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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

JEAN RHYS AND THE TEXT AS GESTURE OF RESISTANCE

BY

CHRISTINE LOUISE STEWART

A THESIS

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Jean Rhys and the Text as Gesture of Resistance" submitted by Christine Louise Stewart in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Jean Rhys's fictions have often been criticized as too narrowly focused and even solipsistic. Only quite recently has the criticism begun to "catch up to" the work in acknowledging its broader political implications.

Although all Rhys's work embodies a consciousness shaped and dominated by the colonial perspective, that perspective is most clearly evident in the last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea, in that it focuses specifically on the colonial experience and the way in which personal relationships repeat the power dynamics at work in cultural conquest. It reveals the multiple nature of oppression and the complicity among colonizations of sex, race, and class.

This discussion of Rhys's treatment of the theme of oppression is divided into sections on identity, place, language, and intertextuality. The first chapter discusses the constitution of identity for the colonial subject, and the way its alterity is established, controlled, and promulgated through the colonial discourse and its texts. The second chapter deals with "place" as grounding for identity and the physical site of a conquest which is also emotional, psychological, and cultural. The next chapter looks at language and the way it names the world, "truth," and "reality," and organizes "knowledge"

and its application. Since all human experience is mediated through language, and since language naturalizes and legitimizes the "worlding" of the dominant group, it is the most crucial site of colonial appropriation. The last chapter focuses on the intertextual connections between Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre, connections which reveal Rhys's novel to be a subversive critique of the colonial discourse which informs Brontë's novel. It is important to acknowledge Rhys's re-entry and re-inscription of the canonical text Jane Eyre as an act of resistance by which the colonial subject is reclaimed, for as Abdul JanMohammed points out, a viable counter-discourse must include not only minority literary texts, but also "criticism that can further articulate the challenge of the texts."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most critics of Jean Rhys acknowledge that oppression, whether a matter of fictional "fact" or paranoiac perception, is a continuing thematic concern in her work. But the treatment of this aspect of Rhys's writing seems often vague or incidental: perhaps because Rhys makes no overtly political statements, the tendency until very recently has been to ignore or understate the reach of political implication in her stories and novels. It is with the understanding that all literature is, in fact, political, and plays a key role in the production of cultural representation, that I should like to make the focus of this study the representation of the theme of oppression as it is culminated in Jean Rhys's last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea, and its textual connections with Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre.

Gayatri Spivak charges that it should be impossible to read nineteenth-century British literature without recognizing that imperialism, understood as social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of their own country to the English (and, I would add, to everyone else) (Spivak 243). If we accept her warning that the disregard of this fact contributes to "the continuing success of the imperialist project," then we

must admit that there are significant and broad social implications in Rhys's re-reading and re-inscription of such a nineteenth-century novel as Jane Eyre, a re-inscription which provides the other, or the colonial subject's, side of the cultural representation of England and her "mission."

The nature of oppression is that it is usually multiple, simultaneous, and complicitous. Racism, sexism, and discrimination by class or political status are all facets of the same power dynamic. Michel Foucault, in his discussion of power, points out that though the analysis of power has traditionally focused narrowly on the problem of sovereignty, and specific power relations have been seen as projections of the sovereign's power over individuals, the realm of power is in fact a more complex domain. He posits the theory that relations of power are dispersed among and between every point of a social body (as, say, between man and woman, teacher and student, every one who knows and every one who does not) and are not simply a projection of the power of sovereign over the individual but the concrete, shifting matrix in which the sovereign's power is grounded--the enabling conditions which make its function possible. One must take into account, he cautions, "the complexity of the mechanisms at work, their specificity . . . the effects of interdependence, complementarity, and sometimes blockage,

which this diversity produces" (187-88).

Jean Rhys's personal history placed her in a position to appreciate the multiplicity of oppression: she was, of course, a woman; she was of ambiguous class, which might be described as "fallen" upper-middle; she was of ambiguous race--white, but black-identified; she was a political colonial, having been born on the British-dominated island of Dominica. Her work is usually described, often disparagingly, as autobiographical, and to a large extent, and justifiably, it is. Her novels give voice to the marginal figure, the woman who is marginal by sex, race, class, and even place. Such a character is always caught in the symbolic systems of the mainstream, and yet cut off and excluded from it. Situated always at the margin, she is a colonial in every way.

Much of the Rhys criticism has been reductive in effect, focusing on the "narrowness of range" in her work, applauding it mainly for the accuracy of its psychological depiction of the oppressed female of the demi-monde, ultimately destroyed by her dependency on men. A number of critics, such as Mary Lou Emery, Dennis Porter, Gayatri Spivak, John Hearne, and Helen Tiffin, have recognized a broader socio-economic implication in her work and its focus on displacement and colonization, but few, perhaps with the exception of Teresea O'Connor and Nancy Harrison,

have made a thoroughgoing attempt to examine the connectedness of this thematic material in the work of Jean Rhys. Dennis Porter, in his reading of Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre points out that while Rhys's last novel (Wide Sargasso Sea) does show a continuity with the first four, and indeed, in a sense both begins and ends the itinerary of the "typical" Rhys heroine, it provides a culmination in that it reveals more explicitly and extensively how the relation between the sexes, in the colonial context, is a clear demonstration of the "multiple hidden connections among class, race, and sex" (542). Certainly, the very "private" stories of Rhys's heroines have broad public implications that are most clearly manifested in Wide Sargasso Sea, dealing directly, as it does, with colonial society and the way in which, as Mary Lou Emery suggests, the power dynamics of cultural conquest are repeated in the dynamics of personal sexual relationships, with their pattern of dominance and submission (429). This study shall attempt to uncover some of "the hidden connections" in Wide Sargasso Sea through looking first at the problem of identity and the construction of "self" for the marginal figure who is so variously colonized, then at the significance of place, then at language as naturalizer and legitimizer, and finally, at aspects of inter-textuality between Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre.

From the period of modernism on, a great sense of ontological uncertainty has prevailed in the western world. The very concept of a stable, unified self, or coherent subject, has been called into question. If the achievement of a sense of identity has become problematic for everyone, it is further complicated for the so-called marginal figure about whom Rhys writes, who does not experience "self" as the system dictates. She is articulated by a system of representation that is masculinist at base, and one in which she has never been a participating subject. If she is a woman outside the dominant race and class, then the factors of race and class are as strong as that of gender in determining identity.

The whole question of the "Other" is central to this novel--the otherness of Antoinette, her sex, her place, her language. For, after all, "otherness," the process of objectification (or de-subjectification) of whatever is not "oneself," is crucial to the process of colonization. As Josette Féral in her essay "The Powers of Difference" explains so incisively, the "other" both "is" and "is not": she <u>is</u> because she is <u>not</u>. That is, her only recognition rests on an original primary oppression: she exists for the "One" only insofar as her difference sets as a standard or norm the value of that One and his system (<u>The Future of Difference</u> 88). The

other is apprehended only in terms of the self, so authentic difference cannot be accommodated.

Place, as represented through setting, is significant in Wide Sargasso Sea in that it provides a physical site, or a geography for the psychological colonialism. In concrete terms, the colonial or imperialist undertaking is an aggressive project whereby the sovereign power intrudes into the alien place, appropriates subject as object, and dictates the legal, economic, and social script. The colonizer comes to own the object and its territories and resources. The process is rationalized as social mission: the colonizer will save the colonized, protect, and "keep" her/him.

In addition to providing a physical site for the multi-faceted colonization, setting is also crucial in Wide Sargasso Sea as the medium through which Antoinette attempts to forge an identity not possible through her human relationships. Not only does she try to articulate her being through nature (which she finds "Better. Better than people") but Rochester, too, apprehends her as inextricably part of her place. He finds both the woman and place alien and Other to him, keepers of a secret, which, withheld, prevents his full possession of them. So place functions in Rhys as objective correlative for the idea of the Other, and for the concept of "worlding" (to use Gayatri Spivak's term) or one's perception of what

constitutes reality (243).

Language is crucial to the consideration of aspects of colonization because it serves as legitimizer: language of certain kinds naturalizes the dynamics of power. If we concur with Hester Eisenstein's understanding of the term discourse, that it denotes not only a particular use of language but also includes in its meaning the philosophical presuppositions that this use embodies, we must then recognize it as a primary site of power (The Future of Difference xxi). And in this case Rochester (or the man whom we call Rochester, since Rhys deliberately leaves him un-named) has the weight of the discourse of the Law, the Church, and the State on his "side" as enabling forces. Women's voice and black voice enter as subtext, which goes unheard in the mainstream of Rochester's world, but which is foregrounded in this text and its connections with Jane Eyre. Also, like place, language in this novel expresses and defines otherness.

That Wide Sargasso Sea is the strongest expression of Rhys's thematic concerns is largely attributable to the intertextuality between it and its "father" text. By attempting a re-inscription of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre in the writing of Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys imposed on herself an external framing text, enabling her to achieve a greater distance from and control of her material than she was able to in the earlier novels. But beyond the

critically acknowledged effect of the earlier text's shaping or controlling influence on Wide Sargasso Sea, there is the much more crucial effect of reciprocal informing power between the two texts. Each fills in or expands context for the other--the worlding of Jane Eyre illuminates the worlding of Antoinette Cosway. Jane Eyre provides the world of England, the sovereign state which for Antoinette can only ever be a dream, or displacement. It also provides the colonial "subject" as constituted by the "truths" which inform the whole discursive field of colonialism. And it fixes the relations between the "other" and the colonizer according to the cognitive codes of that discourse, codes presented as universally applicable. The colonial "subject," perhaps more accurately called object, is a monstrous other who is silenced and under control, and whose life is unknown. Wide Sargasso Sea provides a voice for this woman--Rhys "writes her a life" (the acknowledged motive for the novel), recovering for her name, place, and humanity. By such an intervention into the earlier text, Rhys "writes back" or sets up, in Helen Tiffin's words, a "site of resistance" to the colonial discourse, undermining its claim of universality and moral rectitude ("Rite of Reply").

Jane Eyre is specifically an appropriate colonial text to "write back" to in that it depicts the recovery of

subjecthood for a marginal female character, but one not so removed from the centre as the character Rhys makes her protagonist. Displacement is a starting condition for the heroines of both novels but they move in opposite directions from that point. Jane begins as disinherited alien, an outsider who gradually comes into her legitimacy through an empowerment deriving from her own virtue, and a weakening and chastising of her master, all within the parameters of the patriarchal system of their England. Antoinette, further removed from the centre to begin with because of race and place, experiences a movement that is the reverse of Jane's, ultimately a disinheritance of even her human status. But this opposite movement occurs without a corresponding reversal of cause, for Antoinette's loss is attributable to no corresponding lack or loss of virtue. There is finally a re-convergence of the journeys of these characters, however, for Jane's retrieval of wholeness and legitimacy has required the other woman's sacrifice or total destruction of self. That one member of an oppressed group can achieve some sense of self and autonomy only through the annihilation of the "self" of another member, one who is even more variously oppressed, is one of the strongest indictments of the power systems in the colonialism against which Wide Sargasso Sea stands as critique.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY AND "THE BODY OF STRANGENESS"

> "So between you I often wonder who I am and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all."

The concept of an individualized identity is a relatively recent one in historical terms, but even so, one which has changed rapidly, in line with rapid social change. The achievement of selfhood has traditionally been looked upon as a quest, always fraught with difficulty. But in our time, the task has come to be interpreted as one of construction rather than of search, and the difficulty, or certainly the complexity, has increased. The making of self is a collective enterprise, and the particular lived experience and idiosyncratic physical make up of an individual must always compete with expectations and aspects of identity imposed by society on the basis of class, race, gender, relative position of power, and so on. For the colonized, the challenge of this task is further complicated by their position of marginality: everyone is to some extent defined by historical, social, and racial context, but when one is denied the active role of subjecthood (even granting that that concept is itself an ideological construct), the imposition of an identity at odds with one's experience of

"self" is more drastic and extensive.

If it is our purpose to locate and examine the connections among race, class and sex in a colonial society, it is important to recognize that the dynamic operations of colonization are, like those of all systems of oppression, multiple and complex. Behind the apparent and simplified narrative of the colonization process--that is, the sovereign state intruding into another place and people for the purpose of economic exploitation--there is a complicated network of connected forces. This complex of strategic connections is aptly represented or described by Foucault's articulation of his own concept of "apparatus," which he explains as a manipulation of relations of forces steering them in a particular direction, or blocking, stabilizing, or utilizing them according to the dictates of certain "coordinates of knowledge" which, to an equal degree, both issue from it and condition it (Foucault 196). The colonial apparatus, then, is a strategy both supporting and supported by certain types of "knowledge," such as, for instance, the discourse of race. The apparatus fosters and even helps to formulate certain discursive claims, and then employs them in its own justification.

When one attempts to examine the issue of political oppression as a factor in identity formation, it quickly becomes apparent that political oppression is

strategically bound to the issue of race. The colonial apparatus is served by the ambiguity of the definition of race: in Webster's New World Dictionary, for instance, race is defined variously as "any of the major divisions of humankind according to body type and skin colour"; as "a population marked by the frequent occurrence of a particular gene"; as "any geographic, national or tribal ethnic grouping"; as "the state of belonging to a certain ethnic stock, group or the qualities, traits, etc. of belonging to such a division"; as "any group of people having the same ancestry, family, clan, lineage"; to, finally, "any group of people having the same activities, habits, ideas, etc." (197). The definitions run a spectrum from those in which race is determined by physical or biological criteria, through those in which there is a mingling of physical and cultural criteria, to those which offer a loose description based entirely on cultural traits. This confusion of definition stems from a mystification of race which is implicated in the politics of a colonial power dynamic.

There is some controversy among Rhys's critics about the question of her relationship with the black people of Dominica, a question which is important for its implications about the issue of identity. Perhaps the debate is best represented by the arguments of Thomas Staley and Teresa O'Connor. In his study of Jean Rhys,

Staley argues that although her attitude toward the blacks is complicated and not easy to categorize, there is for Rhys a racial identity with the blacks, partly based on her understanding of how the black people and women share an experience of subordination and powerlessness in her island society (45). O'Connor, in Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels, argues that there is no identification or even empathy with the blacks, but that for Rhys, her connection with them serves a symbolic function in her rebellion against her parents, particularly her mother (35).

Certainly one must agree that Rhys's attitude toward the blacks is ambivalent, but the evidence offered by O'Connor's own citing of a section of Rhys's "Black Exercise Book" suggests that the author's experience directed her to understand the political implication of racial identity, and to express frustration with the ironic arbitrariness of self defined by race. Rhys says that she tried very hard to assent to a possible nobility in her slave-owning grandfather, the estate, and the "good old days," arguing to herself that "having absolute power over people needn't make a man a brute," but the end of her thought, she says, was always "revolt, a sick revolt, and I longed to be identified once and for all with the other's side which of course was impossible. I couldn't change the colour of my skin" (O'Connor 36). For this

writer, then, the question of race and identity was a crucial one. It is partly to address that question that Rhys chooses to take Charlotte Brontë's character Bertha Rochester, whose insanity and powerlessness appear in Jane Eyre to be logically linked with her Creole origins, and "write her a life."

In order to write that life, Rhys must consider how, in the colonial discourse, identity and race are associated with power. In the world rendered by the text of Jane Eyre, the world of Britain at the height of its imperial power, the superiority of the English is unquestioned, and one's degree of "Englishness" is measured by one's status and power. So that, for instance, a disinherited orphan like Jane Eyre, an English girl, at the beginning is both described as, and feels herself to be, someone alien, or foreign: she sits apart, "like a Turk," "a heterogeneous thing," "an interloper not of [Mrs. Reed's] race," "an uncongenial alien" (Jane Eyre 9, 10, 17, 18). Because she has been left without money and without the legitimacy of a father, her political and social status are lower than a servant's, and she is virtually a slave to a "master" who is himself just a child. Even Richard Mason, who is not long removed from England, and has enough authority to "make arrangements" for his step sister, but who is Rochester's inferior in power, is described as a man exceedingly repellent to

Rochester, with "no power in that smooth-skinned face . . . no command in that blank brown eye," and "not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English" (192).

Obviously Antoinette's racial identity as biologically determined is white or Caucasian, but culturally, psychologically, and emotionally her identity is not so obvious. Much of our earliest sense of identity is derived from the reflection and the responses of those people who are closest to us in early life. Because her mother has been so demoralized, she becomes inaccessible to Antoinette, and the daughter's first and most continuous bonds are with Christophine. Also, her first and only friend among her contemporaries is the black child Tia. But though Christophine loves and protects her, she does not allow Antoinette to identify with her people--for, as she tells Rochester about Antoinette, "she is not béké like you, but she is béké, and not like us either" (Wide Sargasso Sea 128). Antoinette herself, when fleeing from Coulibri, experiences a strong urge to remain with Tia, thinking, "I will live with Tia and I will be like her." And even though Tia rejects her, she feels a strong sense of identity with the black child: "We stared at each other. . . . It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass" (38). As a Creole, Antoinette shares the biological element of race with the English, the cultural

elements with both the English and the blacks, and the political status with the blacks.

The Jamaican whites as slave owners had enjoyed a position of superiority and power over the blacks. But after Emancipation, political power of the imperial state overrides any racial power; the perception of racial identity is altered, and the lines of power at their lower levels shift. To the blacks, the former masters and their descendants, stripped of power, and often their money, become "white niggers" and "white cockroaches," and those of their own people who remain loyal are seen as "black Englishmen." Tia reflects this perception when she tells Antoinette that "real white people, they got gold money. . . . Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (21). To the English, the white colonials are imaginatively apprehended as "other," their difference (and differences) realized only to the extent that they are, en masse, "not us." Rochester at his wedding sees the Creoles in the same way that the whites at the Coulibri uprising saw the blacks--that is, as one alien presence. Antoinette reminisces that when she looked out at the angry blacks arriving to burn down the estate, she recognized no one, for "they all looked the same, it was the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming, mouth half open to shout . . ." (35). And Rochester, recounting his first impressions of the

Creole people at the wedding reception, recalls that "thin or fat they all looked alike. . . . I thought I saw the same expression on all their faces" (65).

So the white colonials are objectified and manipulated the way the blacks have always been: Mr. Mason buys Antoinette's mother, a French Creole, and tries to Anglicize her as Rochester later will Antoinette. This Anglicization is the kind of process of imitation that Homi Bhabba elaborates as a strategy of "colonial mimicry" which is motivated by "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (126). It is a taming and controlling process in which the oppressed group's imitation of the privileged subject is part of a complex strategy of reform and regulation in which the Other is appropriated. There is always a "double articulation," for it is important to remember that "to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English" (Bhabba 128). So even though under Mr. Mason's patronage Antoinette and her mother eat English food, follow British customs, and hang English pictures, and Antoinette is "glad to be like an English girl" (although she misses the taste of Christophine's cooking), she looks at her stepfather and mother and sees that "Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, [is] so without a doubt English" and her mother "so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either. . . . Never had been. Never could be" (30). Other examples of this peculiar colonial mimesis

and its doubleness abound, from the blatant and clumsy imitations of Daniel Cosway, who "lives like white people," through Baptiste's putting on and off a service mask over a "savage reproachful face" (until finally he rejects it and there is "not a trace of the polite domestic") (137), to Rochester's Anglicizing of Antoinette by attempting to change her habits, her attitudes, the names she calls things, and finally, even her own name. He is comfortable momentarily with her only at such times as when she, looking up and smiling, "might have been any pretty English girl." For most of the time he views her as "a stranger. A stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (78). When he attempts the ultimate Anglicization of changing her name to Bertha, Antoinette understands this threat to her identity: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name" (121).

And later, when Rochester has not only renamed but removed and replaced her, she reflects that "names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window . . . (147). As Bhabba points out, the "partial representation" of colonial mimicry has the effect of reformulating identity and alienating it from essence (128).

As mentioned earlier, part of the nature of what Foucault calls an apparatus is that it operates under the

assumptions of its own coordinates of knowledge, and in the colonial apparatus its own "knowledge" is privileged over others. So even though Annette and later Antoinette try very hard to translate the people and the land to their husbands, the men impose the conventional English interpretation on the other culture. Mr. Mason claims amazement at his wife and daughter's ignorance: "Live here most of your life and know nothing about the people. It's astonishing. They are children--" (30). At the same time, Antoinette longs to tell him that "out here is not at all like English people think it is" (29).

Just as Mr. Mason has concluded that the blacks are like children, and lazy (so lazy that he plans to import other commodified colonials, "coolies" from the East Indies, as replacement workers), Rochester also imposes an English interpretation on the black islanders and refuses to accept his wife's informed explanation of certain behaviours he takes to be "signs" of their characteristics. He concludes that Christophine (and by extension, all her people) is dirty because she lets her skirts drag (even though Antoinette explains that it is because of pride that she does it); he concludes that she is lazy because she "dawdles about" (and Antoinette explains that her minimal movement reflects her efficiency--every move is right); he concludes that Hilda is stupid (though Antoinette explains that she and all the

island girls are not stupid but very shy). What is even more telling of the colonial apparatus is that there is a transference of these perceived qualities of one powerless group, the blacks, to other powerless groups, such as the politically subordinate whites. Just as the English girl Jane Eyre was articulated by terms usually associated with "foreigners," and others without status, so Antoinette is categorized with other powerless groups, such as children ("not a stupid child but an obstinate one"), the insane, and, of course, the blacks (78). And, it is worth noting here, Rochester classifies both Antoinette and Christophine as insane.

As rationalization for their domination, the whites in power must separate themselves out from the whites they dominate. So by way of reinforcing their Otherness, they begin to blur the perceived racial lines and to see the Creoles as physically other from themselves as well as culturally, and somehow more similar even in that way to the blacks, whose political status they share. So in his part of the narration Rochester tells us that Antoinette has "long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (56). At another time, he observes that Antoinette looks like the black servant Amélie, and that it is not only possible but "even probable" that they are related. We know of his physical revulsion for the

blacks from when he earlier says that he neither "would nor even could" hug or kiss the black people as his wife does, and when after his sexual encounter with Amélie, he notes that "her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought" (113).

Ultimately, and with great irony, this transference of perceived "black" traits to the Creole women is taken to the extreme of an actual reversal of perceived roles, foreshadowed perhaps by Antoinette's being forced to don Tia's dirty ragged dress after Tia has run off in her friend's clean starched one. Annette, who has been the wife of a slave-owner, is put away to become the sexual slave of a man who would have been a slave himself before Emancipation. This reversal of master-slave status serves to point up the abjectness of Annette's position. In the case of Antoinette, Rochester totally rejects her, his "legitimate" wife, sexually, and takes Amélie, the black servant girl, in a sexual encounter to which he knows Antoinette is a captive audience. Again, the deliberate humiliation is double in effect, for Rochester has often and emphatically expressed his distrust of and repugnance toward the blacks. Antoinette, who had been the object of his "savage" desire, becomes the alienated cast-off, and Amélie, who had been the object of his contempt, becomes the romantic intimate.

With the confusion of race and class identity externally imposed on Antoinette, it is no wonder that she claims not to know who she is or where she belongs. When she is "dreaming the end of her dream" at Thornfield, many disparate elements of her childhood and life present themselves, including the image of "The Miller's Daughter" (the icon of the ideal English girl) and "that man" calling her English name, "Bertha! Bertha!" and the parrot persistently crying, "Qui est là? Qui est là?" Antoinette's response, a final attempt at some kind of "self"-assertion, is to again make the leap toward the beckoning figure of Tia.

In the constitution of identity, racial and class status are intricately bound with gender, but because the circumstance of gender is so preeminent a factor in this process, we will here separate it out to some extent, perhaps artificially, the better to focus on it.

In an attempt to unravel some of the dynamics of colonialism, one comes to the inevitable conclusion that an imperialist system is at base a patriarchal system. The representation of male-female relationships in Wide Sargasso Sea provides a striking elaboration of Luce Irigaray's theory that in this kind of society women are "products" to be used and exchanged by men: collectively, they and the activity of the transactions by which they are managed make up an infrastructure on which the whole

order of society depends. In Irigaray's words, "the use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organization and reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as 'subjects'" (84). The movements of the women in this novel are controlled by men in the interests of the social structure they have constructed, and the fact of gender takes priority over the facts of race and class status.

Antoinette's mother is first kept by Mr. Coseway in a kind of interracial harem, then bought and eventually banished by Mr. Mason to become the sexual slave of her black keeper; Antoinette has arrangements for her made by Mr. Mason and carried out by Richard Mason. In making his arrangements for Antoinette, Rochester, the "tall fine English gentleman," gives credibility to the words of Daniel Coseway, the "little yellow rat," over those of his wife. Christophine is bought and given as a wedding gift, and finally has arrangements for her control made between Rochester, Mr. Frazer, and the police. How is it that whatever their race or station these women are so objectified?

Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex made the now familiar statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267). From the beginning of her process of "becoming," Antoinette's acculturation directs her to the development of the kind of consciousness that has been

described as "feminine consciousness," that is, an awareness of self/woman as "other," "defined by male gaze, construct, and desire" (Keohane ix). Her early experience teaches her not only to see herself as sexually defined, but also to dread that definition and its effects. She has seen her mother as a widow reduced to a nonentity without a man, and then betrayed by the man who was to have rescued her. But, in de Beauvoir's words, the girl is "destined to the male from childhood" (643). When Antoinette, still just a young child, first regains consciousness after being wounded at Coulibri, she is reassured about her head wound that "it won't spoil you on your wedding day" (39). The image of how she should look on her wedding day is presumably that presented by the picture she admired so much as a young girl of "The Miller's Daughter," a "lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders" (39). If "becoming a woman" requires that one attempt to meet the expectations of the male gaze and desire, appearance assumes a great significance in female identity. Much of the "value" attached to the women in Rhys's novel is derived from the degree of their perceived beauty, and their anxiety about their looks is reflected in Antoinette's pathetic offer to have another dress made exactly like the one in which her husband finds her attractive. Unlike the female identity's dependence on

appearance, a man's identity is considered to be appropriately located in his power and authority. If we turn to Jane Eyre as the authoritative text of this masculinist colonial world, we learn that Rochester, a man considered ugly by most, has "so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious," that he is able to feel "complete indifference to his own external appearance," an indifference that others looking at him share (135). What a contrast between this male confidence and the anxious entrapment in appearance, especially appearance as perceived by the male, experienced by Rhys's heroines, and typified by the comment of Anna in Voyage in the Dark:

> I was so nervous about how I looked that three-quarters of me was in prison, wandering round and round in a circle. If he had said I looked all right or that I was pretty, it would have set me free. (47)

The women in Wide Sargasso Sea, like Jane Eyre, are destined to look for their identities in their mirror images.

At the convent, Antoinette learns more about what is valued in a girl who is destined for the male, and how that is symbolically represented. The models for emulation presented to the girls are the young saints who have been legitimized by their lives being written, entered into the sanctioned "text" of society. Being

committed to printed text bestows a certain authority and exemplary function on these lives. The saints who are in the book are "all very beautiful and wealthy. All were loved by rich and handsome young men" (45). The convent has, however, its own saint, a "real" saint--that is, the skeleton of a girl of fourteen buried under the altar of the chapel. About this "St. Innocenzia," her physical skeleton a relic of actual experience, nothing is known, for "she is not in the book"--no one has "written her a life." She is like a prototype of the woman whose life has been anonymous and who has been relegated to obscurity and oblivion, just as Rhys has found Bertha, the silenced female character in Jane Eyre for whom she feels compelled to "write a life."

When Mr. Mason on one visit to the convent looks Antoinette over and decides that her time has come, that she "can't be hidden away all [her] life," her instinctive response is negative. He gives the traditional colonizer's promise of security and protection as justification for his "arrangements," just as Rochester will later promise security and protection to Antoinette in persuading her to go along with the marriage arrangements. But the image that comes immediately into her mind is that of her mother's dead horse, symbolically representing complete immobility and entrapment in dependency--and "a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss,

almost choked [her]" (49).

The dawning of Antoinette's sexuality and the accompanying dread of its significance are most effectively rendered in the recurring dream text, which in its "manifest content" (to use Freud's terms) reflects with the clarity and concision of symbolic representation a deep and disturbing "latent content." The vulnerability of the convent-trained girl and her fear of the loss of sexual innocence and what it will mean are so clearly transposed into the pictographic script: the long white dress and thin white slippers the girl tries to protect as she moves falteringly into the dark forest, the hatred on the male stranger's face, the resistance of the swaying jerking tree to which she tries to cling represent concretely those feelings she has no language or authorization to express. In her discussion of dream text as a structural element in Wide Sargasso Sea, Nancy Harrison points out that the evolving dream sequence (this dream episode is the second) both shadows (that is, provides a parallel narrative) and foreshadows the course of Antoinette's life (266). Despite the great reluctance of the protagonist of the dream, there is an overwhelming sense of inevitability surrounding its event:

> 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. (50, emphasis added)

This force of inevitability is complicated and derives from a number of sources: there is the biological inevitability of Antoinette's physical sexuality; there is the inevitability of her role in the social script of this patriarchal society--she is headed and groomed for marriage; there is the inevitability prescribed by the colonial apparatus, in which she is a commodity of the colony, and arrangements have been made for her exchange; and, finally, there is the inevitability of the text in that its ending has been prescribed by the earlier text, Jane Eyre. The situation of the text here offers a paradigm of the way in which the pre-text of the colonizer's world, the dominant mainstream, directs and constrains the colonized's world, the margins.

The reader, perhaps especially the woman reader, is deeply moved by the account of Antoinette's experience of a sexual relationship with Rochester, and the profundity of the betrayal it represents. From the beginning of her consciousness Antoinette has experienced the paradox that, for a female, both her safety and danger originate from the male. While her mother is a widow, Antoinette reflects that her father and "feeling safe in bed" had been connected things, and thereafter she is promised safety by those males who will be responsible ultimately for her destruction.

Rochester promises her "peace, happiness, safety,"

and tells her repeatedly what he knows she wants to hear: "You are safe." But even as he makes this false claim, he reflects that for him, "Desire, Hatred, Life, Death come very close in the darkness" and that sometimes in sex with her she came close to dying in "her way," i.e., actual death, rather than in "his way," i.e., the "little death" of sexual orgasm (79).

In spite of her apprehension, Antoinette at first feels saved by love. There is great pathos in her vulnerability and gentle attempts to care for and protect the husband in the environment that is so strange for him. In sexual awakening she experiences the first human connection that seems fulfilling to her, and the fear of losing it is so great that she claims that she would prefer to die now: "If I could die. Now, when I am happy. . . . Say die and I will die" (77). That this opportunity for intimacy is so crucial to her is not surprising when one remembers the isolation and rejection of her childhood, and the poverty of her alternative prospects. In this she exemplifies the claim that Karen Horney, the early twentieth-century psychoanalyst, makes for the traditional importance of "love" relationships to a woman: "love has been her only recourse and for that reason she has elevated it to the rank of sole and absolute value" (as cited in Irigaray, 51).

For Rochester, as a male, sexuality is a domain

ruled by the phallus, his domain. His own sexuality is bound up with the will to power, and to him, female sensuality must be under control, and appropriate to the female ideal that is a male construct. He classifies as insane the intensity of Antoinette's sexual passion as he reflects that "she'll give herself as no sane woman would--or could. Or could . . . a lunatic" (136), and he seems to fear a loss of his own sense of self and sanity in engagement with her sexuality. For him, sexual intercourse comes to be the threat described in Irigaray's words as "the encounter with the totally other, signifying death" (New French Feminisms 100), and he cannot accept the difference of Antoinette (or her womanhood) except in total appropriation or possession, exclusive possession. When he feels that something is withheld ("she had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing"), his only recourse is to effectively erase her, the other, to forcibly empty her of any "self." It is a kind of "say die." But according to the hypocritical dictates of his English colonial "morality," he will not, he says, abandon or "forsake" her (and thereby discredit the rationalization of "social mission"); nor will he relinquish her to someone else ("she'll have no other love") for she "belongs" to him. Even as he empties her to a doll "with a doll's voice," he insists that "she's mad but mine, mine . . . my lunatic. My mad girl" (136).

For as Hélène Cixous in The Newly Born Woman says of this kind of power dynamic: "the body of strangeness must not disappear. But its strength must be tamed, it must be returned to the master" (128).

It is ironic that it seems necessary here, in an attempt to discuss the construction of a woman's identity, to speak in terms of man's identity. But of course it is necessary because so much of the female "identity" is imposed as a function of male identity, a requirement to the process of constructing male identity. For the status and power of the "one" require the affirmation provided by the presence of the "other." Susan Griffin, in "The Way of All Ideology," speaks of the other as serving the function of providing a locus for the "denied self" (Feminist Theory 276). If we look at man as representative (as its designer and purveyor) of a paternalist ideology, Griffin's explanation of the place of the other in ideology illuminates the nature of the relationship between a man such as Rochester and a woman like Antoinette:

> In this ideology the denied self, projected onto the other, embodies all that is part of the natural sensate life of the body and all of the natural emotions which so often cause one to feel out of control, even frightened of oneself. (276)

If "becoming a woman" has required that Antoinette learn to both fear and respect men, "becoming a man" has

required that Rochester learn to hide his feelings and emotions from very early childhood: "How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted" (85). At first, Rochester's sexual experience with Antoinette has made him "forget caution" and he recalls being rendered "breathless and savage with desire" (78, emphasis added). The choice of words is telling--obviously such strength of feeling or passion is, in his view, something primitive, barbaric, or insane. Because he has been taught by the fathers (there is never any mention of "mother" in his background) to deny this part of his self, it is not until he is rid of "all the mad conflicting emotions . . . and empty" that he considers himself to be again "sane" (141). Of course, he has purged himself by projecting the "insanity," his unacceptable feelings, onto the other, who thus becomes a kind of enemy who must be totally controlled, appropriated, or annihilated. For the "one," the presence of something in the "other" that resists appropriation is very frightening. Such a withholding is met by an attempt at total erasure of the other's presence, a deliberate denial, or forced absence. When Antoinette's mother has resisted all control and been banished, her daughter is told at the convent that she must forget her mother and pray for her "as though she were dead, though she is

living . . . no one spoke of her now" (46). This strange directive recalls Rochester in Jane Eyre reassuring Richard when he worries about Antoinette's imprisonment, "[Y]ou may think of her as dead and buried--or rather [you] need not think of her at all" (215).

Following these precedents, Rochester in Wide Sargasso Sea exerts his power to co-opt the last vestige of Antoinette's self, or authentic "identity," her hatred: "My hatred is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing" (140). With her hate goes her beauty, which leaves her "a ghost in the grey daylight" (140).

By Part Three in the novel, when Antoinette is imprisoned at Thornfield, she has little sense of self left. This section begins with Grace Poole speaking, filling in for the reader what has happened. Then Antoinette becomes the narrator, speaking for the first time in the present tense, which gives a sense of immediacy and rupture with the past. Because there is no looking glass, she tells us, she does not know what she is like now, and she asks, "What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (147).

Antoinette's flaming red dress (like the fire-red signature and personal statistics she emblazons on her embroidery at the convent) is symbolic of her own sense of identity, derived from actual life experience: "something

you can touch and hold like my red dress," she tells us--"that has a meaning" (151). The only remnant of her island left to her in the attic prison, the dress is redolent with all the fragrances that have been an intimate part of her life, scents of "vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees . . . the smell of the sun and the smell of the rain" (151). As well, it is what she wore the last time she saw Sandi, and it is the dress that she is certain would have enabled Richard to recognize her, had she been wearing it when he came. But in gestures also symbolic, in that they represent the imposition of a false identity on Antoinette, Rochester tells her that the red dress makes her look "intemperate and unchaste" and provides for her a grey wrapper to wear instead, leaving her to wonder if her beloved red dress has been exchanged for a counterfeit, if "they had done the last and worst thing. If they had <u>changed</u> it when she wasn't looking . . . and it wasn't [her] dress at all" (151).

Any aspects of "authentic" or experiential identity appear to have been destroyed in Antoinette, whom Christophine once described as a Creole girl with "the sun in her" (130). She is left with various false identities which reflect her function as "other," among them such "legends and lies" as "Bertha," "lunatic," "marionette," "zombie," "monster." Repeating the destinies of her

mother, and her prototype in Jane Eyre, Antoinette's presence is moving toward absence, toward the time to which Rochester has said he looks forward, "the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories, a legend. Or a lie . . ." (142).

CHAPTER 3

PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT

> "This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay."
>
> "I feel very much a stranger here. . . . I feel this place is my enemy and on your side."

Place, like identity, is a crucial element in the process of colonial oppression, and indeed, is inextricably bound with the question of identity. We ground ourselves and embody our "reality" in place. Place functions with considerable economy in Rhys's novel, for it represents and reinforces the opposition of Rochester's and Antoinette's realities in a number of ways. To begin with, the concept of "otherness" running throughout the novel is worked out in terms of place as it has been with identity. And identity itself in the case of Antoinette is to a large extent derived from and expressed in terms of setting. Also, qualities of Antoinette's person and psychological state and even the relationship with her husband are represented metaphorically in elements of the setting. As well, the dynamics of colonialism and its distribution of power are reflected in the characters' responses to setting. And in a similar way, the difference between male and female relationships with nature, paradigmatic of the relationship between the

sexes, is explored through setting as it represents place.

Thematic tension in Wide Sargasso Sea to a great extent derives from the struggle between the mutually exclusive contexts of Rochester and Antoinette. As Nancy Harrison suggests, these contexts are expressed in the elementally opposed idioms of these characters and their ideas of themselves and the world (301). Place is crucial in this novel because it functions as a representation or embodiment of each character's sense of the world, and of "reality." That for each the world of the other can be only a "dream," and unreal, points up the difficulty of achieving accommodation between two different world views and all the difference in experience, education, socialization and acculturation which they represent. Exacerbating the separation of realities is the great imbalance of power between the two. To take just one example, although Christophine does not "know" that there is such a place as England (for she knows only what she sees, she tells us), England is the site of the political and legal power which controls the world she does know. So a power which to her is inauthentic can make the practice of her own power in obeah illegal, and can nullify her ownership of the house given to her by Antoinette's mother.

Of course, one's own experience always represents, to oneself, the "norm," the way things "really are." And

very early on in their marriage, Antoinette and Rochester assure each other that her/his place is real, and the other's place a dream. From the start, Rochester recognizes Antoinette's inability to conceptualize England (which she has never seen), and attributes this inability to a wilful displacement from reality:

> She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but . . . her mind was made up . . . her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe. I could not change them and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. (78)

The delusions of others are more easily recognized, of course, and Rochester does not question his own sense of the unreality of the island, Antoinette's place. Not only is it dream-like to him, but it seems charged with a force of malevolence which makes the place, for him, a <u>bad</u> dream: he is gripped with the feeling that "all this was a nightmare" relieved little by "the faint consoling hope that [he] might wake up" (99). It has always been the privilege of those who hold power to define sanity and insanity, to name the sane and the insane, and Rochester has classified both Antoinette and Christophine as "insane." Yet the reader cannot miss the very apparent paranoia of Rochester, which culminates in his rambling, disjointed speech about all those who "know the secret," who must be watched, who will try to kill,

and who, when they disappear, are replaced by a long, long line of others waiting to take their place (142)! This strain of paranoia is first manifested in Rochester's response to the alien world of the island. He has, he tells us, felt the "green menace" of the place at first sight, and always the "feeling of something unknown and hostile [is] very strong"--the forest is dangerous and hostile, the trees are "enemy trees," the hills are "not only wild but menacing"--at one point, as the trees and their shadows are threatening him, even "the telescope [draws] away and [says] don't touch me" (125). His own dissociation from "reality" is as complete as Antoinette's:

> If these mountains challenge me, or
> Baptiste's face, or Antoinette's eyes,
> they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal
> . . . . (85)

Such a setting as this West Indian island, with its quality of the exotic and the alien, enables Rhys to enhance the representation of the idea of the other. In fact, setting here provides an objective correlative (to use Eliot's term) for the concept of otherness and its effects. Certainly for Rochester, from the beginning, the new place represents the otherness of the not-self, not-known, as he indicates in his comment about his own response: "I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me" (123).

And from the beginning, the place and the woman are apprehended together, seen as a single entity of otherness. Several times Rochester sums up his response to the place, and each time brings Antoinette abruptly into a culminating concluding statement, as, for instance, when he initially finds everything "too much":

> . . . too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. (59, emphasis added)

Again, at the end of Part Two when his wariness has turned to direct hostility, the same pattern can be observed:

> 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. . . . Above all I hated her. (141, emphasis added)

That the setting reinforces the specific otherness of Antoinette is a function not only of Rochester's identification of the woman with the place, but also of her own sense of connection with the island. In spite of its hazards and its ultimate indifference, which she has learned early on to recognize and accept, Antoinette grounds her sense of self in place. She has learned not to expect to possess or be cared for by nature, for she realizes, as she later tells Rochester, "it is as indifferent as this God you call on so often" (107). But, in spite of razor grass, black, red, or swarming white

ants, and snakes, it is still, for her, as she reiterates repeatedly, "Better. Better than people" (24).

She feels comfortably herself only in this setting, which, she says, is "my place and . . . where I belong" (90). Although her husband has claimed that she is "uncertain of any facts," she knows the island intimately, and generally tries both to explain carefully its nuances to Rochester, and to protect him from its dangers. Rochester admits that she is like a different person from the "pale silent creature" he married when, in her natural setting, at ease and laughing, she stops to throw gracefully and "like a boy" a large pebble to protect him from a menacing crab. That she will again become a different "creature" when removed from her place, Antoinette knows: "I will be a different person when I live in England" (92).

It is a salient characteristic of Rhys's writing that there is a sense of animation in the natural setting: the physical landscape reflects and reinforces the metaphysical and psychological landscapes. In her autobiography, Smile Please, Rhys says that as a child she believed that everything in the world was alive (81), a belief held also by some of her fictional characters, including Antoinette. This projection of the human onto nature and the inanimate in general is prevalent in descriptions of physical settings in her work.

The animation extends to interiors--houses, flats, restaurants, and perhaps especially, hotel or boarding house rooms. Good Morning Midnight, for instance, presents a protagonist who is almost obsessed with the search for the right room, and the opening words of the novel are "'Quite like old times,' the room says, 'Yes? No?'" (347). Sasha tells us that "the truth about this business of rooms [is that] . . . a room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside" (366).

In Rhys's narratives a room is both haven and prison. In Wide Sargasso Sea Rochester's dressing room, which he sees as "a refuge" and which he is relieved to be able to bolt shut from Antoinette's room, is like a little chunk of England. Unlike the rest of the house, it is "crowded," containing a carpet, a bed, a press, a writing desk with paper, pens and ink, a bookshelf and some English books. As the Englishman becomes more hostile to Antoinette and her place, he retreats into this room. The rest of Antoinette's house reflects its native place--it is very sparsely furnished (with few "civilizing effects"?) and it is open to nature, continually drawing moths, butterflies, and cockroaches. And of course the Thornfield room in which Antoinette is finally re-placed and misplaced is very much a prison.

Nature and its symbolic representations are heavily invested with psychological or emotional import.

Often, for instance, flowers will intensify the pervasive sense of the erotic in Rhys's work, as in the description in Voyage in the Dark of a hibiscus so proud, so red, that "the sky was just a background for it" and years later Antoinette cannot believe it is dead (34); or the description in After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie of a vase of flame-coloured tulips, some thrusting their heads forward like snakes, some stiff, prim and virginal, some dying with curved grace (300); or the description in Quartet of the "vaguely erotic wallpaper" with "huge fantastically shaped mauve, green and yellow flowers sprawling on a black ground" (186). Trees in the external landscape are often emblematic of the internal landscape of Rhys's characters, their branches described as claws, or fingers pointing accusingly, or "frail and naked" arms uplifted entreatingly (Quartet 132). At the end of Part Two of Wide Sargasso Sea Rochester recalls Antoinette's telling him about the hurricanes. The hurricane wind is "contemptuous . . . howling, shrieking, laughing," and the trees respond in different ways: the royal palms stand "defiantly" even after their branches are stripped, but the bamboos "bend to the earth and lie there, creaking, groaning, crying for mercy" (135). As Rochester speculates that he could never touch Antoinette except as the hurricane does the tree, and as he plans his "touch" of revenge (to take her away from the sun, and away from

the possibility of any other lovers), a cool wind begins, and becomes cold, and the sense of apprehension and suspense is intensified when we are told that "the tree shivers. Shivers and gathers all its strength. And waits" (136). The way nature is represented, as here, for instance, where powerful, capricious winds batter ceaselessly at whatever tries to survive their onslaught, reflects Rhys's vision of the social world as a place where certain powerful forces and the people who represent them overpower those who are weak and lacking in power.

In a more particular way, the connection of Antoinette with her place is enhanced throughout by metaphorical correspondences between her character and aspects of setting. Not only her personal characteristics and psychological state but also the course of her relationship with Rochester are reflected in descriptions of setting. The young woman's shyness and sensuality are recalled in the night blossoms which open only in the darkness to release their potent scent; the frangipani wreath with which Rochester has been crowned and hailed as Emperor or "king" by Antoinette he drops and carelessly steps on; and that event foreshadows the incident in which Rochester seizes a spray of golden-brown orchids which he has always associated with Antoinette, and tramples them into the mud after receiving Daniel's accusing letter. There are many other available examples of tropes

connecting Antoinette and setting, but perhaps the most moving is an image which suggests not only the freshness and innocence of the girl, but also the fragility and transience of the couple's love relationship:

> One morning after we arrived, the row of tall trees outside my window was covered with small pale flowers too fragile to resist the wind. They fell in a day, and looked like snow on the rough grass--snow with a faint sweet scent. Then they were blown away. (73)

The image functions in a similar way to images that are part of the manifest content of the dream sequence. Rhys's imagery generally performs in the Romantic convention in that it gives concrete form to states of being and psychological characteristics, and acts as portent of what is to come.

There is at first an ambiguity in Rochester's response to both the place and the woman: he is attracted but wary. He is seduced by the "untouched . . . alien, disturbing loveliness" and the "secret": ("I want what it hides") (73). Antoinette understands the "untouchability" of the place, and has learned to accept it. She also understands that that impenetrable "otherness" is what Rochester cannot accept, for she tells him, "That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else" (107). Just as he has tried to impose elements of Englishness on Antoinette, Rochester tries to familiarize her place somewhat: he sees the ajoupa as an "imitation English

summer house," he sees in the jungle remnants of paved road (which Baptiste denies the presence of), and the last day at Granbois, cool and cloudy, he recognizes as "an English summer."

When Rochester's attempts to Anglicize and appropriate Antoinette and her place fail, and both resist appropriation, his hatred becomes definite and explicit. So Rochester imagines a prison for Antoinette in England where he will mis-place her--she will later insist that "we lost our way to England" (148). When he re-places her "reality," in effect taking her out of her "world" (her place), he will finally take her out of her identity, which has been grounded in that place. By removing her out of her reality into his, he consigns her to a non-identity in an un-real place. Ironically, this alien world becomes real only when transposed into dream--the dream which will preview Antoinette's final act.

The setting in Wide Sargasso Sea provides a concrete geography for the process of colonization. In the view of the colonizer (always the dominating view), the colonizer's own place is the centre of the world, the place of significance, the real place--even the place of God. Other places, by extension, are at the margins, insignificant, un-real--or, as Rochester describes the island, "God-forsaken." This sense of the exaggerated status of England as a place has the whole weight of the

text and context of Charlotte Brontë's novel behind it. It is this vision of the world that Rhys sets her vision against or in response to. Again and again in Jane Eyre the reader is reminded of the sovereignty of England and the superiority of the English.

The comparisons between England and other lands always seem to imply that there is a wholesomeness and virtue indigenous to England, and a decadence and moral laxness natural to the strange places. Jane's "master" gloats that he would "not exchange this one [plain] little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio; gazelle eyes, houri forms, and all!" (271). Even at its lower levels, British society is superior: in praising her rustic students, Jane makes the observation that "the British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe" and the best of the "paysannes and Bauerinnen" are, by comparison, "ignorant, coarse, and besotted" (392). When Rochester begs her to go to the continent with him, Jane sees the choice as being between becoming a "slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles" or remaining a "village school-mistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England" (361).

The epitome of aggrandizement of the sovereign state in relation to the colony, expressed in language of transcendence, occurs in Rochester's narrative of the

night in which he experiences some kind of psychic or extrasensory communication from the homeland. Awakened by his wife's maniacal yells, Rochester is feeling especially oppressed, and the lurid physical properties of this night reflect his psychological state. It is a "fiery West Indian night" with air "like sulphur-steams," mosquitoes humming sullenly, the sea rumbling dully like an earthquake, the red moon like a cannonball throwing her last "bloody glow over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest"--there is, for Rochester, "no refreshment anywhere" (310). Suddenly a fresh, sweet wind blows across the Atlantic (which is "thundering in glorious liberty"), bringing purification and Hope. Finally and climactically now, the contrast between the pure homeland and the evil strange land is expressed in terms of the divine: the island is hell, "the bottomless pit," and England is the place of God: Rochester is possessed of the sudden conviction that he must "break away and go home to God." (Although he first connects this "going home" with the thought of suicide, he quickly abandons that idea for the plan to return to England.) The voice of Wisdom and Hope which, of course, are conveyed to him over the ocean from England assure Rochester that to remove Antoinette to England and place her with a keeper will allow him to "let her identity, her connection with yourself, be buried in oblivion" (311). Not only does

"wisdom" dictate a consigning of Antoinette to oblivion, but it also offers the sanction of God and Morality for such an act! Rochester will, he is told, "have done all that God and Humanity require of [him]" (311). It would seem that the most extreme acts of oppression require the sanction of the highest authority. And in such a patriarchal system, the fathers have access to, indeed, see themselves as agents of, the Father. Those who exercise worldly power are often not averse to claiming access to transcendent power, for of course it is the ultimate affirmation or validation to have "God on our side."

Wide Sargasso Sea, in the tradition of many novels before it, depicts a strong contrast between the relationship of male and female protagonists with nature. Indeed, also in that tradition, the male hero not only associates the female with nature, but also views both woman and nature as subordinate to himself, or representative of forces which must be somehow controlled and made subordinate to him.

Annis Pratt has made some very enlightening observations about male and female relationships with nature, as they are depicted in myth and fiction, and their implications for male and female relationships with each other (111-14). She takes as her starting point the question of whether there is an essential difference

between the typical male and female Bildungsroman, with the idea that a society's definition of gender identity can be sought in its symbolic representation in literature. The focusing question is, more specifically, "whether there is a 'myth of the heroine' as descriptive of the development of the human psyche as the 'myth of the hero' hitherto taken as definitive" (478).

To represent the male version of the search for identity she alludes to Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's quest as a "'road of trials' or initiatory adventures that consummate in the simultaneous discovery of women and earth . . ." (478). While protagonists of both male and female "education" novels are initiated into naturistic and sexual ecstasy, Pratt asserts that the heroine of the female genre is apt to view herself as "coexistent with the green world," while the hero of the male genre views his heroine and the green world as "coextensive parts of each other but rightfully subordinate to him" (484). If the male hero has usually to come to his discovery of the female and nature through a series of trials and conquests, the female heroine seems more often to come to not only a sense of self but also a vision of the world and sexuality through "recurrent moments of epiphanic vision uniting [her] consciousness with nature" (488).

These descriptions of the male and female versions

of the pursuit of identity can be aptly applied to the main characters in Rhys's novel. As we have noted, Rochester sees Antoinette and nature as bound together and both threatening and alluring to him. Antoinette sees nature as that which she most loves and identifies with, and Rochester as the one who can destroy that sense of her place and her identity. I have seen no better explanation of the complicated configuration of relationships among nature, man, and woman than that offered by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex, an explanation or conceptualization which, it seems to me, accounts for the ambiguity of these relationships, the simultaneous attraction and aversion that characterizes them. Both Antoinette's feelings about nature and Rochester's feelings about her are illuminated in de Beauvoir's theory that "for the young girl, for the woman who has not fully abdicated, nature represents what woman herself represents for man: herself and her negation, a kingdom and a place of exile, the whole in the guise of the other" (710).

Antoinette, as we have noted, has come to terms with this doubleness, but Rochester cannot. In the incident in which Antoinette comes to the conclusion that nature is "better than people," she appears to experience an epiphanic moment of coming to a sense of identity--but one which negates the sense of self she has had--and to a sense of place, but one which contains a sense of distance

as well: ". . . it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer" (24). This revelatory moment occurs in a part of Coulibri she has never seen before, a green world untouched by any mark of civilization, "no road, no path, no track" (24). And although she insists that it is her place and where she belongs, she also acknowledges its unpossessable separateness as well when she tells Rochester that "it is not for you and not for me" (107).

Rochester's view of Antoinette corresponds to the analogy proposed by de Beauvoir between the representation of nature to woman, and woman to man, and that correspondence partly derives from the long and firmly held tradition of the association between women and nature. In Campbell's myth-focused version of the tradition, the hero, by coming to know the woman, through her comes to know the natural world (Pratt, 477). Mary O'Brien reminds us (if we need reminding) that "the one thing that remains constant in all the formulations of 'the nature of Nature' which embellish male-stream [and that, of course, is 'main-stream'] thought: women are inescapably entwined with nature . . ." (102). Woman's "inevitable singularity" is her "ontological oneness with nature," grounded in reproductive function. This reproductive function is the one sphere of activity not open to man, the one secret he cannot know. For that

reason, perhaps there is some persuasiveness in George Gilder's suggestion in Sexual Suicide that man's barrenness renders "relaxed masculinity at bottom empty, a limp nullity" (as cited in Daly, 360). Certainly, Rochester experiences a deep sense of lack or deficiency which will leave him, for all his life, he says, with a thirst and longing for something he feels that Antoinette and her place possess. Another suggestion traditionally put forth as a reason why woman is considered representative of nature and a threat to be conquered by man is that it is only through woman that man enters into life and the world, but at the same time, it is also only through woman that he enters into the temporal progression toward death.

The reader can only speculate about the rationale behind Rochester's conviction that in nature (as represented by Antoinette's place) and in Antoinette there is a secret which he needs, but which is withheld. Rhys's text does not elaborate reasons for it, but rather leaves it to sub-text, or a gap or silence fraught with implication. At any rate, it is clear that Rochester is convinced that there is something, both in Antoinette and her place, that is hidden, that he has "lost before [he] found it" (141). He is obsessed through Part Two with the "secret" that everyone conspires to keep from him.

Evelyn Keller offers some enlightening

observations on the subject of perceptions of "the secret" in women and nature. She notes that well-kept secrets present a predictable challenge to those who are not privy, since they function to articulate a boundary, marking a separate domain, possibly a sphere of autonomous power (69). To men, such secrets are, because they invite exposure, both alluring and threatening: "the invisibility of nature's interiority, like the invisibility of women's interiority, is threatening precisely because it threatens the balance of power between man and nature and between men and women" (74). It seems reasonable to suppose that Rochester's desire to have what is hidden, to possess "the secret," comes down to a desire for power. As Keller suggests, "to expose female interiority, to bring it into the light . . . is to dissolve its threat entirely" (74). Because he has not been able to "dissolve the threat," Rochester's only recourse is to make arrangements to relegate both the woman (by destroying her identity), and the place (by leaving it), to mere memory. When he takes Antoinette to his place, effectively removing her from nature by confining her to a locked room, he is able to make her <u>his</u> secret, which he hides from the world.

Because Antoinette's place is so effectively representative of her character and of the natural world, Rhys has been able in <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u> to exploit the

element of setting remarkably, both in the elaboration of her thematic concerns and for stylistic effect. She has very clearly exposed the valorizing or privileging of the dominant power's place, and the displacement of the Other by that power, and she has disturbed our perceptions and heightened our appreciation of that phenomenon through the metaphorical connections she makes.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, AND POWER

> "Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die."

Someone has spoken of our access to direct experience as consisting of layers of language upon language, for which the homely image of the onion serves as illustration: peeling away layer after layer, one comes only to more layers with nothing (silence?) at the centre. All experience for human beings is mediated by language, that is, language taken so broadly as to include all systems of signs. Language both names and defines "reality": reality, or truth, is what we say it is, especially what those who dominate in a society say it is. It is through language that we naturalize (e.g., "That is the way it is"), and legitimize (e.g., "It is only right that . . ."). For as Roland Barthes has suggested, "the natural is never an attribute of physical Nature; it is the alibi paraded by a social majority: the natural is a legality" (Roland Barthes 130). And so it is that language, in conveying such power, is a key instrument of domination.

The distribution of power through language can perhaps most readily be observed in the special use of language we call "discourse." For purposes of a working

definition, Gayatri Spivak's elaboration of the term "discursive field" is useful: she takes "discursive field" to refer to "'discrete systems of signs' at hand in the socius, each based on a specific axiomatics" (or system of connected, accepted "truths" or "knowledge") (247). As we have noted in the introductory chapter, a full understanding of the term "discourse" demands that we recognize as included in its meaning the philosophical presuppositions embodied in the special use of language that the term denotes. Wide Sargasso Sea is a reading of the broad discursive field of colonialism, within which the discourses of Religion and the Law (discourses of language that penetrate quotidian reality) are two significant supporting or empowering sign systems. As colonialism is a patriarchal system, so also are the discourses of Religion and Law as exercised within that system.

The religion alluded to in the work of Rhys is a religion of fathers answerable to the Father, and it is a religion which she depicts as being meaningful ultimately only to the male characters. Religion is a persuasive force of power, for its cant and liturgical language express the all-encompassing air of established myth. It conveys a sense of immutable, universal truth, in which the origin, present, and future of the world are contained, as in the familiar fragment of Christian

liturgy "as it was, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." There is an incantatory quality to religious ritual that is hypnotic in effect, exemplified in Wide Sargasso Sea in the ritualistic prayers that punctuate and order the convent girls' days: "but after the meal, now and at the hour of our death, and at midday and at six in the evening, now and at the hour of our death. Let perpetual light shine on them" (47). The sense of inevitability and its accompanying sense of legitimacy that the forms of religion convey are conferred on the activities of the men in Rhys's colonial world in their self descriptions. Within the sacred walls of the church they mount marble tablets on which are printed tributes to some of the most powerful men in the community, tributes which attest to the universality and timelessness of their values and definitions. In Voyage in the Dark, sandwiched between the repetition of a line from the Litany, "We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord," we find Anna's meditation on the implications of one such plaque:

> 'To the Memory of Doctor Charles Le Mesurier, the Poor of this Island were grateful for his Benevolence, the Rich Rewarded his Industry and Skill.' That gave you a peaceful and melancholy feeling. The poor do this and the rich do that, the world is so-and-so and nothing can change it. For ever and for ever turning and nothing, nothing can change it. (28)

This illusion of corroboration between God's will and the power structures of society, fostered by the hierarchy of the Church, is recalled more briefly in Rochester's reminiscence of his wedding ceremony in the church where there hung "marble memorial tablets on the walls commemorating the virtues of the last generation of planters. All benevolent. All slaveowners. All resting in peace" (64).

Because for them it is an enabling and legitimizing force, the men in Wide Sargasso Sea find a validity in religion that is sustained throughout the narrative. Even the men of least status confidently borrow from God's ordinances to justify themselves. Godfrey invokes the Law of God to assert his equality (having suffered the ultimate inequality of slavery under the Law of Man) when he tells Annette Coseway that "the Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him. Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken" (16). Even the despicable Daniel Coseway justifies his blackmail by claiming it is his "Christian duty," which he will perform with "God's help" in finding the right words. And of course the men of power in the society have no qualms about their connection with God. In the midst of the uprising at Coulibri, Mr. Mason stops swearing and starts praying in a "loud pious voice," demanding that Almighty God defend

them, a command which is apparently answered when suddenly the noise is silenced. And Rochester, who finds the island "God-forsaken," replies vehemently when asked if he believes in God, "Of course, of course I believe in the power and wisdom of my creator" (105).

But for the women in the novel, the validity of this religion of the Father breaks down. At the convent, when Antoinette stops to think about "the perpetual light" it occurs to her that her mother, for whom she is supposed to be requesting the light, prefers the shade, and also that the shifting shadows she sees outside the convent are "more beautiful than any perpetual light could be" (48).

Perhaps because transcendence and power are not possible for them, the women seem to find themselves confined to the immanence, that is, the restriction to "Life" alone, rather than the possibility for "Life" and "Existence" that men experience, that Simone de Beauvoir speaks of as being the lot of women generally (63). Antoinette learns, she says, to "gabble without thinking" about "changing now and at the hour of our death . . ." (48). Later, when she tries to pray at her mother's funeral, the words "[fall] to the ground, meaning nothing" (51). She has already recognized the irony of Mr. Mason's "mysterious God" who "mysteriously" stops the noise, but who made neither sign nor intervention when Pierre was burned alive in his bed. To Rochester's question of

whether she believes in God, she replies calmly that it doesn't matter what any of them believe because to his indifferent God, they are as insignificant, when they call on Him, as the moth who has died trying to reach the light of the flame.

Aunt Cora too, on the basis of Richard's betrayal of Antoinette, by passing over control of her life in a financial transaction, concludes that "the Lord has forsaken us," and gives up, turning her face to the wall and shutting her eyes. And Christophine, Antoinette's most reliable source of wisdom, when she thinks about what has happened to Annette and what will happen to Antoinette, states flatly, "Ah, there is no God" (130).

Even the so-called women of God, the nuns at the convent, experience religion as an affirmation of the patriarchal system and the position prescribed for women in that system. After all, a nun is a "bride of Christ" and the saints described in the official Lives of the Saints are model "brides," beautiful, young, beloved by handsome, rich men. Mother St. Justine's talk of religion and God and godliness is all mixed up with lessons on grooming and attractiveness--she counsels the girls about how women should be, for God and for Man. One should be kind to God's poor, His chosen ones, she relates in a "casual and perfunctory voice," and should push down the cuticles of one's nails; one should behave with

deportment, maintain the flawless crystal of chastity, and emulate Miss Helene's excellent coiffure (45). Even Sister Marie Augustine, like Christophine a figure invested with some authority, is able to explain the apparent discrepancies in God's mercy only by attributing them to the devil. And that the devil should have such power, she can explain only as a "mystery" which we cannot as yet understand, and with which Antoinette must not concern herself.

When Antoinette has tried to concern herself with the mystery of death and the ecstasy of transcendence, she has learned that one question leads to another question, and all questions lead to sin, and to question the irony of <u>that</u> equation is another sin. Reminiscing about the convent days, and what she was taught about heaven, Antoinette recalls that

> I could hardly wait for all this ecstasy and once I prayed for a long time to be dead. Then remembered that this was a sin. It's presumption or despair, I forget which, but a mortal sin. So I prayed for a long time about that too, but the thought came, so many things are sins, why? Another sin, to think that. (48)

It is through the concept of sin that the church regulates desire, and Antoinette finds that to lose her faith somewhat is to feel "bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe" (48). To be given exact verbal formulas to negotiate one's desire with God--"You say Lord save me, I

perish"--gives a certain sense of security, but also a great sense of constraint.

As we have noted previously, it is a common feature of Rhys's writing that the metaphysical is reflected in the physical. In this narrative, she projects the characters' religious dilemma onto an aspect of setting, a technique which serves to add metaphorical force to her depiction. The text is punctuated throughout by the motif of a cock crowing, and its Christian connection, i.e., that it is a sign of betrayal, is pointed out, but the meaning is left ambiguous, a mystery. When Antoinette hears the cock crow, after persuading Christophine to employ her obeah on Rochester, she thinks, "That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor? . . . And what does anyone know about traitors, or why Judas did what he did?" (97). When Rochester has reached the point of desperation and is writing to lawyers to arrange the first stage of Antoinette's imprisonment, a cock crows persistently all the while he is writing. Rochester tries, literally, to "throw the book at him," but the cock easily escapes him. When he demands of Baptiste, "What's that damn cock crowing about?" Baptiste also eludes him (134).

Rochester's throwing the book is a gesture which carries a certain symbolic resonance when one recalls that throughout the novel there has been a struggle between

that part of the discourse which is "officialized," sanctioned, or sanctified by being committed to print, and that which lies outside the realm of the authoritative word. Some examples of this dissonance are to be found in the opposition between the record of The Lives of the Saints and St. Innocenzia's anonymity; in the opposition between Rochester's piety, legalism, and logic, and Christophine's illiterate wisdom and obeah practices; in the opposition between the inscriptions of the slaveowners' benevolence and the seething rebellion of the blacks; and even in the opposition between Rochester's written letters to his father and the unrecorded "letters" of his thoughts. In the Western tradition, deriving from Greek philosophy, the "word" is signified by "logos," and in the Christian tradition this word ultimately comes together with the Father, the union signified by "Logos." In the world of Rhys's novel, then, the Father and the word are one, and in the ascendent--and transcendent! Helen Tiffin's expression "the tyranny of the text" is aptly applied here.

If the discourse of religion carries the psychological power of a containing myth, the discourse of law carries the practical power of laws which manipulate the application of certain tenets deriving from the myth. The legal system represents itself as the Law, an institution based on certain universal, rationally derived

principles reflecting the abstraction of Justice. "Justice" is evoked in law as the superseding, authorizing, or informing source, in the same way that "God" is called upon in the discourse of religion. In practice, of course, a legal system always involves prescription and enforcement by a ruling authority. In the colonial society depicted by Rhys, one can see already the manifestation of power described by Foucault in our own time. He claims that "it's the characteristic of our Western societies that the language of power is law, not magic, religion, or anything else" (201). And the law that prevails is, of course, the law of England.

That the "language of power is law" is made abundantly clear throughout Wide Sargasso Sea. The language of law has transformative power so formidable that it can take something like the condition of ex-slaves, after Emancipation, and somehow translate its basic characteristics into "legal" practices which are almost the same, in effect, as the practice of slavery before Emancipation. The transformation is largely a matter of language, and serves to mask the oppression, or at least put it at one remove from the blatant exploitation of slavery. Christophine is the character who has been granted the vision to recognize such ironies:

> No more slavery! She had to laugh!
> 'These now ones have Letter of the Law.
> Same thing. They got magistrate. They

> got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. . . . New ones worse than old ones--more cunning, that's all.' (23)

Antoinette reiterates this judgment when she tells Rochester, after he has flaunted his sexual dalliance with Amélie, that he is worse than the slave-owners he has criticized. When he reminds her that his objection to the slave-owners was "a question of justice," she questions the very validity of the concept of justice as he employs it. Rhys points up the fact that its significance is ultimately a semantic one by emphasizing semiotic function, that is, by emphasizing that "justice" <u>is</u> a word, a sign. Antoinette seizes on the word as mere sound or artifact, "marks on paper," thereby debunking any transcendence or ideal in the signified:

> "Justice," she said. "I've heard that word. I tried it out. . . . I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. <u>There is no justice</u>." (121, emphasis added)

She denies justice in the same way (indeed, in the same words) that Christophine has denied God, and in a similar way to Christophine's questioning the existence of the "England" that has been represented to the colonized peoples as the place that supersedes their own place. These women refuse to acknowledge the authenticity of those powers which their own life experiences do not justify.

However, in a practical sense they have no choice

about recognition of or assent to the law, since their lives and possibilities are governed or controlled by it. It is the law that makes possible, indeed legitimizes, the various transactions among the men, transactions that effectively render the women and their possessions, their money, houses, and land, the legal property of the husbands. So absolute is the power of the law that it enables the dominating culture to cancel the powers of the oppressed group. Although the culture-specific practice of Obeah has carried significant power in the West-Indian culture, it is prohibited by English law, and the prohibition is backed up by the physical enforcement of magistrates and police, with which Rochester effectively threatens Christophine.

In this reinscription of Jane Eyre, Rhys's depiction of "the other side of the story," she employs the effective technique of role reversal in allowing the dispossessed black servant Christophine to conduct a quasi-judicial analysis of Rochester's behaviour. This character Christophine, who possesses no "legal" authority, has been invested by Rhys with the wisdom to make her, for the reader, the most persuasive authoritative voice in the narrative. Rhys thus presents us with an interesting paradox: the voice that was silenced in Jane Eyre, the voice of the quintessentially Other, who can tell the "other side," is in this part of

the narrative brought into prominence. At the same time, the fact that it is an oppressed and subordinate voice is acknowledged, in that the narrative voice in this section is Rochester's, and in the end, with the practical power of physical force on his side, it is his voice that prevails.

It is as though sub-text, for a time, but only a time, overcomes main-text: Christophine's patois, a "dark voice coming from the darkness," is, at the same time, a "judge's voice" (126, 129). Her clear-eyed analysis of Antoinette and Rochester's relationship, and Antoinette's eventual fate, and how they reflect Annette and Mason's relationship and Annette's fate, is very persuasive not only to the reader, but also to Rochester. As the "dark voice" delivers a kind of summing up for the prosecution, Rochester repeatedly confirms, in his thoughts but not in the words he speaks, that her charges are accurate: "It was like that, I thought. It was like that. But better to say nothing" (126). It is always illuminating in this text to compare Rochester's unspoken thoughts with what he actually says. Because he has been taught since early childhood to conceal his feelings, one must consider his thoughts a fuller expression of his character. And it is in a comparison between Rochester's thoughts and the spoken language by which he chooses to represent himself to the world that one comes to realize that Rochester has

been not only a perpetrator but also a victim of the repressive patriarchy in which he was raised. In the language of his thoughts, the reader can discern the complicated influence of Rochester's father, a censuring and censoring presence with whom he sometimes agrees and sometimes struggles against.

As we noted earlier, it seems that to commit thoughts to spoken language performs a certain verification or validation of experience, and one is reminded of how as a child Antoinette thought that if she did not speak of her mother's slain horse, it might turn out not to be true. Of course, to transpose spoken language to written language bestows even greater authority. In the case of Christophine, it is the whole officialized, written discourse of colonialism, its "language" or organization of reality (backed up by the real, physical enforcement of the police), that she realizes, finally, she has no defence against. Its power supersedes the powers she has possessed in the context of her own culture. Her last words in the text are "Read and write I don't know. Other things I know," and her last action is to walk away without looking back (133). Clearly the public realm of discourse, the "reading and writing," are in the control of those represented by Rochester, and Christophine, in spite of her personal strengths, does not have access to that realm.

Turning from the implications of language as public discourse, I would like now to focus on the related phenomenon of language as an expression of otherness, a marker of separate conceptual worlds. As we have noted in the discussion of place, Rochester's perception of Antoinette is mainly a perception of otherness, of strangeness, or that which is not-self. And as we have noted in the discussion of identity, Rochester associates Antoinette with those others who share her dependent and subordinate status. While he complains of their strangeness, he makes no effort to understand them, or to really listen to them. His first criticism of Christophine is that "her language is horrible," and after Antoinette insists that he does not understand at all, he repeats that he dislikes her language (71). This incident recalls an earlier one with Antoinette's mother and Mr. Mason. When Annette is explaining the black people to her husband, his reply is "I don't understand. I don't understand at all" (28). And again, when Antoinette draws to Rochester's attention a contemptuous song Amélie is singing, he insists, "'I don't always understand what they say or sing.' Or anything else" (85). He later admits (but not to his wife) on the day they are leaving Granbois that he "scarcely listened" to all Antoinette's stories of the island.

Rochester "doesn't understand" or, perhaps more

accurately, does not really listen to much of the language of the others, for it is a language that does not express the conceptual world that he recognizes or acknowledges. This failure of communication is clear in Rochester's response to Christophine's version of his married history. Her summary of events, with its disturbing accuracy, has an almost hypnotic effect on Rochester, casting confusing echoes in his mind. Christophine's analysis seems to leave him bemused until she mentions, with what he imagines is a hiss, the word "money." Suddenly she has moved out of the unfamiliar (to him) territory of intimacy and feelings, and into a conceptual territory that is familiar, his territory. He immediately has the conviction that he now understands Christophine's motivation and the significance of what she has been telling him. He thinks, in a flash of recognition, "[O]f course, that is what all the rigmarole is about" (emphasis added). He "no longer [feels] dazed, tired, half-hypnotized, but alert and wary, ready to defend himself" (130). He will defend himself against the "rigmarole," all the "mad, conflicting emotions," with the armour of his own discursive territory: he quickly resorts to talk of money, lawyers, magistrates, inspectors of police, and "law and order."

Rochester is in the position where he has the power to reject or deny the language of others, and to

insist on his own terms. Annette Kolodny, in her article "A Map for Rereading," reminds us that "masters need not learn the language of their slaves," but that "for survival's sake, oppressed or subordinate groups always study the nuances of meaning and gesture in those who control them" (62). When Rochester is leaving Granbois, there is a little boy who sobs dejectedly at being left behind. This character provides a striking example of Griffin's concept of the "other" as embodiment of the rejected or denied self, of all that is part of the "natural" life of the body, its emotions and sensuality. Rochester has told us that he was about that age when he was taught to hide all he felt, especially his fears, and now he is noticeably disturbed by this "half-savage" boy who loves him so. When Antoinette insists that the boy "knows English . . . [and] has tried very hard to learn English" in order to please his master, Rochester replies that "he hasn't learned any English that I can understand" (141). The boy's textual significance is underlined when Rochester's last words in the section in which he is narrator are focused on the boy, and express a refusal to acknowledge any sympathy for or understanding of this "denied self": "Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing . . ." (141).

If Rochester has not listened or chosen even to hear the people of the island, and therefore does not

understand them, the same cannot be said of them in relation to him. From the beginning of his marriage, there has been a "knowing" quality in the glances and sidelong looks of the blacks toward Rochester. Christophine and Daniel Cosway have obviously studied this master carefully, and each shows an uncanny understanding of Rochester's motives and vulnerabilities. Although Rochester has asserted that Christophine is a "ridiculous old woman" and "as mad as the other," he admits, only to himself of course, that much of what she charges is accurate. In fact, her psychological grasp of him is so thorough that in debate he can vanquish her only by resorting to the threat of brute force, the physical intervention of the police, which he masks as "law and order." Daniel Cosway's reading of Rochester, and this "gentleman's" jealousy, his need for appropriation and exclusive possession, and his dark fears of miscegenation, is so on the mark that Rochester admits that on reading Cosway's letter, he "felt no surprise. It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it" (82). The content of the letter, the written language, is an affirmation of what is already in his mind. Cosway has studied the colonial discourse, and his carefully selected and distorted "facts," for instance, that Antoinette is of mixed race, or that all white Creoles are mad, or that Rochester's wife, like her mother, is wantonly

promiscuous, are all things that Rochester is predisposed to believe.

Unlike Cosway, who tries to speak in a kind of colonial mimicry, Antoinette makes an immense effort to "speak" her language to Rochester, and make him "hear" her. She tries very hard to break through the language barrier. Her attempts to translate the island and its people have already been noted. She has tried to teach Rochester the meaning of the songs and stories of the island, and even the music of the rain and the birds. Against his version of the "way things are," she attempts to assert that "there is always the other side. Always." Antoinette realizes the importance of having her story (herstory) told, for much of what happened has been forgotten, she says, except the lies, and she is "not a forgetting person" (106). Rochester attempts to put her off when she feels compelled to tell her story, for he feels he has the real story from Cosway. Those lies that remain and grow (in Antoinette's words) are more consistent with his conception of events than Antoinette's version. Antoinette tries desperately to "have spunks" as Christophine has advised her, when she insists, "You have no right. . . . You have no right to ask questions about my mother and then refuse to listen to my answer" (107). She begins to take on the image Rochester has imposed on her, and which to some extent she identifies with, when

she tells him, "I wish to stay here in the dark . . . where I belong" (112). In desperation, her voice high and shrill, the young Creole woman begins to use the black patois, as Rochester observes, "imitating a Negro's voice, singing and insolent" (106). But eventually, Antoinette comes to the conviction that she cannot reach Rochester with her story; she cannot communicate her feelings. For after she has told the heaviest burden of her heart, the story of her mother's final humiliation, she falls silent and then seems to direct her words inward, as Rochester says he hears her mutter, "as if she were talking to herself, 'I have said all I wanted to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed'" (111).

If the women have come to lose faith in language, to mistrust it, it is because language has not been able to represent or communicate their lived experience--they have not been heard. Christophine understands the power dynamics of language very well. Near the beginning she observes about the English that they "talk talk their lying talk" (71). She recognizes that those who are in a dominant position are those who will decide what is the "truth." In discussing obeah with Antoinette, she assures her that "if békés say it foolishness, then it foolishness. Békés clever like the devil. More clever than God" (97). When she is contesting Rochester's claim that Antoinette is mad, she indicates that she understands how he will

establish this charge to be true: 'It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. . . . The doctors say what you tell them to say. That man Richard he say what you want him to say--" (132). Again, Antoinette's story repeats her mother's, for in reply to Rochester's question about Annette Cosway's sanity, Christophine recalls that the woman was distraught after her son's death, and "they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, act like she is mad . . ." (129). In effect, when those who have control over these women's lives say they are mad, treat them as though they are mad, tell others they are mad, then they are driven to madness.

Antoinette finally loses all faith in the power of words, or at least in the power of words to serve her purposes. She informs Rochester that she will tell him anything he wishes to know, but "in a few words, because words are no use, I know that now" (111). As in the prayers at her mother's funeral, the words fall to the ground, without reaching the intended audience.

Rochester has finally destroyed Antoinette's voice, and driven her to silence. On the day they leave Granbois, she looks out to the distant sea, and Rochester tells us, "She was silence itself" (138). Her face has become the impassive, blank face of a doll, a marionette, and when she speaks, it is not with her own voice, for "the doll had a doll's voice" (140). Rochester finds that

he scarcely recognizes her voice. Where there was warmth and sweetness, there is now a breathless, curious indifference. Her identity is no longer contained in her voice, her language no longer expresses her experience or feelings. Like her mother, her Aunt Cora, and Christophine before her, she has been effectively silenced.

In earlier chapters, we have traced the appropriation of identity and place in the colonial process, and in focusing now on the appropriation of language, it becomes apparent that this is the most crucial appropriation, in the sense that the others are contained within it. For it is in language that we constitute our subjecthood, our place, our "truth." If experience is always mediated through language, the cooption of language is true dispossession.

CHAPTER 5

THE GESTURE OF THE TEXT

> "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do."

Jean Rhys's first four novels are set in England or Europe, and not the island colony, which intrudes only as dream or memory in the fourth novel, Voyage in the Dark. But even in the first three novels, as well as in the short stories, whether they are set in the colony or England or Europe, the protagonists inhabit a world that is alien to them: they are women who perceive themselves to be outsiders in a number of ways. For even when Rhys's focus is not specifically the colonial experience, that experience surely informs the perceptions and the writing. The vision of the world represented by Rhys is always one in which the protagonists experience life as a situation of ongoing oppression, but it is in Wide Sargasso Sea that that vision is most effectively and fully rendered. The greater effectiveness or impact of the final novel is attributable in large part to its intertextual relationship with Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. We have looked in earlier chapters at the way in which different oppressions are contained within the oppression of language. And since language is embodied in and widely disseminated through printed text, the significance of

text as instrument and purveyor of colonial dominance cannot be overstated.

In her autobiography, Smile Please, Rhys tells us that at a very early age, ". . . I imagined that God, this strange thing or person I heard about was a book" (20). And in effect, the English book was God to its colonies--"both creator and judge" as Helen Tiffin remarks in her paper "Rites of Reply" (5). It was through their texts that the colonizing powers constituted their colonial subject/objects, and articulated the cognitive systems and values by which they judged these peoples. For that reason, one of the most effective strategies of decolonizing identity, place, and language is to engage with the texts that have been so instrumental in the colonizing process in the first place.

In her re-entry into the canonical text of Jane Eyre, Rhys is taking on, more than the text itself, its context, the world that text represents, and the assumptions on which it rests. Ironically, the specific colonial text of Jane Eyre itself sets up some resistance to oppressions contained within its own discourse, for its narrator is presented as one who has been colonized in her own country by gender and class, but ultimately the novel accedes to the discursive hegemony in which it is situated and which it has internalized. Although the text of Wide Sargasso Sea stands on its own, to read it in the presence

of the earlier text allows a much fuller understanding of its world, because so much of that "world" has been constructed in the texts of its colonizer. I should like now, then, to look rather closely at the text of Jane Eyre, the social script it encodes, and the way it valorizes its own systems, and then at the juncture of that text with Jean Rhys's novel, and at the effects that follow from that juncture.

Not only does Jane Eyre reveal the textual constitution of the colony and the alterity of its people, but it also, of course, "fills in" for us the world of the colonizer, Rochester's world--the very context against which Rhys sets hers. And Rochester's is a very "filled-in" world, a world that presents itself as complete, authoritative, and superior to other worlds. The representation of Rochester's society in this text provides a clear example of Roland Barthes' assertion, persistent throughout his works, that there is no "innocent writing": a social system does not just "reflect" reality in its cultural representations, but shapes and encodes it in its own image, protecting the status quo for its dominant classes who are always the overseers of culture. Women writing at the time of Charlotte Bronte had to enter the field of Literature, considered the province of men, warily, as trespassers, often under assumed masculine names. Then, as

participating transmitters of the received culture, they became, ironically, agents of the masculinist social process and its colonizing projects.

If island society and its organization of class structure as they are depicted in Wide Sargasso Sea are somewhat ambiguous, the social hierarchy as depicted in Jane Eyre is very sharply delineated and naturalized. If marriage in Wide Sargasso Sea is revealed to be an institution marked by control and betrayal, marriage in Jane Eyre is presented as the institution most to be desired and blessed. If there is mistrust or skepticism about the possibility of transcendence in Wide Sargasso Sea, the text of Jane Eyre is presided over by Truth, or the master signifier: "God," "History," and "Experience" all hold up or sustain ideology, and the textual representation of all aspects of society contributes to this affirmation.

The abundance of detail and explanation in this text serves to give an illusion of "reality," of things in their places, their connections clear. Jane, as narrator, for instance, gives us not only a very long and detailed description of the physical appearance of Thornfield, on her first viewing of it, but in summing up "places" its social meaning very specifically: "a gentleman's house, not a nobleman's seat" (102). Mrs. Fairfax "places" the inhabitants of the house for Jane's information in the

same way:

> Leah is a nice girl, to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality; one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority. (100)

To Jane's many queries about her master before she meets him, Mrs. Fairfax answers in terms of social expectation for someone of his class: "he has a gentleman's tastes and habits"; "the family have always been respected here[;] almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind"; he is "a just and liberal landlord"; and "a very good master" (107). The man, like his house, can be readily summed up: to the housekeeper, Mr. Rochester is ". . . a gentleman, a landed proprietor . . ." (108). When Mr. Rochester is planning to marry Blanche Ingram, apparently for reasons of "interest and connections," Jane feels unjustified in judging either of them, considering their position and education, for "acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood," for "all their class hold these principles" (189).

It is in a world where codes and expectations are quite explicit, then, that the disinherited orphan girl, at first looked on as alien and un-English, must make her way into legitimacy. She progresses by growing in

"virtue": she fulfills the criteria of the official middle-class code of conduct for young women, for she is chaste, plain, self-disciplined, hard-working, and spirited, the antithesis of the "fierce ragout" that is Bertha Rochester. It is a revealing exposure of this society, however, that in order to become fully acceptable, she must, in fact, have her family pedigree and economic means restored (through the news of the identity of her biological parents, and the news of the inheritance from her uncle).

As much as Jane molds herself into the ideal of English middle-class womanhood, reflecting the standards of Rochester and the British culture he represents, she remains enough "Other," just by virtue of her gender, that Rochester is driven in his relationship with her by a desire for appropriation. That he longs for complete possession and control of her is evident in the tropes he uses to describe her, such as a lamb to his shepherd, but most often as a bird fighting captivity. When Rochester, holding her by force, speculates (in images of violence) that he could easily bend, tear, or crush her, the realization comes to him that "whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it--the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose" (20).

Even though Rochester realizes that ultimately

some part of her (her "soul"?) will escape his full possession, he will try to tame and keep her. He will re-name her to "Mrs. Rochester," and elevate her image to one befitting his class:

> I will myself put the diamond chain around your neck, and the circlet on your forehead. . . . I will clasp the bracelets on those fine wrists, and load those fairy-like fingers with rings. . . . I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she will have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil. (261)

All Rochester's fantasies are of his being the controlling subject, and her the passive object.

Jane recognizes that this attempt at alteration, a form of the "colonial mimicry" discussed earlier, will undermine her sense of self, and tells Rochester that she is neither an angel nor a bird, and that, renamed and "reformed," she would "not be [his] Jane Eyre any longer" (261). Even though marriage, especially to a man as powerful as Mr. Rochester, is clearly held out in this society as the most desirable goal possible for a woman in Jane's position, she does initially experience, at the prospect of this change in her life, a real qualm, "--something that smote and stunned: it was . . . almost fear" (260). In spite of some attempts at self-assertion, however, the young woman is not able to escape the role of commodity, the role pointed out by Irigaray to be the function of women in a patriarchal society. Rochester

repeatedly reiterates Jane's "use-value" as an "instrument for [his] cure" or his return to grace. He calls her his angel, his comforter, his healer, his treasure, his cleanser, his rescuer. Her gestures of independence notwithstanding, Jane never mounts a serious opposition against the hegemony of her social context, but directs her struggles at accommodating herself to it. To the end, Rochester remains her "master" who represents "home" and security to her, and whose "influence . . . quite masters [her]," taking her feelings out of her own power, "fettering" them in his (177).

Because Rochester in his philandering about Europe and attempt at bigamy has gone against the official moral code of his society (that is, the one to be observed by such a "virtuous" woman as Jane Eyre in the conduct of her life), he must undergo a symbolic purification, or humbling. His chastisement is accomplished through his "heroic" attempt to save his savage wife, an attempt which leaves him blinded and partly maimed, reduced in apparent, or physical, power. This reduction process represents not so much a rebalancing of power, except in the crudest terms, as an affirmation of the patriarchal code of morality. Rochester has undergone a kind of purification through fire. This expiation enables the couple to merge in a "union" which represents the highest, and virtually compulsory, aspiration of a heterosexual relationship in

this patriarchy--that is, the "union" of marriage. It is a marriage that masquerades as one of equality but is actually one of complete appropriation: Jane describes herself in marriage as "absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" (454). The very "filled-in" text of Jane Eyre, representing itself as "the whole story," has, of course, complete closure. Not only do the Rochesters end up "precisely suited in character," "together always," in "perfect concord," but the other important female characters, the Rivers sisters, also end up rewarded with perfect marriages. Rhys's narrative, of course, lacks this kind of closure: in Wide Sargasso Sea there are no happy marriages, not either of Annette's, nor Aunt Cora's, nor Antoinette's. And Christophine, who has not internalized the colonial social script to the degree of the other women, rejects marriage altogether.

The final irony of the multiplicity and complexity of oppression as manifested in Bronte's narrative, an irony not acknowledged in this text, is that one member of the oppressed is the necessary sacrifice for another to be legitimized. If Rochester is right in calling Jane the "instrument" of his "cure," the Creole woman eventually becomes the instrument of the cure for both: she serves as Rochester's instrument of purification and Jane's instrument of legitimation. Has Bertha's being the agent of Rochester's purification, whereby he is considered

morally chastised and therefore deserving of his later happiness, been her last commodity role? Gayatri Spivak makes the comment on the Creole woman's role of martyr that she (Spivak) "must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (251).

Jane Eyre presents itself as a "woman's text" and has been taken by some feminist interests as a strong statement for the freedom of women. Indeed, the protagonist is a spirited young woman in whose consciousness the narrative is grounded. It is true that Jane chafes at the restrictions and some of the injustices of her society and its conventions. Her protestation against conventional expectations for women does, indeed, speak directly to the issue:

> Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too---rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer. . . . (113)

But in spite of her insistence that "it is in vain to say that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity," and her empathy with the "millions . . . in silent revolt" against tranquillity, this character in the

end rapturously gives herself up to a life marked by just that quality (113). Her "oneness" with Rochester is described by the narrator as a life of calm, quietism, and service to her husband.

Jane Eyre is presented as a strong character, but her strengths are those prescribed by the patriarchal society, and her actions remain well within the terms of its social code. Her initial rejection of Rochester is not on the basis of his exploitation of her or the injustice of the very matrix of the power relationships in their society, but rather on his transgression of society's moral code or formula for righteous conduct, a consideration demanded of a virtuous woman in that society. Jane's response is also predicated on the knowledge that her going along with his desire in the face of his transgression would in the end devalue her. She must manoeuver with great ingenuity and resourcefulness to avoid the fate of Rochester's other women, a fate which he sets out quite clearly, and which she realizes would be hers if she is not very prudent. Of his "grovelling fashion of existence" in Europe Rochester says:

> Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Céline, Giacinta, and Clara. (314)

So Jane's refusal of and departure from Rochester is an

act of reading the system and her own most advantageous and self-preserving move within that system, according to its conventions and codes. And her becoming Rochester's wife, with all that that implies, represents, in effect, an affirmation of that system.

As for Rochester's other wife, in this narrative, even textually the character of Bertha serves a commodity role. She provides the gothic horror, the element of mystery, the catalyst, and the suspense. She has been described, most notably in Gubar and Gilbert's The Mad Woman in the Attic, as a "double" for Jane, her dark side, which must be overcome in order for Jane to become a worthy, healthy, desirable partner in the most sought-after social situation of her context--the heterosexual union. At no time is she represented as a person in her own right. She is, rather, depicted as clearly sub-human, a being with no language but growls and maniacal laughter--a wild-beast figure. The notorious description of Bertha as Rochester reveals her to Jane, the solicitor, and the clergyman leaves no doubt about her animal status:

> What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, 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. . . . the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet. (295)

Indeed, Rochester describes her as a "thing," and Jane as

his means of counteracting that thing. Although he has intended to breach the law of bigamy, Rochester feels convinced that an appeal to the higher law would bring assent. For, after all, the voice of wisdom, remember, conveyed over the ocean from England to the colony, has told him that he has done all that God and Humanity required, and now he calls out, "[J]udge me, priest of the gospel and man of the law" (296). Bertha's attack on Richard Mason is represented as a verification of her animal status--a mindless, vicious assault, actually cannibalistic in implication. Her biting the flesh of both Richard and Rochester associates her with the stereotype of the West Indian as cannibal, a stereotype developed by and firmly established in the colonial discourse of the time. Peter Hulme's discussion of the etymology of the term "cannibal" in his Colonial Encounters reveals how the concept served the colonialist project. Of course it was the native Caribbean Indians who were established textually as "cannibals" in the colonial discourse, but as mentioned earlier, the colonizers make all kinds of associations among the oppressed groups, blurring the lines of distinction for their own purposes. There is, then, a connection being made here, a connotation exploited, in the depiction of Bertha as cannibalistic savage.

At this juncture in the narrative the necessity of

re-entering the text to liberate the colonial subject from the way her identity has been constructed in the colonial discourse is clear. Jean Rhys's departure from the plot of the pre-text at the point of Antoinette's attack on Mason is crucial: it restores humanity to the subject. For Rhys's mad wife, in taking this action, is reacting to the duplicity of the term "legally" when Mason responds to her desperate pleas for help with the excuse that he "cannot interfere legally between a man and his wife" (150). This response is, of course, the traditional excuse for refusal to intervene in domestic violence, with its unmistakable implication of ownership of the wife by the husband, and the power to do what he wishes with her. It is the glaring injustice of this kind of legality that impels the woman to a final assertion of self--a rebellion which will end in an attempt to burn down the prison, re-enacting the uprising of the former slaves at Coulibri.

As Tiffin points out, the post-colonial writer's reinscription of the colonial text is not so much a critique of the specific text as an attack on the society it represents, its very philosophical assumptions, and the "knowledge" of its discursive formations. Rhys said she decided to write a life for the mad Creole wife because she "never believed in Charlotte's lunatic": it is apparent that it was also because she did not believe the moral assumptions or "truth" of Charlotte's patriarchally

determined world. It is also apparent that Charlotte Brontë, in the end, capitulates to those assumptions and that "truth." The conclusion of her narrative affirms the text's placement. After the dénouement of the marriages, Bronte moves, as Spivak points out (249), into the allegorical language of religious discourse. This discursive shift announces the text's allegiance with the ultimate authority of this discourse, its transcendent signified, the Logos. The tangential narrative of St. John Rivers, whose "soul-making" mission is "actualized by the unquestioned idiom of imperialist presuppositions" (Spivak, 249), evokes the name of the Father, and thus performs the ultimate closure of God's blessing and consecration. The recourse to the transcendent signified serves the tyranny of this text, and underlines its god-like function of "creator and judge." Such a claim of collusion with the transcendent confirms the necessity for the radical subversion effected by a reinscription of the text, a reinscription which, as we have pointed out, denies the Logos or the legitimacy of a "last word."

The pre-text of Jane Eyre, under the pretexts of the imperialist hegemony it represents, prefigures the ending of Wide Sargasso Sea. The positioning of the text as the source for the second fiction presents itself as paradigm for the positioning of the colonial world in

relation to the world of its colony. There is only one possible ending when the two worlds are brought together under this hegemony, for the world of the colonizer is dependent on the submission or sacrifice of the colonized. The only possibility for a self-willed act is self-immolation. However, in Rhys's post-colonialist "writing back" there is some meaning invested in that act, and the closure of the earlier text is undermined.

Although Jean Rhys scrupulously avoided any ostensibly political statement, and has often been described as "apolitical," and though her heroine makes no attempt at nor has any aspiration for independence, her book ultimately makes a stronger feminist statement than Brontë's. As Edward Said admonishes, it is the obligation of critics to attend to the "force of statements in texts: statements and texts, that is, as doing something more or less effective, with consequences that criticism should make it its business to reveal" (224). Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea makes it its business to reveal the kind of statement Jane Eyre makes, and the effects it has. And the critics of Rhys are obliged to attend to her statement and its effects. As Harrison suggests, what is important for its meaning beyond authorial intention is the gesture of the text (19). The "writing a life" for the character who is represented as less than human makes the gesture of bringing her into the official textual record, thereby

altering irrevocably that record. The cultural representation of the colonial world to itself, as a world that is complete, ordered, natural, and sanctioned by God, is interrupted and exposed by the retrieval of the perspective of those who by their "otherness" are used to shore up the illusion of that world to itself. With the reinscription provided by Rhys's text, the "record" now includes the herstory of colonial oppression. It can be seen to reveal some of the dynamics of colonial power, whether male over female, white over black, rich over poor, empire over colony as they are manifested in the attempt of the oppressed to formulate identity, in their perception of both psychological and physical "place," and in the uses and effects of language to the oppressed and the oppressor.

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