To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stuart Allen Morris entitled "The Anxiety Behind Gynocriticism: Contemporary Application of Gilbert & Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic.*" I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Nancy M. Goslee, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
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The Anxiety Behind Gynocriticism:

Contemporary Application of Gilbert & Gubar's

The Madwoman in the Attic

A Thesis

Presented for the

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Bobbie,

who gave me *White Teeth* and her heart.

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Abstract

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 1979 critical study *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with its gynocritical approach to the fictions of nineteenth-century women writers and the anxieties those writers faced, has garnered much critical attention since its publication--both positive and negative. As feminist criticism has expanded and branched off into several new disciplines, the idea that women writers formed a kind of literary community through the way in which they incorporated their anxieties into the fictions they created has been challenged by subsequent critics. This study examines that critical disapproval and seeks to demonstrate why Gilbert & Gubar's approach is still worthy of study as a system of interpretation and how their approach can be adapted and applied to literature written after the nineteenth century.

This project explores the relevance of Gilbert & Gubar's critical study through an examination of three novels published since 1979: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of how a novel written by a contemporary "literary woman" can be influenced by the works of previous male authors--but in a positive manner. *The Passion*, through the presence of agoraphobic tendencies and reactions in the text and its characters, leads to the conclusion that anyone who struggles against patriarchal tradition will suffer at the hands of that tradition. Lastly, *White Teeth* demonstrates how the kind of anxiety that "infects" the writing of women has changed at the beginning of the twenty-first century from a more

patriarchy/society based anxiety to one based on issues of religion, ethnicity, and race.

Table of Contents

Introduction - Climbing up to the Attic 1

Chapter 1 - Rummaging around for Skeletons in the Attic: Negative Critical Response to *The Madwoman in the Attic* 7

Chapter 2 - Influential Anxiety in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Another Side of Literary Dystopia 28

Chapter 3 - The Topography of Agoraphobia: Mapping Hysterical Desire in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* 47

Chapter 4 - Nineteenth-Century Characters Created Anew: The Search for a Positive Role Model in the London of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* 67

Conclusion - Climbing Down from the Attic 87

Works Cited 90

Vita 95

Introduction

Climbing up to the Attic

In 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published *The Madwoman in the Attic*, an important gynocritical text in which they linked the major nineteenth-century women writers together by what they called the "anxiety of authorship," an adaptation of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence." Gilbert & Gubar sought to adjust Bloom's theory--in which male authors internalize from their literary forefathers the fear that they will fail as writers--to tell the story of women writers who "allayed their distinctively female anxieties of authorship by following Emily Dickinson's famous advice to "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" (73). They theorized that writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot "struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture," suggesting further that these writers--whether consciously or unconsciously--incorporate these struggles into the fictions that they create (51). Gilbert & Gubar see this incorporation manifested in the actions and thoughts of fictitious characters; thus, they spend the bulk of their lengthy text examining the works of the aforementioned authors (and others) in order to expose and link the many accounts of anxiety and madness these works contain and show how these accounts relate and connect to the struggles of the women who authored them.

This project begins with an affirmation of *The Madwoman in the Attic* as a positive and worthwhile piece of literary theory through its study of anxiety and madness, despite numerous criticisms to the contrary. Discussion of these criticisms of *The Madwoman in the Attic* forms the first chapter of my project. The rest of the project deals with how Gilbert & Gubar's work can be applied and adapted in order to remain a vital tool in examining contemporary literature. This discussion will be accomplished by examining three novels published since 1979, the year Gilbert & Gubar published *The Madwoman in the Attic*: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of how a novel written by a contemporary "literary woman" can be influenced by the works of previous male authors--but in a positive manner. *The Passion*, through the presence of agoraphobic tendencies and reactions in the text and its characters, leads to the conclusion that anyone who struggles against patriarchal tradition will suffer at the hands of that tradition. Lastly, *White Teeth* demonstrates how the kind of anxiety that "infects" the writing of women has changed at the beginning of the twenty-first century from a more patriarchy/society based anxiety to one based on issues of religion, ethnicity, and race.

The first chapter will consist of a discussion of the various criticisms of *The Madwoman in the Attic*. According to different critics, Gilbert & Gubar defy history, ignore history, ignore writing by men, appropriate the patriarchal idea of a "grand narrative," reduce the interpretive scope of authors and their works to fit into a certain scheme, and use a culturally anachronistic definition of madness on which to base their project. Based on these and other critiques, the

two main criticisms of Gilbert & Gubar's work are that they assume a community of women that does not exist, and that the basis of their criticism--the anxiety of authorship--is too narrow and unproductive.

The theoretical groundwork of the contention that women writers can be said to form a community comes from two other canonical works of feminist literary criticism: Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). For Gilbert & Gubar, one of the more interesting and influential facets of these works is the attractiveness of Moers' and Showalter's examinations of the literary environment of the nineteenth century. While Gilbert & Gubar found this examination of the nineteenth-century attractive enough to use as a foundation for their work, many critics have been less than impressed with the "women as community" argument. As I interpret the works of critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Nina Baym, and Chris Weedon, who argue that *The Madwoman in the Attic* is reliant on the flawed concept of community, the best way to defend Gilbert & Gubar's work is to argue that certain themes and issues (i.e., madness and anxiety) link particular fictions and the authors of these fictions together in such a way that invites the construction of a genre. Furthermore, while the current literary climate is more global and widespread than ever (not to mention the splintering of the critical theory community) a critical theory such as Gilbert & Gubar's, with its reliance on those qualitative links, can still be especially useful. That is, even though it might be difficult or impossible today to create a category of contemporary fiction written be women with clearly defined boundaries that possesses any semblance of unity (except for maybe biological determination), it is still possible to use the

category Gilbert & Gubar create in order to help understand those contemporary fictions.

The criticism of Gilbert & Gubar's narrow scope made by critics such as Nina Auerbach, Mary Jacobus, and Toril Moi is best answered by suggesting that Gilbert & Gubar were attempting to develop a critical theory that would include a multitude of authors--all women--and the "fictions" that they create. Whether or not they completely succeeded in this task is one question; whether or not the means of examination within that critical study are worthwhile is another. My main goal in the remaining chapters is to answer the criticisms of *The Madwoman in the Attic* by suggesting that Gilbert & Gubar's means of examination are very much worth studying as a system of interpretation and can even be adapted and applied to literature written after the nineteenth century.

In the second chapter, "Influential Anxiety in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Another Side of Literary Dystopia," I focus on Margaret Atwood's statement that George Orwell's *1984*, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* helped motivate the creation of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This chapter will be the one that most directly deals with Gilbert & Gubar's "anxiety of authorship"; I intend, however, to demonstrate how their theory can be adapted--much as they adapted Bloom's theory--to show how previous male authorship can create an anxiety that leads to the author's need to retell and reshape a particular story. In the three visions of dystopia mentioned above, the authors eventually reduce women to sexual and reproductive objects, particularly in the cases of *1984* and *Brave New World* where the women do not even seem to mind this reduction. While Orwell and Huxley may not consciously be attempting a critique of gender and women, this move might disturb many readers by the inference that only

the occasional male has the ability to see through the ideology of the dystopia. In response to this depiction of women, Atwood creates another society where women are reduced to sexual and reproductive objects; this time, though, Atwood creates a character that does mind this objectification. This key difference is the first aspect of the novel that I will discuss, focusing on how the narrator's actions and desires might stem from Atwood's adverse response to the works of Orwell, Burgess, and Huxley. The second part of *The Handmaid's Tale* that I will explore is the end of the novel in which an "enlightened" society discusses the narrative and appears not to understand its real significance. This section I would also argue stems from Atwood's adverse reaction to the works of Orwell, Burgess, and Huxley.

The third chapter, "The Topography of Agoraphobia: The Mapping of Hysterical Desire in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*," will be based on Gilbert & Gubar's theory that the cause of agoraphobia in women is "patriarchal socialization"--a theory that they expand on in their discussion of Jane Austen (53). I want to argue that Winterson uses the idea of agoraphobia in *The Passion* to create a world in which wide-open, public spaces of the patriarchal social order create insanity while confinement in private, enclosed spaces leads to stability and order. What Winterson does in *The Passion* by way of her usual play with gender and sexuality, though, is show that agoraphobia is not just a woman's disease--it eventually disrupts the life of everyone opposed to tradition (i.e., patriarchy). My analysis in this chapter will focus on the major characters--Napoleon, Henri, Villanelle, and Patrick--and their reactions to the element of enclosed and open spaces.

The last chapter, "Nineteenth-Century Characters Created Anew:

The Search for a Positive Role Model in the London of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*," deals with the central character of Irie Jones and her encounters with friends, family, and the London of the late twentieth century. Interacting with her Jamaican mother and English father, a Bengali family with an emasculated father and Islamic extremist son, and a "liberal" suburbanite family bent on radical scientific achievement, Irie Jones is left bereft of any semblance of cultural identity at the end of the twentieth century. Unable to assimilate herself into any of her surroundings, Irie is incapable of attaining the cultural "freedom" for which her name stands in Jamaican. In this chapter, I will explore the transition I see from the more general anxiety of authorship for women writers, which is related specifically to the struggle against patriarchy, to the contemporary anxiety of women writers who struggle with national, racial, and religious identity. This transition, to me, is the best argument for *The Madwoman in the Attic* as a working piece of literary criticism for contemporary fiction.

Chapter 1

Rummaging around for Skeletons in the Attic: Negative Critical Response to *The Madwoman in the Attic*

Gilbert & Gubar aptly title their introduction to the second edition of *The Madwoman in the Attic* "The Madwoman in the Academy" (2000). Though the introduction is, for the most part, positive and even celebratory in tone, Gilbert & Gubar occasionally acknowledge the existence of critical disapproval of their 1979 work. Susan Gubar stops just "short of exclaiming that the implications of some of the arguments embedded in [poststructuralist investigations] and against *The Madwoman in the Attic* have turned *us* into madwomen in the academy" (xxxix). Gubar laments the idea that, over the years, the writer of the text has lost theoretical importance in favor of the idea of "textual production as a complex and powerful set of meaning-effects with political implication" (xxxviii). Gubar sounds even more aggravated when she comments that the work of critics like Toril Moi and Mary Jacobus have made "it difficult indeed to do feminist work in a literary historical context" by rejecting "*any* formulation that would lend credence either to the term 'woman' or to the category 'women writers'" (xxxviii). Although it is not likely that anyone will deny *The Madwoman* its place in the annals of critical theory, Gubar's own words demonstrate a certain concern that the text, as well as the theory contained within, is perhaps becoming obsolete--a relic from a critical world that has since "moved on."

Before examining the criticism of *The Madwoman in the Attic* that has been published between its release and the present time, it is important to understand the climate in which Gilbert & Gubar published their text. In 1979, Toril Moi had not published her feminist criticism of feminist criticism, Nancy Armstrong had not written her political history of the novel, and Judith Butler's theory of performativity would not be fully realized for over ten years. All of these works undoubtedly changed the way people study and write about literature. Before any of those works appeared, however, two critical volumes had been published that greatly aided in developing feminist criticism and that led to the composition of *The Madwoman*: Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977).

Moers, as discussed earlier, begins with the question of what makes the idea of women writers so "fascinating," writing that the biological determination of the female sex as it pertains to writing is "one of those facts which raises questions, opens perspectives, illuminates and explains" (xi). Moers constructs the idea of history of literary women for three main reasons: women write about "everything special to a woman's life," literary communities "already practice a segregation of major women writers unknowingly," and the environment of the 1970's invites the establishment of the history of women in literature (xiii). Building on Moers' construction of a history of literary women, Showalter begins with what one could interpret as a defense of her project:

> English women writers have never suffered from the lack of a reading audience, nor have they wanted for attentions from scholars and critics. Yet we have never been sure what

> unites them as women, or, indeed, whether they share a common heritage connected to their womanhood at all. (3)

Needless to say, both Moers and Showalter found answers sufficient enough to publish their works and begin the study of gynocriticism in earnest; beyond the general proposition of gynocriticism, however, there is a more specific discussion that Moers and Showalter undertake that may have provided the compulsion for Gilbert & Gubar to look at women writers as a unified group.

Showalter suggests that women have always found themselves without a literary history because of what Germaine Greer calls the "phenomenon of the transcience [*sic*] of female literary fame," which is defined as the repeated occurrence of the woman writer who enjoys "dazzling literary prestige during [her] own [lifetime], only to vanish from the records of posterity" (qtd. in Showalter 11). Showalter additionally credits this lack of literary history to "the self-hatred that has alienated women writers from a sense of collective identity" (12). Showalter, as well as Moers, sees the nineteenth century as the time when these disruptions end and publishing becomes a viable professional option for women, citing a woman's use of a male pseudonym (i.e., George Eliot and George Sand) as one key indication of liberation. Showalter goes on to further map out and execute her project, but it is these two preliminary remarks that may have had the most resounding effect on Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

The Madwoman in the Attic is nothing if it is not a lengthy catalogue of frustration, anxiety, and a number of psychological disorders that exist in literature written by women. These conditions no doubt exist occasionally in all kinds of literature, but, as Gilbert & Gubar ask, why are they so pervasive in women's literature? From

Showalter's text, Gilbert & Gubar appear to have taken the ideas of self-hatred and forced anonymity and built upon them in order to show that repression of these kinds of anger and their subsequent expression leads to madness that infects the writer's literary sensibilities, thus causing a further infection of that madness into her fiction; oddly enough, however, they never seem explicitly to justify this claim. Instead, they begin their project with Virginia Woolf's idea that one must first kill "the angel in the house" in order to step towards literary autonomy. Gilbert & Gubar then further assert that one must then confront the monster, the double of the angel, in order to be completely free of the patriarchal aesthetic. The act of murder implicit in the metaphor described above as well as the "diabolic" image of the monster, or madwoman, that Gilbert & Gubar proceed to depict are what they appear most readily to link to anger (545). Though the relation of anger and madness is not made explicitly clear in the text (despite the fact that they link madness and anger together in their index), Gilbert & Gubar intend to make the relation clear through the aesthetic of the angel/monster depiction of women in literature written, for the part, by men that is subsequently forced on women writers by their (male) literary ancestry.

For Gilbert & Gubar, then, the question of the woman as writer is a social question. As broad as their work is, Gilbert & Gubar want to show that one specific fact exists inalienably: up to the nineteenth century, women have struggled to find genuine acceptance in the literary community, which has a distinct effect on the fictions that nineteenth-century women writers created. To Gilbert & Gubar, their establishment of women writers as a community is the best way to show how these women writers reacted to being excluded from the literary

community--an establishment that unifies rather than separates. Further, Gilbert & Gubar base their argument on the idea that these writers sublimate these feelings of critical rejection into their fictions via representations of anxiety and madness expressed in the characters of those fictions. That the existence of these anxieties and madnesses exists in virtually all of the major work by women writers in the nineteenth century suggests to Gilbert & Gubar that there is evidence of a sort of community--on a mental and creative level rather than a literal one--that unifies and codifies the existence of the woman writer. This idea of a non-literal community is undoubtedly the one that has drawn the most criticism over the years. Rather than show how that criticism has developed chronologically, I have arranged the discussion of the responses of critics to *The Madwoman* in such a way that allows for a more complete picture of the critical environment as it pertains to *The Madwoman*.

The theoretical move that Gilbert & Gubar make in order to link anger, madness, and literary ancestry comes from an adaptation of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Gilbert & Gubar note that Bloom's theory is both patriarchal and similar to Freud's theory of patriarchy, "whose psychoanalytic postulates permeate Bloom's literary psychoanalyses" (47). They further reason that Bloom's Oedipal structure leaves no room for a woman to exist as a literary precursor because--since all literary precursors are male-- these precursors "attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which . . . drastically conflict with her own sense of her self" (48). Thus, Gilbert & Gubar create their theory of "anxiety of authorship" based on the feminine aesthetic that literary fathers hand down to their descendants, theorizing that women are hesitant to assume the

role of author because that act would require that they either accept that diabolical aesthetic or defy it.

It is of interest to note that Gilbert & Gubar see the possibility of twentieth-century success for women writers thanks to that woman of the nineteenth century who was willing to engage in "conflict with the will of her (male) precursors" (49) because Bloom himself dismisses the Freudian reading of his own theory in his introduction to the second edition (1997) of *The Anxiety of Influence*: "Any adequate reader of this book . . . will see that influence-anxiety does not so much concern the forerunner but rather is an anxiety achieved in and by the story" (xxiii). Perhaps even referring to *The Madwoman* as a text where his theory has been "weakly misread," Bloom wants the reader to believe that any resulting anxiety that occurs in a "story" based on prior literary influence is not the fault of the author (i.e., the father) who came before the possessor of the anxiety (xxiii). If one believes Bloom, then, the conflict that Gilbert & Gubar seek to establish between male ancestor and female descendant does not exist because the ancestor had no notion of conflict in the first place. This idea might be accurate if one can assume some sort of first literary father; after the first son becomes a father, however, he must (on some level) realize that he is perpetuating the cycle of anxiety of influence (because he has once been on the receiving end of that anxiety). Thus, it appears as if there must be some connection between literary father and son (or daughter), which would support the combative system that Gilbert & Gubar suggest that nineteenth-century women writers initiated via the incorporation of madness in their fictions.

Whether or not Bloom's theory is in itself Oedipal, Gilbert & Gubar's adaptation relies heavily on the idea that the feminine model in literature is handed down "from the stern 'literary' fathers of patriarchy to all their 'inferiorized' female descendants" (51). Gilbert & Gubar look to Milton as the most essential proof of the predecessor's involvement in the perpetuation of the feminine model, claiming that his account of woman's fall is itself misogynistic--they even go so far as to title their section on Mary Shelley and Emily Brontë "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers." They read Milton's version of Eve as "the story of woman's secondness, her otherness, and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall, and her exclusion from that garden . . ." (191). Gilbert & Gubar also do not let it go unmentioned that Milton's claim to "justify the ways of God to men" appears to put Milton in the place of God, especially to the women whose kind he appears to be damning (1.26). Of course, since the story of the "fall" of Eve and her subsequent "betrayal" of Adam comes from the Old Testament, Milton--*if* one believes Gilbert & Gubar's argument--is hardly doing anything but perpetuating a myth that has already permeated Western society; contrary to what Bloom might say, however, Gilbert & Gubar argue that Milton has distinctly perpetuated this myth--and, therefore, the idea that women are subordinate to men--with deliberate consideration.

Nina Auerbach's 1980 review of *The Madwoman* picks up this idea of hegemonic patriarchy, especially as it applies to Milton: "the book entangles *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* so deeply in *Paradise Lost* as almost to rob these great novels of autonomous life" (506). Gilbert & Gubar's treatment of *Paradise Lost* is a microcosm of the book's greatest flaw, according to Auerbach, as "Gilbert/Gubar seem to me too

quick to erect a giant straw penis to explain the shape of woman's art . . . assuming a universal conspiracy between writing and patriarchy" (506). Despite these criticisms, however, Auerbach sees *The Madwoman* as a "bible of revolution" as well as a "jubilant achievement [that] assures that woman writers of the nineteenth century can never again be adored and patronized in the old way" (505, 507). Indeed, despite the expression of doubt concerning the assumption of conspiracy, the tone of Auerbach's review is, overall, a positive one. Many critics, however, were not able to forgive *The Madwoman*'s structure, as Auerbach appears to have done.

In her 1981 review of *The Madwoman*, Mary Jacobus acts as one of those critics who is ultimately unable to forgive Gilbert & Gubar's theoretical structure--or, as Jacobus would have it, Gilbert & Gubar's narrative plot. Jacobus compares Gilbert & Gubar's reliance on Milton as the modern father of female literary anxiety to George Eliot's Causabon with his search for the key to all mythologies. Like Auerbach, Jacobus is extremely suspicious of the patriarchal conspiracy that takes shape in *The Madwoman*. Jacobus's other main criticism of *The Madwoman* is that the narrative of anxiety that Gilbert & Gubar's school creates, "both in what it leaves out and what it fills in, is ultimately determined by the terms of the narrative itself" (522). The narrative that Jacobus refers to is Gilbert & Gubar's narrative, a move that suggests that Gilbert & Gubar are creating (or shaping) their own reality of the nineteenth century rather than the one that really exists. Thus, rather than seeing positives amongst the negatives as Auerbach does, Jacobus is much more content to condemn the whole. As later critics write about *The Madwoman*, condemnation of Gilbert & Gubar's interpretive techniques appears to become the critical vogue.

In her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), Toril Moi makes the case that Gilbert & Gubar's brand of literary theory actually affirms the patriarchal ideology against which women writers were supposedly raging against through expressions of anxiety and madness. Moi hypothesizes that one cannot reject a view such as the hierarchical relationship between author and text that the anxiety of authorship implies without similarly rejecting "the *critical practice* it leads to," meaning here that Gilbert & Gubar cannot simultaneously affirm the gendered hierarchy of literature and attempt to destroy it at the same time (62). Moi further argues that if one makes this rejection of the critical practice (that leads to the anxiety of authorship), then one must further accept Roland Barthes's death of the author as reality. Instead of relying on the patriarchal hierarchy to base their theory, then, Moi believes that Gilbert & Gubar should have made their argument without that hierarchy, thereby acknowledging the fact that such author-based criticism in no longer in vogue. Basin her argument on Mary Jocobus's theory that *The Madwoman* exists as a narrative plot in and of itself, Moi comes to the conclusion that the text of *The Madwoman* is little more than a narrative plot that serves to confirm that phallic nature of authority in writing.

Of course, it does not take Gilbert & Gubar to confirm a patriarchal conspiracy--all one has to do is look at the appendix of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994) to locate such a conspiracy. Bloom, acting more as a compiler than critic, attempts to create a formal list of the Western canon, but he does not include authors such as Julian of Norwich, Jane Barker, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Bradstreet--or even Aphra Behn. In fact, the first female author recognized in Bloom's list is Jane Austen. What Gilbert & Gubar do,

then, is merely acknowledge the existence of a certain history in order to show that some women attempted to work within that history. Instead of quibbling over terminology such as sex and gender, decrying further perpetuation of a patriarchal conspiracy, or trying to argue that conspiracy out of existence altogether by providing a new historical context, Gilbert & Gubar want to use something that already appears to exist in the critical community in order to cultivate a positive historical theory that will contribute to the rapidly-growing genre of feminist criticism. Not unexpectedly, though, even the notion of a historical theory eventually comes under critical scrutiny.

When Nancy Armstrong lays out her thesis for the existence of a history of sexual difference as a social construct in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), she uses Gilbert & Gubar as one of her main targets of criticism: "Gilbert and Gubar virtually ignore the historical conditions that women have confronted as writers, and in so doing they ignore the place of women's writing in history" (8). For Armstrong, Gilbert & Gubar's largest shortcoming is their willingness to presuppose that gender has always already been decisive and society had no part in making it so. Thus, Armstrong argues, it is not productive to view women as a community that exists within society that has to subvert and work within a system dominated by men; instead, Gilbert & Gubar should have asked why women novelists became prominent in the nineteenth century as opposed to being merely the majority of novelists in the eighteenth century. Though Armstrong's theory of sexual difference as social construct is notable, she is not the first to question Gilbert & Gubar's indifference to history and its chronology when it comes to the "community" of women writers in the nineteenth century.

Even before Armstrong published her major work on historicism, Nina Baym makes what is possibly the most negative reading of Gilbert & Gubar's theory in "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory" (1984). Baym makes no secret of her dislike for feminist literary theory in general, stating that it only succeeds when "it ignores or dismisses the earlier paths of feminist literary study as 'naïve' and grounds its own theories in those currently in vogue with the men who make theory" (279). Baym then focuses on *The Madwoman* and the idea that women writers had no other way to express their frustration at the patriarchal social order than by expression it in their fiction by claiming that Gilbert & Gubar's work "assumes the existence of the historical and literary situation which its textual readings require" (281). In reality, Baym argues that women in the nineteenth century had "realizable ambition[s] to become professional writers" (281); the idea that defiance of patriarchal culture must necessarily be hidden within women's writing would be, therefore, absurd. Moreover, Baym believes that the inter-textual nature of Gilbert & Gubar's study ignores any part of culture or history that exists outside the text, weakening the validity of the study itself.

In her 1990 state of feminist theory article, "Feminism and Literature," Showalter makes a gesture to this type of criticism in her analysis of the progress of gynocriticism. She cites K.K. Ruthven's claim in his *Feminist Literary Studies* (1984) that feminist critics--no doubt including Gilbert & Gubar--are perpetrating the same crime as their male counterparts--"namely an exclusive preoccupation with the writings of one sex" (125). Showalter answers that these claims of separatism are grossly unfair "since no one charges that it is 'separatist' to write about American literature, Romantic poetry, or

the Russian novel" (191). She goes on to point out that most feminist critics already have a broad-based education in literature, which will have exposed them to many of the canonical male authors; thus, even though a critic may not choose specifically to mention the works of male authors, it is impossible to separate "women's writing from its contexts in a masculine tradition" (192)--not to mention the fact that, in Gilbert & Gubar's case, they include brief discussions of male authors such as William Blake, Lord Byron, Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and Charles Dickens in *The Madwoman* in order to offer a point of comparison.

Myra Jehlen's criticism of *The Madwoman* in "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" (1982) anticipates Showalter's statement by arguing that in order to effect change or create something new, there must be a place from which to stand or begin. Jehlen compares much of feminist thinking and its relation to maleness and patriarchy with Archimedes' idea of moving the earth: "to lift the earth with his lever required someplace else on which to locate himself and his fulcrum" (190). Thus, in the case of Gilbert & Gubar's project, a consideration of women's writing is futile without some point of comparison with its male counterpart. Jehlen uses Gilbert & Gubar's examination of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an example, stating that one must interpret Satan--presumably Milton's version, that is--as an entity unto himself as well as how Shelley's fellow male Romantics perceived Satan before one can fully begin to decipher Shelley's conception of Satan. "Put simply, then, the issue for a feminist reading of *Frankenstein* is to distinguish its female version of Romanticism: an issue of relatedness and historicity" (198). In a way,

though, this kind of consideration--to an extent--is precisely what occurs in *The Madwoman*.

In her comment from "Feminism and Literature" concerning the context of masculine tradition, Showalter argues that Gilbert & Gubar most likely know and understand the link between *Paradise Lost* and, for example, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*; they choose not to mention *Jones*, however, because it does not fit with their study. Looking at Showalter's statement from another perspective, though, it is the most effective response to the criticisms of Jacobus, Moi, Armstrong, and Baym: it is impossible to separate writing, male or female, from the historical tradition that predates it, which, by taking a brief look at the canon, is overwhelmingly masculine. Gilbert & Gubar may have skewed history in order to aid in the establishment of their (non-literal) community on more than one occasion in *The Madwoman*, but they do so only to aid in describing something (i.e., the community of women writers) that clearly exists already. One certainly cannot ignore Shelley's pervasive allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein*, Brontë's Heathcliff making a *hell* out of *heaven* in *Wuthering Heights*, and Eliot's young Dorothea tending to the old and nearly sightless Causabon. In a slightly less direct manner, one can even go so far as to suggest Lydia Bennet's marriage to Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* is Jane Austen's acknowledgment of the tradition of Eve's fall and subsequent disgrace. Moreover, it would be no simple matter to dismiss all these allusions to the same (patriarchal) tradition as mere coincidence.

The pervasiveness of these allusions in the fictions of these writers is precisely what causes the stigma that Gilbert & Gubar decide to term "the anxiety of authorship." Whether one accepts the Bloomian

model or not, the sheer number of times these writers find it necessary to confront Eve's fall (an event from the Bible that has been absorbed into Western culture and its literature) indicates that some sort of literary patriarchal socialization exists--in other words, while these novels all have multitudinous aspects that recommend them to critical study and canonical longevity, one of those aspects is how stubbornly depictions or allusions to the Fall--more specifically Eve--appear in these novels.

Gilbert & Gubar base their study of anxiety and madness in literature by women on the idea that, from its popular inception with Freud, hysteria (*hyster* being Greek for womb) in all its forms--including agoraphobia and anorexia--is a woman's disease that is caused by patriarchal socialization. By that definition, then, Milton's bogey is another form of hysteria. Following that logic, the novels written by these women writers are expressions of that hysteria. Just as Showalter would later detail further and more explicitly in her 1997 study of hysteria, *Hystories*, Gilbert & Gubar argue that these works by women writers are positive in their depictions of hysteria as they solidify a tradition of expression rather than repression. This tradition of expression is so vital to dealing with hysteria because, as with many other mental illnesses, diseases, and addictions, acknowledgement is the first step towards the individual taking control of the self and the mind. Gilbert & Gubar argue virtually the same thing, suggesting that the woman writer's ascendance into literary acceptance is concurrent with the expression of her frustrations and anger in the fictions she created.

The danger of grouping authors in this kind of relationship is what Oyunn Hestetun addresses in her work, *A Prison-House of Myth*

(1993), where she analyzes *The Madwoman* alongside works by Henry Nash Smith and Fredric Jameson using a framework that explores symptomal readings and historical assumptions. In introducing Gilbert & Gubar's work, Hestetun points out that *The Madwoman* possesses elements that, "when relating ideas, assumptions, and their literary expression to patriarchal society," lead one to see what Lyotard termed a "grand narrative" (124). She then presents the opinion of Stanley and Wise, feminist critics who object to the "grand narrative" approach, that the "grand narrative" as a "causal" theory seeks to implicate someone or something (i.e., a scapegoat) such as in "Marxist sociohistorical models for literary production" (124). Instead of the bourgeoisie that Marxists implicate in their "grand theory," Gilbert & Gubar implicate patriarchy as the basis of the frustrated nature of women's writing as well as the basis of the themes and imagery contained within the writing itself. Interestingly, even though Hestetun's observation appears to support many of the other criticisms directed against Gilbert & Gubar that claim they rely too heavily on the idea that patriarchy is so pervasive that it denies the woman writer the ability to create and publish literature successfully prior to the nineteenth century, Hestetun herself does not see the issue of "grand narrative" as necessarily being a negative thing at all.

Differing from Hestetun, however, Chris Weedon takes issue with that idea that patriarchy is so pervasive in Gilbert & Gubar's project. In *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987), he argues that the danger in a study such as *The Madwoman* is that Gilbert & Gubar depict patriarchy as a "seamless web against which the repressed authentic female voice is powerless" (150). This criticism hearkens back in a way to Baym's argument that writing as a profession was

possible for women in the nineteenth century. The kind of gynocriticism that Gilbert & Gubar employ is one, according to Weedon, that enacts a critical paralysis that can be avoided by focusing on "both the changing structures and practices in which patriarchal power is exercised and the changing modes of femininity which become possible at particular historical moments" (150). Unlike Baym, however, Weedon feels that many of Gilbert & Gubar's analyses are useful as examples of the ways in which patriarchal discourse affects how women express themselves, which is one of Gilbert & Gubar's main goals in the first place.

As should not be surprising at this point, many critics disagree with Weedon's opinion that Gilbert & Gubar's analyses are useful. Moi sees (in *Sexual/Textual Politics*) the "*feminist rage*" that motivates women to pick up the pen and write as a hegemonically inaccurate mechanism that Gilbert & Gubar use "as the *only* positive signal of a feminist consciousness" in order to justify their project (62). Using the writing of Jane Austen as her example, Moi writes that "Austen's gentle irony is lost on them, whereas the explicit rage and moodiness of Charlotte Brontë's texts furnish them with superb grounds for stimulating exegesis" (62). At first glance it does indeed seem odd that an author whose novels are considered deeply involved with "manners" might be afflicted with any kind of rage. Moi's questioning of Gilbert & Gubar's reading of Jane Austen (i.e., Jane Austen's "rage") brings the connection between madness and anger back into consideration, especially considering her criticism that Anglo-American feminists force every woman's text to be about rage because that seems to be all they have to use. To Gilbert & Gubar's credit, however, it is essential to understand that expressions of rage need not actually

contain any anger. To assume that rage cannot be expressed in a more calm, deliberate manner would be to deny the value of creative expression in fictions as well as in any other art form--although that assumption might explain why Moi believes Gilbert & Gubar's reading of Austen is so weak.

If patriarchal socialization is a coercive force that creates hysterical anxiety in women writers, then positive release can come only from recognition of the coercive element. In the case of Jane Austen, there is much critical debate as to whether her constant repudiation of marriage and decorum is subversive or conservative--this debate is truly a never-ending one that cannot be answered here. The fact that Austen is so overwhelmingly concerned with decorum (that is, the rules and conditions of the patriarchal social order), however, is a sign in and of itself that indicates Austen has recognized the existence of patriarchal socialization--and she subsequently spent her entire career responding to it. That patriarchal socialization could so fully encompass Austen's creative energies perhaps suggests a kind of obsessive anxiety related to decorum. The question then becomes whether or not the origin of this obsession in an author like Austen (or Shelley, Eliot, or the Brontë sisters) is some kind of anger or frustration or simply innocuous curiosity--again, with Austen, this question may be unanswerable. To dismiss the possibility outright that anger stemming from the pervasiveness of decorum dictated by patriarchal socialization exists and can be sublimated into genteel irony, however, would be a mistake.

The idea of the woman writer using "madness" caused by anger and frustration to create a positive expression of that "madness" fuels perhaps one of the most interesting criticisms of *The Madwoman*. Marta

Caminero-Santangelo's aptly titled book, *The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or Why Insanity Is Not Subversive* (1998), is an exploration of connotations of madness as applied to women. She begins by crediting Gilbert & Gubar with the contemporary critical view of madness and women: "madness signified anger and therefore, by extension, protest" (1). Caminero-Santangelo's main question, however, is how madness became associated with the idea of women expressing themselves. She theorizes that creating a connotation of madness that is associated with positive subversiveness must result in the ignoring of "associations with mental illness as understood and constructed by discourses and practices both medical and popular" (2). Before beginning her own study of more contemporary fiction by the likes of Eudora Welty, Shirley Jackson, and Toni Morrison, Caminero-Santangelo uses Gilbert & Gubar's mascot, Bertha Mason, as an example of her criticism of established connotations of nineteenth-century madness, suggesting that Brontë did not intend to critique society's negative view of the insane. This idea once again leads to the suggestion that Gilbert & Gubar ignored "historical placement" by leaving out any reference to "contemporary discourses about madness" (5).

The criticism of Gilbert & Gubar's use of madness as a positive paradigm is a troubling one, though Shakespeare and Melville both provide significant literary examples of madness as a state that is conducive to an insightful perspective. The best way to begin to answer the criticism of Caminero-Santangelo is to suggest that, when the works Gilbert & Gubar discuss were written, the modern age of hysteria and madness, signified by Freud's work at the end of the nineteenth century, had yet to begin. Thus, using any modern aspect of hysteria and madness to examine anything from the nineteenth century or before

requires a theoretical shift of sorts. In some ways, it is similar to diagnosing someone like Jane Austen with Addison's disease years after her death--the diagnosis and knowledge of the disease may not have existed at the time, but one can find symptoms and other evidence to suggest that a posthumous diagnosis may in fact be accurate. In the case of madness and hysteria, it would appear similarly possible to suggest that an author--or, more appropriately, a character in the author's fiction--exhibits signs of madness based on a modern definition even though that definition did not exist at the time of authorship. Along those lines, what Gilbert & Gubar suggest is the "infection in the sentence," falling on the assumption that "writers assimilate and then consciously or unconsciously affirm or deny the achievements of their predecessors" (46). In effect, Gilbert & Gubar are using a modern definition of madness to show how women writers reacted to their literary predecessors in order to demonstrate that there is a linking mechanism with which to identify a commonality shared between women writers. Gilbert & Gubar see this linking mechanism as the essence of the creative community that consists of nineteenth-century women writers.

To argue, though, that madness exists in literature written by women solely as a system that unifies authors by way of a common expression (if not experience) would diminish the power of madness in literature. Without the literal expression of madness, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" would not have had the positive societal effect that it did. In the twentieth century, semi-autobiographical works by Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar*) and Susana Kaysen (*Girl, Interrupted*) have played the important role of keeping madness and the popular opinion of it as a destructive, negative force in the

forefront of society's mind. Using madness and its expression in anxiety, agoraphobia, and anorexia (among others), however, allows Gilbert & Gubar to develop a critical theory that further allows them to provide a link among the major women writers of the nineteenth century and their works. Further, this system of madness allows Gilbert & Gubar, as well as anyone else who might be interested, the possibility of exploring the connotations of and the arguments behind the contentious category of women's literature.

Gilbert & Gubar extend their theoretical interpretation of madness in women's writing only to the nineteenth century; one could pose the question, though, whether or not their critical apparatus can be useful in examining novels written by women in the twentieth century. Elaine Showalter writes in 1977 that the feminist movement has taken on "cohesive force" and that novelists "see themselves as trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision" (35). From Showalter's vision, one cannot help but conjure up the idea of the women writers of the twentieth century as a community bound together with a common goal. After the 1970's ended and *A Literature of Their Own* and *The Madwoman in the Attic* had both been accepted into the theoretical community, however, feminist theory seems to have split irretrievably into numerous genres that have as many differences as they do similarities. Additionally, as women of more and more varied backgrounds find acceptance in the business of literature, it is difficult to argue any kind of shared experience--other than one of pure biology (if that).

The critic, then, is left with mountains of novels written by women and wondering if there is any way to justify the category of women's literature. Is it possible to use the critical studies of the

past in an attempt to link the literature of the present together? In this project, I have selected three very different works by popular women writers published after *The Madwoman in the Attic* came into existence. The primary interest here is the study of madness in literature--especially women's literature--and how it affects the way novels are written and interpreted. In the remaining three chapters, contemporary novels will be examined by the methodology set out by Gilbert & Gubar. The goal of this project is to show that a critical study such as *The Madwoman in the Attic* is invaluable as a means of exploring literature even though parts of its scope may be criticized as dated, inaccurate, or irrelevant. The conclusions drawn in this project are not the result of an attempt to justify the term "woman writer" in the contemporary marketplace of literature; rather, it is an attempt to draw out the provocative theory of Gilbert & Gubar and demonstrate its relevance to literature twenty-four years after it was published.

Chapter 2

Influential Anxiety in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Another Side of Literary Dystopia

In their discussion of the anxiety of authorship, Gilbert & Gubar use Atwood's 1976 novel about a modern female literary phenomenon, *Lady Oracle*, to exemplify their contention that "the woman writer feels herself to be literally or figuratively crippled by the debilitating alternatives her culture offers her" (57). At the same time, however, Atwood is no doubt one of the authors to whom Gilbert & Gubar refer when they write that "today's female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging" (50). What Gilbert & Gubar appear to be saying about writers such as Margaret Atwood is that they have internalized the idea behind the anxiety of authorship (even before Gilbert & Gubar codified it) but are not necessarily affected *negatively* by it. Through Offred, the anxious and uncertain narrator, and Pieixoto, the restorer of her narrative, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) is a useful example of this dynamic of anxiety that Gilbert & Gubar describe in the works of contemporary women writers.

In "A Note to the Reader" that follows the text of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood calls her text a "cognate of *A Clockwork Orange*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (316). Several critics have written about the relationship between Atwood's novel and the other three dystopian narratives (most concentrate on George Orwell's *1984*) in

which they all invariably discuss how Atwood's female narrator appropriates and changes the axis of the dystopian tradition. What is most notable about this appropriation is how Atwood radically deviates from the way Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess tell their tales even while inviting the reader to recognize the connection between her dystopia and the three previous ones. This lack of trepidation certainly does not match the anxiety of authorship with which Gilbert & Gubar credit the works of nineteenth-century women writers; that does not mean, however, that Atwood did not suffer a related kind of anxiety--the kind that compels one to "fix" something whether or not he or she is responsible for the object needing to be "fixed." Atwood's appropriation of the dystopian genre and her significant adjustment of the narrative techniques that her predecessors employed demonstrates a positive anxiety of authorship that comes from Atwood's desire to repair a story that has already been told--but told in a manner that leaves parts of the dystopian narrative underdeveloped or out of focus. For Atwood, it is not enough to write about the dystopia and invite the reader to see it; instead, one must become immersed in the dystopia so that the reader can feel and experience the sinister nature of that dystopia. This lack of immersion is the locus of Atwood's authorial anxiety--*1984*, *Brave New World*, and *A Clockwork Orange* may have striking ideological and thought-provoking narratives, but do these narratives provoke actions as well as thoughts?

Relying on the poetry of Anne Killigrew and Anne Bradstreet as well as the comments of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, Gilbert & Gubar suggest that most pre-twentieth century women writers who "refused to be modest, self-deprecating, [and] subservient . . . could expect to be ignored or (sometimes scurrilously) attacked" (62). By the

1980's, Margaret Atwood--along with many other woman writers--had achieved popular status in the literary marketplace, her novels selling well enough that one could hardly deem them anything but successes. This positive environment in which authors like Margaret Atwood exist most likely allows for a different viewpoint than the one shared by her pre-twentieth century counterparts--the fear of lack of acceptance being nearly (if not completely) nonexistent. Thus, when--as it appears to be the case with *The Handmaid's Tale*--Atwood narrates her story from the perspective that she is correcting a flaw or omission she saw in the texts of her dystopian predecessors, she would not fear any such critical ramifications as her pre-twentieth-century counterparts would have.

The lack of that fear does not, however, eradicate all concerns regarding authorship. Gilbert & Gubar render the woman writer's desire to tell a story as the desire to tell it, as Emily Dickinson put it, *slant*. What happens, though, when the story has been told from a *slant* perspective in the first place? If the motivation to author a story comes from the desire to retell the story in a way that redirects the textual, ideological, and emotional direction of the original story, can that motivation be the cause of anxiety--even if that motivation occurs in a positive environment of acceptance? Atwood's perspective on the three dystopian novels authored by Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess--three male authors well-known in modern literary culture (perhaps popularly for their dystopian texts more than anything else)--appears to be one of authorial aloofness: the idea of the dystopia itself appears to be more important than the people affected by the dystopia. Her concern for humanity rather than ideology may have sparked an anxiety--in this case, a positive one--in Atwood that resulted in the

creation of *The Handmaid's Tale*. One can then read *The Handmaid's Tale* as Atwood's anxious response to the dystopian tradition of the twentieth century through the pains that Atwood takes to change a crucial part of the narrative: the role of the individual--more specifically, the woman. Or, as Amin Malak writes in his oft-cited 1987 article, "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition": "By focusing the narrative on one central character, Atwood reveals the indignity and terror of living under a futuristic regime controlled by Christian fundamentalists" (9). This focus on a central character as a person rather than a springboard or excuse for the rest of the novel and the ideologies contained within is evidence that Atwood feels the necessity to tell her tale from the point of view of the individual rather than the ideology.

The main strength of *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *A Clockwork Orange* is how their respective authors deal with ideology, each dealing with different societal conventions that grow out of control and create a dystopian society whose people are regulated by fear. *The Handmaid's Tale* also revolves around a society--an uber-Puritanical one--that also controls the great part of its population by fear; instead of foregrounding the ideology of the dystopian society itself, however, Atwood deals with human reaction for the human's sake rather than the further explication of the dystopia. Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess write central characters (all male) whose main function is to react to and be affected by their particular dystopian society. In essence, these male characters are functions of the novel that are necessary in achieving the reader's proper understanding of the horror of the author's dystopian creation.

Atwood's dystopia, in contrast, exists to define the novel's--female--main character, Offred. Atwood, in her note to the reader, insists that her dystopia is nothing but the logical conclusion of events and trends that already exist, most notably the Puritan colonists of the seventeenth century, "the fanaticism of the Iranian monotheocracy," and the persistent desire of some to take the words of the Bible literally (316). Part of the importance of this move is to shift the emphasis of the dystopia itself into the background in favor of how characters react (i.e., negatively) to the dystopia; long explanations of the present society and how it came to be, therefore, are not necessary because the reader can recognize for him or herself how such a society could come to exist. This approach is useful for Atwood because her desire, sparked by the authorial motive to tell a character-driven story rather than a story written as a vehicle for ideology, is to write the female of the dystopia in a way that Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess did not.

Julia, the only female character of consequence in *1984*, initiates a relationship with Winston, the would-be rebel against Big Brother. She passes him a note that reads "*I love you*" in order to gain his attention and trust (104). Once she and Winston arrive in the safe place she designates, Julia reveals that she has brought men to spots like the one they presently occupy "scores of times" (104). Winston does not mind this information at all; in fact, he revels in her "animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces" (105). After Winston receives the text of the Brotherhood, he reads it with Julia, who promptly falls asleep. Orwell makes great effort to show that Julia's sole interest--and sole purpose in the novel--is sexual subversiveness.

In the end, Winston and Julia each betray one another, which is Orwell's way of proving that love, lust, or any illicit action cannot survive under the socialist regime of Big Brother. Winston and Julia are not able to stand up for their cause; Orwell depicts Julia as the weaker character, though, because she never appeared to have the intellectual interest in subversion that Winston possessed. Instead, it was Julia's carnal nature that caused her to attempt to subvert Big Brother.

In contrast to *1984*, the society of Huxley's *Brave New World* sanctions and encourages not only sex, but sex with multiple partners. The life of the higher echelon being is one of promiscuity, consuming soma--the state-sponsored hallucinogenic--and Obstacle Golf. At the center of Huxley's narrative is Bernard Marx, the odd man who, contrary to the government's idea of cultural stability, believes in intellectual pursuit instead of physical gratification. Into his life enters Lenina, the woman who--ever so slightly--begins to question her lifestyle. After her trip with Bernard to a Savage Reservation in the American West (that results in the importing of a Savage into London), "Lenina felt herself entitled, after this day of queerness and horror, to a complete and absolute [*soma*] holiday" (140). In the end, Lenina remains one of most constant presences in the novel. While Bernard succumbs to the *soma* lifestyle and the Savage faces temptation away from his Shakespearean world of romantic ideals, Lenina fails to grasp and is disappointed by the intellectual arguments offered to her by either man. Like Orwell's Julia, Lenina appears to be satiated by a carnal existence.

In some ways, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* possesses the most disturbing characterization of women in a dystopian society.

Burgess's dystopia is an *ultraviolent* culture dominated by the crimes of youth gangs where seemingly anyone can be affected by crime at any moment. One of the central events of the novel is the rape and murder of a woman by a gang led by Alex, the main character, depicted in Burgess's hybrid Russian-English language: "Plunging, I could slooshy cries of agony. . . . old Dim should have his turn, which he did in a beasty snorty howly sort of a way with his Peebee Shelley maskie taking no notice" (23). The police eventually catch Alex and rehabilitate him by a sort of shock conditioning that leaves him violently ill at the mere thought of violence--or classical music. Burgess's anticlimactic conclusion to the novel is that the only way a youth like Alex can be truly rehabilitated is by *growing up*--once Alex "matures," he no longer desires violence in his life. What this conclusion offers for the women that inhabit this dystopia is somewhat unsettling, as there seems to be no solution to this *ultraviolent* culture except time. One does not doubt that Burgess condemns the violence against women that he depicts in his novel, but he depicts the woman that Alex and his gang raped and murdered as a victim--someone whose sole presence is to be acted upon by someone else. This lack of control is quite disturbing, but only if the reader takes notice of it--Burgess certainly does not seem keen on pointing out this aspect of the novel.

In his introduction to an edition of critical essays on *The Handmaid's Tale*, Harold Bloom characteristically notes that the three aforementioned works "are now period pieces" (1). He cites *A Clockwork Orange*, "despite its Joycean wordplay," as a weak book by Burgess's later standards (1). Further, he writes, "Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* now seems genial but thin to the point of transparency, while George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is just a rather bad fiction" (1).

His point in making these observations is that *The Handmaid's Tale* is close enough to reality that it should be disturbing to the reader. Speaking of Offred's voice as narrator, he calls her tone "consistent, cautious, and finally quite frightening" (2). This issue of narrative voice is possibly the strongest aspect of Atwood's story as well as what separates *The Handmaid's Tale* from its predecessors. Bloom's criticism further demonstrates that the difference between telling an effective, compelling story and simply creating a narrative in which one can embed an ideology is a tangible one. Of course, considering what Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess accomplished in their dystopian narratives, Bloom seems to be a bit harsh in his criticism. *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *A Clockwork Orange* are enduring works for new generations that discover them because they do contain those powerful ideologies that shock, jar, and awe the reader. Atwood, though, wants to do more than shock the reader--she wants to inspire the reader to action. At times, Atwood seems to be telling the reader to know the signs of a dystopian regime in the making, to fight the wrongs of society, and to not be a victim. For Atwood, the difference between a compelling story and one with an embedded ideology is the difference between action against dystopian values and the passive acceptance of the sinister nature of the dystopia.

The narrative of *1984* begins with Winston's defiant act of writing. He realizes his conscious rebellion against Big Brother when he perpetrates the subversive act of writing in a diary because "if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labor camp" (9). Winston's narrative turns out to be but the flimsy reason for beginning Orwell's narrative as Orwell and reader both quickly forget the diary's

existence in favor of a third person narrative. Clearly, this story is Orwell's to tell. The same thing goes for Huxley, who does not even need the premise of a narrator who exists within the story. Atwood's style most closely resembles Burgess's, whose main character is also the retrospective narrator. Alex's tone is that of storyteller--he is telling his life with the purpose that others should learn from it: "But you, O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen. And all that cal" (192). The last chapter's revelation that one can only mature out of ultraviolence, however, has been seen by many as a disappointing end to the narrative. For years, the last chapter was not published, the narrative ending instead with the restoration of Alex's love for violence and Beethoven. For many, then, Alex's narrative--at least in its full version--appears to be one that was literally, to publishers anyway, not worth the paper on which it was printed.

At the end of the narrative, the reader learns that Offred is also a retrospective narrator, having recorded her experiences on cassette tapes after her escape from Gilead. Differing from Alex, however, Offred was never the perpetrator of violence nor is she completely out of danger--physically or mentally. Whereas Alex has the leisure to wonder at the acquisition of a suitable wife and son, Offred is left to fight with herself over her own feelings and consciousness: "I don't want to be telling this story. I don't have to tell it. I don't have to tell anything, to myself or to anyone else. I could just sit here peacefully. I could withdraw. . . . That will never do" (225). This observation comes in mid-narrative, which, along with other mid-narrative breaks and gaps, shows an individual struggling to achieve the material existence of her history--that is, an understanding of

what motivated her to make the decisions she made and act in the ways that she acted. Offred's observations on the telling of her story are particularly useful in illuminating this struggle: "I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else. . . . I'll pretend you can hear me. But it's no good, because I know you can't" (40). The tone of these breaks in Offred's narrative is not like memories of a man who has come to mental safety and stability from a hellish past; they are, rather, the realization that a body who experiences what Offred has experienced will never be able to heal or achieve safety and stability.

At least partly contrary to that notion, however, is Lucy Freibert's observation in "Control and Creativity: The Politics of Risk in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" (1988): "Atwood creates this sense of [narrative] isolation in order to emphasize that Offred's invention of her risk-filled story becomes the source of her freedom" (286). Freibert's argument is that Offred's experience in Gilead combined with "an uncomfortable relationship with an activist mother . . . [and] two marriages of questionable compatibility" enacts a sense of isolation that she can only free herself from through the act of story*telling* (286). The idea that Offred can achieve freedom and sought to do so through telling her story is an awkward notion since the act of telling a story involves a listener as well as the teller. This relationship puts the teller at the mercy of the listener. Offred shows an understanding of this relationship towards the end of her narrative: "I wish this story were different. . . . I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia" (267). And yet Offred tells her story anyway--is this act accomplished for herself, for others, or for both?

Earl Ingersoll links this narrative aspect of *The Handmaid's Tale* to *1984* in his 1993 article "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Echoes of Orwell": "Both narratives have writers/speaker/narrators, that is, producers of texts, at their centers--Winston with his diary and Offred with her tape-recorder" (72). Ingersoll argues that both characters' desire "to affirm a subjective 'truth' as a legacy for future generations to whom they look for validation" is what drives them to the act of creation (72). Of course, by the end of Orwell's novel, Winston no longer cares about his prior notion of truth, leaving Offred as the sole perpetual seeker of truth. In a later article titled "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and Dystopian Tradition" (1997), Lois Feuer further explores what separates Winston and Offred's quest for truth: "Orwell has made the risk-laden choice of creating a protagonist as drab as the world he inhabits" (86). Feuer desires to depict Winston as a grayer character than Offred, which similarly depicts him as a less striking character to the reader; the depiction of Winston as drab, however, also proves useful as a comparison between the inner characters of Winston and Offred.

Orwell depicts Winston as an average drone whose existence revolves around what he does behind his desk at the Ministry of Truth. During his first subversive encounter with Julia, Winston deprecates himself by reminding Julia of his average-ness: "I'm thirty-nine years old. I've got a wife that I can't get rid of. I've got varicose veins. I've got five false teeth" (100). Other than the subversiveness that the government snuffs out, there is absolutely nothing remarkable about Winston--body or soul. What Feuer argues is so striking about Atwood's depiction of Offred is that "Atwood's textual practice mirrors the novel's content, asserting the primacy of the individual human spirit

by evoking it stylistically" (87). Thus, while Orwell tramples the human spirit to prove the insidiousness of the dystopian society, Atwood shows the possibility of strength without diminishing the horrifying nature of her dystopian creation. These stylistic decisions are further evidence of Atwood's displeasure at the tone of the traditional dystopian narrative: while the artistic merit of gray Winston as downtrodden and unlikely rebel is notable, it does little to inspire the reader (after all, Winston's character is thoroughly demolished by Big Brother). Offred, despite the possessed nature of her name, exists as a colorful individual whose character appears more alive than Winston in her thoughts and desires. The characterizations of these two characters, then, is truly indicative of the goals of both texts--Atwood's goal being to make the role of the individual as rebel in the dystopian society appear tangible, emotional, and worthy of sympathy.

Another engaging aspect of Offred's narrative is the fact that she was not only part of the world before Gilead, but that she can also remember it. In Huxley's and Burgess's world, the past is gone except for the presence of Henry Ford (God) and Beethoven (punk music) respectively. Part of what makes Orwell's text slightly more fascinating than Huxley's or Burgess's is that Winston's profession is actually that of altering or, more precisely, eradicating the past. Winston himself is old enough to have lived before Big Brother, but he cannot recall it very well at all: "He tried to remember in what year he had first heard mention of Big Brother. He thought it must have been at some time in the Sixties, but it was impossible to be certain. . . . Everything melted into mist" (33). Uncannily, Orwell further separates the past from the present by the notion that "Tragedy . . . belonged to

an ancient time, to a time when there were still privacy, love, and friendship" (28). Again, to all three authors, concentrating on the horror of the present government appears to be the most effective strategy to tell the story of a dystopia. Atwood, once again privileging the human over the regime in her text, intertwines past and present.

During her narration of her imprisonment and subsequent escape from the Commander and Gilead, Offred often pauses to remember the past: her mother, her life with her husband and child, their attempt at escape and subsequent capture, and her training as a handmaid. One of the most telling aspects of Offred's recollections of the past is her and her coworkers' reaction at not being allowed to work anymore: "We looked at one another's faces and saw dismay, and a certain shame, as if we'd been caught doing something we shouldn't" (177). Along with all the reminders of the "domestic sphere" that this passage should spark in the reader, it also brings to mind a definite discourse on gender. As Jocelyn Harris notes in "*The Handmaid's Tale* as a Re-visioning of *1984*" (1999), "Atwood seems to agree with Woolf that gender, not class, is the source of tyranny, and thus casts her vote against Orwell [and Huxley]" (273). While Orwell has to rely on an event such as the socialist "revolution" that has never actually happened (just as, to an extent, Huxley and Burgess must do), Atwood relies solely on the existence of real elements to define her dystopia. The tangibility of her dystopia along with the constant link to the past--our present--makes the tone of the novel more realistic and sinister.

In the sense that Atwood's goal is to tell the story of a woman affected by a dystopian society rather than to create an explicitly feminist text whose goal is recovery and exploration of specific ideas,

it is important to note that the gendering of tyranny does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* an exclusionary text. Malak argues this idea, writing that "feminism functions inclusively rather than exclusively, poignantly rather than stridently, humanely rather than cynically" (15). Though she bases much of her dystopia on gender rather than class (though elements of race, religion, and class do exist), Atwood makes it clear that men are not the target of criticism. This point is made the most clearly when Offred imagines the three possible fates of her husband, Luke: he was shot dead when she was captured, he is a prisoner, or he escaped and is part of the resistance (104-5). Nowhere does Offred so much as consider the possibility that Luke is one of "them." Instead, the Gileadean regime is a subsection of society--including women like Serena Joy, the novel's equivalent of Phyllis Schlafly--who desire to force their beliefs onto society. The fact that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not an exclusionary text further supports the idea that Atwood is reshaping the dystopian tradition: the novel is not solely an account of a woman's trials written for women, but Atwood's specific warning about the present that is directed at anyone--male or female--who reads the novel.

Interestingly, Offred does not hold herself blameless for this Puritanical subsection's accession to power. As Linda Kauffman points out in her article "Special Delivery: Twenty-first Century Epistolarity in *The Handmaid's Tale*" (1989), "[Offred] castigates herself for not paying enough attention to the alarming sign of intolerance--religious, social, and sexual--in her society before the takeover; and for colluding with the regime in order to survive" (237-8). Whether or not one believes Offred deserves any blame for her current situation, Offred does display a certain guilt in that she allowed what happened

to her to happen--the fact that there is no way she could have prevented it as an individual is irrelevant in her mind. Feuer notes that "[t]hrough telling her story, Offred survives by making herself real, speaking her way out of invisibility into her humanity, as the authors of the slave narratives asserted and discovered humanity by remembering their captivity and their release in the perspective of their new freedom" (91). For Offred, surviving to tell the tale and then telling it is a way to mediate that guilt and become real again. Again, though, this issue of "freedom" is troubling. From what is Offred free? Yes, she is free from the physical space of Gilead--but can she or anyone else ever be truly free from Gilead?

In order to gain a better understanding of the answer Atwood provides to this question at the end of the novel, the nature of Offred's narrative must be emphasized once again. In the works of Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess, the main characters are all movers in their particular dystopias. They all must find ways to survive within the society that exists around them. The fact that the possibility of mental survival in a dystopia even exists serves as a clear point of separation between *The Handmaid's Tale* and its predecessors. Even Offred's one symbol of subversion and hope, a phrase that has been carved in her closet, "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" (52)--which ironically means "Don't let the bastards grind you down"--is turned into "just a joke" by the Commander (186). For Atwood, a dystopia must be the true opposite of an ideal utopia--an uninhabitable hell. This kind of dystopia is not the dystopia of Orwell, Huxley, or Burgess. Ideologically, their dystopias are quite fearful; most people, however, might even be able to live in these dystopias with even a modicum of happiness. Gilead, in its Puritan rigidity, offers no such joy, which

is the lesson that Atwood felt compelled to reveal through her anxiety about the previous depictions of dystopias to author: dystopian existence should not be tolerable.

The reader discovers that the narrative that comprises *The Handmaid's Tale* is actually a transcription when he or she reaches the "Historical Notes" section that serves as an epilogue--an emphatic, albeit heavy-handed, exclamation point to the novel. This epilogue is another transcription--this time from the "*Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held . . . on June 25, 2195*" (299). Atwood intends the reader to see this future society as one that is presumably more civilized than Gilead; as the section unfolds, however, the reader finds that this presumption may have in fact been a hasty one. As Dominick Grace writes in his article, "*The Handmaid's Tale*: 'Historical Notes' and Documentary Subversion" (1998): "while the opposition between alternate societal models in utopian fiction often serves to provide a simple binary opposition between eutopian and dystopian possibilities, Atwood instead offers degrees of dystopia" (156). When readers recall the sense of guilt that Offred felt due to her "complicity" with the hostile takeover by the Christian fundamentalists, they will further realize that the assumption that an academic conference must be an enlightened gathering serves as another form of complicity.

Again providing the link between previous dystopian narratives and her own, Atwood has said that "Orwell is much more optimistic than people give him credit for. . . . [*1984*] ends with a note on Newspeak, which is written in the past tense, in standard English--which means that, at the time of writing the note, Newpseak is a thing of the past" (Hancock 217). Ingersoll notes that "few readers would follow Atwood's

line of reasoning . . ."; to see the ending of *1984* as positive, however, supports the theory that *The Handmaid's Tale* is the result of the need to readjust the goals of the genre of dystopian literature (71). Simply put, just because Oceania or Gilead falls does not mean that the replacement of either society has to be necessarily that much better.

For anyone who has spent much time in academic circles, the character of Pieixoto is clearly an amalgam of everything that is wrong with academia. His approach to the narrative favors the primacy of the text--or, in this case, the tape. His presentation, titled "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*," is actually a lengthy study of whether or not Offred's narrative is legitimate. Having established through historical verification that it probably is, Pieixoto makes two key lamentations. First, he soliloquizes regarding ethics: "we must be cautious about passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans. . . . Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure. . . . Our job is not to censure but to understand" (302). Later, he exclaims, "What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of print-out from Waterford's private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has deigned to vouchsafe for us" (310). Along with his chauvinistic sense of humor, these remarks prove, if nothing else, that this new society possesses the same attitude that allowed a society like Gilead to come into being in the first place. The Gileadeans should be damned for their actions and Offred's story gives far more historical information than any computer printout ever could. None of this appears to matter to Pieixoto, who, as Karen Stein points out in "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia" (1991), sees Offred as a "stepstone for

professional achievement, and a possible source of information about his real interest, the male elite of Gilead" (273-4). Having an interest in the power structure of Gilead is certainly fair enough; that interest combined with moral ambiguity, however, can easily be a dangerous combination.

Unfortunately, Stein calls Pieixoto's attitude towards *The Handmaid's Tale* a "male interpretation" (273). If anything, Atwood silently implicates Maryann Crescent Moon, the chair of the conference, through her glowing introduction of Pieixoto and the fact that she knows Pieixoto on a personal basis. The case appears to be more along the lines of Malak's interpretation of the "Historical Notes": "Atwood soberly demonstrates that when a critic or scholar avoids, under the guise of scholarly objectivity, taking a moral or political stand about an issue of crucial magnitude such as totalitarianism, he or she will necessarily become an apologist for evil" (15). The Atwood who writes the "Historical Notes" is one who feels the need to retell the dystopian cautionary tale with a fitting ending--something Orwell, Huxley, and Burgess were not able to do. Atwood is intent on making it clear to the reader that a society that could allow the possibility of a dystopia is one that is, at least partially, a dystopia itself. The fact that Atwood uses a woman to tell her story is indicative of both the reality of the hegemonic nature of fundamentalism on women and the correction of the vapid women depicted in Orwell and Huxley's dystopias. There is no reason to interpret Atwood's text as anti-male, contrary to Pieixoto's assertion that Nick's heroism at the end is actually motivated by the desire to save himself. Instead, the tendency should be to view *The Handmaid's Tale* as Atwood making a direct and

credible connection between contemporary society and the society of a (semi-)futuristic dystopia.

In laying out the theory of anxiety of authorship, Gilbert & Gubar discuss the appropriation of male plots by women writers: "we might almost call [this appropriation] 'schizophrenia of authorship' . . . because [the woman writer] herself secretly realizes that her employment of (and participation in) patriarchal plots and genres inevitably involves her in duplicity or bad faith" (69). To prove this point, they cite the example of a woman writing a novel that follows the *Pamela* plot, "exploiting a story that implies women cannot and should not do what she is herself accomplishing in writing her book" (69). In the literary environment of the 1980's, however, an author as widely accepted as Atwood must not be seen as merely appropriating the genre of dystopia from her male predecessors. Instead, what Atwood does is more like a reshaping of the genre: she takes a genre that exists in a form that she views as outdated and incomplete, tears it down, and rebuilds it. In the time period Gilbert & Gubar discuss, this reshaping of a genre may not have been possible for a woman writer; nearing the end of the twentieth century, however, it is a definite possibility. The key to this reshaping of a genre is still Atwood's desire to take a genre built by highly regarded authors, expose its limitations, and then show how it should be built. Without the anxiety that the story may never be told correctly--not to mention the lax treatment of women --*The Handmaid's Tale* might never have been written. As it is, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of how the negatively connoted anxiety of authorship of the nineteenth century has become a positive tool for women writers in the twentieth century.

Chapter 3

The Topography of Agoraphobia: Mapping Hysterical Desire in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*

Writing about anorexia and agoraphobia, two diseases primarily linked in the nineteenth century to women, Gilbert & Gubar argue that these diseases "simply carry patriarchal definitions of 'femininity' to absurd extremes, and thus function as essential or at least inescapable parodies of social prescriptions" (54). They take this link between agoraphobia and patriarchy further by defining the term agoraphobia as not only a fear of open spaces--as is often the connotation of the term--but, more specifically, to "'public' places" (53). This link between public places--or spaces--and patriarchy exists primarily for Gilbert & Gubar as a means with which to establish a connection between agoraphobia and female authorship: "Trained to reticence, [literary women] fear the vertiginous openness of the literary marketplace and rationalize with Emily Dickinson that 'Publication--is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man'" (58). Gilbert & Gubar use an act of imagery in the title of their section on Dickinson, "A Woman--White: Emily Dickinson's Yarn of Pearl," to link her to another of their favorite cloistered women, Snow White, who is only safe once encased in a glass coffin. This move not only links Dickinson (real), Snow White (fictional), and the color white (with all its symbolic relation to purity) together, it also serves as an act of comparison that serves to blur the lines between author and character. Gilbert & Gubar enact a similar blur of

fiction and real in their analysis of Jane Austen as not only the creator of women who inevitably are bound *for* the private sphere, but also as a mirror who is herself bound *to* the private sphere. Thus, Gilbert & Gubar imply that agoraphobic qualities occur in both the woman writer's life and in her fiction.

Gilbert & Gubar's comparison between the agoraphobic fear of the patriarchal realm of the marketplace and the safety of an enclosed, controlled space creates a connection between enclosed space and sanity for the woman writer. For the woman writer, therefore, open spaces become coded as public spaces and, thus, the patriarchal world of social order. Any open space that violates this coding, therefore, such as the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, becomes a space of disorder, of insanity, of madness caused by agoraphobia. Agoraphobia and the link it creates between patriarchy, public space, and madness is one that Gilbert & Gubar help codify but do not expand on at great length, choosing instead to focus on agoraphobia's counterpart, claustrophobia. In her own lush prose style, however, Jeanette Winterson explores the topography of madness and agoraphobia in her 1987 novel, *The Passion*.

For *The Passion*, Jeannette Winterson employs Napoleon and Venice, two very distinct emblems of the Romantic period, to ground the novel and its themes of love and loss. Since his death, Napoleon has proved to be an extremely contradictory figure in the numerous ways different people have characterized him; for Winterson, Napoleon is an emasculated (i.e., feminized) overreacher who challenges the patriarchal social order, inspiring the love and passion of the French yeomen. Over the course of the first section of the novel, Napoleon leads Henri, the main character, from the stability of his home in France to the hope of conquest on the English Channel to the

disappointment of defeat in Russia's frozen plains. The disappointment of Henrí's passion for Napoleon leads him to fall into passion with Villanelle, a product of Venice. Venice acts as a space that resists conquest and masculine interpellation, but is also a place where a person's ultimate failure to recognize patriarchal social order ends in madness. Through the reaction of Henri as well as many of the other characters, Winterson shows the damaging effects of patriarchy that occur as a result of Napoleon's journey through Europe and the city of Venice. As Judith Seaboyer writes in "Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*" (1997),

> The text itself is a quest narrative that operates at a number of different levels, at once a journey through space and time. . . ; a romance trial by landscape that inexorably leads to the monster at the heart of the labyrinth; [and] a Romantic *voyage intérieur* whose unrecognized goal proves equally monstrous. (488)

Looking at the novel as a text rife with examples of agoraphobia, one can see how that *voyage intérieur* could be so destructive to someone who is experiencing that inner journey as well as wide-open spaces and landscapes at the same time. The reason that the inner world, symbolized here by Henri, cannot coexist with the outer world of public spaces is the patriarchal social order--that is, a person defined completely by the safety of enclosed spaces cannot be integrated suddenly into the public world where social rules are entirely different and foreign to that person. The quest/journey motif that Winterson employs so well allows her successfully to map agoraphobia in

terms of the patriarchal social order as well as the compulsive nature of passion.

Henri begins as a conscript in Napoleon's army, quickly becoming enamored with the diminutive man. Henri reveals that Napoleon only liked him because he was short, but Henri's passion for Napoleon stems from something romantic and not nameable--something that Henri later sees quite differently: "Nowadays people talk about the things he did as though they made sense. As though even his most disastrous mistakes were only the result of bad luck or hubris" (5). What Henri would later describe as madness began as something worthy of inspiring passion in not only Henri, but thousands of Frenchmen: "We should have turned on him, should have laughed in his face. . . . But his face is always pleading with us to prove him right" (24-5). This irresistible draw that Napoleon possesses lures Henri away from his pastoral French village, a locus of peace and stability.

Henri describes the people of his village as "lukewarm" (7). Until Napoleon's call to war, Henri would most likely have grown up to become a farmer and marry a village woman. The dynamic of Henri's village appears to be one similar to the stereotypical small farming village where the most important relationship is with the land and the crops that it bears. Excluding the conventions of the literary pastoral, this existence is not the kind that is conducive to intense passion--much less violent passion; it is, however, a safe and orderly existence that allows for peace and tranquility with the occasional festival to provide a sense of joy and celebration. Most importantly, Henri's village is a small, fixed location that would be easily overlooked and not normally susceptible to the machinations of the

world surrounding it. Once Henri leaves this existence, he is propelled into much more violent and fast-paced territories.

The enclosed, pastoral world that Henri leaves may not be the most exciting existence, but neither is it the "glass coffin" existence of claustrophobia. Winterson gives the reader no reason to believe that Henri had ever contemplated leaving his village--be it because of ignorance of the world around him or a lack of impetus--prior to Napoleon's call. Over time, Henri would probably have cultivated the same relationship with nature as those who came before him. Instead, when he leaves he becomes "homesick from the start. I missed my mother. I missed the hill where the sun slants across the valley" (6). Literally referring to his mother perhaps, Winterson invites the reader to relate the "home" of homesickness and the hills and valleys of that home with "mother." Henri also speaks of the yearly bonfire the villagers make to celebrate the end of winter--no doubt as an act of deference to the coming spring and the planting season. Henri describes this bonfire as "tall as a cathedral with a blasphemous spire of broken snares and infested pallets" (6). Presumably, part of the blasphemy in this act is the celebration of (Mother) nature and not of God (the Father)--otherwise, an actual cathedral would have been a more fitting location for the celebratory ceremony. Through his childhood in this village, Henri would have had a steady relationship with the feminine ideal of nature, but only in the form of agricultural cultivation. The village represents an orderly existence that perpetuates a relationship with the feminine under the dictates of a patriarchal science. Once this order is violated, as it is by both Napoleon and the city of Venice, the disorder of patriarchy clashes with the role of the feminine and creates madness. In Winterson's story, Henri is the

primary victim of this madness that begins when Napoleon's call pushes him into "those open spaces where [exists] the scorching presence of the patriarchal sun" (Gilbert & Gubar 101-2).

Whether or not the Napoleon Complex is an appropriate or politically correct term to use, Napoleon did have a few characteristics that contributed to an embittered relationship with patriarchy. No secret has ever been made of Napoleon's height; Winterson exploits this fact via his mistress, Josephine, who was not only much taller than Napoleon, but consistently beat him at billiards. The irony of the great mastermind obsessed with rebellion, revolution, and world domination who is dominated physically and strategically by his mistress (who is more interested in cultivating life in her garden than waging war) should not be lost on the reader. The dominance of his mistress (i.e., his passivity) as well as his diminutive physical size are enough in and of themselves to complicate Napoleon's masculine acts of aggression and provide him with the stereotypical gendered label of feminine. Additionally, Napoleon, in the spirit of revolution, sought to usurp the current order in Europe--that is, the current patriarchy. Of course, Napoleon would most likely have instituted another patriarchy had the revolution been successful--a move he begins by crowning himself Emperor, an event that occurs at the end of the first section of the novel. For the moment, however, it is enough to point out that Napoleon's desire to overturn patriarchal social order combined with his feminized appearance categorizes him as a feminine presence.

Seaboyer suggests that "Henri leaves home to join Napoleon, discovering in him and, by analogy, in French nationalism a passion he has longed to feel all his life" (498). For the countries surrounding

France, French nationalism must have appeared as a threat, not something with which they should be pleased. For Napoleon, France is but the beginning, a domestic sphere to leave in order to explore and conquer new places. Henri sees Napoleon one night fascinated with his miniature of the world, "turning the globe round and round, holding it tenderly with both hands as if it were a breast" (4). In "Fractured Bodies: Privileging the Incomplete in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*" (2000), Thomas Fahy interprets this image as Winterson presenting "Napoleon as feminizing unconquered territories on the globe, conflating uncolonized territories and the woman's body--both objects to be violated" (97). Napoleon attempts to enact masculinity by feminizing the realms he wishes to conquer; his image, though, makes it appear more as if he is a feminine force seeking to feminize and, thereby, dominate, the object of his desire. This quasi-lesbian desire is one that foreshadows Villanelle's experiences with the Queen of Spades in Venice. By itself, though, Napoleon's fated charge into open spaces of patriarchal control mirrors the madness of both feminine desire to act prominently in society as well as the taboo of homosexual desire.

The people who follow Napoleon in his quest are equally damned. Seaboyer cites Elaine Showalter's *Hystories* in her discussion of the French soldiers and their experiences in the army: "Showalter suggests that, far from providing the great masculine adventure, war feminized conscripts, who experience powerlessness in the face of danger and lost any sense of being in control" (505). Henri even notices this feminization when he observes that "recruits cry when they come here and they think about their mothers and sweethearts and they think about going home" (28). Henri seems to have temporarily forgotten the

constant homesickness he confessed to but pages earlier. Napoleon's charisma, though--that something in his eyes that propels the soldiers into hopeless battle--causes the conscripts to view Napoleon and his lust for power as a masculine act, despite his appearance. This passion would seem to be an acceptable one, as the soldiers themselves have been feminized by the loss of control in battle. They, however, are still leaving the safe confines of their respective villages and venturing out into the world to subvert the current governing body of whatever country Napoleon is invading at the time--all the governing bodies of Europe, it should be noted, are best described as patriarchal. Henri notes the punishment of two thousand dead conscripts who followed Napoleon into the English Channel and drowned; for those who survived and continued to Russia, more madness was soon to follow. For Winterson, then, it is clear that leaving an enclosed space to wage war on patriarchal social order is an act that should inspire reluctance and fear rather than hope and conviction.

Henri begins his account of the march on Russia, "The Zero Winter," with the statement, "There's no such thing as a limited victory" (79). Again, mirroring the narrative of Villanelle, Henri argues that in every game, be it one of chance or conquest, there is always a winner and a loser. Napoleon loses the battle with Russia, which causes Henri to desert, "his deathly passion for his emperor over but not resolved" (Seaboyer 498). At the outset of this account, Henri makes it clear that he has lost two things: an eye and his liberty. Henri literally loses an eye in the battle at Austerlitz. He is not blinded, but his sight is significantly damaged. Ultimately, the loss of the eye is a succinct figurative act in that Henri loses sight of the village he used to be so homesick for and instead embarks for

Venice. As for his liberty, it is not clear yet that Henri is actually in an insane asylum, but his occasional references to his present residence indicates some sort of captivity: "I have to stop writing now. I have to take my exercise. . . . I hope I have a visitor today" (81). Marjean Purinton discusses the desertion that causes Henri's eventual descent into captivity in "Postmodern Romanticism: The Recuperation of Conceptual Romanticism in Jeanette Winterson's Postmodern Novel *The Passion*" (1998): "Henri receives his 'first upsurge of self' during the march on Moscow during the zero winter, a time when his love of Napoleon turns to hate" (88). This assertion of freedom ends badly for Henri, proving that he probably should have never left his French provincial village. Of course, by the time Henri makes this realization, he has already been corrupted by Napoleon and the wide world around him, making it impossible for him to return to his previous state. Over the course of the rest of the narrative, Henri gradually develops a psychosis so intense--manifested in his obsession with Villanelle that culminates in a psychotic episode that involves the murder of Villanelle's husband, the Cook--that the only place he can even come close to managing it and regaining some semblance of sanity is in the confined space of the asylum.

Not ironically, Napoleon's fate is very similar. After being sent to Elba, where Napoleon is claimed to have said "Able I was ere I saw Elba," he is able to marshal the forces of his mind and regain clarity. "He waited for the moment and like the third son who knows his treacherous brothers won't outwit him, the moment came and in a salty convoy of silent boats he returned for a hundred days and met his Waterloo" (133). Unfortunately for Napoleon, he uses the safety of enclosure and isolation to plot and scheme a return to the usurpation

of established patriarchy. His second exile proves terminal, as he "put on weight and caught a cold, and he who survived the plagues of Egypt and the zero winter died in the mild damp" (133). Perhaps the disappointment of his passion for the second time caused his death; in any case, Napoleon had the chance to recover and lead a calm existence, albeit alone on a small island. Instead, his madness caused by the desire to dominate the open spaces representative of the patriarchy of the governments in control of those spaces left to conquer drove him to repeat his madness--a mistake Henri desperately tries not to make by the end of the narrative.

Before he reaches his final destination, Henri must complete the journey from the zero winter of Russia. With him are Villanelle and Patrick, another of Napoleon's conscripts. Patrick has the gift of an eye that acts as a telescope. Patrick's parish is taken away from him as the result of his "squinting at young girls from the bell tower" (21). As Fahy points out, "Like Napoleon fondling his globe-breast, the leader of the church touches/watches women as a way of 'possessing' them. Looking, in other words, gives men the power to subjugate" (98). Patrick's problem is that he enacts this possession from an interior, confined space instead of in the world of patriarchy where such possession is accepted. Through his role in the church--a *house* of God --Patrick gives up his right to gaze at women (though, as Fahy goes on to discuss, homoerotic interaction might be acceptable). His attempt to appropriate power from within rather than from the outer world of patriarchal order is similar to the attempt of the woman writer who resides within the domestic sphere but attempts to invade the literary marketplace. The church pushes Patrick out into the public sphere

where, though he is now free to ogle at will, he is not able to survive.

During the flight from Russia, Patrick becomes sick, and it is clear to everyone that he is not going to live. Before he becomes completely delusional and incoherent, Patrick wonders aloud "whether or not he could persuade the Bishop to give him a parish again" (105). Patrick never wanted to be on the outside, he just wanted to use his "gift" in order to see it from the safety of his church. The outside eventually ruins him, and he dies. Henri and Villanelle worry about Patrick's death--"What had he died of and could we have caught it?" (106). Winterson does not specify which is worse--that Henri does catch Patrick's disease caused by exposure to open spaces or that he does not die of it by the end of the novel.

Up to this point, the discussion of space has been limited to enclosed spaces that provide safety for the feminine and wide-open spaces that affirm the patriarchal social order and destroy or drive mad anyone who seeks to subvert that order. Leaving Napoleon, Russia, and the battlefield behind them, Henri and Villanelle flee to Venice where they hope to find peace and regain a sense of stability. Venice acts as a "wild card"--a term appropriate for the amount of gambling that occurs over the course of Villanelle's life in the city. Many, including Seaboyer, compare the city of Venice and its waterways to the female body:

> Venice's seductive, decorative beauty, its historical reputation for duplicity, and its topography, at once contained and enclosed by water and penetrated by it, has rendered it an ideal vehicle for the historical and

> cultural burden of ambivalence that inheres in the female body and is mirrored in theories of urbanism. (485)

Or, as Manfred Pfister suggests in "*The Passion* from Winterson to Coryate" (1999), "Winterson's mercurial and fluid, labyrinthine and amphibian city of the interior is like the female body" (18). In short, Venice does not abide by traditional rules. It is a large, public space; for the most part, however, it is also an enclosed space--providing the possibility for agoraphobic and claustrophobic reactions at the same time. Amidst the motifs of gambling, carnival, and fluidity that permeate the city, Venice still punishes transgressions against the prevailing patriarchal social order, showing that its seeming acceptance is but a mask.

Upon their arrival in Venice, Henri asks Villanelle for a map. She replies, "It won't help. This is a living city. Things change" (113). Maps are also symbols of conquest and interpellation in that their existence shows the cartographer's mastery of a place's space. Fahy develops this point further: "By depicting finite territories, roads leading nowhere and lands consumed by unknown monsters, this map-painting captures the futility of empire-building" (104). A space, after all, is always a space--how a cartographer draws boundaries and roads makes no difference as to the existence of the space. Winterson's Venice, though, is indignant rather than indifferent at attempts to constrain it through mapping. That is why, as Winterson writes, "Not even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice. This is a city of madmen" (112). Of course, if Venice is the city of madmen, does that make Villanelle a madwoman?

Villanelle is a true product of the city of Venice, her father being a boatman on the city's waterways. Upon her birth, Villanelle's

parents were shocked to discover that she had the boat*man*'s trademark--webbed feet. Her work in the Casino requires that she wear "a pirate's shirt that concealed my breasts. This was required, but the moustache I added was for my own amusement" (55). Villanelle enjoys playing the man, but she relates that any man's profession (e.g., a boatman) "was closed to me on account of my sex" (53). Despite what Venice may assert itself to be, its social order remains resolute in its patriarchal nature. Pfister suggests that the people of Venice turn the city into "one theatrical performance, or into a carnival that cannot be contained within established spatial and temporal bounds" (20). The city allows masks and disguises, but not actual social subversion--a duplicitous proposition.

Pfister goes on to describe Venice "as a place of ardent and illicit, or transgressive, passions, of *eros* and *thanatos*, of love and madness, of sensuality, licentiousness, prostitution and sexual perversion--as an Other that exceeds and endangers the Symbolic order of the Self" (16). In "The Cartography of Passion: Cixous, Wittig, and Winterson" (1994), M. Daphne Kutzer points out that Venice displays an "off-hand acceptance of sexual persuasions of all sorts . . . whose boundaries shift and reform as easily as the watery reflections of churches in a Venetian canal" (139). The necessary qualification of this statement is that these persuasions and transgressions (i.e., challenges to the patriarchal order) are accepted *only* off-handedly and not permanently. As long as the boundaries shift and reform, passion is possible--as Villanelle discovers in her affair with the Queen of Spades.

Wearing her disguise, Villanelle meets the Queen of Spades and falls in love with her. Their affair--an illicit one that is carried on

while the Queen's husband is away--slowly begins to entrap Villanelle, gradually losing the spontaneous and carefree nature the affair once possessed. Villanelle begins to despise herself and her heart, a heart "That longs for certainty, fidelity, compassion, and plays roulette with anything precious. Gambling is not a vice, it is an expression of our humanness" (73). She even goes so far as to confess to Henri during their journey to Venice that "*There's no sense in loving something you can only wake up to by chance*" (122). Not until they reach Venice does Villanelle reveal to Henri that her heart has been literally taken from her and held hostage by the Queen of Hearts, who appears perfectly satisfied with the briefness of the affair. Villanelle, not playing by the rules of the carnival-esque Venice, loses her heart and her ability to play.

Winterson makes it difficult to discern for the reader what Villanelle wants to do with her heart once Henri rescues it for her. On the one hand, she could attempt to return to the carnival, knowing now how to play the game. On the other hand, she can conform to conventional patriarchy by marrying Henri. What is clear is that neither of these choices is an option any longer. According to Purinton, Villanelle's "world shrinks inward as she discovers the subculture, the hidden mazes, private canals, and silent waterways of pillaged Venice" (72). Villanelle destroys this cozy notion of inward safety when she marries the Cook in order to fulfill her desire to travel. "The world is surely wide enough to walk without fear," Villanelle muses, hoping that she can flee from the memory of the Venetian woman who spurned her (97). Villanelle seeks the solution to her troubles without rather than within, eventually developing the same desperation as Henri to enter the open spaces of patriarchal order.

This desire to go outward and seek wide-open spaces causes her eventually to be sold into the service of Napoleon's army as a *vivandiere*. This desertion of enclosure and entrance into an agoraphobic space that is concurrent with her marriage prohibits her from returning to her prior state. This prohibition is solidified when she asks Henri, who dreams of fulfillment in marriage to Villanelle, to rescue her heart.

For Henri, who was never interested in women at home in France and wanted nothing to do with prostitutes and *vivandieres*, Villanelle proves to be his first romantic interest--and his first conquest. Purinton sees Henri's world as one that "expands outward as he explores the territorial acquisitions of the conquering Napoleon" (71). Entering the world of public space, Henri has learned the ideals of conquest and domination--hallmarks of patriarchy--from his former passion, Napoleon. He has also learned, however, that certain forms of dominance and passion are not acceptable in society, such as the ones Napoleon has undertaken. When Henri meets Villanelle, his passion transfers from Napoleon to Villanelle, and the husband/wife relationship of dominant/submissive--no doubt unconsciously embedded in Henri from past observations--enacts itself. As Helene Bengston notes in "The Vast, Unmappable Cities of the Interior: Place and Passion in *The Passion*" (1999), "Villanelle's association with the carnivalesque view of the world counterbalances Henry's association with the more official versions of it: he believes in road signs, maps, and trustful recordings of past feelings" (23). The only problem with this masculine view of the world is that, having been in a submissive role with Napoleon and being in love with a woman with the aspirations and the webbed feet of a man, Henri is feminized and is unable to assume the

socially accepted role of dominant male. The city of Venice is able to entertain the socially subversive relationship of Villanelle and Henri for a while, but the indignant city will soon act on the subversive relationship whose boundaries do not shift and redefine themselves.

The moment of correction arrives when Villanelle's husband reappears and makes his claim to his wife. Henri takes Villanelle's knife, a *Venetian* blade, and slays the husband. Henri becomes lost in his passion and has to be carried off by Villanelle, who has to rely on her masculine attributes--her webbed feet--to enable them to escape. This expression of Villanelle's masculinity sends Henri further into his daze, this event being the place that most fits Seaboyer's description of Venice for Henri: "it is the place of abjection where meaning collapses, and he is lost, physically and mentally" (499). Henri, a socially-deemed feminine force by virtue of his rustic background and subsequent association with Napoleon, ventures out into public space, learns ideas that are not applicable to his person, enters a city that encourages temporary subversion, and is finally, as Seaboyer puts it, "unable to navigate the labyrinth and is swallowed up into madness and despair" (485). The police, the literal authority of Venice, eventually arrest Henri for murder. The Venetian authority declares him insane and sends him to the asylum on the rocky island of San Servelo. From there, Henri must find some way to manage the insanity that has saved his life.

First, though, an understanding of Villanelle's violation of patriarchal social roles will aid in the examination of how Henri manages his fully realized madness. Though her first husband is dead and she never marries Henri, Villanelle is finally yoked to her socially prescribed role through the presence of the maternal. Simply

put, Villanelle has a baby. The last time the reader encounters Villanelle, she is rowing out past Henri's window, hoping to gain his attention: "I waved and he waved back and I thought he might see me. He would not. Not me nor the baby, who is a girl with a mass of hair like the early sun and feet like his" (150). The reader hears nothing more of Villanelle. One suspects, however, that she will become much like the Queen of Spades--perhaps able temporarily to play, but ultimately tied to her feminine role of mother. Villanelle let her passion for the Queen of Spades overcome her, thus violating the rules of the public space that she inhabited. This violation causes her to lose the ability to slide between prescribed societal roles in the one city that accepts occasional subversion. Ultimately, Villanelle will not be allowed to return to the parts of Venice that hold the shifting landscapes that hold this subversion; instead, she must haunt stagnant places such as the lagoon that borders Henri's island prison.

Like Napoleon, Henri ends up on a rocky island, a prisoner because he desired to conquer that which he could not conquer. Had he never left his French village (or had Napoleon not left Corsica), Henri would have been assimilated into a functional, healthy, and enclosed environment--just as the woman writer who chooses to write privately (e.g., writing in a diary or through correspondence) or piously (e.g., Anne Bradstreet) rather than actively seek publication. Instead, he exposed himself to the wide-open spaces of the battlefield. This exposure to patriarchal reality eventually renders the feminized Henri insane. *The Passion* does not end with this descent into insanity, however; the story ends with Henri's refusal to leave his island enclosure. Unlike Napoleon, Henri has learned his lesson concerning the outside world. He has become a true agoraphobic.

"They say that when Josephine was in the slimy prison . . . she and other ladies of strong character cultivated the weeds and lichens that spread in the stone and managed to make for themselves, while not a garden, a green place that comforted them" (158). This cultivation of a garden becomes Henri's new goal in life. The garden not only hearkens back to the pastoral life once guaranteed him in his French village, but it also is a controlled space that has clear, manageable boundaries in which life can flourish. Henri chooses the existence of manageable boundaries and refuses Villanelle's desire to help him escape--a victory in retreat, which is certainly a violation of the patriarchal order of things (i.e., retreat is defeat). Besides being another violation of social order, the escape Villanelle proposes would propel Henri back into a world that has only created madness. On San Servelo, he is able to manage his madness by denying it room to act.

The reader finds that the majority (or the whole) of the text is a diary that Henri has kept and that he is now re-reading in his prison cell. Seaboyer makes simultaneous connections to Breuer and Freud's definition of hysteria as well as Proustian isolation in her comment on the nature of Henri's text:

> The text--or at least that portion of it related in Henri's voice--is on one level hystericized, the poetically encoded symptom that Henri constructs to maintain a fiction of coherence in the face of disintegration. "Hysterics," as Joseph Breuer famously said, "suffer mainly from reminiscences," and reminiscence is embedded and re-embedded in Henri's narrative, which is a mixture of elegiac memoir and melancholic spiritual autobiography, a remembrance of things past. (489)

Seaboyer goes on to discuss how Henri's choice to remain on San Servelo complies with Freud's pleasure principle: the achievement of stasis can only be achieved in the controlled space of the asylum. Or, as Jana L. French described Henri's refusal to leave in "'I'm telling you stories. . . . Trust me': Gender, Desire, and Identity in Jeanette Winterson's Historical Fantasies" (1999): "in the insular world of his tower he remains cut off from discursive interaction with others. . . . [this refusal] artificially separates the destabilizing force from the object of its critique" (241). Although Henri has found a way somewhat to master his madness, it is at the expense of his passion and freedom. This image should be reminiscent of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott": "A curse is on her if she stay / To look down to Camelot" (40-1). That curse is agoraphobia--the inability to move within the open spaces controlled by patriarchal social order because of its rules of gender.

The Passion is a book of risks and consequences. As Villanelle likes to repeat: "You play, you win. You play, you lose. You play" (66). For Henri, Villanelle, and Napoleon, their risks all end with disastrous consequences. Only Napoleon meets these consequences with further risk, which results in his Waterloo and a second banishment. For Winterson, *The Passion* is (among other things) an account of sexuality and its place in the world. While Villanelle is the only clear sexual "deviant" in the novel by way of her relationship with the Queen of Spades, Napoleon and Henri's feminine characteristics cause them significant hardship--as significant as if they were deviating from heterosexuality, which is the sexual norm of the patriarchal social order. In this way, Winterson connects sexuality and gender in such a way that demonstrates patriarchy's intolerance of both. Simply put, anyone who violates the social order of the patriarchy--

specifically, the codes of behavior for men and for women--will be made to suffer by the majority who do conform to that order.

For Gilbert & Gubar's woman writer, entering the public world was also a game of risks and consequences. The women writers of the nineteenth century enjoyed relative success in their adventures into the literary marketplace; the risks they faced by violating patriarchal order, nonetheless, were still tangible. Reading their texts and finding instances of agoraphobia, as Gilbert & Gubar do, demonstrates that these women writers understood the risks. What a further analysis of this type of agoraphobia, as is available in *The Passion*, allows the reader to see, however, is that patriarchal social codes did not just affect women--they affected anyone who disputed or subverted patriarchy.

Chapter 4

Nineteenth-Century Characters Created Anew: The Search for a Positive Role Model in the London of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

In the index of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the reader will not find terms such as "race," "ethnicity," "nationality," or "religion." The absence of these terms and the corresponding lack of discussion of the themes these words signify on the part of Gilbert & Gubar has been yet another source of dismay amongst critics. Gilbert & Gubar occasionally do mention Harriet Beecher Stowe and her work, but these discussions are nowhere close in substance to the lengthy discussions of Eliot, Shelley, and the Brontë sisters. In fact, *The Madwoman* is fraught with white imagery--Emily Dickinson (a pearl), Lilith (both as a reminder of lily-white and virginity), and Snow White being the most prominent examples. Of course, white imagery is useful for Gilbert & Gubar primarily as a reminder of the virtue and purity expected of Victorian women, but its constant presence in the text also reminds to the reader of the lack of significant literary examples of women of color who wrote during the nineteenth century. Christianity (a topic that has a meticulous listing in the index), aided by the work of Milton, is apparently the only religion germane enough to Gilbert & Gubar's discussion to merit inclusion. And, lastly, *The Madwoman* would not be a useful place to search for information on women writers not from the British Empire or America. That does not mean, however, that

Gilbert & Gubar's work is useless in examining novels that deal prominently with themes of race, religion, and nationality.

When Zadie Smith published her first novel, *White Teeth*, in 2000, critics heaped praise on Smith and her work. When the paperback edition appeared, the publisher chose to include seventeen excerpts of reviews and a list of awards that the novel had won in order to emphasize its literary noteworthiness. Many of the review excerpts concentrate on the idea of Smith as a "new voice." The excerpt from the *San Francisco Chronicle* claims that *White Teeth* "just may be the first great novel of the new century." The excerpt included from *The Baltimore Sun* compares Smith to Mary Shelley, claiming that "[n]ot since Mary Shelley composed *Frankenstein* at the age of 19 has a bookish young woman made such an extraordinary debut." The tenor of the reviews that Vintage chose to include invites comparisons to literary history as well as Smith's place in that history. Why compare Smith to an author who published her great work nearly two hundred years ago? What is so significant about publishing a great novel in the year 2000--that is, why is society so concerned with where it is going and where it has been? Fortunately, Smith addresses these questions in her novel by showing how the past constantly affects the present of her characters; the inscription that Smith uses to begin her novel, "What is past is prologue," draws attention to this consideration of the past (vii). In the same manner, it seems appropriate to look at "the first great novel of the new century" and examine how it converses with the past. As it turns out, a discussion such as this one yields many comparisons to the works of Smith's nineteenth-century counterparts.

Winning the Whitbread First Novel Award, being named *The New York Times Books Review* Editor's Choice, and receiving enormous critical

attention, *White Teeth* is certainly an example of how women have been accepted in to the literary marketplace at the end of the twentieth century. Also of note, though, is the apparent acceptance of the novel's theme--the melding together of different races, nationalities, and religions that creates a new people and, perhaps, a new society. Many reviewers like to compare Smith's writing to that of authors like Rushdie and Pynchon. In one of the more insightful and original reviews, Sukhdev Sandhu compares Smith to other contemporary young writers, writing that "she evokes a London which is deeper, broader and more generous than those anorexic metropolises featured in novelettes about twenty-something scenesters skittering after frivolity" (21). Other reviewers attempt to link Smith to the genre of race--one such reviewer being Greg Tate, who writes in his review for the *Village Voice* that "as someone who knows hella-alienated negroes in the U.K. and something of their crabby barrels, I'm just puzzled--why do I get the feeling she'd rather write about any mess but that one?" (75) Asking a question such as this one seems to miss the point of the novel altogether: Smith's project is somewhat similar to what Winterson did for gendering in *The Passion*--she shows how non-white, non-Christian, and non-English people are feminized in the eyes of British society. Smith uses that deep, broad London in order to explore how these feminized people live and act within their surroundings. More to the point, this feminization causes problems for not only the people being feminized, but also the next generation who searches for role models. This search appears to be, then, the main conflict of *White Teeth*.

White Teeth's massive breadth makes it difficult to determine which character is the main focus of the novel. By the sheer number of times in which other people act upon her, however, Irie Jones emerges

as one of the primary focal points. Irie comes from a multinational, multiracial, and multi-religious family--not to mention that her parents are separated in age by twenty-nine years. The family's closest friends are a Bengali family that consists of an emasculated father, a frustrated and occasionally violent mother, and identical twins who have vastly different personalities. In the latter part of the novel, Irie befriends what appears to be a typical middle-class English family, the Chalfens, who are actually smothering in patriarchal social stereotypes. These three families, along with the influences of everyday British life, create a world for Irie in which it is extremely difficult to establish any sense of "normal" and, more importantly, any sense of self.

Though *The Madwoman* may not be useful in providing any direct analysis of the prominent themes of *White Teeth*, some of Gilbert & Gubar's interpretive strategies are relevant in discussing Smith's characters and the effects that they have on Irie. Most of the references to *The Madwoman* in the chapter will come from the section that deals with Milton and his influence on the works of Shelley and the Brontë sisters, which is ironic considering the relative exclusion of traditional Christianity from *White Teeth*. As Irie's birth represents a non-traditional synthesis that results in lifelong angst, a comparison to Frankenstein's Creature and the relationship that Gilbert & Gubar draw between him, gender, and society is appropriate. The two prominent men of the Iqbal family, Samad and Millat, invite comparisons by way of their physical appearance to *Jane Eyre's* Rochester and *Wuthering Heights*'s Heathcliff. Moreover, Samad's dependence on history--his insistence that his great-grandfather was the hero behind the Indian Mutiny of 1857--likens him to Causabon's own

reliance on his "key to all mythologies" in Eliot's *Middlemarch*. In a more general sense, the Chalfens act as an example of the destructive nature of the seemingly peaceful existence of traditional gender roles in the house. In all of these comparisons, it should be clear to the reader that, even though the subject matter of *White Teeth* might appear to be far away from the writing of nineteenth-century women writers, Smith's work is actually deeply intertwined with many of the same conflicts that those nineteenth-century women experienced and explored in their work.

Before reaching the section on Irie and the aptly titled chapter, "The Miseducation of Irie Jones" contained within that section, Smith gives the reader an extensive account of the Jones family. She begins with Archie, forty-seven and English, who opens the novel with a suicide attempt brought on by a general sense of worthlessness and ennui. While being rescued from this attempt, Archie has the revelation that "Life wanted Archie and Archie, much to his own surprise, wanted Life" (7). That same day, Archie stumbles on a hippie commune where he first sees Clara Bowden, "magnificently tall, black as ebony and crushed sable. . . . [with] a lilting Caribbean accent" (19-20). A short time later, they marry. Clara's parents were Jamaican and Jehovah's Witnesses, causing Clara to feel like an outcast in 1970's England. She discovers the mod lifestyle through a boy named Ryan Topps who, subsequently, discovers the life of the Jehovah's Witness. This further alienation leads Clara to run away to the commune and then to run away with Archie.

One aspect of the novel that most reviewers agree on is that Zadie Smith truly loves and cares about the characters she creates. That does mean, however, that she excuses these characters from the

conflicts to which their backgrounds make them prone. Archie possesses many of the qualities of the "proper" Englishman: WWII veteran, married, middle-aged, and gainfully employed. For him, England is the ideal place and that ideal place welcomes him. The idea that Archie is a failure is a legitimate one; then again, however, he does have friends, possesses the relative comfort of being middle class, and is a cog in the wheel of the British economy--while this may not be the ideal life, it certainly is not a picture of worthlessness either. This relationship between man and environment is not unlike Adam's relationship with Eden that Gilbert & Gubar discuss in their chapter on Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*. They see Victor Frankenstein as the Adam of his world, arguing that Shelley intends the "cherubic Elizabeth Lavenza" to be likened to Eve (230). Gilbert & Gubar go on to claim that this Edenic situation--according to Victor, anyway--is compromised because of Victor's "father's apparent arbitrariness" (231). Archie's life is changed by this same kind of arbitrariness; rather than his father, though, Archie has his first wife to credit because of her familial history of insanity that ultimately leads to her sudden decision to leave Archie. In both situations, the man uses the arbitrary event--that is, an event that acts upon the man rather than the man enacting the event--to blame his former situation in order to leave it and pursue something that society does not credit as valid.

In effect, the marriage of Archie and Clara is the cobbling of numerous backgrounds and experiences together--Archie has been raised to be the "proper" Englishman (i.e., white, middle-class, and patriotic) while Clara, raised as a Jehovah's Witness and all-around cultural outsider, has always looked different, felt rebellious, and never experienced independence. These backgrounds, experiences, and

appearances are all synthesized when Clara becomes pregnant, or, as Archie puts it, "up the spout" (58). Smith makes it clear to the reader right away that, although they may mean well, a union between Archie and Clara may not have the most positive outcome. Even before Clara becomes pregnant, she regards her new husband quite critically: "No aims, no hopes, no ambitions. A man whose greatest pleasures were English breakfasts and DIY. A dull man. An *old* man. And yet . . . good. And *good* might not amount to much, *good* might not light up a life, but it is something" (41). In a conversation with Alsana Iqbal, Clara is further critical of Archie's inspiration-deprived nature, disappointed by the humdrum name "Sarah" that he wants to call the new baby. Clara wants to name the baby "*Irie*. . . . Means everything *OK, cool, peaceful*, you know" (64). Given what must eventually be the physical appearance of their child (if nothing else), the implication that Irie Jones will be able to grow up "okay" and "peacefully" is one that both parents should have known would be difficult--at best.

Between Clara's choice of name and Archie's rushing out to buy cigars--excited more by the fact that his and Clara's child might have blue eyes than anything else--the child's actual future in suburban England appears not to matter much to the parents. This disregard by the parents for the future life of a child invites parallels to Frankenstein's disregard for his Creature. Shelley uses Adam's infamous lamentation to God from *Paradise Lost* to acknowledge this disregard; Smith uses blitheness of language to accomplish it in her text. Though it may appear overly simplified to compare Frankenstein's Creature to a biracial girl--more so if one calls Frankenstein's creation a "monster"--they both uncontrovertibly share the trauma of never seeing another face or body that looks like their own. This comparison seems

especially valid considering the extreme manner with which teenagers often dramatize the world around them.

Needless to say, there are quite a few differences between the characters of the Creature and Irie as well as the times in which they lived. For one, Irie can actually experience and participate in the world around her without the constant fear of horror, revulsion, and aggression that the Creature faced. Contemporary society also favors the media and its saturation of images--the image of the ideal woman prominent among them. That image may occasionally change and have certain shifting variables, but none of those variables accounts for Irie's description of herself: "mountainous curves, buckteeth and thick metal retainer, impossible Afro hair, and to top it off mole-ish eyesight that in turn required Coke-bottle spectacles in a light shade of pink" (224). Irie spends most of her time wishing that she could undo the genetics that have been handed down from her parents in much the same way the Creature despises the parts Victor has forced on him.

Having to seclude himself away from society, the Creature receives his cultural education from his chance discovery of Plutarch's *Lives*, *The Sorrow of Young Werther*, and *Paradise Lost*. Gilbert & Gubar argue that Shelley included these three particular works because "each must have seemed to her to embody lessons a female author (or monster) must learn about a male-dominated society" (237). *Werther* acts as a "Romantic conduct book" while Plutarch's *Lives* and *Paradise Lost* teach the Creature the "masculine intricacies of . . . history," which include the fact that women are excused from history as well as "explanatory visions of past and future" (238). The equivalent of these texts for Irie is that perpetual media image of the ideal woman. When she sees a weight loss ad, Irie thinks that "she was the target

audience (if ever there was one), she knew full well, as she trudged schoolward, mouth full of doughnut, hugging her spare tires, that the ad was speaking to her" (223). Later that day, when Irie is tempted to read Shakespeare's Sonnet 127 as a comforting message, her teacher strips her of that notion, telling her that she should "Never read what is old with a modern ear" (227). For Irie, the denial of comfort in her (mis)reading of Shakespeare is the final blow to her fragile teenage ego. Similarly, the Creature's books, although they provide him with an education, do nothing to relieve him of his aberrant appearance and the social alienation that appearance causes.

For Gilbert & Gubar, the Creature's appearance "represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness" (241). In a culture dominated by media images such as the one in which Irie lives, her physical appearance is a marker of all three of the qualities Gilbert & Gubar attribute to the Creature. Social illegitimacy applies to the inevitability that Irie will never look like women in magazines --or, much more importantly, the women men want to date. Even though Irie was born to wedded parents, she attains the status of social bastard because, rather than being birthed by a non-married woman, she was birthed by a non-"English" woman. Lastly, because Irie is half-black and half-white, she does not have the genuine access to either culture, leaving her without a culture to which she can ascribe or name herself.

Unlike the Creature, however, Irie does not have to hide herself away from society; instead, she decides to change herself in order to be more accepted by society--or, more accurately, socially acceptable so as to attract Millat Iqbal. Irie goes to a hair design salon where she is determined to have her hair straightened regardless of the pain

and damage such a procedure might do: "here ammonia, hot combs, clips, pins, and simple fire had all been enlisted in the way and were doing their damnedest to beat each curly hair into submission" (229). Irie's desire to look acceptable manifests itself in physical agony as the straightening procedure melts her hair and scalp and causes her to pass out from the pain. Irie ends up having hair extensions attached to her shorn hair, but at least she has been able to transform herself into something more acceptable--at least that is what Irie thinks.

When Irie goes looking for Millat, she finds his cousin, Neena, instead. Neena immediately criticizes Irie for what she did to her hair, giving her the standard speech about individuality and self. At that point, Neena, her girlfriend, and Irie all start to pull the new hair, leaving the reader with quite a tableau: "Irie stood, facing her own reflection, busy tearing out somebody else's hair with her bare hands" (241). Not only has that hair been destroyed, Irie's original hair has also long since been destroyed in the process. As in *Frankenstein*, destruction is the result of being created different and trying to attain some sense of belonging. After all, it is not until after the Creature is rejected by the De Laceys that he attempts to wreak destruction on Victor's family. In almost identical fashion, Irie does not destroy part of herself until after Millat rejects her for not, as she thinks, being pretty enough.

Millat Iqbal, the object of Irie's desire, is in many more ways a destructive force to Irie than what has been described. His sexual conquests and other attempts at heightened masculinity such as his love for gangster films--not to mention the darkness of his skin--liken him to Heathcliff in Gilbert & Gubar's analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. This likening becomes clearer when one also compares Irie to

Gilbert & Gubar's description of Isabella, who mistakes "appearance for reality, tall athletic Heathcliff for 'an honorable soul' instead of 'a fierce, pitiless wolfish man'" (288). Isabella stakes her entire life on Heathcliff and he ruins her--all because she could not see (or did not care) what Heathcliff really was.

In Irie's case, her Heathcliff possesses a "broken Roman nose" and has a "smoothly muscled" physique, which makes him irresistible to all the women in the area (224). Millat becomes an urban legend in suburban London as the boy who has "snogged everyone" (236). The only apparent exception, however, is Irie, whom Millat regards as a friend--someone who is above wanting to change him into something he is not. Ironically, Irie does want the same thing that every other woman wants for him; unlike the other women, though, who write poetry about Millat and discuss him at sleepovers, Irie's desire for Millat is an overwhelming passion that cannot be altered or mitigated--even by clear evidence that Millat is not what Irie hopes he could be.

Comparing Irie to Catherine Earnshaw provides for an even clearer picture of Millat as Heathcliff. Answering the question of why Catherine refused to marry Heathcliff, Gilbert & Gubar write that her

> explanation that it would 'degrade' her to marry Heathcliff is an equally inevitable product of her education, for her fall into ladyhood has been accompanied by Heathcliff's reduction to an equivalent position of female powerlessness, and Catherine has learned, correctly, that if it is degrading to be a woman it is even more degrading to be *like* a woman. (277)

What precipitates transition into ladyhood for Irie is her becoming an amateur secretary, which happens at nearly the same time as Millat's

indoctrination into an extremist Islamic group called KEVIN that causes his own female powerlessness.

After the schoolmaster catches them with marijuana on school grounds, he sends Irie and Millat to be tutored at the house of Joshua Chalfen--the other player in the marijuana incident. There, Irie befriends and becomes enamored with Joshua's father, Marcus, who offers Irie the job of sorting files and correspondence. In addition to the salary she receives, Irie also gets to spend time with the man she has begun to romanticize--temporarily putting aside her feelings for Millat. Considering the Chalfen family and its mannerisms, Irie thinks that "she *wanted* to merge with the Chalfens, to be of one flesh" (284). Literally, Irie is wishing she could be the child of Marcus rather than that of her own strange family; in a sense, however, because of Irie's growing affection for Marcus, one might also argue that Irie wants to be related to Marcus Chalfen in a more romantic fashion. Irie's new romantic fascination coincides with her taking up of a female profession, both of which serve as Irie's own descent into ladyhood.

Meanwhile, Millat has become involved with a religious extremist group who, among other things, practice a sort of asceticism. In order to be fully indoctrinated, Millat has to "cut down on the booze, the weed, the women" as well as "purge oneself of the taint of the West" (367). The latter commandment is the hardest for Millat as it requires him to give up his fascination with the gangster film. In essence, Millat has to forsake everything that made him masculine in the eyes of his English surroundings. Millat's new appearance and style of living is off-putting to those who used to find Millat so attractive (including Irie), and he is now reduced to a beautiful brown foreign boy bereft of his sense of masculinity. This alienation from his

surroundings mirrors what Gilbert & Gubar see as Heathcliff's fate: "Heathcliff is 'female'--on the level where younger sons and bastards and devils unite with women in rebelling against the tyranny of heaven, the level where orphans are female and heirs are male" (294). Whereas Heathcliff is feminized because he is an orphan, Millat becomes an illegitimate son of English society because of his refusal of Western masculinity in favor of foreign asceticism.

In an argument about his father with Joyce Chalfen and Irie, Millat shouts, "I'm more of a fucking Muslim than he is. Fuck him!" (277) While that may or may not be true, due to his feminization by a quasi-return to his ancestral religion, Millat has created a true commonality between himself and his father, Samad Iqbal. Samad had the bad luck of being injured during his stint in WWII, leaving him with one lame hand and severely limited career options. His fiery masculine nature is thus mitigated into the profession of waiter, one that Samad views with utter disdain. In fact, Samad dreams of hanging a placard around his neck that reads: "I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER. . . . I AM FORTY-NINE BUT WOMEN STILL TURN IN THE STREETS. SOMETIMES" (49). For Samad, then, the obvious plight of the waiter that is low income is underscored by the idea that being a waiter is an emasculating act. Samad apparently thinks that, like Millat, his foreignness makes him attractive to English women. And to an extent, he appears to be correct when one of Millat's teachers initiates an affair. His profession, though, necessitated by his lame hand, prevents his masculinity from being fully realized.

In a way, Samad's handicap likens him to Charlotte Brontë's Rochester, the once-powerful man who is humbled by a horrific event that leaves him sightless and, thus, powerless. Of course, as Gilbert &

Gubar see it, Rochester's handicap is a positive thing, as "he is paradoxically stronger than he was when he ruled Thornfield, for now, like Jane, he draws his powers from within himself, rather than from inequity, disguise, deception" (369). One might reason that, although Samad is reduced to a lower financial status, the gain of a faithful wife, a best friend, and two children makes up for any financial loss that his humbling handicap incurs. Samad, however, has another claim to masculinity to which he remains steadfast that prevents this positive outlook: his ancestry. As Smith makes it clear, though, no one except Samad Iqbal sees his ancestry as something worthy of notice.

Simply put, Samad's great-grandfather, Mangal Pande, became drunk and shot at an English lieutenant, missed, then lurched at the lieutenant with his sword while the lieutenant's back was turned. Only after that does the unsuccessful rebellion of 1857 start. Archie points out to Samad that Pande's only real claim to fame is the word "pandy," which is defined as "Any fool or coward in a military situation" (209). Samad refuses both readings of Pande's actions, claiming instead that Pande single-handedly started the rebellion, an idea that is supported only by a vague scholar named A.S. Misra. Samad defends Pande so rigorously because he believes that Pande is the only thing he has to recommend him to masculinity: "When a man has nothing but his blood to commend him, each drop of it matters, matters terribly; it must be jealously defended" (212). This reliance on the past as the key to present existence and the emasculation that that reliance incurs once again parallels one of Smith's characters to another Victorian counterpart--this time, the parallel is between Samad and George Eliot's Causabon.

Gilbert & Gubar stress two images of Causabon that show his power and his weakness. First, his relationship with books and history provide him with an "inextricable link between male culture and female misogyny" (501). Gilbert & Gubar contrast Causabon's patriarchal power with his weakness that is reliant on the dead world of books and history: "Eliot makes it seem as if the very provinces of masculine knowledge that he embodies to Dorothea kill on contact" (503). The difference between Causabon and Samad is that Samad has no access through history to masculine power as Causabon does. Ironically, even if Samad's version of history was correct, Pande was still the proprietor of a failed rebellion against the colonial English (i.e., patriarchal) social order. Samad's warped version of his ancestry provides him with delusions of grandeur that damage the present and, more importantly, damage those who rely on him for support--just as Causabon's knowledge of history damaged Dorothea's vitality.

Alsana, Samad's wife through arranged marriage, appears to accept the role of wife as the duty that has been set out for her. When Neena, her niece, begins to lecture her on the wrongs of submission to men, Alsana replies, "What a load of codswallop. . . . The truth is, for marriage to survive you don't need all this talk, talk, talk; all this 'I am this' and 'I am really like this' like in the papers, all this *revelation*--" (65). In fact, Alsana calls Neena "Niece of Shame," implying that Neena's Western lifestyle and beliefs are both embarrassing and wrong. But as Samad continues to fail in his attempts to assert his masculinity as well as to make horrible decisions like kidnapping one of his sons and sending him to Bangladesh as a money and culture-saving venture, Alsana begins to burst under the pressure. Eventually, she comes to the point where she wrestles Samad to the

ground out of rage so someone can assert real authority. These wrestling matches in the backyard are the ultimate display of Samad's emasculation--being defeated by a diminutive woman who would normally accept patriarchal social order without complaint. Indeed, between Samad, the thoroughly emasculated father, and Archie, the postmodern Prometheus, it is little wonder that both Irie and Millat have to seek out male authority elsewhere.

Unlike Irie, Millat does not find his "male authority" in the Chalfen household; he does, however, find something there that he finds beneficial: Joyce Chalfen. Joyce Chalfen appears to be the perfect "angel of the house" in the way she treats Millat--much to Irie's disgust:

> The more progress Irie made . . . . the less interest Joyce showed in her. Yet the more Millat veered off the rails . . . drinking their 1964 Dom Pérignon on the sly . . . holding a KEVIN meeting in the front room, running up a £300 phone bill calling Bangladesh . . . accusing Joyce herself of being a maniac--the more Joyce adored him. (278)

Even before Millat makes his entrance into the Chalfen household, Joyce has the desire to "fix" any child she can: "And yet, and yet . . . Joyce pined for the golden age when she was the linchpin of the Chalfen family. . . Sometimes there seemed nothing to improve, nothing to cultivate" (261). All she had before Millat came along were increasingly self-sufficient children and a garden--an enclosed space whose inhabitants require constant care in order to survive. In fact, Joyce is quite the horticulturist, having published a hybrid gardening/feminist volume entitled *The New Flower Power*--written, incidentally, in her attic. As Smith develops Joyce's character, the

similarities between Joyce and Gilbert & Gubar's angel/madwoman become more and more numerous

Behind the façade of the Chalfen's perfect household lies the possibility of disorder and disaster. Irie and Millat make that possibility surface when they enter the house and create chaos where there was once order. As Smith notes, "The Chalfens had no friends. They interacted mainly with the Chalfen extended family. . . . Joyce challenged anyone to show her a happier family, a more Chalfenist family than theirs" (261). When Millat and Irie enter, the perfectly well adjusted family of independents reveals that they are actually anything but independent. When Irie and Millat begin to corner the attention of the Chalfen parents, the children begin to misbehave in ways that they never had before. Joshua Chalfen, the once perfect student, forsakes his studies as an act of rage against his parents--especially his mother. Neena, the Niece Of Shame with the modern ideas, admits after encountering Joyce that she is, along with the rest of the family, "crazy, nutso, raisins short of a fruitcake, rubber walls, screaming-mad basket cases. Every bloody one of them" (291). Whether or not Joyce Chalfen is a direct commentary on the angel/madwoman paradigm, she certainly is a hyperbolic image--in her desire to mother everything in sight as well as her desire to escape back to the attic and (re)live her days of academic expertise and prowess--of the woman who endures "the psychic split between the lady who submits to male dicta and the lunatic who rebels" (86). This hyperbole is certainly not humorous to Irie, though, who has found another debilitating influence where she thought she had finally found stability.

For Irie, the final ordeal is the correspondence between Marcus Chalfen and Millat's twin brother, Magid. As soon as this epistolary

relationship begins, Irie is no longer the Chalfen patriarch's favorite child: "No love letters could have been more ardent. No passion more fully returned" (304). In one of these letters, Marcus admits to Magid that Irie is not cut out to be a scientist--the most she could hope for is probably dentistry. This statement, combined with the presence of a contemporary Frankenstein, Rochester, Heathcliff, Causabon, and angel/madwoman, is more than this postmodern Creature can take. In the end, she takes the only action that she can think of that will allow her to gain some control over her surroundings: she has sex with both Magid and Millat.

One of the few critics who writes negatively about Smith's novel, James Wood, views this event as an unrealistic and unsatisfying climax. In his review entitled "Human, All Too Inhuman," Wood writes, "It is quite clear that a general message about the need to escape roots is more important than Irie's reality, what she might actually think, her consciousness" (45). He goes on to question Smith's motivation to write such a scene: "This is problem-solving, all right. But at what cost?" (45). One must understand, however, that Irie and the people around her are all characters who exist only in the space of the novel. After all these comparisons between the characters of *White Teeth* and those of nineteenth-century novels written by women as interpreted by Gilbert & Gubar, it should be clear to the reader that Irie's method of taking control has deep roots in literary history. Yes, the event itself may seem a little out of the ordinary, but the motivations behind it make perfect sense in the realm of the novel.

Irie first has sex with Millat, a freak occurrence of sorts. Irie then gets angry and seeks revenge because "Millat didn't love Irie, and Irie was sure there must be somebody she could blame for that. . . .

What was the root cause of Millat's feelings of inadequacy? Magid. He had been born second because of Magid. He was the lesser son because of Magid" (382). Irie felt as if she was defending Millat by taking this course of action. Of course, as a result, Irie becomes pregnant and it is impossible to tell who the father is. This impossibility manages to equalize the two brothers in that each could be the father of the child, thus (in Irie's eyes) negating the conflict over which brother was greater than the other. Irie has to enact the traditional role of female reproduction, however, in order for this negation to occur. In the end, though, Smith gives the reader every indication that this sacrifice does in fact bring stability to the whole circle of families that *White Teeth* encompasses.

At the conclusion of the novel, Irie, the product of a media society and a pair of fractured families, starts a relationship with Joshua Chalfen, the product of a "perfect" middle-class family--"(you can only avoid your fate for so long)" (448). Does the reading of Irie's "miseducation" from Gilbert & Gubar's point of view help to make sense of the novel's ending? One might argue that *White Teeth* ends in much the same way that Gilbert & Gubar argue that *Jane Eyre* does with Jane and Rochester "isolated from society but flourishing in a natural order of their own making" (370)--the novel's final scene is one of happiness with Irie, Joshua, and little girl on the coast of the Caribbean, away from all the madness of London. If Gilbert & Gubar's theories that comprise *The Madwoman in the Attic* cannot make sense of the ending of *White Teeth*, however, that is probably a fitting conclusion itself. *The Madwoman in the Attic* was, after all, written for and about works written by nineteenth-century women authors; as such, it should be no surprise that it would not be entirely compatible

with novels written at the end of the twentieth century. The fact that some of their critical strategies, however, can still be used in productively analyzing contemporary works in *any* capacity speaks to the usefulness and longevity of Gilbert & Gubar's theories of the literary imagination of the woman writer.

Conclusion

Climbing Down from the Attic

Today, the media, doctors, and pharmaceutical companies all seem to be on the verge of trivializing anxiety by the suggestion that more and more people are succumbing to mental disorders caused by anxiety everyday. Fortunately, of course, for the person who does truly suffer from anxiety today, there are health care professionals and medications that can help that person manage his or her anxiety. Neither of these statements changes the fact that there is more than sufficient cause to be anxious about the way contemporary society operates. For women in particular, significant progress has occurred over the past hundred years to assure that some basic rights and freedoms will be upheld regardless of gender; despite this progress, though, Western society is far from egalitarian when it comes how men and women are treated. The literary culture of the Western world operates as a microcosm of general society in that, although women have been accepted as full-fledged members of the literary marketplace, there are some subjects that women (and men) write about (e.g., sexuality, ethnicity, oppression) that meet with critical resistance from some readers, publishers, and members of the media. In any case, it is always admirable to see a writer write honestly about something that makes her (or him) anxious.

While all of this may be true, how does one compare the anxiety women face today with the anxiety women faced in the nineteenth century? After all, some of the great critical debates from Victorian

England (and America) are the "Woman Question," the "Cult of True Womanhood," the "angel of the house," and public/private spheres. Though an egalitarian society has by no means been reached, women do have more access to (public) society and rights within that society then they did a century ago. What is important to consider, though, is how the expression of anxiety has changed and developed from the nineteenth century to today--what has changed and what has stayed the same regarding how people express anxiety can truly give one insight as to how society as a whole has changed. In terms of literature and women writers, Gilbert & Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* may be the best way to investigate these changes and similarities.

What one can discover from *The Madwoman in the Attic* is that, although the causes of anxiety have changed since the nineteenth century, many of the ways that it is expressed have stayed the same. Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, and Zadie Smith all have direct means of expressing themselves in the media as celebrated authors; they are still at their most honest and persuasive, though, when practicing the same craft of writing that Mary Shelley, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters practiced years ago. If these nineteenth-century women writers were compelled by feelings of exclusion to write the particular fictions that they wrote, perhaps women writers today are also compelled by exclusion of a different sort. Rather than feeling excluded only because she is a woman, the contemporary woman writer may also feel excluded from society because she is black, Indian, lesbian, Muslin, or not quite Christian enough. With Winterson and Smith, however, it is becoming apparent that not all women writers believe that women are the only part of society who feels excluded; they show how any person, man or woman, who is in opposition to the Western

patriarchal social order can be excluded from society. While many men do suffer because of contemporary cultural stereotypes that are based on sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion, it is women who still have the additional level of access (albeit somewhat mitigated since the nineteenth century) to being excluded or discriminated against because they are not men.

In this respect, a critical study like *The Madwoman in the Attic* remains an invaluable resource through its commitment to the exposure of a basic and pervasive social and literary issue: the patriarchal social order's attempts to limit the (creative) expression of woman writer. Though their analyses may not always be the most believable or accurate, Gilbert & Gubar's desire to form a community based around nineteenth-century women writers who incorporate their anxieties concerning patriarchy and society into the fictions that they created is certainly a worthy and admirable project. If nothing else, *The Madwoman in the Attic* should remain a valid and studied work of criticism because of how it allows one to explore the ways in which the expressions of anxiety in women's literature have changed from the past to the present and what effect on society these expressions have had.

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