

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS:
Reading and Reflecting from *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Jane Eyre*

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Through a glass, darkly; but then face to face

- I Cor., 13:12

A narrative line drives every text. The line that twists through Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* tangles itself into knots that signify such thematic issues as desire, hatred, death, and violence. However, the line cannot be contained within Rhys's text. It weaves into Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, as well, and underscores signs that one can recognize as mirror images of the primary marks in *Wide Sargasso Sea*¹. Without Rhys's text, one would not notice these signs, and could therefore miss the subtle undertones at work in *Jane Eyre*. In this way, the novel *Jane Eyre* is a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Obviously, this defies many readers' experiences². Nonetheless, one discovers significant meaning in the points that arise in *Jane Eyre* from the direction of this reading.

In her essay, "The Sisterhood of *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette Cosway," Elizabeth R. Baer suggests, "Rhys has commandeered *Jane Eyre* as *her* sequel and in doing so, forever 'revises' our reading of that text by the creation of hers" (132). I would like to contend however, that for many readers, including myself, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has *always* existed as the sequel to Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There is no "revision," no process of looking back. Rather, I see *Jane Eyre* as a glance forward from the foundation that *Wide*

¹ I borrow the vocabulary of "lines and signs" and "marks" from J. Hillis Miller and Jacques Derrida, respectively.

² Many critics consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* to be an ethical explanation for Bertha Mason's insanity in *Jane Eyre*. In "Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Ellen G. Friedman states: "...if Rhys's novel is seen as background, Bertha's act in *Jane Eyre* becomes a willed act of desperation rather than a helpless act of lunacy... This prelude justifies Bertha's act, places it in a moral context (as well as a political context, since Bertha is West Indian and Rochester represents imperialist England)" (Friedman, 118-119).

Sargasso Sea establishes. Current critical fascination with postcolonial literature has created an environment in which the modern student not only reads the postcolonial reinterpretation of a classical text before he or she picks up the classic itself, but one in which the reader often frames his or her interpretation of the canon in a postcolonial context. Therefore, while the two novels mirror each other in many respects, I maintain that *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read as the primary text, and *Jane Eyre* as the reflecting image. In other words, certain facets of Rhys's novel signal comparable features in Brontë's work that often go unnoticed in the course of an autonomous reading.

This interpretation is not a question of the sequence of a particular reading experience of these two novels, but one of epistemology. During the late 1970s, J. Hillis Miller advocated the radically new deconstructionist theory. In his article, "Stevens's Rock and Criticism as Cure II," he suggests, "The study of literature is...a study of intertextuality... The relation between text and precursor text is devious, problematic, never a matter of direct cause and effect" (334). In *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines*, Miller discusses how it is impossible to contain the narrative line of a story within an isolated text. Meaning arises from "the curved, crossed, or knotted line": the "sign" (Miller, *Ariadne* 8). In "My Chances/ *Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies," Jacques Derrida explains why these reverberations are significant:

The paradox here is the following (I must state it in its broadest generality): to be a mark and to mark its marking effect, a mark must be capable of being *identified*, recognized as the same, being precisely *re-markable* from one context to another... the identity of a mark is also its difference and its differential relation, varying each time according to context, to the network of other marks (16).

Epistemologically, the issue of narrative line and signs is significant to the relationship between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* because, in its windings in, out, through and

around these two texts, the line reveals resonating moments between “signs” or “marks” that appear in the two. The value in reading *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of Rhys’s novel becomes clear: the narrative line in *Wide Sargasso Sea* draws attention to reverberations of Rhys’s signs in *Jane Eyre*. Thus, while both heroines see “through a glass, darkly” in their respective experiments in self-identity, it is by tracing the narrative line connecting their texts that the reader at least can observe them “face to face.” From this direct, oppositional perspective, an analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals certain issues in *Jane Eyre* that might otherwise go unnoticed. The direction of my reading affects not only the emergence of doubts regarding the success of Jane’s narration, but a suspicion that her narration *must* fail.

The principal manner in which this resonance manifests itself in the texts is through reflection. Mirroring works at three levels. First, characters seek their reflection to determine self-identity. By understanding another, they hope to know themselves. Characters like Antoinette³, Annette, and Jane wish to confirm their sense of self in the image they see in the looking glass. Sometimes, they see themselves accurately; often, however, misrecognition occurs. In this case, either a character feels challenged and upset by her own reflection, or she deludes herself into perceiving a distorted image as reality. Both of these forms of misrecognition result in the character suffering from a false sense of identity that ultimately breaks apart in rage, madness, and death.

A dynamic of desire and hatred also exists between characters in these novels. Misrecognition problematizes the issue here just as it does individuals and their self-perceptions. Often, characters identify desire as hatred, and vice versa. Other times, they

³ Antoinette is the name the main character and primary narrator of *Wide Sargasso Sea* prefers. Later in Rhys’s novel she is re-named Bertha, by which she is also known in *Jane Eyre*.

do not realize how desire and hatred frequently mirror each other – when Rochester⁴ expresses his hate for Antoinette, he does not perceive the desirous facet of his emotion. Similarly, both Antoinette and Jane believe themselves to desire Rochester, but they do not often admit to the hatred they feel for the patriarchal society he embodies. Moreover, desire and hatred involve strong overtones of death, a prominent undercurrent in both novels. At some level, hatred entails the hope for another's death. Desire implies a wish for sexual fulfillment in the form of orgasm, *le petit mort* – the little death. Death, desire, and hatred are all reflections of each other, and they are themes that one might not recognize in *Jane Eyre* if the knots in the narrative line of *Wide Sargasso Sea* did not make them explicit signs.

The second level of mirroring occurs between the characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. The most important echoing appears between Antoinette and Jane. While similarities between the two may be detected when reading from *Jane Eyre* to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (indeed, modern criticism has discussed this relationship at length), if one reads Jane as a reflection of Antoinette (Rhys's character), instead of a reflection of Bertha (Brontë's creation), several subtle issues come to light. The more obvious ways in which Jane reflects Antoinette, like her dreams or childish fits of anger, suggest that Jane may resonate Antoinette in other ways. In this fashion, a reader may discern issues in *Jane Eyre* such as sexuality, death, and violence that would not necessarily reveal themselves if Brontë's text was read alone.

The last level at which mirroring is important is between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* as reflections of each other as novels. *Jane Eyre* is traditionally considered to

⁴ In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's husband is never named. Most critics refer to him as Rochester and I will do the same.

be a *Bildungsroman* in which Jane, a feminist pioneer, grows into selfhood through her demand for equality. As a reflection of Rhys's text, however, this theme is undermined by the traces of violence and sexual dissatisfaction that *Wide Sargasso Sea* allows the reader to see in *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out, "imperialism...was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (240). As such, Spivak understands Antoinette's responsibility to

play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other [Brontë's Bertha], set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction (243).

Spivak's point here is that Jane's selfhood comes at the expense of Antoinette/ Bertha, but if one considers *Jane Eyre* to be a reflection of Rhys's text, one can extend Spivak's argument to suggest that Jane's selfhood is itself undercut through the destruction of her colonial double.

Charlotte Brontë uses the word "reflect" numerous times in her novel to describe what the Oxford English Dictionary Online defines as "To turn one's thoughts (back) *on*, to fix the mind or attention *on* or *upon* a subject; to ponder, meditate *on*." The language of this definition implies an internal occasion of mirroring. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane learns to understand herself and her needs; as a result, she achieves a distinct, if a bit simplified, sense of identity. Jean Rhys, on the other hand, externalizes this process toward selfhood. She seems to think that a narrative of self-generating identity cannot work in the context of the West Indies. Antoinette is unable to ignore the external forces around her: she must acknowledge race, gender, and social and economic status if she wants to determine her own unique place in the world. Once more *Wide Sargasso Sea* prompts the

reader to consider Jane's obsession with her inner self rather naïve. After all, isn't Jane's final equality with Rochester a result of his emasculation and her improved economic position? Jane's final ability to achieve a concrete sense of self is merely her capability to reflect internally the balance of her exterior sexual and economic situation.

In addition to a vocabulary of reflection, objects like mirrors, looking glasses, meaningful gazes, and clear pools of water pervade both Rhys's and Brontë's texts. The abundance of mirror imagery in these novels stimulates the reader to discern the three aforementioned ways in which *Jane Eyre* reflects *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's identity does not exist as a sole unit; rather, it is made up of opposing European and West Indian fragments. She is a Creole, a white woman of European descent born in the West Indies. Not only is she rejected by the English citizens and the black West Indians for being born in the West Indies to a failing slave-owning class, but, as a woman, society marginalizes her even more. In *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches To West Indian Fiction By Women*, Evelyn O'Callaghan discusses the problems of white Creole women in terms of West Indian literature:

With neither blackness, nor 'Englishness', nor economic independence to sustain her, (the white creole woman) is excluded from all groups that matter to her and subjected to cruel paradoxes: having privilege without power; sharing oppression without the solidarity and support of fellow victims... the product of two cultures, she is denied and despised by both (33-34).

Furthermore, Antoinette lacks a strong mother figure; her only female role model is Christophine, who is an unattainable model because of her blackness. Additionally, both Annette and Christophine were born in Martinique, and ostracized for their francophone origin in the Anglophone West Indies.

Antoinette herself best describes her identity struggle:

...a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you (former slaves and the British) I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all (Rhys, 61).

The West Indies has always been Antoinette's home. Christophine has had more of an influence on Antoinette's ideas and culture than her birth mother has. However, Antoinette's distinctly white European physical appearance and family background make it impossible for her to live the life of a black West Indian – the former slaves will not accept her as one of their own. Therefore, Antoinette's character is split between two distinct identities, and this split is evident in her constant awareness of her reflection⁵. At the same time, Antoinette seems to exist in a sort of liminal space “between” the black West Indians and white Europeans. Her questioning “who I am and where is my country” demonstrates Antoinette's realization that she is somewhat lacking. She has a sort of subconscious sense of her lack of identity and inability to fit in. Furthermore, she wonders, “why was I ever born at all,” a query introducing Antoinette's subliminal desire for death.

The landscape of Rhys's novel acts as one of Derrida's signs, reflecting Antoinette's emotional state. For instance, Antoinette illustrates the lushness of Coulibri's garden⁶:

⁵ In “Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys,” Helen Tiffin explains, “[The white Creole] sees herself as a gauche, immature distortion of the Europeans on the one hand, and a pale and terrified ‘deformed’ reflection of her Black compatriots on the other. As the distorted reflection of two images, neither of which is really her but which beckon and taunt her with their normality, the Rhys heroine relies on mirrors and mirror images...” (328-329). In addition to looking-glasses, some of the objects in which Antoinette seeks her reflection include other people's eyes, bathing pools, the servant Amélie, a marionette, and a painting of an English girl (“The Miller's Daughter”).

⁶ It is interesting to note that “Coulibri” is the Carib word for a type of Caribbean hummingbird. Like the hummingbird, the Coulibri estate proves to be a flitting, ephemeral vision.

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered—then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it.

All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush (Rhys, 11).

The wildness of Coulibri reflects the roving facets and clashing identities of Antoinette's personality. The heat is a sign of her passion, and when she is trapped in England, where the bitter cold correlates to her imprisonment and lost self, warmth comes to represent the energy and relative freedom of her childhood. At the same time, Antoinette seems threatened by the overwhelming sensuality of the garden: "I never went near it." She fears her own imminent sexual blossoming, and makes an early association between sexuality and death: "a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell." Because Rhys presents these themes in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one is able to perceive in *Jane Eyre* how Jane's social anxieties about her relationship with Rochester are influenced by her hidden sexual fears⁷.

As a young girl, Antoinette finds comfort from the subtle uncertainty of her identity in the definitive nature of her reflection. She is troubled by nightmares, and describes how she feels one night:

...suddenly I was awake. I saw two enormous rats, as big as cats, on the sill staring at me... But I was not frightened. That was the strange thing. I stared at them and they did not move. I could see myself in the looking-

⁷ For instance, Jane feels an instinctive need to flee when she encounters Rochester in the Thornfield orchard: "I did not like to walk at this hour alone with Mr. Rochester in the shadowy orchard" (Brontë, 212).

glass the other side of the room...” (Rhys, 49).

When confronted by native animals of her West Indian home, Antoinette seeks her reflection. In her book *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction*, Margaret Paul Joseph claims that “Fear is associated with a looking glass” (39), but I argue that fear is actually connected to the *lack* of a mirror reflection. Because Antoinette is able to see her reflection in the mirror and it confirms her identity, she is not frightened. Apparently, she feels a certain kinship with the rodents: they are both native West Indians shunned by all. Later in the night, she wakes up again; the rats are gone and the looking-glass is not commented upon. Antoinette does not verify her identity in the mirror, and it is only then that she is afraid.

Antoinette has a model for seeking her reflection as a means of defining herself: her mother attempts to do the same thing. When the family is rejected by English society, Antoinette explains what occurs in the Cosway household: “I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped – perhaps she had to every time she passed a looking glass” (Rhys, 10). Annette recognizes herself through her role in society, and seeing herself dressed in fine clothing reinforces her perception of herself as a socialite. Furthermore, Rhys’s use of the words “had to” implies that if Annette does not plan and hope she will not produce the same image in the mirror. In other words, the mirror image relates Annette’s identity to her social status as a married woman, vouched for and protected by an Englishman. Even if it is misrecognition, Annette must define herself through the society in which she moves. If the mirror were to produce an altered persona – that of the shunned “Martinique girl” (Rhys, 9) – Annette would lose her sense of self. After the burning of Coulibri, Annette stops trying to locate her reflection; her

surrender to the struggle for identity causes the society to label her insane. This ultimate escape from the search for reflection also influences Antoinette's adult life⁸.

The fracturing of Antoinette's identity first becomes explicit when she makes the acquaintance of a black West Indian girl, Tia. Together, the two young girls visit a local bathing pool. Rhys does not specifically mention Antoinette's physical reflection in these passages, but Antoinette obviously is able to see her image when she looks into the water. In these scenes, both Antoinette and Tia are naked. Rhys sets the two characters as reflections of each other. In this natural state, however, the most significant distortion in their mirroring is quite evident: the color of their skin. For the most part, Antoinette seeks her reflection in Tia, someone who shares her cultural background and is her equivalent in age and gender. Antoinette recollects, "We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river" (Rhys, 27). She desires to be like Tia in other ways, too: "fires always lit for [Tia], sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry" (13). The point is that Antoinette is paradoxically seeking her own reflection in the person whom she wishes to reflect: Antoinette wants to be able to identify herself according to someone whom she already realizes is different. Therefore, what she sees is distorted: she and Tia cannot be true reflections of each other.

Significantly, Tia also seems to be trying to define herself. At the bathing pool, Tia appropriates Antoinette's dress along with her money. Tia, obviously dissatisfied with her own identity, would like to project the image Antoinette is trying to shed.

⁸ Besides serving as a model for Antoinette, Annette and her daughter's lives mirror each other as well. Both women have marriages in which money is the main motivating factor, and both Annette and Antoinette are driven "mad" by the acts of their husbands. (Mason's blindness about the former slaves leads to Antoinette's brother's death and her mother's insanity, and Rochester's brutal rejection of Antoinette results in her own departure from reality.) Furthermore, both women are cruelly confined after they are declared "mad."

Clearly, this mirroring can never work in their relation to the outside world.

Nevertheless, Antoinette deludes herself into thinking that it does. She wears Tia's dress home and as Sue Thomas, in *The Worlding of Jean Rhys*, points out, Antoinette cannot meet the gaze of English visitors when she wears Tia's dress. The link begins to disintegrate, however, when Christophine says, "Throw away that thing. Burn it" (Rhys, 15). This break from identifying herself with Tia causes Antoinette to develop anxiety over how exactly she is supposed to determine her identity if the person to whom she feels the most close is considered a socially unacceptable acquaintance.

The connection between Antoinette and Tia is completely severed when Antoinette's home, Coulibri, burns. Tia is part of the mob that sets fire to the house, and she throws a rock at Antoinette. Rhys illustrates through the simile of a mirror how the split between the two girls manifests itself in Antoinette's loss of identity:

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been... As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass (Rhys, 27).

Antoinette struggles to retain her childhood perception of herself; she wants to identify herself as Tia does, a culturally and racially black West Indian. Tia's hatred, manifested in her throwing of the stone, mirrors her desire for Antoinette, which her tears reveal. With the direct statement that Tia is Antoinette's reflection, Rhys concedes that it is Antoinette's West Indian culture that defines her more than anything else. This inner recognition of an identity that she cannot outwardly demonstrate and the irreparable

separation of Antoinette from the only peer with whom she has developed a bond instigate Antoinette's feeling that she has lost herself when she loses Tia as her reflection.

Antoinette meets other girls when she goes to a Catholic convent for school, and although she likes them well enough, she does not form any close friendships. These girls are not like Antoinette – they do not experience the divide in their identities that she does. They are not torn between two worlds; neither are they rejected by both. Therefore, Antoinette does not even attempt to delude herself into imagining any of these girls as her reflection. Because there are no mirrors at the convent, Antoinette's identity problem is almost in stasis: she does not grow in self-understanding, but neither does she break apart further. Rhys posits the self-possession of Antoinette's schoolmates as a comparison to Antoinette's confused state: "(The de Plana sisters) sit so poised and imperturbable while (Mother St Justine) points out the excellence of Miss Hélène's coiffure, achieved without a looking glass" (Rhys, 32). The sisters are composed and confident; they have no problem with the fact that they are Creole, and without a fixed social character. They don't need a mirror to determine their identity, and Antoinette wants to be like them: "I admire them." Antoinette is aware that she is missing some part of herself, but she does not know how to repair that deficiency.

One of the nuns in the convent also uses her reflection to determine her identity. Antoinette observes, "We have no looking glass in the dormitory, once I saw the new young nun from Ireland looking at herself in a cask of water, smiling to see if her dimples were still there" (Rhys, 32-33). This nun uses her reflection to reassure herself that she is still the same person, even though she lives in a completely foreign environment. In reality, she isn't checking for dimples; she is making sure that nothing has changed in her

reflection, because if her reflection is altered she has no way of recognizing herself.

Antoinette, on the other hand, finds some semblance of peace during her time at a school without mirrors: “This convent was my refuge...” (Rhys, 33). She finds sanctuary in the convent because she can assume that she is who she thinks she is. In any case, it is impossible for her to misrecognize her reflection if she can’t see one at all. If she doesn’t know that her identity remains fractured, it can’t bother her. Antoinette’s time in the convent is a precursor to her escape into “madness:” during both periods of her life, she avoids identifying herself through another.

When Antoinette marries Rochester, not only does she lose the security of her mirrorless existence, but also she must face her burgeoning sexuality, an integral aspect of self-discovery and identification. Sexuality is an issue with which both Antoinette and Jane struggle, but *Wide Sargasso Sea* addresses the sexual self much more overtly than *Jane Eyre* does; in fact, “Miss Rhys was one of the first women novelists in England to acknowledge a woman’s desire for sexual love...” (Mellown, 124). Antoinette and Rochester’s relationship is highly eroticized. Antoinette’s second dream describes the underlying psychological significance of her sexual nature:

I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don’t wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen... We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind. ‘Here?’ He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. ‘Not here, not yet,’ he says, and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress... It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but I know they are there and I think, ‘It will be when I go up these steps. At the top.’ I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. ‘Here, here.’ (Rhys, 35-36).

Antoinette's sullied white dress is a symbol of her imminent loss of virginity. Her fear and sorrow presuppose the outcome of her marriage.

The mirroring dynamic between desire and hatred is quite evident in this dream. Antoinette is terrified of her sexual awakening, yet she follows the man because she understands that women must be sexually subservient to men. The man, whom one can presume to be a prefiguration of Rochester, conveys a more obvious mirroring of hatred and desire. He hates Antoinette, but nevertheless he desires her sexually. He entices her into the forest and "soils" her virginity as he indirectly causes the staining of her white dress. Later in the passage Antoinette dreams, "The tree sways and jerks... Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years" (Rhys, 36). Knapp interprets this dream to be a "symbolic rape" in which Antoinette expresses "her fear of the male's autonomy over the female in marriage" (Knapp, 116). I argue that despite this valid fear, Antoinette possesses a desire of her own: the swaying and jerking and the seconds as millennia suggest orgasmic release. Additionally, the expectant language of the dream ("It will be when I go up these steps," and "Here, here") demonstrates a certain anxious anticipation for sexual experience. Kenneth Ramchand associates this erotic expectancy with Antoinette's "desire for annihilation" (233).

This idea corresponds to Antoinette's feelings when Rochester does fully awaken his wife's abandoned sexuality. Antoinette answers Rochester's question about what would help her to be unafraid of her happiness:

'If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.'

'Die then! Die!' I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers' (Rhys, 55).

Rochester's way of dying is orgasm, and "Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was—more lost and drowned afterwards" (Rhys, 55). In this part of Rhys's novel, Antoinette is finally happy. She is satisfied with her concept of self, yet afraid of the unfamiliar joy and the loss she feels "afterwards". Antoinette figures dying as the absolute reclamation of identity, a theme that Rhys will return to at the end of Antoinette's narrative.

Antoinette's passion is threatening to Rochester because a proper English wife would never express sexual yearning, nor would she cause her husband to lose caution and make him "breathless and savage with desire" (Rhys, 55). Soon, Rochester grows to hate Antoinette for enticing him to abandon propriety and become as wild as she is. As Antoinette adopts Rochester's way of dying (orgasm), Rochester acquires some of his wife's fatalism: in the section of the novel he narrates, Rochester says, "Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness... I'd listen to the rain... Drown me in sleep. And soon" (56). Eventually, Rochester rejects Antoinette's naturally exotic passion and the way it consumes him.

After the pains of Antoinette's racially and socially tense upbringing, Rochester's refusal to love Antoinette for herself causes the final disintegration of Antoinette's identity. By refusing to acknowledge her uniqueness as a Creole, Rochester attempts to mold her into a "proper" Englishwoman. The most obvious indication of this is his renaming her "Bertha." Once Rochester withdraws his love for his wife and begins to cruelly ignore her, he "breaks her up." Jean Rhys explains, "[Rochester] thinks [Antoinette] is mad and...of course she goes mad" (Rhys, Letter 136). Antoinette therefore reflects Rochester's expectations.

Jean Rhys's disjointed narrative style lends meaning to Antoinette's fragmented personality. Throughout the novel, temporality and point of view shifts⁹. O'Callaghan notes, "Stylistically, this facilitates the representation of a world of fluid boundaries between self/other; living/dead; mad/sane; dream/reality" (6). One fracture in the narrative that is worthy of note is when Rochester finds the ruins of a house in the forest around Granbois. Baer discerns a fascinating correlation between this passage and the one in which Antoinette describes her first childhood dream:

Remembering Antoinette's despair at the crumbling road on page one and the burning of Coulibri, the reader wonders if Rochester has passed into a time warp; this sense is intensified when, as darkness comes on, he sees a little girl... Rochester has somehow blundered into Antoinette's first dream: here is Antoinette as a young girl, encountering the stranger in the forest (140-141).

These kinds of ruptures in the text correspond to the shattered psychological states of characters like Antoinette.

After Rochester's rejection, whatever personality remaining in Antoinette after her troubled childhood slowly fades away and she is left a "marionette." Marionettes have no agency: they do not attempt to act on their own. Rochester is the puppet master to Antoinette's marionette: he controls the strings and she passively reflects his directions. Furthermore, Rochester literally controls Antoinette's voice in the text. He is the narrator of the section in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that describes Antoinette and Rochester's married life. As a sign of his ownership of her, Rochester has appropriated

⁹ This technique is characteristic of West Indian writers who portray the fragmentation of the Creole experience in their texts. Nana Wilson-Tague observes, "The idea of representation as a natural and gradual unfolding of reality and consciousness would be limiting in a colonial context in which the exigencies of representation may require not a mimetic representation of the transcendental subject or a given preconstituted reality but the production of meaning within it" (5).

Antoinette's voice and, besides one small part during her time at Granbois, Antoinette is unable to revive her ability to speak for herself until the very end of the novel.

Eventually, Rochester's treatment drives Antoinette mad. Rather than leading to her complete destruction, however, Antoinette's madness actually liberates her from the stagnancy of her previous doll-like existence. Once again, she seeks to know herself, however disappointing the results may be. When her stepbrother Richard Mason visits her in England, Antoinette uses his eyes as a substitute for a looking-glass:

I remember now that he did not recognize me. I saw him look at me and his eyes went first to one corner and then to another, not finding what they expected. He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that? (Rhys, 109).

Richard does not recognize his stepsister. He does not provide her with the reflection she needs to see in order for her to know that she still exists as Antoinette Cosway from Coulibri, Jamaica.

In life, Antoinette cannot determine a genuine sense of herself because she is unable to see a true representation of her identity in the reflections of various forms of mirrors. Her final descent into "insanity," or the last disintegration of any knowledge of her inner self in relation to society, is caused by the complete removal of mirrors and self-delusion from her life. She must confront her splintered self:

...I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass.

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us – hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (Rhys, 107).

It is interesting that Antoinette is aware of her reliance on mirrors; otherwise she would not feel their loss. Antoinette's desire to kiss the girl in the mirror shows that she does very much want to embrace, or fully become, herself. She wants to become a girl who greatly resembles Tia. The hard, cold, misted-over glass that separates them represents the vague impenetrability Antoinette feels as a Creole to both European and West Indian society. She must circumvent the glass, the external world, to finally achieve a sense of self. Antoinette's question about what she is doing in the attic and who she is is the question with which she has been struggling all of her life. The hard, misted-over glass becomes a metaphor for society itself. She will not find her reflection there, but, recognizing it for the wall it is, Antoinette is on her way to self-discovery.

Wide Sargasso Sea's narrative line extends to Brontë's text: a similar scene occurs in *Jane Eyre*. Shortly before Jane and Rochester's wedding, Antoinette/ Bertha steals into Jane's bedroom and seizes Jane's bridal veil. Although the incident is told from Jane's perspective and the reader cannot know "Bertha's" thoughts¹⁰, Jane recounts how Bertha puts on the veil and gazes at herself in the mirror. This act echoes numerous instances in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Consequently, the reader observes that by appropriating the dress of an English bride, Antoinette appears to once again be trying to determine her own identity. Whatever she sees, however, does not soothe her anxiety, and she tears the veil off her head, rips it in two, and tramples on it. On its own, Brontë's passage exhibits the ravings of a madwoman. When read as a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however,

¹⁰ This scene demonstrates the problem of voicelessness in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë takes away the voices of Antoinette, Rochester, and Grace Poole (who all speak in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) when she makes Jane the sole narrator of her novel. Rhys's showing that "'There is always the other side, always'" (Rhys, 77) suggests that Jane's narrative lacks perspective.

one understands that Antoinette/ Bertha's rage comes from Antoinette's misrecognition of herself as Bertha, Rochester's anglicized wife.

As I have indicated, Antoinette's struggle for an identity has been illustrated in her dreams. Once her personality disappears from the surface and she becomes "mad," the reader has only Antoinette's submerged thoughts to demonstrate her inner turmoil and ultimately successful psychological liberation. In her final dream, Antoinette imagines that she escapes from Grace Poole's guard and descends from the attic to the lower floors: "...it seemed to me that someone was following me, someone was chasing me, laughing. Sometimes I looked to the right or to the left but I never looked behind me for I did not want to see that ghost of a woman who they say haunts the place" (Rhys, 111). However, Antoinette does see her: "It was then that I saw her—the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (111-112). In this scene, the mirror serves as an externalizing agent, rather than as a device for inner self-discovery. Baer interprets the significance of the woman in the "gilt frame:" "Earlier in the novel, (Antoinette) saw the real Antoinette drift out of a window and she became Bertha, the identity Rochester imposed upon her. Now, she sees the ghost...in a mirror; by exteriorizing the image imposed on her, she reclaims herself" (143). I would push this point to explain Antoinette's liberation from her reliance on mirrors, as well. When Antoinette decides to jump into the pool to join Tia again, she is at last deciding who she is. By escaping "the man who hated me" (Rochester) and his cries for "Bertha," Antoinette makes a conscious refusal to be Bertha. Antoinette finally claims her identity, and although she makes use of a mirror to do so, she does not seek its reflection; rather she exorcises it. Only through death can Antoinette escape her dependency on her

outward reflection, and actively control how her identity is determined. In the last paragraph of the novel, the narration' shift from the past tense to the present, "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do," illustrates how Antoinette is finally capable of determining her identity (Rhys, 112). She gains selfhood by refusing to look elsewhere for it, and this is her awakening.

At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette unconsciously echoes one of her worst memories from the burning of Coulibri: the death of Annette's parrot, Coco. His wings had been clipped and Antoinette watched him struggle to fly. In flames, however, he fell to his death. Antoinette, who has been imprisoned in the Thornfield attic, plummets to her own fiery grave in much the same way. Here Rhys highlights the violence that forms the backdrop for the integral moments of reflection in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette loses her alleged reflection (Tia) during a slave revolt: Coulibri burns, Antoinette's brother dies, and Antoinette herself is cut and becomes seriously ill. Antoinette loses her sense of self completely in the context of her husband's menacing language. Finally, Antoinette regains her identity when she figuratively jumps from the roof of Thornfield Hall, which she has set afire. It is significant that violence in *Wide Sargasso Sea* causes one to notice that similar circumstances occur in *Jane Eyre's* pivotal, and parallel, scenes. If one reads Brontë's novel as a story of self-understanding, one does not necessarily realize the signs of class and patriarchal structures of power that so violently prohibit and curtail Jane's movement to selfhood.

Rochester's violent denial of Antoinette's exoticism is the result of his own identity crisis as an Englishman in the West Indies. His trouble with the lush Caribbean landscape is the most significant aspect of his feelings of alienation in the West Indies.

At first, he is enticed by the island of Dominica just as he is by Antoinette: “It was a beautiful place—wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness” (Rhys, 51-52). He describes his lust for his wife in such fierce terms as well; for instance, “One afternoon the sight of a dress which she’d left lying on her bedroom floor made me breathless and savage with desire” (55). Then, the unfamiliar, oppressive heat, colors, tastes, and sounds overwhelm Rochester’s senses and his consciousness. Combined with Antoinette’s sultry manner, the warm climate makes him feel intoxicated and sexually defenseless. Like the sailors in the Sargasso Sea for which Rhys’s novel is named¹¹, and like Antoinette’s search for her reflection, Rochester feels like he is drowning: “Everything is too much... Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near” (Rhys, 41).

Much of Rochester’s apprehension is grounded in his fear of himself and his own “primitive” desires. Bettina L. Knapp proposes,

The ‘extreme green’ (Rochester) notes in the landscape may be interpreted as an awakening of primordial emotions and ‘irrational’ powers, which are anathema to him. His Victorian upbringing causes him to fear their ‘sinful’ dominion over him, but they promise a kind of madness he longs for (118).

The result of this turmoil is Rochester’s displacement of his fear and desire for the land and people onto Antoinette:

I hated the place. I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it

¹¹ “The Sargasso Sea is an oval-shaped area of the North Atlantic Sea, bordered by the Gulf Stream and encompassing the Bermuda Islands. It is characterized by weak currents, very little wind, and a free-floating mass of seaweed called Sargassum. It was mentioned by Christopher Columbus, who crossed it in 1492. The area gave rise to many legends surrounding the fate of ships that supposedly lost their way in the weeds, became entangled, and were never heard from again” (Raiskin, 1).

(103).

Because he does not understand his new home, Rochester feels a loss of masculinity and authority, and this threatens him so much that he rejects his natural desire for Antoinette and forces her to return with him to England.

In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester more explicitly transfers his disconcerting experience with the Other away from the environment and on to Antoinette/ Bertha. Landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of a network of signs between Rhys's novel and Brontë's. Therefore, one who reads *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea* can perceive how, in Brontë's text, the West Indies themselves are still the principal cause for Rochester's distress. Brontë's Rochester recounts a story somewhat parallel to Rhys's; in the beginning, for instance, Rochester is enamored of his new wife: "I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited" (Brontë, 260). Then, Rochester admits to being "physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene":

The air was like sulphur-streams—I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake—black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball—she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest (262).

Obviously, the strangeness of the environment contributes greatly to Rochester's identity problem. In Rochester's account of his marriage, he blames the "hell" (262) that is his life on Antoinette/ Bertha, the "hideous demon" (269). However, Rochester reveals his underlying problem to be the exoticism of the Caribbean when he tells Jane that he has "longed only for what suited me—for the antipode of the Creole" (265). Obviously, the problem does not lie in Antoinette herself, but in her origins. Thus, Rochester's experience in *Wide Sargasso Sea* induces the reader of *Jane Eyre* to become aware of

Brontë's Rochester's underlying insecurities about the West Indies, and to separate these anxieties from Antoinette/ Bertha's persona. Furthermore, the reader extends his or her disbelief in the validity of Rochester's narrative to question Brontë's heroine, Jane, when she does not question Rochester about the undercurrents in his story. One realizes that Jane's story of development is undermined when she fails to be suspicious of a story told by patriarchy's agent, Rochester. By naïvely accepting Rochester's narrative, she unconsciously stifles her own.

Some readers have seen Rochester's rescue attempt of Bertha at the end of *Jane Eyre* as his "vindication" as a husband. However, Rochester's final refusal to call her "Antoinette" proves that he is not trying to rescue his true wife, but his invented one. In "Edward Rochester and the margins of masculinity in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wide Sargasso Sea,'" Robert Kendrick reasons, "(Antoinette's) refusal to answer is, in a sense, the final negation of the 'authoritative' Edward Rochester. She does not attack him as she has in the past, an act that partially affirms his position by virtue of its recognizing him as a representative, if not a holder, of patriarchal authority and thus a suitable target for her rage..." Rochester loses limbs and the use of one of his eyes in the fire, an emasculation that Antoinette/ Bertha's final act helps bring about. Her accomplishment is not the only cause of Rochester's injuries, however. He rejected his wife because of the patriarchal society that raised him. This society is therefore responsible for Antoinette/ Bertha's revenge: the destruction of her prison and the symbolic emasculation of her jailer.

Although he does not often seek his image in a looking-glass, Rochester also desires reassuring reflections. Rochester rejects Antoinette because he cannot see himself, an Englishman, in her: "Lacking a proper English wife, [Rochester] cannot in

turn imagine himself as a proper English husband..." (Kendrick). When Rochester looks in Antoinette's eyes, he finds them "too large" and "disconcerting." "She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark *alien* eyes" (Rhys, 39) [emphasis mine]. In *Jane Eyre*, however, Rochester does indeed find his proper English wife/ reflection: "'My bride is her,' he said, again drawing (Jane) to him, 'because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane will you marry me?'" (Brontë, 217) [emphasis mine].

Following *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s narrative line, the mirror imagery in *Jane Eyre* also prompts the reader to see more complex themes in the characters and texts¹². The earliest example of this occurs in the first chapter of Brontë's novel, when John Reed discovers Jane reading behind the curtains. He orders her to "Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows" (Brontë, 8). Mirroring Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jane's story deals with her quest for identity. As an orphan and dependent in her aunt's home, Jane feels adrift and stifled. It is significant that her tyrannical cousin forbids her from standing in view of the mirror, from which she might attempt to gain a clear reflection of her being. When she attacks John after he throws a book at her head, Mrs. Reed orders Jane to be locked in the red-room. In this chamber, Jane is able to observe herself in a looking-glass, only to find that "All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me...had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp..." (11). Eventually, Jane becomes so frightened by the idea of Mr. Reed's ghost visiting the room that she screams and has "a species of fit" (14). As suggested by Rhys, the

¹² Additionally, one recognizes how Jane's life reflects that of Antoinette: their common experiences include the lack of a strong mother figure – both girls grow up with "surrogate" mothers from among their servants, and convent schooling that, although confining, is a passing opportunity for peace. Both

moments when characters address their selfhood are often triggered by violent events.

John's assault of Jane, like Tia's rock-throwing, effects self-reflection in Jane. She voices her perception of herself: "an uncongenial alien" (13), and recognizes her need to determine an identity for herself that is independent from her reliance on the Reed household.

Ultimately, Jane is successful in her search for self, but only so far as her contentment with her final situation can be considered success¹³. Her self-defining efforts start early, like when she stands up to Mrs. Reed. After her passionate reaction to her aunt's injustice, Jane experiences an incredible development of self: "Ere I had finished this reply my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhopd-for liberty" (Brontë, 30). The next time she really begins to doubt the development of her identity is during her engagement to Rochester. In their landmark book *The Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain that the child in Jane's dreams is a symbol of "her orphaned alter ego" – a "symptom of a dissolution of personality" that she will carry until she can fully attain "maturity, independence, [and] equality with Rochester" (358-359). Jane cannot reach this goal before she suffers more reevaluations of the self.

On the morning of Jane's intended wedding to Rochester, she looks in the mirror and cannot recognize herself: "I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (Brontë, 244). This inability to identify herself foreshadows the day's disaster and echoes the dream that Antoinette has at the convent before she marries Rochester. After the cataclysm of learning of Bertha's existence, Jane regresses back to her girlhood and questions her own identity: "...where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday?—where was her life?—where were her prospects? Jane

¹³ Critics like Eugenia C. DeLamotte doubt the success of Jane's *Bildungsroman* because the ending of *Jane Eyre* portrays woman's transcendence as the confinement of domesticity. See her *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, 226-227. (Additionally, Jane persists in referring to Rochester as "master.")

Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride—was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate” (Brontë, 252). Jane learns that if she does pledge herself to Rochester, she might very well suffer the same fate as Antoinette/ Bertha: to be pent up and unable to believe in herself or her strength of character. Despite her hopes, Jane will not be able to belong. Then, she is overcome:

...it came: in full, heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, ‘the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me’ (253).

By considering *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one can detect the parallels in Antoinette and Jane’s respective interactions with Rochester. For instance, Jane’s confrontation with Rochester after she informs him that she must leave Thornfield has clearly violent undertones when read against *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

[Rochester’s] fury was wrought to the highest: he must yield to it for a moment, whatever followed; he crossed the floor and seized my arm, and grasped my waist. He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of the furnace... (271).

Even if Jane is confident in her ultimate safety, the reader knows that Rochester will very likely find some way to eventually break Jane’s spirit¹⁴. Despite Jane’s naïveté, Rochester’s shocking deception does compel Jane to re-evaluate her own sense of self. A dream of her mother encouraging Jane to leave Thornfield stimulates Jane to depart, and after a very difficult period of wandering, she finds a home with her cousins at Marsh

¹⁴ The reader will recall that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester’s cruel rejection of his wife causes Antoinette to hate him. After this accomplishment he then forces the hate out of her eyes until there is “Nothing left but hopelessness” (Rhys, 102).

End. *Wide Sargasso Sea* shows the reader that if Jane had become as embedded in the patriarchal structures as Antoinette had, it might have been too late to leave.

Although Jane thinks that the Rivers siblings offer her a sort of salvation from her tribulations at Thornfield, one knows from the marks on this particular narrative line that Jane actually only stumbles into an alternate version of her difficulties with Rochester. While Diana and Mary Rivers offer models of female strength, their brother represents staunch patriarchy. Jane must reject St. John before she can have a truly independent self. Jane explains what life she has to refuse: "...at (St. John's) side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital..." (345). It is popular opinion that Jane's denial of St. John's authority completes her search for selfhood. Supposedly, she is released from her anger and self-pity – no longer will she reflect Bertha nor dream of the orphaned child: Gilbert and Gubar think "...she had *wakened* to her own self, her own needs" (368). While I agree that Jane becomes more self-aware by the end of Brontë's novel, I contend Jane's full awakening: I do not find evidence in *Jane Eyre* that Jane breaks out of her mirroring of Antoinette/ Bertha. First, Jane never truly expresses Bertha, Rochester's prisoner's, considerable anger¹⁵. Moreover, Jane never even realizes that she is also a reflection of Antoinette, Rochester's marginalized wife.

¹⁵ Gilbert and Gubar describe how Jane and Bertha reflect one another: "Bertha...is Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead... every one of Bertha's appearances—or, more accurately, her manifestations—has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part. Jane's feelings of 'hunger, rebellion, and rage' on the battlements, for instance, were accompanied by Bertha's 'low, slow ha! ha!' and 'eccentric murmurs.' Jane's apparently secure response to Rochester's apparently egalitarian sexual confidences was followed by Bertha's attempt to incinerate the master in his bed. Jane's unexpressed resentment at Rochester's manipulative gypsy-masquerade found expression in Bertha's terrible shriek and her even more terrible attack on Richard Mason. Jane's anxieties about her marriage,

In examining Jane's "happy" ending, the reader that sees *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of Rhys's text recognizes that Jane cannot possibly achieve sexual equality with Rochester. The overwhelming majority of Jane's language in the "Conclusion" to Brontë's novel makes this obvious:

Never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect...of the landscape before us...and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done... he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes (Brontë, 384).

Jane serves Rochester in numerous ways. There is minimal discussion of how he satisfies her needs, and although Jane bears an heir for her husband, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s charged sexuality leads the reader to notice the utter lack of language alluding to Jane's sexual fulfillment. The following question arises: is Jane doomed to be a servant? Thus, despite the development of her selfhood, I cannot agree that Jane's quest for self-identity is complete. Because Jane is unable to recognize and build a life that satiates the parts of Antoinette/ Bertha that she reflects – the sexuality of a mature woman and the anger and resentment of a dependent one – she will never escape Rochester's patriarchal authority. In fact, Jane's failure to ever regard Antoinette/ Bertha as an individual makes Jane a participating member of the patriarchal society that not only oppressed Antoinette but also will continue to oppress Jane herself.

Wide Sargasso Sea resists the sort of conclusion Jane reaches in *Jane Eyre*. In Rhys's text, one sees how "madness" can be a defense mechanism against the complete

and in particular her fears of her own alien 'robed and veiled bridal image, were objectified by the image of Bertha in a 'white and straight' dress, 'whether gown, sheet, or shroud I cannot tell.' Jane's profound desire to destroy Thornfield, the symbol of Rochester's mastery and of her own servitude, will be acted out by Bertha..." etc. (360).

breakdown of identity in the face of social oppression. Even in *Jane Eyre*, one of Jane's ways for escaping the horror of the red-room is madness, in the form of "a species of fit" (Brontë, 14). By describing Antoinette's descent into madness, *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates how Brontë's novel pushes Antoinette's Otherness – as a passionate woman and as a Creole with "the sun in her" (Rhys, 95) – outside of the narrative by making her – writing her – mad. One sees that Jane's fears and desires are not so different from Antoinette's, and, as a result, one understands that Jane's narrative is unsuccessful because she continues to repress her true identity in the face of Rochester's patriarchy.

Antoinette, on the other hand, achieves self-realization through her madness. O'Callaghan explains, "...it is possible to view the madwoman's strategy of 'opting out' of *all* role models/images/stereotypes as a refusal, if not a deconstruction, of the arbitrary boundaries of a divided patriarchal colonial society (47). Antoinette's madness allows her freedom from Rochester's authority. As a woman existing outside the restrictive limits of society, Antoinette possesses self-agency. In the end, she refuses to acknowledge Rochester's patriarchal control and *chooses* her own fate.

In the critical context of Miller's "signs" and "narrative line" and Derrida's "marks," I have shown how themes in *Wide Sargasso Sea* bring to the surface subtle, mirroring ideas in *Jane Eyre*. Reflections occur at three levels in these texts. First, individual characters seek mirrors to get a sense of their self-identity. Sometimes, they misrecognize the image they encounter – be it a distortion of themselves or an impossible doubling with another – and they begin to lose their concept of self. Cultural and social divisions and environmental unfamiliarity exacerbate this problem, as one can see in the cases of Antoinette and Rochester.

The second level of reflection at work in these novels occurs between characters. Rhys's narrative line reveals striking instances of mirroring between Antoinette and Jane. Because of the obvious ways in which Jane reflects Antoinette's life – such as their visionary dreams or marriages to Rochester – the reader starts to realize that Jane has fears and desires of her own, and that she possesses suppressed hatred for the patriarchal society in which she lives.

The last level of mirroring arises between the novels themselves. Critical interest in postcolonial literature may lead to one's initial reading of *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but the points I have made derive from something more complex than a mere "accident" of reading. This project stems from and is valuable because of the hidden aspects of *Jane Eyre* that it brings to light. My reading is important because it provides a unique, alternative perspective on Jane's "accomplishments."

By reading *Jane Eyre* as a reflection of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one realizes that, at the end of Brontë's novel, Jane remains trapped under Rochester's authority. The reader notes the hollowness of Jane's supposedly contented language at the end of her narrative: she states that her life with Rochester is happy without expressing any of her previous barely-restrained passion. Furthermore, she devotes the final two paragraphs of her story to St. John Rivers. Jane mentions that St. John has failed to marry and goes on to report his impending death. In these concluding sentences, Jane glorifies his death with powerful feeling that is conspicuously absent from the earlier passages describing her marriage. Jane refers to St. John's "incorruptible crown," stating that the news of his imminent deliverance "filled my heart with Divine joy" (Brontë, 385). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette finds the rebirth of her identity in death; similarly, a reader of Rhys

perceives Jane's own subtle conception of death as liberation by noting her elation about St. John's indisputably magnificent end. Like Antoinette, St. John seems to be quite happy with his alternative to marriage, and Jane secretly envies him. Thus, Jean Rhys's novel makes apparent the repressed parts of Jane's identity that prevent *Jane Eyre* from succeeding as a novel of the triumphant realization of self.

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