette sees her reflection, there is the sense that the person in the mirror is not herself. What Antoinette sees in her reflection is the stereotypical madwoman with a pale face and wild hair; in this sense, she recognises the image of the madwoman that has been thrust upon her. Although *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not draw on the metaphor of the divided selfhood as explicitly as *The Bell Jar*, the disconnection between Antoinette and her reflection indicates that there is some kind of split between her and the constructed version of her, one that she does not choose for herself. If the looking-glass in *Wide*

Sargasso Sea represents a constructed version of madness, in *Surfacing* it represents a constructed, commodified version of femininity. Linked to Anna, who uses the mirror to enhance and change her features with makeup, the mirror – which provides a ‘wavery’ (Atwood 2009:51) and therefore distorted reflection – becomes a symbol for a false, invented self that conforms to societal ideals of female beauty. The mirror, therefore, also links the novel’s particular construction of madness to the problems of the patriarchal objectification of women which is why, ultimately, the narrator must reject the mirror and turn it to face the wall. In relation to the split between an authentic self and a false one, in *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing*, the trope of the photograph is used to highlight this division in the psyche. In *Surfacing*, the protagonist sees the image of herself in photographs as an image of who she was before the event that precipitated her madness, and therefore the photograph symbolises the real self that has died. In *The Bell Jar*, however, what Esther sees is an image of her false self. This idea is further emphasised by Esther’s fear of a camera and her anxiety at the thought of the camera taking something of her. The implication is that in the act of photography, a theft of her authentic identity occurs, leaving her with a false self. Esther’s anxiety also points to the way in which the three novels foreground the subjective experience of madness. In other words, the novels not only depict madness as the result of external circumstances, but also depict the ways in which madness itself is experienced by the mad person.

In both *The Bell Jar* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the loss of feeling, of a coherent identity, is illustrated through the trope of the zombie. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther compares her lifeless voice to that of a zombie while, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is told that her face looks like that of a dead woman. The zombie, also referred to as the undead in popular culture, is a human corpse that has been reanimated and therefore it is at once dead and alive. Historically, the figure of the zombie also refers to a person who is poisoned, resulting in a loss of mental faculty so that he/she can toil as a slave. Therefore, the zombie – spelt without the ‘e’ in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – is a metaphor for the experience of madness as a loss of the ‘true’ self. Just as the zombie has lost its mental faculty and has become a slave to its monstrous cravings for human flesh, so does the mad person experience a loss of the quality that makes you human. The metaphor of the zombie is given nuance by the fact that the process of zombification – the act of turning a person, dead or

alive, into a zombie – was practiced on those in need of punishment for deviant behaviour. Therefore, what the metaphor suggests is that punishing those who deviate from societal norms – in the novels, women who do not conform to societal views of femininity – causes them to become mad.

The novels discussed in this dissertation draw in various ways on a similar repertoire of images and metaphors, suggesting striking affinities of both experience and modes of critique. What is also common to all three novels and the narratives of female madness they inscribe is the importance of identity. The notion of madness as an experience of a loss of identity is depicted through the trope of names and naming. In *Surfacing*, the narrator is never provided with a name which means that, if your identity is tied to your name, she has no identifiable identity. The lack of a name also point to her state of alienation in society; without a name, she cannot be categorised, which suggests that in her madness, she does not belong. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther takes on a persona in order to protect her identity from a strange man, calling herself Elly Higginbottom. There is a sense that Esther is detached from her persona, as well as the sense that she could lose her identity to her persona. This is made clear when she says that her friend, Doreen, ‘seemed to think Elly was who [she] really was by now’ (Plath 1966:14). It is specifically in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that the importance of names is illustrated in the husband’s act of renaming Antoinette to Bertha. Significantly, although he is implied to be Rochester from *Jane Eyre* the husband, like *Surfacing*’s narrator, is never named in the novel. Because he is a male in patriarchal society, the denial of a patronymic highlights his own position as victim of patriarchal laws; as the younger of two sons, he has no entitlement to an inheritance from his father and must, as a result, marry for money. Despite the sympathetic treatment of this, his act of renaming his wife is illustrated as an act both to affirm his authority over her and to construct a new identity for her. The act of renaming Antoinette depicts the husband as representing the colonial settler, who usually renames places and landmarks such as rivers and mountains in order to exercise power over the colonial subject. Furthermore, the husband’s renaming of Antoinette to Bertha points to an attempt to change her identity into that of *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha. The result of this, however, is that as this constructed version – the stereotypical madwoman with unruly hair and wild eyes – is imposed on Antoinette and she begins to lose her identity to Bertha. This

loss of identity is further highlighted by references to colour; Antoinette associates the colour red with her real identity, feeling like herself when wearing her red dress, while dull, depressing colours are associated with Bertha and her incarceration. The result of the husband's renaming of his wife is that she finds herself caught between two identities: that of the madwoman that is imposed on her, and that of her real, authentic identity. The novel ends with Antoinette following through with the plot set out for her by Brontë's Bertha. However, the references to red indicate that it is Antoinette who sets fire to the house and not Bertha, and therefore that her incineration of Thornfield Hall becomes an act of defiance against the stereotypical construction of the madwoman as well as against the patriarchal construction of women.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Surfacing*, the protagonists' psychic instability is connected to their affinity or association with nature and the natural environment. In both novels, the protagonists identify or are associated with the natural environment. In a state of isolation, abandoned by those she loves, Antoinette's fragile state of mind is symbolised by scenes of abandonment, desolation and wildness. The garden at Coulibri, in particular, becomes representative of the fragmentation of Antoinette's psyche. The suggestion of danger in the description of the garden overtaking the estate can be linked to stereotypical notions of the madwoman as wild and animalistic, as in the portrayal of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. However, there is also the suggestion that the reclamation of the estate by the natural world can be viewed in a positive light and, linked to Antoinette's deteriorating psyche, suggests that Antoinette's madness is not a result of hereditary defect, but is an appropriate response to patriarchal oppression. Similarly, descriptions of nature in *Surfacing* can be linked to the destructive power and consequences of patriarchal oppression. In the diction used to describe the effects of industrialisation, the novel constructs a world that is both diseased and depleted of its resources. Again, if the destruction of the natural environment is linked to the narrator's psyche, the suggestion is that her madness is a legitimate response to the destructive consequences of patriarchal oppression. This idea is reinforced through the image of the dead heron, strung 'up like a lynch victim' (Atwood 2009:149). Because the heron cannot be eaten, its death comes to symbolise the violence articulated in man's desire to dominate nature and, by extension, patriarchal domination of women. The result of such domination is the

senseless death of a bird and, in the narrative of madness in the novel, the protagonist's psychic deterioration.

In the narratives of madness depicted in these texts, madness is not only explored in subjective terms but also in relation to the particular trajectory it takes and the ways in which it is resolved. *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing* both draw on R.D. Laing's views about the resolution to madness which involves a journey into 'inner space' (Woods 2011:141). This journey into 'inner space' or the subconscious is modelled on the journey of Joseph Campbell's epic hero, specifically 'the classical journey to the underworld' (Wolfe & Wolfe 1976:899). In Campbell's rendition of the journey, the hero must travel to the underworld or, as he refers to it, 'The Belly of the Whale'. Here, the hero usually battles some kind of monster and dies; however, since the hero's quest needs to continue, the hero will be reborn before exiting the underworld with some form of divine knowledge or weapon. In Laing's description of the schizophrenic's journey, the patient has to go through a metaphorical death – or loss of self – and rebirth before recovering, which involves a return to sanity with access to some form of divine knowledge gained in the 'belly of the whale'.

In the narratives of psychic breakdown in *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing*, each protagonist goes through a journey that is modelled on this trope of the hero's journey. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther begins her metaphorical journey by literally going underground by attempting to commit suicide in the crawlspace beneath her mother's house. According to Wolfe and Wolfe, many of the popular narratives of madness in the US 'involve some sort of chaotic, metaphoric journey within the hospital, from ward to ward' (1976:899). The same could be said of Plath's treatment of madness in *The Bell Jar*. After being rescued, Esther is committed to an insane asylum where she is treated with insulin and electroshock therapy and where, through a journey to self-knowledge, she begins her recovery, where she is able to reconcile the demands of idealised femininity with her creativity. In *Surfacing*, the protagonist's metaphorical journey begins when she dives in the lake and comes across her father's drowned body. Her journey does not involve insane asylums or hospital wards but, rather, is framed as a psychotic journey into her own subconscious. In a journey to self-discovery, the narrator attempts to reject civilisation altogether and to fuse with

nature. What she comes to realise through this is that if she does not return to civilisation, she would become the stereotypical madwoman and would need to be committed to an insane asylum. In a similar discussion of the formulaic narrative arcs in psychological literature, Wolfe and Wolfe argue that an experience of chaos, 'followed by emergence into some sort of an ordered universe, seems to be the central dramatic movement of many of these narratives: a movement from disorder to order, or at least the promise of order' (1976:899). In both *The Bell Jar* and *Surfacing*, the novels end with the possibility of a return to order, to sanity, to civilisation. Thus, both novels represent the journey of madness in terms of an ultimate resolution of the problematic nature of being a woman in patriarchal society.

While the resolution in *Surfacing* is also presented through a journey, in *The Bell Jar*, this journey takes place in a psychiatric institution. In this way, (like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*), the novel explores the problems of patriarchal oppression that exists within the institution of psychiatry itself. Esther's treatments are administered by male doctors and are used to reinforce the ideal norms of femininity. It is only when Esther's shock therapy is administered by a female doctor that Esther chooses recovery. In addition, since Esther does not emerge from her journey with divine knowledge, the novel also subverts Laing's romanticised view of the hero's journey. In *The Bell Jar*, furthermore, the false self that needs to be killed off in order for the true self to be reborn is represented by a double, or doppelgänger, who dies so that Esther can live. In contrast to Esther's recovery taking place within a psychiatric asylum, *Surfacing's* narrator chooses recovery in order to avoid being committed to an insane asylum. Rather, her journey resembles Laing's notions of the schizophrenic's journey into the subconscious, after which she realises that she faces the choice of becoming a madwoman, locked in an asylum, and choosing to return to civilisation, but refusing to be a victim. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, does not depict the resolution of madness through a journey. Unlike the other two novels, the narrative of Antoinette's madness places emphasis on the need to contest dominant stereotypes of female madness, specifically Victorian assumptions of the raging madwoman in the attic as depicted in Brontë's *Bertha*. In a sense, unlike the other two novels, Rhys is preoccupied with providing a voice for the marginalised, silenced 'other' depicted in *Jane Eyre*. In so doing, the author departs from the convention of the single protagonist-narrator by allowing the figure of the oppressor the

power to narrate the second part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In this way, she gives both sides an opportunity to speak, a device which could be read as a critique of Brontë's denial of Bertha's voice. A further difference between *Wide Sargasso Sea* relates to the novels' resolution. The former two novels present the possibility of redemption and 'return' for both Esther and the protagonist of *Surfacing*. By contrast, the story of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is resolved in Antoinette's decision to commit suicide. In this novel, the choice for Antoinette is represented as a choice between madness – locked in an attic in a foreign country – and death. In this sense, her suicide, represented an act of defiance, ensures her liberty both from dominant social definitions of madness and patriarchal oppression but also denies the possibility of a return.

What is striking about the way in which madness is inscribed in all three novels is the importance of creating or fashioning new metaphors and thus new ways of describing and imagining female madness. This works not only to counter damaging normative models but also points to the problem of patriarchal language itself. It is important to note that Plath herself felt that her creativity had been hampered by canonical male poets and, in *The Bell Jar*, this problem is evident in Esther – who is a writer – losing her ability to read and write in her experience of madness. What this loss indicates is that, in a society where creativity and intellectualism are seen as belonging to the male domain, as a female writer, she would have to use the language of those males. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the duality of patriarchal language is manifested in the husband's refusal to see or listen to the other side; in his embodiment of the rational male, he casts Antoinette on the side of irrationality and, as a result, she is silenced. For the narrator in *Surfacing*, patriarchal language – specifically the failure of language – is at the root of her madness. Her problem with the language is that the diction used in describing the body is inherently dualistic because it implies a division between the head and the body. As Susan Bordo has argued in her study *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (2004), the head, or the mind, is associated with the male principle, and the sexualised, animalistic body is associated with the female principle. *Surfacing* offers a similar critique of this patriarchal dualism by questioning language as a place of gender disparity. In 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1971), Adrienne Rich writes about her own experience writing as a woman in a world dominated by male language and the difficulties of having a voice in a realm where the

predominant images of women are those created by men. In *Surfacing*, the narrator's realisation of her own complicity in the oppression and destruction of the natural environment also causes her to realise that if you use the language of patriarchy, you have also incorporated the ideology of patriarchal society. Therefore, in her attempts to reject civilisation – and by extension, patriarchal language – the narrator searches for a new language that is devoid of dualism and gender inequality. The end of the novel, however, intimates that a complete rejection of civilisation is not sustainable. In order for a revolt against patriarchal oppression to be successful, the narrator would have to return to civilisation, but with an awareness of both the norms and expectations of patriarchal society as well as her own complicity in the oppression of that society.

The metaphors and images used in the three novels all attempt to portray madness not only as a legitimate response to patriarchal oppression, but also to depict the experience of madness as dark, confusing, and often painful. While the novels often draw on conventional metaphors, especially relating to notions such as movement and loss, they also invent new ones. This act of creating new metaphors of madness points to the oppression or silencing of women writers in patriarchal society. In each novel, the protagonists are either silenced by patriarchal language, or struggle to make language their own. Similarly, the authors of each novel are faced with the task of portraying madness in a language that historically has been seen to belong to men. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, the 'woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images ... which male authors have generated for her' (1980:812). In other words, the authors of the three texts discussed were faced with the task of rejecting stereotypical images and descriptions of the madwoman and female madness in order to avoid, as *Surfacing's* narrator attempts to do, the views of a society that has painted the madwoman as animalistic, irrational and wild. Therefore, in their creation of new vocabularies of madness, the novels do not just explore alternative representations of madness but they also show how, in rejecting the use of patriarchal language, women writers bend language into new shapes. *The Bell Jar*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *Surfacing* each uses new vocabularies, stories and metaphors of madness in order to offer a particular construction of madness that can be viewed as 'divinest sense': as an acceptable and appropriate response to the patriarchal oppression of women.

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