



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„Of revenants and after-lives: Recurring representations of
bridal madness in reworkings of *Jane Eyre*“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna, 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 190 344 333

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Deutsch

Betreut von / Supervisor:

o. Univ.-Prof. i.R. Mag. Dr. Margarete Rubik

Table of Contents

List of figures	i
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Gap of research.....	7
1.2. Questions of research	8
1.3. Procedure and research methods.....	9
2. Theorising identity	11
2.1. “I feel 100% myself today”: Authenticating (bridal) identity	11
2.2. Deconstructing bridal identity.....	16
2.3. Understanding abjection	19
2.4. Feminist and post-colonial theory	24
2.5. Representing everything her culture finds beautiful: Bridal standards	29
2.6. Unveiled and becoming: Aspects of bridal femininity.....	32
2.7. Conceptualising bridal madness: A model of the mad bride.....	43
3. Rebecca – Elle revient.....	48
3.1. Rebecca as (m)other.....	49
3.2. Angel or monster? Rebecca’s multiple transgressions	53
3.3. Out of bounds: Rebecca breaching boundaries	56
3.4. Rebecca as a corpse bride	59
3.5. Here comes the bride – again.....	64
4. Wide Sargasso Sea – Le Revenant	69
4.1. Bridal wreaths becoming death wreaths	70
4.2. Unchaste and intemperate: Excessive sexuality	72
4.3. Under western eyes: Unveiling the bridal body	74
4.4. Infamous daughter of an infamous mother	76
4.5. Abjecting the bridal dress: Dreams of a fallen woman.....	80
4.6. Blind spots and flawless performances	82
4.7. Qui est là? Losing one’s identity	84
5. Jane Eyre – Revisited.....	87
6. Conclusions and outlook.....	93
7. Bibliography	97
8. Appendix.....	111
8.1. German abstract.....	111

List of figures

Figure 1 The waiting bride transfixed	30
Figure 2 Unveiling the bride's true nature	40
Figure 3 Bridal madness in the form of restrained revenge	40
Figure 4 Attributes of bridal madness: Phallic sword and feminine veil	41
Figure 5 A bridal angel of death	41
Figure 6 Bridal identity evaporating	42

1. Introduction

“Something of her breath (faugh!) mixed with the air I breathed” (Brontë 307)

“A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure” (Brontë 308)

“I breathe the air of England [...] and can face this glittering sky with greater courage” (Du Maurier 8)

“There is a cool wind blowing now – a cold wind” (Rhys 108)

These introductory quotes allow me to begin this thesis *in medias res*. All quotations given above stem from a particularly rich and ambiguous site of cultural representations, a truly intertextual field: the modern myth that is generated by *Jane Eyre* and its manifold reworkings. Based on the motif of breath, these snippets offer glimpses into matters that play a crucial role in this thesis: the first quote, taken from *Jane Eyre*, depicts monstrous femininity, with ‘her breath’ acting as *pars pro toto*, as abject, indeed contagious. ‘Her breath’ apparently poses a threat to the speaker and his surroundings. As implied in the last three quotes, social order and dominant priorities seem to be evaporating into thin air. Something – to which we cling as it promises to guard against chaos and immorality (Europe, England, cool-headedness) – is about to be (or is already) lost, as cultural boundaries are in jeopardy. These implicit dangers are referenced in the quotes via the fetishisation of Englishness, negotiations of imperialist mentalities as well as attempts to confine the female grotesque that has grown out of bounds.

Mixing their contemptuous, disgusting and abhorrent breath with the air oneself is breathing, thus, unifying what should remain separate, aberrant femininities unveil their abject, *other* nature at culturally critical nodal points: transgressions in the form of bridal madness threaten to disrupt everything that is generally held to be stable and safe in terms of identity, power, agency, gender, ethnicity and class. Only purgatorial, cleansing forces, symbolised by nature (fresh air, cold wind or fire) and revered by culture¹ (patriarchal and imperialist power mechanisms), are felt to be

¹ Arguably, the natural tropes fresh air, cold wind and fire are tied to patriarchal and imperialist power mechanisms in that the cleansing and possibly destructive force of the natural elements evoke Euro- and androcentric practices seeking to marginalise – blow/sweep out – whatever threatens to metaphorically besmirch the perceived uniformity of hegemonic ideas and attitudes, i.e. the marginalised, the exotic, the other.

safeguards against “what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). These unsettling disturbances manifest in the form of cultural ambiguity, abject degeneracy and feminine excess. The parenthetical interjection in the first quote (faugh!) recalls notions of the abject, in particular expresses feelings of loathing in the face of “[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4).

These sketchy introductory notes touch upon the subject matter of this thesis – inherently ambiguous, bridal madness encroaches upon everything that is considered valuable and invested with cultural prestige. However, this thesis also sets out to illustrate how in some cases, ambiguity is the very quality that makes for fascination, holds us spellbound and effectively grips us – just as one of the most pernicious modern myths, *Jane Eyre* and its strange after-lives, undoubtedly does. Lately, a ‘breath of fresh Eyre’² can be perceived. Without a doubt, *Jane Eyre* has been firmly established as a key text that keeps inspiring academic scholars and popular culture alike (Schaff 25). The modern myth’s appeal even seems to be increasing, as the wealth of recent reworkings and adaptations of Charlotte Brontë’s novel indicates. These cultural artefacts have been approached from a variety of academic angles, each approach opening up a rich arena for research. Since the publication of *A Breath of Fresh Eyre* in 2007 (a landmark study in the tradition of Patsy Stoneman’s *Brontë Transformations*), a new abundance of texts adapting or referring to the 19th century novel has emerged. This phenomenon – *Jane Eyre* continually returning in the novel’s ‘strange after-lives’³ – is paralleled by another cultural leitmotif, distinctly working its ways like a red thread through current and past popular and academic discourses: representations of bridal characters going mad. As will be argued below, these two phenomena can be read as intricately intertwined with one another.

It is safe to say that at least since the early 19th century mad brides have been popular figures in literature and culture – and their popularity stays undiminished until today. Bertha Mason Rochester, Lucy Ashton/Lucia di Lammermoor, Miss Havisham, Lady Audley, Anne Catherick, Tess of the d’Urbervilles⁴ and countless others have

² This pun has been taken up from the collection of the same title.

³ This expression refers to Barbara Schaff’s survey of *Jane Eyre* as a central text of both the literary canon and popular culture.

⁴ Tess of the d’Urbervilles’ “madness”, understood in this thesis as a rather complex phenomenon involving transgressions of cultural boundaries, is based on the character’s conflation of the

left their traces across a wide range of cultural artefacts: in fact, the mad and abject bride's popularity seems to be on a steep rise. The image of bridal madness has become so common as to feature in many notable productions of contemporary popular culture. Mysteriously veiled female figures recalling eerie bridal imagery abound and are symptomatic of a resurgence in representations of bridal madness: for instance, the recent fifth season of the American horror TV anthology series "American Horror Story" features a nymphomaniac "bridezilla" figure personified by Lady Gaga, whose star persona frequently draws on notions of aberrant femininity. An "abominable bride" with a murderous tendency also plays a prominent role in a recently widely publicised episode of the BBC TV production "Sherlock". Bridal madness by no means stays on-screen: reaching out into our daily lives, aberrant brides have become omnipresent in every facet of popular culture.

At the heart of *Jane Eyre* – this 19th century text that keeps resurfacing in academia, 'high' as well as popular culture – bridal madness, a thwarted wedding, eerie wedding garments and aberrant versions of femininity play a vital role, too. Arguably, these elements of the narrative form the core of what lingers in our minds, what holds us spellbound, grips us and makes us revisit the tale again and again: a romance plot with a gothic twist. The model of the mad bride can help reveal what *Jane Eyre* and its retellings and adaptations (re-)negotiate in the arena of meaning-making in terms of gender, ethnicity, agency and power relations. The idea that adaptations of *Jane Eyre* (and other canonical works) are specific to the time of their production is well-accepted in the academic field and has been frequently applied in a variety of analyses (see, for instance, Mann, Hopkins or Parkinson). Thus, disentangling specific aspects of *Jane Eyre* reworkings should shed light on epistemological strongholds and contingent ways of thinking. It is this chore that I have set myself, and it is this motive that gives an impetus to this project.

A personal note and a few introductory and necessarily tentative words about the phenomenon of bridal madness and its academic analysis seem in order at this point. The topos of returning, retelling and reworking lies at the heart of both a theory of adaptation and a model of the mad bride. However, in the context of this paper there is also a self-referential aspect to the notion of reassembling and rewriting,

Dangerous Woman and the Woman in White (Hughes 84) – or, in other words, Tess' personification of a low-class Fallen Woman as well as a Pure Woman (Hughes 172-173).

which shall be sketched out briefly. In 2012, I started working on theorising bridal madness for my first diploma thesis. Since then, we have seen the continuing re-emergence of *Jane Eyre* in manifold forms: according to an online Wikipedia entry, in almost every category of narrative form at least one new text focussing on Jane and her darker double (Gilbert and Gubar 314) has emerged: one feature film, one radio production, one stage play, one literary sequel, four literary reworkings, one literary retelling and one literary spin-off were released (wikipedia.org/Adaptations_of_Jane_Eyre). The Victorian novel and its numerous reworkings seem to substantiate Linda Hutcheon's observation that the best – or, to use Darwinian terminology, fittest – stories “do more than survive; they flourish” (32). Powerful, flourishing reworkings make “the canonical text seem always to have contained the germ of this rebellion, and all literary history, by extension, seem to contain potential transformation, awaiting the right re-reader” (Rody 144).

Adding to the motivation for working on this topic in the context of this thesis was the fact that I started teaching in 2014 and the tale of the governess Jane Eyre has since then grown on me in ways I had not anticipated earlier⁵. Last but not least, academically engaging with bridal madness has sharpened my senses in this respect: I cannot but notice the ubiquity of mad brides. However, not only should it be noted that the figure of the mad bride keeps returning, but also that this version of femininity still merits study. Taking the perceived ‘breath of fresh Eyre’ seriously, a new – more sharpened – perspective on the topic will be taken. Having said that, my first diploma thesis “Bridal G(l)ory: Constructions and Representations of the Mad Bride” shall naturally form the basis for the present paper, providing the means for tackling bridal madness in the context of *Jane Eyre* and its reworkings. It is thus considered essential to review and build on the most important findings of my prior work.

Thus, the first question to be discussed for introductory reasons is: why exactly does bridal madness keep haunting Western cultures? Arguably, one reason for the mad bride's attraction, wide cultural circulation and revenant-like persistence may be the fact that she is situated in a societal in-between space, which, in order to preserve cultural boundaries, must be vigilantly controlled and is therefore invested

⁵ Of course, this is not to say that I share Charlotte Brontë's aversion “to the idea of teaching” (Fisk 223). Rather, Jane's profession represents one of many areas for a reader's identification with the resilient heroine.

with immense cultural significance. Furthermore, in representations of the mad bride, two opposed, emotionally heavily charged discourses (bridal decorum and monstrous excess) are juxtaposed, resulting in a dialectic struggle in signification. In the course of this thesis it will be shown that via the signifier of the mad bride, issues of identity, body, sexuality, gender and beauty are effectively negotiated – while patriarchal discourses seek to confirm certain norms by continuously putting forth ideals of bridal decorum, the mad (and typically abject) bride exposes and disrupts cultural boundaries in unruly ways.

Accordingly, the mad bride is commonly regarded as a literary symbol of liberation and as such has long entered other media and forms of discourse. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work on *The Madwoman in the Attic* references Bertha Mason Rochester, a prominent mad bride, as a symbol of the dialectical struggle exercised by either the angel or the monster, the classic female roles generated in literary phallogocentrism⁶ (Gilbert and Gubar 17). It is from this liminal space that the authors have drawn vital implications for generations of feminist literary criticism up to the present. Emerging in a quite diverse range of texts, these deviant female figures are united by paradox (they may be represented as both human and animal, young and old, female and male etc.), and thus share abject ontological designations. Arguably, it is this excessive, paradoxical marking of the bridal subject that constitutes her 'madness' and typically surfaces in abject materialisations.

Therefore, the mad bride in the tradition of Bertha Mason Rochester must be read in light of other models conceptualising deviant femininities that challenge patriarchal constructions of women as mere victims, such as the 'female grotesque' as examined by Mary Russo, or the 'monstrous feminine' as explored by Barbara Creed. As will be argued in section 2.1, bridal identity is generally described as stable and transcendent in popular discourses. Accordingly, the bridal body depicted within the frame of the Western white wedding is typically constructed as closed and clean. Via reiteration, rigid discourses on bridal agency and beauty can be systematically implemented and performed as natural and self-evident, and thus come to be cited in terms of essentialist constancy. In contrast, due to her inclusivity, the *mad* bride can

⁶ This neologistic portmanteau coins phallogocentrism and logocentrism: in Kristevan theory it is understood that "women are outside of the male-dominated phallogocentric discourse and that women maintain an abjected, marginalized position in masculine culture" (Green 356).

be related to excessive, dangerous and even violent femininity. Typically, such aberrant versions of femininity embody a variety of cultural taboos and hold a somewhat liberating, counter-hegemonic potential.

Furthermore, an important question concerns the mechanisms via which bridal madness works on the diegetic level, i.e. how (the moment of) madness is incorporated into the diegesis. It is assumed that via the affective powers of 'madness' and possible instances of diaeresis, aberrant and/or abject brides are not entirely confined to the narrative frame and can therefore easily travel across different texts. A question to be asked in this context refers to the kinds of elements that are being 'translated' across reworkings and in which respects aspects are time-specific and contingent on a historical perspective (see section 1.2). As will be shown in the sections devoted to practical analysis, issues being (re-)negotiated via representations of bridal madness typically manifest themselves in the form of abject corporeality and aberrant materiality interlinked with bridal imagery, by means of which normative, collective figurations of a context are fleshed out and individualised.

As mentioned above, this material excess (i.e. an abjected wedding dress, a deviant bridal body, protruding body boundaries) typically results in a certain degree of independence from the narrative on the structural level as well as eases the acquisition of an iconic status. Arguably, these extra-diegetic traits destabilise the narrative level to some extent and let the mad bride permeate different media and epochs – this is where *Jane Eyre's* supposed openness and adaptability (Schaff 34) comes into play. As, on the one hand, bridal madness has been surrounded by an aura of trans-historical, ambiguous – almost sublime⁷ – iconicity (dread and fascination), and, on the other hand, can be read as an expression of the cultural anxieties of a time period and its epistemic and ideological perspective, the model lends itself perfectly to a detailed analysis of *Jane Eyre* adaptations and reworkings, which are particularly rich in literary symbolism and bridal imagery.

Western cultures' history of the stylisation of madness as a female phenomenon proved an important topic in early feminist writings and accordingly has been widely investigated (see, for instance, Showalter, Felman, Chesler, Vogel), in particular so as to challenge tenacious misogynist representations. While relevant findings of

⁷ The abject can be seen as being "at the heart of the sublime's psychodynamics" (Wright 86), thus "open[ing] the way for a non-periodising approach" (Wright 85).

these works will be drawn upon, this thesis aims to take a more specific approach to the investigation of this distinct, yet polyvalent version of femininity by discussing the abject materiality of madness in *Jane Eyre* and selected popular reworkings. Whereas there is a veritable tradition of Kristeva-inspired ‘abject criticism’, mostly investigating instances of the abject for their potential of resisting patriarchal hegemony, the figure of the bride has seldom been analysed for her disruptive agency as manifested in abject materiality and has not been looked at from the perspective generated by *Jane Eyre* and its reworkings.

This dearth of critical material is surprising, given that the representation of bridal madness is a significant narrative and structural component in *Jane Eyre* and can be read as being interlinked with its derivatives in significant ways. Furthermore, depictions of mad brides by means of the abject circulate widely and, taking into consideration that the analysis of aberrant femininity in a wide sense has been established as an important field of research in English Studies (see, for instance, Creed, Russo), it seems only natural to apply these well-tested concepts in the development of a highly specialised theoretical model. While the white wedding and the bride in Western culture were discovered as objects of investigation about 15 years ago (see, for instance, Freeman, Ingraham), the potential monstrosity of the bride has up to this point been discussed only marginally (see, for instance, Bell, Biddinger, White). The phenomenon of bridal madness has so far only been very briefly addressed within the field of opera studies (see, for instance, Huser, Lessard), without, however, extending on the specifics of bridal identity. Apart from minor references, the bride going mad in white has hitherto been solely discussed in terms of research gaps: Clair Hughes, for instance, draws attention to this “curiously persistent stereotype that is rarely questioned” (167) and stresses that its “source [...] has not been traced” (168).

1.1. Gap of research

While the studies mentioned above address important questions concerning the bridal body (in particular naturalised categories of beauty), identity and agency, and respective representations in patriarchal systems of meaning, a thorough analysis of mad brides’ transgressions and their portrayals within cultural texts that are continuously being retold has yet to be carried out. In particular, no research has been found that surveys representations of mad, abject, or monstrous brides as

stemming from a long cultural and literary tradition closely connected to one of the first mad brides: Jane Eyre's darker alter ego, Bertha Mason Rochester. Hitherto no studies have traced and contextualised a historical development of this figure. Although some results have been achieved on recent pop-cultural, post-feminist phenomena such as 'Trash the Dress' (White) and 'Bridezilla' (Biddinger), no single study exists which adequately covers the historical development of these aberrant femininities, much less investigates negotiations taking place on a material level, where collective anxieties can be accessed in a more perceivable form.

Thus, the analysis of bridal madness as a pervasive means to contextualise and deconstruct hegemonic boundaries concerning the bridal subject that manifest themselves in respective cultures and ideologies has not yet been fully exploited. Furthermore, existing studies focus solely on partial aspects of the phenomenon of the 'mad bride', doing little to disentangle the complex and intricate web of meanings within which manifestations of bridal madness are situated. While not all desiderata listed above can be addressed within the scope of this thesis, a first important step shall be taken by applying the model of the mad bride to a particularly rich and multivalent text that can be read as constantly being in progress (Schaff 34). Given that adaptations and reworkings of *Jane Eyre* have seen a revival recently, it shall be argued that by employing close reading techniques informed by this model, aspects of *Jane Eyre* and its retellings can reveal culturally relevant aspects concerning the intersectionality of gender, agency, ethnicity, class and colonial status. The application of the proposed model to readings of selected primary texts disallows a singular focus on any one category cited above in isolation from others, while still offering a highly detailed and focussed investigation.

1.2. Questions of research

Questions that will govern literary analysis along the conceptual framework sketched out above⁸ firstly concern the abject materiality of bridal madness and how meaning is created and negotiated via this material aspect. To be more precise, it will be asked in how far the abject in the context of bridal madness is to be seen as trans-historical and to what extent it has to be contextualised with regard to the Symbolic order in which it emerges. Applying the model of bridal madness, the thesis takes

⁸ Section 2.7 offers a detailed account of the model of bridal madness.

Jane Eyre as its reference point and aims to trace mad brides as they travel through time and across the media, as well as discuss the major shifts in the figures' meaning potential. It shall be asked which cultural anxieties are being negotiated via constructions of the mad bride and in how far expressions of bridal madness can be considered emotional liberation or confinement. Another important aspect of research concerns bridal madness as a system of signification and its effects on the above-mentioned appeal to both academic criticism and popular culture.

It is assumed that “[s]tories [...] evolve by adaptation” (Hutcheon 31) and are made of ‘memes’, in other words “units of cultural transmission or units of imitation” (Hutcheon 32) that change when being transmitted, thus, when the respective story is being retold. The project will specifically investigate how exactly bridal madness is constituted in the different texts on a material level, thus, in which ways the particular memes of these signifying mediums are being transmitted and adapted. Furthermore, it shall be analysed which boundaries are being breached by mad brides and the cultural significance thereof in relation to the historical moment of production and (re-)negotiation. In short, it will be asked what regulating systems are determining negotiations of mad brides.

1.3. Procedure and research methods

Adopting a constructionist approach grounded in literary and cultural studies, the proposed project understands its primary material as texts in the broadest sense, thus, as sites where meaning and knowledge is being (re-)produced and (re-)negotiated, and not merely reflected. Based on the assumption that via constructions of bridal madness, socio-cultural transgressions of boundaries and thus societal norms are being (re-)negotiated, this thesis sets out to comparatively investigate negotiations of mad brides in exemplary texts. By drawing on theories of the abject (Kristeva), performativity (Butler), affect, intertextuality, excess (Russo, Creed), and Third Space (Bhabha), naturalised categories of bridal identity, beauty and agency within patriarchal discourse systems shall be deconstructed. For this purpose, the paper will eclectically engage in (comparative) close reading, critical evaluation, contextualised hermeneutics, motif analysis and deconstructive, feminist, post-colonial as well as psychoanalytical reading methods in order to develop a sound theoretical framework to be put into application.

The selection criteria for primary sources are largely determined by the object of research, the materiality of bridal madness. As it is assumed that Bertha Mason Rochester's emergence as mad bride/wife has triggered a veritable tradition of bridal madness, this paper sets out to analyse *Jane Eyre* and a selection of its reworkings. As language, image and discourse are considered to be systems that produce meaning, references to primary sources as diverse as literature, film, television, fashion, photography, popular press, advertisement and video clips will be made when considered necessary for advancing the argument. Novels subjected to literary analysis include Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The choice of the two reworkings, which represent the primary material of analysis, is based on the following deliberations: as Du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* represents a highly popular and very well-known retelling of the Victorian text, it is assumed that the text represents and negotiates issues of gender, agency and power in a relatively obvious way⁹. Thus, insights drawn from close analysis should pinpoint aspects of significance clearly and highlight otherwise hidden layers of meaning. Rhys' *Jane Eyre* reworking *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been chosen because of its immense influence as to how the 19th century novel is being perceived in contemporary discourses such as filmic adaptations (Mann 153, 158). Taken together, the two novels can serve as landmarks of the history of early 20th century feminist thought, in that both illustrate in their own unique ways "a critique of patriarchy, a plea for female independence, and an exploration of the unconscious" (Schaff 31) and thus paved the way for more recent reworkings of the Victorian novel.

The theoretical part of this thesis will firstly review and analyse discursive configurations of the stable (bridal) identity (section 2.1), secondly introduce alternatives to these stabilising discourses (section 2.2) and thirdly outline critical models and theories considered essential for practical analysis (section 2.3 and 2.4). In a next step, representations of bridal identity and the white wedding shall be deconstructed, thus laying bare constituents of commonly held beliefs and naturalised notions that are taken for granted in popularised discourses (section 2.5 and 2.6). Consequently, a comprehensive model of the mad bride shall be presented

⁹ Having a lot in common with sensation novels, the plot of *Rebecca* openly frames how gender, agency and power are interrelated and thus serves to delineate the subtleties of bridal madness. Via its "use of psychological and body horror" (Wisker, *Don't Look Now* 19), the novel's emphasis on immediate effect might help us interrogate the nuances of representations of mad brides.

(section 2.7) and applied in the analysis of selected primary sources (sections 3, 4 and 5).

2. Theorising identity

2.1. *“I feel 100% myself today”¹⁰: Authenticating (bridal) identity*

Setting out to sketch the theoretical frame within which this thesis is situated, it is perhaps best to begin reviewing the most general terms, and then to move on to more particular matters. In 2012 I suggested that by closely reading our culturally shared narratives, “a particularly tenacious and widely held conception of identity can be traced” (Leitner 11). It was outlined that popular discourses on identity traditionally draw on notions of timelessness, truth, continuity, depth and authenticity (Hall 10 qtd. in Karkaba 92). These notions are intricately connected to the concept of the ‘transcendent subject’ which is believed to be “antecedent to [...] the forces of society, experience, and language” (Barry 18). In these traditional, popularised discourses, identity is furthermore related to ideas of a “stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already ‘the same’, identical to itself across time” (Hall, *Cultural* 3). Such an understanding of “individuality” further implies an element of uniqueness via which subjects and their boundaries can be recognised. According to traditional Western ways of thinking, we are endowed with a specific set of characteristics and come to be who we are by means of individuality and truth, as expressed in our conscious self, “which has always been regarded as the primary self” (Barry 107). Coherence can therefore be established as the decisive factor in the liberal humanist ideal of the ‘unity of man’ (Becker-Leckrone 21).

Close readings of the Western repertoire of thought have revealed that identity is collectively imagined as being endowed with qualities such as fixity and stability, with authenticity functioning “as a guarantee to secure continuity and resist the mutability of a rapidly changing world” (Karkaba 92). Notions of stabilising coherence are complemented by processes of striving “onward and upward toward idealist perfection” (Becker-Leckrone 23). Negotiations of the concept of ‘identity’,

¹⁰ User Olivia comments on her wedding day on an online platform geared towards brides experiencing wedding stress or engagement anxiety (emotionallyengaged.com/what-brides-say) – this quote is discussed in more depth below.

etymologically suggesting notions of ‘sameness’ (OED “identity”), thus are heavily invested with emotional and moral discourses resting “on the exclusion of the other, the other individual or the other identity group, whose difference is felt as constituting a potential threat or danger” (Karkaba 92). Interestingly, the same might be said about discourses on adaptations and reworkings of literary texts. As outlined by Linda Hutcheon, moralistic words are frequently used to denigrate film versions of literary texts (2): ‘violation’, ‘perversion’, ‘infidelity’ or ‘deformation’ have been used in this “morally loaded discourse of fidelity” (Hutcheon 7). A source text is typically considered to be a true, stable, authentic entity, while adaptations are often described as desecrating an ‘original’. Contrastingly, in the context of this thesis, reworkings and adaptations are regarded as particularly revealing in terms of cultural anxieties that are being (re-)negotiated in contemporary (literary) discourses. Thus, the view of ‘original’ texts representing ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ which are being corrupted by its rewritings is not considered helpful in advancing my argument.

Parallel to discussions on adaptation processes, discursive constructions of identity suggest that the core of our true self, reason, can be defiled due to a variety of reasons. Madness would be a prominent example in this context: “the identity of madness is precisely what reason needs to exclude in order to define itself” (Tarabochia 68). Accordingly, subjects declared mad, in particular when they are female, are depicted as fragile, fragmented and out of control (Meyer, Fallah, and Wood 217). In *Jane Eyre* and its derivatives, the search for identity is central – in *Rebecca*, for instance, both the nameless, naïve narrator and mad bride Rebecca are exploring their identity (Petersen 53), while many aspects cannot be consciously uncovered in the course of this quest. In contrast, Western discourses frequently depict the unmarked, sane subject to be grounded in the Cogito, the “wilful and conscious *presence* of the self to itself” (Becker-Leckrone 24, emphasis in the original). Based on the Cartesian principle ‘I think, therefore I am’, the sane subject might also be popularised via notions of the “transcendental Self-Consciousness” (Žižek 29).

In the following, the theoretical positions thus far discussed shall be related to contemporary cultural discourses of particular interest to this thesis: conceptions of the bridal identity. On the one hand, it can be stated to be an obvious fact that in our daily life we assume a wide variety of social and cultural roles – subject positions – and that “[i]dentities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions

which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall, *Cultural* 6). On the other hand, identity is typically conceptualised as having an inner 'core', so that the "individual can remain the same person over time, whatever his life experiences may be" (Karkaba 92). The wedding ritual, in which women adopt the role of brides, constitutes, as shall be argued below, a culturally critical moment as far as issues of identity are concerned. Women's accounts of this experience are often framed by references to an authentic essence constituting one's identity, which must be communicated accordingly. One of the ritual's constituents is the wedding gown, which "seeks to express who you want to be, how you want be acknowledged and which surface of yourself you would like to show to the world" (Keller-Drescher 38).

In the context of the Western white wedding, cultural pressure is primarily put on women, which has helped generate services such as 'bridal counselling' – in one online bridal account, a bride identified as Olivia discusses her successful counselling session and states: "I feel 100% myself today" (emotionallyengaged.com). That identifying as a (successful) bride must feel – without a tinge of doubt – authentic, true and stable is communicated in modern bridal accounts in many ways. The choice of a wedding dress is frequently reported to mirror the woman's *true* self: the dress is seen as reflecting "the tastes and values of the bride and is thus tied to her identity" (Otnes and Lowrey, see also Cotto or Arend 155). Most popular discourses negotiating the concept of identity are informed by this truism, reflecting the Western idea of a subject being unique and recognisable: via "signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (Barker "Identity") identity is commonly communicated as a fixed and stable essence. The question as to why bridal identity by all means has to be represented and openly communicated as perfectly intact will be explored below by tackling cultural anxieties invested in the process of women becoming brides.

In a further step, concepts and notions outlined above shall be connected with popular culture, which bears relevance to this paper insofar as popular 20th century reworkings of *Jane Eyre* will be analysed in its practical part. Closely reading popularised bridal tales has revealed that one's tastes and values are believed to reflect a stable identity that is constantly being reproduced. The choice of the 'right' wedding dress constitutes a critical moment in this reiterative construction of the self. Bridal accounts of the "revelatory experience of *instinctively* knowing that this is *her* dress" (Leitner 12, emphasis in the original) indicate the dominant role the perceived true core of one's identity plays in contemporary narratives of bridal consumerism.

The following observations on discourses negotiating bridal identity shall be included in this section as the representation of bridal identity via dress plays, as will be shown in sections 3, 4 and 5, a pivotal role in the texts put under scrutiny.

Otnes and Lowrey point out that most brides describe “the selection of the wedding dress [as] an intense, hierophanous experience, during which the perfect selection seemed to be magically revealed to them” (Otnes and Lowrey). It can be further argued that, as the dress is believed to reflect its wearer’s true identity, it is “considered preordained, authorised and given by a ‘higher’, indisputable and even mythical, indeed *magical* order” (Leitner 12, emphasis in the original). Choosing a dress that does not reflect one’s true identity accordingly represents a scenario that induces anxiety and unease concerning one’s identity boundaries (Leitner 12). A ‘recent bride’ featured in a magazine article titled ‘Finding the dress’ is quoted thus: “I remember going back to prom with my father looking at pictures of me in that dress, and saying, ‘Who’s that girl?’ [For my wedding] I wanted to look like myself.” (Foley). The assertion that the identity as a bride ought to capture the person’s ‘real’ self can be identified across a wide range of cultural artefacts. That bridal identity is to be continuously marked as stable and authentic must be considered telling: cultural anxieties about what might lurk behind the white veil represent a powerful impetus for constructing bridal identities and bodies as stable and clean. It shall be noted at this point that in this thesis, the fluid notion of anxiety is understood as a “wider social response to patterns of threatening change” (Hughes and Wood 296) which can be characterised as “something less concrete than fear, less visceral than panic and yet still powerful enough to shape ostensibly separate political and social concerns into a threatening whole” (Hughes and Wood 296).

In popular online-narratives that can be found easily and in abundance, bridal identity not only is wishfully constructed as stable and endowed with indisputable validity, the bridal agent is also represented to wilfully engage in acts of self-fashioning, thus consciously communicating the particulars of her identity within a given framework (Keller-Drescher 38): “the style of dress reflects the woman’s personality, and her attitudes towards her body, sexuality, the wedding ritual, and marriage itself” (Harris Walsh 243). Incessantly insisting on the subject’s autonomy (Leitner 12), these modern bridal narratives draw on the notion of the Cartesian cogito, a second-order consciousness (Dimovitz 9): “Within the conventions of wedding attire (if she chooses to adhere to these rules), the bride has complete

freedom. She can decide on the length, neckline, bodice, train, etc., to suit her wishes” (Harris Walsh 243).

In what might be termed a “classic narrative of interpellation, [the bride] not only [is ascribed] *complete freedom* within given norms, but she also can deliberately *choose* whether she wants to stay within a given system of meaning making” (Leitner 13, emphasis in the original, see also Arend 149). While “[w]edding-specific body management efforts [have lately included] more extreme weight loss methods (e.g., laxatives, fasting)” (Neighbors and Sobal 431) and surgical processes of disciplining the bridal body have become wide-spread, discursive constructions of feminine and bridal agency have “recently been allowed considerable ground to flourish in neoliberalist and post-feminist cultures that celebrate individualism” (Leitner 13). Accordingly, individuals are either rewarded with success or publicly exposed as a failure (Ringrose and Walkerdine 227-229). Bridal narratives can thus be interpreted as negotiations of hetero-normative standards regulating feminine beauty and bridal decorum. As such, they are based on the alleged stable essence of individuality (Leitner 13). Similarly, the white wedding has come to be understood as a “principal site for the construction of heteronormativity” (Kimport 874) that has “very real material consequences” (Kimport 875) in its perpetuation of patriarchal patterns¹¹.

These introductory notes have so far touched upon Western constructions of (bridal) identity, the white wedding’s heteronormative stabilising powers and have indicated that, in a similar vein, discourses on adaptations are built on notions of stability and authenticity. This paper sets out to analyse the classic *Jane Eyre*, which has been considered a standard of literary tradition, indeed a central work of the British literary canon (Schaff 25), arguably reflecting values defining European cultures. Applying the model of the mad bride in my reading of this canonical text and its adaptations and reworkings, the source text will neither be treated as rigidly fixed and stable, nor as narrowly ‘authentic’. Productively communicating with its numerous adaptations and reworkings in ways Hutcheon theorises (84), *Jane Eyre* constitutes a complex semiotic field in which cultural boundaries of identity, gender, ethnicity etc. are constantly being renegotiated.

An adequate theoretical and analytical framework is required for critically engaging in this polyvalent field. The next section shall provide the means to

¹¹ For a discussion of the feminist enterprise, see section 2.4.

destabilise discursive routines seeking to perpetuate (bridal) identity as a given, allegedly “defined by frames of reference and meaning that are not subject to subsequent change” (Nicolae 318). In a further step, these theoretical concepts shall inform non-normative readings of the literary canon that is no longer understood as “fixed, normative or authoritative” (Schaff 26). As *Jane Eyre* can be termed “an “unfinished” work in progress” (Schaff 34) containing “many provocatively unresolved discrepancies” (Schaff 34), deconstructive readings are considered fruitful in engaging with the original text as well as a selection of its derivatives.

2.2. Deconstructing bridal identity

In a momentous shift of paradigm in the second half of the 20th century, liberal humanist perspectives on identity were critically questioned for their perceived essentialism. Within cultural and literary studies ‘identity’ came to be established as a central category in need of reconceptualization (Karkaba 92-93). Consequently, a wide variety of analytical tools and critical methodologies were developed and successfully employed for tackling essentialist conceptions of identity – such a methodological toolkit is considered vital for applying the model of the mad bride in the interpretation of *Jane Eyre* and derivative texts, too. Approaches renegotiating notions of identity that are considered necessary for putting forth the subsequent argument shall therefore be sketched out briefly below.

Social constructivist and discursive approaches have theorised identity as culturally *constructed* and *contingent*, differing sharply from ideas of the naturally given or preordained stable entity that are outlined above. Discursively produced as well as emotionally charged (Barker “Identity”), constructions of identity come about within systems of signification – frequently experienced as ‘common sense’ – and are naturalised via a set of specific characteristics (Hall, *Cultural* 2). According to Stuart Hall, discursive constructions of identity are largely determined by the notion of alterity, which “entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (Hall, *Cultural* 4-5, emphasis in the original).

The production of meaning is thus intricately interlinked with *binary oppositions*, which serve the stabilising function of “reify[ing], confirm[ing], and maintain[ing] the alien sense of “the other”” (Winterhalter 215). As a constitutive element of identity,

binaries arguably are “produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (Hall, *Cultural* 4). Consequently, binaries must be read as products of power and hierarchy structures. If we take the implications of this contingency seriously, deconstructive readings can be employed to challenge notions of self-evidence or authenticity of meaning.

The cultural bias that is created by naturalising binary oppositions will be shown to be quite pronounced when it comes to representations of bridal subjects. By an application of deconstructive methodology, the binaries themselves can be reconceptualised in order to reveal that they are less stable than is usually conveyed in structuralist accounts (Leitner 14). By employing poststructuralist concepts, identity can be shown to “[open] onto otherness which reveals itself as a process of signification that feeds on ambivalence and interpretation, calling for perpetual destabilisation of meaning” (Karkaba 98). Embracing notions of ambivalence and destabilisation can “strike a serious blow at certain traditional theories of meaning” (T. Eagleton, *Literary* 112).

Such a blow could be struck by deconstructing language as culturally loaded and linked to anxiety. This idea is based on poststructuralist theories which propose that language might turn against its users in uncontrollable ways (Barry 60). Problematizing discursively produced boundaries of what constitutes gender, the allegedly stable difference between bride and bridegroom might be questioned by closely investigating the history of language: in the 15th and 16th centuries, ‘bride’ could refer to both sexes (OED “bride”). Linguistically obsolete, this instance of gender trouble lying at the core of the dichotomous pair has become quite visible in popular discourses. For instance, Sidney Eve Matrix and Pauline Greenhill note that “[t]he norm is for brides to be female. However, in a world in which transgendered and transsexual folks rightly seek a place, the norm cannot be presumed” (6).

Highly acclaimed and widely received, the androgynous model Andrej Pejic made an appearance in Jean Paul Gaultier’s fashion show in spring 2011, in which Pejic presented the most prestigious piece of clothing: the collection’s bridal dress. In November 2011 Pejic was featured as a bride on the cover of *Out* magazine and in 2014 assumed a transgender identity. The European Song Contest winner of 2014, the bearded drag persona Conchita Wurst likewise closed Gaultier’s autumn/winter

2014 haute couture show in Paris, sporting a bridal dress in black. In a recently released music clip, Conchita also performs in a bridal dress that neatly conforms to Western standards. Combining outspokenly feminine and masculine markers, the drag persona is repeatedly causing wide-spread uproar but has also revealed cultural anxieties. That Conchita, a persona visibly troubling cultural boundaries of gender and sex, should frequently use bridal markers in her self-representation must be considered telling. In a semiotic analysis of same-sex wedding photography, Kimport concludes that there is a high level of “consistency with different-sex weddings [which] suggests the persistence of enacted heteronormative gender standards in same-sex weddings” (894). As will be argued, the emotionally charged discourses on the bride and what constitutes her bridal identity and sexuality contain cultural potential that merits detailed study – and the analysis thereof can fruitfully inform literary and cultural interpretation.

As the small selection of contemporary examples indicates, binary oppositions such as groom/bride or male/female can be severely troubled via bridal aesthetics, as violations of these cultural boundaries might cause profound unrest. Speaking in poststructuralist terms, “words are always ‘contaminated’ by their opposites” (Barry 62) and “obsolete senses retain a troublesome and ghostly presence within present-day usage” (Barry 62). What the examples above also demonstrate is that “the identity or meaning of a term depends entirely [...] on its relation to, its difference from, other terms” (Grossberg 93). By analogy, the self is defined via the other, ‘I’ is defined in its difference from ‘non-I’ which implies that by deconstructing these binaries, the boundaries of the (bridal) subject might be reconfigured via notions of openness, hybridity and pluralism. Such innovative configurations will, however, likely be met with social abjection, as a quick glance on public discourses on the boundary-troubling brides referred to above seem to prove. It is at this point that contemporary re-figurations of bride and one of the most famous mad brides, abject(ed) Bertha Mason Rochester, meet. It is also at this point that a more sharpened focus of theory shall enrich this paper by shedding light on the ambiguous, excessive subject position created by the markers ‘bride’ and ‘mad’. Exploring counterhegemonic approaches to subjectivity, the next two sections shall introduce Kristeva’s theory of the abject as well as feminist and post-colonial ways of thinking.

2.3. *Understanding abjection*

As shall be argued in section 2.7, mad brides featured in literary texts and adaptations transgress boundaries of identity and the body and trouble dichotomies in ways suggesting ambiguity and excess. This paper tries to develop the argument that these bridal transgressions will firstly materialise in some way (either in the form of bodily deformations, violations of dress or abjection of surroundings), will secondly constitute culturally critical moments and will thirdly be negotiated in terms of identity notions that reflect the episteme of the period in which the text or its adaptation/reworking was produced. As this paper is concerned with ways cultural artefacts discuss and renegotiate identity in terms of fragmentation and multiplicity, a discursive and conceptual system shall be systematically developed via which “thinking qua innovation and beginning is predicated on the ability to cross (i.e., to tread across) familiar, fixed boundaries” (Margaroni 793). Employing Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject as laid out in *Powers of Horror* provides a valid theoretical frame for this aim. Befitting the scope of this paper, the following pages will eclectically present and analyse relevant aspects of Kristeva’s complex theory.

Secondary literature on Kristeva’s work frequently points out that her thinking is positioned at thresholds (Leitner 16) – as is the abject body she theorises: “a kind of metaphorical threshold, a being somewhere between subject or object, an abyss into which we can all fall since it holds Symbolic identity in suspension” (Jobling 216). These notions of liminality are an expression of Kristeva’s “long-standing interest in the ways by which any established order is challenged, undermined, or changed, in the necessity for disturbance” (Goodnow 2). Indeed, Kristeva’s continuing efforts to “produce a different kind of subject through upsetting the patriarchal symbolic and destabilizing the language” (Fotaki 1256) can be named one of the defining aspects of her intellectual career. This theoretical position has been attractive for feminist and post-modernist scholars alike: a conceptual framework depicting “the formation of meaning and the subject [as always being in] processes of becoming something” (Kauppi 22) can form an enticing starting point for deconstructive readings.

Kristeva’s use of the term abject is based on Latin *abicerere* (to throw away, let fall) and French *abjection* (loathing) (Suchsland 122-123). In her conceptual system, the abject is first and foremost characterised by ambiguity (Kristeva 9) since it threatens a variety of boundaries, blurring the ontological lines separating inside and

outside, subject and object. This mysterious ambivalence is described by Kristeva in quite poetic words: “It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (Kristeva 1). The abject can neither be assimilated by the subject, nor, due to its proximity to the subject, be classified as an object (Berressem 21). Thus, the abject cannot be part of the Symbolic order, in which the subject is positioned, even though the borders to the semiotic might be considered permeable and the subject’s separation from the semiotic is never performed in a definite manner. In analogy, the legitimacy of the distinction between self and other is threatened (Miller 324). In contrast to an object, “which I name or imagine” (Kristeva 1), the abject is not safely distanced, nor is it a signified, or in other words, a domesticated or aestheticized other, which can be understood and accepted (Kristeva 3). There is, however, one similarity to the object: both are located at the threshold to the Lacanian Real, thus resist symbolisation and are opposed to the ‘I’ (Kristeva 1).

As it puts identity in particular and meaning in general at stake, the abject must be banished and expelled (Wisker, *Don’t Look Now* 22). However, it still acts as the subject’s safeguard, representing taboos installed by the Symbolic order as well as functioning as the subject’s vital pre-condition (Kristeva 3): in order to define one’s boundaries, the individual relies on the rejection of the abject (Kutzbach and Mueller 9). Before the subject has emerged into consciousness, the infant, according to Kristeva’s adapted Lacanian conception, knows no borders and is unified with the maternal. In order to conceive of oneself as a unified being, the constitution of one’s boundaries via the language system, which is based on lack and separation, is vital (Barry 109). In this context, Kristeva makes an important point: “the subject will always be marked by the uncertainty of his borders” (Kristeva 63). The fluidity of boundaries can be accounted for by the fact that subjectivity is constituted by “rejecting what [the infant] took itself to be – the mother’s body” (Chanter 63). The phase in which the child comes to recognise its own boundaries and separate its body from its environment can be compared to the conception of Lacan’s mirror stage. In this process of abjection and separation, the infant subject expels what it believes to be parts of its own body. Even though this exclusion is pronouncedly violent, it is not a clean cut: “Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens [sic] it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (Kristeva 9). Dissimilar to the repressed, the abject is thus ever present in our consciousness, constantly posing a challenge to the subject

(McAfee 46) and creating a strong “need to reenact primal separation from the mother” (Zerilli 127).

Thus, a defining quality of the abject is its relative elusiveness and richness in ambiguity (Foster 114). It is striking that Kristeva “is careful not to give a neat and closed definition of the abject, but rather approaches it negatively” (Leitner 18). Also Gina Wisker stresses the relational state of the abject: “Kristeva’s definitions of the abject [...] focus on the rejection of that which is other than ‘I’” (*Don’t Look Now* 22). Tellingly, the canonical definition of the abject conceptualises “what I must get rid of in order to be an I at all” (Foster 114). In a nutshell, everything that endangers the subject’s boundaries is considered abject, as that which “blurs boundaries between self and other, [...] threatens a social system based on differences”. (Tatum, *Something* 248).

Befitting the theory’s wide applicability, Kristeva describes that “[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that is causing abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). These lines suggest an enormous potential for counter-hegemonic readings of cultural artefacts and discursive constructions of identity. In the analysis of subjects located at social margins, Kristeva’s concept can shed light on cultural processes of abjection. Situated in-between, social abjects must be expelled from society in order to keep cultural boundaries intact. Confusions of these borders constitute a threat of annihilation and meaninglessness within the Symbolic order (Kutzbach and Mueller 8).

It is important to realise, however, that said separations cannot be exercised in an entirely clean and radical way (Kristeva 9), as “abjection is the underside and inner lining of the symbolic order[,] the boundary that separates the subject from its abject is a labile one, unstable and prone to periodic disintegration” (Davis 248, see also De Nooy 289). Never is the subject completely, but only *clumsily* separated from the pre-objectal maternal (Kristeva 13). An analysis of Kristeva’s discourse reveals that the concept of the maternal keeps surfacing in her argumentation: the pre-oedipal mother, posing a threat to the paternal law and the Symbolic order, is constantly pointing to the subject’s labile boundaries. Thus, the mother threateningly reminds the subject of the “frailty of the Symbolic order, on which life as an autonomous subject depends” (Tatum, *Something* 242) in that the fear of being

reunited with the maternal and the consequent disintegration of the subject's autonomy is tapped into (Tatum, *Something* 242). As every encounter with the abject reminds the subject of its initial abjection of the maternal body, all acts of abjection are performed in a desire to stabilise the border between self and (m)other (Kutzbach and Mueller 8, Kristeva 64). Arguably, this accounts for the abject being primarily embodied by wastes and fluids traversing the body boundaries (Leitner 20-21): menacingly, they remind the subject of the primal, pre-oedipal relation to the mother, and therefore, once ejected, must never be re-admitted (Douglas 123).

Adapting the sociologist Mary Douglas' work, Julia Kristeva conceptualises filth and abject matter in ways moving beyond the purely somatic and corporeal towards relational systems of social boundaries. Due to the theory's "broader conceptual basis, [...] such transgressions as immorality and xenophobia" (Pheasant-Kelly 213) can be read as breaching a variety of social boundaries. Significantly, bodily secretions traversing the body's boundaries are considered marginal and abject (Douglas 121). Therefore, the concept of pollution can only exist in societal structures which clearly define their boundaries (Kristeva 69 and Douglas 35, 113). Letting the concept travel, bodily margins and the traversing of bodily fluids can represent the fragility of any bounded system (Douglas 115). In sum, the abject can be argued to deny coherence and to threaten ordering systems of static identities (Harradine 74, Grosz, *Volatile* 193).

Kristeva describes the abject *within* the body (i.e.: cancerous growths, pregnancy) as particularly horrifying as it threatens to dissolve the boundaries of the subject from its own centre (Goodnow 28-34). When supposedly stable markers, such as skin, are broken or subverted, the chimeric myth of the clean and closed body is exposed (Kristeva 53), which might have profound consequences on conceptions of the stable identity, too. Fashion photography in the 1990s, for instance, depicted models with bruised skin (Arnold 489, 498) and thus arguably renegotiated popularised images of the clean body via "corporeal degradation, the pollution of form" (Dorrian 312). At an early point in her treatise Kristeva classifies the abject as a traitor or a friend stabbing us (4) – accordingly, in our confrontations with the abject, the body's perceived integrity is revealed to be a wishful construction: via abjection "any fixed ideas concerning our core identity are undone; we confront the limits of our bodies' solid boundaries and glimpse the possibility of ourselves as other" (Jobling 216). Kristeva's description of the composite reveals important

characteristics of the abject: the combination of two opposed notions affects us as it is perceived as treacherous – this occurs when death interferes with what is supposedly securing life (4), or when stable subject identities are “threatened by modes of corporeality that are considered excessive, unclean or anti-social” (Jobling 216), such as dirty substances besmirching an allegedly clean and closed body – or a virginal white dress. Importantly, the abject lacks authenticity as well as moral consistency (Lechte 160) and thus stands in stark contrast to conceptions of the liberal humanist identity that have been laid out in section 2.1.

Close readings of Kristeva’s abject might also conjure up parallels with other concepts of interest. Following Bakhtin (26-27), Mary Russo defines the grotesque body as an “open, protruding, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change” (62-63), as opposed to “the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek” (Russo 63). Inherently ambivalent, the grotesque body may be likened to “death that gives birth” (Bakhtin 25), which, to use Kristevan terms, can be called composite. Notions of grotesqueness, ambiguity and the composite are expressed in the literary representation of Miss Havisham. As I have suggested elsewhere, “her excess feeds from her body that is outgrowing itself and merging with her withered dress¹², as well as with the room that confines it: protruding, becoming, unfinished and, due to her indecisive hovering between the oppositional poles of bride and spinster, living and corpse-like, abject” (Leitner 22).

These observations can provide a glimpse of ways in which the abject can be made use of in close readings of (literary) texts and their representations of bridal madness. According to Megan Becker-Leckrone, the abject might “[put] the subject in the most devastating kind of crisis imaginable” (20) – using this concept in literary interpretation, the cultural boundaries that are (re-)produced in cultural artefacts may be identified and productively renegotiated.

To be more precise, this paper sets out to apply the model of the mad bride that is based on notions of multiplicity, ambiguity and fragmentation (Leitner 22) to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and selected adaptations and reworkings. Generally speaking, these close readings will focus on constructions and representations of

¹² The image of a ‘mad’ bride’s wedding dress merging with her surroundings is echoed in Lars von Trier’s film *Melancholia* (2011): depressed bride Justine, whose identity boundaries finally coincide with her sister’s, is being held back by her wedding dress, as the metaphor “I’m trudging through this grey woolly yarn, things clinging to my legs. It’s really heavy to drag along” literalises (Gordon).

weddings and brides and their cultural implications within the *Jane Eyre* complex. At first sight, the proposition that reading the figure of the bride might “disrupt hegemonic conceptions of a ‘natural’, normative order replete with well-defined categories and dichotomous boundaries” (Leitner 22-23) may seem surprising. After all, “the bride appears to stand at the very centre of a tightly organised structure that is firmly engrained within hegemonic Western thought, domination and oppression” (Leitner 23). Arguably, the white wedding “has inscribed at its core what every culture investing in the continuation of its structures must hold to” (Leitner 23) – curiously, however, *Jane Eyre* and its derivatives famously feature thwarted weddings, dark brides, aberrant wives and a most ambiguous perspective on marriage¹³.

Based on heteronormativity (Kimport 875), popular narratives of the wedding revolve around images of the bride bearing “a promise that points to the future” (Keller-Drescher 38) in terms of the continuation of a family and society at large. According to Vikki Bell, the Western ‘white’ wedding represents “indeed a moment in which certain cultural awarenesses and identifications are crystallised and anxiously ritualised” (464). Engaging in this heavily charged performative act, more precisely this “physical and spatial staging act that builds meaning on various levels” (Keller-Drescher 37), the bride clearly merits close study. Shedding light on how bridal images are constructed and negotiated as cultural texts, the following section will sketch out theoretical concepts useful for developing the present argument insofar as it adds a somewhat critical outlook to the analysis to ensue. More precisely, the next chapter provides the epistemological lenses necessary for tackling romanticised notions of bridal beauty and identity and for subsequently employing deconstructive reading methods in the paper’s practical part.

2.4. Feminist and post-colonial theory

Discriminations against women, which have come to be seen as arising from discriminating speech acts and the employment of binary oppositions (for a short discussion of binaries, see section 2.2), make up one of feminism’s main concerns. Feminists regard stereotypical ascriptions to gender (one example would be the frequently quoted myth of men’s rationality and women’s irrationality) as emerging from these dichotomies. In contrast to ‘sex’, the notion of gender is viewed as being

¹³ It should be noted that, in terms of a female *Bildungsroman*, Jane’s “successful transition to maturity is signalled by the novel’s conclusion with marriage” (Schaff 27).

“socially produced through language and through the interaction of different discourses” (Spaull 118). Pursuing this argument further, gender can be said to be based on conventions which are potentially alterable through discursive interventions (Waniek 51).

However, the notion of ‘sex’ as biologically given has been increasingly questioned, as in feminist discourses the view is being held that “society not only shapes personality and behavior, it also shapes the ways in which the body appears” (Nicholson 79). Consequently, the practice of using the body for grounding “cross-cultural claims about the male/female distinction” (Nicholson 83) has been put under critical scrutiny by feminists. Biological foundationalist theories, which accept that femininity is socially formed, but at the same time see sex as something given, are contested from a social construction perspective. Rather, sex is understood as “a continuum constructed of chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, and hormonal sex” (Wodak 3). Cixous sees conceptualising the multiple and ever-changing bisexual nature of every human being as a way out of the problematic opposition masculine/feminine (Moi, *Feminist* 108-9). A variety of feminist concepts (masquerade, *écriture féminine*, the semiotic) consciously reflect on and ironically subvert women’s status of marginality by celebrating this very status (Mills et al. *Conclusion* 233).

Feminist theories generally contest limiting constructions of the category ‘women’ – they rather value this term’s incompleteness in order to make it a place of struggle over meaning (Butler 27). Representations of brides adhering to hetero-normative standards and representing limited agency exemplify such generalising discourses in that ‘the bride’ is conceptualised in generic ways (see section 2.5). Counteracting these confining tendencies, feminist theorists have frequently turned to the analysis of cultural artefacts considered counter-hegemonic. For instance, Jean Rhys has received considerable attention in feminist theory, in particular in connection with the analysis of gynotexts, as she seems to resist participating in such generalising and oppressing discourses and “does not write about ‘La Femme’ (this generalisation about women is what she deplores in her savage critiques of male discourse), but always about ‘une femme’ in her jagged particularity” (Howells 42). A case in point is *Wide Sargasso Sea*, subjected to analysis in section 4: as a powerful rewriting of the 19th century novel *Jane Eyre*, it describes “colonial and sexual

particularity in Antoinette”¹⁴ (Arizti 40), thus deconstructing the generalising discourse of madness via which Bertha is portrayed and “demonstrat[ing] the aesthetics of generically feminist “re-vision”” (Rody 137).

Feminists of the ‘French’ tradition go some steps further and question “the very nature of subjectivity itself. ‘Woman’ as a sign, they argue, is a fictional construct of patriarchal discourse” (Millard 156). What in popular discourses is perceived (and naturalised) as a coherent identity (see section 2.1) is revealed to be socially constituted in that it is generated by linguistically nurtured forms and categories (Butler 28). Furthermore, the French perspective embraces ways of attacking essentialist notions such as ‘the natural’, ‘the real’, ‘the human’. Deemed an inherently feminist enterprise, such deconstructive readings are meant to “[destabilize] the very order which keeps women oppressed” (M. Eagleton 11).

These concepts point towards a certain degree of eclecticism noticeable in feminist criticisms. Deconstruction, as indicated above, has come to be regarded as a valuable reading tool as it “defies ready-made categories and clear-cut characterizations” (Grosz, *Ontology* 75) such as generalising concepts of ‘woman’ inherent in the binary opposition man/woman. In a male-dominated society, this dichotomy is essential for keeping the system working: “man is the founding principle and woman is the excluded opposite of this” (T. Eagleton, *Literary* 114). The patriarchal system thus requires the implementation of a binary logic: as Kimport points out, “heteronormativity is the institutionalized expectation that bodies are constructed into oppositionally situated (sexual and social) categories” (876). Deconstructive readings can reveal how such oppositions are produced in the first place as well as show how binaries partly undermine each other (see section 2.2). As ‘woman’ is the image of what ‘man’ is not, ‘she’ makes clear what ‘he’ is. Consequently, ‘man’ depends upon ‘woman’ and – ironically – “is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as no-thing” (T. Eagleton, *Literary* 115). Such ways of reading gender seek to unravel oppositions produced by patriarchal discourses. Feminist literary theory makes use of a variety of other criticisms as well – it is partly for this reason that feminist theories make up such a wide field.

¹⁴ Antoinette, the female protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is considered to embody bridal madness as defined in this paper.

Post-colonial theories predominantly aim to detect and challenge Eurocentric universalism in literature and culture. Thus, critics analyse both texts written in the imperial period by a literate elite identifying with the colonising power as well as texts produced “under imperial licence” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire* 5). Finally, their critical attention shifted towards post-colonial counter-discourses that “used to be positioned outside general attention” (Döring 9). The latter category of text subsumes peripheral challenges of dominant colonial discourse, epitomised by the rhetoric of empire (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 56).

Similar to feminism, post-colonial theories challenge the concept of a fixed, inherited identity as it is described in section 2.1. Concepts of hybridity and syncretism expose any notion of purity as chimerical and instead stress the “heterogeneity of all cultural determinations” (Döring 35): “‘I’ is [...] not a unified subject, a fixed identity [...] ‘I’ is, itself, *infinite layers*” (Minh-ha 94, emphasis in the original). This condition of unstableness can be termed the “special post-colonial crisis of identity” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire* 8-9). Just as identity is revealed to constitute no natural fact, notions of West and East are equally understood as man-made (Said 132).

Another parallel between the two approaches is their focus on the Other (anyone who is separate from one’s self – in Eurocentric phallogocentrism, the self would be the white, Western male) and the language that brings these othering discourses about. Also feminist concepts such as ‘writing the body’ and bisexuality as a counterhegemonic force find their reflection in post-colonial theory as ‘writing place’ and cultural syncreticity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 102).

As has been indicated above, the employment of difference and alterity is considered a powerful tool in negotiating identity: “The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual” (Bhabha, *Location* 67). These forms of differences are employed in establishing hierarchical dichotomies such as coloniser/colonised. Also post-colonialist theory seeks to demonstrate that binaries are blurred and hierarchies are crumbling, that “stable notions of colonial dominance are, fundamentally, groundless” (Döring 27). Such an enterprise includes the challenging of derogatory stereotypes which merge with those feminists fight: while the colonised is represented as childlike and *effeminised* (Carr 19), there also

exist “shared, mostly unspoken ‘beliefs’ that women (*like Blacks*) are intellectually inferior, emotional rather than rational, primitive and childlike, more sensually and sexually oriented” (Pearce 20, emphasis added). Tackling these generalising ascriptions will play an important role in this thesis’ practical part.

The depictions cited above frequently include constructing the Other as part of a homogenous, monolithic group. Even scholarly criticism itself, including feminist theory, has been attacked for participating in such constructions, thus dealing inadequately with ‘Third World Women’ – a label that has been heavily criticised as well: ““Wo-” appended to “man” in sexist contexts is not unlike “Third World”, “Third”, “minority”, or “*color*” affixed to *woman* in pseudo-feminist contexts” (Minh-ha 97, emphasis in the original). The ‘Third World Woman’ is seen as suffering under a double colonisation or even “triple oppression in terms of patriarchy, the colonial powers and gendered versions of silencing and oppression” (Wisker, *Key Concepts* 135). Thus, she has been constructed as victim *par excellence* whose “political immaturity [is contrasted] with the progressive ethos of Western feminism” (Gandhi 472).

As this short outline of the paper’s theoretical framework has shown, feminist and post-colonial approaches intersect to a large degree. This shared ground of concepts, methods and aims might be boiled down to a concern for the socially marginalised in terms of gender, ethnicity and agency. Moreover, this concern can be ascribed to relatively recent perspectives of ethical criticism which aim to analyse ways in which cultural artefacts “invite [readers] into specific ways of feeling, thinking, and judging” (Gregory 206). The identity markers of gender and ethnicity are, as will be analysed in the practical part of this thesis, of the utmost importance in constructions of mad brides in the tradition of *Jane Eyre*. Consequently, the interpretation of these cultural artefacts will be informed by the complex entanglements of gender, race, ethnicity, agency and power relations. Taking a critical perspective, the following sections shall shed light on the concept of the bride, this role model’s cultural implications and the ways in which bridal configurations are informed by mechanisms of patriarchy and hegemony.

2.5. Representing everything her culture finds beautiful: Bridal standards

Our society's current obsession with white (in particular royal) weddings (Keller-Drescher 39) can be traced back to Queen Victoria's wedding in 1840, an event taking place just seven years before the publication of *Jane Eyre*. In a desire to make the spectacle public, the bridal couple and the wedding attendants were displayed as wax figures at Madame Tussaud's so that the people could retrospectively contemplate the bridal dress and veil (Felderer 4). This added a quite material and innovative aspect to more mundane practices such as the more conventional dissemination of wedding pictures. In 1847, the publication year of *Jane Eyre*, Queen Victoria commissioned the painting of a portrait of her wearing her wedding clothes. This heightened attention to wedding-related paraphernalia has had considerable consequences, as it was Queen Victoria's publicised bridal apparel that – despite representing a “conspicuous choice” (Neumann 27) at the time – would come to define standards of the Western-European wedding as well as shape ideals of feminine beauty and bridal attire (Keller-Drescher 45). Furthermore, the event was the first to be staged as “a spectacle centred on the bride” (Findlay 419). The royal bride's choice of white for her dress established the colour as the standard for any bridal gown (Harris Walsh 245), as well as making “lace, or lace over silk, and a lace veil with an orange-flower wreath [...] indispensable to a British wedding thereafter” (Hughes 170). Historicising the wedding dress, Clair Hughes aptly comments on “[w]hite [as] an absence, a blank sheet waiting to be filled” (72): close readings of bridal attire reveal that wedding gowns are invested with immense signifying potential, effectively operating in acts of self-fashioning (Keller-Drescher 47).

Arguably, this blank sheet is personified by the bride who captures most attention and nourishes collective expectations (see, for instance, Sobal, Bove, and Rauschenbach 113, 118 or Lewis 169). The bride's compelling look, in particular her dress, has come to symbolise the essence of what the bride's culture considers beautiful (Hughes 157), prompting Western cultures to readily engage in conspicuous consumption hyper-emphasising bridal appearance (Arend 145). Mostly, brides are associated with the beautiful, which according to Edmund Burke's conception connotes “smallness, smoothness, fragility or delicacy and light” (Covino 3) and which, according to Patricia Yaeger, can confine women to a specific and quite narrowly defined position. Typically, descriptions of the ideal wedding portrait resort

to the category of the beautiful: “There is no chaos in this world; like the arrangements within the images, theirs is a world of symmetry and balance. They are the beautiful people, carefree, and dashing” (Lewis 170). However, a paradox can be observed in this context:

the bride, on the one hand, is expected to look spectacular (i.e. conforming to the ideal of hetero-normative conventions of female beauty), but, on the other hand, must not make a spectacle of herself. Social conventions dictate that she must not violate what constitutes serenity, what is considered becoming and beautiful. The category of the beautiful might be put in relation with the Classical, sleek and closed body of white marble, rather than flesh and blood – it is not open, protruding or vast, it must not show any hints of internal bodily (abject) matter. (Leitner 24-25)

Caroline Magennis notes that “[t]he predominant version of the ideal body in the current Western tradition is one which divests itself of the excesses of female embodiment” (92), emphasising imaginary idea over palpable materiality. Conforming to notions of what is considered beautiful and bridal, this ideal “body is discrete and involves the containment of potential transgressions against order and the boundaries of the self” (Magennis 92). Arguably, the “Western white wedding aims to produce a clean, mannered and closed bridal body that docilely seeks to stay within the boundaries of identity, body and dress” (Leitner 25). Aptly, the referential background for the artist Helen D. S. Anderson’s series of black-and-white photographs featuring bridal figures (for an example see Fig. 1) is “the ubiquitous story, told over and over again, to young girls and women of their wedding day [...] a surreal story of perfection. Her day planned and executed to *exacting standards*” (Anderson 106, emphasis added).



Figure 1 *The waiting bride transfixed*

Arguably, these exacting standards are closely connected to the constant reaffirmation of cultural boundaries, an “almost military precision implied in wedding planning” (Currie 416), and the continual retelling and reiteration of narratives constructing the meaning of feminine beauty and bridal agency in Western cultures. Conforming to these standards also means repeatedly renewing the accomplishment of gender performativity (Arend 147). Quite pessimistically, Charles Lewis argues that “‘her [the bride’s] day’ is one where the “ideal” results in her own objectification and commodification” (183) and that “[s]he is the “beautiful bride” in the spotlight rather than the individual human being about to consummate an important relationship” (Lewis 183). What can be gathered from this glimpse into negotiations of the signifier ‘bride’ is that bridal femininity is constructed as “ideal, rather than individual, as white marble, rather than flesh and blood” (Leitner 25) – also, virtues of the idealised angelic woman originating in the eighteenth century will come to mind: “modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness” (Gilbert and Gubar 23) as well as the nineteenth century’s angel-woman’s “alienation from ordinary fleshly life” (Gilbert and Gubar 24) can thus be identified in contemporary depictions of the bridal body and identity, too.

Reflecting on the use of a tableau of wax figures as the medium to communicate Queen Victoria’s wedding, it might be argued that we “are obsessed with the somewhat static, confined and clean *image* of [bridal femininity], the cultural mediations of which produce its alleged coherence and containment” (Leitner 25) – this observation is in line with feminist criticisms concerning patriarchal expectations of women: “From her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that of *serving* an image [...] a woman is first and foremost a daughter/a mother/a wife” (Felman, *What* 21). Depicting the bridal Queen Victoria as a wax figure that arguably is “defined, reduced even, to the story of her wedding day” (Anderson 106) suggests that bridal identity is conventionally captured as static and transfixed in the ritual wedding process (Leitner 26). At this point we might legitimately ask: “Do we take [white weddings] for granted to such an extent that we don’t notice that they merit study?” (Ingraham 3)¹⁵.

¹⁵ It will be demonstrated that we indeed take the white wedding for granted and discursively produce it as common sense (Arend 144). As Clair Hughes has pervasively analysed, the less is said about a wedding in fiction, the better – unveiling and deconstructing the meaning-making system of the wedding lays bare its constituents that serve to control cultural boundaries.

As this thesis tries to connect Ingraham's question with (re-)negotiations of bridal madness in *Jane Eyre* and its derivatives, it is considered important to realise that bridal identity might also be read as becoming, *in statu nascendu*. Drawing on this notion of fluidity in readings of bridal identity might destabilise cultural narratives confining women to this narrowly defined bridal subject position. Applying the model of the mad bride in reading literary texts and adaptations, "ubiquitous stories" revolving around mad brides and thwarted weddings might be told *anew*. Metaphorically speaking, the subsequent chapters set out to 'lift the veil' of what in Figure 1 is covered up quite literally. In the course of this unveiling process, a model of identity shall be presented that in its practical application might add new impulses to a perceived 'breath of fresh Eyre' in Brontë criticism.

2.6. *Unveiled and becoming: Aspects of bridal femininity*

While romanticised notions of the Western-European white wedding have been outlined above, it is considered necessary to now turn the focus upon the spectacle's centrepiece, the bride, and to trace how the bridal subject is negotiated in academic and popular discourses. Pinpointing *instabilities* that complicate the signifier 'bride' shall help advance the model of the *mad bride* as a deviation from conventionally fixed identity structures that can fruitfully inform *Jane Eyre* criticism. Embracing ambiguity as an invaluable impetus, cultural instabilities will be identified in order to deconstruct supposedly fixed binary oppositions. The purpose of such an endeavour is twofold. Firstly, the signifier 'bride' shall be revealed to be inherently unstable. Secondly, additional aspects of interest such as the affective sublimity of the gory wedding dress, or the threatening prospect of the bride becoming monstrous shall be touched upon briefly.

A close look at discussions of fictional bridal characters reveals a curious paradox: interestingly, the apparently closed signifier 'bride' opens up an array of questions (Leitner 27-29), just as detailed accounts of extravagant bridal dresses and lavish weddings in fiction mostly prove to be followed by unhappy marriages (Hughes 157-185). These observations must seem puzzling, given that connotations of the term 'bride' are readily associated with a highly confining, fixed and stable role of femininity, as symbolised by the fixed image in Figure 1. Even though the bridal role has been deemed the most common for women (Young) with the "wedding ceremony itself using the bride as a focal object in a parental display of status" (Leshkovich

91)¹⁶, this section shall, metaphorically speaking, lift the veil and demonstrate step by step that the bridal subject cannot be captured that easily. Taking many, partly conflicting forms, the bride merits closer deconstructive scrutiny and must remain, in some aspects, elusive to the last. The observation that “[w]hen we are in roles that look the most obvious and given, we are actually in roles that are constructed, learned, and far from inevitable” (Willis 184) clearly applies to the bridal role. It is thus essential to crack open the kind of circular reasoning employed in conventional, ‘unmarked’ ways of thinking: heteronormativity and its operating mechanisms (including the white wedding and popularised portrayals of the bridal identity and body) assume an “a priori existence of sex, gender, and sexuality that induces particular forms of expression (signs) that are interpreted as evidence of a subject’s sex, gender, and sexuality (the signified)” (Kimport 876-877).

One way of tentatively disentangling normalising discourses on brides is to scrutinise the usage of the word ‘bride’ in relevant texts. Such a text is Clair Hughes’ analysis of how dress is employed in key literary texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, focussing on wedding dresses and their wearers in fiction. Closely reading Hughes’ remarks on the literary tradition of having female characters go mad in white satin, shows that the signifier ‘bride’ is used for describing a very wide array of femininities. As examples of the “curiously persistent stereotype that is rarely questioned” (Hughes 167), Hughes gives Dickens’ Miss Havisham and Shakespeare’s Ophelia, calling both of them thwarted brides (Hughes 167). Tracing a possible source of the Victorian representation of mad brides, she proposes Scott’s Lucy Ashton or Donizetti’s operatic Lucia (Hughes 168-169). This white-clad, blood-thirsty bride has proved to be extremely influential and representations of this figure established white satin as an indispensable sartorial element of these highly stylised mad scenes. Granted, Ophelia’s mad scene lacks textual evidence indicating her even wearing a white dress (Hughes 167). However, in the collective construction of her madness, the white garment came to be lastingly ingrained in the portrayal of the iconic character. According to Elaine Showalter, this stylisation can be traced back to the Elizabethan stage, where Ophelia was featured in white, subsequently shaping medial accounts of madness (Showalter 11). In addition to Ophelia and Lucy/Lucia,

¹⁶ Leshkowich originally refers to Bonnie Adrian’s analysis of Taiwan’s wedding industry – however, the quote bears relevance to a Western-European context insofar as Taiwanese bridal practices intentionally mirror Western cultures (Leshkowich 91).

Hughes gives “Bertha Mason Rochester, Wilkie Collins’s Anne Catherick, Miss Havisham – and countless others” (Hughes 169) as examples of mad *brides*.

The entry on ‘bride’ in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) reveals that the word denotes a wide range of marital statuses as well as being characterised by a pronounced fuzziness at the category’s boundaries: ‘bride’ thus may refer to “[a] woman at her marriage; a woman just about to be married or very recently married. The term is particularly applied on the day of marriage and during the ‘honeymoon’, but is frequently used from the proclamation of the banns, or other public announcement of the coming marriage” (OED “bride”).

The plurality of meanings provided in the OED is mirrored in Hughes’ discussion of fictional female characters, too. Ophelia and Miss Havisham are called thwarted brides and indeed are depicted as eternally frozen in an in-between state: in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Ophelia’s body is typically stylised as corpse-like, even when she is purportedly living (Jamison 261), while the withered Miss Havisham is famously stuck at twenty minutes to nine. Both are forever positioned in the culturally precarious, transitional phase between single and married life. Also Collins’ mysterious woman in white, Anne Catherick, never marries, while Bertha Mason Rochester infamously does – but both are included in Hughes’ analysis. That these fissures in meaning and ambiguities in bridal representations are far from trivial shall be illustrated by referring to the political realm:

In the parliamentary debate on Prince Leopold’s allowance, Mr. Gladstone, being criticized for speaking of the Princess Helen as the ‘bride’, said he believed that colloquially a lady when engaged was often called a ‘bride’. This was met with ‘Hear! hear!’ from some, and ‘No! no!’ from others. Probably ‘bride elect’ would have satisfied critics. (OED “bride”)

In the texts chosen for critical discussion, the concept of bride similarly indicates multivalence as well as potential unease. For a good part of *Jane Eyre*, talking about Rochester’s bride causes confusion, as Rochester tries to make Jane jealous by flirting with Blanche Ingram. This situation produces denotative incoherencies such as: “‘I shall be glad so to do, sir, if you, in your turn, will promise that I and Adele shall be both safe out of the house before your bride enters it.’ ‘Very well! very well! I’ll pledge my word on it.’” (Brontë 225). Rochester’s oath, as the informed reader will notice, is linguistically nonsensical, a violation of Grice’s maxim of quality, given that Jane, far from being safe out of the house, is to be the (thwarted) bride. The mystery as to who the signifier ‘bride’ actually refers to, culminates in this conversation: “‘My

bride! What bride? I have no bride!’ ‘But you will have.’ ‘Yes;—I will!—I will!’” (Brontë 253). As these snippets may illustrate, the bridal subject can be interpreted as highly elusive and somewhat fluid, as ontological boundaries are most difficult to sketch out – and arguably, it is this ambiguity that nourishes the plot of romance and female agency to a significant extent.

Ultimately, assuming the bridal identity proves highly ambiguous in Jane Eyre’s case, thus forming a key constituent of the romance plot: first of all, she feels unfit to condone Rochester’s practices of dressing her up, while later being a bride becomes a mere idea, a “visionary” concept, rather than a viable, ‘flesh and blood’ position she can actually assume. That the terrain of the bridal liminal state, bordered by girl- and womanhood, is slippery can be shown with this quote: “Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again” (Brontë 295): the positions of woman, girl and bride, supposedly forming specific roles in a continuum of femininity, are muddled up in upsetting ways. Alienated by the fashioning of herself as a bride, Jane tries to abnegate this identity: “I encountered the beads of a pearl necklace Mr. Rochester had forced me to accept a few days ago. I left that; it was not mine: it was the visionary bride’s who had melted in air” (Brontë 319-320), stressing the elusiveness of the concept.

In *Rebecca*, the romantic couple’s wedding ceremony is neither narrated, much less disrupted – however, the heroine’s identity as a bride is far from secure, as the text stresses repeatedly. Similar to Jane’s first attempt of getting married, the ceremony is reported to be unusually simple and rather informal: “‘Not in a church?’ I asked. ‘Not in white, with bridesmaids, and bells, and choir boys? What about your relations, and all your friends?’” (Du Maurier 55). Once married, Mrs. de Winter cannot fill out the role expected of her and thus conceals herself in unfitting, camouflaging clothes: “I can see myself now, unsuitably dressed as usual, although a bride of seven weeks, in a tan-coloured stockinette frock [...] and over all a shapeless mackintosh, far too big for me and dragging to my ankles” (Du Maurier 61). Also before settling in her new, intimidating, household as the mistress, the first-person-narrator does not identify herself as a bride but longingly contrasts her subject position with that of a ‘visionary bride’: “I wanted to be a traveller on the road, a bride in love with her husband. Not myself coming to Manderley for the first time, the wife of Maxim de Winter” (Du Maurier 62).

Throughout the novel, the second Mrs. de Winter is called a bride by various characters, which before the pivotal event, the fancy dress ball that functions as a mad scene, she disowns: “‘I’m not a bride,’ I said. ‘I did not even have a proper wedding. No white dress or orange blossom or trailing bridesmaids’” (Du Maurier 194). As will be argued, the fancy dress ball does feature her as a bride – albeit a ‘mad’ one that represents the conflation of what should remain separate. Also *Wide Sargasso Sea* troubles clear-cut identifications of Antoinette as a bride, thus heightening the identity crisis negotiated in the novel: while “[t]he tradition of the bride taking her husband’s family name in place of her father’s explicitly identifies her as the object of a patriarchal transaction in which surname performs the genitive function” (Walker 493), the renaming and un-naming of the bride seems to “deny rather than reinforce” (Walker 493) her marital status.

As these first glimpses into constructions of brides in *Jane Eyre* and its derivatives reveal, the concept is and has long been laden with cultural anxiety and ontological inconsistencies – which arguably lie at the heart of the Victorian novel and its reworkings. Also Clair Hughes’ discussion of brides going mad has left us with just as many questions as it can provide answers. The different narratives of the characters listed by Hughes, such as being “captured at their day of marriage, or in an in-between state due to the fact that a wedding will never take place, or years after a marriage, possible thwarting another one to take place” (Leitner 34) must be considered telling. They prove that the term ‘bride’ lends itself to deconstructive readings that can reveal the darker, more conflicting sides of beloved romance plots. In particular, employing the model of bridal madness can highlight notions of ambiguity and multivalence.

Inherently unstable, bridal identity remains elusive to the last. The bridal subject position is shady: even concerning the bride’s marital status, the meaning of the signifier ‘bride’ cannot be pinned down easily. This aspect of ambiguity arguably produces intense cultural anxiety in relation with concepts of gender, sexuality and the politics of reproduction. Engaging in a performative process when becoming a bride, aspects of bridal identity are consistently being reproduced so as to shape cultural fluidity into recognisable, socially approved forms: accordingly, capturing bridal beauty conventionally involves notions of “the eternally beautiful, inanimate *objet d’art* patriarchal aesthetics want a girl to be” (Gilbert and Gubar 40, emphasis in the original). A popular performative aspect of bridal identity is the idea of carrying

the female subject over the threshold, suggesting that transgressing a physical boundary somehow mirrors – and metaphorically stabilises – her true identity. Susanne Frieze meticulously sketched out the process in the course of which a new social status, that of being a wife, is assumed. Necessarily simplifying, her proposed structuralist model comprises three identifiable, consecutively staged phases a bride has to undergo in order to become a wife. In her account, structures remain conspicuously intact: the process of becoming begins with the entering of a bridal shop and ends on the wedding day, which is conceptualised as a climax (Frieze 56). However, close readings of discourses negotiating this process reveal a somewhat more blurred, even dark picture.

Taking a semiotic perspective, Vikki Bell reads the fluid bridal transformation, in particular the process and its signs, as invested with cultural anxieties and thus in need of close observation and control (466). Adding to this level of anxiety, a bride can be conceptualised as “[a] person who transgresses boundaries [and] is for some time in a peculiar situation in a place where boundaries meet, where different worlds come into contact” (Mzoughi 91). Analysing popular magazines’ counselling articles geared towards brides-to-be, Bell lays bare the regulatory mechanisms applied in the rituals of the hetero-normative white wedding and also discusses bridal educational literature’s “effective[ness] in teaching brides how to express their individuality within the white wedding format” (Arend 146).

Since the wedding represents a ritual “with particular cultural power that [conveys] messages about appropriate social roles” (Fairchild 364), the bride must transgress culturally produced boundaries in socially sanctioned ways. By all means, the process of becoming, the bride coming into existence as a wife, must be *becoming*, thus, befitting and proper. As the process of becoming (the twofold meaning of ‘becoming’ (OED “becoming”) must be borne in mind) is ambiguous, it needs to be tightly controlled and, by employing regulating mechanisms in the guise of well-meant advice, guided so as not to become abject or monstrous (Leitner 37-38). As Kimport argues, a “bridal consumption culture encourages women to aspire to be a “superbride,” one who consumes all the right magazines and advice columns to make her wedding day ideal” (878). Indeed, one cannot help but notice the parallels of popular bridal educational texts to conduct books on “[t]he arts of pleasing men” (Gilbert and Gubar 24) geared towards women of the eighteenth century, culminating in modern methods of beautification: processes of ““killing” of

oneself into an art object [and] trying *not* to become female monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 34, emphasis in the original) inform representations of bridal identity and corporeality, too.

According to Lévi-Strauss’ and Rubin’s alliance theory, a wedding symbolises a ceremony in which women are exchanged as goods (Heritier 121). In this ceremony “about the outward displays of circulation” (Bell 463-464), a hint of cultural confusion as to where boundaries are to be set would unsettle the formally staged exchange. Standards of what is considered beautiful dictate the spectacle: the bridal body and identity must be clearly separated from what constitutes ‘non-I’. It is at this point that Kristeva’s theory of the abject comes into play: the need to clearly separate the subject from its pre-Oedipal form, to safely construct boundaries of meaning and the self finds expression in a tightly regulated affair that is the white wedding. That this affair is far from unambiguous and that the processes involved are far from linear – also at the time in which *Jane Eyre* was published – is one of this paper’s basic premises. Brontë’s contemporaries’ heated debates of the ‘marriage question’ (Detmers 81) must be considered interdependent with notions of bridal destabilisation. Also, it is important to realise the legal implications of the ritualistic wedding ceremony of Brontë’s time that has significant consequences for *Jane Eyre*’s marriage plot: “As a contract, marriage does not depend on the ever-renewed public consent of the parties: the consent of the moment of the wedding ceremony is what gives the union its legal status” (Phillips 204). Once madness disrupts the script of the white wedding, nothing remains safe.

In the moment of the wedding ceremony, it is thus essential for the bridal subject to clearly affirm her identity as stable and to publicly present her body to be conforming to the cultural imperatives of what constitutes being contained and ‘becoming’. Fluidity of the identity and body would be considered a threat to cultural boundaries, a configuration of excess rather than decorum. Bridal excess in the context of this thesis combines what should be separate: in contrast to self-proclaimed stability as to what constitutes bridal identity, the process of becoming holds a distinct threat of ambiguity as well as the continuous deferral of meaning. What can lurk behind the white veil must be considered troublesome: semantically overdetermined, what comes in the form of bridal beauty can turn violent, what seems proper and restrained can become monstrous. A few examples shall exemplify this essential point.

According to Bell, anxiety caused by bridal becoming basically is connected to constructions of female desire (466). This motif can be traced in a wide variety of cultural contexts. In Moroccan and Ancient Indian cultures, bridal veils were considered a means of protection from the evil eye, one of the classic subversive symbols of femininity (Gilbert and Gubar 19). The only cure for the dangers emanating from the evil eye was believed to be the purifying act of the wedding ceremony (Ball and Torem-Craig 13). Similarly, ancient Roman cultures saw face coverings as essential in “prevent[ing] malevolent influences from harming the unwary groom” (Ball and Torem-Craig 13).

At this point the literary representation of Bertha Mason Rochester might come to one’s mind: “The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognised well that purple face,—those bloated features” (Brontë 293). In a moment that disrupts the diegesis, the mad bride’s hair¹⁷ functions as a veil that is lifted to reveal the evil eye and her true – abject – identity that is instantly recognised by Jane. Undoubtedly, the image of the abject, dangerous bride haunts us and keeps re-emerging in Western popular culture. A brief account of contemporary popular representations of bridal beauty turning monstrous and life-threatening shall demonstrate that popular bridal figures, too, transgress or blur semantic boundaries, in that the angel turns out to be really a monster, an “[e]mblem[...] of filthy materiality [...] possess[ing] unhealthy energies, powerful and dangerous arts” (Gilbert and Gubar 29).

A TV advertisement for Smirnoff stages the revelation of “[s]hocking reality seen through the clarity of the vodka bottle with a vampire bride” (robinbrowndesign.com/moving-image/smirnoff-wedding). Styling a wedding in a Russian folk design hall, the bride’s true nature (‘shocking reality’) is revealed to be that of a blood-thirsting vampire sucking the life out of her prey, the unwary groom. What appeared to be a lovely, restrained bride turns out to be shockingly treacherous: shedding light on what lurks behind the veil, the clarity induced by Vodka unveils what the bride has been hiding all along – despite her beautiful appearance (Fig. 2)! In other words, the outwardly contained (‘becoming’) bride really is becoming a monster.

¹⁷ The significance of hair in representations of mad brides will be discussed in section 4.2.



Figure 2 Unveiling the bride's true nature

Geared towards adolescents, the film adaptation of one instalment of the immensely popular *Twilight* saga, *Eclipse*, draws on the topos of bridal glory becoming gory, too. Avenging crimes inflicted on her by men wearing the coat of patriarchal respectability (she is beaten, gang-raped and left to die by her fiancé and his male friends), the new-born vampire Rosalie dons the wedding dress she never came to wear when she was alive. Before she goes to torture and kill her attackers, she reveals her red eyes, which are, in the context of the saga, characteristic of a new-born vampire thirsting for blood as well as a symbol of immense physical strength (Fig. 3). As the *Twilight* saga adaptations are part of the cultural mainstream, it is not surprising that in this text, even female rage in the form of bridal madness (as a vampire, Rosalie does transgress the boundary of life and death) is restrained: Rosalie is proud of the fact that she did not drink her molesters' blood. Still, the image of bridal beauty turning monstrous is haunting and disrupts the filmic diegesis in the form of a narratively unmotivated flashback.

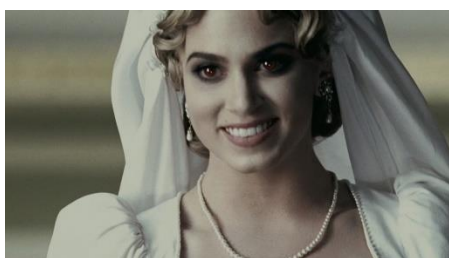


Figure 3 Bridal madness in the form of restrained revenge

Another bride on a killing spree, the protagonist of *Kill Bill*, is attributed the masculine symbol of a phallic sword (Fig. 4). Her boundary transgressions mainly concern bodily disfigurements troubling standards of the beautiful and becoming. Known as 'The Bride', the form of female rage embodied by her also includes aspects of gender trouble.



Figure 4 Attributes of bridal madness: Phallic sword and feminine veil

The popular BBC production “Sherlock” features two brides on a violent mission. The identity boundaries of each are blurred: while Mary Watson’s real name was, for a long time, not revealed in the series, the ‘abominable’ bride gone mad, Emelia Ricoletti (Fig. 5), functions as an avenging angel fighting for a feminist and violent cause, eventually causing gender trouble (the series’ male antagonist, Moriarty, finally appears in Ricoletti’s bridal garments in an unsettling vision disrupting the diegesis).

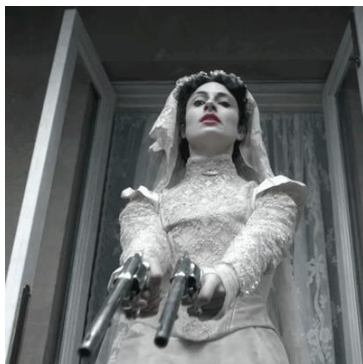


Figure 5 A bridal angel of death

Significantly, the female assassin Mary Watson does not actually appear in bridal garment when she shoots Sherlock (Fig. 6) – disrupting the narrative, this stylisation is imagined in retrospect, revealing a schism: Mary was not what she claimed to be, namely a radiant bride and devoted wife, but was hiding a secret that violently disrupts configurations of the feminine. In a moment of revelation (a visionary, trauma-induced mental state in which the protagonist is hovering between life and death), the shooting is reimagined within a sartorial frame befitting bridal madness.



Figure 6 Bridal identity evaporating

What the examples cited above demonstrate is troublesome: these deviant brides make a spectacle of themselves in that they trouble boundaries of different kinds. Entering ontological states of uncertainty, these bridal figures are straying, refusing to conform to what is considered becoming. Not taking advice on how to appear proper but positioning themselves on the actively demanding rather than the passively receiving end, they turn monstrous: we are confronted with treacherous, unpredictable and openly sexual vampires and murderers. We have been seduced and betrayed by them: they step out of the diegetic frame, flaunt our expectations and haunt us. And they have come a long way: the monstrosity of these popular bridal constructions can be traced back to Bertha Mason Rochester, the madwoman in the attic, endlessly hovering between the status of bride- and wifehood and returning in more than one strange after-life.

Lifting the bridal veil can reveal the female as gory, *thirsting* for blood, indeed invoking notions of the female castrator as described by Barbara Creed. Thus, the image of the bride becomes conflated with polyvalent and conflicting ascriptions connected to myths of maternity and castration (Creed 151). In this sense, these mad brides corrupt the popularised notion of women being castrated and symbolising a lack (Creed 152). An aspect closely associated with bridal propriety gone 'mad' is sexual notoriety, which is thrown into sharp relief in the context of a ceremony that is predominantly concerned with regulating sexuality and gender. In general, bridal madness involves a certain amount of fluidity in terms of identity and body. Thus introducing a counter-discourse to mainstream representations of contained brides, the model of bridal madness can be considered useful for deconstructive readings of *Jane Eyre* and selected reworkings.

2.7. Conceptualising bridal madness: A model of the mad bride

As has been stated in the introduction, this thesis is predominantly intended to practically apply a differentiated theoretical model for describing and analysing the mad bride's subject position as volatile. This volatility is strongly informed by a high degree of ambiguity in terms of identity and body, which exposes and threatens to blur cultural boundaries. In this chapter, the most important findings gathered so far shall be reviewed briefly so that the model of the mad bride can be delineated in a reasonably structured form.

An introductory question shall guide this endeavour: What exactly is it that unifies as outwardly diverse characters of widely divergent backgrounds as Bertha Mason Rochester, Ophelia, Miss Havisham, Lucy Ashton, Lady Audley, Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*, the *Bride of Frankenstein* and many others? Being negotiated as both mad and bridal assigns this particular construction of femininity to a liminal sphere in which neither marker of identity is secure: while madness as defined by Foucault constitutes a threshold at which reason is not yet entirely demarcated (Bitouh 171), the bridal subject is commonly understood as a liminal being (see, for instance, Köhne). Thus, when we are confronted with bridal madness, we are faced with notions of fluidity and frailty, corrupting what is perceived as the 'natural' order of things.

Taking a closer look at the Western white wedding, it can be argued that, similar to the signifiers 'bride' and 'mad', the wedding ceremony as a whole is fragile in its discursive representations. For instance, the white wedding is frequently portrayed in terms of linguistic and cultural anxiety. In his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin continuously describes the marriage vow "I do" to be posing the threat of infelicitous performativity (Sedgwick 3). Similarly, Vikki Bell defines the wedding, nowadays a fairly complex and highly stylised cultural script, as a "moment in which certain cultural awarenesses and identifications are crystallised and anxiously ritualised" (464). For an explanation of 'logical conflation', the confusion caused by semantic ambiguity is exemplified by resorting to the slippery bridal state in the representation of which "a motion is merged with or [sic] a causation with manner" (wikipedia.org/Conflation). The example sentence given is: "The bride floated towards her future" (wikipedia.org/Conflation), detailing that the bride could "[b]e married on a boat, airplane, or hot-air balloon, etc. [as] not all marriages occur in

a church [...] She could be gracefully walking the aisle towards matrimony” (wikipedia.org/Conflation). That the wedding script is adduced as an example of linguistic ambiguity is perhaps no mere coincidence but indicates some cultural anxiety.

Elizabeth Freeman points to the wedding’s not-necessarily verbal language that makes use of visual metonymy (34), forging new forms of connections which, however, are possibly fraught with incoherence and disparity (34-35). Ethnographic research on the wedding script has found that when bridal couples engage in ceremonies that are “inconsistent in many ways from the institutional guides for weddings” (Fairchild 376), they are confronted with multiple cultural and social dilemmas. Ideologically charged and seemingly stable notions of the white wedding can be revealed as contingent and *naturalised* categories by analysing paradoxes and gaps of meaning.

Because of such semantic gaps, working definitions of ‘mad’ and ‘bride’ have been considered necessary – in the following, the most important findings gathered so far shall be shortly summarised. In the context of this thesis, a ‘bride’ is to be broadly and anti-essentially understood as a liminal being whose identity, subject position and gender are continually questioned (Köhne 58). Furthermore, it can be suggested that the bride is being given a quasi-theatrical platform as well as the “means of extended self-display” (Freeman 31), and thus assumes a highly performative role. Due to this inherent aspect of performativity, categories of identity and gender are easily revealed to be in fact cultural constructions that need to be stabilised. Accordingly, the bride’s body and identity are commonly being subjected to regularising mechanisms and close scrutiny. Consequently, there is general consensus on the bride’s relative powerlessness. For instance, Catherine Driscoll postulates that “[t]he wedding is a carnival, but any transgression involved is, like the bride’s empowerment, strictly limited” (181). However, as suggested above, one aim of this paper is to carefully deconstruct common representations of the bridal subject and in the process identify possibilities of bridal empowerment via ‘madness’.

Madness in the context of this paper is broadly understood as an epistemological problem, rather than personal, pathological insanity¹⁸, and it is

¹⁸ Madness has been defined as a cultural phenomenon, based on differences in norms and values (Tennholt 4). Foucault’s conceptualisation of madness as a figuration of boundary, a “[...] realm in which the man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart, are not yet disjunct” (Foucault x),

proposed that bridal madness typically involves the transgression of cultural boundaries which can be described via a dialectic model of dichotomies. In more specific terms,

[t]he mad bride's 'madness' shall thus be defined as (1) the transgression or dilution of boundaries within dichotomies, (2) the embodiment of *both* polarities A *and* B forming a given binary pair, or (3) the subversion of conventionally established hierarchies within binary oppositions A/B (organic/inorganic, subject/object, animate/inanimate, human/animal, young/old etc.) in a non-compliant way. (Leitner 49)

A further assumption is that these semantic over-determinations and transgressive combinations represent a kind of cultural excess¹⁹ and manifest in the form of abject²⁰ materiality (for instance, a blood-splattered or otherwise dirtied wedding dress or a deformed bodily appearance). In the culturally critical moment of transit, bridal madness typically is materialised in abject terms, which, in the context of this paper, is viewed as not entirely trans-historical, but determined to a certain extent by the dominant social order of a socio-historical context and its material and epistemic practices. As cultural representations of bridal madness typically materialise, they can be said to both express and shape collective norms and ideals. Focussing on these material practices, historically grounded shifts of meaning shall be identified, assessed and contextualised. Put more simply: assuming that via closely reading and analysing *Jane Eyre* we can understand essential aspects of the representation of mad brides, it should be rewarding to ask which aspects of bridal madness are retained in the novel's reworkings. Bridal madness shall not be celebrated offhandedly as a "byword for emotional liberation" (Robertson x, qtd. in Hughes 168) too soon: rather, each cultural artefact should be understood on two levels. On the one hand, representations of bridal madness represent a product of its time and the prevalent ideological position. On the other hand, literary constructions of mad brides are positioned in a process informing subsequent reworkings and (re-)negotiations, as will be shown in analyses of *Jane Eyre* and selected derivatives.

supports such a reading. Furthermore, representations of madness have been shown to typically involve aspects of performativity and theatricality (Showalter 149). Thus, the signifiers 'bride' and 'mad' can be interpreted as culturally contingent, naturalised constructions.

¹⁹ This definition of excess is consistent with interpretations of *Jane Eyre* derivatives: Arizti describes Antoinette's excessive ascriptions as being of "oxymoronic nature, which exceeds the either/or logic of binary oppositions" (44).

²⁰ The term 'abject' is used in the Kristevan sense.

In a next dialectical step, it shall be argued that materialisations of bridal madness take place beyond established designations, in what can be characterised as ‘Third Spaces’²¹ in the sense postulated by Homi Bhabha: these are places of enunciation that unsettle stable symmetric alignments of binary subjects and polarised objects (Bhabha, *Poetics*). This spatial metaphor helps to account for Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, whose employment shall serve two purposes: on the one hand, the abject provides the methodological lens to read the subject as fragile and prone to crisis (see section 2.3). As the subject is permanently confronted with the inherently ambiguous abject (the abject is neither subject nor object), its boundaries (drawn for reasons of self-preservation) are at constant risk. On the other hand, via the abject, natural bodily processes (excretions and decay) can be read as productively disrupting culturally prescribed notions of the female, bridal body. Both questions of identity and body can be addressed by interpreting abject materialisations of bridal madness that arguably are negotiated in a Third Space.

Struve (124-128) sheds light on three aspects of Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, all of which are relevant to a discussion of mad brides²²: the fluid process of meaning-making that deconstructs any notions of stability and essence, the impossibility of a ‘truthful’ reproduction of power relations, and the constitution of new forms of solidarity, agency and articulation. At this point a reference to *Jane Eyre* seems apt: due to the novel’s “gaps, rifts or collisions” (Schaff 35), its richness and ambiguity is situated (and enjoyed) in a Barthesian “sensual in-between space between the fixed and the flexible” (Schaff 35), thus giving life to its derivatives as well as to (re-)negotiations of bridal madness. As the novelist D.M. Thomas remarks in *Charlotte*, another rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, “every age finds its own attic-room for its unique madness” (Thomas, *Charlotte*, qtd in Thomas, *Pathologies* 101). Exploring these attic-rooms, these in-between ‘third’ spaces should reveal aspects informing culturally unique representations of madness.

The application of the model outlined above thus lends itself to a close reading of *Jane Eyre*, a novel famous for its “provocatively unresolved discrepancies” (Schaff 34), featuring a “liminal figure [...] negotiating a series of positions between different

²¹ The fact that Bertha Mason Rochester is held captive on the *third* floor should perhaps not be dismissed as a mere coincidence.

²² The concept of the Third Space has been applied to a reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and its negotiations of identity by Guragain.

class-, race-, and gender-related imperatives” (Schaff 34). Apart from adding to literary criticism, expected results of the model being practically applied are relevant for English studies and cultural studies in a broader sense, too. On the one hand, practical analysis will apply insights gathered in studies of aberrant femininities to a very specific topic, thus, it will put well-known theories and concepts to the test by applying them to a phenomenon that has been critically shunned. On the other hand, surely, a thorough analysis of the academically neglected figure of the mad bride is called for by the pervasiveness and cultural significance of this “curiously persistent stereotype” (Hughes 167), which in recent years has once again gained particular prominence. The next two sections set out to thoroughly analyse representations of bridal madness in selected reworkings of *Jane Eyre*, thereby tackling hegemonic, repressive and essentialist discourses on the bridal body, subject and agency.

3. *Rebecca* – Elle revient

“Do you think the dead come back and watch the living?” (Du Maurier 172)

Fulfilling the prophecy expressed in her boat's name “Je Reviens” (“I come back”), Rebecca, the so very promising bride, indeed comes back after her death and haunts Manderley, thus foreshadowing the revenant Jean Rhys envisioned when writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As shall be demonstrated below, Rebecca also brings back aspects of iconic bridal madness, as Bertha Mason Rochester's legacy is appropriated for the early 20th century's interwar years. Rebecca's uncanny powers that are believed to be exercised even after her death merit detailed study. Lifting the veil in close analysis will reveal that the dialectic complex of dread and fascination that is so characteristic of Rebecca stems from polyvalence and ambiguity and provides an enticing example of bridal madness.

Before an analysis of Rebecca as a reincarnation of the mad bride in the tradition of Bertha Mason Rochester shall ensue, it seems important to stress once again that the representations and constructions of this version of femininity are to be regarded as aspects of a cultural artefact. By no means must the following interpretative comments be understood as a moralistic comment. The close reading will draw on the insight that “body and sexuality are not fixed and pre-given biological entities but [...] come into being as a result of a process of discursive production” (Papp 124). Furthermore, the fact that the literary technique of having an unreliable narrator recount the story (Llompарт Pons 70) is employed in this retelling of *Jane Eyre* must be borne in mind when setting out to analyse the portrayal of Rebecca's identity and body. As there might be something to the assertion that Rebecca's worst crime is to have “resisted male definition, asserting her right to define herself and her sexual desires” (Wood 232, qtd. in Nigro 145), it seems all the more worthwhile to dwell on the particularities of her refusal to comply to defining and confining boundaries as well as to reflect on her punishment, which can be considered to be “culturally inflected: conditioned by the codes of acceptable behaviour in terms of gender and culture” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 93).

What is it specifically, that makes Rebecca, the so very promising bride, ‘mad’ and how can the representation of Rebecca's madness enrich readings of *Jane Eyre*? To be sure, she is marked ‘other’ by her “promiscuous, rebellious, adulterous,

and possibly lesbian or bisexual” (Llompart Pons 73) traits which are summarised by Maxim in the line: “She was not even normal” (Du Maurier 271). The following analysis is based on the model of bridal madness focussing on the dread and fascination embodied by Rebecca, in particular “her transgressions of the categories of [...] gender and sexuality” (Harbord 102). Furthermore, the ensuing close reading will draw on Kristeva’s theory of the abject, which need not be considered entirely trans-historic. Assuming that Rebecca is a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, “the passions embodied in both novels in the first mad or promiscuous and dead²³ wife, the heroine’s alter ego, the repressed of each period” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 90) shall be explored and put under critical scrutiny. According to secondary literature, the period in question, the first half of the 20th century, is one fraught with insecurities concerning power relations and aspects of gender that are constantly being renegotiated in the interwar years: “the changing expectations and aspirations of the period, with increasing access to work, leisure and birth control transforming women’s life” (Verdon 88) arguably created a climate of cultural anxiety that finds its expression in this retelling of *Jane Eyre*.

3.1. *Rebecca as (m)other*

Significantly, Rebecca is meant to be pregnant in the final phase of her life. Taunting Maxim, Rebecca hints at her alleged pregnancy and suggests that the child is not his. In Kristeva’s theory of the abject, cultural representations of the maternal body draw on notions of ambivalence as well as the dilution of boundaries: spectacularly growing and leaking, the maternal body gives birth, afterbirth and lactates. Borders are further violated in that the pregnant body hosts an ‘other’ inside, which causes phallogentric discourses to depict the mother as truly Other (Magennis 92-93, Tatum, *Explaining* 12). Kristeva uses ambiguous language to account for maternal corporeality, referencing “the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body” (Kristeva 54). In her self-fashioning as a pregnant woman, Rebecca accordingly unifies ambiguous (masculine and feminine, rascal and angelic) traits, marking her ‘mad’: in her self-

²³ Both novels differ, however, in one crucial aspect: while for the most part of *Jane Eyre*, the first wife is still alive, Rebecca is dead from the beginning of the novel and functions as the heroine’s alter ego beyond the grave.

fashioning as a mother-to-be, “[s]he looked like a boy²⁴ in her sailing kit, a boy with a face like a Botticelli angel” (Du Maurier 278). This description profoundly conflates notions of gender as well as age, corrupting the qualities of the ideal bride, which largely coincide with “the three things that matter in a wife [namely] breeding, brains, and beauty” (Du Maurier 272). The “border between the sexes, a separation between feminine and masculine as foundation for the organization that is “clean and proper,” “individual,” and, [...] subject to law and morality” (Kristeva 100) is effectively blurred.

Interestingly, Rebecca is finally found not to have been pregnant at all, but to have suffered from uterine cancer. Again resorting to Kristevan terminology, cancerous growths and pregnancy can be interpreted to be sharing abject qualities that make both bodily states particularly horrifying. Given as examples of the abject within the body, these bodily growths threaten to blur the line between inside and outside the body and thus violate the image of the body as clean and closed (Kristeva 53) – the image furthermore recalls literary representations of female deformations “below the waist” (Gilbert and Gubar 30) that are hidden beneath particularly beautiful surfaces.

Rebecca’s unruliness and lack of chastity is believed to have become inscribed in her body, recalling the threat of the bride becoming monstrous, which might be revealed once the veil is lifted: her lover Favell, a social abject himself, asks after the revelation of Rebecca’s illness: “This cancer business,’ he said; ‘does anybody know if it’s contagious?” (Du Maurier 369). As we will see below, Rebecca’s composite, thus abject, identity traits do spread contagiously beyond her own bounds, mostly via her sexuality. Arguably, this excessive, ‘mad’ position is distilled from cultural concerns of the interwar years: the period was informed by discussions of phenomena such as “declining birthrate, nationalism, pro-natalism, and modern degeneration anxieties” (Bashford 170) as well as “reproductive and bodily rights, feminism, and birth control” (Bashford 171). That procreation and its inscription in the female body is of primary concern is also exemplified in the controlling gaze to which Mrs. de Winter’s bridal body is subjected when returning a visitor’s call, one of a bride’s social obligations: “I saw her eye too, dubious, considering, taking in my

²⁴ The merging of the two Mrs. de Winter also finds its expression in the portrayal of the grown woman as a boy: also the narrator compares her own appearance – in a moment of (gender) confusion (Hallett 41) – with that of a boy: “[My nails] were scrubby, like a schoolboy’s nails” (Du Maurier 148).

clothes from top to toe, wondering, with that swift downward glance given to all brides, if I was going to have a baby" (Du Maurier 125).

What Rebecca, ill with cancer, symbolises in her final confrontation with Maxim is not less disconcerting than the perversion of a marriage's first and foremost function, the defilement of the socially sanctioned continuation of a family line. Rebecca provokes Maxim to believe that she is carrying an illegitimate child, whereby she would disrupt the matrimonial system from within and indeed disturb "identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). Furthermore, illegitimacy breaks the explicit economic contract of their marriage in that it "threatens to taint the blood-line of the de Winters" (Kim 27) by circumventing the law of entailment (Kim 33). In this design, Rebecca is rendered abject, too. Traitorously, she deceives everyone around her: portrayed in Maxim's tale as abject, thus truly "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (Kristeva 4), Rebecca knows well how to outwardly impersonate a radiating bride and loving wife and to mask terminal illness as pregnancy – we are reminded of the literary tradition of "other women [who] can create false appearances to hide their vile natures, [and thus] are even more dangerous" (Gilbert and Gubar 30). This act of deliberate duplicity is described in terms suggesting filth and abjection: "I've kept my part of our *dirty*, damnable bargain, haven't I? But you've cheated. You think you can treat my house and my home like your own *sink* in London" (Du Maurier 278, emphasis added). Clearly, Rebecca's surroundings are closely associated with both physical and moral corruptness and strongly suggest substance abuse, a subject of concern in the interwar years (Grey 194).

What is at stake here concerns once more the blurring of boundaries, in this case boundaries the married couple have agreed on so as to live up to what decorum dictates: while Rebecca's apartment in London may be abjected, Manderley must by all means stay unblemished, so that the boundary separating self and other remains secure. Significantly, the bias inherent in binary oppositions is again reversed insofar as the comfortable and homely (Manderley as a patriarchal symbol of house and home) acts as the very source of everything abject and gets conflated with Rebecca's 'sink'. Symbolising the English, proper way of life (Frank 239), Manderley acts as a desired haven, recognisable by "its glamor, which must be maintained; its rituals, which must be obeyed; and its honor, which must be preserved at all costs" (Frank 240). The symbol of Manderley reflects deep-rooted desires and contemporary anxieties: it stands "solidly for aristocratic virtue, the caring practices which spring

from paternalism, continuity, fruitfulness” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 88). What is more, Manderley in the socio-cultural context of its time epitomises “every girl’s fondest desire (and duty): marital bliss amidst servants, visitors, balls and vast beauty in ornament and decor” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 88). However, in interwar Britain, aristocratic powers in terms of politics were growing thin in reality, while their influence in the cultural and social domains was still visible (Berthezène 74) – arguably, the frailty of the aristocracy provided all the more reason for not allowing its visible practices to become corrupted and defiled.

The domestic sphere of Manderley, representing the patriarchal system at large as well as “all the English values of propriety, honesty, inherited wealth, paternalism” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 88) must be kept unblemished at all costs. Accordingly, the prospect of metaphorically (and literally) dirtying the estate poses a great threat that is frequently imagined in graphic terms: “She knew I would never stand in a divorce court and give her away, have fingers pointing at us, *mud* flung at us in the newspapers” (Du Maurier 273, emphasis added). Just as the performative process of becoming a bride must be closely controlled, the novel features “a constant preoccupation about [the] *perpetuation* [of the patriarchal system]” (Llompart Pons 75, emphasis in the original). However, via ‘madness’ Rebecca threatens to disrupt the “rigidity of traditional patriarchal rules regarding the socially imposed boundary between femininity and masculinity” (Llompart Pons 80-81) that is represented by Manderley. Ultimately, the system has failed: cultural boundaries have been muddled and there will be “no inheritance of wealth and the maintenance of family strengths and values” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 94). What goes on in one’s home is graphically portrayed as a far cry from “trivial, domestic matters outside history and beyond politics” (Giles 42) – terror indeed starts at home.

Maxim’s strict adherence to delineating boundaries that define patriarchal norms of sexuality and cleanliness culminates in, what Petersen has termed “domestic horror of confinement” (57). What Maxim fears is a collapse of supposedly secure boundaries within one’s home. When the familiar home uncannily turns against its inhabitants, chaos and madness might ensue and come (back) in the form of Rebecca’s body and identity. Ultimately, Manderley, a supposedly safe haven where patriarchal values seem intact, uncannily turns into Rebecca (Petersen 58) – the notion of Manderley being a living organism is foreshadowed in the opening dream sequence: “the house was not an empty shell but lived and breathed as it had

lived before” (Du Maurier 3). Like Bertha Mason Rochester, the madwoman in the attic, who represents the subconscious level of Thornfield Hall, Rebecca is ever lurking in the shadows of Manderley: her spirit can be perceived in the smell of its flowers, style and the sound of the sea. Once the mad bride has entered her new home, her ambiguous, transgressive identity and body continuously inform her surroundings, effectively subverting them.

3.2. Angel or monster? Rebecca’s multiple transgressions

Maxim’s representation of Rebecca’s behaviour essentially juxtaposes the lovely and angelic with the defiled and monstrous:

[Rebecca] walked about with a smile like an angel on her face, her arm through mine, giving prizes afterwards to a little troop of children; and then the day afterwards she would be up at dawn driving to London, *streaking* to that flat of hers by the river like an *animal* to its hole in the ditch, coming back here at the end of the week, after five *unspeakable* days. (Du Maurier 274, emphasis added)

Her conduct unspeakable, like the unspeakable abject which cannot be named (Kristeva 1), Rebecca “strays on the territories of *animal*” (Kristeva 12, emphasis in the original), and thus conflates what should be kept separate. Outwardly life-giving, angelic and feminine, Rebecca rewards children and metaphorically nurtures life, while as a mad bride, her becoming-monstrous is tangible in her animal-like ways.

Like “death infecting life” (Kristeva 4), Rebecca’s conflation of the human and the animal (indicated in the quote above) spreads contagiously onto her most intimate male connections. After murdering Rebecca, having to deal with her corpse and her excessively leaking corporeality, Maxim is depicted in animal-like ways, too: “Up and down, up and down in the library. I heard him. I watched him too, through the keyhole, more than once. Backwards and forwards, *like an animal* in a cage.” (Du Maurier 244, emphasis added). Also Rebecca’s lover Favell embodies animalistic traits and is described in particularly repelling terms, emphasising bodily detail in graphic ways: “Favell drank it greedily, *like an animal*. There was something sensual and horrible the way he put his mouth to the glass. His lips folded upon the glass in a peculiar way. There was a dark red patch on his jaw where Maxim had hit him” (Du Maurier 335, emphasis added).

In both quotes provided above, men are put under scrutiny by women: Mrs. Danvers is gazing at Maxim, Mrs. de Winter at Favell. Both men are feminised as

objects; their animal-like state is described in great detail. Scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, is strongly connected to power relations – typically, women are objectified by the powerful male gaze (Mulvey 395). Du Maurier's reversal of gender roles, whereby phallic authority is wielded by female spectators, is important for the representation of mad bride Rebecca, as traits of different, indeed antagonistic, personae bleed into each other, thus creating an uncanny atmosphere by means of excess.

Reflecting contemporary cultural anxieties via the representation of a mad bride, the novel captures the insecure and critical state of patriarchal masculinity's ideal, "which was increasingly under threat at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Llompart Pons 76). Attempting to sketch out what is at stake here, namely hegemonic masculinity, a set of oppositions as proposed by Michael Kane shall be quoted for purposes of illustration: "good, light, unity, male, limit, mind, spirit, culture, high, 'fit' versus "bad, darkness, plurality, female, unlimited, body, matter, nature, low, 'degenerate'" (Kane 11). Rebecca, as the personification of the latter notions, which bear a close proximity to the abject and the grotesque, poses a serious threat to everything Maxim and Manderley stand for. Endowed with subversive knowledge, however, monstrous Rebecca knows how to act competently within the system, making everyone believe she, the radiant bride, is in fact nurturing Manderley. Accepting that "Rebecca has won" (Du Maurier 265) in her death, Maxim indeed is increasingly portrayed as unmanly, effeminate, and treated like a child by the narrator, who all of a sudden becomes older and mature (Llompart Pons 77) – this twist of characterisation is paralleled by Mr. Rochester's metaphorical castration and Jane's subsequent empowerment.

Maxim's feminisation is of particular significance as he originally symbolises the ongoing creation of a "clearly oppositional, binary structure for the masculine and the feminine" (Papp 121). While femininity is described as deceitful in Maxim's language (Papp 122), masculinity ought to be represented as clearly separated from everything deemed feminine. As Papp asserts, Maxim desires to sketch the following contrast in a clear-cut manner: "simple and straightforward masculinity that has a primal relation to meaning, truth(fulness) and authenticity, and a grotesque, abnormal, deceptive, morally inferior femininity, alien and threatening for its capability of distorting, manipulating and misrepresenting (intended) meaning and truth" (122).

However, Rebecca holds a firm place within Manderley's system (even in death), while simultaneously unifying what should be separate – she thus represents that “femininity as real otherness [...] is uncanny in that it is not the opposite of masculinity, but *that which subverts the very opposition of masculinity and femininity*” (Felman, *Rereading* 42, emphasis in the original). A true liminal figure, she frequently reverts to those poles within binary structures that hegemonic constructions deny her and thus embodies traits of deceptiveness which came to indicate “greater, social decay” (Wisker, *Dangerous* 85) between the wars.

Rebecca, the deceitful female who undermines patriarchal binaries in painful ways, is acting like a “friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 4) in another respect, too. In Kristeva's concept of the composite two opposite notions are terrifyingly combined in ways that grip their beholders and suggest treachery, namely the interference of death with what supposedly saves one from death (Kristeva 4), or the violent emergence of dirt in what is supposed to be innocent and clean. In analogy to conceptions of the liberal humanist identity, the abject must be seen as lacking authenticity and consistent morality (Lechte 160). Acting as an (Botticelli) angel of death rather than the angel in the house, Rebecca is by the large majority believed to be not only a loving wife but to also bear the promise of procreation. Her outward appearance as a woman giving life is stressed by her consulting physician: “Outwardly of course she was a perfectly healthy woman,’ he said” (Du Maurier 367). Also Manderley is said to have profited immensely from Rebecca's presence, who was metaphorically endowing the estate with life: “The beauty of Manderley that you see today, the Manderley that people talk about and photograph and paint, it's all due to her, to Rebecca” (Du Maurier 274-275).

The frequent allusion to Rebecca as an angel is significant in itself: as Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out, “the monster may not only be concealed *behind* the angel, she may actually turn out to reside *within* (or in the lower half of) the angel” (29, emphasis in the original). Rebecca's subversive powers of course largely stem from her sexuality, which, tellingly, is revealed to be deadly rather than life-giving. As Bernhard Frank argues, cultural anxieties of the time are translated onto Rebecca's infertile body, which may symbolise the downfall of the British Empire in terms of power relations, gender and class: “In the subtext, it is most fitting that Rebecca should be unable to have children and be dying of uterine cancer – an empire without a future, rotted from within” (Frank 240), which matches Maxim's description of

Rebecca as in fact “vicious, damnable, rotten through and through” (Du Maurier 271). Also in this respect, Rebecca’s overabundance of ontological meaning materialises in the form of abject corporeality – in Kristeva’s terminology, foulness in its conflation of life and death is utterly ambiguous: “in foulness, an abundance of life is rotting from within” (Berressem 44).

As it all too painfully turns out, Rebecca does not warrant life, but death. Apart from being terminally ill, Rebecca is revealed to be infertile: “The X-rays showed a certain malformation of the uterus, I remember, which meant she could never have had a child” (Du Maurier 367). As Barbara Creed has pointed out, the portrayal of women as monstrous generally references their maternal and reproductive functions (151) – hysteria, the ‘female malady’, and other mental illnesses were thought to be caused by a woman’s reproductive system (Gilbert and Gubar 53). Rebecca’s treacherous self-fashioning as a woman with intact maternal powers – who is prepared to use these powers against Manderley estate by producing an illegitimate heir – makes her subsequently revealed bodily status abject, productively marks her body ‘mad’ and indicates her loose morals. Monstrous and murderous, she haunts Manderley and those living there beyond the grave: Maxim is convinced that Rebecca has manipulated him into killing her, which brings him near a fatal verdict (“I remembered her eyes as she looked at me before she died. I remembered that slow treacherous smile. She knew this would happen even then. She knew she would win in the end” (Du Maurier 265)). Exercising her deathly claim as mistress over Manderley even in and after her death, Rebecca nearly brings death to Maxim as her murderer who is almost convicted of his crime. She effectively causes the downfall of Manderley and drives the de Winters into permanent exile, where England becomes an empty husk, a dead signifier drained of its blood and stripped of its flesh.

3.3. *Out of bounds: Rebecca breaching boundaries*

What ultimately makes Rebecca unbearably abject in Maxim’s eyes is her lack in self-containment. Both her verbal and bodily (sexual) incontinence leads towards her violent death. Her loose mouth and use of foul language is climaxed by laughing extensively at the brink of death: “She began to laugh. She went on laughing. I thought she would never stop” (Du Maurier 279). In this respect, she mimics Bertha, “a hatred that smiles” (Kristeva 4), and foreshadows her corporeal state as an excessively leaking female body: “‘I’d forgotten,’ said Maxim, [...], ‘that when you shot

a person there was so much blood” (Du Maurier 280). That the innermost materiality of the female body will not stay within its bounds but leaks out, adds to Rebecca’s excessive monstrosity: “Even by the fireplace, where she had not been, there was a stain” (Du Maurier 280). Rebecca’s “uncontainable femininity” (Papp 123), as materialised in her abject, leaking, grotesque corporeality must be done away with. Everything that has been contaminated by her leaking body must be cleansed so as not to breach the boundaries of decorum, keep the blood-line untainted²⁵ as well as to cover up a capital crime. Thus, the imagery of cleansing water references Maxim’s desire to “sustain the fantasy of Manderley” (Kim 28).

Uncontainable, excessive and insatiable in her sexuality, Rebecca is portrayed as vampire-like and dangerous in Maxim’s comments: “I could never be certain what might happen. There had been Frank, and Giles. She might get hold of one of the workmen on the estate, someone from Kerrith, anyone ...” (Du Maurier 276). Acting like an active predator who does not patiently *receive*, as would be considered aptly feminine and traditionally bridal, but *takes hold* of her male prey, Rebecca displays her animalistic, vampiric, ‘mad’ side that cannot be controlled nor constrained. Acting aggressively in her sexuality, she inverts notions of sexual agency coded as gendered and, as Nungesser argues, surpasses Bertha’s “animal-like physicality and uncontrollable madness” (211) in her nymphomania. One of her victims is Frank, who is frequently described as innocent and lacking (sexual) knowledge. Constructed as feminine and virginal, he is metaphorically deflowered and devoured by aggressive Rebecca: “Then she started on Frank, poor shy faithful Frank” (Du Maurier 275). Arguably, excessive Rebecca epitomises the interwar years’ “anxieties about the ‘modern woman’ and sexual morality” (Grey 194) that played a part in official discourses such as “civil and criminal trials after the First World War” (Grey 194) and threatened contemporary idealising portrayals of femininity in terms of nurturing, angelic constancy and cleanliness in character (Grey 188, 195).

Lacking restraint, Rebecca is described as incessantly taking and pronouncedly active: “Rebecca slashing at her horse; Rebecca seizing life with her two hands” (Du Maurier 272). Rebecca’s sportiness is in line with interwar portrayals of the ‘new

²⁵ The threat of the blood-line and a family name becoming desecrated via bridal madness, in particular via imagery of filth, is referenced in *Jane Eyre*, too: Rochester decides to confine his bride to the attic because she has “sullied [his] name” (Brontë 308) as well as “mingled [his] name with such a tone of demon-hate” (Brontë 308).

modern' woman, a "symbol of youth and freedom" (Skillen 181), with sport playing an active role, thus "challeng[ing] traditional ideals of femininity" (Skillen 181) and epitomising women's growing independence (Snape and Pussard 2). Similar to Antoinette, Rebecca's eyes are given as an indication that her femininity has grown out of bounds: "There was something about her eyes ..." (Du Maurier 272), referencing her vampiric sexuality that takes rather than gives life. Rebecca's status as living as well as dead is suggested in a variety of similes: "[Rebecca] stepping from her shadow world like a living figure from a picture frame" (Du Maurier 272), "She was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. [...] How alive was her writing though, how full of force" (Du Maurier 57), "She's still mistress here, even if she is dead" (Du Maurier 246). This ambiguous force is so strong that Rebecca's death is frequently questioned as a fact or all the more emphasised, as if to forcibly establish it as the truth: "'Rebecca is dead,' I said. 'That's what we've got to remember. Rebecca is dead'" (Du Maurier 282), "Rebecca was dead. Rebecca could not hurt us" (Du Maurier 374). These reiterations echo the mentally impaired Ben's²⁶ repeatedly uttered assertions that "[Rebecca] won't come back no more" (Du Maurier 113), a kind of wishful thinking that is juxtaposed with Rebecca's boat name 'Je reviens'. Rebecca's fluidity of subject positions, her refusal to stay within culturally assigned realms (i.e. of death, of femininity) has wide-reaching repercussions on the level of characterisation that can be interpreted as manifestations of cultural anxiety.

Bowing to the imperative of cleanliness, Maxim is further feminised by his sanitising gesture and his submissive body language when he is cleaning up the site of Rebecca's murder: "I knelt there on the floor with that dishcloth, and the bucket beside me" (Du Maurier 280). Unbearably close to unruly Rebecca's leaking corporeality, Maxim's identity nearly conflates with hers via his actions: "The floor was wet with the salt water. She might have done it herself" (Du Maurier 281). In this unspeakable proximity to Rebecca's (literal) fluidity, Maxim finally comes to think of himself as mad: "Perhaps I was [mad]. Perhaps I am. It doesn't make for sanity, does it, living with the devil" (Du Maurier 272-273), thus echoing Mr. Rochester's speech in the attic and referencing notions of feminine contagiousness via bridal madness.

Rebecca's presence knows no bounds and is finally, after her death, even felt in the landscape surrounding Manderley. As Petersen has convincingly analysed, in the

²⁶ The character Ben is discussed in more detail below.

famous opening dream sequence the landscape is anthropomorphised and personified as a destructive witch. More specifically, nature is presented as deviant, metaphorically referencing “unnatural human sexuality” (Petersen 56). Supplying dense imagery, the passages in particular make use of language suggesting reproductive bonds as well as erotic violence:

The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a *strange embrace* [...], [t]he rhododendrons stood fifty feet high, twisted and entwined with bracken, and they had entered into *alien marriage* with a host of *nameless* shrubs, poor *bastard* things [...] conscious of their *spurious* origin. A lilac had *mated* with a copper beech, and to bind them yet more closely to one another the malevolent ivy, always an enemy to grace, had thrown her tendrils about the *pair* and made them prisoners. (Du Maurier 1-3, emphasis added)

While plants are deemed monstrously gigantic, seemingly have a life of their own and recall language used to describe illegitimate children (‘nameless’, ‘bastard’, ‘spurious’), (sexual) unions are termed ‘strange’ and ‘alien’. On this metaphorical level of the grotesque landscape, anxieties concerning marital bonds and reproductive relationships are expressed in a conspicuous manner. In particular, the threat posed by aberrant sexualities, “illegitimacy and disruption onto “the perfect symmetry” of the house” (Kim 20) as well as the complex triangle of desire (Rebecca-Maxim-narrator) are foreshadowed. Arguably, the novel’s construction of sexual desire predominantly feeds on reframing boundaries between life and death – a conflation that is mirrored in the disturbing imagery of the landscape.

3.4. Rebecca as a corpse bride

Rebecca’s literary construction as a corpse, “the most sickening of wastes” (Kristeva 3), represents another facet of bridal madness in its abject manifestations: throughout the novel, Rebecca’s corporeal state is discussed, hypothesised and visualised – even in and after her death. Mrs. Danvers paints an image of drowned Rebecca that calls Ophelia, another mad bride, to mind. By dwelling on her clothes, eroticising her naked, dead body and culminating in a bewildering composite image of beauty and violence, a very unsettling ontological transgression is negotiated: “There was nothing on the body²⁷ when it was found, all those weeks afterwards. [...]

²⁷ The body that is described in this quote turns out not to be Rebecca’s body after all. Both female bodies, however, are disturbing their beholders due to a lack of boundaries. Furthermore, both bodies are mystified and eroticised in their liminality. The confusion of the two bodies adds to the construction of a conflicting vision involving beauty and death.

'The rocks had battered her to bits [...] her beautiful face unrecognizable, and both arms gone' (Du Maurier 169-170). With water slowly dissolving her boundaries into non-differentiation, what is believed to be Rebecca's disintegrated body and identity are characterised by "fluidity, the ability to shift between subject positions and across social and cultural spaces" (Harbord 102), and – despite all efforts – ultimately cannot be captured. Arguably, this quality of fluidity embodied by Rebecca can also be read as a serious blow to the "limited framework of acceptable roles for women in the interwar period" (Mullholland 446-447).

As it all too painfully turns out, the corpse described so minutely by Mrs. Danvers is not Rebecca's at all: the attempts to categorise and classify this female body go horribly awry. By employing scientific methods to reading this ambiguous body, making sense of Rebecca is desperately attempted throughout the novel, as her literally dissolved body boundaries cause immense unrest. Anxiously, bodily decay is discussed in detail by the narrator and Maxim: "A body rots in water, doesn't it?' I whispered; 'even if it's lying there, undisturbed, the water rots it, doesn't it?'" (Du Maurier 282). Evoking notions of ambiguity, Rebecca's corporeal boundaries pose more upsetting questions than they can provide answers. The lack of defining limits of bodily matters adds to the fascinating power Rebecca holds even beyond the grave. Significantly, Rebecca's conflation of life and death is an integral element of her beauty and attraction – this complex entanglement of the abject and the beautiful, the monstrous and the angelic shall be analysed in more detail below.

Functioning as a symbol of death due to her outer appearance, the housekeeper Mrs. Danvers plays a crucial role in the beautification of Rebecca's corpse. Her close relationship to Rebecca is highly eroticised, and involves an element of social confusion via the subversion of class boundaries (Hallett 38, 41-45). The lesbian undertones present in the whole novel become manifest in the above-quoted strangely ambiguous voyeuristic description of what is supposed to be Rebecca's body: the disturbing image draws on notions of dread and fascination as exercised by the abject. Similar to the bride functioning within the frame of the white wedding, Rebecca's beauty is repeatedly emphasised by resorting to hyperbole (Harbord 100): "tied to the fictionality of desire" (Harbord 100), it is recounted that Rebecca was "the most beautiful creature [ever seen]" (Du Maurier 134). The hyperbolic post-mortem description of Rebecca's beauty uncannily parallels expectations invested in bridal attire to represent everything the bride's culture

considers beautiful (Hughes 157). It is important at this point, however, to contrast Rebecca's conflation of death and beauty with the Victorian self-sacrificing angel-woman (Gilbert and Gubar 25): Rebecca's death is far from selfless – her cunningness and duplicity reaches across the boundary that supposedly separates life from death.

It seems apt to dwell on the place most intimately connected with Rebecca, the cottage at the beach which symbolises Rebecca's duplicity as well as represents the site of her murder. It is here that the traditional dichotomy 'woman/man: nature/culture' is conspicuously blurred, thus undermining the socially imposed gender dialectics. As nature encroaches on culture, nothing remains secure. What is signified in the domestic tokens of bliss displayed in the abandoned cottage (china, ships' models, sofa-bed, rusted grate, books) is respectability, family life and Englishness at large that is romanticised "as the epitome of the prestigious authority and the respectable order of the past" (Kim 11). However, these ideals are in utter decay, as is revealed in the narrator's account of the infamous, now neglected cottage, a veritably anarchic space:

That rusted grate knew no fire, this dusty floor no footsteps, and the china there on the dresser was blue-spotted with the damp. There was a queer musty smell about the place. Cobwebs spun threads upon the ships' models, making their own ghostly rigging [...] The fabric of the sofa-bed had been nibbled by mice or rats. (Du Maurier 112)

While this abject place is deemed unfit for inhabitation or care and even marked a forbidden place by Maxim²⁸, it continuously attracts Ben, a mentally impaired man. Considered mad, he is termed a "quite harmless, poor devil" (Du Maurier 114), but nevertheless has been threatened with being put into an asylum, supposedly by Rebecca. As it turns out, Rebecca and Ben not only share a history of nocturnal encounters at the cottage but Ben has also witnessed Rebecca's illicit affairs as well as her being murdered by Maxim. Ben, conforming to the stereotype of the omniscient madman, is thus highly significant in unveiling and shedding light on the multiplicity and ambiguity of Rebecca's subject positions. In this respect, the cottage is of particular importance: via the cottage, Rebecca is portrayed as the daughter of

²⁸ In this respect, intertextual relations to the *Bluebeard* plot (Nungesser 215) are particularly pronounced: the young bride is forbidden to enter the first, murdered wife's/wives' space.

nature²⁹ and first and foremost tied to the element of water: fond of sailing and inhabiting the west wing from where the sea can be heard, Rebecca is imagined to find her only true equal in the sea (“And then she was beaten in the end. But it wasn’t a man, it wasn’t a woman. The sea got her. The sea was too strong for her. The sea got her in the end” (Du Maurier 244)). By employing a number of similes, the passages in which the narrator describes the wood near the cottage (see below) portray Rebecca as a part of nature: the wood is anthropomorphised as a woman in the first passage, while natural tropes are used to reference Rebecca’s body and outer appearance in the second passage.

Recalling the haunted, gloomy atmosphere of Manderley estate (“[it] is not a place in which to pause, not after the sun has set” (Du Maurier 9)) in the famous opening passages, the narrator foreshadows an image intricately connected with Rebecca’s eroticism: “When the leaves rustle, they sound very much like the stealthy movement of a woman in evening dress, and when they shiver suddenly, and fall, and scatter away along the ground, they might be the patter, patter, of a woman’s hurrying footstep, and the mark in the gravel the imprint of a high-heeled satin shoe” (Du Maurier 9).

After the revelation of the fact that Maxim has murdered Rebecca, the narrator envisions herself at the scene of crime, the cottage, a passage which parallels the narration of her memory quoted above: “It seemed to me I stood again by the cottage in the woods, and I heard the drip-drip of the rain upon the roof. [...] And I thought of the dark steep path through the woods, and how, if a woman stood there behind the trees, her evening dress would rustle in the thin night breeze” (Du Maurier 276-277). The effect of the two passages’ interwoven, cross-referential language and chiasmic structure (the landscape is like mysterious Rebecca, Rebecca is like the mysterious landscape) is that Rebecca’s femininity is presented as fluid and liquid, not immediately accessible but always related as elusive, narrated via analepsis – this quality of Rebecca’s is furthermore stressed by her metaphorical and physical proximity to water.

²⁹ Significantly, she is also a daughter of culture: in her knowingness, she cunningly deceives everyone around her by outwardly complying with cultural imperatives. Thus, Rebecca embodies both transcendence of and identification with nature, unifying masculine and feminine ascriptions (Gilbert and Gubar 14).

Cixous sees water as the “feminine element *par excellence* [providing] comforting security of the mother’s womb [as] it is within this space that Cixous’s speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another” (Moi, *Feminist* 117, emphasis in the original). This notion can be tied to the Lacanian theory of the Imaginary as a period in which the child believes to be part of the mother. The entry into the Symbolic order is marked by the acquisition of language together with the acceptance of the phallus, the Law of the Father. Via the beach-cottage, one could see Rebecca as being situated within the realm of water, within the womb of nature, thus, within the Imaginary or what Kristeva calls the Semiotic. Furthermore, the highly significant relation between Rebecca and Ben adds a pathological aspect to Rebecca’s transgressions. Indeed, Ben, who seems out of place when not near Rebecca’s beach-cottage, falls out of the Symbolic order by his enigmatic use of language, which is, similar to Rebecca’s identity and body, considered deceitful and corrupt (“[H]e did not seem to understand anything I asked him.’ ‘He makes out he’s worse than he is,’ said Maxim. ‘He can talk quite intelligibly if he wants to” (Du Maurier 114), “Someone’s paid this half-wit, I tell you. Paid him to tell his string of dirty lies” (Du Maurier 338)).

Inhabiting Rebecca’s abjected place, Ben troubles meaning within the Symbolic order and represents the inexplicable Other. The ever-lurking threat of Ben being closed off in an asylum parallels Maxim’s wish to restrain Rebecca in his desire to confine the unexplainable Other to a defined space of passivity so as to prevent patriarchal order from being challenged. Indeed, Ben’s otherness poses a very real threat to the present system of power structures via which Manderley is operating: as a witness of Maxim murdering Rebecca, Ben could actually disempower the patriarch by reporting the crime.

By ‘truly’ inhabiting the cottage, an abject place symbolising physical and moral decay, Ben and Rebecca are effectively ‘othered’ and pose a threat to meaning and the power structures at play. Desiring both Ben and Rebecca to be physically and symbolically constrained, boundaries of the maternal womb (which is associated with the psychotic (Gilbert and Gubar 53)), are metaphorically constructed around their ‘mad’ identity and body. The cottage is stylised as the uninhabitable, ‘other’ place and its description as an abjected, damp, “[d]ark, and oppressive” (Du Maurier 112) womb can further be tied back to the Freudian notion of femininity as a dark, obscure continent (Gilbert and Gubar 93).

Ben's enigmatic ways of speaking can be read as a refusal to conform to practices of phallogocentrism and the Symbolic order. Lacan concludes that "to remain in the Imaginary is equivalent to becoming psychotic and incapable of living in human society" (Moi, *Feminist* 100), thus, to becoming a social abject. Indeed, Ben (outwardly) as well as Rebecca (secretly) may be interpreted as living isolated from society, as living in their own land, operating according to their own principles – in a liminal in-between space that is particularly threatening and described in conventionally abject terms: the cottage. Maxim forbidding his bride to enter the cottage can be tied back to Lacan's conclusion: the refusal to accept the Law of the Father is associated with embodying the psychotic. The symbol of water so intricately connected to the cottage also stands for the "voluntary return to a chaotic state, involution" (De Vries 493), which supports the claim that Rebecca is imagined to be positioned in the Imaginary, the stage anterior to the Symbolic – thus, the term 'involution' may well be employed³⁰.

The most important findings of this sub-section can thus be put in a nutshell as follows: not only is the "rather seedy beachhouse [Rebecca's 'authentic' space] where she met her lovers" (Wisker, *Dangerous* 91), but it also represents the site of her murder, in which floods of blood severely threaten what is supposed to always stay unblemished, as well as the site where Maxim is feminised. It is first and foremost in this liminal 'Third' space that Rebecca's multiple transgressions, her bridal 'madness', are manifested in the form of abject materiality (female body fluids, a dissolving corpse, decaying symbols of Englishness). Via a complex network of intra-textual cross-references, these forms of abjection find their expression in an unsettling image subverting traditional notions of the white wedding. The following section shall take a closer look at what can be termed the novel's major boundary transgression.

3.5. *Here comes the bride – again*

In the climatic passages of the novel, Manderley's fancy dress ball, the first person narrator's identity is being reconceptualised in profound ways as the ball is stylised as a 'mad' wedding, a "site where the contradictory and interrelated desires

³⁰ Kristeva's adaptation of these concepts does not draw a clear-cut line between them – her theory sees the Semiotic as inherent within the Symbolic. From a logocentric point of view, however, one would certainly see the Semiotic/the Imaginary as a step backwards from the "respectable norm", thus from the Symbolic.

of female subjectivity are contested and negotiated” (Kim 29). Preparing for the ball, the bride finally engages in those acts of conspicuous consumption that are so emblematic of *Manderley* – and reminiscent of the lavish white wedding – which she has hitherto been denied. Significantly, it is in these passages that the identity and body of the second Mrs. de Winter merge with Rebecca. Thus, the angel in the house and the monster haunting the (beach-)house are no longer securely separated but bleed into one another in a heavily charged ceremonial moment. Representing *Manderley*’s power, the famous fancy dress ball is staged like a wedding in which significant cultural boundaries must be confirmed via a complex semiotic system involving performativity and language. In the following, parallels between the ball and the white wedding (that has not been described on the diegetic level) shall be outlined, since the ball explicitly functions as a stand-in for the wedding in the logic of the narrative: as a tenant of the estate argues: “We missed the fun of the wedding, you know; it’s a shame to deprive us of all excitement” (Du Maurier 193), thus expressing the need for the fancy dress ball to take place.

The above-quoted element of excitement, of course, is only one – visible – aspect of the spectacle: the ball has to stand in for the wedding so as to consolidate social order and the matrimonial bond, so as to confirm the boundaries of the bridal identity and body to be stable and fixed. The ball thus functions as “the festive assertion of the spirit of village community and the ceremonial consolidation of the social fabric – heterosexual marriage – of the established power” (Kim 34). Also, the curious absence of the proper white wedding bears significance with respect to the interwar society: due to a steep rise of the number of single women, “the traditional threshold experiences – the rites of passage from the role of daughter to wife and mother – were not to be [for many women]” (Mulholland 453). Thus, the narrative’s blind spot reflects the precariousness of the white wedding in interwar Britain, which was faced with a multiplicity of newly emerging versions of femininity. Arguably, this era of insecurity all the more called for the need to consolidate – often via mechanisms of the aristocracy – well-established notions of family, marriage and gender. Accordingly, it is decided to give the “ball in [Mrs. de Winter’s] honour as the bride” (Du Maurier 193).

Also in cultural terms and in the context of the narrative, the parallels between the white wedding and the fancy dress ball are pronounced. Firstly, the event must be carefully planned so that cultural boundaries are kept intact. Secondly, it serves a

public function: that of reaffirming kinship patterns and reproducing and stabilising the dominant social order. Thirdly, the ceremony involves an element of mystery and magic linked to a moment of authenticity: the bride/hostess must hierophanously express her 'true' identity, that of "the grand lady of the stately house" (Kim 34), by means of the dress she chooses for the occasion – this choice must be kept a secret until it is publicly revealed and sanctioned. The white wedding and its demands with regard to physical appearance can be regarded as an intensified expression of general tendencies of the modern era in which the "body itself is more concealed behind elaborate and decorative clothing and becomes a 'danger zone'" (Burkitt 40). That the bride's dress and bodily appearance can induce anxiety in cultural terms, shall be analysed in detail below.

It is important to reflect on the choice of dress the narrator makes. Ill advised by Mrs. Danvers, the sinister housekeeper serving Rebecca even after her death, the second Mrs. de Winter decides to reproduce a portrait of "Caroline de Winter, a sister of Maxim's great-great grandfather" (Du Maurier 203). In the description of this portrait, the narrative goes to great lengths to stress what is being negotiated at this point: Caroline's dress is described in painstaking detail and it is pointed out that this portrait was painted before her wealthy marriage, "when she was still unmarried" (Du Maurier 203). Captured in this delicate state between maidenhood and matrimony (it is stated that she was a "famous London beauty" (Du Maurier 203)), Caroline is stylised as a bride. Choosing this white, bridal dress, the narrator self-fashions herself (albeit somewhat naïvely) as a bride, too. Her conscious decision to engage in what turns out to be a chimeric masquerade but is meant to magically reveal her unblemished, authentic identity as a bride and legitimate mistress of Manderley, is stressed by her comment: "What a relief it was to have decided at last! Quite a weight off my mind" (Du Maurier 203). As a review of popular bridal 'educational literature' proves, the choice of a wedding dress (and the affirmation of one's true, authentic identity and body) indeed represents a weighty one that comes with a certain amount of culturally induced responsibility (see section 2.1).

However, this wedding is going to be thwarted due to the 'corrupt' paraphernalia chosen: as the bride intends to triumphantly walk down the stairs, she realises that "[s]omething [is] wrong" (Du Maurier 213) and asks herself: "Why [is] Maxim looking like that? Why [do] they all stand like dummies, like people in a trance?" (Du Maurier 213). The disastrous merging of the angel and the monster, the bride and the whore,

is what is 'wrong', what makes this fancy dress ball *in lieu* of the wedding, go truly awry and unsettles a site marked as heteronormative (Hallett 74). In a moment that should reveal the bride to be 'herself', the narrator's ontological boundaries are conspicuously blurred: by donning the outwardly virginal dress unruly Rebecca wore for her last ball, the angel has publicly turned into the monster and bridal meekness bleeds into bridal madness, thus merging imagery of "the purity of virginal femininity but also the unruly female sexuality" (Kim 30). The bride's transgression of the boundaries separating angel and monster by eerily materialising the spectre of Rebecca (Kim 29) confines the witnesses to immobility: also they are stripped of their humanity; animate subjects turn into inanimate objects. Ultimately, bridal madness is manifest on a material level: the doomed dress must be abjected and gets ripped in the process (Du Maurier 215). Though stripped of the 'mad' dress³¹, the bride herself remains in a trance and the wedding is revealed to have been a "miserable, sham performance" (Du Maurier 225) all along, failing to confirm social order:

[T]he swaying couples twisted like bobbing marionettes, to and fro, to and fro, across the great hall and back again, and it was not I who watched them at all, not someone with feelings, made of flesh and blood, but a dummy-stick of a person in my stead, a prop who wore a smile screwed to its face. The figure who stood beside it was wooden too. His face was a mask, his smile was not his own. (Du Maurier 224-225)

It is this moment of rupture that dangerously conflates angelic and monstrous traits and thus, like the abject, "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4), triggering the events that lead directly to Manderley's destruction. As a stand-in for the white wedding that is not described in the novel – and cannot ultimately function as a herald of "unalloyed bliss" (Hughes 159) – the fancy dress ball ought to constitute a space conforming to heteronormative patterns in which "normative sex, gender, and sexuality [are] reinscribed" (Kim 878). However, boundaries are not kept intact and gender performativity is exposed as frail in that the ritual turns into "the work of a machine"³² (Du Maurier 225). Furthermore, the first and second Mrs. de Winter get conflated in uncanny ways that feed on notions of bridal madness

³¹ Taking off the bridal dress proves difficult, thus adding to its 'mad' excess: it first lets the narrator trip and stumble over its flounces, then is torn as unfastening the hooks cannot be managed, making the maid's hands tremble while she is "all the time catching at her breath" (Du Maurier 215).

³² The dull, mechanic and machine-like qualities reference the de Winters' life in their exile, once bridal madness has usurped "Manderley as an emblem of mythical Englishness" (Kim 16) and memories of their former, now bygone, "routines and traditions of the English upper-classes" (Kim 18) must be repressed, resulting in a bloodless marriage and a robotic life.

distilled from contemporary cultural and social anxieties. What this conflation of the two Mrs. de Winter entails is laid out above: it concerns no less than the dissolution of the border separating the angel and the monster, life and death, human and animal, subject and object. These transgressions represent the dissolution of the “domestic ideal prevail[ing]” (Mullholland 454) in this culturally anxious climate of the 1930s – in the realm of bridal madness, nothing remains secure.

4. *Wide Sargasso Sea* – Le Revenant

“It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair.” (Rhys 122)

Arguably, *Wide Sargasso Sea* negotiates “[t]he collapse of rational order, of stable and conventional structures on all levels” (Schapiro 84), thus representing a modernist novel³³ (Fincham 18). In the following analysis, it shall be argued that this kind of collapse is principally orchestrated along the lines of bridal madness as understood in the context of this paper. Disentangling the ‘madness complex’ will predominantly require the application of the theoretical lenses supplied by feminist and post-colonialist tenets. The title of this analytical section refers to Jean Rhys’s first idea for the title of her modernist retelling of *Jane Eyre*: the 1940s title ‘Le Revenant’ (Thacker 513) on the one hand emphasises the element of the Caribbean supernatural (*obeah*, ghosts and zombies haunting the living and thus blurring the boundary between life and death) (Jenkins ix), and on the other hand references a sense of returning: when they haunt the living, revenants, or zombies, *come back* from the dead – like Rebecca and so many other mad brides³⁴.

Furthermore, the notion of “‘revenant’-type experiences [implies that] the distinctions between reality and unreality, life and death, day and night, present and past, are continually blurred” (Jenkins ix). Also, as the introductory quote above suggests, the unsettling powers of revenants or ghosts blur the line between self and other – in this case between Jane and the female protagonist Antoinette/Bertha (Jenkins 145). Via bridal madness, linguistically constructed sets of dichotomies such as “Activity/Passivity Sun/Moon [...] Day/Night Father/Mother Head/Heart Intelligible/Palpable Logos/Pathos” (Cixous 101) might be unravelled, as might be

³³ The classification of Jean Rhys as a writer is far from resolved: she has been notoriously reclaimed by feminist, modernist, Caribbean, and postcolonial critics alike (Walker 491, Jenkins 166). Similarly, the categorisation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a modernist novel can be easily problematized.

³⁴ An example of a bride troubling the boundary separating life from death is Richardson’s Clarissa, whose “preparations for death parallel those for marriage” (Hughes 161). As the colour white connotes virginity and a bridal state as well as evokes notions of “mourning, shrouds and ghostliness” (Hughes 70), literary representations of deathly bridal figures are very common. Also Wilkie Collins’s Anne Catherick is a case in point: via her white dress, she expresses notions of death, ghostliness and madness (Hughes 71).

boundaries between self and other³⁵. Indeed, Caribbean women novelists have been described to continually “articulate their distrust of fixed categories [sic] or binary oppositions like black/white, master/slave, male/female, colonizer/colonized (Schomburg-Scherff 370). Clinging to symbols of ‘culture’ and coming to fear his newly-wed bride in the sweltering heat and menacingly feminine surroundings of the West Indies, the male narrator consults a book called *The Glittering Coronet of Isles* and learns that: “A zombi [sic] is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead” (Rhys 66). Inherently ambiguous like a zombie, this revenant, the mad bride in the tradition of *Jane Eyre*, returns once again – with a vengeance.

4.1. Bridal wreaths becoming death wreaths

Tellingly, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* weddings are warrants of death, not life. In this sense, Rhys’ novel functions as a true rewriting of bridal madness. Early in the novel, when Mr. Mason, Antoinette’s stepfather-to-be, interprets the abandoned huts of the locals as an indication of a wedding taking place, it turns out that the locals have actually been gathering for their attack against Coulibri estate, an emblem of former slave-owners. This attack in turn brings about Annette’s “first death” and triggers Antoinette’s childhood traumata that ultimately drive her mad. Also, it shows Annette’s “final act of spirit, of self-assertion, before she succumbs to a state of complete inertia and mental decay” (Schapiro 89), thus intricately connecting notions of madness, death and weddings. While in Caribbean customs wreaths are used to celebrate marriages, in England they are used at funerals (Jenkins 133). Antoinette’s newly-wed husband cannot identify with this, from his point of view, perverted tradition and is disturbed by the conflation of weddings with death³⁶: “[The wreath] fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it” (Rhys 42). Adding to the deathly connotations of the wedding, the place where the newly-weds spend their honeymoon is called Massacre. This confusion of what is supposed to give life (the

³⁵ To be more precise, writing across oppositions is achieved by “manipulating narrative conventions” (Winterhalter 214). Identifying the speaking voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is complicated by the frequent blending of dialects (Winterhalter 215), the use of parallel narration (Winterhalter 222) and shifts in time frames (Patke 188). In the introductory quote “It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair” (Rhys 122) a similar effect is achieved by means of ambiguous reference: Antoinette might see herself in the mirror or reference *Jane Eyre* as an intruder.

³⁶ The wedding night is also significant with respect to gender: Rochester’s repulsion caused by the wreaths references his anxiety emerging on this night: from now on his narrative represents a “mad attempt to reaffirm his manhood in a world which threatens its very conceptualization” (Winterhalter 223).

wedding as a symbol of sanctioned reproductive bonds) with what takes life is expressed by Antoinette, who disturbs the boundary separating life from death. Endowed with subversive knowledge, which can be interpreted as a “powerful weapon that the witch uses to enslave her victim” (Fayad 446), she informs her husband that “[t]here are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about” (Rhys 81). A decisive feature of Annette, Antoinette’s mother, in turn is the ambiguity as to whether she is alive or dead: a male relative informs Rochester³⁷ that “[s]ome say she is dead, other [sic] deny it” (Rhys 59). Indeed, also Antoinette herself inwardly dies but outwardly is still alive – recalling notions of the revenant or zombie. Her spiritual death is foreshadowed in her body and its gradual transformation, in particular when it comes to the evaluation of bridal, feminine beauty.

After the wedding ceremony that is “continuous with the larger colonizing operations of the British Empire” (Rody 137), the bride’s hand feels “cold as ice in the hot sun” (Rhys 44). Crucially, taking her icy hand is all Antoinette’s groom remembers about the bride (“my bride in white but I hardly remember what she looked like” (Rhys 44)). Antoinette is introduced in this analeptic glimpse of the wedding day as “the girl I was to marry” (Rhys 44) – the respective sentence starts with the negative coordinating conjunction “nor” and does not give the bride’s name. This linguistically expressed negativity indicates the narrator’s emotional distance (Acquarone 23) as well as his refusal to acknowledge, or rather inability to grasp, Antoinette’s bridal identity. What we are witnessing in these little analeptic snippets is the bride’s *becoming* as a transformational process involving cultural anxieties and demanding close control, “[as] in the movement, the transformation, the care of the signs is crucial to ensure the correct direction of transformation” (Bell 466). Bell explicates that in the highly scripted performance of the white wedding, the bride must never enter a “zone of uncertainty” (466). To illustrate her argument, she takes up the conventional image of taking the bride’s hand, which in itself is tightly regulated: “[i]n her movement of the hand, the bride must struggle to retain her hand as only ever human, never monstrous, never the becoming-animal” (Bell 466). When Rochester takes Antoinette’s hand, though, the becoming-monstrous and death-like is foreshadowed, eclipsing every other feature of her bridal beauty in blossom.

³⁷ Though never named, the male narrator is dubbed “Rochester” in this paper for reasons of practicality and to mark aspects of intertextuality (Rody 145).

4.2. *Unchaste and intemperate: Excessive sexuality*

Antoinette's embodiment of life and death is typically portrayed in strongly sexualised terms. While during the day she disturbs her husband by laughing excessively³⁸, engaging in a language he cannot understand ("At this she'd laugh for a long time and never tell me why she laughed" (Rhys 55)), at night she is described as a different person: "But at night how different, even her voice was changed. Always this talk of death" (Rhys 55). In her sexuality, Antoinette's proximity to death is particularly pronounced in that during sexual activity, her ontological boundaries are about to dissolve ("You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. [...] 'Die then! Die' I watched her die many times" (Rhys 55)). Her excessiveness culminates when she is accorded vampiric and masculine traits at once: "Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was – more lost and drowned afterwards" (Rhys 55). Antoinette's overabundance of sexual energy, which has been interpreted as nymphomania (Fayad 445), both deathly and life-giving, both thirsty and drowned, soon can be read in signs inscribed in and displayed on her body. Antoinette's "clenched teeth pull[ing] at the [bed] sheet" (Rhys 61) and her eyes, a matter of constant contemplation on the part of Rochester and other males (Rhys 27, 37, 45, 94, 96) are a case in point. Depictions of the monstrous bride and the evil eye converge with traditional Caribbean legends of the *soucriant*, the female vampire, of whom Rhys writes in her biography: "During the day they looked like ordinary women but you could tell them by their red eyes" (Rhys, *Smile* 30). Ultimately, Rochester describes Antoinette as "this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife" (Rhys 96) and Christophine remarks: "Your face like dead woman and your eyes like *soucriant*" (Rhys 73, emphasis in the original).

Suffocating the male in her excessive sexuality, which is symbolised by the abundance of Antoinette's hair³⁹, the beautiful bride becomes abject. After engaging

³⁸ Laughing can have unsettling powers and may signify "potency and indeterminacy" (Hai 511). Furthermore, it shall be pointed out that "[u]nder disciplinary cultural regimes, women have often been forbidden to laugh, in part because an open mouth that reveals teeth was seen as threatening to those in power and as promiscuous, suggestive of open genitals" (Hai 510). It should also be noted that Antoinette herself fears the ambiguity of Rochester's laugh, causing her to nearly call off the wedding: "I didn't like the way you laughed" (Rhys 45) and that laughter is strongly connected to one of the novel's leitmotifs, shame (Shapiro 89).

³⁹ Sexuality suffocates Antoinette herself, too. Rochester describes her as "more lost and drowned afterwards" (Rhys 55) – this is just one of many parallels between Rochester and Antoinette, the oppressor and the oppressed (Schapiro 100). However, this kind of sexual union can also be read as

in *obeah* practices and secretly giving Rochester a love potion in order to *de facto* stage a second wedding night, Antoinette unleashes her sexual energy in unspeakable ways, which her husband tries to repress (“All I will remember of the night” (Rhys 87)). After this sexual encounter, sexuality and death become intricately intertwined and Rochester dreams that he is buried alive and experiences “a feeling of suffocation” (Rhys 87) after waking up: significantly, this instance of screen memory recalls the gaps of remembrance in connection with the wedding day. Silenced and demure in his sexuality, Rochester finds himself lying next to a Medusa-like Antoinette: “Something was lying across my mouth, hair with a sweet heavy smell. I threw it off but I still could not breathe” (Rhys 87-88). Symbolising Antoinette’s excess of identity and body and referencing the West Indian surroundings, her hair scents are experienced as too much and sickening by Rochester. Abjecting Antoinette as matter/*mater* (mother), Rochester is vomiting excessively (Rhys 88). Rochester has thus entered a zone of uncertainty governed by bridal madness in which his “monologue becomes overrun with female voices” (Winterhalter 225).

Abundance of female hair can be read as “a metaphor for monstrous female sexual energies” (Gilbert and Gubar 27) that arguably must be hidden behind the bridal veil. Hair as a symbol of active femininity and unrepressed sexuality plays a paramount role in representations of bridal madness. We might recall a dream recounted by the second Mrs. de Winter right before the discovery that Manderley has been destroyed by fire: “He held her hair in his hands, and as he brushed it he wound it slowly into a thick rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands and smiled at Rebecca and put it round his neck” (Du Maurier 379). Both Antoinette and Rebecca’s Medusa-like qualities and proximity to vampirism are expressed via excessive amounts and uncanny powers of hair. Moreover, both mad brides engage in incestuous sexuality, a cultural taboo: while Rebecca’s illicit relationship with her cousin Favell effectively marks her as abject, Rochester is all too willing to accept another male’s interpretation of Antoinette’s identity and sexuality: Daniel Cosway’s insinuations concerning an illicit sexual relationship between her and her cousin Sandi significantly contribute to Antoinette’s final abjection and confinement to the attic.

parallel to Rochester’s practices of renaming and un-naming Antoinette, the “annihilation of the female by the male [...]” (Walker 507).

Both Antoinette and Rebecca are portrayed as displaying an insatiable sexual appetite that is unaccountable and ascribed abject qualities of insanity, danger and witchcraft – notions that are typically evoked in women’s portrayals of temptresses in order to account “for the fact that the male has abandoned his “sanity”” (Fayad 446). Rochester insinuates that his bride has been engaging in extra-marital affairs, while he displays a certain “revulsion about sex” (Fayad 445): “She thirsts for *anyone* – not for me” (Rhys 107, emphasis in the original), “She’ll not care who she’s loving” (Rhys 107), “She’ll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could” (Rhys 107). Similar to depictions of Rebecca, this kind of vampiric, all-devouring and predatory sexuality is closely connected with *foul* language that is ascribed qualities of the abject (vile, filthy): “the vile names she called me. Your *doudou* certainly knows some filthy language (Rhys 101, emphasis in the original). Life-draining and suffocating, both Antoinette and Rebecca’s bridal madness is shaped by a pronounced castrating power that largely contributes to the fascination they exercise (Wisker, *Don’t Look Now* 31). This ambiguous representation of the feminine (both dreadful and fascinating) is too much for masculinity, representative of patriarchal power structures, to take: both Manderley, a symbol of patriarchy, and Rochester, a patriarch and coloniser, literally collapse at this point of the narrative, as the abject has grown too powerful in its ambiguity. Manderley burns down to ruins, Rochester starts vomiting after a wedding gone wrong: in *Rebecca*, it is the sham wedding, the fancy dress ball, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is the *obeah* induced second wedding night that unveils what has truly been lurking behind the veil, thus heightening the sense of “escalation of marital enmity and abuse” (Walker 505).

4.3. Under western eyes: Unveiling the bridal body

After having turned his inside out, Rochester engages in a voyeuristic description of Antoinette’s sleeping body. This sudden shift in power relations (after violently retching, Rochester all of a sudden is secure of the power of the male gaze) marks an important point in Antoinette’s oscillation between life and death, her zombie-like state, her “death-in-life or life-in-death condition” (Schapiro 96). He acts as a coloniser marking his space in a territory that is originally not his by taking possession of the room and his bride. In a close evaluation of Antoinette’s body, he explicitly points out her physical beauties only to deem them traitorous (“All present, all correct. As I watched, hating, her face grew smooth and very young again, she even seemed to smile” (Rhys 88)) – the exactness and orderliness of conventional

feminine beauty is felt to be transient and secretive, thus not to be trusted and reminiscent of the abject, “a friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 4).

In Freudian interpretation, gaze is “a phallic activity linked to the anal desire for sadistic mastery of the object” (Moi, *Sexual* 134) – and “as long as the master’s scopophilia (i.e. ‘love of looking’) remains satisfied, his domination is secure” (Moi, *Sexual* 134). Rhys’ fiction frequently “exposes the interests at stake in male centred psychoanalytic constructs of the feminine, just as [it] explores collaborative sexual fantasies where women are perceived [...] as objects of the male gaze” (Howells 12). As Rochester marks Antoinette ‘mad’ in his description, he abjects her, instantly beginning his adulterous affair with the black servant Amélie, Antoinette’s (literally) dark double (Hai 507). The description of the sleeping Antoinette involves both the eroticisation and abjection of her identity and body by referencing her mother, who has been subjected to this kind of controlling (male) gaze, too.

Gazing at the other body, “the fetishisation of the particular parts of the female body is obvious” (Pearce 30). This focussing on body parts is in line with the depiction of Antoinette as a doll⁴⁰ which is closely connected to Rochester’s brutal speech act practices of renaming his bride, culminating in the mantra-like expression and parenthetical interruption “*Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta*” (Rhys 100, emphasis in the original). The objectification of the bride as a doll hints towards Antoinette’s “sense of self-dispersal” (Schapiro 101), the Manderley wedding that is revealed a sham in that people turn into bobbing marionettes, but also at Antoinette’s revenant-like qualities: having effectively murdered her (“I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl” (Rhys 88)), Rochester brings his bride back in the form of a doll (Fayad 448) and ultimately strips her of her humanity, leaving only “a child’s scribble, a dot for the head, a larger one for the body, a triangle for a skirt” (Rhys 106). This crude sketch of a dehumanised woman, bereft of her individuality and only recognisable as a woman by gendered clothing – La Femme – finds its expression in Antoinette’s body: before she is transported to England, she is portrayed as a mechanical puppet: “The doll had a doll’s voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice” (Rhys 112) until finally, the doll’s smile is “nailed to her face” (Rhys 112).

⁴⁰ Furthermore, the objectification of Antoinette references her childish inability to “[...] distinguish animate from inanimate objects” (Fincham 19) as well as her abject bond with the maternal.

4.4. *Infamous daughter of an infamous mother*

Since Antoinette's identity can be read as being doubled with her mother Annette (Voicu 96), an in-depth analysis of Antoinette as mad bride must necessarily refer to her mother, too. Foreshadowing Antoinette's fate, Annette is believed to be tying the knots of a "fantastic marriage [her husband] will regret" (Rhys 11). The state of their home Coulibri, so closely connected to Annette's marriage and Antoinette's childhood, is portrayed in abject terms on a material as well as social level. A house that "leaks like a sieve" (Rhys 12), clothes that have grown shabby, an impaired child, a rotting horse's corpse, and a garden in which "a smell of dead flowers [is] mixed with the fresh living smell" (Rhys 4) represent the decaying estate of Coulibri. Its inhabitants are social outcasts in the ambiguous era after the Emancipation – being former slave-owners and of Creole descent, Antoinette's family is continuously confronted with dire poverty and social abjection.

The estate itself can be read as an extension of Annette's identity and body boundaries: when she is not present at Coulibri, the estate is described as sad (Rhys 11), after she has been declared mad, Antoinette realises that Annette "was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone" (Rhys 25). Before her second marriage, Annette is so much a part of the house that she refuses to leave it at all (Rhys 4). The wildness and excessiveness of the garden is complemented by her habit of "talk[ing] aloud to herself" (Rhys 5). In general, Coulibri estate is ascribed feminine qualities: it is described as leaking, thus referencing female fluidity, sensual – and 'mad': "All Coulibri estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery – why should *anybody* work?" (Rhys 5, emphasis in the original). The place can be read as fluid in its internal as well as external boundaries: once the organising system of slavery disappeared, standards of work morality were corrupted, resulting in an archaic state manifest in the overgrown garden that has gone "wild". The garden represents a powerful symbol of utter chaos: characterised by a mentally impaired and sickly child, socially unacceptable clothing and lack of industriousness and order, the place "bears the seeds of corruption, representing a duality that is the 'secret' that Rochester is to be so afraid of" (Fayad 439). More precisely, the kind of duality Rochester comes to fear is threatening because it transcends boundaries and merges what is meant to be separate – significantly, also Kristeva refers to notions of 'corruptness' in connection with the composite (4).

Dehumanised as vermin (“white cockroaches”) and thus likened to parasites and impurity, both Annette and Antoinette occupy a liminal space that marks them neither black nor white in ethnic terms. Instead, they come to be portrayed as a cancerous growth from within, an inherently abject, unspeakable Other residing within the self⁴¹. This ontologically excessive position of being both black and white, a “foreigner-within” (Voicu 98), frequently manifests itself in the form of bodily deformations as well as violations of dress code. Antoinette’s childhood is characterised by torn, old and dirty clothing (“My dress was even dirtier than usual” (Rhys 9); “I had no clean dress” (Rhys 9); “The old muslin dress [...] tore as I forced it on” (Rhys 10)), which is a sign of social abjection Annette is very careful to gloss over for her second wedding. Acting as a bridesmaid for her mother’s wedding, Antoinette is surprised to find that “everything [she wears is] new” (Rhys 11). However, Annette’s bridal beauty cannot veil her abject position, her ‘fantastic’ bridal identity is ridiculed (Rhys 11-12) and her children – and by extension her maternity – are read as mad, “a *lowering* expression” (Rhys 12, emphasis in the original). In short, the transitional ceremony constituted by the wedding in white is not enforced in its legitimacy, as the audience refuses to “[confirm] the validity through its presence” (Keller-Drescher 38). Instead, in a moment foreshadowing the burning down of Coulibri, the attendants observe the spectacle minutely and comment disparagingly on Annette’s bridal excesses.

The root of Antoinette’s childhood trauma, the destruction of Coulibri, and its aftermaths lay bare the constructiveness of the wedding masquerade, as what has been termed ‘fantastic’ on Annette’s wedding day is horribly realised on the day she turns mad: during the fire, Annette’s wedding ring falls off, her hair starts burning (Rhys 19), her body is violated and her identity becomes the centre of laughter and ridicule. The hate crime triggers Annette’s descent into madness as well as Antoinette’s coming of age. The abjection of the maternal (Annette is declared dead, though actually she is locked away in a kind of perverted mental institution) effects Antoinette’s entry into the realm of the Law of the Father. This entry is symbolised by the convent and, eventually, marriage. Despite her initial conformity to hegemonic standards, Antoinette is soon branded as a madwoman, too: visibly marking her as her mother’s daughter, the scar on her forehead is slowly turning into her mother’s

⁴¹ The desire and loathing Rochester feels for Antoinette can be compared to the ambiguous powers exercised by the abject (Pollanen 12).

frown, a trace of patriarchy (Fayad 440). The scar is a matter of interest: it stems from the burning of Coulibri, after which Antoinette fearfully asks if it will leave a permanent mark, to which her aunt replies: “It won’t spoil you on your wedding day” (Rhys 25). The reference to her wedding day in connection with this physical mark that is aligning Antoinette to her mother’s downfall must be considered significant. Functioning as a sign of bridal madness in that it references both Antoinette’s and her mother’s transgressions of culturally constructed boundaries, the mark must not be revealed in a moment that necessarily presents identity as stable and unviolated – on the bride’s wedding day, her body must be presented as unblemished. Furthermore, an important trait of her bridal madness is foreshadowed shortly after the fire: Antoinette sees her cut off plait in the drawer and thinks it is a snake⁴² (Rhys 24), thus referencing what will surface as her bridal excess in terms of female sexuality.

Annette’s identity boundaries are in jeopardy after her “first death” that has been caused by the fire. When Antoinette sees her mother after she has been crudely “institutionalised”, thus, when her fluid femininity can no longer be held by Coulibri that is all the more leaking like a sieve, she does recognise conventional tokens of femininity that are connected to her mother’s identity (dress, hair), but is unsure as to how to define this woman’s ontological boundaries: “I thought, ‘It’s not her.’ Then, ‘It must be her.’” (Rhys 25). This confusion of identity is aggravated when Antoinette is equated with her mother: “Look the crazy girl, you [sic] crazy like your mother” (Rhys 26). The signs indicating the two women’s “craziness” comprise walking without shoes and stockings – being “*sans culottes*” (Rhys 27, emphasis in the original) – and having “eyes like zombie [sic]” (Rhys 27). Both allegations mark the women socially as well as ontologically abject: they are seen to be violating social clothing conventions as well as blurring the line between the living and the dead. As their eyes⁴³, conventionally read as the window to the soul, reveal, their status as ‘Other’ also feeds on metaphysical notions.

At the convent, Antoinette is introduced to the Law of the Father, which is symbolised by guiding instructions for girls to keep their bodies clean and their souls

⁴² The snake imagery with its sexual connotations is frequently evoked in *Rebecca*, too: “‘Tall and dark she was,’ he said. ‘She gave you the feeling of a snake’” (Du Maurier 154). This quote indicates that the omniscient madman Ben is able to see Rebecca’s true, abject identity.

⁴³ For a discussion of eyes in connection with female monstrosity see page 58.

unblemished. Trying to inscribe physical signs of order, chastity and deportment (Rhys 30) onto her female body by keeping it clean and not exposing it, Antoinette has understood what is expected of her as a woman and as a bride. Under the controlling gaze exercised by the convent and the power structures it is situated in, Antoinette meticulously performs the duties required for keeping feminine corporeality unblemished and restrained: she pushes down her cuticles when washing her hands, soaps her body under the chemise and dresses “with modesty” (Rhys 32). Significantly, she calls these controlling measures of the body “trick[s] to be learned” (Rhys 32). Similar to contemporary “[w]edding-specific body management efforts” (Neighbors and Sobal 431), these tricks of femininity reference the performativity of the societal and cultural roles Antoinette is required to play in order to conform to exacting standards of feminine identity and agency. At this point in the narrative, Antoinette has assumed a socially sanctioned role of femininity, seemingly confirming society’s narrow standards: her performance is that of a morally and physically pure girl industriously preparing for the phase of womanhood. Positioned within the feminist anti-essentialist tradition, the text demonstrates that positions of gender are not something natural but rather artificial roles that *need* to be learned and performed in public – “it is not about just *being able* to take a [gendered subject] position; it is unavoidably necessary to make such decisions” (Nagl-Docekal 10, emphasis in the original).

Soon, however, the pressures laid on Antoinette are nearly too much to bear: when she senses that her stepfather intends to marry her to an ‘English friend’, Antoinette feels as though sadness and loss “almost [choke] [her]” (Rhys 33) and is mentally transported back to a moment of her childhood representing a particularly abject experience: the sight of a dead horse. In this moment, Antoinette’s inability to fully enter the Symbolic order (Pollanen 14) and the effects this ambiguous positioning has on her perceptions of language become paramount: “Say nothing and it may not be true” (Rhys 34) is what she feels after finding the dead horse as well as after the realisation of her step-father’s wishes, which are symbolic of the Law of the Father. Antoinette thus engages with death and abject matter in ways remarkably similar to her reaction to the prospects of her future wedding – by refusing to linguistically acknowledge sources of loss, she wishfully thinks that she might be spared. Kristeva’s theory of the abject sheds light on why Antoinette’s ways of dealing with loss are doomed to failure: the power exercised by the abject “cannot be

redeemed, rhetorically or otherwise, even as we refuse to accept or even believe in the abject with its emphasis on the materiality of death" (Miller 323).

4.5. *Abjecting the bridal dress: Dreams of a fallen woman*

In a constant – failing – search for sustaining mothering (Rody 135) that almost makes her regress to infancy (Rody 142), Antoinette cannot abject the (m)other and consequently cannot fully enter the realm of the Father. In a dream, Antoinette envisions herself as an abjected bride blurring the boundaries between her childhood and her womanhood as well as merging her own identity with her mother's. This confusion of identity boundaries is played out via the white dress, which recalls Antoinette's mother, who frequently was dressed in white (Schapiro 94). In this dream, Antoinette's bridal madness is foreshadowed by manifestations of transgressive femininity. In particular, her "white and beautiful" (Rhys 34) dress which Antoinette explicitly does not "wish to get [...] soiled" (Rhys 34) references imperatives of cleanliness concerning the bridal dress, body and identity and threateningly indicates the "inevitability of corruption and contamination" (Schapiro 94).

Antoinette dreams that she first holds up the skirt of her long dress and walks with difficulty, then lets it trail in the dirt and finally stumbles over the dress and falls to the ground. This short dream sequence can be interpreted as an account of Antoinette's whole life by employing the tripartite model of Gennep's rite of passage⁴⁴ with reference to the phase of bridal becoming, as discussed in section 2.6. Moreover, Antoinette's nightmare can be read as a transposition of one of Jane Eyre's dreams (Rovera 113), a proleptic gesture towards her thwarted wedding and the ensuing phase of bridal madness. In their dreams, both brides-to-be stumble⁴⁵ in an eerie, ambiguous space in which nature has encroached on culture: Jane prophetically dreams of a "grass-grown enclosure" (Brontë 282) and a "marble hearth" (Brontë 282), while Antoinette's nightmare features an "enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall" (Rhys 34).

⁴⁴ This model has been used for analysing the bridal processes of becoming (see, for instance, Frieze).

⁴⁵ Also the second Mrs. de Winter stumbles over the flounces of her white, bridal dress in the climatic moment of the fancy dress ball (Du Maurier 214). The precariousness of the moment is accentuated by the fact that the dress uncannily takes on a life of its own, cannot be managed properly, ultimately gets ripped and has to be struggled out of (Du Maurier 215).

In Genep's model's first phase, that of "separation from former conditions" (Schomburg-Scherff 370), Antoinette is separated from Coulibri, symbolic of the former protective plantation system and the maternal body, and confined to the convent in which she is to learn tricks of femininity. Trying to conform to standards of feminine beauty as constructed and controlled within the Symbolic order is what Antoinette does in the first phase of her dream. When she is holding up her dress, she furthermore experiences a very real effect of the female body's physical confinement that testifies to the commodification of women in the patriarchal system: that of walking in shoes that are not sensible in her surroundings, effectively limiting her agency. In the phase ensuing after her childhood trauma, Antoinette learns tricks of what it means to be a woman, to embody modesty and chastity – thus, she learns how to performatively engage in culturally approved roles of femininity, that of the dutiful step-daughter and the morally and physically clean, devout convent schoolgirl, mirroring her mother's attempts to confirm standards of cleanliness, femininity and beauty on her wedding day.

Letting the pristine white dress trail in dirt represents the phase in Antoinette's life that is best described as bridal madness, a position of excess troubling cultural boundaries that manifests in abject materiality. It is thus the second phase of the rite of passage, "the marginal phase of transformation, during which a person is situated between two worlds" (Schomburg-Scherff 370). This phase of liminality, characteristically "unstructured, ambivalent and paradoxical" (Schomburg-Scherff 370) and typically featuring an identity crisis⁴⁶ (Schomburg-Scherff 370), represents no less than the nodal point of cultural boundaries, thus a space of "ritually and symbolically dense meanings" (Schomburg-Scherff 370) – in short, the space of bridal madness. The dirtied dress must be read as symbolic of this deviant version of femininity that disregards cultural imperatives of cleanliness and order. Referencing dirt, in Mary Douglas' terms "a function of structure" (Schomburg-Scherff 371), the dress symbolises a status that is "structurally not definable" (Schomburg-Scherff 371). The image of the soiled bridal gown furthermore references a variety of similarly abjected wedding dresses: directors of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, for instance, unequivocally make their leading lady go mad in white, bloodied satin (Hughes 169). Miss Havisham's dress that has merged with her abject surroundings

⁴⁶ In this context, also the "betrayal of the familiar" (Schapiro 94), in that nature turns treacherous and menacing (Fincham 19) like in the Manderley dream sequence, can be observed.

is not described in historically specific terms (Hughes 166-167) – rather, it continues to haunt us due to its universal affective power. What exactly it is that manifests itself in Antoinette’s dirtied white dress shall be analysed in more detail below.

A short outlook on what the last dream image, Antoinette stumbling over her dress, symbolically entails and foreshadows shall suffice at this point. Her downfall both points forwards as well as backwards. On the one hand, it points backwards to the “death set by her mother and the mother text, *Jane Eyre*” (Schapiro 103, emphasis in the original). On the other hand, it proleptically references her ambiguous fall from the roof of the English house that supposedly represents Thornfield hall. To complicate matters further, her fall also refers back to her collapse at the convent after having been likened to her mother and ascribed qualities unifying death and life – that of a zombie, a revenant. The excessive position taken by Antoinette cannot be accounted for within patriarchal hegemony – thus, she will have to fall: both literally as well as metaphorically. The pictures of the fallen woman and the young bride become conflated in this highly significant last image of the dream sequence: it represents the third phase of aggregation that scrutinises “the presence or absence of social premisses [sic] which allow for successful processes of identity formation” (Schomburg-Scherff 372). Due to the power mechanisms of colonial patriarchy (Cutter 132), Antoinette is finally dismissed and abjected, confined to the third story from where she can only fall down.

4.6. *Blind spots and flawless performances*

In the context of this thesis, the most interesting phase of the rite of passage as presented in Antoinette’s dream is the second one: in a liminal space “inversions and new playful combinations, by reflection and creativity” (Schomburg-Scherff 370) are typical. In this respect, the process of bridal becoming plays a paramount role. However, like *Rebecca*, the novel refers to the wedding only in retrospect: significantly, linguistic analyses of these analeptic passages reveal that, from Rochester’s perspective, the wedding marks an end, rather than a beginning (Acquarone 21). Part two, narrated by the male protagonist, begins with the words: “So it was all over” (Rhys 36) and “Everything finished” (Rhys 36). The narrator’s inability to identify with the ceremony or the Caribbean surroundings is expressed in the lexical material and syntactic structure: passive and negative constructions,

modals of obligation and words with negative connotations create an overall atmosphere of male displacement and alienation (Acquarone 21-22).

A second analeptic passage consists of incoherent, ambiguous tags of memories of the wedding day. Conceding that he has “blanks in [his] mind that cannot be filled up” (Rhys 44), the narrator avoids naming anything to do with the wedding⁴⁷. The narrative account of the ceremony is based on fissures and blind spots, thus heightening the sense that this ceremony is highly arbitrary, forcing its participants into a “flawless performance” (Rhys 44), stripping them of their ‘flesh and blood’ identity. Arguably, in this alienating image, Manderley’s fancy dress ball is echoed: via processes of reification, people become things, “exchangeable aesthetic objects” (Voicu 92), with the core of the ceremony, “the outward displays of circulation” (Bell 463-464), usurping the humanity of everyone concerned. Rochester does not recognise his own voice anymore, and describes it as “correct but toneless, surely” (Rhys 44), while Antoinette’s name is only revealed by an *unnamed* female relative of hers. Thus, the relative’s identity is again bereft by Rochester’s refusal or inability to acknowledge her individuality – significantly, also Antoinette comes to be stripped of all names: she is neither referred to as ‘Mrs. Rochester’⁴⁸ nor can she keep her given name Antoinette, “the part of her that should have remained constant despite her legal status” (Walker 494).

The people, in particular the women present at the wedding cannot be accounted for – the bride least of all. All that can be grasped is the death-like coldness of her hand. The wedding attendants are described as follows: “Cousin Julia, Cousin Ada, Aunt Lina. Thin or fat they all looked alike. Gold ear-rings in pierced ears. Silver bracelets jangling on their wrists” (Rhys 44). This simultaneous generalisation and fetishisation of particular body parts merits a closer look, as Antoinette’s subject position is clearly based on the ambiguity of her surroundings⁴⁹. On the one hand, the wedding attendants are described in conventionally

⁴⁷ In this respect, he treats language similarly to Antoinette, who refuses to name what she cannot bear to acknowledge.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, however, the working title of the novel was ‘The first Mrs Rochester’ (Rovera 111).

⁴⁹ That concepts of individuality and subjectivity are intricately intertwined with aspects of the other, thus society at large, is reflected in the novel’s first lines: as Mona Fayad puts it, the ‘I’ as differentiated from the other is not asserted by the opening ‘they say’, but that “[i]nstead, that self is presented as objectified by society” (438).

homogenising terms: the women are depicted as “anonymous masses rather than individuals” (Barry 186), while on the other hand, particular body parts are portrayed in great detail, hinting towards a fetishistic engagement with substitutes for ‘proper’ sexual bodies⁵⁰. Similarly, the way Antoinette is fascinating as well as dreadful in Rochester’s eyes feeds on ambiguous principles: she is both deficient (her deficiency and feminine lack are expressed in the frequent blind spots of the narrative) and embodies too much (Antoinette’s excess is indicated by the intensity of colours, brightness and scent): the representation of Antoinette as “negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness – in short, [...] non-Being” (Moi, *Feminist* 127) is complemented by ontological over-determinations in the field of ethnicity, agency and gender as well as excess.

4.7. *Qui est là*⁵¹? Losing one’s identity

Merging with her surroundings when she is assuming her bridal identity, Antoinette is ascribed a plethora of ambiguous qualities, thus creating a subject position of excess. More specifically, Antoinette transgresses a variety of boundaries: being of Creole descent, her ethnicity is considered ambiguous, she furthermore blurs the line separating death from life as well as troubles the boundary between animate bodies and inanimate objects. Her monstrosity largely stems from her surroundings, to be more precise, from “the violent social relations of European colonialism” (Rody 137): her femininity is read through hetero-normative lenses adopted by the people impacting her life, resulting in a state where “[c]ultural and personal pathology [...] are interlinked” (Schapiro 103). Moreover, the representation of Antoinette’s madness feeds on and merges with her background: in Barbara Schapiro’s words, “the boundaries between the internal subjective world and the external object world have dissolved” (84). This dissolution can be observed on both

⁵⁰ In Freudian theory, ‘fetishism’ refers to replacements of the normal sexual object by another one bearing some relation to it (Bruzzi 37) – an example would be a part of the body, i.e. hair (Childs, Weber, and Williams 76).

⁵¹ “Who is there?” – The parrot’s perpetually repeated cry that haunts the novel: the bird’s death in the course of the Coulibri fire foreshadows Antoinette’s fatal leap from the roof of Thornfield Hall, thus presages the climax of her identity search.

the literal⁵² (Coulibri estate, Massacre, the third story in the 'cardboard house') and the figurative level (her Creole heritage, her connections with her mother and black servants). "[C]ircumstances of loss, violence, and exploitation in marriage" (Rody 138) drive both mother and daughter mad – at last, also in the pathological sense. In this respect, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is characteristic of Rhys' oeuvre, as Helen Carr identifies "the vulnerability, inventedness and multiplicity of identity [as] constant and central themes in Jean Rhys's writing" (xiii).

Being a post-Emancipation white Creole puts Antoinette in the in-between Third space of the split-subject: she is white but not necessarily purely white, she is not native of the 'mother country' but at times thinks of England as home (O'Connor 21) – even though she increasingly does have doubts about this conception and even questions the existence of a place like England. Gilroy notes that "we are constantly informed that to share an identity is to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, "racial", ethnic, regional, and local" (98). According to these parameters, Antoinette's identity is at danger as not one of them can be met safely and each of them reveals ambiguities when applied to Antoinette. As far as race is concerned, Creoles may not be entirely sure of their 'pure' white descent: Rhys herself was not (Carr 16). The ethnic identity of a Creole is similarly vague: they are a "notch below pure whites" (Pizzichini 31) and viewed with critical eyes (both Annette and Antoinette are called 'white cockroach' by the blacks, and 'white nigger' by the whites). Even the term 'Creole' itself carries contradictory meanings. It can denote a "person of mixed European and black descent, [...] a descendant of Spanish, French or other white settler families in the Caribbean [or even] a member of an Afro-Caribbean, i.e. black community" (Döring 148). Supposedly, in Antoinette's case the second meaning applies⁵³. Such an identity poses questions of affiliations and loyalties to places, people and cultural practices (O'Callaghan 107). However, according to Homi Bhabha, a hybrid identity position, which is also closely related to the concept of 'native mimicry', has the potential to offer a platform for disrupting "'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (*Location*, 66).

⁵² That the description of landscape, as part of the projective method, is a vital device in connection with the novel's characterisation techniques (Voicu 95) has been discussed by many scholars. For instance, Antoinette's focalisation has been interpreted as "powerful and distinctive [...] in its somatic relationship to nature" (Fincham 19).

⁵³ However, the first one cannot be entirely precluded, as Creoles can never be sure whether or not their ancestry also includes black influences (O'Connor 21, O'Callaghan 107).

Like the subject position of the mad bride as defined in section 2.7, the white Creole's "personal identity [...] is not "either/ or," but reluctantly "both/ and" (Mzoughi 88). More specifically, notions of Creole subjectivity are "precariously balanced [...] on the border of European whiteness and Caribbean indigenusness" (Voicu 98). Constantly hovering between various subject positions, Antoinette's identity is best described by resorting to the concepts of errantry (the deconstruction of the myth that identity stems from one singular root, embracing multiplicity and relativity (Mzoughi 100)) as well as hybridity (Guragain 65). It should also be pointed out that Rhys' "fictional [exploration] of the complex nature of identity [is] firmly grounded in [its] historicized [representation] of women's social and economic dependence (and British colonialism)" (Walker 503). Ultimately, however, Antoinette's identity is lost entirely: a last glimpse in the mirror lets her see a vaguely familiar ghost "with streaming hair" (Rhys 122). Due to the pressures exercised on her, she "is forced to recognize herself as she is perceived" (Voicu 97): as the madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason Rochester.

In conclusion, the kind of madness characterising Antoinette is based on culturally excessive subject positions: both dead and alive (a zombie), both a child and a bride (via the connection to her mother)⁵⁴, both suffocated and suffocating in her sexuality (a vampiric *soucriant*), both black and white (a white Creole), both subject and object (a doll) and both dreadful and fascinating (abject), Antoinette finally is attributed Victorian notions of female madness. In the depiction of the "[i]nfamous daughter of an infamous mother" (Rhys 120), in particular in the ascription "[...] intemperate and unchaste" (Rhys 120 and Brontë 306), the two novels finally coalesce. The following section turns to *Jane Eyre*, the 'mother text' that keeps coming back – each time feeding on notions of bridal madness.

⁵⁴ This kind of ambiguity is referenced by Grace Poole when she says about Antoinette: "[Rochester] said that the person I had to look after was not a young girl. I asked if she was an old woman and [he] said no. Now that I see her I don't know what to think" (Rhys 114).

5. *Jane Eyre* – Revisited

“I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out—I am come back to you.” (Brontë 434)

After the thwarted wedding, Rochester tells his would-be bride Jane about his legal wife Bertha, who is “called by the law and by society a part of [himself]”. He claims that “her excess had prematurely developed the *germs of insanity*” (Brontë 306, emphasis added). Like the abject that has to be expelled in order for the subject to secure its own boundaries and to come into existence (Kristeva 3), Bertha Mason Rochester’s ambiguity in terms of identity, agency, gender, ontology and ethnicity is too much to take. Significantly, her excess is related to insanity, to be more precise to germs, infection, and contagion. Bridal madness is abject because it threatens to spread beyond designated boundaries – and, indeed, it has spread beyond textual boundaries.

In the early 20th century Daphne Du Maurier suffers from homesickness, seemingly longing to breathe “the air of England” (Du Maurier 8). While she is stationed as an army wife in Egypt (Kim 12), Du Maurier imagines the plot of *Rebecca* along the lines of *Jane Eyre*, but problematizes notions of heteronormative romance, later remarking that “[s]eeds began to drop” (Du Maurier *Notebook* 4, qtd. in Kim 12, emphasis added). Some forty years later Jean Rhys describes the female protagonist of her forthcoming novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in these words: “the bride [sic] poor bride very romantic, with some French or Spanish blood, perhaps with the *seeds of madness*, at any rate hysteria” (Rhys *Letters* 297, qtd. in Rovera 111, emphasis added). Infected by the germs or seeds of bridal madness and its affective powers, these texts can be said to be in an “ongoing dialogical process” (Hutcheon 21). The following section shall elucidate in which ways *Jane Eyre* criticism can profit from tracing and assessing these dialogues between texts. In other words: a second look at the insights gathered in sections above suggests that close readings of reworkings can indeed help gain a comprehensive understanding of *Jane Eyre* and its infectious fascination.

Arguably, the protean, polyvalent figure of the mad bride to a considerable extent makes for the story’s unbroken popularity: initially shunned as an “unwelcome intrusion of gothic style into a realistic text” (Shuttleworth xvii), the figure of Bertha Rochester Mason has been re-read as defining the novel in profound ways, arguably

generating much of its apparently timeless appeal. At this point the mere reference to countless parallels between Bertha and Jane on the level of structure as well as representation shall suffice in order to indicate the significance of the mad bride on a variety of levels, representing far more than “a legacy of the ‘over-heated imagination’ of Brontë’s early writings” (Shuttleworth xvii). Provoking and sustaining discussion, this liminal yet omnipresent figure keeps inspiring alternative discourses informed by the politics of the particular context of creation and reception, with the texts becoming “mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible, heard and silent” (Hutcheon 21). Revisiting the canonical novel by applying the model of bridal madness will by no means radically rewrite *Jane Eyre* criticism – however, this fresh perspective can accentuate aspects of the Victorian novel and its ‘strange after-lives’ and tie these to present day concerns, acknowledging that adaptations can “[offer] us new insights into the original text” (Brennan 114).

Mosaic interrelations within the universe spawned by incremental literature can be identified on the levels of content, symbolism, structure and cultural context. Delineating similarities and differences in these areas can help shape literary interpretation in principled ways and shed light on the classic’s remarkably consistent level of fascination. On the diegetic level, *Jane Eyre* certainly can still be considered disquieting: plot elements such as a thwarted wedding, an ominous first wife and an ordeal of female soul-searching have informed 20th century novels such as *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* – and could, without a doubt, fill 21st century novels, too. As far as symbolism is concerned, the mad bride functions as a foil to Jane as well as a vital incentive for the moral development that lies at the heart of this female *Bildungsroman*⁵⁵: the torn veil⁵⁶ in *Jane Eyre*, the uncanny bridal costume in *Rebecca*, the soiled white dress in *White Sargasso Sea* testify to the confused borders of identity⁵⁷ generated by bridal madness, which makes women stumble – and some fall. Thus, via bridal madness, a narrative level is added that clearly resonates with present day concerns not necessarily confined to the novel *Jane Eyre*.

⁵⁵ The notion of *Jane Eyre* representing a female *Bildungsroman* that focusses on female development is relatively undisputed (Schaff 27).

⁵⁶ Jane, who typically releases feeling in rational ways (Eagleton, *Myths* 19), only accepts the costly, ‘mad’ veil under protest. After it has been torn by Bertha, its “legal owner” (Hughes 164), she is about to get married in the plain veil representing “Jane’s independence and identity” (Hughes 164).

⁵⁷ This confusion of identity boundaries is symbolised by mirror images in all the discussed novels, too.

However, these concerns are certainly shaped by the novel's principal themes: bridal madness creates a discourse that negotiates some of the most pressing issues of identity, gender, agency and sexuality.

The most important findings of this study can help accentuate as well as possibly – and necessarily humbly – re-structure essential aspects of *Jane Eyre* criticism. For instance, it has been demonstrated that contrary to what might be expected, weddings in literature rarely function as shorthand for “a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks” (James 4th paragraph) – thus, they normally do not act as a reassuring force in social and cultural terms⁵⁸. On the contrary, literary representations of weddings in white usually are unsettling as the ceremony threatens to lay bare the skeleton of the cultural system, and personal and social order at large: they expose an intricate complex based on the “distinctions we draw between opposites: self/other, me/not me, living/dead, male/female, infant/child” (Goodnow 6). As has been argued above, representations of bridal madness first and foremost negotiate boundaries: the Victorian concern of “the boundaries between sanity and insanity becom[ing] more ill-defined” (Shuttleworth xx) parallels, to give just one example, interwar anxieties about women acting like men in terms of their professional and personal agency.

The most iconic mad bride, Bertha Mason Rochester, infamously troubles a variety of those boundaries: in the dream-image prior to the thwarted wedding ceremony featuring a “robed and veiled figure, so unlike [Jane's] usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger” (Brontë 286), the boundaries of Bertha, the rightful owner of the torn veil, and Jane blur. Rochester's (unfulfilled) wish to “[l]et [Bertha's] identity, her connection with [himself], be buried in oblivion” (Brontë 309) points towards another conflation: that of life and death. Like Rhys's conceptions of the revenant, Rochester likens his legitimate, but abject bride to “some corpse in yonder churchyard” (Brontë 316), even if she is “as robust in frame as she [is] infirm in mind” (Brontë 307). Furthermore, Bertha is attributed animalistic as well as masculine traits: the disturbing depiction of her as a “clothed hyena [...] on its hind feet” (Brontë 293) references notions of gender ambiguity as well as moral

⁵⁸ Accordingly, “Brontë's anxiety about the marriage plot” (Brennan 122) informs reworkings of *Jane Eyre*, such as *Rebecca*, too.

degeneracy. As mentioned by Sue Thomas, the symbol of the hyena, an animal feeding on decaying corpses, stands for those thriving on false doctrine in religious terms. Furthermore, the hyena is considered corrupt as it was believed to be able to change its sex (*Tropical* 7).

This enumeration of boundary transgressions represents but a small fraction of factors shaping Bertha's excess and ultimately marking her mad. All of these transgressions manifest themselves in the form of abject materiality and are typically connected with bridal imagery. Once Rochester lifts the veil of the "bride already courted for [him]" (Brontë 305), femininity is revealed in all its gory details: sucking blood like a *Vampyre*, with red balls for eyes (Brontë 284, 294), the 'female malady' is simultaneously naturalised as well as ascribed gothic qualities. Victorian accounts of madness trace a direct relation between lunacy, female sexuality, menstruation circles and the moon (Shuttleworth xxii). Particularly uncanny are the parallels between Bertha and Jane, which, to name but one example of intertextuality, are also reflected in the conflation of Rebecca and the second Mrs. de Winter: an issue of interest concerns the representation of bridal cunningness in connection with Bertha as well as Jane, who – during both courtships – employs sly calculation in that she "[blends] flashes of flirtatious self-assertion with her habitual meek passivity" (T. Eagleton, *Myths* 18), thus complicating any superficial reading of Jane's character and connecting her bridal subject role with Bertha's flirtations in *her* fiery courtship. Adding to these complexities, the identity and body of mad bride Bertha can be read "as an 'experimental site' – in relation to which Jane can safely evaluate her own actions – and as a cautionary tale, a prophetic warning of the bitter fate that awaits those who openly defy the laws of patriarchal society" (Keiper 144). Thus, bridal madness has profound effects on the level of characterisation.

Granted, all these observations have already been made elsewhere in some form or another. So what can be gained from revisiting well-known insights? It shall be argued that the model of the mad bride has the advantage of offering a way to conceptualise aspects that account for the novel's unbroken fascination. For instance, applying the model of the mad bride can shed light on deconstructive processes informing a 20th century focus on the heterosexual love relationship, as they can be observed in *Rebecca* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann 12). To a large extent, these processes of deconstruction are orchestrated by representations of bridal madness and monstrous femininity – and it

is certainly not wholly insignificant that it is the powerful imagery generated by bridal madness that it represents one of the novels' primary affective powers.

Famously, Charlotte Brontë criticised her depiction of Bertha, saying that she "erred in making *horror* too predominant" (Brontë, *Letters* 3, emphasis in the original), seemingly being herself spellbound by the abject bride. It shall be argued that deconstructing the kind of horror involved in bridal madness sheds light on its affective powers – which can on the one hand be read as an alternative discourse but might inform readings of the novel as a female *Bildungsroman*, too. As close readings of *Jane Eyre* derivatives and their interrelations with the Victorian novel and among one another have shown, bridal madness is constructed similarly across time and place. However, the very specific ways in which bridal transgressions are negotiated as well as the particular nature of what makes these transgressive traits abject can reveal important aspects of the scrutinised text in terms of its cultural contingency, testifying to the novel's adaptability which, in contrast to "some fixed textual ontology" (Schaff 26), "has guaranteed the novel's place in the cultural consciousness over time" (Schaff 26).

By applying the model of the mad bride, the appeal of *Jane Eyre* can thus be explained on two levels: like the abject, bridal madness is – to a certain degree – trans-historical. Irrespective of the time and place of creation, cultural artefacts featuring mad brides base the aberrant female's madness on boundary transgressions. However, bridal madness can also be read as contingent in terms of the specific nature as to what the transgressions involve in epistemological terms. This argument is supported by Schaff's observation that *Jane Eyre* "addresses the particular social concerns of its time, but [...] at the same time reaches beyond the historical limitations of its context and touches on archetypal human conditions" (34). Thus, what Linda Hutcheon postulated to be a principal pleasure of adaptations holds true for the universe spawned by *Jane Eyre* and its derivatives, too: the formula "repetition with variation" (4) has to be specified in this context as follows: repetition on a structural and metaphorical level meets variation in terms of ideology and narrative conventions. One of the latter issues concerns the unsettling first marriage featured in the Victorian classic: when Bertha marries Rochester, "problems and anxieties arise [when] the margin enters the centre" (Schaff 28) – or, put in psychological terms: when the other encroaches upon the self, the abject unleashes its affective powers.

Via bridal madness, issues of ambiguity can be accentuated and understood in its far-reaching consequences. For instance, *Jane Eyre* negotiates “anxieties and complexities of the Victorian understanding of gender by paradoxically dismantling and reifying nineteenth-century notions of masculinity and femininity” (Godfrey 853). This insight can be fruitfully complemented by applying the model of transgressive bridal femininity. As Esther Godfrey convincingly argues, much of the ambiguity perceived in connection with the novel’s romance plot stems from gender identities being continually “built up only to be torn down” (868). These deconstructive and ultimately stabilising processes include the negotiation of androgynous connotations of class differences, gender theatricality and power reversals (Godfrey 868). The sexual threat issued from gender instability in the Victorian era thus is expressed by both contingent elements (governesses holding a socially precarious position) as well as the alternative discourse of bridal madness. Dismantling the layers of meaning shaped by the element of bridal madness can also provide further insights on the kinds of boundaries that are being negotiated. The model of bridal madness can thus shed light on the specific texture of the “combination of ambiguous and conflicting sites of cultural representation which has protected *Jane Eyre* from being confined exclusively to Victorian women’s writing” (Schaff 34).

6. Conclusions and outlook

In conclusion, applying a comprehensive model of bridal madness to the literary analysis of *Jane Eyre* and selected derivatives has allowed for a focus on abject materiality as a productive system of signification. Abject manifestations of bridal transgressions in terms of identity, agency, gender, ethnicity, class and beauty were, on the one hand, read as contingent constructions within a particular context of literary production and reception. On the other hand, such manifestations were shown to form an alternative discourse characterised by ambiguity and conflict that largely contributes to the undiminished popularity the canonical novel *Jane Eyre* and its 'after-lives' enjoy. It could be shown that representations of the white wedding generally function as culturally critical moments in that – threatening boundaries of identity, authenticity and essence – they are invested with anxiety and unease. Moreover, the specific kinds of cultural boundaries threatened by particular forms of bridal madness were discussed in contextualised ways. This dual perspective allowed for a comprehensive analysis of *Jane Eyre* derivatives in light of the Victorian novel as well as an analytical focus on the reworkings as modern classics in their own rights, thus doing justice to their aesthetic particularity. While not a primary purpose, applying the model of bridal madness also shed light on notions of feminine liberation and confinement. In sum, ambiguity and conflict have been shown to be vital, affective powers in keeping *Jane Eyre* alive as a constant inspiration to academia and popular culture alike.

Notions of openness have consistently informed and profoundly shaped this thesis and its lines of argumentation. The naturalisation of fixed (bridal) identity boundaries and its reverberations on conceptions of authenticity have been deconstructed. In a similar vein, adaptive processes have been understood as principally open. This perspective has introduced the model of bridal madness as a means to identify and discuss hidden layers of meaning and counter-hegemonic discourses in cultural artefacts on both a broad level as well as in great detail. To be more precise, this thesis has contributed to *Jane Eyre* criticism by both analysing individual novels' embeddedness in their contexts as well as by tracing intertextual expressions of "archetypal human conditions" (Schaff 34). The model of bridal madness has proved a valuable conceptual tool in literary and cultural analyses of textual artefacts in the *Jane Eyre* tradition, enabling a broad insight into

representations of gender, agency, identity and body. However, a brief outline of future research suggestions shall indicate areas that lend themselves to an application of the proposed model, but are not entirely confined to *Jane Eyre* criticism.

Questions that necessarily had to be left unanswered within the confines of this thesis concern contemporary representations of mad brides in popular culture. As yet, few attempts have been made to account for contemporary popular representations of aberrant brides as monstrous, depictions that arguably can be traced back to Bertha Mason Rochester's excessive monstrosity. Vikki Bell provides a brief cultural analysis of the white wedding as a moment of identification along various cultural boundaries and reveals that the role of bride, being *in statu nascendu*, involves an anxious transformation. In particular, images of the bride becoming monstrous are interpreted as indicating cultural anxieties about female desire (466) – an insight that has informed this thesis in invaluable ways. Megan Biddinger's paper on the medial construction of Bridezillas similarly points out the dangerous potential of progress in connection with the bridal identity of becoming – a topos that arguably can be identified in a range of *Jane Eyre* derivatives, too. Biddinger's analysis of the reality TV show 'Bridalplasty' suggests that representations of surgically enhanced brides-to-be typically involve spectacular monstrosity, which is, however, ultimately contained by the show's closure featuring 'princesses' rather than 'frankenbrides'. Of interest in this context would be a thorough investigation as to which cultural anxieties this kind of feminine monstrosity negotiates and in how far such representations can be historicised in a literary context.

Applying methods of feminist content analysis, Michele White examines the phenomenon of the 'Trash the Dress' movement and its highly ambivalent entanglements with cultural conceptions of the bridal body as clean and mannered, arguing that a marketed gesture of resistance works within normative forms of representations. In her study *The Wedding Complex*, Elizabeth Freeman asks how texts featuring a wedding can reorganise gender and celebrate alternative lives by crossing various cultural boundaries and how especially failed and excessive weddings can grant their participants social transitivity. A more thorough reading of the wedding ceremony featured in *Jane Eyre* and its reworkings against the background of gender trouble would be of interest in this respect.

As has been pointed out in this thesis, cultural reworkings of the mad bride are proliferating in manifold forms and artefacts of popular culture, too. Typically, such reworkings of the bridal figure going mad retain a pronounced material aspect, in particular a dangerous proximity to abject matters. This proximity to abject materiality has been shown to be closely linked to excess, in particular to semantic over-determinations and transgressions of cultural boundaries. Thus adding an additional level to the narrative, mad brides have traditionally displayed a high level of mobility across textual borders. Related to this extra-textual quality, issues of aesthetic categorisations such as the difference in representations of the sublime and the beautiful could be addressed in future research. Moreover, an analysis deconstructing visualisations of in-between (third) spaces mad brides come to occupy might greatly enhance our understanding of popular pictorial representations of bridal madness.

Arguably, recent phenomena in connection with popular representations of femininities have heightened the need for a thorough theoretical and practical investigation of mad brides in terms of negotiations taking place on a material level, which focusses not only on diachronic, but also on synchronic aspects. Firstly, in current post-wedding photo sessions called 'Trash the Dress', stylisations of brides typically draw on notions of monstrous 'madness'. The depicted abjection of bridal dresses is usually appropriated as an emblem of unconventionality, thus a rebellious posture and respective discourses ("bridal rage", "anti-wedding") are marketed as resistance and empowerment. Even though notions of liberation are evoked, the discourse instigated by 'Trash the Dress' (TTD) is highly ambiguous, and has been argued to strongly adhere to hetero-normative standards (White) in that, ultimately, cultural boundaries and standards of beauty, agency and gender are being confirmed rather than negotiated.

This aspect of ambivalence and perplexity is paramount to negotiations of mad brides (and current post-feminist constructions of femininity), which is why questions of containment and possible empowerment could be addressed in future projects. A link to *Jane Eyre* can be identified in this respect, too: investigations of the validity of depicting bridal madness as a "byword for emotional liberation" (Robertson x, qtd. in Hughes 168) might enhance an understanding of *Jane Eyre* as a female *Bildungsroman*. Secondly, also the narrative of the "bridezilla" has been thriving in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Stemming from the tradition of the mad

bride, bridezilla typically embodies excess and monstrous activity. This type of femininity is predominantly evoked in post-feminist texts that arguably portray emotional constraint, rather than liberation, thus meriting critical study. At this point the circle may be closed again, as what comes to mind in the context of post-feminism is the attempt to domesticate “Brontë’s nonconformist heroine [...] in her integration into popular culture” (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann 9), a phenomenon that might be related to historical change, possibly adding to the novel’s undiminished popularity (Rubik and Mettinger-Schartmann 10).

Finally, what Linda Hutcheon has remarked about the relationship of an adaptation with the adapted text arguably holds true for *Jane Eyre* and its ‘strange after-lives’, too. In Hutcheon’s words, reworkings “[do] not draw the life-blood from [their] source and leave it dying or dead, nor [are they] paler than the adapted work. [They] may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise” (176). As this thesis has ventured to demonstrate, this nurturing bond across textual borders is fed by indeed vampiric, abject figures: mad brides confusing, among other boundaries, the border between death and life, angel and whore, self and other. Affectively powerful, bridal revenants described in gory detail exercise power over us and keep us spellbound by breathing life into cultural negotiations: threading into and through one another, the literary representations of these fascinating figures have taken a ‘breath of fresh Eyre’ and expanded the confines of one life. It is perhaps safe to conclude this thesis with one more prophetic note, underlining the revenant-like qualities of bridal madness and its manifold after-lives: Elles reviennent⁵⁹!

38115 words

⁵⁹ “They [the mad brides] (will) come back”.

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Figures

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8. Appendix

8.1. German abstract

In der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit werden literarische und mediale Repräsentationen von verrückten Brautfiguren, die in direktem Bezug zu Charlotte Brontës *Jane Eyre* stehen, analysiert und interpretiert. Das zugrundeliegende Modell der Untersuchung fußt auf kulturwissenschaftlichen Konzeptionen von diskursiv erzeugten Grenzziehungen. Dem Modell entsprechend, wird bräutlicher Wahnsinn (bridal madness) in erster Linie in Form von Grenzüberschreitungen gelesen, welche sich auf textueller Ebene in einer abjekten Art und Weise manifestieren.

Die populärkulturell weite Verbreitung von Brautfiguren, die anhand des obig skizzierten Modells interpretiert werden können, wird von einem stetigen Anstieg von *Jane Eyre*-Adaptionen begleitet, deren Popularität den viktorianischen Ausgangstext in seiner nach wie vor starken Präsenz stützt. Beide gegenwärtig beobachtbaren Phänomene können anhand des Modells von bridal madness beschrieben werden und stellen einen Impetus für die Analyse und Interpretation von ausgewählten *Jane Eyre*-Adaptionen aus dem 20. Jahrhundert, Daphne Du Mauriers *Rebecca* und Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea*, dar. Dekonstruktive Lesarten bezüglich der diskursiven Verhandlung von kulturellen Grenzziehungen können zudem gewinnbringend auf den Ausgangstext *Jane Eyre* angewendet werden.

Um dieser Aufgabe gerecht werden zu können, ist eine breite kulturwissenschaftliche Beleuchtung von bräutlichen Figuren und deren diskursiven Verfasstheit unumgänglich. Deshalb sollen zunächst Aspekte bezüglich Identität, Handlungsfähigkeit und Körper in der westeuropäischen Denktradition situiert und in Bezug zum Signifikanten „Braut“ gesetzt werden. In diesem Unterfangen werden dekonstruktive Ansätze durch feministische sowie postkolonialistische Theorien und Modelle ergänzt. Ein Kernmodell stellt das Konzept des Abjekten nach Julia Kristeva dar, da es erlaubt, kulturelle Grenzüberschreitungen und deren Manifestationen als bedeutungsgenerierend zu lesen. Kristevas Konzeption des Abjekten bietet zudem die Möglichkeit, transhistorische sowie kontextspezifische Aspekte in den Blick zu nehmen und die Popularität der untersuchten Texte und Artefakte in Hinblick auf deren affektive Wirkungen zu lesen.

Der praktische Teil der Diplomarbeit stützt sich auf die in den theoretischen Kapiteln ausgearbeiteten Annahmen und Theorien. Aus der Anwendung des Modells von *bridal madness* ergeben sich einerseits detaillierte Einzelanalysen und -interpretationen der ausgewählten Texte, andererseits werden gewonnene Erkenntnisse für eine vergleichende Zusammenschau herangezogen, wodurch ein Beitrag zur *Jane Eyre*-Forschung geleistet wird. Da durch die modellangeleitete Interpretation exemplarischer *Jane Eyre*-Adaptionen Rückschlüsse auf die Gründe der profunden Popularität des viktorianischen Bildungsromans gezogen werden können, wird auch ein Forschungsdesiderat angesprochen. Die Untersuchung der spezifischen literarischen Verhandlung der kulturellen Grenzen und deren Verrückungen wird von der Forschungsfrage nach dem bedeutungsgenerierenden Potential der verrückten Brautfiguren in der Tradition von *Jane Eyre* angeleitet.