

The Ability System and Decolonial Resistance: The Case of the Victorian Invalid

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Determinations of ability/disability are rooted in coloniality, specifically in categorizations of race, gender, and animality as they bear on social formations. I elucidate this rootedness by weaving the “coloniality of ability” into María Lugones’ accounts of the coloniality of gender and the colonial-modern system as founded on the “human-nonhuman” difference. This enables me to reveal an “ability system” based on the “(dis)ability-bestiality” difference and delineate with more specificity liminal sites of oppression and resistance across the heterogeneous socialities of coloniality-modernity. From the perspective of the coloniality of ability that I develop, I focus on the liminality of the white woman Victorian invalid and that of the colonized “bestial” body in order to distinguish between two forms of colonial-modern liminality—“light” and “dark.” I also draw from this discussion two forms of colonial-modern oppression—“dehumanizing” and “bestializing”—and two related modalities of anticolonial resistance—“humanizing” and “decolonial.”

Key words: decolonial feminism; disability; coloniality of ability; bestiality; animality; liminality; Victorian invalidism; anticolonial resistance; the ability system; María Lugones

From an analytic and conceptual, rather than historical, perspective, I show that determinations of ability/disability are rooted in coloniality, specifically in categorizations of race, gender, and animality as they bear on social formations. I elucidate this rootedness by weaving the “coloniality of ability” into María Lugones’ accounts of the coloniality of gender and the colonial-modern system as founded on the “human-nonhuman” difference.¹ This enables me to reveal an “ability system” based on the “(dis)ability-bestiality” difference and delineate with more specificity liminal sites of oppression and resistance across the heterogeneous socialities of coloniality-modernity.²

In my discussion, liminalities are social positionalities or sites that elude categorization and are created when hegemonic forms of social power and meaning (such as heteronormativity and ability) imaginatively construct and situate people in reference to the ideal of the “human.”³ Although they are sites of oppression, liminalities can give the lie to modernity’s promise of a “universal humanity.” In this, I follow Lugones’ view that liminalities present possibilities for existing in ways not wholly governed by available, normative demands and not oriented by the “human-nonhuman” horizon of coloniality-modernity.⁴ Furthermore, like Lugones, I ground resistance in liminality. From the perspective of the coloniality of ability that I develop here, I focus on the liminality of the white woman Victorian invalid and that of the colonized “bestial” body in order to distinguish between two forms of colonial-modern liminality—“light” and “dark.” I also draw from this discussion two forms of colonial-modern oppression—“dehumanizing” and “bestializing”—and two related modalities of anticolonial resistance—“humanizing” and “decolonial.”

1 The Coloniality of Ability

Lugones' Coloniality of Gender

Lugones' decolonial approach revolves around what is, for her, the central binary of the colonial-modern world system: "the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and non-human" (Lugones 2010: 743).⁵ The "human-nonhuman" difference is reified through violent and historical processes of subjectification and social formation, whereby it remains both superimposed on colonized and enslaved bodies and constitutive of colonial-modern socialities even after colonization and slavery have "ended." While fundamentally expressed as the racial difference between white and non-white peoples, Lugones' coloniality of gender reveals that the human-nonhuman difference is co-constituted by further dichotomous and hierarchical categorizations, such as those pertaining to sex and gender.⁶

Lugones sees the human-nonhuman difference articulating a "light side" and a "dark side" of colonial-modern social formations. The light side—the domain of the "human"—is constituted by the positionalities of "white" men and women. The dark side—the domain of the "non-human"—is constituted by the positionalities of those racialized as "non-white." Although the dark side is situated subordinately and serves as a normative ground for damning judgments about the colonized, it also acts as the negative through which the light side sees itself (Lugones 2010: 743). To this end, a series of dichotomous hierarchies map onto the light and dark sides, each reinforcing and yet concealing the fundamental human-nonhuman difference on which they are grounded: civilized/uncivilized, modern/traditional, rational/irrational, etc. (Lugones 2008: 4).

Lugones elaborates on the implications of the light and dark sides of colonial-modern social formations through the lens of gender. She explains: "Historically, the characterization of white European women as fragile and sexually passive opposed them to non-white, colonized women, including women slaves, who were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor" (Lugones 2008: 13). This is to say, the white, bourgeois characterization of gender for the light side is historically defined not by the difference between white men and white women, but by opposition to the distorted characterization of gender applied to the dark side.

According to Lugones, the "dark" form of gender arises when coloniality-modernity imaginatively constructs colonized subjects as "not-human-as-not-men" and "not-human-as-not-women," and, thus, as without gender—as "animal" (Lugones 2010: 744). She writes:

It is part of their history that only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. They were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of "without gender," sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. (Lugones 2008: 13)

In this way, Lugones exposes the colonially constructed "gender-animality" dichotomy and shows that for the dark side, "gender" is an empty term which in fact only reduces the colonized to animality. The semantic consequence of this dichotomy, she argues, is "'colonized woman' is an empty category: no women are colonized; no colonized females are women" (Lugones 2010: 745).

Because this dichotomy serves as a means of denying the humanity of the colonized and solidifying the domain of the human, Lugones also notes that "turning the colonized into human beings was not a colonial goal," for to humanize the colonized would be to evacuate the domain of

the nonhuman, to render the meaning of the category human meaningless, and to collapse the central dichotomy around which coloniality-modernity revolves (Lugones 2010: 744). Therefore, there was no humanizing or socializing intent to understand the colonized as gendered. Yet at the same time, the colonized were subjected to the forced superimposition and internalization of the western and bourgeois category of gender as if it were a universal category, a process necessary for the success of colonization and the establishment of the ideal of a global modernity. This projection entailed that “women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of ‘women’ as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism” (Lugones 2008: 13).

Effectively, then, while the colonized were articulated as nonhuman and “ungendered,” the concept of gender was weaponized to create rootless social imaginaries that annihilated their ways of living and cosmologies and that appeared to “redeem” them into modernity.⁷ However, Lugones’ coloniality of gender shows the mendacity of promises of social and political redemption. She writes, “There was no extension of the status of white women to colonized women even when they were turned into similes of bourgeois white women” (Lugones 2008: 13). Hence, Lugones maintains the exclusion of the colonized from the domain of the “human” within colonial-modern social formations, a debarment which she locates in the coloniality of gender’s sustained reduction of the colonized to animality as a genderless form of life.

The Colonial Construction of “Ability” and the “Bestial”

Although Lugones does not incorporate ability-disability into her analysis, I find that her account of the coloniality of gender implies the “coloniality of ability.” In particular, I bring forth a colonial-modern “ability system,” where the domains of the human and nonhuman are in part constituted as formations of minds and bodies occupying social positionalities of “(dis)ability.”⁸ This system of loci of (dis)abilities co-constitutes the colonial-modern system and is articulated by modern determinations of two central features of the human: the bipedal body and the *ego cogito*. Through varying arrangements, attributions, denials, and distortions of the bipedal body and the *ego cogito*—and the co-determination of these processes by other colonial-modern racial, sexual, gender, and class distinctions—the ability system constructs a cartography of the human-nonhuman difference (see Rivera 2017 and Vallega 2014).⁹

Lugones explains that within the colonial-modern gender system, gender is constructed and situated in reference to white males as the human being par excellence (Lugones 2010: 744). However, this account presupposes the ability system’s role in the construction of white males as “superior” in terms of having both a white bipedal body and a purportedly heightened capacity for the *ego cogito*, which allows them to assume reflective distance and mastery over the flow and material engagements of everyday consciousness. Hence, although the *ego cogito* is concretely tethered to the bipedal bodies of its white male progenitors, both the white male body and this anchoring recede from view as the ability system emphasizes the *ego cogito* and its capacity for abstraction from and mastery over bodies.

The “able” body is thus constructed as the white, male, “invisible” body, and “ability” is articulated in intellectual terms as the rational capacity for distance and control—as “able-mindedness.” This characterization of ability as able-minded then contributes to the gendered construction of “man” as the exemplary human being. In this way, the ability system pronounces the gendered “humanity” of white men and reinforces their superior social status on the light side of the colonial-modern divide as understood by Lugones.

The superiority of white male ability is also constituted by a series of subordinations. These occur on both the light side and the dark side of the human-nonhuman difference. On the light side, the ability system constructs a derivative form of “ability” (and by extension, rationality) in reference

to white females. In this process, a lesser form of the *ego cogito* is located in the bipedal bodies of white females—whose embodied processes of menstruation and childbirth (when seen from the dominant perspective of white men) keep the body persistently in view and curtail their capacity for rational abstraction. The reproductive visibility of the white female body undergirds the ability system's rendition of white female ability as “able-bodiedness,” whereby white women are articulated as “mothers” and vessels for the heterosexual, biological reproduction of “kinship” relations (i.e., human relations on the light side) (Spillers 1987: 74–80).¹⁰

On the dark side, the ability system denies “ability” to bodies as a way of delimiting the nonhuman domain and further defining abilities as social positionalities inhabitable by white, human bodies. In my view, this process involves the construction of two domains within the nonhuman: the “animal” and the “bestial.” Animal bodies lack both a bipedal form and the *ego cogito*—in this they are cognitively and morphologically nonhuman. Bestial bodies have a bipedal form but lack the *ego cogito*. The construction of bestial bodies involves both an extermination of non-western forms of rationality and, because the *ego cogito* is regarded by colonial-modernity as *the* marker of the human, a total denial of the humanity of non-white peoples (see Jackson 2020 and Spillers 1987).¹¹ While for Lugones the colonized are constructed as animal through the denial of gender, from the perspective of the coloniality of ability I develop here, the nonhuman does not completely coincide with the animal (see Jackson 2020, Kim 2017, and Ko 2019).¹²

In reference to the labor demands of global capitalism as established by the light side of coloniality-modernity—understood here in terms of the reproduction of property and, most fundamentally, consumption—the domain of the nonhuman is further elaborated through hierarchical articulations co-constituted by distorted sexualizations (see Lugones 2008).¹³ In this sense, nonhuman bestial and animal bodies are defined in terms of labor capacities; the most essential of which is “consumability” (see Ko 2019, Woodard 2014, and Perkins 2004).¹⁴ The most subordinate positionalities within the ability system are thus those animal bodies deemed fit for human consumption. However, although still essentially defined by consumability, bestial bodies are set apart in that they are also seen as capable of reproducing human property relations (e.g., through rape and the forced reproduction of enslaved populations and physical labor). In this sense, while bestial bodies bear co-constitutive relations to both the human and animal, as the liminal border between human and animal, they belong to neither.

The Colonial Construction of “Disability”

The bestial liminality of non-white bodies is further determined by the co-constitution of the coloniality of ability and the coloniality of gender, which together empty situate non-white bodies as “disabled.” Here, the parallels between my account of the coloniality of ability and Lugones' coloniality of gender become more apparent. Denied both ability and gender, non-white males become “bestially disabled” as “not-men-as-not-able-minded” and non-white females as “not-women-as-not-able-bodied.”¹⁵

However, as Lugones shows in relation to gender, the ability system's articulation of the liminal, bestially disabled body does not make “disability” a meaningful concept or an inhabitable social-political positionality for bestial bodies.¹⁶ This is because colonial-modern social formations foreclose the inclusion of nonhuman bodies in the social realm of human life. Yet, in the concrete formation of colonial-modern socialities, the ability system conceals the racist, colonial conditionings of (dis)ability and re-circulates this social category as universally meaningful for all bodies.¹⁷ The ability system thus creates the illusion of a path to “modernity” in the overcoming of disability. This is a false promise of inclusion in humanity which conceals the human-nonhuman difference, the emptiness of

the category of (dis)ability for nonhuman bodies, and the non-belonging of nonhuman bodies to colonial-modern (i.e., “human”) social-political life.

At the same time, the ability system’s distorting superimposition of disability on non-white bodies helps generate disability as a meaningful category and social positionality for the light side.¹⁸ Through mechanisms such as medical diagnosis, white bodies can inhabit socially intelligible and permissible human forms of deficient embodiment as if the only determinants of (dis)ability were cognitive and physical factors. In this way, the ability system’s entanglement with the coloniality of gender is concealed. The substantive determination of disability for white bodies does not arise from the contrast between light forms of ability and disability. Instead, it arises from the bestially disabled and ungendered body’s contrast with both the superior, able and gendered human body, and the inferior, consumable animal body. The central dichotomy generated by the ability system is therefore not “ability-disability,” but rather “(dis)ability-bestiality.” Whereas Lugones shows that the semantic consequence of the coloniality of gender is the emptiness of “gender” in reference to the colonized, the semantic consequence of the coloniality of ability is the emptiness of both “able” and “disabled” in reference of nonhuman bodies: no able or disabled bodies are colonized; no enslaved body is either able or disabled.¹⁹

The emptiness of (dis)ability for bestial bodies and the precarity of their liminal positionality between the human and nonhuman animal comes into view when “disability” is misapplied to bestial bodies through diagnostic processes within colonial-modern social formations—in which case the bestial body is interpreted as incapable of reproducing property relations. In William Goodell’s study of North American slave codes, he notes the enslaved community’s value for medical research. Goodell explains that “assortments of diseased, damaged, and *disabled* Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are bought up, it seems... by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon, for purposes of ‘medical education’ and the interest of medical science” (quoted in Spillers 1987: 86–7; my emphasis).²⁰ Here, the essential consumability of the now “disposable” bestial body comes to the fore in light of medical diagnoses—the same diagnoses that, for white bodies, result in the status of disability as an inhabitable, although marginalized positionality. In this disclosure of the consumability of liminal bestial bodies, they are shown to slip into the domain of the animal.

2 Colonial-Modern Forms of Liminalities, Oppressions, and Resistances

While this slippage reveals the emptiness of disability for non-white bodies, the absence of this slippage for white bodies diagnosed as disabled exposes the meaningfulness of disability for bodies on the light side. This leads me to differentiate between two forms of liminality within colonial-modern socialities: “light” and “dark” liminalities. Light liminalities include social positionalities of under-determination that, although marginalized, remain within the boundaries of the human, as these limits are demarcated by the light side of the colonial-modern system. Dark liminalities include positionalities constituting the dark side of colonial-modernity—nonhuman bodies over-determined in their bestiality and animality.²¹ In the following sections, light and dark liminalities will be explicated by distinguishing between disability as it applies to the white bodies of Victorian invalids such as Florence Nightingale and disability as it applies to the bestial bodies of nineteenth-century colonized subjects like Bertha Mason.

I also differentiate between two modalities of oppression by means of which light and dark liminal positionalities are formed in colonial-modern social orders: “dehumanization” and “bestialization.”²² In this sense, light liminalities formed by marginal re-positionings within the domain of the human are constructed by dehumanizing forms of oppression. For dark liminalities like

bestiality, their status as nonhuman (and the need for colonial-modern social orders to maintain this status) precludes the possibility of being subjected to dehumanizing oppression.²³ The modes of oppression whereby non-white bodies are liminally constructed as bestial or slip into the animal are more properly called processes of bestialization.

Unlike dark liminalities, available to light liminalities are resistant possibilities for re-affirming humanity that grant social traction in terms of social permissibility, public visibility, and political efficacy. This is because in their under-determination, light liminalities have the possibility of redefining themselves against the grain of colonial-modernity. To this end, I distinguish between two forms of resistance arising from liminal sites within colonial-modernity: “humanizing” resistance and “decolonial” resistance.²⁴ Arising from liminal colonial-modern positionalities, humanizing resistance challenges social arrangements or instances of dehumanization (e.g., disability stigma or patriarchal gender norms) for the sake of social reorganization. This form of resistance fails, however, to recognize or question its commitment to the colonial-modern human-nonhuman difference as the horizon structuring the possibilities for social mobility and situating the ends of resistance. The social traction afforded to forms of humanizing resistance within colonial-modern socialities, as means of conferring recognition on forms of resistance that are complicit in the reproduction of the human-nonhuman difference, betrays this implicit colonial commitment.

Decolonial resistance, according to Lugones, arises when and where colonial-modern processes of subjectification and social formation are “met in the flesh over and over by oppositional responses grounded in a long history of oppositional responses and lived as sensical in alternative, resistant socialities at the colonial difference” (Lugones 2010: 748).²⁵ In this, decolonial resistance arises not just from colonial-modern liminal positionalities, but from the leeway afforded when they are inhabited as fractured loci, as cracks in the colonial-modern fiction of universal humanity (see Rivera 2021).²⁶ Decolonial resistance is thus distinguished from humanizing forms of resistance in that from within colonial-modernity (and empowered by the awareness of its illusory nature), it looks beyond the human-nonhuman horizon in search of new possibilities of being. It does not aim to challenge particular facets of society for the sake of social reorganization or progress, nor does it buy into the colonial-modern project of humanization.²⁷

To talk about decolonial resistance as a modality of resistance not over-determined by a commitment to the colonial-modern system of power, Lugones introduces the term “active subjectivity.” Active subjectivity refuses to anchor agency in the modern, colonial concept of the subject, and in this way, captures the minimal sense of agency found in lived, resistant, liminal inhabitations (Lugones 2010: 746).²⁸ Informed by alternative community relations and social logics, the decolonial resistance of active subjectivities enacts a lived transformation of social reality and creates new possibilities of being (Lugones 2010: 753).

Unlike humanizing resistance and the social-political visibility afforded to it, decolonial resistance cannot be located within the public spectrum of social-political (i.e., “human”) life. As Lugones puts it, “legitimacy, authority, voice, sense, and visibility are denied to resistant subjectivity” (Lugones 2010: 746). I differentiate, then, between humanizing and decolonial modalities of resistance in terms of social (im)permissibility, public (in)visibility, and political (in)efficacy, and in terms of commitments, or lack thereof, to social-political mobility and reorganization (Rivera 2021: 5–6).

That white bodies diagnosed as “disabled” do not slip from the human as a consequence of experiencing dehumanizing oppression can therefore be understood in terms of their continued light liminal status. Even when deemed “incurable,” and despite marginalization, they remain human bodies with access to alternative possibilities for reproducing humanity that lie beyond “ability.” These are ways in which the disabled body can redemptively participate in the curative model of the ability system and find social purchase; but these possibilities remain firmly embedded within the colonial-

modern ability system.²⁹ Moreover, under-determined disabled bodies marginalized by the ability system can also *resist* this system by appealing to other dominant markers of the human as these are co-constituted by the ability system. In this sense, available to the disabled are possibilities for inhabiting their light liminal positionalities in humanizing modes of resistance, which, unwittingly, participate in the enforcement of the colonial-modern ability system.

3 Humanizing Resistance and the Case of the Victorian Invalid

In my view, Victorian invalidism and secondary interpretations of this cultural phenomenon show more clearly the explanatory power of the coloniality of ability to unpack dehumanizing modalities of oppression and humanizing resistances operative within a colonial-modern ability system. To this end, I look to the Victorian invalid as a light liminal positionality of disability constructed by the dehumanizing oppressions of the nineteenth-century ability system.³⁰

According to Maria Frawley, the liminality of the Victorian invalid's body is constituted through the diagnosis of "long-suffering," which in part constructs disability and chronic illness as "an incapacity for exertion (and hence work)" (Frawley 2004: 5 and 41). The diagnosis of long-suffering also signals medicine's failure to ensure recovery. In this way, the invalid's body transgresses the authoritative sphere of medical understanding and competency and comes to be situated through dehumanizing oppression at the border of medical and social intelligibility (Frawley 2004: 5–6).

Frawley characterizes the liminality of the invalid's body in terms of a crucial power: "the ability to unsettle, the capacity to be indeterminate" (Frawley 2004: 6). With this, Frawley acknowledges the under-determination that characterizes light liminal positionalities and their possibilities for resistance. In the under-determined liminal positionality of invalidism, Frawley also grounds the possibility of resisting "nineteenth-century master narratives concerning health, medicine, progress, and mobility" (Frawley 2004: 3–4).³¹

From the perspective of the coloniality of ability, I also locate in white, bourgeois, women invalids the possibility of resisting nineteenth-century social arrangements of ability. To this end, Sheila Rothman explains that "invalids were allowed to modify, or in the extreme case, to avoid the obligation to earn an income or to fulfill the duties of wife and mother" (Rothman 1994: 22).³² I gather, then, that despite experiencing dehumanizing marginalization, inhabitation of the light positionality of invalidism can free Victorian bourgeois women from the construction of ability as the reproduction of kin and afford to them the possibility of laboring in other gendered forms.³³

But this resistance comes by way of alignment with other dominant determinants of the human as these are constructed by the ability system. I see this most clearly in the resistance of publicly visible, white, bourgeois, women who engaged, from the positionality of invalidism, in nineteenth-century social-political debates about women's labor.³⁴ For example, Florence Nightingale's "invalidism permitted the inversion of the sentence imposed by her gender and class by permitting her to sequester and immobilize herself while laboring prodigiously on projects of both national and imperial importance" (Bailin 1994: 19).³⁵ Moreover, historians and nineteenth-century commentators cite Harriet Martineau, another public Victorian-era invalid figure, as "the spur to interest and activism over women's access to work" (Young 2019: 16).³⁶

In terms of invalid figures like Nightingale, their public, political presence are both acts of resistance that positively epitomize the "real" Strong-Minded Woman and instances in which social traction is afforded (Young: 2019: 36).³⁷ Mary Poovey explains:

For Harriet Martineau and others, Florence Nightingale planted a flag upon a new territory, a ‘woman’s battle-field,’ that others could now defend. As these women read her, Florence Nightingale gave the lie to the arguments about women’s natural limitations; she proved beyond a doubt that women could work in the public sphere. (Poovey 1988: 198)³⁸

Hence, while Nightingale and others resist the ability system by rejecting the construction of white, bourgeois women’s ability, it is also *to* the ability system’s construction of white male ability that they appeal as public intellectual figures and Strong-Minded Women.

Yet, the social traction afforded to publicly visible and politically efficacious white, bourgeois women invalids was not unique to Nightingale and Martineau. Jane Wood points to this phenomenon as the social “permissibility” of the invalid. She writes: “Further twists of logic serve to sanction *the sick body as a permissible sign of female selfhood*, inasmuch as infirmity accords with the constructions of woman’s natural weakness and vulnerability” (Wood 2001: 31, my emphasis).³⁹ Wood understands the social permissibility of the invalid body in terms of its simultaneous unsettling and appealing to nineteenth-century sex and gender norms.

The coloniality of ability suggests, however, that the social traction of the resistant invalid body comes also from its complicity in the enforcement of the colonial-modern human-nonhuman difference proposed by Lugones. I understand the Victorian invalid’s resistance, then, as a form of humanizing resistance. In this, alignment with the human-nonhuman difference is shown to be possible even when aspects of colonial-modern social formations are resisted for the sake of social liberation; for despite contesting the (dis)ability arrangements of the nineteenth-century ability system, the humanizing resistance of Victorian invalid women does not let go of a “willing toward being human.”

4 Decolonial Resistance and Bertha Mason

The case of the Victorian invalid cannot shed light on dark liminalities and decolonial resistance as these relate to the nineteenth-century ability system’s construction of bestiality. To this end, I look to Bertha Mason of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.⁴⁰ In Brontë’s 1847 novel, Bertha Mason is the West-Indian-born, Creole wife of Rochester and “madwoman in the attic.” Mason, however, is given no (human) voice of her own.⁴¹ She remains largely hidden throughout, appearing mainly under the cover of night, and when seen, is distortedly cast.⁴² As the dark side of the human plot, Mason is silent, invisible, and inefficacious.⁴³

In my decolonial interpretation, Brontë’s depiction of Mason as inhuman and monstrous arises because as a non-white, colonized subject, Mason is already situated as nonhuman, positioned as the bestial border between the human and nonhuman animal. (see Nygren 2016 and Cox 2017).⁴⁴ I locate in my interpretation of Mason three main points: the ability system’s distorted and grotesquely sexualized framing of ungendered, non-white bipedal bodies; the ability system’s denial of the *ego cogito* and non-white rationality; and the empty application of “disability” to bestial bodies as a bestializing form of oppression whereby the liminal status of these bodies slips to animal status.

Mason’s body is denied the capacity to reproduce kin by being sexualized as both hyper-masculine and seductive-feminine: like enslaved women, she is “characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor” (Lugones 2008: 13). She is at one point described by Rochester as “tall, dark, and majestic” (Brontë 2016: 273), and at another by Jane Eyre as “a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was”

(Brontë 2016: 263). In her distortedly sexualized body, Rochester also locates the source of Mason's madness: "the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad—her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity," by which it is implied that Mason contracted syphilis through sexually depraved behavior (Brontë 2016: 275; original emphasis).

The characterization of Mason as "robust in frame" is accompanied by denials of her rational capacity, which describe her as "infirm in mind" (Brontë 2016: 275). To this end, Rochester depicts Mason as possessing a "pigmy intellect." He claims to have found "her nature wholly alien to mine; her tastes obnoxious to me; *her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger*" (Brontë 2016: 274; my emphasis).

From the perspective of the ability system I have developed, as a colonized female body, Mason is viewed only in terms of her exclusion from the categories of (dis)ability—an exclusion which reduces her to the category of bestial and situates her primarily in terms of the embodied capacity to reproduce property, as well as the capacities to perform physical labor and to be consumed.⁴⁵ In this, Mason is constructed as "not-woman-as-not-able-bodied." However, the bestial reduction by which Mason is articulated as nonhuman does not fully constitute her as "mad." This involves a further slippage in Mason's dark liminal status.

This slip is brought about by Mason's failure to perform the primary task assigned to her by the ability system: the reproduction of human property relations. Rochester explains: "I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household" because of Mason's "violent and unreasonable temper," "her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders," and her vices which "sprang up fast and rank" (Brontë 2016: 274). Mason not only fails to reproduce Rochester's property because of the disruption she causes to household operations; I see this also in her failure to produce for Rochester the comfort he felt he was owed and in her refusal to passively exist as "Mrs. Rochester."

These failures are not dissimilar to the disruptions of gender norms which in part constitute diagnoses of Victorian middle-class women as "invalid" and which characterize their resistant potential (see Frawley 2004 and Wood 2001).⁴⁶ Yet Mason, in her violation of normative expectations as these are constructed by the ability system, is not diagnosed as an invalid. She is diagnosed as mad. In this way, Mason's normative non-compliance is situated outside the human register of (dis)ability.

This is supported by Alexandra Nygren's observation that "in the nineteenth century, relatively little was known or understood about mental illness, and those who suffered from it were often placed in institutions, yet Bertha is not even treated this well. As both disabled and a colonial subject, she is locked up in the attic of her husband" (Nygren 2016: 118).⁴⁷ In the bestial reduction to animal, Mason slips further into the cracks of coloniality-modernity. Both characters in the novel and Brontë no longer play at inclusion; rather, their treatment of Mason in light of the diagnosis of "madness" confirms her fundamental nonhuman status, her essential consumability, and her prior exclusion from the social-political sphere of human life.

Mason's diagnosis and experience should thus not be taken to represent a regressive stance on madness as this applied to bodies *in general*, in which madness is seen abstractly as "dangerous, uncontrollable, animalistic, with the emphasis placed on confinement rather than treatment" (Cox 2017: 246). Rather, Mason's case represents a specific stance on madness as this relates to non-compliant, bestial bodies within the modern-colonial ability system—bodies whose nonhuman status are disclosed in the bestial reduction to the animal brought about by empty diagnoses of disability. Mason's experience reveals, then, a fate confronting bestial bodies failing to reproduce human property relations within colonial-modern social formations.⁴⁸

The emptiness of Mason's disability and her entrapment within the nonhuman can be seen even more clearly in the impossibility of her being cured. As "mad," Mason's "disability" is understood in reference to her mind. Yet, as a bestial body, it is precisely a mind, an *ego cogito*, that the ability system

denies Mason from the outset. Hence, in the diagnosis of madness, Mason is excluded from the possibility of recovery or cure. Furthermore, because the *ego cogito* is essential to the light forms of ability which establish the trajectory of the ability system's curative model, Mason can also be seen as excluded, prior to diagnosis, from the possibility of a cure in reference to physical disability.

Finally, Mason's bestial re-situation as consumable animal is made evident in the way her physical description changes throughout the novel. Prior to her diagnosis of madness, Rochester describes Mason as sexually alluring and "dazzling" (Brontë 2016: 273). As her madness becomes apparent to Rochester, Mason becomes sexually "gross, impure, and depraved" (Brontë 2016: 275). Following the diagnosis, she is cast in increasingly monstrous, ungendered, and animalistic terms:

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sign, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face... [with] a fierce cry... the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet. (Brontë 2016: 262–3)

Yet, it is *here*—in the bestializing oppression that reduces Mason to animal—that I locate an opening for decolonial resistance as Lugones characterizes it. Mason's liminal locus now lays bare the human-nonhuman difference, revealing the imaginative fictions of the ability system. The colonial-modern promise of her inclusion in a universal humanity is clearly shown to be false. In this, Mason expresses a departure from the horizon of coloniality-modernity through inhabitations of embodiment and imprisonment in modes of being that, from the dominant perspective, appear as mad, monstrous, and animalistic.

Looking to Mason as inhabiting a bestial liminal locus, I interpret her as engaged in a form of decolonial resistance, which I earlier characterized as a resistance that, rather than seeking social liberation or political efficacy, destabilizes the social hold of the human-nonhuman difference. I read her as inhabiting a dark liminal positionality constituted by social conditions of the Victorian nineteenth-century, and by the coloniality of ability and gender, in ways not oriented by colonial-modern horizons. She neither rebels antagonistically against colonialism, patriarchy, or ableism, nor is a doomed casualty of these forces. She is not concerned with the need to align with the human or with the registers of (dis)ability from which she is excluded.

In this, I do not aim to humanize Mason, to render her madness intelligible or rational, or to move her from the margins to the center of the plot. I do not look to give an account of Mason's resistance as efficacious. I simply aim to "faithfully witness" Mason, to be open to the possibility that she could have been guided by horizon(s) radically other than my own or that of the colonial-modern ability system, in which anticolonial resistance appears as a redeeming or restorative project of socialization and humanization (Lugones 2003: 7).⁴⁹

I think, then, of Mason as beyond the colonially forged human-nonhuman distinction. I imagine that she awakens "in her embodied self a double feeling/consciousness of the permeable body," and moves to "discover, explore, appreciate, engage her permeable body in reciprocity, in an unstable, dynamic balancing" (Lugones and Ortega 2019: 277).⁵⁰ Playing with the permeability of her body, with the ways it eludes the social violence of categories of ability and gender, I envision her staring into the fireplace seeking guidance from the flames. Perhaps she learns from them to inhabit the space around her as flickering, licking, spitting, and curling, a learning that is invisible to those around her.

Rather than desperate or irrational, when Mason sets fire to Thornfield I see her acts of arson as instances of what Vallega calls “body-ing”:

A thinking that engages the active site in which meanings and identities are renegotiated, not theoretically at a distance, but in getting into, inhabiting the broken locus of enunciation, that is, in thinking in/with the differencing movements, encounters, dialogues, silences, misrepresentations, fractures and transformations operative in processes of configuring, gathering, and letting go of identities. (Vallega 2020: 68)⁵¹

I imagine her imprisoned and bestialized body *becoming* flame—I follow her as she spreads along the walls, inhabiting her “broken locus of enunciation,” smoking, blazing, and breathing. With each of the tips of her tongues, Mason envelops Thornfield, neither human, nor beast, nor animal.⁵² Hers is a resistance that cannot be denied, romanticized, or rendered socially intelligible.

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- 1 In a decolonial feminist account of disability, Marcela Beatriz Ferrari (“Decolonial Feminisms and Disability: Towards a Conceptualization of the Coloniality of Ability,” *Nómadas* n. 52, a. 7 (Spring 2020): 115–131) utilizes the coloniality of power, coloniality of gender, and racialization to elaborate the concept of the “coloniality of ability.” Unlike Ferrari, I depart from the ability/disability dichotomy and attend to the ways in which (dis)ability are semantically empty categories in reference to the colonized and enslaved. For an attempt to bring together decolonial theory and disability studies in application, see Thomas P. Dirth and Glenn A. Adams, “Decolonial Theory and Disability Studies: On the Modernity/Coloniality of Ability,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2019): 260–89.
 - 2 I am influenced by Alison Kafer’s “political/relational” model of disability (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 6–9) but seek to develop this further through a decolonial approach.
 - 3 For more on social positionalities, identity, and visibility see Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
 - 4 In this sense, liminalities are the sites where change and transformation occur. For more on this see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
 - 5 María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4, (Fall 2010): 742–59. For more on the colonial-modern world system of power, see Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London: Routledge, 2010), 22–32 and Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jauregui, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 181–224.
 - 6 María Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise* 2, (Spring 2008): 1–17.
 - 7 I borrow “ungendered” from Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81.
 - 8 A limitation of this account of the coloniality of ability comes from the variability of contexts and experiences of oppression across the global colonial-modern world system. While appropriate attention to these distinctions cannot be paid in this paper, the differences between the ability system as it

- pertains to, for example, the colonization of the Americas and slavery and displacement in the United States and Africa, should be considered as the coloniality of ability undergoes further development.
- ⁹ This is suggested by the “coloniality of reason”—the dominant, western articulation of rationality delimited by Omar Rivera in “Reading Alejandro Vallega Toward a Decolonial Aesthetics,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (2017): 162–73. With this, Rivera develops Alejandro Vallega’s account of the epistemic placement of colonial-modern subjects, found in *Latin American Philosophy: From Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 102–3.
- ¹⁰ Here I draw from Spillers’ distinction between the reproduction of kin and the reproduction of property relations (Spillers 1987: 74–80). In this sense, both the bipedal body and a lesser form of rationality are necessary components of white female ability as able-bodiedness, for the reproduction of kin and humanity requires not just the biological reproduction of offspring, but also “mothering”—the parental function whereby colonial-modern culture and ideology are reproduced through specific forms of child rearing, a process which does not live up to the abstract rationality of the *ego cogito* yet still requires a minimal rational capacity.
- ¹¹ For more, see Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 1–44. See also Spillers (1987: 69–73).
- ¹² In recognizing the delimitation of nonhuman animals as fundamental to racial oppression, I follow Jackson, Claire Jean Kim, “Murder and Mattering in Harambe’s House,” *Politics and Animals*, vol. 3 (2017): 1–15, and Aph Ko, *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out* (Brooklyn, NY.: Lantern Books, 2019). With this, my intention is to push Lugones’ account of the human-nonhuman difference and the reduction of the colonized to animality further by attending to the zoological dimension of coloniality-modernity (Lugones 2008: 13). This allows me to differentiate between bodies constructed as nonhuman and nonwhite, and bodies constructed as nonhuman and animal.
- ¹³ In this way, I understand the ability system as also oriented by the deep labor exploitation of the colonized whereby they are “used as throwaway labor, forced to work till death” (quoted in Lugones 2008: 16).
- ¹⁴ I follow Ko in understanding consumability broadly and seeing it as “a marker of zoological oppression” (Ko 2019: 71). For more, see Vincent Woodard, *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism within US Slave Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) and James W. Perkins, “Reversing the Gaze: Constructing European Race Discourse as Modern Witchcraft Practice,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 3 (2004): 603–29.
- ¹⁵ This same process does not occur in relation to animal bodies because, as defined by the double-denial of a bi-pedal bodily form and rationality, they are over-determined by the consumability of their hyper-visible bodies. This is to say, animal bodies lack the “spectral” presence which, for Lugones, characterizes the liminal positionality of colonized bodies and which allows colonized bodies to be used by the light side as substratum for the construction of humanity through the projection of gender. I draw here from Lugones’ characterization of the oppressed as “de-souled specters of the human” (Lugones 2010: 752–3) and Mariana Ortega’s “Spectral Perception and Ghostly Subjectivity at the Colonial Gender/Race/Sex Nexus,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, (2019): 401–9.
- ¹⁶ I understand the ability system’s operations akin to Ko’s “zoological witchcraft” (Ko 2019: 73).
- ¹⁷ For Lugones, a two-fold process of generation and obfuscation characterizes the global system of coloniality-modernity. In concrete acts of colonization and enslavement, concepts like gender and (dis)ability are generated, in part, through superimposition onto the colonized and enslaved. In this way, the truth and meaning of colonial concepts are grounded in the capacity to, through projection onto the colonized and enslaved, impose oppressive conditions of exclusion, justify colonial violence, and reify the human-nonhuman difference. In the unfolding of coloniality-modernity, such concepts then become untethered from their colonial origins and re-deployed within “modern” social formations as if they meaningfully applied to all members of a “universal humanity.” This process of obfuscation covers over the violent, colonial origins of modern concepts and socialities. It also conceals

- the ways in which modern social orders continue to be organized around the human-nonhuman difference and hence continue to perpetuate colonial conditions of oppression and exclusion. Indeed, for Lugones, “this denial *is* coloniality” (Lugones 2010: 749; my emphasis).
- 18 Here, I think not only of Ko’s elaboration of zoological witchcraft (Ko 2019), but also of Jackson’s use of the term “plasticity” (Jackson 2020: 11). I also think of Spillers’ account of intimate alignment between motherhood and female gendering/ungendering within the context of US slavery (Spillers 1987: 78).
- 19 While “disabled” can be misapplied to bestial bodies, both it and “ability” are socially inapplicable to animal bodies.
- 20 Goodell also includes this 1838 advertisement: “‘To planters and others.—Wanted, fifty Negroes, any person, having sick Negroes, *considered incurable by their respective physicians*, and wishing to *dispose* of them, Dr. S. will pay cash for Negroes affected with scrofula, or king’s evil, confirmed hypochondriasm, apoplexy, diseases of the liver, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, etc. The highest cash price will be paid, on application as above.’ at No. 110 Church Street, Charleston.” From the *Charleston Mercury* for October 12, 1838 (quoted in Spillers 1987: 87; my emphasis).
- 21 For a helpful discussion of Jean Paul Sartre and Franz Fanon on the over-determination of the oppressed, see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 131–49.
- 22 With the term “bestialization,” I acknowledge being influenced by Jackson’s account of “bestialized humanization” and her claim that “blackness is not so much *derived* from a discourse on nonhuman animals—rather the discourse on ‘the animal’ is formed through enslavement and the colonial encounter encompassing both human and nonhuman forms of life” (Jackson 2020: 23). However, I note my departure from Jackson and sustained agreement with Lugones in that I continue to understand non-white bodies as excluded from the domain of the human (Lugones 2008 and 2010). See also Ko (2019: 73). I remain with Lugones on maintaining the colonized’s exclusion from humanity because this allows me to account for the liminal slippage experienced by colonial-modern subjects racialized as bestial when they are fictitiously recognized as human through the empty application of light categorizations such as disability (it also accounts for the absence of this slippage for marginalized white bodies). This phenomenon I see Jackson acknowledging when she writes that for Black peoples, “being recognized as human offers no reprieve from ontologizing dominance and violence” (Jackson 2020: 20). But Jackson is concerned that critiques which focus on “denied humanity” maintain a commitment to the humanization of blackened people and therefore overlook “alternative conceptions of being and the nonhuman that have been produced by blackened people” (Jackson 2020: 3). However, in her desire to locate alternative conceptions of being generated by oppressed peoples, in particular through their literary and aesthetic practices, I see Jackson coming close to Lugones’ theorization of decolonial resistance (especially given Lugones’ later turn to decolonial aesthetics). This is to say, I see both thinkers attending to alternative possibilities for existence that arise from ways of living and aesthetic practices which do not buy into the human-nonhuman framework. However, Lugones demonstrates the possibility of attending to the nonhuman status of the colonized without seeking to humanize them. In this sense, her coloniality of gender shows that critiques of colonial-modern forms of gendered oppression need not result in calls to humanize the colonized. Rather, a decolonial theorization of oppression can open into theorization of decolonial resistance precisely by bringing into view the continued life of the human-nonhuman difference, and the colonial-modern dictates and liminalities it gives rise to. By understanding the human-nonhuman difference as what oppressed peoples and communities “resist” when they explore alternative, embodied inhabitations of their dark fractured loci—when they learn to think and live in ways not oriented by the human-nonhuman horizon—a decolonial critique of oppression gives way to a decolonial search for resistance.

- 23 As Lugones notes in relation to gender, in order to keep the light positionalities of ability and disability meaningful in their human uses, the human-nonhuman difference, as constitutive of colonial-modern social formations, must persist (Lugones 2010: 744). Bestial and animal bodies must, then, continue to constitute the dark side of the human-nonhuman difference. From the perspective of the coloniality of ability, the goal of colonization is not to recognize bestial or animal bodies within the (dis)ability register and its curative model, but rather, to keep these bodies thoroughly reduced to nonhuman consumability.
- 24 While these modes of resistance follow from the distinction between light and dark liminalities, they can each arise from either form of liminality.
- 25 For more on the colonial difference, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49–88.
- 26 For more on leeway and decolonial resistance, see Omar Rivera, *Andean Aesthetics and Anticolonial Resistance: A Cosmology of Unsociable Bodies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 4–25.
- 27 I see an instance of Lugones’ notion of “curdling” (*Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 133)—a realization of against-the-grain creativity and an articulation of within-structure-inarticulate powers—and an opening for decolonial resistance in Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” Specifically, I see this in Spillers’ turns to the “law of the Mother,” which for her characterizes the situation of the African American community (Spillers 1987: 79–80). While this is a consequence of the misnaming of the “power of the female” enacted as a means of perpetuating racial oppression and enslavement, Spiller resists critiquing this situation by viewing it as a “fundamental degradation,” for this “supposes descent and identity through the female line as comparable to a brute animal” (Spillers 1987: 80). In other words, Spiller rejects this because it would be to accept the “superiority” of patriarchy and, I would add, to accept the inferiorization of the “animal.” Refusing to approach the situation in terms of a condemnation, Spiller instead advocates for “claiming the monstrosity,” for unearthing the latent female power within the African American community.
- 28 For more on active subjectivity, see Lugones (2003: 207–37).
- 29 For more on the curative model, see Kafer (2004: 27–28).
- 30 For more on invalidism in relation to the socially determinative factors of class, nationality, and religion, see Maria Frawley’s *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For more on invalidism in relation to sex and gender, see Jane Wood’s *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 31 Jane Wood understands the resistance of the invalid in terms of challenging, through illness, the essentializing assumptions about women’s nature dominating nineteenth century medical and social discourse (Wood 2001: 26).
- 32 Sheila Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
- 33 Harriet Martineau’s brother-in-law’s public attempts to discredit her come to mind as examples of the dehumanizing oppression experienced by Victorian invalid figures. For more on this, see Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sick-Room*, ed. Maria Frawley, (New York: Broadview, 2003), 11–28 and 187–202.
- 34 In *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (McGill-Queens’s University Press, 2019), Arlene Young does not acknowledge invalidism as a mechanism “used by advocates of women’s work to change cultural attitudes” toward Victorian-era gender and labor norms (Young 2019: 7). I, however, situate invalidism within this matrix and recognize its role in securing new or renewed areas of work for middle-class women (such as the hospital nurse and the typewriter) (Young 2019: 4–5).
- 35 Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

- 36 Specifically referenced is Martineau's 1859 article in the *Edinburgh Review*, "Female Industry."
- 37 In response to the use of "strong-minded woman" as a pejorative term, in 1863, George Whyte-Melville invoked "that most powerful icon of womanly caring and devotion to duty, Florence Nightingale, as the epitome of the Strong-Minded-Woman." Whyte-Melville argues "strength of mind, far from being a drawback to her other attractions, is a most desirable quality in a woman. The real strong-minded-woman is patient, though right-thinking; forgiving, though clear-sighted; judicious in advice, entreaty, and even reproof" (quoted in Young 2019: 36). Young notes that "Florence Nightingale was, of course, in reality not the gentle Lady with the Lamp revered in the public imagination, but a determined sanitary reformer and hard-headed administrator—even more strong-minded than Whyte-Melville acknowledges" (Young 2019: 179).
- 38 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 39 Such permissibility can also be found in Florence Nightingale's self-description: "I am an incurable invalid, entirely a prisoner of my own room" (except during a periodical migration) and overwhelmed with business;" a characterization which, as Frawley notes, suggests no conflict between Nightingale's status as an invalid and the possibility of her laboring as a public, political figure (from a letter to an admirer dated October 2, 1866; quoted in Frawley 2004: 1).
- 40 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: W.M. Norton and Company, Inc, 2016).
- 41 For example, Mason is heard as a "demonic laugh—low, suppressed and deep," "goblin-laughter," "gurgling and moaning" (Brontë 2016: 135) and "a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling" (Brontë 2016: 188).
- 42 Mason is seen as "the foul German spectre—the vampyre" (Brontë 2016: 255) and as having a swollen, purple and "savage face" (Brontë 2016: 254). In contrast to Jane's "clear eyes," "face," and "form," Rochester opposes Mason's "red balls," "mask," and "bulk." In this, Mason is eye-less, face-less, and form-less (Brontë 2016: 263).
- 43 Mason is also depersonalized by Brontë as an "it" (Brontë 2016: 263).
- 44 In attending to Mason through the lens of the coloniality of ability, I am influenced by Alexandra Nygren's interpretation of Mason in "Disabled and Colonized: Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*," *The Explicator* 72, no. 2 (2016): 117–9. Here, Nygren describes Mason as "a disabled female subject who is a casualty of patriarchal, colonialist, and ableist hegemony" (Nygren 2016: 117). I am also thinking of Jessica Cox's "The insane Creole: the afterlife of Bertha Mason," in *Charlotte Brontë: Legacies and afterlives*, ed. Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne, (Manchester University Press, 2017), 221–40, in which Cox notes that Mason's monstrous representation is "firmly associated with her mental state which, in turn, is variously linked to hereditary tendencies, her racial identity and sexuality" (Cox, 246–50).
- 45 Indeed, Rochester's marriage to Mason not only allowed him to take her as his property, it also afforded him a thirty thousand pound dowry (Brontë 2016: 273). Furthermore, although Mason's status as Rochester's wife may seem to locate in her the capacity for the reproduction of kin, this capacity is denied to Mason by the overall plot of *Jane Eyre*, in which she remains childless despite being wedded to Rochester until her death. The denial of Mason's capacity for the reproduction of kin is also evident in Rochester's perception of Mason as low-minded, which exposes the ability system's construction of Mason as without rationality and hence without that minimal capacity necessary for mothering.
- 46 Frawley illuminates the role that nineteenth century medical diagnosis plays in demarcating and enforcing a social domain, and hence in constructing liminal positionalities insofar as medicine configures determinants for diagnosis, treatment, and cure (Frawley 2004: 5–6). Wood elaborates on the entanglement of health and gender in the nineteenth century context, wherein normative femininity is prescribed by a diagnosis reflecting gendered traits of self-effacement and passivity as signs of a "healthy" woman (Wood 2001: 31). For Victorian women, this diagnostic chain therefore links health and cure to conformity and disease to transgression (Wood 2001: 46).

- 47 Indeed, Rochester reports that Mason's mother, who was also mad, was "shut up in a lunatic asylum," and yet he declines to do so in Mason's case (Brontë 2016: 274). Rochester admits that he considered keeping Mason at another home of his where "those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate" (Brontë 2016: 256). Here, the "healthiness" of the environment justifies Mason's imprisonment within the immediate control of Rochester, a rationale not unlike those given to justify British imperialism (see Paul Crawford, Ana Greenwood, Richard Bates, and Jonathan Memel, *Florence Nightingale at Home* (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 194). For more on Florence Nightingale's "bedroom imperialism" and "colonial crusade," see Crawford et. al. (2020: 193–200) and Poovey (1988: 191).
- 48 This interpretation of Mason's madness is concealed, however, if Mason's experience is framed in terms of the ability/disability dichotomy, an approach that many secondary interpretations take.
- 49 Lugones writes "to witness faithfully, one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. Faithful witnessing leads one away from monosensical life" (Lugones 2003: 7). With the notion of faithful witnessing, I depart from influential reinterpretations of Mason such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1966) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2020). For more on reinterpretations of Bertha Mason, see also Cox (2016).
- 50 María Lugones and Mariana Ortega, *Carnal Disruptions*, in *Speaking Face to Face: The Visionary Philosophy of María Lugones*, ed. Pedro J. DiPietro, Jennifer McWeeny, and Shireen Roshanravan, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 273–84.
- 51 Alejandro Vallega, "The Aesthetic-Cosmological Dimension of María Lugones' Decolonial Feminism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8, no. 1–2 (2020): 61–83.
- 52 Because of the ways in which active subjectivity and decolonial resistance exceed the purview of dominant registers of intelligibility, drawing from Anzaldúa's *la facultad* (Anzaldúa 1987: 60–1), Lugones turns in her development of decolonial resistance to embodiment and aisthesis—"a sensible-intelligence and intelligent sensibility that never separates reason and sensibility" (Vallega 2020: 65). This is also a turn to aesthetics, or what Lugones calls "decolonial aisthesis"—"the decolonial deconstruction of aisthesis that privileges the senses" (Lugones and Ortega 2019: 275). Thus, what was once the field of decolonial resistance is now becoming the field of decolonial aesthetics. This trajectory is currently being developed by Vallega (2020) and Rivera (2020, 2021) in particular. As a common source for those theorizing decolonial resistance and/or decolonial aesthetics, see Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (Duke University Press, 2015).