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New Perspectives on Imagology

Edited by

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A “Jezebel” or a Further “Madwoman in the Attic” in Caroline Lee Hentz’s *The Planter’s Northern Bride*

Karin Andersson

Abstract

This article examines striking similarities between stereotypical characters in Caroline Lee Hentz’s US-American plantation novel *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854), and Charlotte Brontë’s classic *Jane Eyre* (1847). Especially, a connection can be made between Hentz’s Italian “Madwoman in the attic” Claudia, and Brontë’s transatlantic Caribbean counterpart Bertha. An intersectional methodology performed through a close reading will show how both women are literally and metaphorically trapped within spaces and stereotypes. This article transfers imagology into a global setting while extending its scope beyond investigating national characteristics.

Keywords

nineteenth century – plantation novel – intersectionality – Jezebel – Southern Belle

1 Introduction

Cotton, white mansions, fried chicken, voodoo, steamboats, confederate flags, beautiful belles, caring mammies, jezebels, and cavaliers are probably just a few of the images that come to mind when the Old South¹ is mentioned, and engrained internal conceptualizations, or stereotypes, are difficult to alter once established (West 1995, 458). Examining the textual manifestation of such mental images and their surrounding discourses is an important task within imagology, which originated as a branch of European comparative literature, especially connected to German and French scholarly output. However, the approach itself can be applied to any literary text that contains national

1 The Old South refers to the American Southern states before the Civil War.

stereotypes, which is illustrated through the transnational focus covered by numerous articles in this volume.

One way of expanding imagology's methodological scope is to integrate further means of analysis. For instance, intersectionality as an approach could assist in illuminating reflexive relationships and intersections of categories such as class, ethnicity, age, whiteness, disability, national belonging, nation, and gender. Joep Leerssen (2016) also suggests that intersectionality could help observe and theorize categories of identity and their correspondence to certain sociotypes. Using an intersectional framework widens the scope of imagology, whose purpose is usually to examine national images and characters. Additionally, within this article, I suggest that intersectionality could be employed as a means of illustrating how patriarchal power operates within ethnotypes.

This article will deal with similarities between the nineteenth-century American plantation stereotype of the Jezebel, often literary rendered as a promiscuous, assertive, and cunning mixed-raced enslaved woman, and the European Madwoman, who is portrayed as hysterical, seductive, and animal-like. To examine the intertwinements of these stereotypes I will look at the antagonist of one of Caroline Lee Hentz's plantation novels (*The Planters' Northern Bride*, 1854) Claudia—the Jezebel—and Charlotte Brontë's character Bertha (*Jane Eyre* 1847)—the Madwoman in the attic. Through an intersectional close reading, I will suggest that the Jezebel and the Madwoman seem to be transatlantic counterparts.

2 Intersectionality and Imagology Combined

Intersectionality, which is strongly connected to third wave feminism, is said to be the most important contribution to academia provided by feminist theory to date (Carbin and Edenheim 2013, 234). Since intersectionality turned into a "buzzword" (Davis 2008), the interest in the concept and its application has been remarkable. In fact, between 2011 and 2014, approximately 1,000 scholarly articles were published using intersectionality as an analytical tool or discussing it as such (Marfelt 2016, 33). Intersectionality could be interpreted as an endeavour that "embraces messiness, complexity, multiplicity [...] and it attempts to think outside existing gender, sexuality, and race binaries" (Thorpe et al. 2017, 363). The postcolonial scholars Phoenix and Pattynama have defined intersectionality as "exploring intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how people are simultaneously positioned—and position

themselves—in multiple categories, such as gender, class, and ethnicity” (2006, 187).

Its origin is usually traced back to the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, critical race theory, and Third World Liberation movements (Marfelt 2016, 32). The interest in intersectionality is, arguably, from the get-go, its promise to be critical (Davis 2008, 71). Flaunting inequalities obscured due to power hierarchies on structural and institutional levels becomes possible. The empowering effect of intersectionality lies in the “critically informed discussions of difference” (Watson and Scraton 2013, 36), and the chance to show that “the experience of one category drastically alters another” (*ibid.*, 37).

In 2005 the feminist scholar Leslie McCall made a first attempt to establish a methodology for intersectionality. She coined the terms “anticategorical”—rejecting the use of categories all together and discussing identity as a whole (McCall 2005, 1770), “intercategorical”—making use of existing categories, and “intracategorical”—discussing differences within a category. However, how many categories one should discuss is not predecided, and some scholars clearly wish to investigate categories as dynamic processes, for example racialization (Choo and Ferree 2010, 134) rather than race per se.

In 2012 the Danish scholars Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup suggested a qualitative methodology for conducting intersectional analysis. They argued that intersectional close readings of life-story narratives enhance the understandings of how categories function within an individual. Taking everyday life as a point of departure, they discuss the selection of categories and ways of illuminating intersections. One could say that they apply McCall’s intracategorical approach to examine nuances of class articulation but add several implications for a hands-on analysis. To maintain the openness of intersectionality, they advise deciding on categories that seem to display intersections of power, privilege, and identity. However, the first selection should only be a starting point that may be altered later, if other categories turn out to be relevant. Within imagology the interest usually lies in investigating national (European) stereotypes. Intersectionality could throw into relief how nuances of nationality can be further divided into categories such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexual identity, or disability. This endeavour would show how several aspects cannot be separated from one another, which in turn provokes reflection among readers on the constructedness of national stereotypes. Within my analysis, I will perform an intersectional intracategorical close reading according to Christensen and Qvotrup’s guidelines while teasing out hidden power structures provided within the narration of two fictional female characters. McCall refers to intracategorical complexity “because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of

intersection—people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups" (2005, 1774). I would argue that marginalized stereotypes like the Jezebel and the Madwoman would both qualify within that range.

Intracategorical in this context also refers to taking the overarching category "woman" as a starting point, and then exploring further subcategories and intersections within that category. I will primarily investigate how ethnicity and gender operate within the antagonists Claudia (Jezebel) and Bertha (Madwoman), since both gender and ethnicity are foregrounded in the narrations of these characters. In this case, gender and ethnicity enable an understanding of privilege, power, and identity, and of how the stereotypes Jezebel and Madwoman are successfully constituted as disadvantaged within the narratives.

3 Plantation Stereotypes

Plantation stereotypes are stock characters to be found in plenty within the plantation novel, also often referred to as the Southern novel, which usually promoted the social institution of slavery in America during the nineteenth century. The Southern Belle, who is often one of the main characters in a plantation novel, could be considered an auto-stereotype of ideal antebellum Southern womanhood. She represented virtue, youth, fertility, and health in a society that was characterized by a hot climate, fatal diseases, and remote living conditions. Once the Belle married she became a Matron who resided over a household, and potentially over enslaved people. For instance, in 1838 Caroline Howard Gilman published her text *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, which is often discussed as a typical plantation novel, with a typical plot: "a young Charleston woman lives in her father's family, witnesses sundry incidents, is courted, marries, has children, and with that, the book stops" (O'Brien 2010, 185). Written as a novel of education, one follows how the Southern Belle Cornelia transitions into a Matron while each chapter of Gilman's novel treats a further aspect of Southern domesticity.

Caroline Lee Hentz was another popular author of this genre and wrote eighteen plantation novels altogether, one of which this article will consider. The plot of Hentz's Anti-Tom novel² *The Planters' Northern Bride* is seemingly straightforward and concerns the romantic relationship between the Northerner Eulalia Hastings and the Southern planter and slaveholder

2 A small genre emerged containing Southern writers' responses to Harriet Beecher Stowe's negative depiction of Southern society in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

Russel Moreland. Eulalia's father, Mr. Hastings, is a convinced abolitionist and preacher, which results in several political and ethical discussions between him and Mr. Moreland. Accordingly, the initial hundred pages are devoted to overcoming bumps in the road before the protagonists can finally be married. After the wedding, Mr. Moreland takes Eulalia to his home in the South, where the readers are acquainted with typical enslaved stock characters residing on his plantation. However, neither Gilman's nor Hentz's narrative became nearly as popular as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which is probably the first text that comes to mind when the plantation novel is mentioned. Yet Stowe wrote from the perspective of an abolitionist, and, therefore does not represent the genre but rather writes back to it.³

After the Civil War, the plantation novel lived on through nostalgic depictions such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) but also through African American authors like Charles Chesnutt who, at the turn of the century, was one of the first to satirize the genre in his work *The Conjure Woman* (1899).

In hindsight it seems to be a common belief that Southerners were racist and Northerners not; however, both proslavery texts and abolitionist writings frequently relied on racist ideologies (Levy 2012, 274), a fact that is discussed in James Baldwin's text "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1946), which, in turn, writes back to Stowe's text.

Few of the mentioned texts discuss taboo topics such as the corporal punishments, state laws, and ideologies that upheld slavery. Dating back to colonial times, one can find sources that reveal Southerners' fear of the sexuality of enslaved people that they misguidedly assumed to be able to control by reducing Black peoples' personalities to unthreatening hetero-images (Yellin 1972, 57). One example of an unthreatening female stereotype is the so-called Mammy, often depicted as "a bandana-clad, obese, dark complexioned woman with African features" (West 1995, 459). The Mammy is a generally cherished and idealized stereotype, arguably because of her alleged total fidelity and asexuality, whereas her antagonist the Jezebel is depicted as a seductive savage trickster.

The discursive power within plantation stereotypes can be illustrated through the fact that they have an impact on real behaviour. For instance, West writes that the Mammy stereotype is still adopted by many Black women in

3 Although Stowe's purpose was to criticize slavery, she made use of the same stock characters as proslavery writers, which, especially resulting from the popularity of her text, enforced rather than questioned racial stereotypes. James Baldwin convincingly shows this by, for instance, pointing toward the characters Elisa and George who are both fair-skinned enslaved people who pass as white both by their looks and manners, instead of being portrayed as people of colour.

the US due to its strong reinforcement through mass media, films, and literature (1995, 459). In addition, the curse of slavery seems to live on through the sex industry. Alice Walker writes in her short story "Coming Apart" (1980) that pornography offers Black men a misguided opportunity to access and control white women, who had previously been unavailable to them. Within this context Black women are still portrayed as Jezebels, allegedly driven by sexuality and animalistic instincts (Walker 1980, 110).

During the second wave of feminism, a sincere scholarly interest arose in investigating female plantation stereotypes. The impetus arguably originated with the critic Barbara Welter's article "The Cult of True Womanhood" (1966), in which Welter argues that nineteenth-century Western women needed to be "pious, submissive, chaste, and pure," and that they were "hostages within the home" (Welter 1966, 151). She asserts that the conventions of the Western nineteenth-century woman can be grasped through "the cult of true womanhood," hereafter referred to as "the Cult."

Although Welter's concept was widely applied, it was also later severely criticized for being too descriptive and deterministic, especially during third wave feminism where her research was even referred to as "a clumsy attempt of analyzing the politics of true womanhood" (Roberts 2002, 151). Importantly, both Hazel Carby (1987) and Barbara Christian (1980) suggest that Welter fails to theorize how the Cult is a whitewashed concept that ultimately excluded Black women from "real" womanhood. They also argue that historians of Southern history, like Anne Firor Scott (1974), have been preoccupied with determining to which extent women corresponded to the conventions of the Cult, instead of investigating the ideology itself (Christian 1980, 7; Carby 1987, 24). Carby also problematizes the fact that existing scholarship has failed to analyze female plantation stereotypes reflexively (1987, 21). She especially underlines that ignoring contextual circumstances has obscured the perception of female Black stereotypes. Similar to Leerssen, she cautions that a stereotype does not mirror reality but rather supports dominant societal ideologies, which are in need of investigation (Leerssen 2016, 22).

4 Defining the Belle, the Jezebel, and the Madwoman

Up until this point, this article has outlined intersectional guidelines for doing a close reading, and presented the literary genre with which this text engages. I will now move on to define the stereotypes that the upcoming analysis will deal with. A typical description of the Southern Belle can be found in *The Old*

Virginia Gentleman (1885), written by the Southern physician and humourist George William Bagby:

More grace, more elegance, more refinement, more guileless purity, were never found in the whole world over, in any age, [...] archness, coquetry, and bright winsomeness—[...] their character was based upon a confiding, trusting, loving, unselfish devotion—a complete, immaculate world of womanly virtue and home piety was theirs, the like of which [...] was [...] never excelled [...] she is sacred.

1943, 37

This quote allows us to view the Belle on her pedestal, and, as was argued before, it is this image of a seemingly perfect woman that set an unrealistic standard of womanhood that other female plantation stereotypes could not live up to (Seidel 1985, 118).

The Belle's antagonist seems to be the Jezebel. Old prejudices and delusions concerning Black female sexuality led to the Jezebel stereotype that, during antebellum times, suggested that Black women were promiscuous and driven by their libido. This made them vulnerable, and turned them into scapegoats. Especially, these prejudices simplified the process of men blaming enslaved women for sexual contacts if they ever became public (Gray White 1987, 76).

The name Jezebel is to be found in the Bible, and it is also from the scriptures that the stereotype has received its negative connotation. Jezebel was the first heathen princess, and the wife of Ahab. She is described as adulterous and evil. Betina Entzminger defines the African American Jezebel in a similar way as “a femme fatale [...] hyperbolic and sexually knowing, physically powerful because of her allure, and morally dangerous” (2002, 2). Sue Jewell with others deliver a similar rendering: “Physically, Jezebel was often portrayed as a mixed-race woman with more European features, such as thin lips, straight hair, and a slender nose [...] she functioned primarily in the role of a seductive, hypersexual, exploiter of men's weaknesses” (1993, 162). It could be argued that the Jezebel had more European features in order to appear appealing to white men and the readership. For instance, Aisha Lockridge writes that the Jezebel is “walking a tightrope between sanity and lucidity” (2012, 129), which allows us to draw a parallel between the Jezebel and its suggested transatlantic double—the Madwoman.⁴

4 The name Madwoman was first introduced by Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar in their text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (2000). Other scholars who have retraced the stereotype in eighteenth and

Based on the analysed texts, but also on travel accounts from the time period, it seems as if animal-like behaviour, madness, and a darker skin colour are often connected, since enslaved women were often described as both hysterical and animalistic.⁵ The Madwoman found in European literature is described in similar terms. For example, apart from Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, one finds the Italian character Giulietta in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* (1815). Similar to Hentz's antagonist Claudia, she is described as a seductive and ill-meaning Italian. The narrator describes that she provides a man with a drink that makes him lose his better judgement. The drink, or rather potion, induces the protagonist to feel drawn to Giulietta. One can clearly draw a parallel between a love potion and voodoo, and by extension between the stereotypes of the Madwoman and the Jezebel, who are both said to have made use of such measures. The European Madwoman has also been discussed as the binary opposite to the common literary stereotype "the Angel in the house," who also bears similarities to the Southern Belle (Honig 1988, 35).

As the title of article text suggests, I wish to discuss to which extent the Jezebel stereotype could correspond to the nineteenth-century Madwoman, at least within the two investigated novels. Bertha in *Jane Eyre* is narrated as a rich Creole woman who grew up in Spanish Town, Jamaica. She is deprived of a voice of her own until Jean Rhys's postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) was published. Her narrative tells the story of Antoinette (later Bertha) prior to her arrival in England, and her slow progression into alleged madness.

In 1979 the scholars Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar published the text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* wherein they examine a relatively small canon of female white writers and how their depictions of female characters often correspond to either saints or monsters. They argue that the female writers resort to simplified characters for acceptance by a wide audience. Bertha—the Madwoman—becomes the ultimate example of a demonized female character—akin to how the Jezebel is the least positive female African American stereotype.

In 1985 the postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," which is a further rereading of Bertha that combines the character as rendered in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide*

nineteenth-century literature seem to agree that the Madwoman is a recurring stereotype always viewed from a male perspective, depicted as sexually provocative and self-abusing to balance out male fears about authority and control (Kromm 1994, 508).

5 For examples, consult the nineteenth-century travelogues by Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), and Fanny Kemble's *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839* (1864).

Sargasso Sea. She foregrounds England's imperial context, patriarchy, and colonialism, and concludes that Bertha is a product of an imperial discourse, which, I would argue, inextricably links the Madwoman to slavery, and, by extension, to the Jezebel.

To summarize, without much effort, one can distinguish dichotomies between the Belle/Angel in the house and the Jezebel/Madwoman, such as white versus whitish, asexual versus sexual, civil versus uncivil, and, not the least, unthreatening versus threatening. In a way these dichotomies seem to be present up until today. The sociologist Patricia Hill Collins states: "Afro-American women have been assigned the inferior half of several dualities, and this placement has been central to their continued domination" (2000, 20).

5 *The Planter's Northern Bride and Jane Eyre*

At first glance *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) and the English writer Charlotte Brontë's bestseller *Jane Eyre* (1847) seem to be two completely unconnected novels. *Jane Eyre* is considered a Victorian classic whereas the Anti-Tom novel might be mentioned in relation to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at best.

The main objective of Hentz's novel was to reject Stowe's claims on slavery as an immoral institution. She implies in her text that since Stowe described all the adverse sides of slavery, she would now reveal the other side of the coin, and portrays Southern plantation life as paternalistic and honourable, preferable to the alleged poverty and desolation of the bourgeois Northern society. Nevertheless, the novel seems to have a yet unexplored intertextual connection to *Jane Eyre*.

One can find strong similarities both in the plotline and in the characters of *Jane Eyre* within Hentz's novel. Both novels centre on a love story between a well-to-do bachelor (Mr. Moreland) or seemingly bachelor (Mr. Rochester), and an innocent, pious young woman with a humble background (Eulalia and Jane). Secondly, both novels incorporate a foreign ex-wife antagonist (Claudia) or seemingly ex-wife (Bertha) who threaten the foreshadowed and desired romantic union of the positively portrayed protagonists.

Both Claudia and Bertha seem to be rejected mainly because of their ethnicity, but they are also both referred to as Madwomen, which immediately points toward an intersection of gender and mental illness—the popular nineteenth-century diagnosis of hysteria.⁶ Likewise, both male protagonists have one child

⁶ Hysteria was a popular diagnosis during the nineteenth century. The word comes from the Greek *hysteria*, which means womb. The Greeks believed that an unbalanced or sickly uterus

from a previous liaison, and in both cases the fathers have trouble bonding with these daughters (Effie and Adèle), since they remind them of their allegedly promiscuous mothers. Additionally, both female protagonists (Eulalia and Jane) become surrogate mothers to the bullied daughters, and encourage the fathers to let bygones be bygones.

Furthermore, both female antagonists eventually die in unnatural circumstances, which, in a melodramatic manner, ultimately allow the protagonists to pursue their romantic objectives undisturbed. Accordingly, there are crucial overlaps between these novels published only a couple of years apart on different sides of the Atlantic. *Jane Eyre* became a bestseller overnight in America, published under the male-sounding pseudonym Currer Bell. In reviews it was referred to as a naughty and provocative book (O'Brien 2010, 187). This fact would explain why Hentz chose to create light versions of the characters and events. Based on its immense popularity, it is not unrealistic to consider it a further intertext alongside *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Also, according to correspondence between Hentz and her publisher, she was actively searching for plotlines that would sell in great numbers. This is possibly because her French husband, an allegedly "jealous school master" (Bakker 1998, 3) named Nicholas Marcellus Hentz, had fallen ill in 1849; Hentz became the breadwinner of the family from that point onward and needed to publish one novel a year to pay for their living. Hentz asked her publisher if it could be profitable to write a novel that responded to Stowe's. Her publisher strongly advised her to compose such a text. O'Brien writes, "Stowe's book was an opportunity, beckoning for sales" (2010, 187), and he also states that "Hentz was unashamedly partial to wealth" (ibid., 188). Ironically, in the end the novel only sold well after Hentz's death from pneumonia in 1856 (Rindo [2009] 2014).

5.1 *The Belle versus the Jezebel: An Intersectional Close Reading*

The potentially most interesting woman in Hentz's narrative could be the Italian antagonist Claudia, the former Mrs. Moreland and a persona non grata who, in every respect, is described as Eulalia's opposite. As was argued by Christian (1980) and Carby (1987), the alleged Belle and the alleged Jezebel need to be analysed together to best grasp their discursive intertwinements. The narrator states that "evil passions had darkened and marred the brilliant face of the one [Claudia], while purity, goodness, truth, and love had imparted to the other an almost celestial charm [Eulalia]" (Hentz 1854, 363). It seems as if the author attempts to stretch the boundaries of binary positions, which

was the cause of hysteria, which, therefore, was an illness only ascribed to women (Price Herndl 1995, 554).

leaves no reader oblivious as to whom the protagonist and antagonist of the narrative are.

Accordingly, the narrator describes that Eulalia is blonde, and Claudia has “raven black hair” and “black eyes that glanced carelessly and haughtily” (*ibid.*, 315). Eulalia dresses and acts with great modesty whereas Claudia wears “black lace” (*ibid.*, 315), “crimson velvet,” and “glittering rings” (*ibid.*, 363). Eulalia is full of “angelic sweetness” (*ibid.*, 465) whereas Claudia’s “every feature expressed scorn, hatred, and revenge” (*ibid.*, 316). It is evident that, from a white nineteenth-century Southerner’s perspective, we encounter a positive auto-image embodied by Eulalia, versus the hetero-image of the foreign-Other Claudia. If we retrace Jewells’ (1993) definition of a Jezebel, Claudia corresponds entirely on a surface level by wearing “seductive” clothing and jewellery, but the imagery of evil passions also seems to be rooted on a deeper symbolic level, which could be linked to her darker colour of skin.

Eulalia, on the contrary, convinces through her musical skills and “unselfish devotion,” as was suggested Belle-like by Bagby (1885). Manuel Cuenca correspondingly writes: “Hentz regards this angel descended on the plantation as the only possible agent to regulate sectional and racial relations in America. When domestic virtues are threatened the whole national political body is on the verge of collapse” (1998, 89). Accordingly, Eulalia is a character linked to all values contained within the Cult—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Mr. Moreland exclaims that Eulalia is “surrounded by a halo of music and prayer” (Hentz 1854, 61), and after giving birth she kept a “childlike, virgin innocence” (*ibid.*, 422). Because of these descriptions, Cuenca (1998) reads Eulalia as a metaphor for the virgin-mother. Accordingly, Eulalia’s male child instantly becomes the idol of its father while Claudia’s daughter Effie is described as difficult and impolite, since she has the “passionate and willful temper of her mother” (Hentz 1854, 377).

Based on the descriptions provided by the narrator, one can see that piety, submissiveness, and whiteness are clustered categories of idealized womanhood that cannot be entirely separated from one another within this context. Eulalia is not only depicted as blonde and white but also as angelically sweet and pure, whereas Claudia’s darker complexion is mirrored in her daring style of clothes, allegedly nasty manners, lack of dignity, and taste in jewellery. Therefore, although ethnicity is the foregrounded category of identity within Claudia, one can also observe how connotations of morality and domesticity are deeply intertwined with whiteness, and, accordingly, unattainable to her. This could serve as an example of intracategorical analysing where one “interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself” (McCall 2005, 1773).

Shortly after Eulalia and Mr. Moreland's wedding, Claudia visits Eulalia unannounced to see her daughter Effie, who, against Claudia's wishes, still resides with Mr. Moreland. She explains to Eulalia, "I thought I married a lover! He turned into my master, my tyrant! He wanted me to cringe to his will, like the slaves in the kitchen, and I spurned his authority! I defied his power! He expected me to obey him!" (Hentz 1854, 366). She goes on by referring to her roots: "because my mother was a foreigner, they accused her of all that was evil, and forbid me to associate with her. But I can tell you, the spirit of the Italian is resilient, and will not be held down" (*ibid.*, 366). Mr. Moreland also refers to Claudia and her family as "itinerant minstrels, wandering through the American cities, leading a kind of wild, gipsy life" (*ibid.*, 372). The quote reveals the racist disposition of the Southerners in their community, and a hierarchy of ethnicities where Italian descent does not seem to be desirable.⁷ However, instead of feeling intimidated by the expectations of her surroundings, Claudia feels empowered by an Italian nationalist discourse that allows her to transcend the need to fit into "Southern womanhood." Consequently, this illustrates how ethnicity and submissiveness were intertwined and enabled Southern womanhood, whereas, within Claudia's discourse, submissiveness does not seem to have mattered much, which in turn communicates that womanhood ought not be interpreted as universal.

Eulalia, allegedly filled with celestial charm, does not sympathize with Claudia's need for independence and answers, "the woman who has forfeited her position as a wife and mother is excluded from the social privileges she has wantonly abused. She may be an object of charity, pity, kindness; but of friendship and esteem, never!" (*ibid.*, 364). Evidently, this quote is a telling example of how the ideology of the Cult was reproduced. Eulalia asserts a hierarchy that deems Claudia unworthy of respect.

From an imagological perspective, we can also observe how the auto-image of the Belle is celebrated and becomes a norm at the cost of marginal femininities—a self-serving dynamic (Chew 2006, 183). To the scholar Caroline Field Levander (1998, 85) Claudia becomes the real heroine of the narrative—the one woman who dares to challenge the Cult. As a consequence, she is cast out and resides on an unknown abandoned plantation far into the wilderness until she falls severely ill and dies as an alleged Madwoman. Entzminger correspondingly argues that "women who refused to submit to society's strict and rigid roles [...] were somehow doomed to madness and evil as logic outcomes" (2002, 7).

7 It has been argued that Italian women within Gothic novels are often portrayed as "haughty, vindictive, and deceitful" (Radcliffe 1998, 7) in order to serve as the English heroine's antagonist. This might explain why Hentz chose to make Claudia Italian.

5.2 *The Transatlantic Connections*

As in *Jane Eyre*, where Bertha's laugh can be heard at night and items move or disappear, there is a Gothic atmosphere that haunts Mr. Moreland's plantation, since no one knows where Claudia is or when she might appear. Similar to Bertha, Claudia presents a threat to the romantic liaison between the two protagonists of the novel. In *Jane Eyre* it seems to be mainly a legal and moral issue that causes Jane to leave Thornfield Hall, whereas in *The Planter's Northern Bride* it is Claudia's sexuality that poses a danger to the relationship between Eulalia and Mr. Moreland, which becomes evident through Eulalia's focalization: "it was exquisitely painful to her to think that Moreland had ever loved such a being" (Hentz 1854, 372).

Not only are both Bertha and Claudia described as having black hair, mixed descent, seductive ways, and mental issues, they are also both the rejected wives of respected men who subsequently want to marry devout Christians after apparently having been seduced against their better judgements. In terms of power, both Bertha and Claudia brought money into the relationships that then became the property of their husbands. Both women also left their original homes to be with their spouses—both acts could be seen as a loss of power, since both their wealth and social connections decreased at the time of marriage. Mr. Moreland recollects his past with Claudia and says that "he blames himself so much for having slighted the warnings of experience, and yielding to the impulse of passion" (*ibid.*, 462). Interestingly, Mr. Rochester offers a similar comment about Bertha, "I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her" (Brontë [1847] 2008, 352).

Ironically, it seems as if both Mr. Moreland and Mr. Rochester see their second marriages as acts of moral purification. They both feel that their first wives have stained them. In fact, that same exoticness that initially attracted them begins to disgust them, arguably, since their wives did not correspond to the normative female ideals they were used to. Bertha and Claudia are thus blamed for having beguiled their husbands into marrying them; just like Jezebels allegedly seduced plantation owners and other married men to engage in sexual relationships with them.

Once they were married, Mr. Moreland claims that Claudia showed her true colours and he feels as if "he had been a victim of an evil spirit, who, assuming the form of a beautiful woman, had ensnared his heart, and was seeking the destruction of his soul" (Hentz 1854, 375). Once again, Claudia is portrayed as a Jezebel who allegedly tempted, or even resorted to voodoo rituals to make Mr. Moreland marry her.⁸ This statement challenges a common misconception,

⁸ Voodoo imagery clearly links Claudia to Antoinette (later Bertha), the protagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who has a love potion made.

namely, that women within the planter society were overly passive (Welter 1966, 151). Yet this does not illustrate passivity but rather that their "power" seemed to be limited and inextricably linked to their sexuality—gendered.

In Hentz's novel slavery is a part of everyday life, whereas in Brontë's text slavery seems to be an omnipresent moral burden embodied and articulated through Bertha. The protagonists can easily be rid of both the Jezebel and the Madwoman, which points toward an alignment in terms of power over an enslaved person as well as over an unwanted woman. As the gentlemen consider the marriages to be over, both attempt to conceal their pasts and erase the memories of their spouses, arguably as a way of escaping guilt. Hence, Mr. Rochester hides his wife in the attic while Mr. Moreland bans Claudia from their village.

The women subsequently lose individual identity through their isolation and maltreatment, and eventually turn into passive objects of contempt. By turning the antagonists into Madwomen, the responsibility of the failed marriages can successfully be transferred onto the women, and removed from the husbands, who were apparent victims of "Claudia the leopardess" (Hentz 1854, 365) and "Bertha the tigress" (Brontë [1847] 2008, 245).

Animalistic imagery connects Bertha and Claudia, and by extension, the stereotypes of Madwoman and Jezebel. Mr. Rochester describes Bertha, "on all fours, it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (*ibid.*, 461). Similarly, as Claudia argues with Eulalia "she recoiled from her, as if she were a serpent or a demon" (Hentz 1854, 365), and she is said to be "walking backwards and forwards, with the fierce grace of a leopardess" (*ibid.*). One can even find an almost identical description of Bertha when Jane calls her "a figure running backwards and forwards" (Brontë [1847] 2008, 254). On one occasion Bertha is also referred to as a grovelling clothed hyena. Significantly, the animals used are all carnivore species that can be found on the African continent and, therefore, hint at the women's mixed descent as well as their allegedly dangerous nature. Bertha is even referred to as an "it," which deprives her even more of a human identity and instead supports her transformation into an animal or Madwoman. The examples show that a certain derogative imagery surrounds both stereotypes, which creates a reflexive connection where one seems to mirror the other.

6 Conclusion

In summary, this article has illustrated how one could perform an intersectional close reading while deconstructing stereotypes. I applied Leslie McCall's intracategorical perspective as well as Ann-Dorte Christensen's and Sune Qvotrup Jensen's implications for an intersectional close reading.

With the categories of gender and ethnicity as my starting point, the outcome points toward intertwinements of various subdivisions of these categories. For instance, it was shown that traits such as piety, submissiveness, purity, and domesticity are inextricably linked to whiteness within the analysed characters. This insight does not only reveal structures of gendered power hierarchies but also how one could revive and work with Barbara Welter's analytical framework of "the cult of true womanhood" (1966) in a productive way.

Furthermore, several similarities between the plantation novel *The Planters' Northern Bride* and *Jane Eyre* were highlighted. The overlaps were discussed both in terms of corresponding characters, themes, and plot development. The Jezebel could be interpreted as the Madwoman of the plantation by showing how both stereotypes are represented similarly through animalistic imagery, characteristics, and appearance—all connected to madness—and by extension the gendered condition of hysteria. Both Bertha the Madwoman and Claudia the Jezebel are portrayed as if their own allegedly uncontrollable sexualities caused their downfalls, whereas I have argued that intersections of ethnicity and gender, supported by (pseudo)science, ultimately enabled their exclusion from the societies depicted in the novels.

However, it is the similarities and not the differences between the antagonists and protagonists that make them threatening within the narratives, since a racist ideology rests upon the idea that there are inherent differences between races. Without the differences, racism could not be justified. In turn, biological determinism masks the fact that racial categories are historically and culturally constructed. For example, Claudia comes from Italy but is genuinely described as a mulatta, whereas Bertha is of Creole descent. Both women could probably pass as English women, which make them intimidating to the female protagonists who, in self-defence, create differences between them to uphold a racial hierarchy where they themselves are privileged. Finally, the Madwomen seem to reside on fictive plantations as well as in attics, and Jezebels could also be found in nineteenth-century England.

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