

Université de Montréal

**The Effect of Collective Psychology on the Mistreatment of Nineteenth-Century Women in
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"**

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Résumé

L'étude des fonctionnements psychologiques et des comportements d'une personne dans un contexte de groupe constitue le cœur de la psychologie collective. Un survol des écrits dans ce domaine nous permet de mettre en lumière et de mieux comprendre le phénomène de la psychologie collective et comment son existence au sein d'un groupe ou d'une foule peut avoir des conséquences dramatiques. Dans cette thèse, nous démontrerons comment le phénomène de psychologie collective a été la cause principale des mauvais traitements infligés aux femmes au cours du dix-neuvième siècle. Nous analyserons deux œuvres littéraires de femmes issues de ce siècle en nous appuyant sur les concepts de la psychologie collective. Plus spécifiquement, nous nous pencherons sur l'influence de la société patriarcale sur les comportements des individus en société et dans leur vie privée. Nous explorerons, sous l'angle de la psychologie collective, deux œuvres littéraires qui mettent en scène des personnages féminins et qui illustrent les différents types de maltraitance subies par ces femmes. Nous retiendrons les œuvres de Charlotte Brontë et Charlotte Perkins Gilman, respectivement *Jane Eyre* et *The Yellow Wallpaper*, pour démontrer les différentes formes de la maltraitance qui émane du phénomène complexe de la psychologie collective. Notre analyse démontrera comment les personnages féminins doivent endurer la maltraitance de leurs proches en raison du rôle insidieux que joue la psychologie collective dans leurs vies.

Mots clés: Psychologie collective, maltraitance, phénomène, groupe, foules, dix-neuvième siècle, femmes, féminisme, personnages, femmes littéraires.

Abstract

Collective psychology, at its core, is the study of the ways in which individuals act in group settings. An overview of various works written in the field of collective psychology brings forth an understanding of this phenomenon and how the behavior which ensues from its presence in a group or crowd can lead to devastating results. This thesis demonstrates how collective psychology was a primary cause for the mistreatment of women in the nineteenth century. This phenomenon is utilized as the basis for an analysis of literary works written by nineteenth-century women. More specifically, this study observes the influence of a patriarchal society on the behavior of individuals within society, as well as within their homes. This thesis explores literary examples that feature women who undergo various types of mistreatment based on the effects of collective psychology. I will consider Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" to demonstrate the important patterns of mistreatment which emerge due to the complex phenomenon of collective psychology. This analysis will demonstrate how the female characters from these works endure mistreatment by those closest to them because of the insidious presence of this phenomenon in their lives.

Key words: Collective psychology, mistreatment, phenomenon, group, crowd, nineteenth century, women, feminism, characters, literary women.

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Understanding Collective Psychology and its Impact on the Treatment of Women

Collective psychology is a complex and nuanced phenomenon with various controversial implications. In basic terms, the phenomenon relies on the notion that the identity of the many can meld into one entity, which comes to constitute the mind of the crowd. However, there are subtleties to this theory which help explain its long-lasting popularity amongst psychiatrists, academics, and scientists. Thinkers such as Gustave Le Bon, William McDougall and Sigmund Freud have written on this particular topic in order to help clarify what constitutes collective psychology in ways that highlight its underlying effects. Drawing on the works of these writers makes it possible to understand more fully the insidious nature of the collective mind of the crowd, and the ways it led individuals of the nineteenth century to mistreat innumerable women.

Nineteenth-century female authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Charlotte Perkins Gilman depict this phenomenon in their works in ways that suggest a profound understanding of this theory's implications. As such, their female characters clearly demonstrate collective psychology's subtler characteristics. In his work *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Sigmund Freud identifies these characteristics as he explains that "Group Psychology is ... concerned with the individual man as a member of a race, of a nation, of a caste, of a profession, of an institution, or as a component part of a crowd of people who have been organised into a group at some particular time for some definite purpose" (2). From this we can understand that collective psychology does not simply require a grouping of individual minds into a collective format. The focus, rather, is on the underlying issues which constitute the objective of the crowd, a concept to which Freud alludes as the "definite purpose". The

purpose of a crowd can range from overtly evident to convoluted. An example of a crowd with an evident purpose can be seen in marches or protests where individuals are brought together and are working toward a clear goal as a group. However, my concern here is instances where a psychological crowd is established in a more convoluted way. The collective mind created within a crowd whose purpose is subtler in its nature can be seen in nineteenth-century asylums, as well as in private households where women of the era were unofficially treated for mental ailments. Women who received medical treatment for symptoms of insanity were significantly impacted by the presence of collective psychology within the asylum or the household. With regards to the mistreatment received by women of the era, Abdullah Fawaz Hamed Al-Badarneh writes that “[women] were used as instruments necessary to ensure that men retained their domination either in the household or at the work place”; furthermore, “by legitimizing gender hierarchies and binaries, women’s inferiorization was made to look natural” (1). Thus, I argue that this mistreatment, suffered by the women of a patriarchal nineteenth-century society, resulted from the prevalence of the collective mind phenomenon, wherein the patriarchy played a major role. In her work, Jennifer Pruitt argues that “[t]o be approved in a patriarchal society, a man had to appear to have authority, both at work and at home” (2). This phenomenon led men of the era to assert themselves firmly, both privately and publicly, as authoritative figures. Pruitt later suggests that “[i]n the nineteenth century, patriarchy manifested itself on a public stage and was enacted in men’s occupations, in their control over women and other men to maintain order” (2). As a result, the collective understanding of nineteenth-century men fuelled their behavior regarding women, a process captured by many authors of the era in their literary works.

In regards to the phenomenon of a psychological crowd, Gustave Le Bon, a psychologist renowned for his work and analyses regarding the psychology of crowds, describes the popular mind of the crowd by stating that “[i]t is not necessary that a crowd should be numerous for the faculty of seeing what is taking place before its eyes to be destroyed and for the real facts to be replaced by hallucinations unrelated to them” (17). For Le Bon, the number of individuals in a psychological crowd has no bearing on the suggestibility of the crowd that they form. “It is not easy to describe the mind of crowds with exactness,” Le Bon suggests, “because its organisation varies not only according to race and composition, but also according to the nature and intensity of the exciting causes to which crowds are subjected” (3). Thus, similarities arise between Freud’s understanding of the purpose of the crowd as its behavioral drive, and Le Bon’s reference to the “nature and intensity” of the cause that gathers a crowd. An important purpose, or drive, for the collective behavior of nineteenth-century society, was the desire to control women. This assessment helps shed light on the fact that, for many nineteenth-century women, issues pertaining to their personal freedom were not solely based on their position as women in larger society. Many issues arose from their position as women within their private households, in which the presence and possibility for the constitution of a psychological crowd was significant, despite the absence of large numbers of people.

Although Le Bon theorized the phenomenon in 1895, collective psychology was not a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century. It has been present in the lives of crowds for many centuries. In the second edition of their work *Collective Behavior*, Lewis M. Killian and Ralph H. Turner discuss the presence of this phenomenon in centuries long past. They look to “the year 1096, in the square before cathedral at Clermont,” when “Pope Urban II issued his call

for a crusade to free the Holy Land. Within a short time the whole of Europe was in a state of unprecedented excitement and feverish activity” (1). Hence, the suggestibility of the crowd is made clear through this example, as is their reaction to a leader. Killian and Turner go on to state that “[t]he behavior of people in such collectivities so often contrasts with their routine group activities, [wherein it] seems much more unpredictable, and frequently involves a great deal of excitement” (3). They elucidate an important concept of collective psychology in which the mind of an individual found in a group dynamic gains in suggestibility leading them to actions which can be unprecedented and completely out of character.

Although, when studying the phenomenon of collective psychology, we encounter terms such as “crowd” within Le Bon’s analysis, or “group” within William McDougall’s, it is imperative to remember that, in fact, the number of individuals within a crowd has little to no significance when analyzing group behavior. “A group always consists of people who are in interaction,” explain Killian and Turner, “and whose interaction is affected by some sense that they constitute a unit” (5). Here, Killian and Turner suggest once again that the fundamental requirement for the constitution of a psychological crowd is in no way related to the quantity of individuals gathered at one moment. In fact, what links them together are their interactions and their sense of belonging to the group and/or the relevant cause. This is true of the constitution of the psychological crowd in nineteenth-century households. The individuals in the households of the era, no matter their station and position, all had a part to play in their domestic community. Their personal sense of belonging to a community constituted the drive for many residents of these households to act within the constructs of the collective mind phenomenon established in the home. The need to belong to the crowd and to conduct oneself in ways which adhere to its social constructs could lead individuals to act in unrecognizable

ways. Le Bon postulates that an important effect of a collective mind is that it can drive the individuals who form this crowd to savagery. “[B]y the mere fact that he forms a part of an organised crowd,” explains Le Bon, “a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation” (8). Within a crowd, then, the individual’s humanity is compromised. This process is relevant to any form of collective mind, whether it be a small group with a common goal, or a large group, such as a society. In any case, what is certain is that the individuals who form such a crowd lose their personal integrity and beliefs in order to conform to the beliefs of their leader. These personal losses occur within a crowd because “the isolated individual possesses the capacity of dominating his reflex actions,” Le Bon writes, “while a crowd is devoid of this capacity” (11). As such, when alone, an individual who is faced with any kind of moral dilemma will be able to weigh the situation based on their own sense of right and wrong, prior to establishing a course of action. However, when this same individual is part of a psychological crowd, they will instead react more impulsively and they will do so with regards to their understanding of the leader’s desires, and not necessarily their own. More often than not, the reaction of an individual who is part of a psychological crowd will be more violent and more savage than it would have been in isolation. Le Bon describes this savagery further by explaining that there have been many instances where an individual, following their involvement in a crowd where a collective mind was in play, would later regret their actions to the extent of not even recognizing said actions as their own. The discrepancies between their individual moralities and the acts they committed as part of a collective mind are so great that they cannot even recognize the person they were at the moments they committed these acts.

The collective mind described by Le Bon has medical implications which played an important role in the nineteenth-century mistreatment of the mentally ill. Although the

nineteenth century saw the burgeoning of advocacy for the mentally ill, damaging ideologies lingered. Even though there was concern for improving the plight of individuals deemed clinically insane in this era, the widespread notion of these individuals as untreatable was still prevalent. In their article, Albert R. Roberts and Linda Farms Kurtz speak of the renowned Dr. Philippe Pinel, who, in the late eighteenth century, attempted to change societal views of the mentally ill. “Pinel’s view (which was perceived as radical in the 1790s)”, argue Roberts and Kurtz, “was that the mentally ill were not incurable criminals but were ill persons who could be cured by being sent to a mental hospital” (78). We might infer, based on this conclusion, that prior to Pinel’s studies of the mentally ill, there was a strong societal tendency to view the individuals afflicted with these types of ailments as untreatable. This degrading view of the mentally ill gave the caregivers and medical practitioners of the era the freedom to mistreat their patients because very few individuals were advocating for their welfare. Thus, we can also infer that an important stimulus for the mistreatment of the ill was a fear of the unknown. This stimulus, I argue, is the basis of many forms of mistreatment that occurred in nineteenth-century society. “Collective behavior, it has been suggested, is not the random, disorganized activity of a gathering of individuals free of the influence of social control,” state Killian and Turner, to which they add that, “[c]ollective behavior occurs when the established organization ceases to afford direction and supply channels for action” (30). Even though asylums and institutions existed in the nineteenth century, society’s lack of understanding of the purpose of these organisations led to instances of mistreatment. A fundamental cause of the mistreatment of the mentally ill was ignorance regarding their ailments. Lisa Appignanesi refers to Freud’s work in this regard and suggests that when women presented with notably intense symptoms, such as “weeping, screaming and raging” (159), they induced fear in

onlookers. These symptoms, when they occurred in one patient at one time, were misunderstood by the medical practitioners of the era. Due to this fear of the unknown, the collective behavior of the individuals within the institutions and households of the era became abusive.

The nineteenth century was a pivotal moment, wherein various psychological ailments finally began to be officially recognized and documented. It was during this era that the mind doctors, such as they are described by Appignanesi, attempted to differentiate psychological ailments from one another in order to improve the care given to suffering patients. In her work, Appignanesi provides an important definition of delirium as given by Esquirol, a nineteenth-century mind doctor. “A man ‘is in delirium when his sensations are not at all in agreement with external objects,” explained Esquirol, “[or] when his ideas are not at all in agreement with his sensations, when his judgements and his resolutions are not at all in agreement with his ideas, when his ideas, judgements and resolutions are independent of his volition” (quoted in Appignanesi, 60). Esquirol’s definition helped clarify the inner-workings of the minds of the ill. Despite such progressive views, Appignanesi explains further that, “[u]nder the power of the new professionals, claims of madness were now more difficult to reverse: for those with less social power, like women, this could make unwanted confinement difficult to resist or escape” (60). Appignanesi underscores the lack of power accorded to diagnosed victims and supplies an example for the possibility of mistreatment. She conveys the impossibility of escape for these women who were confined not only by lock and key, but who also found themselves at the mercy of individuals who blindly followed the constructs of the psychological crowd within which they found themselves.

Instances where women presented with symptoms resembling those of the mentally ill were met with fear which led, in many cases, to their caretakers attempting to control them, rather than attempting to cure their ailments. Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830 – 1980*, outlines the many causes for the degradation of women's mental health. Showalter discusses the various implications of confinement and looks at how it impacted nineteenth-century women who had been subjected to medical treatment in asylums. Indeed, confinement was a common treatment for the mentally ill. It was often used as a means of control over patients and often demanded that their time be governed completely. It also required that the patients remain confined to a specific area or building without the possibility of release. Many women were refused the right to both physical and mental exercise, which proved to be devastating to their recovery. "The excessive confinement that replicated the feminine role outside the asylum" suggests Showalter, "may have contributed to the excitability and restlessness of asylum women. They simply had fewer opportunities than male patients for outdoor activity, physical recreation, or even movement within the building" (81, 82). The daily realities of women within the asylum differed greatly from those of men, which mirrored social arrangements outside of the asylums. Showalter goes on to explain that if women were found acting in anything other than what institutional leaders deemed "ladylike behavior," they were sentenced to damaging punishments within the asylum. There was, in fact, a collective understanding of proper ladylike behavior, which was accepted as the basis for female behavior during the era. The proper nineteenth-century woman was to adhere to the social constructs of her era and pursue a life with the sole purpose of fulfilling domestic roles with the utmost care. This requirement was exceedingly problematic for many women of the era and is reflected in various nineteenth-century

narratives. The representation of women in narrative fiction often mirrored societal views of the ideal woman and these representations were extremely limiting. “Victorian women in adult fiction were submissive and repressed,” writes Edith L. Honig, “or, if independent and assertive, mad and bad” (4).

In the late years of the nineteenth century, important changes regarding the social constructs of the age were being discussed, especially with regards to the equality of men and women. With reference to John Stuart Mill’s work on equality and psychology, Appignanesi explains that “[b]y the 1870s, women’s growing and concerted demands not only for the vote and for equality within marriage, but for education and greater freedom of activity, met with the newly mobilized strength of a scientific and medical establishment, specializing in nervous and mental illness” (120). As Appignanesi suggests, nineteenth-century society was comprised of two opposing ideologies, one that strove for the achievement of gender equality, and another that wanted to maintain patriarchal beliefs and structures. The collective psychology of men was widely based on their common goal of keeping women captive within their domestic roles as wives and mothers. Women, at least those who rebelled against these constructs, had a collective psychology of their own with the common goals of equality and freedom. These two collective psychologies, being so contradictory, created an imbalanced society within which men still remained in power, and it is because of this power that they could subject their wives and patients to varying types of mistreatment. Appignanesi elaborates by explaining that “Mill called for a proper psychological assessment which would show that the differences between men and women are only differences of their education and indicate no inferiority given by nature” (121). Appignanesi suggests that the collective mind of the ‘male crowd’ from this era was in fact misguided in wanting to subdue and diminish the

rights of women. Nonetheless, the power of men within the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century was not diminished following Mill's remarks. On this point, Rachel Jones suggests that "[t]hrough biology and scientific experiments, the Victorian scientists theorized the female to be the weaker sex" (13). She continues by observing that "[s]ince they were bound by their reproduction systems to bouts of temper and bleeding, women were thought to be more unstable than men" (13). This perception of women is what allowed for the influence of men on their wives and patients to remain so great as to allow for the mistreatment of these women within their homes and in asylums. The only response possible for the rebellious female psychological crowd was quiet rebellion. An important platform for this rebellion was the written word. More specifically, an interesting form of quiet rebellion during this era was the use of narrative fiction to depict, through fictional characters, the real plight of society's marginalized. Authors used their work to shed light on the dysfunctional societal constructs of their era, a concept which Allison Lane Tharp analyzes and describes by stating that "protest authors used the written word to expose acts of containment and to denounce them" (63). "[P]rotest authors," Tharp continues, "whether writing about class, race, or gender, use images of physical confinement and separation as a shorthand argument to prompt their readers to recognize the ideological containment of certain citizens and to push their readers toward material action in the world" (63, 64). Female authors of the nineteenth century could then utilize the written word to denounce their mistreatment, as well as to prompt others in society to react to their work in an attempt to force them to action. An emblematic figure of this rebellion is depicted in nineteenth-century literature and has since widely been known as "the madwoman in the attic" a name established by Gilbert and Gubar in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic, The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.

In reference to the figure of the madwoman, Elizabeth J. Donaldson states that “[m]uch like the determined women who fueled feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, these madwomen rebel against the strictures of patriarchal authority” (99). Thus, both protest authors and characters attempt to demolish the detrimental views of society against their marginalized citizens.

Although the reactions of psychological crowds could have positive outcomes, the occurrences which took place in the nineteenth century regarding the treatment of women were mostly negative in nature. To that effect, Benjamin Lamb-Books refers to Adorno’s work on the topic of collective psychology by explaining that “[c]ollective psychology describes the affective manipulation of the masses in ways that reinforce their own domination, e.g. wasting a people’s psychic energy for resistance by stirring xenophobic fears” (41). When a psychological crowd devotes itself to its leader without question, it allows for the discrimination of a race or gender. “An important cause of a psychological crowd’s blind devotion to a leader is that,” as Le Bon suggests, “[a]n individual may accept contradiction and discussion; a crowd will never do so” (24). The reasoning process of a crowd is entirely different from that of an individual. As noted earlier, with an individual, it is possible to discuss, argue and reason with any opinion one might have. This does not mean that the mind of an individual is completely malleable, but simply that there is a stronger possibility of personal growth. However, in a group, there is no such possibility; the collective mind takes over. Due to the fact that the individual thought process of the constituents of a psychological crowd is completely overtaken by the leader, there is no way to sway their beliefs and intentions, unless of course it is desired by the leader. This devotion to a leader is the mark of a patriarchal foundation as it is depicted in so many nineteenth-century literary works. Thus,

this phenomenon helps identify the moments in these works where the collective mind guides characters through the narrative.

Nineteenth-century authors successfully depicted many of the harmful effects of the collective mind phenomenon on women of the era. In their narratives, Brontë and Gilman present the plight of women from two separate continents during an era where women were considered marginalized individuals. Their work reflects the ways in which collective psychology, within patriarchal homes and societies, could easily lead to the mistreatment of women. Moreover, these same works clearly portray how women could cope or react to their situations with varying intensity. Thus, I will argue that in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë suggests two opposing reactions to the female condition of the age. First, with Jane herself, Brontë describes a female character whose inner-strength leads her to fight against the constructs imposed upon her. Second, with Bertha she presents a character whose constraints, being both figurative and literal, drive her to drastic and intense reactions to her captivity. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" offers an example of the ways women, within their own homes, might slowly lose their grip on reality because of constant censoring and mistreatment. All of these ideas are analyzed alongside theories of collective psychology in order to view how this psychological phenomenon was in fact responsible for the mistreatment of women in the nineteenth century. This thesis will also demonstrate the drastic measures taken by women of the era to resist the constraints of their time and liberate themselves from the societal expectations imposed upon them.

Mistreatment in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre, a work originally published in 1847, still succeeds in representing many aspects of society as it stands today. This work depicts certain characters who adhere to values and principles that remain standards to which one should aspire even in the twenty-first century. Values pertaining to what is right, are portrayed through Jane, the novel's female protagonist. Violeta Craina alludes to this reality in reference to Marianne Thormälhen's work when she explains that "Jane's decisions are never influenced by any of the people she meets. She never uses anyone else's eyes to assess a new situation, or a new twist of fate that she faces" (45). This analysis of the character helps convey her nature as strong-willed and independent throughout the narrative. However, there are many characters in the novel – such as Rochester, and the inhabitants of his mansion, Thornfield hall – whose morals can be found deficient in this regard. The following chapter will clarify the specific ways in which these characters lack sound moral values. To do so, foundational works in the fields of medicine and psychology will be evoked to explore how the mistreatment of women takes place in the novel. The notion of collective psychology, which was thoroughly presented and described in the previous chapter, will be used with the purpose of uncovering the possible cause of the medical mistreatment of Rochester's wife Bertha. The phenomenon of collective psychology will also help elucidate the various forms of mistreatment suffered by the novel's protagonist Jane. Episodes from Brontë's work, I will argue, provide apt examples of common mistreatments that occurred throughout the nineteenth century. Bertha's plight will be analyzed from medical and psychological angles, which will illuminate the basis of her mistreatment. An analysis of Jane's character will reveal the ill effects of the collective mind from psychological and sociological perspectives. I will argue that Brontë succeeds in

depicting female characters who are routinely mistreated. In fact, the difficult trajectories of the female characters in this novel are largely influenced by the collective mind found both in society as well as in the households depicted in the novel. Brontë's narrative successfully brings to light the damaging effects of the collective mind phenomenon on its victims through the portrayal of characters who suffer its devastating effects.

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë clearly demonstrates varying ways in which nineteenth-century women were subjected to victimization. Through Jane's character, Brontë describes the different stages of a woman's life in the era. The narrative begins with the protagonist as a child whom we view being subjected to the psychological and physical abuse of her family. The narrative moves on to Jane's victimization at Lowood school, where her standing in society as a poor orphan child is the basis of her mistreatment. Finally, it is during her stay at Thornfield Hall that Brontë dramatizes the mistreatment of women, and more specifically the psychological effects of medical mistreatment as portrayed through Rochester's mad wife Bertha. The phenomenon of collective psychology plays an important role throughout all of these forms of mistreatment. It is this notion which will clarify the motivations behind the characters' unkind and harmful behaviors. In his work, Steve Mark Cowan clarifies important gender expectations of the era by stating that "[b]eing a contemporary of Victorian England, Brontë, through her writing of *Jane Eyre*, offers the reader insights into various female gender models" (7). Cowan then goes on to explain that "Brontë's protagonist's inner thoughts and feelings were obviously provocative in a period where women were expected to be mild, subservient and passive" (7). It is because of the widespread notion that women should behave in such ways, intertwined with the pressure felt by individuals to comply and enforce these

notions that the mistreatment of women could take place. The collective psychology reigning over the residents of Gateshead Hall, Lowood and Thornfield Hall leads to the mistreatment of women and is largely enabled by the characters' inability to contradict the will of their leader. Many of the subordinate characters are led to acts causing harm to the female victims in the narrative. In other words, mistreatment occurs because the subordinate characters blindly and mindlessly follow the wishes and commands of their leader. Killian and Turner describe this behavior through various approaches, an important one being the effect of suggestion on the individuals of a crowd. They refer to Le Bon's work with regards to the important role of the unconscious within the behavior of the crowd. To that effect they state, "[t]here is the implication that social control ceases to operate in the crowd and that the influence of social norms is replaced by the operation of an individual, psychological mechanism... The crowd leader and the crowd itself are often described as being analogous to a hypnotist" (14). This concept is observable in Brontë's work, where the characters described as caregivers and guardians are depicted as blind followers of their leader.

Jane's character is often described as rebellious against the constructs of the ages. In this regard, Randi Eline Selvik suggests that "Jane Eyre was created as a revolt against Victorian standards, and in many ways, she represented a critique towards the social establishments" (17). Selvik then goes on to state that "[Jane] was given characteristics that separated her from the accepted norms, and because of that, she was exposed to challenges throughout her journey in the novel" (17). The first of these challenges occurs when Jane arrives at Gateshead Hall to live with her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and her children. In this household, Jane is subjected to relentless torment by her relatives. In the very first chapter of the novel,

Jane explains that “John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near” (10). In one particular instance, when Jane is caught hiding behind a curtain in a window-seat reading a book, John discovers her, strikes her, insults her and ultimately throws a book at her. In that moment Jane is overcome by feelings of rage and injustice, having been the victim of many of her cousin’s outbursts. Her intense feelings in response to this episode lead her to reciprocate John’s attack with violent insults as she attempts to defend herself against the physical abuse. “My head still bled with the blow and fall I had received,” she explains following the attack, “no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium” (15). Jane here underscores the injustice of her treatment by suggesting that John had hit her maliciously and that this was part of a larger pattern of “irrational violence,” to which she responded, in desperation, with violence. However, due to Jane’s standing as an orphan child, a dependant in the household, and also because of Mrs. Reed’s blind affection for her son, Jane is reproached and humiliated. Her punishment comes in the form of seclusion. She is sent, alone, to the red-room, a chamber of the household where no one ventures, except for a servant, who cleans there once a week. Because of the isolated nature of this setting, the child’s mind is sent into a frenzy of varied emotions. At first, experiencing a strong and not uncommon reaction to seclusion, Jane is fearful of her solitude and resents her punishment. As time passes, her emotions escalate and she develops an intense fear of the room itself, and what it represents. Beth Tressler states that this seclusion “changes Jane’s daydreams in the window-seat into involuntary nightmare and

mania” (9). This is the room in which Mr. Reed, her uncle, passed away, and with this knowledge Jane’s fear of the supernatural increases. Ultimately, it is this fear of the unknown that provokes in Jane a state of anxiety in which her physical capacities are drastically weakened. “My heart beat thick, my head grew hot,” she explains, “a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down – I uttered a wild, involuntary cry – I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort” (17). Jane physically reacts to her confinement with symptoms similar to that of a mad woman. Her heart speeds and her temperature rises, symptoms synonymous with those of an anxiety attack, which lead the young character to irrational outbursts.

Jane’s behaviour – her lack of control and her violent physical outbursts – demonstrates clearly the ill effects of confinement. This event in the novel demonstrates the impact of Jane’s relentless mistreatment at Gateshead Hall, where the effects of the collective mind might be viewed as the basis for the Reeds’ engagement in immoral behaviors and actions. The red-room episode is pivotal in the novel because even though Jane is, of course, not explicitly aware of the collective mind phenomenon taking place within her household, there is a moment following this episode where her understanding of the household dynamics seems remarkably astute. Following her confinement, she is brought back to her own bedroom. She sleeps, and when she awakes, she sees a stranger whom she quickly recognizes as the apothecary, Mr. Lloyd. “I felt an inexpressible relief,” Jane remarks, “a soothing conviction of protection and security, when I knew that there was a stranger in the room: an individual not belonging to Gateshead, and not related to Mrs Reed” (18). Brontë, in this statement, portrays the devastating effects that the collective mind of Gateshead has had on

Jane. The relief she feels upon seeing a stranger results from the ongoing torment to which she is exposed on a daily basis, which causes her not only to resent and fear the Reeds, but also to find solace within the presence of strangers. My argument here is that Jane feels relief in the presence of Mr. Lloyd due to the fact that he has not been influenced by the collective mind shared by the inhabitants of Gateshead. Jane does not perceive Mr. Lloyd as an enemy; on the contrary, he is independent of Mrs. Reed's tyranny toward her, and so he represents a semblance of safety within the household during his stay. We can also infer from this statement that Jane views her mistreatment to be limited to the behaviors of her fellow inhabitants, and not, at least in this particular instance, influenced by the outside world. Jane, despite her young age, already comprehends that the Gateshead community shares a collective mind led by her aunt. Mrs. Reed dominates over the household with a ruthless mind that thrives on oppressing young Jane by tormenting and abusing her.

The collective mind assumed by the community of Gateshead Hall is directly related to the strict hierarchy within the household. Mrs. Reed is the decided leader of Gateshead. Her actions and behaviours encourage the other occupants of the house to treat Jane as they do. Mrs. Reed's initial lack of affection and blatant disregard for Jane slowly transmutes to neglect and ultimately leads to forced seclusion. Mrs. Reed's behavior is the foundation on which John and his sisters perpetuate the mistreatment Jane receives from their mother. As Jane's cousins internalize and mimic their mother's abusive behaviours, the cycle of abuse not only continues, but worsens, until the protagonist feels compelled to seek outside help for the emotional and physical mistreatment she endures. Even the servants at Gateshead, who are regarded with higher esteem and are shown more respect than Jane, engage in the collective mistreatment of the young protagonist. Mrs. Reed, as already noted, is the indisputable leader,

with her son John following closely behind. Below him are his sisters, Eliza and Georgiana, and then two other important characters, Bessie and Miss Abbot, workers of the household. Mrs. Reed's ubiquitous influence on the behaviour of the house's inhabitants therefore extends beyond her family, to the servants. Following Jane's attempt at rebellion against her cousin John, described above, Bessie exclaims, with reference to Jane: "Hold her arms, Miss Abbot; she's like a mad cat" (12). Bessie here animalizes the girl and thus suggests that she is beneath her, a mere servant, and perhaps not even worthy of the treatment and respect merited by a human being. The collective mind phenomenon, in this case, seems to prevail over familial ties and class distinctions. Jane is in fact technically the social superior of Bessie and other Gateshead servants, and she is related by blood to the Reeds, but these facts are annihilated by Mrs. Reed's authoritarian treatment of her niece and the compulsive mimicry of her behavior amongst the other Gateshead inhabitants. Even household workers, who in the nineteenth century were expected to be deferent and accepting of their low ranking, take their place above Jane, who is treated brutally, locked away, and forced to serve a sentence of seclusion for acts that we, as readers, see as nothing other than self-defence.

Freud's wisdom on the notion of collective psychology serves to elucidate Jane's mistreatment at Gateshead, as described by Brontë. "[T]he intense emotional ties which we observe in groups," notes Freud, "are quite sufficient to explain one of their characteristics – the lack of independence and initiative in their members, the similarity in the reactions of all of them, their reduction, so to speak, to the level of group individuals" (29). Freud here indirectly captures the important and destructive familial bonds that are at the heart of the collective mind at Gateshead Hall. Certainly, as has been made clear, Mrs. Reed, being mistress of the household and mother of three children, naturally holds a position of power

over her children. However, this position of power allows her influence to extend over all of the inhabitants of her dwelling. Her wishes and demands are met immediately and without question. In the episode where Jane is kept in seclusion as punishment, Bessie, a woman who later in the novel comes to admit her affection for Jane, obeys Mrs. Reed unquestioningly and enforces Jane's unwarranted punishment. Despite Bessie's attachment to Jane, she is influenced by Mrs. Reed's despotic tendencies. Bessie thus serves as an example of the power of the collective mind on the people who are part of its inner structure. As Freud explains, the individuals who are part of such a structure, whether willingly or not, find themselves led without question by the demands of their leader, due largely to their lack of independent thought and initiative. The community of Gateshead is stripped of these qualities due to its participation in the structure of the collective mind. At Gateshead, Mrs. Reed exerts power and control over all of those inferior to her, because their positions are precarious and depend upon her approval and her support. She capitalizes, therefore, on her role as a mother whose young children need her, and as a manager of servants who depend upon her for their livelihood. The lack of initiative among members of the kind of group to which Freud refers above, is, therefore, in the case of Brontë's novel, directly related to the impositions of social and familial hierarchies.

Mrs. Reed's pervasive mistreatment of Jane eventually leads to an important confrontation between Jane and her aunt. Following her conflict with John and consequent confinement, Jane is overtaken with what would commonly be called a fit of anxiety today. She is bedridden and loses most of her physical strength. She is evaluated by an apothecary, a man who succeeds in convincing Mrs. Reed to send Jane to school and who is therefore responsible for Jane's liberation from Gateshead. Just prior to Jane's departure, she has a

heated conversation with Mrs. Reed. The dialogue captures her angst as the victim of mistreatment. “I will never come to see you when I am grown up,” she explains to her aunt, “and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty” (35). Such a statement is an important demonstration of Jane’s inner strength and demonstrates a bold awareness of her past neglect. At this precise moment in the novel, Jane expresses her inner pain and her recognition of Mrs. Reed’s unjust enforcement of her authority.

Following the red-room episode, Jane is sent to Lowood, a girls’ school where Jane (along with the other residents), continues to be the victim of a sort of collective mistreatment. In this particular case, those who run the school blindly follow unjust regulations for how such schools are to be run, without any regard for the health and happiness of the residents. Consequently, Lowood, which caters to girls from low-income families, has miserable living conditions and is administered following the harshest of regulations. Pupils endure famine and neglect. The school itself resembles the asylums of the era, in which students are fed meager meals of the lowest quality and are emotionally persecuted. Jane herself becomes the victim of such persecution, particularly as a result of the actions of the school’s master, Mr. Brocklehurst. She is publicly humiliated and scorned, and she is forced to stand alone in front of the entire school to be admonished for crimes that Mr. Brocklehurst frames as abhorrent, but that, in reality, never actually occurred. The crimes are in fact exaggerations of reality, related to Mr. Brocklehurst by Mrs. Reed, thus evidencing her continued toxic influence beyond the walls of Gateshead. Brontë’s sophisticated recognition that collective psychology is intricately connected to class status and social hierarchy is further evidenced in Mr. Brocklehurst’s

automatic, uninformed belief in Mrs. Reed's accusations. Jane is a poor child residing in a neglected school, whereas Mrs. Reed is a woman of much higher standing whose opinion is believed unquestioningly. Jane openly recognizes this injustice as she confronts her aunt, exclaiming, "You told Mr Brocklehurst I had a bad character, a deceitful disposition" (35). However, Jane's attempt to defend herself against Mrs. Reed's baseless accusations is to no avail, and Jane is ultimately punished nonetheless.

Following this event, Lowood is overtaken by illness and death, a process enabled by the collective neglect of the school. "That forest-dell, where Lowood lay," writes Brontë, "was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence; which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into an hospital" (73). The epidemic described here leads to the death of many students. This passage serves to demonstrate the defencelessness of the Lowood girls, who are, Brontë seems to imply, victimized as 'lowly' orphans, following a nineteenth-century consensus that they are not worth as much as those of higher social standing. The propagation of disease within the walls of Lowood is at least in part due to the substandard conditions that larger society deems acceptable for orphan girls. "Semi-starvation and neglected colds," the narrator explains, "had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time" (73). The narrator's words imply that previous neglect has caused dire conditions at Lowood, which in turn leads to the death of so many of its residents. The girls of the establishment are poor and thus the runts of society. They suffer due to the fact that they are at the bottom of the social scale and are essentially left to die, uncared for.

Collective mistreatment is a concept which dominates the novel and follows the protagonist throughout her evolution. Many years pass before Jane leaves Lowood to venture out into the world, but even as an adult, in a new environment, she encounters examples of collective mistreatment. Jane becomes governess for a young lady named Adèle, at Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester's estate. The situation at Thornfield Hall shares similarities with Gustave Le Bon's notion of a "psychological gathering." Le Bon states that "[t]housands of isolated individuals may acquire at certain moments, and under the influence of certain violent emotions ... the characteristics of a psychological crowd. ... [H]alf a dozen men might constitute a psychological crowd, which may not happen in the case of hundreds of men gathered together by accident" (2). In other words, as noted in the previous chapter, the number of men gathered in a group is not representative of the group's ability to constitute a psychological crowd. Rather, it is their common direction or purpose which links them together. At Thornfield Hall, Mr. Rochester's ill will toward his wife Bertha incites the development of a psychological crowd. However, in this instance, unlike in Le Bon's rendition of the phenomenon, the group gathered is not merely left to chance, but is placed within a strict social hierarchy, much as was the case at Gateshead. Nonetheless, the participants' complicity is ensured by their desire to remain employed, and in this way their actions still share some of the characteristics of the crowd to which Le Bon refers in his work. Le Bon states that "[t]he simplicity and exaggeration of the sentiments of crowds have for result that a throng knows neither doubt nor uncertainty" (22), much like the workers at Thornfield.

Bertha's treatment, like Jane's, is elucidated through a consideration of collective psychology. There are two distinct ways of observing Bertha's role in the narrative. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Jane's struggles are representative of

difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome; oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End). Most important, her confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester's mad wife Bertha, is the book's central confrontation, an encounter [...] not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage' (Gilbert and Gubar 339).

From this perspective, it is possible to consider Bertha's character to be the personification of Jane's inner turmoil. From the beginning of the novel, Jane is constantly faced with conflict. Bertha's rage and constant rebellion against her captors mirror Jane's need to free herself from the constraints of her era, an era in which a woman had much to fight for in order to gain her personal freedom. But we might also view Bertha as a character representative of medical mistreatment in the Victorian era. The nineteenth century is ripe with horrific stories of the medical mistreatment of women, in asylums and in homes. Whether they are fictional, as in *Jane Eyre*, or documented facts of non-fiction as found in numerous documentaries and journals, there is no mistaking the reality of the suffering endured by countless women.

In her work, Appignanesi discusses the new medical trends of the early nineteenth century. She discusses improved ways with which the medical minds of the era endeavoured to observe mental illness. Although, in theory, these new techniques and observations should have helped women suffering from medical mistreatment, the techniques discussed by Appignanesi serve to demonstrate the contrast between proper medical treatment and the overwhelming mistreatment that could in fact occur. All of this took place in an era where medical professionals were in fact attempting to understand the complex inner-workings of the mind. Appignanesi explains that

First-hand clinical observation – the development of what Michel Foucault calls the medical gaze – is married to a new sense that medicine can encompass both a knowledge of nature *and* a knowledge of man in society. Where the mad are concerned, the new breed of doctors suppose that it is worth both managing them and acquiring knowledge of how their minds and emotions work (Appignanesi 59).

Brontë dramatizes the medical treatment described by Appignanesi and thus sheds a light on the medical neglect suffered by some of the characters in her novel. There is no mention of a medical practitioner attempting to understand Bertha's disorder. Bertha is not 'managed' in the way Appignanesi describes, she is locked away and forgotten. In another relevant passage, Appignanesi remarks that for the medical practitioners of the era, "[t]he inner experience of madness, madness from the point of view of the sufferer, thus becomes the object of an intense curiosity" (59). Brontë shows Bertha being victimized in the sense that she is completely disregarded, rather than being an object of interest. Bertha's only caretaker, Grace Poole, is present in the novel as more of a guardswoman than a medical practitioner. Mr. Rochester readily locks Bertha away, and at no point in the novel does he attempt to understand the cause of his wife's malady. The curiosity to which Appignanesi alludes is thus completely absent in *Jane Eyre* and constitutes undeniable proof that there was in fact medical mistreatment in regards to Bertha's character.

Brontë portrays a character that is in fact branded with a mental illness for which she is never treated. This is perhaps suggestive of Brontë's understanding of the lack of medical attention attributed to the mentally-troubled women of her era. Although it is obvious that the type of captivity to which Bertha is subjected would in itself be enough to drive any person mad, the cause of her madness is never explained. The nineteenth century saw the development of five techniques with which to assess the cause of mental ailments. "Pinel,"

notes Appignanesi, “names five general areas that can play a role in mental alienation: heredity, ‘irregularities’ in the environment, the role of sudden or oppressive or excessive passions, a melancholic constitution; and lastly, physical causes” (66). In cases of medical mistreatment, one or many of these areas are ignored. In Brontë’s novel, Bertha is brought to an unknown house and held captive on a secluded floor suggestive of Pinel’s area of environmental irregularities. It is by forcing patients into completely unrecognizable environments and keeping them utterly secluded, Pinel suggests, that individuals who may have suffered from minor melancholic tendencies could develop severe symptoms which would lead them to be diagnosed as mad. Brontë portrays a situation in which this process goes completely unrecognized by characters. No medical professional even begins to get to the bottom of Bertha’s troubles, let alone to identify Pinel’s five causes for mental alienation. In this way, Brontë captures in fictional form a case of horrible medical neglect.

Throughout the novel, there is no telling what pushes Bertha’s character to such extreme fits of madness; however, it is possible to infer that some, or most, of her symptoms are aggravated due to her captivity. The very fact that Rochester succeeds in secretly holding his wife captive in their home demonstrates the presence of a collective mind negligent towards the care of women in regards to mental diseases. Brontë seems to be drawing on the notion that women, contrary to men, seemed to be targeted much more frequently as objects of medical mistreatment during the nineteenth century. In this era, women were increasingly subjected to captivity due to perceived mental defects. As Showalter, in her work *The Female Malady* points to, an important cause for the collective view of women as being more prone to mental illness was that, “despite their awareness of poverty, dependency, and illness as

factors, the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control” (55). Due to the important influence doctors had over their patients, such a view had an important influence on society in general. The opinion that women were unable to control their emotions translated into dangerous realities for wives and daughters. If a man was displeased with his wife, the information given to him by the doctors of the era made it much easier for him to have his wife held captive, either in his own home or in an asylum, a process Brontë dramatizes through the character of Rochester in her novel.

Showalter explains the causes for mental illness in women and girls of the nineteenth century. She also considers the reactions of individuals surrounding the ill, particularly those of the victims’ brothers, husbands, fathers, etc. “A girl’s growing awareness of this social dependence and constraint,” writes Showalter, “the realization of her immobility and disadvantage as compared with her brothers, and other boys, may well have precipitated an emotional crisis” (57). Showalter here highlights an important cause of mental illness for women of the era. Because of their awareness of societal views, as well as their societal standing, women were led to the harsh realization of their inequality, and it is this realization which eventually led them to lose their senses. The physical outbursts they underwent could be read as attempts to give voice to their ailments and sufferings.

Such an explanation of cause and reaction might be seen in Bertha’s character. The reader is only privy to Bertha’s outright insanity in the moments when she completely loses her ability to constrain her anger and hatred. For this reason, the initial perception of her character is completely devoid of an understanding for the cause of her disease. However, as

Bertha's ailments and confinement are further explained, it becomes evident that a significant cause of her disease is the collective mind of society and of her household. Mr. Rochester's tyranny against his wife leads her to her most powerful psychological option, complete rebellion. Throughout the novel, Bertha's actions can be understood as those of a desperate woman unable to physically free herself from captivity, causing her to seek psychological independence. "Bertha is both a threat and a warning," clarifies Aubrey L. Mishou, "[demonstrating] the dangers of becoming a passionate woman (a state which conclusively leads to madness) and the consequences for defying one's role within the household" (255). It is because of Bertha's defiance of the household's constructs that she is subjected to mistreatment. Both the suggestibility of the crowd with regards to its leader's requirements, and the simplicity of their actions, provoke unlimited possibilities in regards to their reactions to any given stimulus. In a case such as Bertha's confinement to the attic at Thornfield Hall, there is no limit to the violence or mistreatment she might receive from the community of her household.

The community of Thornfield constitutes a psychological crowd whose influence comes directly from their leader Mr. Rochester. Moreover, even though an outsider might view the residents' actions at Thornfield Hall as cruel and unfounded, such vehement thoughts are not shared by the individuals who find themselves within the constructs of a collective mind. As Le Bon explains, a psychological crowd "forms a single being, and is subjected to the law of the mental unity of crowds" (2). This applies to the situation at Thornfield insofar as the psychological crowd within the walls of the mansion is comprised of individuals whose personal beliefs and convictions have been completely annihilated and substituted by the beliefs of their leader Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester's power over the minds of his residents

becomes clear during Mr. Masson's stay at Thornfield Hall. During the night, Jane describes a cry she hears as follows: "The night – its silence – its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall" (195). The cry comes from Mr. Masson, who suffers a brutal attack at the hands of Bertha, leading to his need for medical attention. This episode results in Jane's awareness of Bertha's existence. The opposing nature of both characters also comes to light during this episode. "Although Bertha remains mostly hidden in her husband's attic," writes Negeen Natalie Nikraves, "she still plays a significant role as Jane's alter ego and offers a haunting presence throughout the pages of the novel, subtly pointing to the dangers of both opposing the feminine ideal and succumbing to marital confinement" (17). Even though Jane helps save Mr. Masson's life by remaining by his side for hours while Mr. Rochester seeks professional medical attention, she remains ignorant of Bertha's station within the house. Mr. Rochester's ability to keep Bertha's social standing hidden from Jane is a feat which can only be explained by Mr. Rochester's important power over the minds of those in his employment.

The organisation of the psychological crowd of Thornfield Hall can be understood and explained according to Le Bon's theories. Mr. Rochester's role as leader of the mansion is clearly established by his ability to keep Bertha a secret from not only larger society, but also many residents of their home. Rochester's position of power is enforced by the collective mind of his residents, which in turn influences the individual mind. "The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous," explains Le Bon, "and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand" (6). Individuality and freedom of thought are two characteristics which do not withstand the framework of a community guided by a collective psychology. Characteristics belonging to the individual are discarded in favour of the values and demands consistent with

those of the crowd. Le Bon refers to the concept of 'contagion' as an important cause for the appearance of a psychological crowd, a concept which he explains as the sacrifice of the individual for the common beliefs of the group. This could be understood as an important cause for Bertha's mistreatment. The 'brainwashing' effect on the individuals of the psychological crowd means that personal values are completely suppressed in order to cater to the rules established by Mr. Rochester.

Brontë slowly develops Bertha's character through an aura of mystery. Many chapters pass after her initial introduction before details of Bertha's character are unveiled. Her existence is kept secret and when she is mentioned, it is solely with cryptic allusions to a demonic presence in the household. By the end of the novel, we have been made fully aware of the fact that Mr. Rochester's wife has been secretly held captive in a small apartment of Thornfield Hall for most of their marriage. Because confinement was a common reality for nineteenth-century women who had been diagnosed with a mental illness, Brontë's dramatization of this treatment method denotes her understanding of the society within which she resided. There are moments in the novel where we are led to believe that Bertha is utterly mad and that there is no possibility for her reintegration at Thornfield in her appropriate station, as Mr. Rochester's wife. However, there are also myriad other aspects of her malady that allow us to fully comprehend how her descent into madness occurs. Throughout the novel, there are a few episodes, prior to the discovery of the truth about Bertha, where she is described as a mysterious entity within the walls of the mansion. "[I]n writing mental illness as a derivative of immorality," Karen Beth Strovas argues, "Brontë ascribed onto Bertha's madness the cultural stigmas and stereotypes of immorality that went along with it in mid-nineteenth-century England" (384). The immorality in question here is in reference to Bertha's

violent outbursts toward Rochester himself and other characters in the novel such as Richard Mason. Because of these occurrences, the air of mystery surrounding Bertha translates into a visceral fear within Jane even as she remains ignorant of Bertha's existence. "[A]t any rate" Jane explains, "I started wide awake on hearing a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious, which sounded, I thought, just above me. [...] This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered, as it seemed, at the very key-hole of my chamber-door" (139). Following this event, Jane starts to believe in a demonic presence in the household. Such a belief is exceedingly damaging to Bertha because it instills a fear in others which brings many of them to treat her with a lack of humanity and respect. This process might be understood through Le Bon's suggestion that "[a] crowd is not merely impulsive and mobile. Like a savage, it is not prepared to admit that anything can come between its desire and the realisation of its desire" (12). Mr. Rochester, in a sense, leads such a savage collective mind. He is driven throughout the novel by his desire to be rid of his ties to his wife. His desire for freedom is what leads him to acts of cruelty toward another human being, and it is also what leads his residents to follow suit.

Jane Eyre offers fictional examples of the depths to which the leader of a collective mind has ultimate control over the individuals who constitute the crowd. As mentioned earlier, at the top of the hierarchy of Thornfield we find Mr. Rochester. Just below Mr. Rochester is Mrs. Fairfax, who handles most of the mansion's business, a notion which is made clear during Mr. Rochester's absences from the home. We then find Leah, another employee of the household, one of the only ones to which a name is attributed. An exceedingly important character in this hierarchy is Grace Poole. Grace is the only employee whose role is to take

care of Bertha, and she is charged with the task of keeping Bertha's life a secret from the other residents. Finally, we find Jane, the governess, and Adèle, her young charge. Now, as previously mentioned, Mrs. Poole plays the sacred role of secret keeper in the household. However, there are instances in the novel when her capacity to play this role is indeed proven ineffective. A particular instance of this occurs when Leah and a charwoman are found discussing Grace's position in hushed tones, and Jane arrives. Leah and the charwoman are talking about Bertha's presence in the house, along with Grace's delicate task of taking care of her charge. When Jane arrives: "The charwoman was going on; but here Leah turned and perceived me [Jane], and she instantly gave her companion a nudge" (157). This demonstrates the insidious nature of the collective mind at Thornfield Hall. At this point in the novel, some of the household's residents – though not Jane – have effectively proven their awareness of Bertha's presence. However, none of these individuals treat Bertha humanely or attempt to seek professional help for the poor woman hidden in the shadows of the house. As discussed earlier, there is no doubt that much more could have been done to treat Bertha's symptoms. Many individuals could have intervened to help free her from her undue and damaging captivity. Unfortunately, this never occurs, thus proving Mr. Rochester's governing power over the collective mind of the household's community.

Rochester's requirement by law to remain married to Bertha is a torturous reality for the master of the house and it leads him to treat his wife inconsiderately and inhumanely. As stated by Freud and Le Bon alike, the creation of a collective mind stems from the leader's emotional reaction to a situation. In any given group, if the leader is wronged or deeply scarred by a situation or an individual, they can develop deep feelings of aggression. When

this occurs, the leader focuses all attention on righting this perceived wrong. Mr. Rochester's character serves as an example of this process. As noted above, the cause for Mr. Rochester's initial anger toward Bertha is her mental illness. However, a lot of Rochester's anger is directed toward his father and brother. In fact, the main cause of his deceitfulness is directly linked to the deceit to which he was subjected by his father, brother, as well as Bertha. All three were aware of Bertha's genetic predisposition to madness, due to the fact that her mother was afflicted with this very illness. Rochester's father's motives for encouraging the marriage were based solely on his desire to increase the family wealth, and Rochester was not informed of Bertha's mother's illness. It is only once they were married that Bertha's symptoms appeared and that Rochester became aware of his wife's malady. These details are disclosed by Mr. Rochester as reminiscences following Jane's discovery of Bertha. Yet, prior to the moment in the narrative where he shares these facts with Jane, he does allude to himself as a cursed man. "Dread remorse when you are tempted to err, Miss Eyre;" cautions Rochester, "remorse is the poison of life... Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform – I have strength yet for that – if – but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened cursed as I am?" (129) This moment in the narrative sheds light on the tortured expression so often attributed to Rochester's demeanor. Rochester is clearly tormented by strong feelings of remorse and anguish, both being types of emotions that can be the root cause for the development of a psychological crowd. Hence, it is the intense nature of Rochester's emotional turmoil which drives him to become the leader of a psychological crowd whose actions are both violent and inhumane in their essence. This does not excuse Rochester's actions, for Bertha remains the ultimate victim. The portrayal of the collective mind's impact on both Bertha's and Jane's characters is at the heart of Brontë's medical and social critique.

The Group Mind and its Consequences in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" depicts the plight of one woman as she suffers in a patriarchal society. As Beverly A. Hume suggests, we can "interpret the narrative as one that offers the detailed and chilling account of a woman's entrapment, defeat and movement toward madness" (477). More specifically, the narrative brings to light – through the means of autobiographical fiction – the difficult lives of women from the nineteenth century who had been declared mentally ill. My goal is not to state that all women who were deemed mentally ill in this era were diagnosed erroneously or maliciously. Rather, my goal is to observe Gilman's work as a reflection of the medical neglect suffered by so many women of the era, so as to help clarify the reasons why this might have occurred, at least according to Gilman. "The Yellow Wallpaper" brings forth the point of view of a woman who has been diagnosed with a mental illness. The short story's narrator presents with obvious symptoms of a mental disorder, which worsen as the narrative progresses. The purpose of this chapter is to focus more specifically on the suffering the narrator endures as she undergoes treatment for these symptoms. The effects of collective psychology will be considered causal factors for the narrator's mistreatment. In exploring Gilman's story in the context of nineteenth-century societal and medical ideas, this chapter argues that the collective mind of society, as well as the collective mind established within the narrator's household, are at the heart of the narrator's mistreatment.

The "Yellow Wallpaper" is written from the point of view of a woman diagnosed with a hysterical disorder and is loosely based on Gilman's own experience. Her point of view might be seen to demonstrate the psychological evolution of victims of medical mistreatment.

The opening lines of the story help clarify the lack of credulity attributed to women seeking medical help. The narrator expresses her opinion of her husband/physician's views on the matter as she writes: "John is a physician, and *perhaps* – (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) – *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster. You see he does not believe I am sick!" (351) This excerpt conveys the early stages of neglect suffered by the narrator. In the very same opening paragraphs, the narrator explains that "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (351). The narrator's words hint at the impact of collective psychology in a patriarchal society where men and women occupy certain roles in a marriage. In this chapter, I will provide an in-depth analysis of the presence of collective psychology within the narrator's household in order to establish that the diagnosis she receives is deeply flawed and largely due to the effect of collective psychology, as opposed to sophisticated medicine. The narrator is initially referred to as a "nervous" woman with "hysterical tendencies". As I will show, collective psychology becomes the primary factor in her diagnosis. In order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the narrator's medical mistreatment, I will consider the narrator's case in its proper nineteenth-century context.

Collective psychology, or the group mind, in its simplest form surfaces in situations of fear or utter panic. Fear, a basic and fundamental emotion, is common to all humans and it is therefore possible to consider fear as the common motive which ignites and fuels the collective behaviour depicted in Gilman's story. With regards to circumstances of fear, William McDougall remarks that "[t]he essence of the panic is the collective intensification of the instinctive excitement, with its emotion of fear and its impulse to flight" (36). Hence, the group mind is initially formed by an emotion common to all individuals within a crowd. When

a basic emotion, such as fear, is faced by large numbers of individuals at once, the basic instinct of the crowd is survival, which then comes to constitute their common goal.

Combining these two factors, the common emotion or reaction of a crowd and their common goal, creates what McDougall terms a “collective mental life”. This definition of the collective mind can be understood through Gilman’s work, for it can be applied to the collective mental life which is formed within the narrator’s household. In reference to McDougall’s theory I postulate that John, patriarch of the household within a patriarchal society, is in control of the events taking place, as well as of the individuals within the household. We can also consider the possibility of fear as a basic emotion found within the narrator’s household. I suggest that it is this fear of the patriarchal foundation of nineteenth-century society that brings the characters in the narrative to obey and serve the man of the house without question or hesitation, a sentiment which extends to the narrator herself. The narrator is a character who, even though she seemingly understands her condition, attempts for a large part of the narrative to submit to her husband/physician’s commands. Gilman’s narrative helps clarify the basis of collective psychology within the narrator’s household, while also exploring a very real underlying problem for nineteenth-century women.

Following an analysis of how the collective mind can be formed within a group, it becomes possible to analyze its effects on its members. McDougall explains that when an individual is part of a group, the individual slowly loses their sense of personal instincts, beliefs, and values. The individual thus molds to the values and beliefs of the group in order to conform to its constructs. In doing so, as noted in the previous chapters, the individual foregoes personal common sense and acts as the group acts, no matter the consequences. In many situations this is problematic and potentially dangerous. When individuals who are part

of a crowd lose their sense of self, the end result is a group of individuals who act as they are told without regards to the repercussions of their actions. Making clear links between this phenomenon and the events which occur in “The Yellow Wallpaper” provides the framework with which we can examine the causes of the narrator’s mistreatment. The instances of medical mistreatment in this story can be understood as a direct result of her caretakers’ fears of veering away from widespread and commonly accepted societal values and behaviours.

Gilman’s work is written in the first person, and the opening lines of the story help set the scene for the character’s growing angst regarding her health. These opening lines also help establish a comprehensive image of the narrator’s environment and close contacts. Her husband John, who we learn is also her physician, plays a key role in the presence of a collective mind within the narrator’s household. Gilman succeeds in depicting a female character who is aware of her condition, and who has the intelligence to understand what is required to heal it. However, her requests with regards to her medical treatment are systematically ignored by John. Instead, he resorts to commonly used treatments of the era such as confinement. Although the narrator is not confined in an asylum, a common occurrence for nineteenth-century women who had been diagnosed with a mental illness, she is nonetheless sequestered in a domestic space. She is required to stay at the summer house where she and John are residing. She is forced to submit to her husband’s views and prescribed treatments. She is obligated to remain enclosed in a house, and more specifically in a room, in which she is expected to do nothing other than rest until her symptoms vanish. Although, at the start of the narrative, her disdain for the room is clear, her appreciation and obsession with the room increase rapidly and attain alarming proportions. In the beginning, the narrator declares, “I don’t like our room a bit” (352). Initially, confinement to this room and

restrictions regarding the use of her personal time are two important tools utilized by her physician/husband which, later in the narrative, become fundamental factors in the narrator's worsening symptoms.

The narrator's treatment shares important similarities with a common treatment of the era known as the rest cure, which has been recorded in the works of several literary women. Carla B. Frye refers to doctor Silas Weir Mitchell's rest cure by stating that "[t]he foundation of [Mitchell's] treatment was to improve nutrition and restore energy by revitalizing the patient" (830). Unfortunately, she continues, patients of the rest cure were sentenced to "extended and total bed rest" (830) and "isolation from family and familiar surroundings" (830). In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman succeeds particularly well in demonstrating the characteristics of the rest cure and focusing specifically on the ill effects of this treatment. In the beginning of the narrative when the narrator has just arrived at the summer home, she does not present with serious symptoms of mental illness. But as Gilman traces the narrator's evolution and treatment, she demonstrates how damaging the rest cure can be to patients who do not require it (or even to those who do). Prohibiting women to use their minds and bodies in the ways they so choose is clearly, Gilman seems to suggest, a sign of a man's patriarchal desire for dominance and control over women. Not only is this morally unsound, but, as the narrative demonstrates, it also has devastating mental and physical consequences for the narrator. As Hume postulates, "Gilman's mad narrator unveils not only the ills of the rest cure treatment and a repressive domestic culture filled with Johns and Jennies, but also her hatred for a domestic (and maternal) role she has no desire to assume" (12). Hume thus sees the narrator's plight as exemplary of larger turn-of-the-century patriarchal injustices.

The narrator is depicted as a woman of intelligence with an appreciation for written art forms. She enjoys writing and considers it an important tool for her recovery. She seems to use the written word as a form of catharsis for her inner turmoil. Herein lies the most important and detrimental of the character's restrictions, which are decided by her husband and enforced by him and the narrator's caregiver Jennie. When John first takes her writing away from her, she announces, "he hates to have me write a word" (353). The narrator here indirectly expresses her disdain for a patriarchal society in which the male head of the household can enforce such rules. "Forbidden to write," suggests Asha Nadkarni, "the narrator's main task becomes one of interpretation – of trying to read the wallpaper – and it is precisely this process of interpretation that becomes both maddening and ultimately liberating" (219). In other words, it is because of this prohibition that the narrator slowly succumbs to the damaging symptoms of mental illness. Moreover, because this important outlet is prohibited, she reverts to deceit, a factor which worsens her condition dramatically. The mere act of having to hide her passion causes her great bouts of fatigue. The narrator explains that writing would help "relieve the press of ideas" (355) that causes her such angst. As such, keeping her from her writing increases her symptoms in the narrative. Nineteenth-century society is largely to blame for this censorship, because in this era "women exist only to be acted on by men," suggest Gilbert and Gubar, "both as literary and sensual objects" (8). This implies that women in general were not permitted to explore their literary imagination. Gilman conveys these limitations by creating a household where the female protagonist is completely repressed in her need for literary expression. John is not concerned with his wife's desire to write. He seems to believe she is unfit for such cognitive work and he seems influenced by conventional societal understandings and dismissals of the literary woman. Restrictions such as these were

not uncommon for nineteenth-century women. The reason for this literary censorship was that "activities such as daydreaming and writing for personal pleasure were considered self-centered" (Höhn 4). Girls born into the nineteenth century were usually educated with the sole purpose of fulfilling their future domestic roles as mothers and wives. This education began as of a very young age, "[t]he purpose of these schools," explains Marilena Elizabeth Eileen Höhn, "was to prepare young women for marriage and their duties as wives" (9). Gilman conveys an understanding of these restrictions, as well as their impact on the women who suffer from them, through her narrator. Because the narrator has aspirations greater, or simply other, than those her society ascribes her, she suffers from the effects of limitations, restrictions and censorship and she is treated for a mental illness.

In the story, the consequences of censorship are slowly and insidiously displayed through the narrator's symptoms. Upon her arrival at the colonial mansion, the very first thing the narrator wishes to do, and does, is write. However, once she is settled into the room with the yellow wallpaper, and her medical treatment begins, she says "We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day" (353). The narrator's lack of motivation to write for the first two weeks of her treatment might be perceived as a direct result of her medical mistreatment. It is because of her society's standards that the female protagonist moves to actions of a deceptive nature, such as hiding her writing. It is this very act which seems to cause her even greater pain, "I did write for a while in spite of them;" she explains, "but it does exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it –, or else meet with heavy opposition" (352). The narrator chooses to bend to society's expectations and, in doing so, worsens her own condition with the additional exhaustion caused by trickery.

The narrator's position as a woman who is attempting to renounce the roles attributed to her due to her gender is better understood in her proper nineteenth-century context.

"Diagnoses focusing in on nerves coincided with symptoms which expressed a malaise with the stresses of the times," explains Appignanesi, "as well as with gender restrictions" (114).

This assessment in some ways mirrors the narrator's diagnosis and helps ascertain the causes of her symptoms. An exploration of the stress of her circumstances and of the larger societal expectations and pressures she faced as a woman of this time, begins to reveal the nature of the narrator's condition.

The narrator is depicted as a new mother in a strange house who is forced to submit to gender-associated domestic roles, which slowly leads to the appearance of the first symptoms of her nervous state. Her dislike of these roles aggravates her symptoms increasingly. Her societal standing as woman, and specifically as wife and mother, in the late nineteenth century means that her roles within the household are predetermined without her consent. Moreover, the narrator's consent is not required in the treatment process, which is determined by her husband, as it was for many other women of the nineteenth century. Through the narrator, a representative figure for innumerable women of the era, Gilman portrays the damaging and difficult inner-struggles of women who were not inclined to adhere to societal expectations. The narrator's inclination to veer from these expectations, and her inability to do so, are directly linked to her nervous state and her psychological decline.

Many causes are suggested as the basis for the narrator's illness. For one, Gilman depicts a physician who does not conduct a proper analysis of his patient. His diagnosis is based solely on the narrator's apparent nervous symptoms. In other words, there is no mention

of him attempting to understand the underlying issues which lead his wife to display these symptoms, nor does he request that his wife share her personal understanding of her plight. The narrator's wishes regarding her own well-being are set aside and rendered moot due to her standing as a woman in a household governed by a man. Showalter describes such a reality and connects it with societal expectations of the nineteenth century. "[L]ongings for independence and for mastery were socially unacceptable at every phase of the female life-cycle," notes Showalter, and "[e]ven when doctors observed these longings in their female patients, and noted the women's powerless position in their families, they did not make the obvious connections" (132). Much like these women, Gilman's narrator fails to free herself from her domestic roles, or to correct her physician's misunderstanding of the causes of her illness.

The narrator demonstrates various tendencies toward rebellion within her household, and in doing so she also rebels against the constructs of her society. Nineteenth-century society saw an important, yet quiet, female rebellion. This rebellion presented itself in subtle forms, a notable one being mental illness. Just as the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" strives for more freedom than her socially-accepted domestic duties provide, many women of the era, as they tried to fulfill their personal aspirations, did so as well. These aspirations, once presented to their husbands or other significant men in their surroundings, were often reframed and diagnosed as symptoms of a mental illness such as a nervous condition, or often as hysteria. These diagnoses might therefore be understood as a male protest to the feminist rebellion that was beginning to occur. They were perhaps based on male fear, as men faced the rise of feminism. The fear felt by these men was not based solely on women's ambitions. Their fear extended to the potential annihilation of the foundational constructs of the

nineteenth-century home, and the determined roles of women within the family. Showalter explains men's retaliation, probably based on fear, as she states that "[f]emale intellectual inferiority could be understood as the result of reproductive specialization, and the 'womanly' traits of self-sacrifice and service so convenient for the comfort of a patriarchal society could be defended in evolutionary terms as essential for the survival and improvement of the race" (122). Certain men of the era feared that, were they not to control female ambition, they would not only lose control over women per se, but also over the functionality of the household.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" explores society's fear of the empowered, intellectual woman, represented in the character of John. The character's condescending responses to his wife's requests point to his belief in her "intellectual inferiority". John, like many nineteenth-century patriarchs, views and treats his spouse as inferior, and in so doing, his treatment succeeds in inciting a quiet rebellion in his wife. John seems to believe the nineteenth-century commonplace notion that, "[b]y *nature* ... woman was constituted to be 'the helpmate and companion of man'; her innate qualities of mind were formed to make her man's complement rather than his equal" (Showalter 123). Because of this, the narrator's diagnosis and treatment are based on symptoms which are nothing other than a refusal to comply with gender-associated domestic roles.

The story presents several instances of the narrator's angst toward her role as a new mother and one might even argue that she is suffering from postpartum depression. Taken together, the narrator's references to her child are extremely contradictory. Hume states that, "this narrator insists that she loves her child, her 'dear baby,' the 'blessed' and 'impressionable little thing.' She stresses that she 'cannot be with him' because it makes her

‘so nervous’ and later asserts that her ‘one comfort’ is that she, rather than her child, has to ‘occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper’” (5). The narrator does seem to want to comply on a certain level with her expected domestic role as mother, yet there is a strong part of her that refuses this role. Her extreme nervousness could be attributed to the pressure she feels to be with and care for her child. As a woman, wife, and mother, she is held captive in a life where her ambitions are completely repressed, which leads her to “escape into illness”, explains Appignanesi, and become “the mirror image of rebellion”(115). The narrator indeed requires escape from her domestic roles as wife and mother, but this escape causes a split within her character. Although she feels somewhat inclined to comply with societal expectations, her symptoms are obvious expressions of rebellion against these expectations.

In the story, the narrator uses her writing as a tool to escape the constraints of her imposed restrictions. She also utilizes this tool as a tactic for her rebellion against John’s diagnosis and society’s expectations of her. She demonstrates her need for independence by refusing to follow John’s and Jennie’s orders, an example being that she refuses to sleep when she is expected to. Many nineteenth-century literary texts depict the stories of women who have been diagnosed with a mental illness. These texts present society’s pressure on women to pursue domestic roles without complaint as a leading cause of their psychological rebellion and decline. “In these domestic texts,” suggests Höhn, “the female protagonist’s ability to control her personal desires and secret dreams was awarded with social acknowledgment” (4). The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is like the protagonists of these domestic texts in her attempts to conceal her personal thoughts and feelings.

As has been thoroughly explained, these rebellions were often triggered by a woman’s inability to care for her child, or her refusal to accept her role in the household. These women

often presented with a loss of control over their emotions which was a symptom of rebellion widely noted in accounts of women's struggles of the era. In her work, Appignanesi tells the story of a young woman named Celia who undergoes medical treatment in asylums, loses her self-control, and attempts to attain physical freedom when she is detained against her will. Appignanesi recounts her violent symptoms: "Celia becomes uncontrollable, running amok, throwing her suitcases into the ocean, attempting suicide, acting out with considerable violence" (215).

Similarly, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" expresses her discontent and lack of freedom through random violent outbursts. In the beginning of her confinement, these symptoms are subtle, but, as the narrative progresses, her violent symptoms intensify. The narrator's request to visit her cousins Henry and Julia provides an important example of the narrator's lack of emotional restraint. Following this request, the narrator ponders her husband/physician's decision, and she explains: "But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished" (358). This excerpt not only demonstrates the narrator's inability to control her emotions, but also her husband's misunderstanding of her needs, as well as his inability to appropriately and successfully treat his wife for her ailments. The forceful nature with which John treats his wife in an attempt to rid her of her defiant beliefs and wants contributes to her descent into madness.

Gilman succeeds in capturing important medical and social realities of women's mental illness in the late nineteenth century, particularly in her descriptions of the narrator's violent outbursts. When the narrator's psychological freedom is taken from her, she attempts to regain her physical freedom. The final pages of the story describe her gnawing at bed posts,

crawling about the room, and shouting at her husband, events that might be interpreted as a direct result of her mistreatment. One cannot help but feel sympathy for the woman, even though, by the end of the narrative, she does in fact exhibit erratic behaviour. This reality does not seem to matter simply because these actions, such as crawling around the room in an animal-like manner, can be interpreted as a result of her treatment and environment. In the very last lines of the narrative, the narrator states: “I’ve got out at last, ‘said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (366) This excerpt is a testament to the narrator’s increasing volatility and successfully conveys the consequences of her medical mistreatment.

The patriarchal structures outlined in the narrative mirror the inequality of men and women in a nineteenth-century setting. “Gilman’s writing,” explains Margaret V. Delashmit, “asserts that women were considered inferior males and hence inferior humans because the ideal human had been defined by male qualities” (107). It is because of this perceived inferiority that the symptoms used to diagnose the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” stem from the power attributed to the men in her society. The fact that the narrator is medically treated by her husband raises an ethical issue in the sense that this dual role gives him complete control and dominance over his wife/patient. The complexity and dysfunction of this situation has a deep impact on the narrator. Gilman depicts the dangers of a man, despite his possible good intentions, occupying simultaneously the roles of husband and physician – and ultimately of patriarch. “So I take phosphates or phosphites whichever it is,” states the narrator, “and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that

congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” (351). Gilman captures the inferiority attributed to women of the era through John’s ability to silence the narrator’s requests and desires.

Having analyzed the patriarchal forces at work in the medical treatment of Gilman’s narrator, I will now consider the group mind as a cause for her mistreatment. I argue that the narrator’s husband’s participation in a collective view shared by other practitioners of his profession, including the narrator’s brother, causes the narrator to be subjected to medical mistreatment. At the start of the narrative, the narrator explains that her husband views her as suffering from a nervous depression and that her brother who, “is also a physician, and also of high standing, says the same thing” (351). The patriarchal values of the era which viewed women solely through their expected domestic roles are insidiously woven into John’s profession as a physician. Due to the diagnosis given by her husband and supported by her brother, and the ensuing medical treatment, we witness the deterioration of her mental health. In this instance, society plays a major role in the workings of collective psychology. As Haug suggests, in a patriarchal society, women are thought of as ‘other’, and the adult white male is the frame of reference for what the ideal citizen should be. Social and medical structures often enforced social and medical limitations upon women, with disastrous results, a process that Gilman seems to have captured to some degree in “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

Gilman’s story illustrates the restrictions imposed on women in a patriarchal household. The nineteenth century was an era in which equality between men and women was far from being attained because, “[o]nce married,” explains Höhn, “a woman was considered her husband's property and subject to his decisions” (12). Following such laws and the

conventions that came with them, the protagonist is unable to oppose her husband's decisions regarding her own life and well-being. The narrator finds herself in a society where "[t]he female as an equal to the male is thus ignored, and the feminine as an inferior to the masculine is emphasized" (Ghanderharion 66). The narrator is indeed valued as her husband's property, and nothing more. His ability to keep her enclosed in a prison-like manner further illustrates his power as a man of the late nineteenth century, as well as the limitations imposed on the women.

The narrator is forbidden to write throughout the narrative in a way that mirrors the widespread notion that it was improper, or inappropriate for nineteenth-century women to participate in the literary world, which was a male-dominated profession at the time. In this regard, nineteenth-century society was most likely influenced by the group mind phenomenon. McDougall explains that "[t]he essential conditions of collective mental action are, then, a common object of mental activity, a common mode of feeling in regard to it, and some degree of reciprocal influence between the members of the group" (33). I suggest that, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", "the common object of mental activity" could refer to the literary imagination of women; "the common mode of feeling" could be understood as the common opinion that women were unable to achieve literary aspirations; and the "reciprocal influence between members of the group" could be attributed to the power men had over women which allowed them to stifle women's ambitions. These theories might be considered the foundation of the "psychological crowd", a term McDougall allots to the participants of a group mind, established in "The Yellow Wallpaper". Gilman seems to have understood this destructive pattern as an influential factor of a patriarchal society and clearly depicts it in her narrative.

The influence of collective psychology on the characters within the household causes the narrator's nervous state to increase dramatically. The literary censorship imposed upon the narrator forces her imagination to find a different outlet. Thus, her obsession with the wallpaper begins to peak, when, Chantal D. Moore argues, "the heroine's explorative and creative self is projected in the madwoman image behind the bars on yellow wallpaper" (3). This is a direct result of the narrator's habitual creative outlets being stifled. Whereas, at first, the wallpaper only instills disdain in the character, her inability to express her inner-turmoil leads her slowly to an unhealthy obsession with the wallpaper. In the opening pages of the story, she describes the wallpaper as follows: "The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" (353). This statement reflects the narrator's negative impression of the wallpaper. Because of John's influence over the members of the group mind within the household, the narrator is kept from her writing and her social engagements. This could be the reason she finds solace within the wallpaper as the narrative progresses. The wallpaper begins as a repellant entity and becomes a mirror image within which the narrator begins to perceive herself. She begins to believe that her well-being depends on the wallpaper. As her obsession grows, her imagination amplifies as well. She begins to see a creeping woman, then many creeping women, hidden within the paper. The narrator views the wallpaper as symbolic of her captivity within the room. She begins to see the bars on her room windows reflected in the wallpaper, keeping the woman in the wallpaper captive, just as the bars in her windows keep her captive within her room. Furthermore, once her illness reaches its peak, her obsession with the wallpaper moves from the visual and inanimate to her other senses as well. She begins to 'smell' the wallpaper and describes its odor as follows: "It creeps all over the house. I find it hovering in the dining-

room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs. It gets into my hair” (362). The narrator’s mental faculties seem to decline as her fixation grows into an all-consuming obsession, which ends with the narrator creeping about the room in the same way as the woman in the wallpaper.

Gilman seems to dramatize the group mind of the narrator’s society and present it as a primary cause of the narrator’s medical mistreatment. Freud refers to Le Bon’s work on the collective mind as he attempts to elucidate the various characteristics that constitute a group mind. To that effect, he asks himself the following questions: “What, then, is a ‘group’? How does it acquire the capacity for exercising such a decisive influence over the mental life of the individual? And what is the nature of the mental change which it forces upon the individual?” (3) He goes on to answer these questions in order to paint a complete picture of the group mind phenomenon. These questions guide my analysis of the characters in the “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

First, it is important to note that there are in fact different types of gatherings of individuals that can be considered groups in Gilman’s story. Two important groups have already been mentioned: first, the smaller, yet very influential group found within the narrator’s house, and second, the larger and more prominent group that is society as a whole. Both groups influence the narrator and the other characters of the story in important ways. This would answer Freud’s question concerning the development of these groups, for as he states, “[i]f the individuals in the group are combined into a unity, there must surely be something to unite them, and this bond might be precisely the thing that is characteristic of a group” (3). In the story, the narrator’s society forms a group because of the widespread desire to keep patriarchal structures intact. Society’s influence over the individual minds of its

constituents is largely present in the story due to the impact of the leaders found in society. An important characteristic of these leaders is their ability to exert power over the minds of less influential individuals. The weaker minds are taken over by the influence of the stronger-willed, which causes the beliefs and desires of those in power to spread. In Gilman's story, societal forces play an important role in the collective psychology described in the narrative. The group mind phenomenon gives John power as leader of the household. Leadership within a group mind plays important roles in regards to conformity. Freud states that "what is heterogeneous is submerged in what is homogeneous" (4) which explains why the narrator's personal requests and needs are systematically ignored. The narrator's medical mistreatment could most likely have been avoided had it not been for the husband's internalization of societal views concerning literary women, or, more generally, women's so-called inferiority in relation to men.

Gilman draws on the concept of leadership as a psychological result of collective psychology and the ways in which this effects the narrator's household. The narrator's household has the more specific common goal of curing the narrator of her perceived illness. Because John is considered the patriarch of the household he has ultimate control over his wife; however, John does not seem to wish his wife harm. There is no mention of physical torture, a concept so common in the asylums of the nineteenth century. Throughout the narrative, John's opinions of his wife are apparent. He calls her by endearing yet patronizing names, terms most often attributed to little girls. He refers to her as a "little goose" or "little darling" on more than one occasion and in so doing he creates a strong separation between himself and his wife. The terms he assigns to his wife position him as the man and in control while simultaneously positioning the narrator as inferior. She is a weak "little goose" and is

expected to be controlled. “A crowd always tends to follow some leader in thought, feeling, and action,” suggests McDougall, “and its actions are effective in proportion as it does so” (186). In the story, the impact of collective psychology on the medical mistreatment of the narrator is largely due to the fact that in her household, John is the leader. He is the leader because society in the nineteenth century deemed that the man was in fact the leader of every household, and the narrator’s household is no different. John is given complete power over the psychological crowd within his household, a crowd constituted of the narrator, her caregiver Jennie, and John himself. The effectiveness of John’s leadership is clear throughout the narrative. Jennie follows his instructions exactly and keeps the narrator from work and social engagements. The narrator herself follows his orders by forgoing her own desires and requests in regards to her well-being. Most importantly, the narrator is restricted to her room and remains in confinement for most of the narrative. In her work, *Insanity, Rhetoric, and Women: Nineteenth-Century Women’s Asylum Narratives*, Madaline Reeder Walter explains the plight of nineteenth-century women who had been kept in captivity within the walls of asylums, and emphasizes the importance of writing as a means of relief for these patients. “Most often women writing these asylum narratives protested their confinement,” explains Walter, “[they] asserted their sanity, and depicted abuse” (IV). Gilman’s use of confinement in the narrative reflects her understanding of the plight of women diagnosed with mental illnesses, as well as her understanding of the importance of writing for their sanity.

In the story, Jennie’s implication in the household’s group mind might be what leads her to contribute to the narrator’s mistreatment. Although Jennie does seem to give the narrator more space and freedom to heal from her illness, she still abides by John’s rules. The narrator clearly reacts to Jennie in the same way as she does to John. We can perceive that,

from the narrator's perspective, both caregivers form an entity against which she feels the need to rebel. This is clear when the narrator is writing alone in her room and she fears being discovered by Jennie. She exclaims, "There's sister on the stairs!" (356). In this instance, the type of group to be recognized within the household could be aligned with McDougall's theory that

If any group enjoys continuity of existence, certain more or less constant relations, of subordination, deference, leadership and so forth, will inevitably become established between the individuals of which it is composed; and, of course, such relations will usually be deliberately established and maintained by any group that is united by common purpose, in order that its efficiency may be promoted (McDougall 32).

In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the "leadership" referred to might be read as John, the husband, physician and man of the household, who readily assumes this role from the start. Jennie's role as "subordinate" to John is quickly established and explains her behavior towards the narrator. The "common purpose" which unites the household is the narrator's illness and her need for recovery. The household's inner-organization explains the foundation of the narrator's medical mistreatment. Jennie, being a part of this construct, readily assumes her role as caregiver for the narrator, all the while remaining subordinate to John. Jennie is thus an important part of the group mind of the household and as such relinquishes control of her own beliefs. In so doing, even though in the beginning of the narrative Jennie seems to be a passive participant in the narrator's medical treatment, by the end she readily enforces the rules, and the more she does so, the more the narrator's nervous state increases.

Gilman's work suggests a profound understanding of the intricacies of nineteenth-century patriarchal forces, and how the patriarchy affected the minds of the medically mistreated women of the era. The group mind and its influence on medical and social constructs of the era are represented throughout the narrative, which provides the necessary

framework to understand the cause for the narrator's mistreatment. "The Yellow Wallpaper" clearly demonstrates patriarchal and misogynistic societal forces, which are represented in the narrator's husband. Two important aspects of the narrator's society play major roles in the development of her symptoms. The narrator's mental decline is provoked by the social pressures felt by women in an era in which they were expected to adhere to a domestic lifestyle as wives and mothers. Her instability is further aggravated by the societal restrictions forced upon women such as her, thus preventing them – and by extension her – from striving for anything beyond conventional gender roles, and inciting feelings of oppression.

Conclusion

Collective psychology had dire implications for nineteenth-century women in the sense that it resulted in the mass mistreatment of those of them who were diagnosed as mentally ill. The patriarchal structures in place at the time were indeed understood as foundational for nineteenth-century society and the behaviors of its citizens were largely influenced by them. For those in power, a group mind established within said society was favorable, for, as Killian and Turner argue, “so long as these forms [of collective behavior] remain within the bounds that have become regularized in repeated episodes,” they “do not seriously threaten traditional values and the established pattern of authority” (159). As long as the collective behavior of nineteenth-century men and women remained aligned with the patriarchal constructs established within society, the foundation of society – particularly with regards to conventional understandings of gender – remained intact.

The women who desired to go against the established structures of their time were often “label[led] as mentally disturbed,” Showalter argues, “and of all the nervous disorders of the *fin de siècle*, hysteria was the most strongly identified with the feminist movement” (145). Little was required to diagnose these women, for, as Showalter continues, “doctors had noticed that hysteria was apt to appear in young women who were especially rebellious” (145). Literary women of the era, such as Charlotte Brontë and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, succeeded in depicting the desires of women who aspired to lives greater than their allotted stations typically allowed. More importantly, they succeeded in conveying the very real dangers of a process in which to desire something more, as a woman, frequently led to destructive medical mistreatment. In both *Jane Eyre* and “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Brontë and Gilman developed strong-willed female characters and positioned them in environments

characteristic of their respective ages. These environments, and the individuals within them, represent the dangers, especially to women, of the presence of a collective mind, especially for those who, within the constructs of this collectivity, were considered a threat. In identifying the collective mind phenomenon as a cause for the medical mistreatment of nineteenth-century women, my thesis aimed to provide an original and detailed analysis of this mistreatment, and to consider the reasons for which it might have occurred.

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