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**The Madwoman as a Symbol of Female Repression:  
A Comparative Study of *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper***

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**Abstract:** The paper investigates how two classic 19th-century literary works represent the "madwoman" figure through both texts' symbols of female confinement in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Within both texts women battle madness due to public norms and mental barriers which limit their independence and end in complete psychological breakdown. This research examines the women characters of Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* and an unnamed narrator from *The Yellow Wallpaper* to represent the physical and psychological battles women fight within patriarchal societies. The research delves into how authors exploit madness as a literary device to explore themes of preservation, individuality and control during its analytical study of restricting systems which prevent women from asserting their freedom. The study shows how both authors link gender with mental illness and containment to display how losing self-expression weakens women until they become strong symbols of resistance to cultural norms.

**Keywords:** Madwoman figure, Female confinement, Patriarchal societies, Gender and mental illness, 19th-century literature

**Introduction:** It has been a central theme throughout history that female oppression has steadily grown more prominent in literary work which reveals how Patriarchal societies used force to suppress women. In Gothic literature, the madwoman represents society's rejection of normal female positions as she carries fears about women regaining control over their own lives. Through their character the madwoman breaks traditional gender standards to reveal how post-patriarchal society both burdens women along with intensifying marriage's restrictive practices.<sup>1</sup> The female characters in Gothic literature appear as embodiments of mental and emotional torment which intensifies with each passing day for women characters. This analytical study explores the madwoman symbol in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Jane. *Reclaiming the Monster: Abjection and Subversion in the Marital Gothic Novel*. no. 1, June 2018, pp. 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.18193/SAH.V4I1.125>.

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The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman to present the suppression of women through literary analysis of societal criticism and Victorian cultural conditions.

Literature presents female repression through women's experiences of physical and social isolation because authors reflect the societal pressure to control female autonomy and erasure. As a Gothic figure the madwoman displays total domination of repressive forces while embodying blended expressions of suppressed female emotions toward denied freedom.

During her stay at Thornfield Manor Bertha Mason represents a severely damaged version of Jane Eyre through her "madwoman in the attic" condition. The book *The Madwoman in the Attic* explains that Bertha plays the role of "Jane's own imprisoned and enraged alter ego, the ferocious secret self she represses as an orphan-turned-governess."<sup>2</sup> Through this representation we see the devastating effect which occurs when women face denied freedom to choose and express themselves.

Within *The Yellow Wallpaper* readers witness the unnamed narrator become mad after undergoing the medically recommended "rest cure" for hysterical women.<sup>3</sup> Due to confinement and lack of creative freedom and autonomy the narrator transfers her entrapment onto her prison walls until she collapses into madness as both an act of rebellion against and a manifestation of patriarchal dominance.<sup>4</sup> This paper explores how the madwoman motif as a literary device enables the assessment of female social control as it fights for women's independence and personal expression.

**Historical and Cultural Contexts of Female Repression:** During the 19th century female repression affected literary representations of women because of cultural and historical factors. Society and laws of the period designed rigid gender rules which created widespread marginalization of women in both England and America during this era. Women received limited social roles that made them dependent while assigning them passive tasks within domestic spaces. This form of female repression emerges from combination effects between gender status and both social class background as well as racial characteristics and restrictive legal frameworks provided to women.

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, S. Weir. *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*. J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1881.

<sup>4</sup> Treichler, Paula A. "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1-2, 1984, pp. 61-77.

**19th-Century Gender Roles and Expectations:** At the start of the 19th century society established strict norms defining women's positions through requirements of domesticity alongside obedience. Historical along with cultural traditions created expectations for females which functioned to maintain strict female limitations. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in "The Madwoman in the Attic", the "angel in the house" ideal specified that wifely devotion and maternal care were a woman's primary life functions in the home.<sup>5</sup> The ideology worked to both restrict educational chance and career growth and provided fixed as well as confined areas for women. When authorities enforced gender stereotypes, they treated women who stepped outside normative expectations as if they were abnormally dysfunctional.

During the nineteenth century the Cult of True Womanhood or the Cult of Domesticity established precise social standards which limited female activities to home-based parenting functions. Women lived according to a particular set of noble standards which emphasized piety alongside purity and both submissiveness and domestic duties as essential qualities.<sup>6</sup> According to this belief framework, women should focus on their domestic capabilities because their moral excellence stemmed from their mastery of piety and purity along with submissiveness and domestic activities.

During this era women depended economically and legally on men because state law did not grant them ownership rights over property nor did it give them control of potential inheritances nor financial independence. Women had limited rights to marry because the law enforced their subordination through fathers, husbands and brothers even in their private relationships. Society considered independent women or intellectually focused women or ambitious women in careers to be deviant and dangerous elements in their society. During this time period literature frequently presented unstable women as either mentally disturbed or disruptive elements in society.<sup>7</sup>

**The Social and Medical Perceptions of Women's Mental Health:** Society together with medical professionals from the 19th century viewed mental health in women through entrenched gender roles so they often placed unnecessary restrictions on them. Doctors during the 19th century often medically categorized women who showed emotional instabilities and signs of discontent together with independence as patients with hysteria. Medical professionals abuse the vague medical term 'hysteria' to diagnose and stigmatize normal female behavioral pattern involving mood swings along with feelings of confinement

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151-174.

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2000.

and resistance to social pressures.<sup>8</sup> Through the rest cure method designed by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, women received medical sanction for withdrawing from life control which reinforced doctors' perspective of women as inherently frail bodies. Medical professionals isolated women during treatments because they prohibited intellectual and creative activities which made women's emotional condition worse.<sup>9</sup>

These prevailing beliefs from society and medicine appear within literary writings of that era such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Jane Eyre*. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Jane Eyre*, the writer uses these two female characters to analyze how oppressive treatment from society and physicians end in mental breakdowns. Society declared these female characters "mad" through their behaviors that departed from social norms for women thus illuminating the links between social management of female bodies and minds and mental disorders.<sup>10</sup>

**The Madwoman in *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*:** The characterization of "madwoman" plays a central role in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* since these characters illustrate how society suppresses its female populations and makes them suffer from imposed marital and social behavioral guidelines. In 19th-century literary references, the word "madwoman" describes women who exist in physical as well as mental confinement while also experiencing social misunderstanding and isolation. The madwoman figure within *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* represents societal restrictions on women with embodiment of mental health issues.

**The Madwoman in *Jane Eyre*:** Throughout different critical studies about the "madwoman in the attic", Bertha functions as a complicated symbol uniting suppressed feminine expression with mental instabilities together with racial elements and sexual discourse. This analysis explains both Bertha's depiction of trapped feminine energy and her role in uncovering the novel's themes of insanity in combination with racial understanding and gender relations.

**Bertha Mason and Repressed Femininity:** Through her marriage to Edward Rochester, Bertha Mason represents the total opposition to Jane Eyre. Through her uncontrollable rage and free sexuality along with her defiance of Victorian norms, Bertha creates a clear

<sup>8</sup> Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. Penguin Books, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, S. Weir. *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*. J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1881.

<sup>10</sup> Treichler, Paula A. "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1984, pp. 61-77. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/463825>.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. Penguin Books, 1985.

opposition to the stereotype of the "angel in the house" which Victorian women were expected to meet. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) explain that Bertha's madness represents the "repressed energies and desires", that Victorian women had to constrain while following their social roles.<sup>11</sup> Bertha signifies a cautionary tale for the results of female rebellion against feminine social conventions which appear as Jane's hidden yet warning mirror image.

**The Intersection of Madness, Race, and Gender:** The complex self of Bertha interacts through multiple points where madness meets racial heritage along with feminine roles and psychiatric disorder. Because the English women around her wanted controlled emotions Bertha's racial heritage linked with her breakdown but her Creole background created an exotic separation between herself and British society during that era. According to Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the racial background of Bertha helps explain her disruptive character which threatens the symbolic structure of stability in *Jane Eyre*.<sup>12</sup> According to Patricia Ingham (1990), Victorian society used Bertha's portrayal as a basis to reinforce their notion that colonial authority functioned as a barrier to separate "Otherness" from metropolitan areas.<sup>13</sup>

Through her attic prison, the author shows how male-dominated systems prevent women from having control over their actions. Madness controls Bertha according to both the position of her gender and the historical racial oppression of colonial power which links her delusions to biological essentialist beliefs. Through novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys develops these insights by creating a backstory for Bertha then suggesting that her society's racial and gendered oppression moulded her beyond madness.<sup>14</sup>

**The Madwoman in *The Yellow Wallpaper*:** Throughout "The Yellow Wallpaper" the wallpaper represents both social restrictions against women and their societal condemnation. Through her growing obsession the wallpaper mirrors her current battle for identifying herself and gaining independence throughout her surroundings controlled by patriarchy.<sup>15</sup> We learn about gender and mental health interactions with social norms through observing the narrator's developing mental illness and her settled house arrest and the symbolic significance of her wallpaper.

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Ingham, Patricia. "The Myth of the Madwoman in the Attic: The Reception of *Jane Eyre*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1990, pp. 123–138.

<sup>14</sup> Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Norton & Company, 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Suess, Barbara A. "The Writing s on the Wall: Symbolic Orders in *The Yellow Wallpaper*." *Women's Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 79–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870310086>.

**The Narrator's Confinement and Mental Deterioration:** In "The Yellow Wallpaper" John behaves with antagonistic kindness through his management of his wife's treatment and kennel-like imprisonment of her emotions which harm rather than help her mental state.<sup>16</sup> Women during the 19th century faced societal views of extreme fragility needing male leadership so the rest cure embodied the prevalent belief in weak women minds and bodies. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" isolation drives the protagonist toward instability because the barriers of confinement make her insanity worse. Through the oppressive environment the narrator finds patriarchal control which drives her to look for freedom by destroying the very wallpaper that restricts her.<sup>17</sup> The great amount of control his husband asserts over her life through fake caregiving becomes a main reason for her deteriorating mental state because he ignores her thoughts while trying to assert dominance over herself.

**Symbolism of the Wallpaper and Female Imprisonment:** Throughout the narrative the yellow wallpaper stands as the strongest emblematic element. The complicated design of the wallpaper represents both her psychological condition in relationship to her environment of oppression. Because of her slipping mental health condition and her husband's oppressive control the yellow color of the wallpaper stands for sickness along with decay.<sup>18</sup> The complex maze pattern in this work reflects the mental distress escalating from living under an oppressive environment.<sup>19</sup> At first the pattern and color of the wallpaper created repulsion in the narrator whereas her fascination grew into a subtle obsession. The narrator develops intense preoccupation with the wallpaper which indicates her tried struggle to achieve liberation from the controlling dimensions of her present life. The wallpaper functions pictographically to reflect both the literal barriers trapping her body and the wider social institutions which cage women's ability to achieve independence and psychological good health.

**Comparative Analysis: The Madwoman as a Symbol of Repression:** Through their depiction of the madwoman both *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* use this character to represent how society mistreats and criticizes women whose mental states escape understanding. The principal characters Bertha Mason and the unnamed narrator bear significant similarities because their supposed mental conditions lead to confinement while functioning as an allegory for social and medical restrictions of women. Bertha and the

<sup>16</sup> Saadah, Sufi Ikrima, et al. "Antagonistic Kindness in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'the Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Elite English and Literature Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2, Dec. 2022, pp. 89–97, <https://doi.org/10.24252/elite.v9i2.28681>.

<sup>17</sup> Ali, Alma. "Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' as a Road to Women's Discourse." *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, Aug. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i04.4907>.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, Greg. "Gilman's Gothic Allegory: Rage and Redemption in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1989, pp. 521-530.

<sup>19</sup> Fetterley, Judith. "Reading about Reading." *The Feminist Press at CUNY*, 1978.

narrator function as dual reflections of each other by showing different methods of rebellion while holding the shared meaning as symbols of feminine suffering from patriarchal social standards. Through their stories these female characters expose structural limitations that both contain women physically while also trapping them emotionally and psychologically until their destruction.

### **Parallels between Bertha Mason and the Narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper***

**Isolation and Confinement:** The main subjects of isolation and confinement unify both "Jane Eyre" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." Through these narrative devices Brontë and Gilman explore the experience of female suffering by showing how societal rules oppress women to create destructive outcomes for their mental state and personal freedom.<sup>20</sup> Bertha Mason spends all her time trapped in the attic section of Thornfield Hall due to her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Through her literal imprisonment the author represents both mental and emotional barriers that Victorian society enforced on women.<sup>21</sup> John puts his wife under a rest cure protocol as she lives in a rented mansion nursery space because he diagnoses her with a nervous condition. As imprisonment and restricted activities lead to her mental breakdown, she develops an obsessive fixation toward the wallpaper.<sup>22</sup>

**Mental Illness:** Both characters bring attention to mental illness as their dominant topic. The text describes Bertha Mason as mad leaving her in isolation because of her illness.<sup>23</sup> Dr. John's medical restrictive treatments lead the Narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* from postpartum depression to a full mental breakdown while she maintains a state of confinement.<sup>24</sup> Through their characters both authors show that marginalization of women's powerful nature leads to psychological problems because patriarchal systems silence womanhood.

**Patriarchal Control:** Poitras explains that male figures' authoritarian behavior shows how patriarchal systems work to keep women in subjection.<sup>25</sup> *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* serve as examples according to feminist scholar Toril Moi to show how

<sup>20</sup> Pazhavila, Angie. *The Female Gothic Subtext: Gender Politics in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper*. Jan. 2007, <https://opus.uleth.ca/handle/10133/478>.

<sup>21</sup> Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Smith, Elder & Co., 1847.

<sup>22</sup> Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. *The New England Magazine*, 1892, pp. 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Richard J. Dunn, Norton Critical Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*, Dover Publications, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Poitras, Ivy Elizabeth. "The Method in the Madwoman: Functions of Female Madness and Feminized Liminality in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Yellow Wallpaper*." *University at Albany, State University of New York*, 2020, p. 23.

patriarchal systems harmed the mental and physical states of women through restrictive gender norms. Moi demonstrates through these texts that the societal pressure against female autonomy resulted in emotional distress and physical confinements which caused mental and physical illness.<sup>26</sup>

### **Different Depictions of Resistance and Confinement**

**Expressions of Resistance:** By carrying out violent acts Bertha reveals her resistance to imprisonment through her destructive behavior of lighting Rochester's bedroom on fire and making attempts to stop his union with Jane. Her conduct shows the deep strength of her suppressed passions because patriarchal power forcefully controls her.<sup>27</sup> Because her rebellion exists within her mind the protagonist develops an obsession for the wallpaper assuming it conceals a captured woman. Through her fixation with the wallpaper the narrator creates a method of persevering against bodily constraints which shows her wish for liberation.<sup>28</sup> Through violent behavior Bertha Mason presents external resistance in Jane Eyre while the protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper* uses passive resistance through internal means.

**Outcomes of Resistance:** Despite her noteworthy resistance Bertha ends her life in tragic circumstances. Failure to obey social conventions results in her punishment which eventually leads to her fatal downfall. The analysis criticizes modern society because it ostracizes and penalizes female nonconformity toward strict gender boundaries.<sup>29</sup> The narrator's resistance, though strong, results in her mental collapse. Her ongoing fascination with the wallpaper and her conviction about releasing the imprisoned woman leads to a complete mental deterioration. Shown through her inability to escape confinement the narrator displays damages that result from enforced immobility.<sup>30</sup>

**Critique of Medical and Social Systems:** During the 19th century medical institutions inquired Bertha Mason medically but treated her turmoil as if it were irrational or hysterical. Through her diagnosis the medical staff demonstrated their approach toward psychiatric

<sup>26</sup> Moi, Toril. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979, p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. 1892, Project Gutenberg, [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1952](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1952).

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979, p. 89.

<sup>30</sup> Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*. Virago Press, 1987, p. 110.

dilemmas by identifying them as departures from female stereotypes.<sup>31</sup> Through Bertha Mason's case in *Jane Eyre* the author critiques how the Victorian era treated mental illness especially when dealing with female patients.

The main character in *The Yellow Wallpaper* experienced harmful treatment from her husband during the timeline of the rest cure treatment that mandated bed rest and isolation. The treatment intensified her symptoms because these healthcare methods sought to reduce women to silence and social imprisonment.<sup>32</sup> The narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* experiences medical mistreatment because society during that time period ignored and dismissed mental health conditions in women.

**Psychological and Feminist Perspectives:** Both psychological and feminist perspectives provide detailed investigative methods to examine female mental instability in *Jane Eyre* by Brontë and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Perkins Gilman. During this time frame the authors examined what happens when gender norms meet mental health as well as how society views female conduct. The narrative demonstrates how patriarchal frameworks create a psychological and gendered oppression of women which carries mental costs as the characters confront restrictions and suppression.

**Psychoanalysis of Female Madness in Both Works:** According to psychoanalytic thought madness expresses unconscious battle and repressed psychological contents as well as internal psychic conflicts. Bertha Mason who married Rochester before *Jane Eyre* characterizes female mental dysfunction which stems from heterosexual constraints through colonial rulership. Feminist researchers read Bertha's madness as showing how the system silences women's freedom along with their independence and choices.<sup>33</sup> According to Freud the return of repressed emotion explains Bertha's mental condition because she reveals hidden passions that Victorian society refused to let women express leading to the mold of domestic perfection.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout *The Yellow Wallpaper* the protagonist's mental decline emerges entirely from her husband's coercive control combined with societal pressure. Through her failing mental state, the wallpaper turns into a metaphor aptly representing her physical capture plus increasing delusions of captivity. She starts recognizing patterns which contain imprisoned figures and recognizes them because they resemble her position trapped between social

<sup>31</sup> Shildrick, Margrit. *Dangerous Discourses: The Politics of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Macmillan Press, 1991, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Treichler, Paula A. *Women's Health, Women's Rights: The Historical Struggle for Mental Health and Autonomy*. Rutgers University Press, 1984, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. Virago Press, 1985.

<sup>34</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Avon, 1998.

expectations and her husband's dominant character. Instead of being born with madness she develops psychological instability because society confines her freedom to make decisions.<sup>35</sup>

**Feminist Theories of Gendered Oppression:** While Jane Eyre experiences oppressive social conditions in her period she avoids insanity on the path to her survival. Providing an example of what happens when women oppose societal norms Bertha illustrates the tragic results women face when their desire for autonomy exceeds their capacity to achieve it.<sup>36</sup>

Berker DAL analyzes in *The Yellow Wallpaper* how patriarchal society uses various manipulative methods to control feminine physical strength and mental health. Patriarchal society uses observation and punishment methods combined with distance techniques to govern both the narrator's physical body and linguistic expressions to control her thinking. This evaluation demonstrates how patriarchal oppression destroys women's freedom along with causing serious mental health issues.<sup>37</sup>

**The Role of Narrative Structure in Depicting Repression:** Mainly through narrative techniques, the two authors Charlotte Brontë and Charlotte Perkins Gilman demonstrate repression in *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* while showing how their characters experience psychological entrapment along with their battle for individual independence. Each narrative adopts a personal first-person perspective to enable readers to understand deeply the expression of social pressure and emotional and psychological repression which affect the main characters.

Through its first-person narrative style, the book reveals to readers everything Jane experiences while she faces the Victorian social limitations. Social position along with gender restricts both her independence and ability to speak. The reader's experience with Jane at both present and past times occurs through the first-person narrative framework enabling an examination of her inner struggles regarding shame and repression besides forming emotionally profound relationships that threaten traditional sympathetic readership.<sup>38</sup> The structured way Jane writes her story enables her to escape her limited

<sup>35</sup> Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*, edited by Joyce Carol Oates, Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 41-56.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979, p. 360.

<sup>37</sup> Berker, D.A.L. "Patriarchal Oppression in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." *Academia.edu*, 2015, [https://www.academia.edu/44972582/Patriarchal\\_Oppression\\_in\\_Charlotte\\_Perkins\\_Gilman\\_s\\_The\\_Yellow\\_Wallpaper\\_](https://www.academia.edu/44972582/Patriarchal_Oppression_in_Charlotte_Perkins_Gilman_s_The_Yellow_Wallpaper_).

<sup>38</sup> Bennett, Ashly. "Shameful Signification: Narrative and Feeling in *Jane Eyre*." *Narrative*, vol. 18, no. 3, Jan. 2010, pp. 300-23, <https://doi.org/10.1353/NAR.2010.0005>.

restrictions because she declares her personal experiences while resisting passive repression of women throughout that period.

A first-person narrative reveals how the main character displays both her suppression together with her decline into madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper." As readers go through the main character's personal story, they share in her loneliness alongside cultural restrictions that make her future rebellion more powerful emotionally.<sup>39</sup>

Both works demonstrate the journey of their protagonists through expressing or remaining silent to achieve greater voice control by allowing their stories to adapt based on their environment conditions. Throughout *Jane Eyre* uses her voice as a means to gain personal empowerment. The rejection of injustice in her life allowed Jane Eyre to gain independence and escape the abusive behavior of Mr. Rochester as well as the restrictive societal norms. Through her power of expression Jane Eyre distinguishes herself from Bertha Mason who remains bound to silence because of denying women their voices.<sup>40</sup>

In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the main character's struggles to speak due to patriarchal rules made by her husband John. The journal entries become her words to speak against her silent treatment while supporting her firsthand experience of mental illness.<sup>41</sup> By maintaining a journal *The Yellow Wallpaper's* protagonist asserts both passive and explicit resistance to her husbands' domination which exposes her hidden feelings and elevates the damage done by patriarchal restrictions.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the story, she expresses herself by openly resisting the silencing influences in her surroundings. At its desperate and tragic core, the tearing of wallpaper represents the woman's liberation struggle against her physical and mental imprisoning elements.

**The Madwoman's Role in Challenging the Patriarchal System:** Through their works about female madness, Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *The Yellow Wallpaper* depict mental disorders as female rebellion against male-dominated systems which deny women their freedom. These narratives use female madness as a metaphor to show women escaping the oppressive norms that limit both gender expression along with social power. The two literary works present different manifestations of female madness but agree on showing how women face mental deterioration as a punishment for

<sup>39</sup> Hall, Thelma R. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper": A Surrealistic Portrayal of a Woman's Arrested Development*. Jan. 1994, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED370113.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Beattie, Valerie. "The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in *Jane Eyre*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1996, pp. 161-175. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29533162>.

<sup>41</sup> Hood, Rebekah Michele. *Invisible Voices: Revising Feminist Approaches to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Including the Narrative of Mental Illness*. Jan. 2017, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7678&context=etd>.

<sup>42</sup> Hedges, Elaine R. "Afterword." *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Feminist Press, 1973, pp. 49-63.

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resisting patriarchal oppression. This reveals the dangers that arise when women strive to understand their oppression.

**Female Madness as a Form of Rebellion:** Female madness exists through Bertha Mason in "Jane Eyre" to symbolize the hidden anger which women experience because of societal gender restrictions. Bertha's transformative behavior defies male power through her state of mental instability because her madness stands for suppressed sexual desire and refusal to meet Victorian feminine standards. The attic serves as a reflection of Jane's inner battles because it exists just like her internal turmoil from societal restrictions. Through Bertha's broken state the novel demonstrates how society restricts female identity expression.<sup>43</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar established in "The Madwoman in the Attic" that Bertha Mason defines Jane Eyre's "truest and darkest double."<sup>44</sup>

Throughout "The Yellow Wallpaper" female mental deterioration stands as a metaphor to fight against patriarchal suppression. Through her breakdown the narrator battles for self-ownership to contradict both cultural standards and her husband and physician's confining requirements of bedrest.<sup>45</sup> Feminist scholar Susan Lanser explains that the "rest cure" treatment applied to the narrator by her husband functions beyond medical treatment because it functions to suppress her will and minimize her autonomy.<sup>46</sup> Judith Fetterley states that the narrator's uncontrolled state demonstrates a complete overhaul of male-female power relations particularly in matrimony.<sup>47</sup> Her rebellion manifests as a psychological and unconscious reaction to everything that oppresses her. Such an expression of madness serves as an opposing force against social domination since dominant power limits other methods of protest.

**Breaking Free: The Dangers of Unveiling Repression:** In her analysis of Victorian female mental health Elaine Showalter investigates how Bertha Mason demonstrates the worst possible outcomes of masculine dominance. Showalter identifies that Bertha's character reflects the cultural and medical approaches which sought to control and classify women's

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<sup>43</sup> Chawla, Cheena, and Patel Memorial. *Female Quest for a Self through Acts of Transgression: A Study of Jane Eyre and The Scarlet Letter*. Jan. 2014, <https://www.the-criterion.com/V5/n5/Cheena.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979, p. 360.

<sup>45</sup> Yogapriya, S. "Female Predicament in the Novel the Yellow Wallpaper." *Louis Savenien Dupuis Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, May 2022, pp. 17–20, <https://doi.org/10.21839/lsdjmr.2022.v1.29>.

<sup>46</sup> Lanser, Susan. "The Rest Cure and Women's Identity in *The Yellow Wallpaper*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1981, pp. 101-116. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044743>.

<sup>47</sup> Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Indiana University Press, 1978.

behavior.<sup>48</sup> The author investigates Jane's rebellious behavior which functions as a method to handle social restrictions and preventions. At Gateshead Jane risked uncovering social repression through her rebellious conduct which resulted in her forced exile or societal conflict because her social status was complex.<sup>49</sup> Both characters experience personal suffering and loss because they broke free from repression through rebellion. Unveiling repression causes greater harm to individuals than rebellious acts do since social structures resist transformation intensely.

According to Annette Kolodny the protagonist's fixated interest in wallpaper indicates her effort to escape from her trapped domestic environment. Kolodny interprets the wallpaper as both a metaphoric symbol of confinement and the narrator's foundational attempt to gain independence.<sup>50</sup> The analysis demonstrates why exposing repressed emotions can lead heroines to mental collapse. The conflict between patriarchy ends with her loss of sanity because she fights against established social restrictions.<sup>51</sup> The act of tearing down the wallpaper symbolizes how the narrator fights against both her medical restrictions and her traditional female character. Through the breakdown of the narrator Gilman demonstrates how healthcare professionals disregard women's emotional realities and how wider society restricts women to dull roles.

**Conclusion:** Both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Jane Eyre* use the madwoman character to metaphorically convey how patriarchal societies restrict women's freedom and cause their psychological breakdown. Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* and the unidentified speaker from *The Yellow Wallpaper* demonstrate how restrictive forces destroy women through the repression of their freedom of choice and emotional needs. The characters develop mental disorders because of the extreme circumstances they endure which mainly consists of enforced voicelessness and domestic restrictions combined with deprivation of personal agency. The story shows that when women attempt freedom from female constraints, they face devastating outcomes through Bertha's enclosure in the attic and the protagonist's forced restriction.

Through the enduring symbol of the madwoman in both narratives, society demonstrates its habit of disciplining women when they defy social norms and want to be

<sup>48</sup> Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*

<sup>49</sup> "Power Strife and Rebellion in 'Jane Eyre' from the Perspective of Field." *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 11, Jan. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.25236/ajhss.2023.061101>.

<sup>50</sup> Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." *New Literary History*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1980, pp. 451-467. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/468938>.

<sup>51</sup> Tang, Xiaoon. "Analysis of the Awakening of the Heroine's Female Consciousness in the *Yellow Wallpaper*." *Journal of Education and Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 2, July 2023, pp. 150-56, <https://doi.org/10.54097/jeer.v4i2.10847>.

themselves. Through Bertha's destructive action of burning Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* society becomes aware of the destructive outcomes which happen when emotions and identities are forced to remain suppressed. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* the narrator destroys the wallpaper during her mental collapse because she uses it to fight against her imprisoning mental restrictions. The main characters defy traditional gender norms for women by demonstrating that suppression of female autonomy creates destructive outcomes in their lives.

The literary works continue to generate significant impact within modern scholarly discussions about gender in combination with mental health. Feminist analysis today continues to focus on the mental wellness of women together with the detrimental effects of social gender requirements. Society continues to expect women to occupy specified roles while ignoring their personal uniqueness as well as their minds and emotional state. Society continues to treat women's expressions of emotions with prejudice and discrimination. The mental condition of the madwoman in *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* demonstrates the harmful outcomes of holding back psychological suffering thus emphasizing our present-day necessity for sympathetic treatment of women's mental health.

Through their narratives these works warn audiences about the destructive effects of silencing women and their needs including mental health requirements which require social institutions to progress beyond repression to ensure complete freedom of expression. Both *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* serve as important works which remain crucial to our present-day discussion of gender identity and mental health and personal rights since they illustrate modern challenges that affect women's lives.

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