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SEXUAL/TEXTUAL MARGINALITIES OF CARIBBEAN INSPIRATION AND ORIGIN

a thesis on two texts by two women writers of caribbean origin  
upon the theme of marginality

WIDE SARGASSO SEA by Jean Rhys

ANNIE JOHN by Jamaica Kincaid

by  
YU-MEI LEE  
B.A.Hons. (Dunelm)  
1990

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Sexual/textual marginalities of caribbean inspiration and origin  
...two texts by women writers: Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys  
and Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid

M.A.Thesis by Yu-Mei LEE, B.A.Hons. Dunelm  
Submitted October 1990

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the theme of Marginality in Writing by women of Caribbean origin.

My work condensed itself into a specific analysis of two texts. Taken together, these texts focus the insights I researched into a significant whole. Each text was written by a woman of Caribbean origin, and their backgrounds are a symbolic polarity from each other. Jean Rhys was a white creole born in Dominica in 1894 and who spent her adult life in England; Jamaica Kincaid is black, native to Antigua and now a journalist in New York.

The protagonists of each text - Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid, and Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys - are both young girls influenced by the image of their mothers. Significantly, they share almost the same name (Annie/Antoinette) which is also that of their mothers. Thus they become a symbolic fusion of a heroine of Caribbean origin.

In the course of extensive and eclectic reading, I discovered the theme of Marginality to be entwined with the concept of Intertextuality. In separate chapters, I have discussed marginality with reference to narrative structure and narrative time, image and metaphor, culture (which involves colonialism in the Caribbean), race relations and gender (specifically feminist), and ultimately according to Susan Sontag's observation of the marginal literary subject:

an unimportant 'work' ... could be a marvellous 'text'.  
Considering something as a 'text' means...precisely to  
suspend conventional evaluations. ... notions of 'text'  
and 'textuality' charges the critic with the task of  
discarding worn-out meanings for fresh ones. °

I hope that in the course of my thesis, I have succeeded in the enlightenment of fresh meanings in Writing by women of Caribbean origin. I conclude that an understanding of the significance of these texts lies in the fact that their marginal quality is part of a total intertextuality.

Yu-Mei LEE  
28/9/90

°Susan Sontag. A Susan Sontag Reader. Random House. New York. 1983. p428

## CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION:	Marginality & Intertextuality	4
II. The Marginality of Time:	NARRATIVE STRUCTURE & NARRATIVE TIME	
	(i) Annie John	8
	(ii) Wide Sargasso Sea	16
III. The Marginality of Image:	THE IMAGING OF THE MOTHER-MIRROR	
	(i) Wide Sargasso Sea	35
	(ii) Annie John	43
	(iii) The Speculation of Identity	51
	(iv) The Fabrication of Identity	57
IV. The Marginality of Metaphor:	THE METAPHOR OF FLUIDS	66
V. The Marginality of Culture:	THE COLONIZATION OF LANGUAGE	91
VI. Footnotes		120
VII. Bibliography		124

THE REAL EXCITEMENT IN CRITICISM IS TO FIND A  
CERTAIN WAVE, AND WAVELETS WITHIN THE WAVE,  
AND HOW THINGS MOVE AND MOVE BACK - THE ENTIRE  
WEATHER-MAP OF INTELLECTUAL AFFAIRS.

Geoffrey Hartman <sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION: MARGINALITY & INTERTEXTUALITY

It is the theme of marginality in Writing by women of Caribbean Origin that I wish to explore. The theme condensed itself into research on the writing of two women of different generations, colouring and background, but from the same region of islands. Therefore they possess the same colonial experience and cultural inheritance. Jean Rhys was born on the island of Dominica in 1894, came to England when she was sixteen and created a sensation when Wide Sargasso Sea surfaced after a literary absence of many years. Jamaica Kincaid was born in Antigua and is now a journalist in New York. They are both native to the Caribbean but have become literary exiles in separate dominant cultures - British and American. Their places of exile in effect represent an acknowledgement of the central role played by colonising powers - one past, and the other being the more insidious presence of economic colonialism in the influence of lives.

This became a polarity suitable for the confines of an M.A. Thesis. The body of writing by these two women was further honed down into two chief texts. Both texts describe a young female protagonist, one called Antoinette and the other Annie. It is an apt and significant coincidence, especially as Antoinette calls herself after her mother Annette, and Annie is named after her mother Annie. Antoinette is a white creole girl, and Annie is black - both are native to their islands. However because of their colouring, they experience literally different coloured views of life on their island. Each girl also experiences an ambivalent relationship with her mother, being both a mirroring of her mother and a separate



being. It could be said that Wide Sargasso Sea is the mistresspiece of Jean Rhys, and Annie John that of Jamaica Kincaid.

These texts are linked by Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. Indeed, Wide Sargasso Sea is ostensibly the story of the first Mrs. Rochester, silenced and hidden from view in the third storey of Thornfield Hall. Mrs. Rochester is presented by Bronte as a mad Creole heiress who regressed into beast-like Bertha. In Annie John, Annie John calls it "my favourite novel, Jane Eyre" (AJp92). Charlotte Bronte is her heroine to the extent that Annie's childhood daydream is of imitating Bronte's life in Belgium down to the last detail of "wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles and carrying a bag filled with books that at last I could understand". (AJ p92)

Antoinette mentions "my favourite picture, 'The Miller's Daughter', a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes..." (WSSp30). In the Colonies, the teaching of English centred around foreign, but English, details like Wordsworth's daffodils in vales. In the Caribbean, a young girl dreams of becoming a bluestocking like the one she has read about in a cold climate. Another girl's vision of hope for a happy future is focussed on a blooming English girl literally as pretty as a picture. But the vision which remains imprinted in Antoinette's memory is not that of the miller's daughter. It is instead that of Tia the black girl and her only friend, throwing a stone at her and shattering any illusion of friendship. Her longest lasting impression is formed:

We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (WSS p38)



Is the Colony such a mirror-image of its Imperial Centre? The education system seems geared towards the formation of such an illusion. Yet Wide Sargasso Sea is not a mirror-image of Jane Eyre. However both texts are a history of and literally, a prelude to each other. In narrative time, Wide Sargasso Sea predates Jane Eyre. The figment of one imagination seeks to explain one fragment of another. And without a doubt, Jane Eyre is the inspiration behind Wide Sargasso Sea. States Jean Rhys:

I've read and re-read "Jane Eyre" of course, and I am sure that the character must be "built up". ...The Creole in Charlotte Bronte's novel is ... necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks...OFFSTAGE. For me...she must be right ON STAGE. She must be at least plausible with a past, the REASON why Mr Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the REASON why he thinks she is mad and why of course she goes mad, even the REASON why she tries to set everything on fire... (Personally, I think THAT one is simple. She is cold - and fire is the only warmth she knows in England.) <sup>2</sup>

Many margins are crossed and confused by the intersections of different imaginations. The question which must be asked of this abstract concept of intersection is - do the margins of a text influence and focus its centre, or is it the centre of a text which influences and forms its margins? The text is thus an extension of the intersecting complications in relationships between an Imperial power and her colonies, White and Black people, Men and Women, and the very structure of the language which describes and defines all these. These intersections of the imagination are summed up in one word - intertextuality. Intertextuality is the interweaving of imaginations sewn in and shown by their texts, where the

thread of each text woven in has equal texture. By contrast, contextuality is the frame, the fixture upon which the fabric of the text is founded.

Exploring the narrative texts of Antoinette and Annie is one step in the discovery of new and profound depths in the meanings of margins, and the margins of meaning in the writing of two exceptional but exemplary women of Caribbean origin. The intertextuality between Annie John, Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea is a deepening of their individual and collective meanings, whereby the imaginative origin in the Caribbean is the context. Marginality is entwined with the concept of intertextuality. In separate chapters, I will discuss marginality with reference to narrative structure and narrative time, image and metaphor, culture (which involves colonialism in the Caribbean), race relations and gender (specifically feminist). Ultimately, I hope to succeed according to Susan Sontag's observation that

an unimportant work ... could be a marvellous 'text'. Considering something as a 'text' means...precisely to suspend conventional evaluations. ... notions of 'text' and 'textuality' charges the critic with the task of discarding worn-out meanings for fresh ones. <sup>3</sup>

## II. NARRATIVE STRUCTURE & NARRATIVE TIME

Describing the narrative structure of both chosen texts is a start in the search of the meaning of marginality in Writing by women of Caribbean origin. It may be the beginning of the conclusion that marginality is the very definition of such writing.

### (i) Annie John

The chronology of the passage of narrative time in Annie John is overall a straightforward progression. Kincaid titles every chapter and these titles herald significant consecutive developments in Annie John's life. The text is written in the voice of a single narrator, Annie John herself who like Jane Eyre, is the titular voice of her narrative. She speaks with authority on the different stages of time in her life. Certain key paragraphs are the focusses of narrative momentum. They are marked by 'framed time' as weighty as the mythical and immemorial phrase "Once upon a time...". For example, the text begins:

For a short while during the year I was ten, I  
thought only people I did not know died.  
(AJ, p3)

It leads into a description of Annie John's childhood, a pastoral idyll of familiarity, farmyard animals and friendly neighbours. However, "From our yard, I could see the cemetery. ... Until then, I had not known that children died." (AJ, p4) Even in childhood Arcadia lurks the

beginning of the knowledge of Death, and more awfully, that Knowledge is an insufficient talisman against Death. The tone set in the first sentence is that of the temporality of time with a finite end. This is highlighted by the present tense of the first person which yet embraces the past. The conclusion is already death. Present and past, life and death, are summarized in a paradox of knowing the end in the beginning. Already the volatile and ambivalent relationship between narrative and time is telescoped into an immediate sense of finite, physical and temporal, spaces and distances.

In the second chapter a paragraph begins "The summer of the year I turned twelve..." This age marks Annie's portion of perfect happiness, wrapt with her mother in the ritual of unpacking the trunk which contained her mother's new and individual life separate from the life of her parents. This wooden womb now encloses Annie's entire life as lived so far, and is a vessel of love as well as voyage. The trunk embodies Annie's childhood Paradise and is simultaneously her mother's assertion of solitude in independence and intrepidity. The trunk is thus a paradox by being both a symbol of extreme union, and of the divisiveness of separation. It was painted by her mother's own hands, within it nestle clothes her mother fashioned and embroidered for her, it is as if the whole of Annie was molded by her mother's hands. It contains literally all the remnants of a mother's love, and is as much their emotional umbilical cord as the fact that their clothes are cut out of the same cloth. Without the trunk lie the bits and pieces of Annie's life created by her father's hands - the furniture, and the house in which they are contained.

Kincaid's focus on Annie's years of age is a signal of the continuous and consequential passing of the time of her narrative. The years of Annie's age are memory markers. The apparent superficial simplicity of this technique is qualified by a parallel marking of Annie's mother's age. It implies that her coming of age in her past is in line and linked with her daughter's future:

When my mother, at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house in Dominica and came to Antigua, she packed all her things in an enormous wooden trunk that she had bought...

(AJ, p19)

This interjection occurs in the second chapter entitled "The Circling Hand", and marks the beginning of her mother's voyage into full realisation of the separateness of her being. The boat she is on is almost wrecked, but she arrives safely with her trunk on the new island of her life.

Annie describes her mother starting out at an age she herself reaches at the end of her narrative when she describes her own walk to the jetty. Hence, this early interjection of her young mother's life in the otherwise smooth chronology of Annie's own passage of time, implies repetition. Her memory of her mother's life is woven into her own life, and her own memories. Does her life ultimately become a repetition, a mirror-image, of her mother's? The heading of the first chapter, "Figures in the Distance" was an apprehension of the unfamiliar and strange; this ultimately stretches into Annie's final walk which she shares with her parents:

We must have made a strange sight: a grown girl all dressed up in the middle of the morning, in the middle of the week, walking in step in the middle between her two parents, for people we didn't know stared at us.

(AJ, p138)

They are not figures in the distance, but figures dearly familiar to her, walking in the here and now. In the end, Annie's emphasis is on her own known centredness in time and place, paced at an even tempo of familiarity, for as she walks to the jetty of her departure, the spectrum of her past life passes by in a rhythm initiated by her parents, just as they had created everything else in her life. Beyond lies more strangeness and stares, anonymity and the unknown. It is her last time of being the tangible focus of her parents, literally centred between them. She no longer even looks like a mirror-image of her mother for she towers above her.

Significantly, the final time Annie's age is mentioned is in the sixth chapter entitled "Somewhere, Belgium" which begins dramatically and decisively:

In the year I turned fifteen, I felt more unhappy than I had ever imagined anyone could be.

(AJ, p85)

This chapter heading signals 'someness' and uncertainty, which is developed into a revelation of anxiety to be alone, and more significantly, removed from her mother. The three years between twelve and fifteen have chartered a voyage across a turbulent ocean of emotion. The ensuing chapter is a description of estrangement, far off from the idyll of Paradise she had once shared with her mother. Annie relishes the imaginative prospect of communicating with her mother only by a letter vaguely addressed to a place where her mother would know nothing about her. The choice of Belgium is inspired by her heroine Charlotte Bronte. The rift which now exists between mother and daughter seems as decisive as

the quarrel between her mother and her mother's father. Although Annie's wish to move to a different geographical location only remains in her head, her departure from her parent is as profound a wound as her mother's was. By the separateness she wills herself to feel as well as feeling anyway, Annie wishes to deflect any illusion about being her mother's reflection. She had once desired above anything else to be the mirror-image of her mother, but her mother refused it by saying;

"Oh no. You are getting too old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me."

(AJ, p26)

Now Annie's wish to be separate and differently defined is entirely her own.

Thus Kincaid's seemingly simplistic device of a linear chronicling of passing time marked by Annie's various comings of age contains a crucial interruption - Annie's mother's own coming of age and the implied comparison of Annie's status at a similar time. This imaginative hiccup in a straightforward narrative structure imbues the text with much more significance. Annie's walk to the jetty is the continuation of her mother's imaginative and emotional voyage - and yet is her own individual rite of passage as distinct from her mother's.

There is further emphasis in the development of Annie from young girl into young lady by biological and educational reminders signalling the expansion of body and mind. The repeated mentioning of school and menstruation, both cautionary first steps into the mentality and

physicality of young womanhood, emphasises the significance of these events. The significant event is mentioned twice, and the overlap signals not only the passage of time but the changes in Annie's life within that time which has passed. For example, the final paragraph of the third chapter begins with her first mention of menstruation (AJ p51), and the final paragraph of the next chapter also begins with a mention of menstruation, which subtly summarizes Annie's achievements in between;

Soon after, I started to menstruate, and I stopped playing marbles.

(AJ, p70)

The onslaught of menstruation is the onset of maturity, and the end of childish and tomboyish behaviour. Marbles, to Annie, were a world of contention between herself and her mother. They were literal embodiments of the metaphorical little black ball, a sphere of hatred tightly knotted into her insides which she also describes her mother as possessing. They share the same black ball. These marbles were symbols of rebellion, lies, deceit and thievery, all the qualities her mother brought her up not to have, and which were the forbidden fruits of a friendship shared with the Red Girl, a wild and filthy child spiced with life. That menstruation and marbles are linked is the conclusion from such a definitive statement. Kincaid thus implies Annie's bodily maturity with emotional maturity, and her girlhood expands into a global sensation far greater, and more imaginatively iridescent, than mere marbles.

Kincaid's chapter headings inculcate a sense of drama. Each title is an introduction, summary and conclusion to a phase of life, an influential personality, a significant moment. For example, two chapters are headed by two different girls, Gwen and the Red Girl. They are descriptions of the



different polarities of Annie's personality. Gwen is good and clean, whose dream of perfection is Annie marrying her brother so that they will remain sisters eternally. Gwen is the friend Annie brings home. The Red Girl is Gwen's antithesis. It is significant that the other character honoured by a chapter heading is none other than the man who 'discovered' Annie's island and became its white historical father - Christopher Columbus. In this text his existence is singularly qualified by a material appendage and an unexpected stance - he is bowed down by chains. These successive titles "Gwen", "The Red Girl", "Columbus in Chains", are suggestions of different stages of Annie's growing consciousness of her identity as influenced by crucial figures in her life, in the present and in history. Columbus is the embodiment of her colonial inheritance, but in the reversed role of humiliation as opposed to triumph.

The other titles are abstractions, keys to stages of Annie's awareness. The first chapter, "Figures in the Distance", is followed by "The Circling Hand". Her initial childhood frame of anonymous persons in the still remote perspective of life, gradually zooms into the focus of her mother's hand upon her father's back in a most secret, intimate gesture. The first heading symbolises Death, the Unknown; the second is a revelation that Death - in the sense of the catastrophic collapse of all that is cherished - lurks even at home, within and between the people she knows best of all, trusts and loves most of all. It is all the more deadly because it hides in the bosom of the familiar. It is Annie's first described moment of pure consciousness of her separate identity, what Lacan calls the triangulation of the mirror-stage when the father-figure interrupts the dyadic unity between mother and child. <sup>1</sup>

I looked at them for I don't know how long.

(AJ, p31)

Her parents seem not to see, let alone reflect upon her. Later on, Annie is convinced her mother had seen her. She then stares at her mother "directly in the eyes" and "talked back to her", resulting in

She looked at me, and then, instead of saying some squelching thing that would put me back in my place, she dropped her eyes and walked away. From the back, she looked small and funny.

(AJ, p31)

Annie's speech and gaze are distinct and defiant gestures of the knowledge of her separateness and the new marks of her identity. Her mother's motions are symptoms of defeat, but it is a pyrrhic victory for Annie for it marks the beginning of a new and profound pain deep within herself.

The next, and final series of three titles, begins with a description of 'address unknown' in "Somewhere, Belgium". It describes Annie's feelings of and desire for displacement. The next chapter leads from geographical dislocation into atmospheric chaos. It is the mysterious "Long Rain", and Annie draws the same strange kind of rational conclusion from it as she had previously done with her menstruation and the playing of marbles.

It rained every day for three and a half months, and for all those days I was sick in bed. I knew quite well that I did not have the power to make the atmosphere feel as sick as I felt, but still I couldn't help putting the two together.

(AJ, p126)

The title speaks for itself, the Long Rain exists in itself with no explanation nor justification for its being. It literally permeates every pore of material existence, raises the sea level and reduces the landmass, and has a profound effect upon the imagination of the people. More significantly, it is an expression of the reconciliation Annie has with her mother for she is once again in the weak and vulnerable state of a child, embraced by her mother and her mother's mother Ma Chess who practices the native medicine of healing obeah. They are all surrounded by mystical waters. It is the reenactment of recovery within the womb.

Chapter titles are thus a narrative technique which provokes a response. They are signs, markers, boundaries, and Kincaid utilises them to create an overall linear sense of progression where narrative is predominantly simultaneous with time.

\*\*\*\*

(ii) Wide Sargasso Sea

This contrasts with Jean Rhys's partitioning of Wide Sargasso Sea. There are no chapter headings, no obvious markers as to the content of each fragment. There are only three numbered parts, with subdivisions of major paragraphs as in Annie John. These parts follow the basic succession of Antoinette's life - as a young girl, a married woman, and a mad woman on the brink of death. Fluctuations in narrative time and timbre are signalled by gaps, brackets and italics. Xaviere Gauthier makes a telling comment about

gaps, borders, spaces and silences, holes in discourse.. If the reader feels a bit disoriented in this new space,...it proves, perhaps, it is woman's space. <sup>2</sup>

Jean Rhys comments on her structuring of narrative and her motives behind it - it is to create a plausible experience of Antoinette's space as opposed to the space of Bronte's Bertha;

It can be done three ways. (1) Straight. Childhood, Marriage, Finale told in 1st person. Or it can be done (2) Man's point of view (3) Woman's ditto both 1st person. Or it can be told in the third person with the writer as the Almighty.

...  
I am doing (2).<sup>3</sup>

However, Rhys's partitioning is not the simple summary as described above. Her text is emphatically complicated by the imaginative configuration of each part. Many voices interlace the thoughts of Antoinette the young girl, and her life also expresses and is expressed by her mother, Annette. Antoinette thus becomes Antoinette/Annette who inherits the nominal appendage Mason née Cosway. The life of Antoinette Rochester is predominantly chronicled by her husband, who calls her Antoinette/Marionette and gradually insists on using her 'real' name, Bertha. And finally, Antoinette becomes the mad woman in the attic of Thornfield Hall - Bertha Mason Rochester. Antoinette has undergone many enforced transformations to the point of not knowing who she is anymore. As Antoinette once said, "naming is a form of obeah too" (WSS, p111) and that "names matter" (WSS, p147).

What sense of chronology exists in the narrative structuring of Wide Sargasso Sea? The chronology of Wide Sargasso Sea is complicated by the inherent acknowledgment of its narrative to its "mother text" Jane Eyre. It can be shown that Wide Sargasso Sea is both postlogue and

prologue to Jane Eyre, woven on the loom of Caribbean imagination which in Jane Eyre hung upon the barest, most exotic, and hyperbolic thread.

V. Turner in Critical Inquiry defines narrative as such:

"Narrate" is from the Latin NARRARE ("to tell"), akin to the Latin GNARUS ("knowing")...the Greek GIGNOSKEIN, whence GNOSIS, and the Old English past principle GEENAWAN, whence the Modern English "know". Narrative, it would seem, is rather an appropriate term for a reflexive activity which seeks to "know" antecedent events and the meaning of those events...<sup>4</sup>

The narrative of Wide Sargasso Sea describes a reflexive activity seeking to 'know' the antecedent events of Jane Eyre and their meaning. Robert Scholes in his essay "Afterthoughts" comments upon the concept of narration:

A narration is a text which refers, or seems to refer, to some set of events outside of itself.<sup>5</sup>

This is in effect a paradox. While seeming to refer to events without, the text embraces the events and makes them its own substance. This paradox exists in the relationship of Wide Sargasso Sea to Jane Eyre. Scholes continues;

narrative is past, always past. To speak of the future is to prophecy or predict or speculate - never to narrate.<sup>6</sup>

Wide Sargasso Sea is ostensibly a rewriting of the past of Jane Eyre; its text contains a 'prophecy' of the crux of the plot within Jane Eyre - that

of the burning of Thornfield Hall. Yet it is Bronte's text which is a fundamental and originary influence on the narrative of Wide Sargasso Sea.

In chronological terms of real time, Jane Eyre was written before Wide Sargasso Sea and therefore is within, and forms, the latter's historical past. Thus, in real time, Jane Eyre is the "mother-text" of Wide Sargasso Sea.

In terms of fictional chronology as opposed to historical chronology, Wide Sargasso Sea enacts the paradox of being both the past and future of Jane Eyre. For Rhys's story is the imagined past of Bronte's, but was written after. Thus, Jane Eyre is Wide Sargasso Sea's future in imagined time, and metamorphoses into becoming the "daughter-text".

So which time sequence, which concept of time, is Rhys's text contained within? Rhy's narrative strategy is the interweaving of these two notions of time. This marriage of real and imagined time is a neat narrative twist. There are profound symbolic repercussions, for the concept of time is of tantamount importance in narrative.

I can ... tell a story without specifying the place where it happens...nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past or future tense. This is why the temporal determinations of the narrating instance are manifestly more important than its spatial determination. <sup>7</sup>

Both texts are linked by shared key names and events in different sequences of Time. States Paul Ricoeur:

Dechronolization implies the logical abolition of time; repetition, its existential deepening. <sup>8</sup>

The intertextual confusion of chronology in Bronte's and Rhys's texts is the result of the repetition of crucial motifs (Mr. Rochester, the creole heiress, the burning of Thornfield Hall). This creates the existential deepening of the meaning of both texts, although the characterization of each person and event is separate and different. For example although the creole heiress figures in both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette does not exist in Bronte's text although she metamorphoses into Bertha in Rhys's. But Jean Rhys states categorically, "Mine is not Miss Bronte's." <sup>9</sup> The first tangible hint of the previous text occurs when Antoinette is greeted in her first day at school by the label "You are Antoinette Mason, ne Cosway", for the first part of Wide Sargasso Sea is in the creole tones of Antoinette's voice far removed from the bestial grunts of Bertha Mason.

Wide Sargasso Sea begins in the first person, the voice of Antoinette. There are interjections of the reported speech of others, but conveyed in such a way that their voices become her own. The first, and most significant interruption is Christophine's voice in dialect. Christophine's status as a Caribbean Everywoman is emphasised by the fact she is equally comfortably conversant in both patois and English. It is significant that she predominantly chooses to speak patois, for patois embodies a more intimate communion with her environment. The interjections of maliciousness from the Jamaican ladies of society are a chorus of comment. They depict Antoinette's external sense of herself in contact with the society to which she belongs - or rather, does NOT belong. Although

these comments ostensibly describe her mother Annette, Antoinette feels their barbs like her own wounds. For in describing the mother, they describe the daughter.

The second part of the text is in the voice of a man who is never named. However he is identified by circumstantial detail as Mr. Rochester. Jean Rhys comments, "Mr. R's name ought to be changed. Raworth? A Yorkshire name, isn't it?...Mr Rochester, I presume?"<sup>10</sup> Rochester's part of the text is almost half the entire text in spatial terms. Could Wide Sargasso Sea perhaps be more about Mr. Rochester than Antoinette? However there is a significant difference in Rhys's rendition of Rochester's first-person narrative. Many more interruptions exist, forming major significant interludes, and their chronology has its own significance.

The first interruption is Daniel Cosway's venomous letter. He is the snake in Antoinette's new Paradise, Granbois. Confusion and suspicion already exist in Rochester's mind because the overwhelming strangeness and exotic extremity of girl and place disorientate him, and he has no proper framework by which to place his thoughts in perspective. Daniel Cosway's letter is the first decisive sowing of the seeds of doubt, and because it is the first and echoes the doubts Rochester already holds within himself, it seems all the more believable. Rochester chooses the forked path Daniel prepares for him out of the Gates of Paradise. It is Antoinette who is the sacrificial victim. In the ensuing chronology of events, it is significant that the interruptions which most precisely mark Rochester's developing train of thought, come in the tangible form of letters. They bring with them the false aura of proof. Writing, especially English writing with legal overtones is something Rochester is familiar with. Although Daniel's



patois style as well as his vitriol disconcert Rochester, it is the form in which his missive comes which reassures him. The first letter is uninvited and insidious and concerns his wife. The next is solicited by Rochester from his legal advisor Mr. Fraser and concerns Christophine. This letter is in effect a legal document by which Mr. Fraser sanctions Christophine's arrest. It is the embodiment of Imperial Power and is the reassurance Rochester needs to suppress Christophine's native power which disconcerts him. Her obeah is beyond the limits of his knowledge, but he is now armed by his knowledge of English Law. Both the letters Rochester receives describe to him the supposedly 'black' elements of the Caribbean in which he desires to believe, thus justifying his consequent actions - promiscuity, the possibility of incest hinted at by Daniel Cosway, and Christophine's black magic. For Rochester, each letter provokes a confrontation. One confrontation is with evil, embodied by Daniel, and the other confrontation is with good personified by Christophine. Her name stems from Christ, and her term of endearment, Pheena, used by Antoinette, sounds like Phoenix - the bird that never dies and rises from the flames. Her name reminds us of Antoinette's flame-coloured dress, resurrected by her imagination before she lights the fires which ignite Thornfield Hall. In the flames Antoinette's memory rises from the ashes of Bertha. In this chronology of events, 'good' follows 'evil' - but only after the damage has been done.

The longest, and most unusual interlude within Rochester's voice is written in the first person, in the voice of Antoinette. It is a desultory and poignant introduction of the theme of death, for as she rides in despair to seek help from Christophine, she passes by the landmark - the "Mounes Mors (the Dead Ones)" (WSS, p89). This passage marks Antoinette's

isolation in her desolation, paralleled by the surrounding of her voice by the rest of the text which is the voice of her husband. The foil to Antoinette's voice is Christophine's who acts as mother and healer. Christophine's natural power ultimately fails because Rochester's white power with all the force of English Law behind him, proves stronger.

Two physical interruptions then follow. First is Rochester's encounter with Daniel in a room which seems prepared for ritual sacrifice - "A large table covered with a red fringed cloth made the small room seem hotter; the only window was shut." (WSS, p100). It is an atmosphere of oppression, equivalent to the red room in which Jane Eyre is imprisoned and falls into a dead faint. Daniel calls himself Esau, who was cheated out of his birthright, as Daniel claims of himself. (However Antoinette contemptuously denies his name is really Cosway, but is instead Boyd - Daniel Boyd self-christened Esau Cosway.) The next and most physical interruption is Rochester's adultery with Antoinette's half-caste maid Amelie, within Antoinette's hearing as she lies on the other side of the wall. It is an act of premeditated cruelty, and with this action, Rochester evolves into depths never plumbed by Bronte's. These encounters mark irrevocable changes in the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette. Rochester's condemnation of her begins with the cruelty he inflicts upon her. It drives her mad with longing and hate. It is then that he starts to call her Bertha. It is a dull and stolid name, an insult to the light, almost frivolous femininity conjured by 'Antoinette'. When Rochester does call her Antoinette, he couples it with 'Marionette' in a mocking rhyme. It is Rochester who imposes artifice upon her, and splits her personality, so that when she next looks in the looking-glass her reflection is not the same.

It is Rochester's confrontation with Christophine which is the most significant interlude in his narrative. Rhys uses the technique of repetitions in italics, and within brackets. They are interruptions or interludes depending on the voice echoed and its content, and the accompanying memory evoked. The voices echoed are Christophine's, Antoinette's, and his own. They delineate his relationships, and relationships which do not involve him. It does not matter whose relationships they are, for ultimately what matters to Rochester is his interpretation of them to suit his own purpose. The snatches of repeated speech are either of words said immediately before - which then impress more cogently the significance of the statement; or words said much further back in time and emotional experience, and which are now weighted by memory with more meaning. These repeated fragments condense Rochester's sense of himself, his surroundings, the past and the consequences he must face. It is significant that in the most heated phase of his argument with Christophine, it is Christophine's condemnation of him which rings loud in his ears. Her accusations metamorphose into thoughts and statements expressed by a voice that turns out to be his own - but faded, distant, and almost intangible. It is as if his will is no longer his, and these echoes of his voice confirm the foundation of Christophine's accusations. Yet - the penultimate bundle of words in brackets is Antoinette's cry of misery, repeating her first words in the interlude of her voice enclosed by Rochester's:

(I lay awake all night long after they were asleep,  
and as soon as it was light I got up and dressed and  
saddled Preston. ...)

(WSS, p127)

But the final interjection in this series of echoes is Daniel's poison. His venom is what lingers on in Rochester's mind;

(Give my sister your wife a kiss from me. Love her as I did - oh yes I did. How can I promise that?) I said nothing.

(WSS, p130)

Within this echo a confusion of voices exist, which intensifies its insidiousness. Who speaks? The first two sentences are Daniel's mocking threats of insinuated deeds already done. The third sentence, however, has an uncertain status - is it said by Daniel or by Rochester? This ambivalence holds the promise of many significant meanings, and is the summary of such promises. However the words beyond the brackets are without doubt Rochester's. They express the annihilation of his speech and emotion. This is confirmed by his words concluding his part of the text, ending in nothing...

That stupid boy followed us. ... Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing...

(WSS, p142)

Rochester cannot conceive of the simplicity of love which asks for nothing but to be with the beloved, and which loves for nothing. Antoinette has been reduced to a blank-faced marionette, and Rochester sums up his own outcome aptly by his last words.

Why is Rochester's first person narrative which is the most substantial part of the text, also the most disembodied and fragmentary? We are reminded of Xaviere Gauthiere's comment "gaps, borders, spaces and silences, ... perhaps, it is woman's space".<sup>2</sup> Is Rochester's narrative thus a subtle embodiment of Antoinette's fragmented space and non-sense of self? Is it that Rochester speaks for everyone, and/or that everyone speaks for

Rochester? It is the part of the narrative which evokes the chaos of conflicting emotions and confusion of mind in the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette, and within their individual selves. Rhys's narrative techniques successfully reflect this.

The first and final parts of Wide Sargasso Sea which are in Antoinette's voice are more uniform although they chart the current of her life with all her emotional eddies. The central part of the text describes her marriage and its inevitable dissolution between persons who embody more than themselves. Rochester stands for the legal and rational mind of English Law which is only justice for Englishmen. English Law, especially its colonial offshoot, casts out women and natives. Antoinette embodies - to Rochester - all that is exotic, emotional, and extreme.

The third part of Rhys's text is the most insubstantial in terms of spatial volume, it is almost a mere interlude in itself. However it bears equal if not more imaginative weight, and leads to a fiery conclusion. Characters from Jane Eyre exist, (Mrs. Eff for Mrs. Fairfax, and Grace Poole) and these abbreviated fragments from another past make up the material of the present. Significantly, the first mention of the past is with relevance to Rochester, "They knew that he was in Jamaica when his father and his brother died, ... His stay in the West Indies has changed him out of all knowledge." (WSS p145) This speech signifies that the Caribbean has wrought a change in his character, and the greater implication is that Rhys's text has also wrought a different man, although the words describing him are almost lifted verbatim from Bronte's text. In the first sentence Grace Poole is spoken of in the third person, but immediately after her voice metamorphoses into the first person. She thus

links Rhys's text more intimately with Bronte's. Gerard Genette comments on the concept of 'first-person' and 'third-person' narrative;

the terms 'first-person' - or 'third-person' narrative ... seem to me inadequate, in that they stress variation in the element of the narrative situation that is in fact invariant, ie: the presence (explicit or implicit) of the 'person' of the narrator. This presence is invariant because the narrator can be in his narrative only in the 'first-person'; and stressing 'person' leads one to think that there exists a choice the narrator has to make - a purely grammatical and rhetorical choice. But the novelist's choice, unlike the narrator's, is not between two grammatical forms, but between two narrative postures (whose grammatical forms are simply an automatic consequence)... The presence of first-person verbs in a narrative text can thus refer to two very different situations which grammar renders identical but which analysis must distinguish; the narrator's own designation of himself as such, or else the identity of the person between the narrator and one of the characters in the story. ... Thus two types of narrative are distinguished: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells, the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells. <sup>11</sup>

Annie John fits into the latter category, Annie being the narrator always present in her story. Wide Sargasso Sea, as we have seen, possesses a conflicting continuum of first-person and third-person narratives, sometimes within the same character as we have seen with Grace's voice. Genette confirms his point;

Thus, if a story is told from the point of view of a particular character, the question whether this character is also the narrator, speaking in the first person, or whether the narrator is someone who speaks of him in the third person, is not a question of the point of view, but a question of voice. <sup>12</sup>

It is these layers of voices which make up the interfaces between Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre. The layering of voices in

Wide Sargasso Sea implies deeper marginalities of meaning within the text.

The opening phrases of the final part of the text contains such hints:

'They knew that he was in Jamaica...', Grace Poole said.  
...Next day Mrs. Eff wanted to see me and she complained  
about the gossip. I don't allow gossip. I told you  
that when you came. Servants will talk and you can't  
stop them, I said.

(WSS, p145)

The first sentence may be Antoinette's voice describing what Grace Poole said in the third person, but it may also be Rhys's authorial acknowledgement of Bronte's text. However, Rhys effectively transforms the past into the "present before our eyes", to use Wayne Booth's phrase:

the third-person narrator can be shown technically in  
the past tense but in effect present before our eyes. <sup>13</sup>

Grace Poole's swift metamorphosis into the present tense of the first-person just as rapidly glides into Mrs. Fairfax's first-person statement, and then back to Grace's voice. It has an almost unreal dreamlike quality, this merging of past with present, and brief snatches of one person's voice with another. The leapfrogging of consciousness from one text to another also disconcerts. But by blurring the margins of identity of voice and text, and thus any limiting sense of boundary, Rhys succeeds in re-writing (and re-reading) the key fragments of Jane Eyre into the fabric of Wide Sargasso Sea.

Only the first and single italicized paragraph of the third part of the text, is in a voice other than Antoinette's. It describes thoughts

received by Grace. However Antoinette has received no grace and instead is immolated in the cold hell of Thornfield Hall. She is guarded by a cold, dull Poole with her only warmth provided by a flame-coloured dress. Her spirits are damp. Rhys now evolves a sharper delineation of the contrary concepts of past and present time in the relationship between Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre, embodied by the split personality Bertha/Antoinette. Antoinette vaguely apprehends her image of disillusionment in the now non-existent looking-glass;

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. ... The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. ...who am I?

(WSS p147)

Her surroundings now draw the conclusion she is Bertha, for Rhys repeats Bronte's significant circumstantial detail. However, her voice and imaginative tones in the first person, are Antoinette's. The climax is an astounding imaginative overlap, an interface which seems to fuse, yet separate, both texts. Rhys uses the deft device of a dream which repeats and prophecies Bronte's text. Rhys's imaginative reconstruction of Bertha's movements are barely mentioned but insinuated repetitions of snatches of Bronte's text. Dreams are a satisfactory device fulfilling Rhys's purpose of fusing originality and acknowledgment. For dreams take place in real and imagined time; they blur any sense of boundary by being an unconscious apprehension of the conscious. They have a chronology of their own and a different, perhaps more potent significance. Dreams are one definition of intertextuality - between the material of consciousness, and the fabric of the unconscious.

The end of Wide Sargasso Sea is its own unique flicker of



potentiality. Its journey down a dark passageway leads to its own conflagration of the imagination. But its end is simultaneously the memory of a previously read text, and begins different imaginative consequences for that text. Echoes, by definition, usually come after. But because Rhys is manipulating two contrary concepts of time, real and imagined, this echo looks forward. The End of Wide Sargasso Sea conjures the probability of an End Beyond... Physically Rhys's text ends here, but imaginatively the candle does not die down here but goes on to illuminate a new interpretation of Jane Eyre. With a mistress-stroke, Rhys acknowledges Jane Eyre in the conclusion of her own text, yet the conclusion of Wide Sargasso Sea is brilliantly original.

Thus, the narrative structure of Wide Sargasso Sea is an apprehension of intertextuality. Its chronology unlike Annie John's, is not a line of progressing markers of age, but multiple layers and interfaces of memories, echoes, dreams, and superimposed voices. They are all techniques of repetition, and therefore of "existential deepening". Wide Sargasso Sea's own interior textuality is enriched by its relationship of intertextuality with Jane Eyre. To quote Paul Ricoeur, the recollection of a story is "governed as a whole by its way of ending", and this "constitutes an alternative...representation of time." Thus, instead of time being a movement from the past forward into the future,

It is as though recollection inverted the so-called natural order of time. By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn to read time itself backward... In this way, a plot establishes human action not only within time, but within memory. Memory...repeats the course of events.

...  
The end of the story is what equates the present with

the past, the actual with the potential. The hero is who he was. <sup>14</sup>

But at the end of Rhys's text, is Antoinette who she was, or is she also Bertha? Similarly, does Bertha ever become Antoinette in Jane Eyre, after one has read Rhys's text? Also, does Annie John remain the same Annie John? Kincaid's text is ostensibly the charting of Annie's development and the separation of her identity from being a mirror-image of her mother. Thus the end of the story may equate the present with the past, but the heroine is not necessarily who she was. The end of Wide Sargasso Sea leads on into the beginning of a new re-reading of Jane Eyre, and vice versa. Rhys's text has its beginning in Bronte's, and also its end. To Edward Said, beginnings are significant and have their consequences:

Every writer knows that the choice of a beginning for what he will write is crucial not only because it determines much of what follows, but also because a work's beginning is, practically speaking, the main entrance to what it offers. In retrospect, we can regard a beginning as the point which ... the writer departs from all other works; a beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing ... of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both. ...Is the beginning the same as an origin? Is the beginning of a given work its real beginning, or is there some other, secret point that more authentically starts the work off? <sup>15</sup>

Similarly, is the end of a work its real end? Is the end of Wide Sargasso Sea more authentically the one it prophecies in Jane Eyre? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak confirms Said's musings about the relevance of beginnings by defining the concept of a 'beginning before the beginning' - the preface;

"PRAE-FATIO" is "a saying before-hand".

... Hegelian AUFHEBUNG is a relationship between two terms where the second one at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence... A successful preface is AUFGEHOBEN into the text it precedes... It is, to use Derrida's structural metaphor, the son or seed (preface or word), engendered by the father, is recovered by the father and thus justified.

The preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide, for the book (the father) makes a claim of authority or origin which is both true and false. (As regards parricide, I speak theoretically. The preface need make no overt claim...of destroying its pre-text. As a preface, it is already surrendered to that gesture...). Humankind's common desire is for a stable center... And a book, with its ponderable shape and beginning, middle, end, stands to justify that desire. But... What, then, is the book's identity? ...two readings of the 'same' book show an identity that can only be defined as a difference. The book is not repeatable in its 'identity': each reading of the book produces a simulacrum of an 'original'... Any preface commemorates the difference in identity by inserting itself between two readings - my reading, rereading, rearranging of the text - and your reading.

The preface, by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, merely enacts the book's repetitions which are always other than the book. There is, in fact, no 'book' other than these ever-different repetitions: the 'book' in other words, is always already a 'text', constituted by the play of identity and difference. <sup>16</sup>

In deed, it can be said that Wide Sargasso Sea is a preface, even aufgehoben to Jane Eyre, and vice versa. I am tempted to replace "father" with "mother" for it is more fitting with regard to the texts concerned. Rhys's text is both homage and matricide to Bronte's. An isolated identity of any text is an impossibility. This analysis assumes a reading of Wide Sargasso Sea coupled with a reading of Jane Eyre, and such an assumption is not unreasonable. Most readers, especially female readers, have read Jane Eyre. It is a formative text for many young female readers. Gerald Prince comments;

We must not confuse the narratee with the reader ... actual readers may or may not coincide with the person addressed by the narrator... There are many 'signals', direct and indirect, which contribute to our knowledge of the narratee. The assumptions of the narratee may be attacked, supported, queried, or solicited by the narrator... <sup>17</sup>

Rhys solicits the assumptions of the narratee by signals stretching back to Jane Eyre. Confirms Gerard Genette:

As soon as a story is well-known ... retelling takes the place of telling. Then following the story is less important than apprehending the well-known end as implied in the beginning and the well-known episodes as leading to this end. <sup>18</sup>

In effect, Wide Sargasso Sea carries out the retelling of Jane Eyre and apprehends the latter's well-known end in both the beginning and the end of Rhys's text. This crucial interface between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea is significant for one key link between Wide Sargasso Sea and Annie John is that of Jane Eyre, which illuminates their shared Caribbean and colonized literary experience. Reading and re-reading enacts repetitions "always other than the book" which blurs any conceivable margin of definition. States Maurice Blanchot:

Words that are not meaningless, but focusless; ...and will never stop; when they stop they go on; are never silent... <sup>19</sup>

The meanings of words go on, even when they themselves have stopped - no text possesses a de-finite margin of interpretation. It participates in an intertextuality beyond itself and its interpretations divulge its marginalities.

IN ASIAN CULTURES THE MIRROR OFTEN  
FUNCTIONS AS THE VERY VOID OF SYMBOLS.  
Trinh Minh-ha <sup>1</sup>

THE QUESTION PROMPTED BY THE FREUDIAN NOTION  
OF NARCISSISM WOULD...BE; WHAT IS THIS  
NARCISSISTIC IDENTITY? HOW STABLE ARE ITS  
BORDERS, ITS RELATIONS TO THE OTHER? DOES THE  
'MIRROR STAGE' EMERGE OUT OF NOWHERE?

... NARCISSISM PROTECTS EMPTINESS, CAUSES IT  
TO EXIST, LEST BORDERS DISSOLVE...AS LINING OF  
THAT EMPTINESS. ... THAT ZONE WHERE  
EMPTINESS AND NARCISSISM, THE ONE UPHOLDING  
THE OTHER, CONSTITUTE THE ZERO DEGREE OF  
IMAGINATION.

Julia Kristeva <sup>2</sup>

### III. THE IMAGING OF THE MOTHER-MIRROR: REVELATION AND CONCEALMENT

#### (i) Wide Sargasso Sea

The relationship between mother and daughter plays a key role in these texts by Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid. There is much mirror-imagery which provokes marginal depths of meaning within the text. Ernest Becker comments in The Denial of Death:

each of us repeats the tragedy of Narcissus - we are hopelessly absorbed with ourselves.

...Man lives in a world of symbols and dreams and not merely matter. His sense of self-worth is constituted symbolically, his cherished narcissism feeds on symbols. <sup>3</sup>

The tragedy of Narcissus is that of his consuming self-absorbed reflection of his own gracefulness in the pool (it is a symbolic ripple that Antoinette's jailer is called Grace Poole). Like a pool, the looking glass enables the reflection of oneself and others. Self-reflection enables Woman - or, more specifically a woman such as Annette - to live in a world of symbols and dreams, to prolong and cherish her narcissism. For Annette, looking at a looking-glass is an attempt to materialize what matters most to her soul. The first mention of the looking-glass in Wide Sargasso Sea is with regard to Annette's beautiful and lonely self:

perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass.

(WSS, p16)

Mr. Mason is the materialization of her hope. This is the legacy Annette's daughter Antoinette inherits, as her mother's mirror-image. The mirror reflects - and probes - the depths of the soul.

The mirror rapidly metamorphoses into a metaphor of the soul. The looking glass becomes a particularly compelling symbol of the human soul in its entirety. For even when the souls of women serve as mirrors of themselves, the illusions and disillusionment their reflections harbour contain a telling reflection the male psyche. As Virginia Woolf comments wryly:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. <sup>4</sup>

Irigaray also makes an interesting allusion in a footnote;

It should be noted that 'PSYCHE' in French also means 'CHEVAL-GLASS'. <sup>5</sup>

A cheval-glass is a revolving reflecting glass traditionally used predominantly by women as an aid in the adornment of artifice, and in objectifying themselves with ornamentation. This is largely a consequence due to the imposition of the male gaze. Further, Psyche embodied the Soul in Greek myth, coupled with Love. The Oxford English Dictionary describes Psyche as "Soul, spirit, mind (in Gk. myth personified as beloved of Eros...)". If a looking glass reflects all these and is also described as being beloved by Love, Love's self-love, how apt the images of narcissism and of the soul in the metaphor of the mirror. The daughter mirroring the mother in herself, and the mother treating the daughter as but an extension of her self, is an imaging of one's own narcissism and the expressive imposition of one's self upon the other. It is a wilful translation of relation to reflection, and is reflected in these texts by Rhys and Kincaid. Mirroring is also a metaphor of writing:

Writing necessarily refers to writing. The image is

that of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors...literally a...reflecting reflection that remains free from the conditions of subjectivity and objectivity and yet reveals them both... I-YOU, not one, not two... Yet how difficult it is to keep our mirrors clean. We tend to cloud and soil them...for we love to use them as instruments to behold ourselves, maintaining a narcissistic relation of me to me... Considered an instrument of self-knowledge, one in which I have total faith, it also bears a magical character that has always transcended its functional nature. In this encounter of I with I, the power of identification is often such that reality and appearance merge while the tool itself becomes invisible. ... Trying to grasp it amounts to stopping a mirror from mirroring. It is encountering the void. <sup>6</sup>

Trinh expresses that the mirror reflects the dual relationship I-YOU instead of being simply the singular focus of self-reflection; I-EYE. It is both the mirror of one self and the other, of oneself and the mother.

A mother's image forms her daughter's. To J.K.Gardiner, for one crucial stage in life the mother mirrors the child - and she implies that the mirroring is more intimate and lasting if that child is a daughter.

According to observational studies, mothers respond to their daughters more intensely than to their sons, ...The unmirrored child becomes the typical twentieth century fragmented, alienated adult. <sup>7</sup>

This mirroring is necessary, because of

our need to experience psychological visibility: to see ourselves in and through the responses of another person, one with whom we have important affinities...in effect, our need for a psychological mirror. <sup>8</sup>

The psyche is a mirror. The earliest and perhaps most important affinity experienced by the child at the initial and crucial stage of its development is that which it shares with its mother. To Nancy Chodorow, daughters are induced into the narrative structure of mothering by the



situation in which they grow up, being mothered into the repetitive role of mothering. Mothering is psychologically enforced, internalized, developed, and the daughter's sense of self-identity is thus stripped down and re-robed by social and psychological pressure. Hence a daughter's feelings toward her mother are bound to be volatile. Kincaid demonstrates Annie's ambivalent relationship with her namesake, and Rhys highlights Rochester dressing his wife in the borrowed role of her mother - the mad woman - which Antoinette eventually becomes. In terms of psychology, Nancy Chodorow's essay "The Reproduction of Mothering" describes the tragedy of motherhood - the murderous impulse every child feels towards its beloved mother, and the murderous impulse a mother may feel toward her beloved child. This is especially potent between mothers and daughters, because

mothers of daughters...tend to experience them as...extensions of themselves. Clinical evidence...show that girls simply do not, as Freud claimed, abandon their mothers as love objects at the inception of the Oedipus complex, nor do they perceive themselves as castrated.

Rather, they remain deeply identified with their mothers through adolescence, gaining their sense of femaleness first from this identification and not, as Freud would have it, from turning to their fathers as heterosexual objects and wishing to have babies from them. <sup>9</sup>

Psychologists such as Jacques Lacan also speak of the crucial 'mirror-stage' which every child undergoes. The Mirror stage signals the Imaginary phase and from it evolves the gradual awareness of self-identity. Toril Moi explains;

The Imaginary corresponds to the pre-Oedipal period when the child believes itself to be a part of the mother, and perceives no separation between itself and the world. In the Imaginary there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence.

...The Imaginary is for Lacan inaugurated by the child's entry into the Mirror stage between the ages of 6-8 months. The principle function of the Mirror stage is to endow the baby with a unitary body image... The child, when looking at itself in the mirror...only perceives another human being with whom it merges and identifies. The Mirror stage thus only allows for dual relationships. <sup>10</sup>

This dual relationship is what the child possesses with its mother. Toril

Moi goes on to interpret Lacan:

It is only through the triangulation of this structure, which occurs when the father intervenes to break up the dyadic unity between mother and child, that the child can take up its place in the Symbolic order, and thus come to define itself as separate from the other. <sup>11</sup>

Antoinette calls herself after her mother Annette. An-TOI-nette. Her name is her mother's enclosing the french word for the familiar second person - TOI. Although the name is an attempt to imitate, it implies separateness. The first gesture Antoinette really remembers her mother demonstrating towards her is one of firm, offhand rejection: "But she pushed me away, ... without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her." (WSS, p17) Antoinette turns instead to Christophine. Christophine's domain is the kitchen, perennial symbol of nourishment, comfort and family embodied by the mother-figure.

Antoinette's mother-figure finds her a friend, Tia, a little black girl. One shared moment develops into mutual hatred and racial insults. Says Tia; "black nigger better than white nigger" (WSS, p21) and she puts on Antoinette's dress and leaves her her own. It is thus robed in the raiment of a "black nigger" that Antoinette first greets the rich white

family to whom she will belong. Clothes are the adornment of identity. Thus Antoinette symbolically becomes a reflection of Tia. In a climactic moment Antoinette leaves her home and her past, the burning shreds of her old identity, never to return:

We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (WSS, p38)

Having been clothed by Tia, Antoinette now has to be suitably robed for her new role in a new life - white and civilised. Her new vestments are cut out of the same cloth as her mother's. It is the start of her new identity as a young lady, Antoinette Mason. Unlike Antoinette, Annie's new identity as a "young lady" is marked by the time her clothes are no longer of the same cloth as her mother's.

When Antoinette puts on yet another new identity, that of Antoinette Rochester, she gradually loses her right for self-approbation and adornment. Rochester insists in his disillusionment that Antoinette is the mirror-image of her mother:

Tied to a lunatic for life - a drunken lying lunatic - gone her mother's way.

... She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied.

Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she'll have no lover, for I don't want her and she'll see no other. (WSS, p135-6)

His expression of vindictiveness is to take away her pleasures - loving, and loving herself, her reflection. To him, it is a "damnable looking-glass" - the inexplicable feminine thing which he describes as hellish.

This is his fear of his wife's potential female power, and he succeeds in ensuring she never realises it by labelling her 'mad'. He refuses to comprehend the grace she receives through the narcissism of her reflection. A telling exchange exists between husband and wife, when what Antoinette describes as 'ornamented', Rochester corrects as being 'wrought'.

... the handrail was ornamented iron.'

'Wrought iron,' I said.

'Yes, wrought iron, and at the end of the last step it was curved like a question mark and when I put my hand on it, the iron was warm and I was comforted.'

(WSS, p109)

This is an attempt by Antoinette to explain herself to him - but Rochester does not listen to nor understands the inuendo of her nostalgia. Ornament connotes frivolity, softening hard iron by the graceful curving lines of filigree work and other beautifying decoration. She could derive happiness from its hardness by her own touch of human warmth, and seeing that even this unyielding metal could curve into an acquiescent question mark. Rochester however remains rigid, and corrects her curtly with 'wrought' derived from 'work'. He works upon his wife, subtly changing her meanings into his. The result of which is that his desire to impose harsh solitude upon her - no loving, no looking-glass, no softness nor ornamentation, - succeeds in her incarceration in his cold lonely hell. Antoinette's face becomes "blank, no expression at all." (WSS, p137) She has lost any reflection of warmth and love, all expression of life. Antoinette's final comment about her looking-glass is poignant and profound:

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. ... The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between

us - hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. ...who am I?

(WSS, p147)

Her looking-glass is her psychological mirror, reassuring her of her sense of self. It is a companion. Without it, Antoinette is not allowed even the luxury of being "not quite myself". Now she does not even know who she is at all - there is no half measure of 'quite knowing'. Instead her face, her life is now a blank. Rochester has turned her self into an echo of his - "For nothing. Nothing ...". (WSS, p142) He has also succeeded in transforming Antoinette into the image of her madwoman mother.

I took the red dress down and put it against myself. 'Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?' I said. That man told me so. ...'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother,' he said to me.

'Oh put it away,' Grace Poole said...

(WSS, p152)

Clothes trigger off memories for Antoinette - memories of herself and of her mother, even when they are no longer cut out of the same cloth.

'I am not a forgetting person,' said Antoinette.

... I remember the dress she was wearing - an evening dress cut very low, and she was barefooted. There was a fat black man with a glass of rum in his hand. ... I saw his mouth fasten on hers and she went all soft and limp in his arms and he laughed.

(WSS, pp110-111)

The memory of dresses is a comparison between daughter and mother. Clothes are for dressing and undressing - they have sexual connotations for the Cosway women. Annette's is low cut, Antoinette's is flame-coloured like passion, a description of a culture in which the evaluation of women is according to their attractiveness to, and therefore adornment for, men. Women and 'natives' were part and parcel of the colonial possession of an entire culture by white masters.

(ii) Annie John

The cloth which colours Annie's relationship with her mother is of a different cut from that of Antoinette's. It is the material of bright and childish joy, - "a piece of cloth - a yellow background, with figures of men...seated at pianos" (AJ p26) - rather than that of an adult passion. As different is the imaging between Annie and her mother - their mirror is altogether different from that shared by Antoinette and her mother. Annie John's mirroring of her mother takes place in a less tangible way although her mother's presence in her life is more tangible than that of Antoinette's. There are no obvious references to looking glasses, and of clothes - only that they were cut out of the same cloth and made by her mother's hands. But Annie John is also about the mother-mirror, and more specifically the daughter's growing resentment of it after her childish desire for it. Indeed, Mrs. John desired her daughter as a mirror-image of herself, for

She was my mother, Annie; I was her daughter, Annie; and that was why I was called by my mother and father Little Miss.

(AJ, p105)

Instead of a looking glass reflection, the mirror-imaging between Annie and her mother is symbolized by spheres. Spheres are orbs like eyes. First they are iridescent glass ones - marbles - which then metamorphose into little black balls.

It was my mother who gave me my first marbles. ...she thought that their unusual size - they were big as plums - and their color would amuse me. ... They looked to me like miniature globes, the white representing the seas, the colors representing the land

masses. I didn't think very much of them as I rolled them about in my palms, but my mother...said, "What a nice color! Amber." Amber! Needless to say, when I showed the marbles to my friends at school I said, "Such a nice color, amber," causing the desired effect ... they widened their eyes and shaped their mouths into tiny "o"s.

(AJ, pp55-56)

"O" is zero the sign of nothing, or the sign of wonder, the zero degree of the imagination. Marbles are also crystal balls. One can see depth in them and they can colour one's vision. They were first expressions of love from mother to daughter, and are captured miniature worlds of delectable nourishment of the senses. They look like juicy plums, are beautifully tactile when rolled in palms, and are a feast for senses other than eyes. They are beautiful symbols of land surrounded by seas. They illustrate that Annie's vision of her worlds are transformed by her mother. She utters the magic word "Amber" and Annie's eyes are opened and her view utterly transformed. She imitates her mother, and her friends imitate her reaction. Their mouths express the globed shape of the marbles in nothingness, amazement and envy. Annie has discovered the capacity to create such feelings and to create new worlds - through imitation of her mother's good naturedness.

However the next episode of the marbles that Annie shares with her mother does not reflect such good naturedness. Annie has single-handedly transformed her mother's reaction to them, and they have now become orbs of contention.

My mother kept up the search for the marbles. How she would torment me!

(AJ, p67)

Seeing that her daughter has become as unrelenting as herself in the face

of threats, Mrs. John tries a new, insidious tactic. She tells her daughter the story of the long black snake lurking in the bundle of green figs she once carried, almost fainting, all the way home. This is Annie's response;

And so, feeling such love and pity for this girl standing in front of me, I was on the verge of giving my mother my entire collection of marbles. She wanted them so badly. What could some marbles matter? A snake had sat on her head for miles as she walked home. The words "The marbles are in the corner over there" were on the very tip of my tongue, when I heard my mother, her voice warm and soft and treacherous, say to me, "Well, Little Miss, where are your marbles?" Summoning my own warm, soft, and newly acquired treacherous voice, I said, "I don't have any marbles. I have never played marbles, you know."

(AJ, p70)

Mrs. John knows her daughter plays marbles. It is when Annie imagines her mother a mirror-image of herself as a young girl, that an overwhelming sense of softness and tenderness surges up. Then she realises the snake-hiss of her mother's speech, and again, retaliates by imitating her mother. Defiant to the last, Annie still mirrors her mother. But, when she menstruates, she stops playing marbles. It is as if this biological signal of her young womanhood, as opposed to her mother's exhortations to be a 'young lady', stop Annie's disobedience and immature behaviour of her own accord. It is the unavoidable biological mark of the separateness of her being from her mother. This separateness is also signalled by a new sphere in her life - the little black ball, so different from the large beautiful and iridescent plum-like amber marble. This black ball is not given to her by her mother, but created by herself. In deed, it is something she gives to her mother.



My unhappiness was something deep inside me, and when I closed my eyes I could even see it. ... it took the shape of a small black ball, all wrapped up in cobwebs. ...it weighed worlds. ... I was beyond feeling sorry for myself... I could only just sit and look at myself, feeling like the oldest person who had ever lived... After I had sat in this way for a while, to distract myself I would count my toes; always it came out the same - I had ten of them.

(AJ, pp85/86)

It exists deep in her mind's eye, and where the marbles were miniature worlds, these black balls weigh worlds. It is embraced by the dust of her heart and is a metaphor of uncomprehending but keenly felt despair, profound and ageless. And yet, Annie remains the child she ever was - counting her toes. But counting her toes is accompanied by the mature realisation that although she seems to have changed immeasurably, other things, however simple or because they are simple, remain constant. This ball reflects all the blackness inside her and begins to reflect its blackness on every colour creating her joie de vivre.

Everything I used to care about had turned sour. I could start with the sight of the flamboyant trees in bloom, the red of the flowers ... seem on fire...; seeing this sight, I would imagine myself incapable of coming to harm if I were just to walk through this inferno. I could end with my mother and me; we were now a sight to see.

(AJ, p87)

As with Antoinette, the sight of red - a red flower, a red dress - is the signal of flames. Red is also the colour of the blood of menstruation. Annie wishes to perish in such an inferno incinerating herself and her mother; and Antoinette does perish in the flames of Thornfield Hall as the incarnation of her mad mother. Infernos symbolically purify, and enable resurrection anew. By "sight to see" Annie means that her mother and

herself have become poles apart, behaving contrary to the other's desire. They have developed interfaces of behaviour, mannerisms with one meaning for others and separate meanings for themselves.

We both noticed that now if she said that something I did reminded her of her own self at my age, I would try to do it a different way... She returned the blow by admiring and praising everything that she suspected had special meaning for me. ... My mother and I soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other. For my father and the world, we were...love and laughter. I saw her with my old eyes, my eyes as a child, and she saw me with hers of that time.

(AJ, p87)

Annie is rebelling, defiantly declaring her separateness and insisting that even when her mother was the same age as she is now, she is entirely different. But her mother's mind thinks the same way as Annie's, and she knows the strategy which outsmarts her daughter, blow by blow. Their mirror-image has two faces and a multitude of reflections. They also have two sets of eyes, each. It is as if one set of orbs see clear and beautiful like marbles, and the other set sees cobwebbed, black vision blinding each to the other. Annie confesses:

I had never loved anyone so or hated anyone so. But to say hate - what did I mean by that? Before, if I hated someone I simply wished the person dead. But I couldn't wish my mother dead. If my mother died, what would become of me? I couldn't imagine my life without her. Worse than that, if my mother died, I would have to die, too, and even less than I could imagine my mother dead could I imagine myself dead.

(AJ, p88)

Her relationship with her mother is all about love and hate, life and death

all its manifold meanings. Its shared margin with death makes life meaningful, likewise the margin with hate is what makes the meaning of love so poignant. Annie just cannot imagine herself disembodied from her mother, however hard she tries to remain separate. Her mother is both her life source and death source. It is as if when confronted by such an ultimatum, Annie is not just a mere reflection of her mother, but her mother herself.

They share one final confrontation when Annie's black ball merges with her mother, forming yet another indissoluble binding.

We looked at each other, and I could see the frightening black thing leave her to meet the frightening black thing that had left me. They met in the middle and embraced. ... it was as if I were not only a stranger but a stranger that she did not wish to know. ... she used the French-patois word for it... The word "slut"... As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, "Well, ... like mother like daughter."

(AJ, p101)

In contrast with Rochester's insistence on what his wife does not wish to know, that she is like her mother - meaning mad; Annie insists her mother is like herself - a slut. In both cases, it is the humiliation of likeness, the former imposed upon the daughter and the latter upon the mother.

At that, everything stopped. ... The two black things joined together in the middle of the room separated, hers going to her, mine coming back to me. I looked at my mother. She seemed tired and old and broken. Seeing that, I felt happy and sad at the same time. I soon decided happy was better...when she said, "Until this moment, in my whole life I knew without a doubt that...I loved you best,"...

I looked at my mother - at her turned back this time - and she wasn't tired and old and broken at all. ... It was I who was tired and old and broken, and as I looked at my mother, full of vigor, young and whole, I wanted to go over...and beg forgiveness... But I couldn't move... it was as if the ground had opened up between us...

(AJ, p103)

In Annie's inner eye, her mother and herself have created individual, and yet the same inner black worlds which can meet and embrace. But when Annie says defiantly that she IS the mirror-image of her mother, a great gulf yawns between them which cannot be trespassed. Even the symbol of enmity they shared is forced to separate. As always, her mother proves the stronger and prouder and it is Annie who is crushed. Her mother creates within her the sensation of drowning in a sea of infamy. Like Christophine, Mrs. John speaks patois for its more penetrating flavour. She accuses her daughter of committing a crime which compromises the sex she shares with her mother, and by extension her very self and her mother. By her tone of voice and manner of speaking, she sets her daughter apart from herself - until her daughter insists there is no margin between them. It is significant that Annie says she is like her mother in order to save her own sense of identity. It is this inseparableness which causes the simultaneous and conflicting emotions of happiness and sadness, love and hate, even unto life and death, between mother and daughter. It is the paradox of no 'between' existing between them which is the cause of all this separation.

I was, in fact, as tall as my mother ... we looked at each other eye to eye. ... but then I could see: what did such a thing matter?

...  
Out of the corner of one eye, I could see my mother. Out of the corner of the other eye, I could see her shadow on the wall, ... for the rest of my life I would not be able to tell when it was really my mother and when it was really her shadow standing between me and the rest of the world.

(AJ, pp104-107)

Even though Annie is as large in life as her mother, she can apprehend such 'equality' is tenuous. What is the ultimate and ulterior significance of

being on a level with her mother; and as with the marbles before, does it really matter? The significance lies in this - eye to eye and orb to orb, they see into each other's intimate little worlds, and all their most secret depths are reflected into the vision of the other. She will always be reminded of the living spectre of her mother forming the interface between herself and the world, casting the dividing line and definitive margin which Annie seems unable to cross - even if it were for dear life. A shadow is almost like a ghost - but not quite. Luce Irigaray comments upon ghostly credentials;

Now a ghost has never been stopped by a wall, or even a door, much less by a curtain or veil. A ghost doesn't even re-mark them. But you can easily check his ghostly credentials by seeing how easily he can cross any partition, separation, division, interval between ... places, times, space-times. ...Barriers, separations, differences are necessary, however, if ghosts are to exist... The barriers include, of course, those which forbid crossing over from death to life, from life to death. ... defenses against phantoms breed phantoms and vice versa. <sup>12</sup>

Although a shadow is as insubstantial as a ghost, it requires an object. Shadows are formed by barriers, ghosts transcend them. To Annie, her mother's presence will always be such a barrier - her mother is the shadow of her life and the only release will be death. But with her mother's death, Annie conceives of her own too. Barriers also breed ghosts.

### (iii) The Speculation of Identity

Trinh Minh-ha reminds us that a mirror "reveals to me my double, my ghost..." <sup>13</sup> Annie's mirroring of her mother has thus taken spherical shape. There exists a very special tool for a specifically female mirroring; it is the speculum. Its significant curved shape is highly suggestive of the spheres in Annie's life shared with her mother. There is great symbolism in the speculum

being, of course, a spherical shape - for the sphere is of all figures the most perfect and like unto itself - and polishes the outside curve to a perfect finish. Also makes it a mirror, but one turned inside out and thus unable to lose anything or receive anything from the outside, both because there is nothing outside it and because everything that it brings about happens inside it. <sup>14</sup>

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the speculum as

1. (surg.) instrument for dilating cavities of human body for inspection. 2. Mirror, usually of polished metal ... esp. in reflecting telescope. 3. (Ornith) specially coloured area on wing of some birds. <sup>15</sup>

Thus a speculum is a tool, a probe, a solid reflector, an area of distinction and beauty on an animate being. As a concave mirror, gynaecologists use the speculum to inspect the 'cavities' of the female body; hence it becomes a specifically 'female mirror'. The speculum is a mirror which not only reflects light so one can see, it is a mirror which, by probing, focusses light so that one can perceive. States Toril Moi;

To make this point, Irigaray quotes Plato: "Turned horizontally in relation to the face, this concavity will make it seem as if it were turned upside down." But the concave mirror is also a focal point, a lens that can concentrate light rays so as to 'shed light on

the secrets of caves' and to 'pierce the mystery of the woman's sex'. The speculum is a male instrument for the further penetration of the woman, but it is also a hollow surface, like the one it seeks to explore. A speculum entering and illuminating the woman's vagina can only do so by virtue of its own concave shape; it is paradoxically, through the imitation of its object that the speculum objectifies it in the first place. <sup>16</sup>

The speculum is thus a half-orb which can see; it is in effect an eye. It can also be used by women to look at themselves. In relation to the face, the speculum possesses the power to invert perception. It also has the ability to ignite. We have seen powerful connotations in the texts of Rhys and Kincaid of the symbolism latent in the image of flames. Toril Moi confirms;

what if there is a mirror/speculum hidden at the center...? The mystics do frequently use the image of the burning mirror (or MIROIR ARDENT) ... the burning mirror does seem to be the one mirror that reflects nothing... <sup>17</sup>

In the background of the flames of Coulibri, Antoinette looks at her little black friend Tia's face and sees only herself. Prior to her ignition of Thornfield Hall and her immolation, Antoinette had seen no looking glass, nothing but the memory of Tia both shadowed and illuminated by flames - "And the sky so red ... I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke." (WSS, p155) Blackness is absence only as the 'other' of whiteness, and Antoinette's point of view is white. The only mirror which remains for Antoinette is her shred of memory - Tia her miroir ardent and black alter ego - who ultimately reflects nothing. Nothing but herself who is reduced to nothing.

Ardent comes from 'ardour', which as well as "fierce heat" is defined by the O.E.D. as "warm emotion". In French, "ardent" means "burning". In her childhood, Annie's mother Annie was truly her daughter's miroir ardent.

Her mother's "Little Miss" Annie John followed her everywhere embraced by the warmth of love. When they are separated by Annie's defiance and her adolescent eyes, beyond the dividing line of their selves lies only the dusty ashen shadow her mother casts upon her. No more illuminating warmth nor loving reflection, nothing.

Ultimately, Irigaray comments on the 'miroir ardent' of the mirror/speculum; that being

a concave mirror concentrates the light and, specifically,...this is not wholly irrelevant to woman's sexuality. ... Which 'subject' has taken an interest in the anamorphoses produced by the conjunction of such curvatures? What impossible reflected images...took place at each of their articulations? When the 'it is' annuls them in the truth of the copula in which 'he' still forever finds the resources of his identification as same... one will rightfully suspect that any perspective, however surreptitious, that centers the subject, ... any closure that claims...to be metaphysical - or familial, social, economic even -, to have rightfully...fixed and framed that concave mirror's incandescent hearth. If this mirror - which however, makes a hole - sets itself up pompously as an authority to give shape to the imaginary orb of a 'subject', it thereby defends itself phobically in/by this inner 'center' from the fires of the desire of/for woman. <sup>18</sup>

As Irigaray points out, which subject has probed with interest the anamorphoses produced by the curvatures of this concave mirror? The O.E.D. defines ANAMORPHOSIS as a "distorted drawing appearing regular from one point; abnormal transformation." From only one perspective without the speculum does the alignment of vision seem straightforward, and it is this perspective which is appropriated by the subject now in existence. When viewed from all other perspectives, the speculum provides angles of vision of distorted formation; paradoxically, a straightforward perspective where all the lines of vision fall coherently into place is precisely an



"abnormal transformation". According to Lacan, the Subject is male. This is because the Speaking Subject only comes into being after the triangulation of the dyadic unity between mother and child. In effect the entry of the Subject is the entry of the Father-figure disrupting the homogeneous unit of Mother/Child. Or rather, it is the entry of the phallus symbolising the Law of the Father. Thus, Irigaray implies that the 'subject' who is male, sees through the speculum only through one (male) point of view rendering his vision approachable, irreproachable, regular, logical and believable - although it is in truth an abnormal transformation of perspective. He centres the Specular according to his authoritarian phallogocentric vision. In effect, he 'fixes and frames' the speculum's incandescent female hearth according to his demands and needs; its effect is ultimately, that of closure. Her articulation of the speculum, on the contrary, exists in the copula of the curvature - it is a gap, a blank space, a margin of definition. Her speculum is a curved mirror with a hole, a void, a circular fissure with a myriad reflecting capacity. Metaphorically, its focus ignites the fires of desire of woman, ignites the fires of the desire for woman. But he, being the subject, transforms her into the circuit of his subjectivity. For him the speculum becomes an objectifying male probe, turning her from her rightful relationship as Speculum/Subject into the Object interrogated by the Specular - and Speculating - Tool.

But, may come the objection, - defending against the objective and the object - the speculum is not necessarily a mirror. It may, quite simply, be an instrument to dilate the lips...so that the eye can penetrate the interior...notably with speculative intent. Woman, having been misinterpreted...would now become the 'object' to be investigated ... in the future the ultimate meaning will perhaps be discovered by tracking down what there is to be seen of female sexuality.

Yes, man's eye - understood as substitute for the penis - will be able to prospect woman's sexual parts, seek there new sources of profit. ...even if not only the woman but the mother can be unveiled to his sight, what will he make of the exploration of this mine? ...What will he have seen as a result of that dilation? And what will they get out of it? A disillusion quite as illusory... a suspense will remain inviolate <sup>19</sup>

The speculum is a solid partially enclosing space, a fold that is curved, a semi-wrap, a masculine probe that has to reflect its object before perceiving it in the first place, thus becoming a female mirror in its CON-TEXTE. ('Con' is french for 'cunt'.) However, misinterpretation of the female context, such as

The castration of woman, penis-envy, hatred of the mother ... are all signs that the appropriation of the specular, or speculative process/trial is a victory for (so-called) masculine sexuality. They are signs of a specular process/trial which favours a flat mirror as most apt to capture the image, the representation, the auto-representation. This domination excludes the little girl from any discovery of the economy of her relationship with her mother, and with maternity. <sup>20</sup>

This flat mirroring is a masculine mirroring, allowing only for a dual relationship I-YOU within a masculine context in which the male is the Subject and the woman his Object. The specular process which favours a flat mirroring is his method of appropriation of the Speculum according to his own desire and power. It also divides the mother/daughter relationship. A flat mirror lacks the depth and dimension of the speculum proper. A speculum being a mirror enclosure of space of three dimensions.

Irigaray thus points out that the female vision of the speculum is different and separate from the male view. Male specular logic disregards the nuances of the property of the speculum as a mirror and chooses to concentrate instead on its evaluation as a probe of 'perception'. The

female vision is that the speculum is the symbol of a self-sustaining feminine principle and its mirroring. Even if the speculum is merely an instrument for dilating the lips of woman, it surely symbolically expands the orifice of speech, as well as that of reproduction. Speech too, reproduces itself in order to create and recreate meaning. Which lips does man mean, which lips can woman take to mean? With the speculum, the man's EYE/I becomes a metaphysical penis (which echoes Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's description of the pen as being a "metaphorical penis" in The Madwoman in the Attic<sup>21</sup>; indeed, it too is a tool articulating with speculative intent). Irigaray's accusation is that man utilises the specular tool to suffocate woman by initially misinterpreting and now investigating her ... but surely woman can inversely argue a distortion of this argument into an act of liberation for herself? She can take over this Symbolic male disruptive articulation of her self, and imagine instead the dilation of her lips as allowing her access to her own symbolic self-articulation and self-assertion. She will then be able to say, "This is MINE", instead of having him probe her veritable mine of wealth for his own speculative interest. The speculum had allowed him access to and power over the female interior as an Imperial power exploits the colonized. The male EYE/I had limited female subjectivity to only the orifices through which he thought to see; thus denying her symbolism of herself. She is no longer a commodity profiting him. If any disillusionment comes to light, at least it becomes her own, and her own symbolic suspense will remain inviolate.

Ultimately we are reminded that to seek companionship, - and in particular perceptive companionship - from a mirror is to be met with the response which greeted Antoinette's attempt to be rid of her essential solitude:

But the glass was between us - hard, cold, and misted  
over with my breath. (WSS, p147)

It is a margin containing the illusion of invisibility, but which cannot be trespassed. Only when it becomes a metaphor for other than it is - such as sexuality and textuality - can the crossing of its interface be achieved.

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(iv) The Fabrication of Identity

A looking glass provokes one to look at oneself. As well as revealing oneself bodily and psychologically, a mirror also provokes one into concealing oneself. By conjuring a comprehension of nakedness, the looking glass invites, incites, adornment. Material is woven for concealment, concealment beckons revelation, and revelation inspires the conception of material as the stuff of writing. Weaving has become a feminine myth and metaphor of writing. Irigaray quotes Freud verbatim:

Women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilisation; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented - that of plaiting and weaving. ...Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals. The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another... We should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive of the achievement. <sup>22</sup>

One is tempted to ask Freud why the most natural step which occurred to him at the first sight of female pubic hair should be that of concealment by plaiting and weaving as opposed to, say, pulling it apart, tearing or shaving it off in order to reveal? One should try to guess Freud's

unconscious motive behind this thought. Irigaray links his essay "Women Have Never Invented Anything But Weaving" with another of Freud's assumptions, that of female vanity. Irigaray states in her essay "The Vanity of a Commodity" that if woman is valued only in terms of her face value, then of course

Whence the importance she vests in fabrics and cloths to cover herself with. ... Women can, it seems, (only) imitate Nature. ... Therefore woman weaves in order to veil herself, mask the faults of Nature (in man's eyes) and restore her to her wholeness. ... Whence the need for weaving... A protective, defensive texture. A hymen whose usefulness needs to be re-evaluated. <sup>23</sup>

In the eyes of men such as Freud, Father of modern psychology, the vision of woman is that she is nothing but a fabrication. Rochester's tone corroborates with this argument when he says, "She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied. Vain, silly creature." (WSS, p136) Freud implies the only thing worth imitating from her is her genital area of which she creates a faithful reproduction.<sup>23</sup> The most vivid metaphor of weaving is a myth of faithful unproductive boredom, inverting day and night. It is the Penelope myth. The productivity and deeds of the day are unravelled and wasted by night; it is implied that woman's wealth is non-wealth and a night activity at that. This shining example of Womanhood weaves in order to restore herself, to sew herself into her rightful wholeness. This materialization of metaphorical philosophy according to masculine principle is a fabrication. More truly, instead of being a metaphor of waste and sexuality - and that of women; weaving is a metaphor for writing and textuality. States Walter Benjamin:

the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the

Penelope work of recollection. Or should we call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not involuntary recollection much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting the warp, a counterpart to Penelope's work rather than its likeness? For here the Day unravels what the Night has woven. When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the tapestry of lived life, as loomed for us by forgetting. <sup>24</sup>

To Benjamin, weaving is the act of recollection and forgetting; to Trinh, the weaving of a text is language itself for:

language is always older than me. Never original, 'me' grows indefinitely on ready-mades, which are themselves explainable only through other ready-mades ... Writing as an inconsequential process of sameness/otherness is ceaselessly re-breaking and re-weaving patterns of ready-mades... <sup>25</sup>

Thus, according to Trinh, self-identity is a woven identity and writing is such an expression of this self. Weaving, as a metaphor of writing, ceaselessly recreates new meaning in the margins of the material of the text. Roland Barthes also described speech as a woven entity;

Speech is irreversible: a word cannot be retracted, except precisely by saying that one retracts it. ... The correcting and improving movement of speech is the wavering of a flow of words, a weave which wears itself out catching itself up ... The eponymous figure of the speaker is Penelope. <sup>26</sup>

The eponymous figure of the speaker is thus feminine. If, as according to Freud, the female sex has a natural penchant for weaving, by the extension of his metaphor the female sex possesses a complex weave of signifiers of speech and its material attributes - the text, as opposed to just her sex - which signify herself. Trinh comments on the woman signifying herself. It is

impossible for her to take up her pen without ... questioning her relation to the material that defines her and her ... work. As focal point of cultural consciousness and social change, writing weaves ... the complex relations of a subject caught between the problems of race and gender, and the practice of literature... 27

The weaving of writing is a marginal thing with many pluralities of meaning. It is further complicated for woman because the material she handles in order to define herself is man-made. However the threads she uses to adhere her material together are of her own colouring. Roland Barthes sums up;

The plural of the text depends not on the ambiguity of its contents but on the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers. (Etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric.) The reader of the text may be compared to someone at a loose end. ...its reading is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages... 28

Thus, according to Barthes, the text is a woven tissue of which the weave is speech; to Trinh woven textuality is language itself, to Benjamin the woven thing is both a recollection and a forgetting. Irigaray completes the circle of comment. According to Freud, woman's woven textuality stems from her sexuality, the 'instinctive' concealment of her genital area. On the contrary, to Irigaray, textuality is woven into an awareness of feminine sexuality. Instead of this possessive propriety of language, in which woman and the language used to define her is treated as a commodity, the keynote of her language is proximity, which she weaves into her text. It is an intimacy of nearness, closeness, not that of possession and closure:

...Property and propriety are...foreign to all that is female... Nearness...is not foreign... Woman enjoys a closeness with the other so near she cannot possess it, any more than she can possess herself. 29

Such sexual intimacy of the fabrication of a text is expressed by Antoinette in the convent.

My needle is sticky, and creaks as it goes in and out of the canvas. 'My needle is swearing', I whisper ... We are cross-stitching silk roses on a pale background. We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath, I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, nee Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839.

(WSS, p44)

Her tool clings in protest as she wields it, but with it she emblazons irrevocably her identity in stitches of flames. Flames are symbols evocative of Antoinette's self. It is the colour of her recurring red dress, the emblem of her erotic femininity; expressive also of her end in a cold and strange alien background. Her stitching describes her life. Her needle is a persona in its own right, it uses strong language and with it she colours her expression of her self as lurid and exotic, a wild imaginative frenzy. This contrasts so markedly with her aunt's neat and regulated, well-matched and well-made patchwork.

As she talked she was working at a patchwork counterpane. The diamond-shaped pieces of silk melted one into the other, red, blue, purple, green, yellow, all one shimmering colour. Hours and hours she had spent on it and it was nearly finished. Would I be lonely? she asked and I said 'No', looking at the colours. Hours and hours and hours I thought.

(WSS, p47)



Her aunt's beautiful straight lines are a contrast to Antoinette's fluid curving flowers and hyperbolic writing. But with both women it is a labour of concentration, love and time, an expression of solitude and harmony - or disharmony. Significantly Antoinette marvels at her aunt's patience and discipline. Both pieces are made of the stuff of their contrasting characters. Antoinette's sojourn sewing in the convent symbolizes her sexual blooming. It is significant that while she is at the convent, her stepfather Mr. Mason brings her presents of pretty clothes and trinkets which she cannot wear. Laying eyes on her, he is aware that she is of a marriageable age. It was for Mr. Mason that Antoinette's mother sold her last piece of jewellery in order to attract him to her. Adornment is crucial to Annette's sense of identity - which is the identity a man bestows upon her. The practice of artifice is thus encouraged by Antoinette's mother and her stepfather, and is her inheritance. Her stepfather's gifts of dress and ornament are the initial expressions of the financial aspect of their relationship, which culminates when Antoinette and her assets are married to Rochester.

Clothes are such a material umbilical cord between Annie and her mother that 'gifts' are too formal a term for them, unlike the presents of bought frivolous clothes Mr. Mason gives his step-daughter. As Antoinette's stitching of her text in the convent is a symbol of her youthful bloom, so too is Mrs. Annie John's embroidering of baby clothes beneath a tree a description of her state of fruitful expectancy before Annie's birth.

There was the chemise...the first garment I wore after being born. My mother had made that herself, and once

... I was even shown the tree under which she sat as she made this garment. There were some of my diapers...there was the dress I wore on my first birthday: a yellow cotton with green smocking on the front; there was the dress I wore on my second birthday: pink cotton with green smocking on the front;...

(AJ, p20)

It is an entire catalogue of love. Her sewing is the preparation of the material of Annie's life in a perpetual maternal embrace. It is work of her imagination, body and time. Her mother has literally fashioned and coloured her life from the barest essentials of diapers to the finery of bright and cheerful smocking. This contrasts so vividly with the time Annie's mother called her a slut in reaction to seeing her daughter 'loitering' with a group of young boys. In reality, Annie

was really looking at my own reflection in the glass ...  
I saw myself just hanging there among bolts of cloth,  
among Sunday hats and shoes, among men's and women's  
undergarments...

(AJ, p94)

Amongst all these accoutrements of adornment, from the fineries one wears to show off on special days, to the necessities one hides daily, Annie's mirror image amongst all this woven stuff cuts a lonely figure. She is surrounded by the female metaphors of her textuality - her mirroring and the woven things surrounding her are subtle expressions of herself. These garments are not merely fabrications. They express an atmosphere, a memory, a time, a person - such as Bertha's red dress redolent with the colour of flames, sole fragment of the lingering memory of lovely Antoinette. Cloth is a material out of which a maternal configuration of shared and hoped for rapture can be bequeathed to a daughter.

\*\*\*\*

Thus, the apparently simple symbols of the mirror and of feminine handiwork are weighted with profound marginalities of meaning. The mirror and weaving have become metaphors of writing. Weaving becomes meaning, the texturing of a text, and the material woven is reflected in the magic mirror in which tool and its margins disappear and the reflection becomes the self. The questions asked - and to a certain degree answered by these texts - are; What kind of mirroring takes place in which type of mirror? Probing, reflecting, focussing? A flat mirror, the revolving psyche, the igniting speculum? In which context or con-texte? Which frame, which fold of material? Does the material reveal or conceal? Does the mirror reveal or conceal this material? Is the mirror, and weaving, still specifically feminine symbols of writing? These all lead to the marginal-imaging of the mother-figure in these texts by Rhys, and Kincaid.

THE SARGASSO SEA, A FREE-FLOATING SWAMP  
OF SEAWEED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ATLANTIC.

THE CLOCKWISE SPIRALING OF THE  
MORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN CORRALS THE LUMPY  
FIELDS OF SARGASSO WEED INTO AN AREA OF  
100 SQUARE MILES AND UP TO 30 FEET DEEP.  
EVEN CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS ON HIS JOURNEY  
TO THE NEW WORLD WROTE ABOUT BEING MIRED  
FOR DAYS IN THE YELLOW-GREENISH HYDRO-  
MISTLETOE.

Tania Aebi - the youngest person, and a  
girl, to circumnavigate the globe  
single-handedly. <sup>1</sup>

AN ISLAND HAS SET LIMITS, SEA AND SKY  
MEET IN INFINITE AND MINUTELY DEFINED  
HORIZON... THERE IS SPACE FOR THE  
WANDERING PERIPHERY OF THE MIND, MEANDER  
WITHIN THE MARGIN OF MEANING.

Christopher Searle <sup>2</sup>

IV. THE METAPHOR OF FLUIDS:  
THE SEA OF DREAMS

The metaphor of fluids has been used of the feminine sex in the past. It is also a contemporary metaphor of female writing, especially in French feminist and psychoanalytical thought. The use of the metaphor of fluids is of marginal, but profound significance to writing by women of Caribbean origin, especially when a text is possessed of a title as abstractly potent as Wide Sargasso Sea. It is interesting that Jean Rhys correlated the completion of her text with a recurring dream;

I've dreamt several times that I was going to have a baby... Finally I dreamt that I was looking at the baby in the cradle - such a puny weak thing. So the book must be finished... I don't dream about it any more. <sup>3</sup>

To Rhys the title of her text bears the same mystical significance;

I have no title yet. "The First Mrs. Rochester" is not right. Nor, of course is "Creole". That has a different meaning now. ... titles mean a lot to me. Almost half the battle. I thought of "Sargasso Sea" or "Wide Sargasso Sea" but nobody knew what I meant. <sup>4</sup>

Rhys also toyed with "Gold Sargasso Sea" from a Caribbean Song. To choose width rather than gold is to choose an intangible imaginative span beyond material valuation. The Sargasso Sea has the stature of myth and legend but is in fact very real - Christopher Columbus and Tania Aebi in different centuries have battled with this presence of primitive life. It has been described as a zombie sea, a marginal zone of the living dead:

...an apparently dead ocean where flotsam accumulates, a melange of derelict ships and the sargassum seaweed. It is said that one can walk on the Sargasso Sea; in the past writers wrote ghost stories about it. Rhys's novel is, in some sense, a ghost story too. <sup>5</sup>

This is the sea of sensibility surrounding Rhys's text as virgin margin surrounds print on a page. Walking on water is the stuff of madness, dreams and blind faith. In choosing the name of this sea as her very significant title, Rhys commands a sense of timelessness, of a mysterious clutter with imaginative consequences. It highlights the essence of her text. The Sargasso Sea was a margin between the Old World and the New, a mass both solid and fluid, a boundary which yet was not definitive and which could be trespassed but under peril. For the Sea is a timeless metaphor of mystery, and of man - and the Sargasso Sea is especially dense cohesive, and mysterious. Paul Theroux quotes from Elias Canetti's Crowds and Power;

There are crowd symbols in nature...and the sea is a distinct one. ..."Its multiplicity lies in its waves - the waves are like men. ...Its mystery lies in what it covers... It is universal and all-embracing; it is an image of stilled humanity; all life flows into it and it contains all life."

...  
Canetti describes the crowd symbol of the English. It is the sea: all the triumphs and disasters of English history are bound up with the sea, and the sea has offered the Englishman transformation and danger. ...  
"The Englishman sees himself as a captain," Canetti says: this is how his individualism relates to the sea. <sup>6</sup>

The sea is the metaphor of the universality of man, and so it seems, especially that of the Englishman. Rochester is the chief male protagonist in these texts and he is an Englishman. Transformation and danger were

and I did not. But I could hardly say so. Not yet." (WSS, p75)

An island Paradise is associated in the colonizing mind with images of uncontrollable fecundity, noble savages and ignoble natives in searing tropical heat - a loose ease of life breeding disease and sin. The island thus becomes the image of immorality. Yet, 'Paradise' is the word used to describe the island; it is a colonial notion imported by the white man. The natives never knew they lived in 'Paradise' until they were told so and taught so in the classroom. Kincaid demonstrates the legacy of white and patronising colonial history still has the present power to punish a little native girl. Annie is stripped of her status as class prefect (another imported colonial title) for defacing her imperialist text. She has in effect, knocked God who discovered and therefore created her island, off his pedestal.

I had gone too far this time, defaming one of the great men in hisy, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home. ... Had my peers ever seen anyone so arrogant, so blasphemous?

(AJ, p82)

Chris Searle compares this teaching of the illusion of a 'great white history', with the imported notions of 'Paradise' from the white tourist trade of today which prostitutes the island commercially;

anxieties within the garden...make people reach out from the island world to the outside world, to grasp on to modernity and the white man's compensations. People wake worried in a clouded Paradise...<sup>8</sup>

White man's compensations mean little to the Caribbean islander when he is

exploited by them - for such 'compensations' can only happen when funded by exploitation. Exploitation carries on beyond slavery. Pat Ellis points out:

the original sources are fed back their own products...our sugar is fed back as prettily wrapped confectionary stamped 'Made in England'...so is our own reggae fed back to us on a multi-million dollar label by a King of Reggae who is American. <sup>9</sup>

Chris Searle comments that the child "develops in this strange elision". The Caribbean islanders thus suffer from the delusion of Paradise without its rewards. However, John Donne meditates in his Seventeenth Devotion -

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls - it tolls for thee.

But perhaps this Devotion is purely European. Every white man is a piece of the continent and part of the mainland - as long as the colonies remain relegated to and as its margins, the black man lies beyond his vision, and the woman out of sight. Such is the perspective of the white man and his imperial power, and the focus is himself. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "continent" has two meanings;

continent<sup>1</sup>, Temperate; chaste.

...  
continent<sup>2</sup>, Continuous land, mainland...

Freud shrouds woman by his description of her 'private parts' as the



famous "dark continent" of feminine sexuality. <sup>11</sup>

Does this "dark continent" therefore imply a belt of chastity, a temperate mainland, or a lush, beckoning, undiscovered and dangerous Paradise? Temperate aptly describes the climate of the Imperial Power, and the Main Land is by definition the Centre and focus of all other lands called colonies. The lush Paradise is one such colony. Which, therefore, is the dark continent? A colony cannot be the Main Land, which implies it is not the Dark Continent. Helene Cixous speaks of yet another Dark Continent - that which is taught to the little girl as soon as she enters Lacan's Symbolic phase:

As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because You are Africa. You are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous.

... Men have made for women an antinarcissus.  
...We are black and we are beautiful.

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to lack. <sup>12</sup>

Are women therefore the "Dark Continent" because they are chastely temperate or because they are lustily fecund? Rochester described Antoinette as "intemperate and unchaste" (WSS, p152). Women may be the lush island Paradises or African continents of wet incontinent dreams, but it seems that by definition, the Dark Continent more truly describes the dominating Imperial and Main Land power which prides itself on its white control. It centres itself as the focus of all its colonies and possesses for itself the prerogative of 'discovery' (which really means

(s)exploitation). It is this whiteness which labels black as its antithesis, as outside of itself, swiftly followed by the justifiable rationale that dark must be dangerous and therefore oppressed. Dark stands for Black men, and for all women. Thus the Dark Continent has long been a white colonizing male's euphemism of the feminine sex and of its colonies full of blacks and savages - requiring discovery, exploration, possession, exploitation, and ultimately the synthesis of all these - colonization.

Should the dark and the black personify lack and all that is negative? When by its very definition the Dark Continent and Main Land better describe the climate and temperament of the dominating White Male Imperial Power with its lack of knowledge of the margins which define its self-centredness, and its sombre and authoritarian arrogance of self-superiority. For 'darkness' has become a white euphemism for non-illumination and ignorance - from which the colonizer suffers. For his world vision is only turned inwards upon himself.

Islanders have their own world vision, and vision of themselves. The very fact of an island being a finite land mass provides a special focus and framework from which to view oneself and beyond. Perspectives beyond the island have to confront the horizon, a margin infinitely merging sea and sky and which cannot be trespassed. This margin of merging sea and sky surrounding the island imbues it with a sense of meaning necessarily separate from that of the mainland, or Main Land. Our view is defined according to the alignment of our perspective, our perspective depends on the focus our framework allows, and this all depends upon the shifting framework itself - whether the margins remain solidly constant, or constantly fluid and diffuse. Gregory Woods comments on the alignment of

human perspective:

How does one paint a landscape? As if it were within reach... as if its horizon could be touched with...an outstretched hand... a way of managing the world, of touching the horizon, while yet deferring to its size; and of creating it anew... he reduces his landscape to a human scale... <sup>13</sup>

In the texts of Rhys and Kincaid, the island home of the female protagonist is described as a landscape of Paradise and the Garden of Eden. This childhood vision of Paradise and its horizons in the eyes of a young naive, native or creole girl are a view different from that of her white all-knowing colonial master. Annie says, "It was in such a Paradise that I lived" (AJ p25); and Antoinette describes the estate of her childhood, Coulibri, thus:

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible - the tree of life grew there.

(WSS, p16)

For Antoinette, her childhood garden was beautiful even without a mother's love, for it had a strange and unnatural life of its own which drew her. On the contrary, Annie's mother was the embodiment of her childhood Paradise, and of the colonial values which ultimately destroyed her - suffused by her ambience, nourished and nurtured, clothed by material made by her hands, all in a maternal embrace of love. Annie identified her mother as the life source of her Paradise. Gregory Woods describes the intimate relationship between landscape and love, and therefore landscape and identity;

We may even conclude ... that the loved one could not possibly be loved in any other location. Instead of serving as an evocative or decorative background to a

portrait of a loved one, the landscape becomes the subject, of which the human figure is but a small, if not insignificant part. ... This trend of thought naturally concludes in the concept of the beloved (or hated) landscape; or of the loved one AS a landscape. <sup>14</sup>

Thus, Annie's Paradise is her mother, a landscape of love in which her identity is a mirror-image of her mother. Coulibri is Antoinette's childhood Paradise, and after its destruction by the black people who hated them, Granbois (or Tall Trees, Big Woods) her holiday home, becomes Antoinette's new Paradise and symbol of her marriage. It is to Granbois that she leads her husband and lover, to her "sweet honeymoon house". When she grew to identify it with Rochester and hate, it was destroyed for her - but this time by coldness, not by flames. The landscape of love sours into a landscape of hate. Antoinette's exotic bloom perishes in the cold and forbidding fortress of Rochester's hate which is Thornfield Hall - her landscape of suffering, a metaphoric field of thorns. Her memory as Antoinette is only resurrected from the ashes of Bertha as a phoenix is from the flames.

Christophine, Antoinette's mothering and magical principle, has a name reminiscent of the risen Christ and the resurrected phoenix. In Antoinette's time of dire distress and need, it is Christophine's place and presence of mind she desires. Antoinette identifies in spirit and vibrancy with Christophine's place;

dark green mango leaves, and I thought, 'This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay.' Then I thought, 'What a beautiful tree, but it is too high up here for mangoes and it may never bear fruit,'...

Pink and red hibiscus grew in front of her door...  
(WSS, p90)

The tree is tall and strong and vitally alive, but Antoinette's conclusion of it is its barrenness. Mangoes are a lush, sweet and succulent fruit and grow plentifully. But this tree lies beyond the landmark of the rocks, the "Mounes Mors (the Dead Ones)" (WSS p89). To Antoinette the atmosphere still seems marked by a feeling that is forbidding rather than fruitful - an epitome of hopelessness. But these are feelings that stem solely from Antoinette's mind, for over Christophine's doorstep glow a welcoming fragile flourish of colour. Yet the overall ambience of Christophine's landscape is the colouring of ambiguity. Gregory Woods emphasises the

significance of plants, as suggested by the myths of their origins. Many...bear human memories... The trees, also remember human origins... Love...motivated all their metamorphoses.

...Alternatively, flowers are an expression, not of their own, but of the earth's desire. <sup>15</sup>

Flowers frame Christophine's doorstep and it is her help by which Antoinette seeks to regain her husband's desire. The wreath marking the consummation of their matrimonial happiness was placed upon the bed by Christophine, and it is with this wreath that Antoinette crowns her husband. But Rochester

took the wreath off. it fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it. The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass...

(WSS, p62)

Rochester ignores the frailty of the flowers when he crushes them. They signify the bloom of his wife. Yet he cannot help but be made aware of their lingering fragrance, a subtle pressure of pleasure which cannot be

denied. He heads for the window, a frame from which to view beyond, and he sees his wife mirrored in it, which places his view in a different perspective. One pane of glass thus becomes two different frames enclosing their wedding space - one transparent from which to look out, which offers release and which Rochester takes possession of; and one which reflects her vision, encloses and traps her view. The window thus becomes a mirror, and takes on a new margin of meaning. Flowers and mirrors are heady and heavy in the symbolism of femininity. After reading Daniel Cosway's poisoned piece, Rochester

passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. 'They are like you', I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud. This brought me to my senses.

(WSS, p82)

The flower's small and intimate, touching gesture reminds him of one such gesture to his wife - which reminds him of yet another gesture at the beginning of their marriage which was not so delicate, but cruel.

If flowers are old and lasting metaphors describing the marginality of femininity - its vulnerability and desirability, so too are birds. Fragrance and song are as diffuse as fluids. Flowers are a description of Antoinette's ornamental, fragile beauty. Birds are also an epitome of femininity because they are small, palpitate when held in the hand, and are often trapped in gilded cages. Like flowers, birds are fragile and ornamental, and can be crushed.

Of all creatures, birds alone can fly all the way to heaven - yet they are caged. Birds alone can sing more beautifully than human voices - yet they are unheeded, or silenced... I find that the caged bird makes a

metaphor that truly deserves the adjective female... when Rochester proposes...Jane fights to get free... 'Jane, be still; don't struggle so, like a wild frantic bird...' 'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you.' <sup>16</sup>

It is lovebirds which Annie's mother embroiders on her daughter's bedspread, and it was her parrot that Antoinette's mother tried to save from the flames. Unlike a phoenix, the parrot perished, but its death averted Antoinette's doom. With its screeches echoing the screams of Annette ringing in their ears, the black people averted their faces at the sight of a dying parrot (for it was bad luck to see one), and gradually dispersed in fear without harming the Cosway family. According to Helene Cixous;

Flying is woman's gesture - flying in language and making it fly. ...It is no accident that voler has a double meaning...(fly, rob)\* women take after birds and robbers... They...fly the coop...take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it...

What woman hasn't flown/stolen? ... A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. ... we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves... Heterogeneous, yes. For her joyous benefits she is erogeneous: she is the erotogeneity of the heterogeneous: airborne swimmer, in flight, she does not cling to herself: she is...desirous and capable of others, of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him, of you. <sup>17</sup>

Cixous's 'She' is the embodiment of the feminine principle and transcends all barriers - physical, metaphysical, metaphorical, mystical. She is at home in sky and sea - "airborne swimmer", and her presence is the merging of this margin, where sky and sea become one. No insular presence, she. Her sights and horizons lie beyond in her heterogeneous freedom; she is in deed a new horizon unto herself. Although Cixous's description of such

\* In French, "voler" means "to fly", "to steal".

sexual textuality is ultimately fantasy, it should not be simply dismissed. Lacan agrees Woman's gesture is a flighty and flowing tongue, (meaning therefore frivolous and fickle) in another marginal pun which is more ambivalent, and less complimentary in meaning. To Freud's question "What does Woman want?", Lacan concludes that the question must remain open since by his rational reckoning the female is "fluid", fluidity is "unstable", and therefore she is not to be trusted.

Woman never speaks PAREIL (similar, equal, like). What she emits is flowing (FLOUENT). Cheating (FLOUANT). <sup>18</sup>

A flowing emission sounds unclean and vaguely obscene - it is not a compliment. By the implication of his comment, her principles are at stake. To Lacan, women's speech is of marginal importance as revealed by his dismissive description of it as "fluid" - in other words, irrational and untrustworthy. But fluids have other connotations, and meanings mysterious and potent rather than derogatory. Josephine Lowndes Sevely confirms the ancient mythological and etymological connection between fluidity and women's sexuality which Cixous contemporarily describes;

For a long period of time the little lips of the vagina were commonly known as "NYMPHAE" ... means "water goddesses" in Greek. <sup>19</sup>

Lips speak, and liquid lips speak fluid thoughts. The goddess is a different logos and her speech therefore has a different, less solid but no less potent authority. Her textual authority is not phallogocentric in the sense of "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was God." Instead, her authority stems from a different history, or HERstory. Sevely continues;



Historically, goddesses of nature were often associated with the waters of the earth and bodily fluids, the sources of all life. The Egyptian goddess Ishtar was goddess of the seas and tides and women's menstrual fluids. From Ishtar evolved the Greek goddess Aphrodite, later to become Latin Venus, born of the waters of the earth, and the medieval Mary, Queen of Nature, whose name is derived from the Latin MARE meaning "sea".<sup>20</sup>

Trinh Minh-ha states categorically that the

Liquid/ocean association with woman/mother is not just a facile play on words from the nineteenth century Romantics - MER/MERE.<sup>21</sup>

Toril Moi confirms that Cixous's contemporary linking of female sexuality with the written textuality of fluids begins with ancient herstorical and symbolical reasons;

For Cixous, as for countless mythologies, water is the feminine element par-excellence...contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb. ...Her vision of feminine writing is...located within the closure of the Lacanian Imaginary... In the Imaginary, mother and child...are one. Cixous refuses to accept the loss of that privileged realm. The mother's voice, her breasts, milk, honey and female waters are all invoked as part of an eternally present space surrounding her and her readers.<sup>22</sup>

Cixous goes on to say specifically that the sea is a "word without water"; but if a woman speaks, words resume their original and originary state of meaning, responding as water does to a primeval thirst. In effect, in Cixous's psychological/philosophical fantasy, the sea is a metaphor for woman, for her speech is not dehydrated of its meaning.

There is almost nothing left of the sea but a word without water: for we have translated the words,...emptied them of their speech, dried, reduced, embalmed them... But a voice has only to say: the sea, the sea, for my keel to split open, the sea is calling me, sea! calling me, waters! 23

Luce Irigaray also demonstrates her own definition of fluid 'Womanspeak';

it emerges spontaneously when women speak together, but disappears as soon as men are present. ...the first thing to be said about 'womanspeak' is that nothing can be said about it..."one speaks it, it cannot be metaspoken" 24

Moi confirms Irigaray's "definition of woman's style"<sup>25</sup> is:

its intimate connection with fluidity and the sense of touch. 25

Cixous's 'Womanspeak' is fantastic and fluid and thus diffuse, beyond the comprehension of men because according to Cixous, they do not hear the mysterious and mystical call of the waters which signify Woman. Irigaray's 'Womanspeak' is as intimately fluid. This time it is not just beyond the comprehension of men, but beyond their experience. To Irigaray, women possess a mysterious and magic speech which not only cannot be heard by men, but "disappears" as if the women themselves were rendered invisible and intangible by the very presence of men - beyond touch and therefore true apprehension of female sexuality. In other words, it could be said that if 'Womanspeak' exists, it is forced to become 'Pluralspeak' - a series of homonyms in which the same words possess different meanings because of polarised contexts. Thus 'Womanspeak' signifies difference to men for they hear it in their context, see it from their viewpoint, sense it according to their own surroundings. Thus her call metamorphoses into something alien. Or is 'Womanspeak' in deed something that IS utterly different in utterance? Is it her speech which signifies difference, as

opposed to his conception of it?

In her essay "The Mechanics of Fluids", Irigaray implies metaphors are masculine constructs, rendering it impossible to escape from the phallogocentric principle of language which governs the very definition of textuality. Fluids, most significantly embodied by the sea, have become metaphors for women's sexuality and therefore any textuality regarding her. The concept of the intrinsic sexuality of metaphor, in particular the possibility of the inherent 'masculinization' of every metaphor, even those which are supposedly 'feminine' like the metaphor of fluids, has its textual consequences. This is especially so when bearing in mind that according to Lacan, the feminine principle does not acquire the status of the Subject in the text. Therefore no metaphor will possess any meaning with regard to her. According to Irigaray's argument, the feminine principle does acquire the status of the Subject - but it is subjected to a solidification of meaning in which the diffuse plurality of her sex is denied. Therefore her 'metaphor of fluidity' has no place in a meaning which is dominantly masculine. Irigaray objects to

the privilege granted to metaphor (a quasi solid) over metonymy (more closely allied to fluids) ...all language is metaphorical, and by denying this, language fails to recognize the 'subject' of the unconscious and precludes inquiry into the subjection...of that subject to a symbolization that grants precedence to solids. <sup>26</sup>

Thus, according to such an apprehension of 'reality', the possibility of the metaphor of fluids defining women's sexuality and space within the text is a paradox. Perhaps the significance of the metaphor of fluids does not exist anyway, or more meaning than is justified is imposed upon it. This

thought occurs in The (M)other Tongue where there are

reservations about what might be called that fetishization of the female body in relation to writing. It may be true that femininity in its quintessential embodiment, Motherhood, can provide a privileged mode of access to language and the mother tongue. What would worry me is the codification, based on this insight, of woman's writing and writing style. In recent French feminist theory, one sees tendencies toward .. centrality of woman's body and blood, closeness to nature, attunement to quality of 'voice' rather than to 'dry' meaning: elemental rhythms with writing as flow, 'liquid' syntax, lyricism at all costs...to see in this genre the one and only genuine mode of feminine writing would...be a mistake. <sup>27</sup>

This point is pertinent. Although such access to language and mother tongue expressed by a description of motherhood provides but one marginal reading of the text, this quintessentially feminine relationship between mother and daughter is a crucial pivot in Wide Sargasso Sea and Annie John. J.K.Gardiner comments that mothering is more profound as a symbol of fluidity if the child is a daughter and therefore embodies the potential of being the mother's mirror-image.

the fluid nature of female personality arises specifically from the mother's relationship with her daughter... <sup>28</sup>

However, Toril Moi points out that regimenting the metaphor of fluids in accordance with the categorization solid/fluid implying the couple male/female, is to continue confining it within the patriarchal line of discourse. Moi discusses this with specific reference to Irigaray, commenting that her

mimicry of the patriarchal equation between woman and fluids, woman as life-giving sea, source of blood, milk and amniotic fluid...only succeeds in reinforcing patriarchal discourse. This failure is due to her figuring of fluidity as a positive alternative...it is no longer mockery of the absurdities of the male, but a perfect reproduction of the absurdities of the same. When the quotation marks are no longer apparent, Irigaray falls into the very essentialist trap of defining woman that she set out to avoid. <sup>29</sup>

Yet, the justification of the metaphor of fluids with regard to women's textuality lies in Gisela Ecker's pertinent comment in Feminist Aesthetics:

symbols are not neutral; they come to us with a history of cultural associations, a whole 'sexual fix'. <sup>30</sup>

However Gardiner confirms Moi's thinking:

the simplest answer to the question of what characterizes women's writing is that nothing does. The next simplest...goes to the opposite extreme to find difference inevitably springing from the fact of female embodiment... No one believes that women write only with their bodies, but some people feel that women's writing is influenced by body consciousness, and some contemporary french writers self-consciously produce 'feminine writing' lavish with such imagery. ...Such persistent self-creation may affect women's writing, as in Rhys's constant references to mirrors and cosmetics. <sup>31</sup>

Gardiner describes the true pleasure of women in writing as lying in

writing's invisibility, with its...freedom not to be conventionally feminine, and its separation...from the traces of one's fleshy form. <sup>32</sup>

Her argument is an antithesis to Cixous's and Irigaray's fluid, and fleshy female fantasies which constitute their writing. Gardiner also comments on

the marginalization of women's writing which she describes as being an imposed and accepted concept, as opposed to being inherent. To Gardiner, the description of women's writing as being a form of marginalization is a phallogocentric conspiracy which some feminists are party to:

The idea that woman's writing reflects woman's experience appeals to common sense, but anti-humanist critics challenge this common sense 'expressive realism' and its preconception that literature transparently expresses real life.

A common variant of the idea that women's writing reflects women's experience is the specific notion that the distinguishing experience of women is that of oppression or marginalization within a male-dominated culture. <sup>33</sup>

The advantage of this theory is that it allies women's position with that of other oppressed groups, and this is also its disadvantage, since it does not differentiate gender oppression from other oppressions. ... such oppressions are complex and interactive in their effects.

A further variation on the concept of women as an oppressed group is the notion that 'Woman'...is defined exclusively as man's Other. ... <sup>34</sup>

Theorist Toril Moi is hostile to the whole issue of gender difference in writing. "The pursuit of sex difference in language is not only a theoretical impossibility, but a political error." Nonetheless, she suggests that proper contextualization can clarify some confusions. <sup>35</sup>

Any context cannot exist without the margins which define it. Moi states that 'proper contextualization' can clarify some confusion of sex difference in language, which according to her cannot theoretically exist. Furthermore, its presumption results in political consequences. However to say confusion exists in sexual differentiation within textuality, is tantamount to admitting that sexual difference in the text exists. It is the traditional bond between creativity and context which Moi seeks to qualify. This bond is described by Simone de Beauvoir's famous and newly qualified statement:

"One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman." ... this statement can be reversed: one is indeed born a woman, with a physical destiny programmed differently from a man's, with all the psychological and social consequences linked to this difference. ...superiority and inferiority are fragmentary evaluations linked with subjective judgments... Each of us will draw his or her own conclusions... the human species, which is cultural by its very nature, is the only species capable of conceiving itself as a species, to conceptualize sexes... <sup>36</sup>

This is ultimately because women are

Not a class. ...women are an inferior caste. In principle, one can move to another class, but caste is a group into which one is born and cannot leave. <sup>37</sup>

In deed, perhaps by our very attempts to explain the identity of feminine textuality, we destroy the heterogeneity of sexuality in line with the political limitations of caste. In favour of Moi's argument, does textuality supersede sexuality? Or are text and gender woven into one and the same imaginative and psychological fabric in a type of textual intercourse as implied by Irigaray and Cixous? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak comments:

the possibility of explanation carries the presupposition of an explainable universe and an explaining subject. These presuppositions assure our being. Explaining, we exclude the possibility of the radically heterogeneous. <sup>38</sup>

Gender differences are radically heterogeneous, and the context of their heterogeneity must influence the creation of each text. Ultimately, explanation also prohibits marginalization and its potentialities of different and more profound understanding. Instead, the politics of the

ideology of explanation - 'common sense' in more usual words - has become the pinnacle of autocratic and authoritarian phallogocentrism. Spivak summarizes:

although the prohibition of marginality that is crucial in the production of any explanation is politics as such, what inhabits the prohibited margin of a particular explanation specifies its particular politics. <sup>39</sup>

Thus the marginality that is writing by women requires not explanation but identification. Explanation and identification in this case are one and the same. The question to be asked therefore, is the question of speaking as a woman. Perhaps there is no answer - except that the question is sufficient as an answer in itself. However is the question of speaking as a woman as self-sufficient in itself in a masculine context as it is in a feminine? Maybe it is the feminine context which has to be analysed thoroughly first - after all, her questions are already in the exclusive possession of metaphors which are implicitly masculine anyway. Shoshana Felman comments in her essay The Critical Phallacy;

Is it enough to be a woman in order to speak as a woman? Is 'speaking as a woman' a fact determined by some biological condition or by a strategic theoretical position, by anatomy or by culture? What if 'speaking as a woman' were not a simple 'natural' fact, could not be taken for granted? <sup>40</sup>

Spivak, in her essay "New French Feminisms in an International Frame" echoes Felman's argument in her question which stresses the double focus faced by every woman in every context. This double focus is the expression of her marginalization:



there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss? Indeed, it is the absence of such unfeasible but crucial questions that makes the 'colonized woman' as 'subject'... 41

Thus speaking as a woman cannot be taken for granted. The woman of the colony is another caste apart. The woman who lives on an island possesses yet another sense of marginality. We have seen that the 'metaphor of fluids', far from being a superficial symbol stemming from the association of MERE (mother) with MER (sea), has marginalities of meaning embracing the entire question of the identity of the woman who writes - and what she writes about. This is what Annie John discovers when, on her first day at school, every girl writes a composition. Annie's composition provokes such an emotional response from her teacher and classmates alike that it is selected for the classroom library, and her company immediately becomes much sought after. Her composition is about her mother and the sea, and it is the evocation of a dream in which the ending is entirely of her own making. The dream is 'true', and the ending a make-belief - thus Annie's story expresses an interface of consciousness.

My mother was a superior swimmer. When she plunged into the seawater, it was as if she had always lived there. ... I, on the other hand, could not swim at all. ... The only way I could go into the water was if I was on my mother's back, my arms clasped tightly around her neck ... When we swam around in this way, I would think how much we were like the pictures of sea mammals I had seen, my mother and I, naked in the seawater... I would place my ear against her neck, and it was as if I were listening to a giant shell, for all the sounds around me - the sea, the wind, the birds screeching - would seem as if they came from inside her, the way the sounds of the sea are in a seashell.

(AJ, p43)

To Annie, her mother in water is a primeval creature so in harmony with this fluid element that she becomes an expression of an ageless memory of the sensuousness of existence. The mother with her utterly dependent baby on her back is an image of the amniotic bond of fecund maternity. It is as if they are one, in a truly naked and natural relationship with nothing else between them. Annie's mother is the embodiment of Cixous's airborne swimmer, and the fluid and feminine erogeneous. The elements and their endlessness are part of her, as indissoluble as the echo of the waves in a shell. Annie continues the account of her dream in which she describes the unfathomable sense of loss when she can no longer find her mother in the sea. With herself on the shore and unable to swim, the awareness of separation between herself and her mother is a revelation beyond bearing. The sea becomes a symbol of separation and hostility, and she is unable to speak and describe the sensation that fills her, for "My tears ran down into my mouth, and it was the first time that I realised tears had a bitter and salty taste." (AJ, p44) The salty waters had previously been so identified with her mother as a source of nurturing love - as it is in the womb - that Annie had never before realised the sea as an entity in its own right, divorced from her mother and endowed with the feelings of isolation. Yet her own tears are also salty waters; she too forms and is part of the substance of the sea in her own right. She has learned confusion and ambivalence with regard to the sea, and isolation with regard to herself. Because of the sea, she becomes her own island. It is well to remember the words of Ernest Becker;

Man lives in a world of symbols and dreams. <sup>42</sup>

So too does Woman.

MYSTIFICATION THROUGH LANGUAGE IS PERHAPS THE  
SUBTLEST AND MOST INSIDIOUS TECHNIQUE OF  
DOMINATION... HIS LANGUAGE TRANSLATES HIS  
WORLD TO MEANING. HIS LANGUAGE IS HIS  
ARTICULATED BEING... IF HIS LANGUAGE BETRAYS  
HIM, HIS EXPERIENCE IS DEFORMED.

Chris Searle <sup>1</sup>

## V. THE COLONIZATION OF LANGUAGE

Chris Searle's statement theorizes the denial of black people by white figures of speech, the exploitation of the colony by an imperial legal system, and the betrayal of women by language which is a construction of masculine metaphors. The previous chapter has observed that some women have in one strategic line of defense, proceeded to attempt to demystify themselves by using their own mystifying, diffuse language. Of which the paramount example is the metaphor of fluids - and in particular the symbolism of the sea.

Difference in language has consequences for female Caribbean consciousness. As Trinh Minh-ha comments, every detail of human existence is sewn into the fabric of time, for "Every gesture, every word, involves our past, present, and future." <sup>2</sup> Caribbean history, with its complications of colonisation and therefore of culture, has its consequences for the status of its women. Historically, the evaluation of women of the Caribbean by their men and masters have not only demarcated them as separate but deemed them inferior. Therefore their culture and inheritance of Caribbean history is different, and perhaps it is more truly defined as their HERstory. Their herstory would be that of the trading of commodities, for that has been woman's traditional evaluation in the marriage marketplace, even if they were no longer slave commodities. Yet, it is only after marriage that the Caribbean woman traditionally derives any status of her own, paradoxically after she belongs to a man. Pat Ellis comments "The image of the strong, independent and dominant Caribbean

statement;

"Now that you are married, you are your own woman." <sup>3</sup>

Annie John baulks against this fate for accompanying it is the realisation of her essential difference, and ultimately separation from her mother.

The case of the créole woman is no different. Wed by English Law, her self and her property become the property of her husband. This is illustrated in Rhys's text. For the woman in the Caribbean, whether creole or native, marriage is a sexual imposition with no textual rights.

Pat Ellis also describes the sexist imposition within language in which women are literally forced to speak a different language. This difference in language has its cultural overtones;

The strict sexual division of labour in carib settlements was reinforced by language differences between men and women; men spoke one language, and women another... The male bias in Caribbean history interpreted the sexual relations between white colonialists and slave women as instances of women's treacherous collusion with oppressors... <sup>4</sup>

The Caribbean male refused to see that in most cases of sexual liason, the slave women was oppressed into its performance. Edward Brathwaite points out that this oppression had irreversible consequences for the origins - and originality - of Caribbean culture which has become inherently creole.

it was in the intimate area of sexual relationships...where the most significant - and lasting intercultural took place. ... The coloured population was an admission of this interaction (resulting in)... physical and metaphysical effects as well. ... This slow, uncertain but organic process...is what we mean by creolization. ... Here were two cultures of people, having to adapt themselves to a new environment and to each other. The friction created by this confrontation was cruel, but it was also creative. <sup>5</sup>

Brathwaite should make quite clear that this definition of creole culture is not simply confined to coloured people. Creole culture is a colouring, not a colour. The colouring is derived from the country of settlement, not the colour of skins. Brathwaite discusses the etymological root of 'creole':

'Creole' appears to have originated from a combination of two Spanish words: CRIAR (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and COLON (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into CRIOLLO: a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it... <sup>6</sup>

The creation of a creole culture is an unconscious and natural evolutionary process of blurring the rigid margin between the Black/White definition of people which has so confined and condemned the colonization of the Caribbean. P.M.Sherlock quotes Naipaul in The Mimic Men:

It was one of the tragedies of slavery and of the conditions under which creolization had to take place, that it should have produced...mimicry. ... within our culture, the very word and notion of mimicry is loaded with plural meanings. <sup>7</sup>

The question is, can a black man ever express himself with white man's

words without compromising himself? Can the colonized describe his freedom in the syntax of an imperial power? Can woman voice her self in a textual fabric that is her antithesis? Does the Object, the 'Other', have to metamorphose into the Subject before his vehicle of expression becomes truly his? Do words have to become homonyms when used by a different race and gender of people? Can words therefore encompass the plural margins of meaning belonging separately to Subject and Object, or is this plurality itself the very definition of their separate marginalities? Maurice Blanchot states categorically:

In this world language is the essence of power. It is the powerful and violent who speak. ... Thus language imposes the dialectic of master and slave which obsesses us... The slave only hears. To speak is what matters... <sup>8</sup>

The speech of the slave is summarily degraded if not completely silenced. Susan Sontag observes, "Behind the appeals for silence lies the wish for a perceptual and cultural clean slate". <sup>9</sup> It was the slave who by necessity employed silence, sometimes a silence cowed beneath the lash. Perhaps more insidiously and devastatingly, the slave embraced the silencing of his speech and therefore of himself by mimicking the white man - for that was where the power lay. This cultural clean slate enabled the copying of the white man's language, resulting in the metaphorical whitewashing of the black man's consciousness.

...the words and sayings of the folk mirrored this world of contempt and hate, and captured its corrosive quality. ... buckra was 'white man'...and the word became an adjective describing the best quality: eg buckra yam. ... In white and brown creole society honourable African day names like...Cuffee for Friday were applied derisively to blacks. Cuffee meant a stupid person. ... The word mulatto was taken over

from the Spanish to designate initially white/black, then any person of mixed blood. The definition of race was complex to the point of lunacy...mulatto/white was mustee or mustefino. Sambo was black/brown. <sup>10</sup>

The tiniest trace of black was defined to the ultimate negative point. Black people were treated as commodities, and commodities are speechless. Jamaica Kincaid confirms this poignantly;

Do you know why people like me are shy about being capitalists? Well, it's because we, for as long as we have known you, WERE capital, like bales of cotton and sacks of sugar, and you were the commanding, cruel, capitalists, and the memory of this is so strong, the experience so recent that we can't quite bring ourselves to embrace this idea that you think so much of. <sup>11</sup>

The condition of slavery itself demonstrates the false but convenient appropriation by white oppressors of the labelling bond of colour. Colour was immediately a badge of slavery - but the 'indigeneous' (meaning native and creole) slaves themselves rejected any kinship with the newly captured and imported Africans, calling them foreign, humiliating them, and thus deriving a artificial and insecure sense of superiority. This was an inherited cultural imposition of hierarchy imitated from their white masters. Creole blacks felt and were different culturally, and sometimes racially, from African blacks. But to the white man in charge, black was black and obviously different from white and that was all that mattered. Rhys has Rochester say to Antoinette, "Slavery was not a matter of liking or disliking ... It was a question of justice." (WSS, p121) This ineradicable colouring of culture translated itself into the white man's inequitable sense of justice, with consequences for Caribbean history hereafter.



This saw the establishment of two societies, two worlds... one European-centred with European laws, institutions, languages and cultures; and the other a black world of dispossessed and displaced folk, who gradually developed their own folk-institutions, coded ways of speech... It was not the merging and shaping of a single society out of these two diverse communities...but two like circles, intersected each other... <sup>12</sup>

The texts by Rhys and Kincaid are a description of these two worlds with their marginal intersections. The colonisation of the Caribbean caused confinement within the limited definition of colouring; this is its oppression. P.M.Sherlock begins his history of "West Indian Nations" with the statement "The story of the people of the Caribbean begins with the nature of the region itself". <sup>13</sup> But which speech does the story of the people of the Caribbean begin with? Is it speech 'natural' to the region, a true 'mother tongue'; or the presence of an adopted, imposed speech, the 'tongue of the white fathers'? Throughout history, Caribbean speech and ultimately literature, has become coloured by a white, imperial and masculine culture. The words Sherlock uses to describe his region is 'West Indies'. The 'West Indies' echo the 'East Indies', the 'Far East' and the 'Middle East' - and the only thing the names of these heterogeneous regions have in common is that they are all labelled relative to a white European focus which presumes itself the centre. White power renders these abstractions tangible, and misconception becomes deception.

The alternative description of the region, the 'Caribbean', is another example of the colouring power of language. The word 'Caribbean' is derived from 'Carib', the name of a tribe which is but one amongst many. To name the whole region the 'Caribbean' does not acknowledge the existence of

the whole region the 'Caribbean' does not acknowledge the existence of other tribal people like the Arawaks. Yet the name of the Carib tribe persists in colouring the whole region, and not only that but also the Sea which these diverse islands share in common. Such a name, and such naming, confers a semblance of unity and shared inheritance which may more than in actual fact and deed exist. Also, to call the Caribs the indigeneous tribal people of the Caribbean may be as misleading a misnomer as describing this cluster of disparate islands the 'Caribbean' or 'West Indies'; for the Caribs were themselves migrants, and not the only ones, from the Americas.

The people who inhabited the islands at the time when Columbus arrived were the late or neo-Indians; some speaking Arawakan, and others Cariban. They migrated from Venezuela... The Arawaks...were wiped out in the first century of Spanish Occupation. The Amerindians of Trinidad survived until the early 19th Century and we still use many of their place names. The only Amerindians left in the islands are in the Carib Reserve ... In their mythology the Caribs consider themselves the first of the Indian tribes. They speak of themselves as 'the' people, and of their language as 'the' language. <sup>14</sup>

The forebears of the Caribans were themselves mistakenly named on being 'discovered'. They were described as 'Indians' regardless of what they named themselves, because the explorers thought they had discovered India. Discovery brings with it the prerogative of arrogance which swiftly materialises itself into conquest, oppression and exploitation. Perhaps there is an ironic validity in the description 'West Indies', after all. The Amerindians who emigrated to the Caribbean had in the past been called 'Indians' when they were discovered in the Americas. They were simply given the same name when they were 'rediscovered' in the 'West Indies' for

other, the savage. One arrogant and acquisitive mistake compounds another, perpetuates it and makes it 'right'. It is significant that the memory of the Amerindians is continued by their place names - it is the last of their rituals to have survived and with it the consciousness of their culture and race.

There seems no recall of people before the Caribs (and Arawaks). This implies they were the first people to migrate to the islands, hence they are not described as immigrants. They were not a guest people imposing upon a host. Neither were they invaders nor conquerors. The label 'the' which is self-given describes the status of being supposedly first, and therefore by association, the most important. 'The' is a self-regarding symbol of status. The Caribs at present survive in a 'Reserve'. However this 'reservation' is not the implication of privilege, but rather the ultimate consequence of exploitation - a race being reduced to almost nothing. It is a description of physical and emotional barriers keeping people within and people without. (One such emotional barrier is the cliched 'British reserve'). What is it that happens which makes a people a token people; and what happens to them once they have become a token people?

They have become marginalized and set aside, and in the case of the Caribs, given token land marked as a 'Reservation'. The parcelling out of land is by historical definition the formation of a colony.

COLONIA, that is to say, a settlement of...grants of land in the surrounding territorium administered by the town, ...the term COLONIA also meant that an existing town or city was accorded special municipal status.

... The establishment of a COLONIA was always a matter of explicit imperial policy. <sup>15</sup>

The Caribbean may not be Roman Britain although there have been efforts to transform it into British Caribbean, but the imperial sentiment of parcelling out land in order to form a colony is the same. A colony is thus a definition of land acknowledging the presence of power in the interests of people other than the natives. The lot of the Carib people, those who lent their name to the rest of this region of islands, mirrors the lot of the entire Caribbean. Trinh Minh-ha confirms that independence and a sense of identity is intimately bound with a sense of regional belonging:

Self-determination begins with division of the land. ... "difference" is essentially "division" in the understanding of many. <sup>16</sup>

Division is also difference in the understanding of many. The division of land is intimately bound with a sense of regional - sometimes irreconcilable - differences. Having outlined the physical lines of demarcation by building up borders and border control,

they work toward your crasure while urging you to keep your way of life and ethnic values within the BORDERS of your homelands. This is called the policy of "separate development" in apartheid language. Tactics have changed since colonial times; indigenous cultures are no longer overtly destroyed. You may keep your traditional law and tribal customs among yourselves, as long as you and your own kind are careful not to step beyond the assigned limits. <sup>17</sup>

Geoffrey Hartman observes that this divisiveness manifests itself in more

definitions of marginalities. The existence of a margin necessitates the limitations of finite space. A margin is a border within a border, and the inner border delineates two concepts of space - one central, the other, peripheral. Thus, the framework of a culture has its margins, as its lands have their borders. Division will result in

more frames by virtue of the fact that the frame starts breaking up. The contained manifests itself, but part of the contained is the container. <sup>18</sup>

In other words, part of the periphery is contained in the centre, and part of the centre manifests itself in its margins. There are political consequences. Edward Said voices an emphatic opinion on marginality as the consequence of the parcelling out of land;

I do not believe in partition, not only at a political and demographic level, but on all sorts of other intellectual and spiritual ones. The whole idea of parceling out pieces for communities is just totally wrong. Any notion of purity - that such and such territory is essentially the Palestinian or Israeli homeland - is just an idea that is totally inauthentic...

The notion of struggle...of everyone quarreling over territory... That's how it relates to questions of influence and why it is now called "intertextuality". <sup>19</sup>

Any form of partitioning ultimately results in the appropriation, transformation, occupation and exploitation of one culture by another. Similarly, the marginalities in every text create within it the potential of becoming a powerful discourse, wielding real power. This is the struggle of intertextuality. Kincaid's A Small Place is one such polemic. It is a description of the struggle of intertextuality, expressing the

discord of transplanted and imposed influence within a colonized and creolized culture as described in Annie John and Wide Sargasso Sea. Whereas language is merely speech or writing viewed 'objectively' as a series of signs without a subject, 'discourse' means "language tangibly grasped as utterance, involving speaking and writing subjects and therefore potentially readers or listeners".<sup>20</sup> Thus discourse has the real potential of embodying political attitudes accompanied by physical power. Figures of speech become statesmen who make history. Historical discourse is not just textual play, it is produced within the real world of power struggle. Discourse, therefore textuality, is a central human activity and in Raman Selden's phrase - "a violence we do to things".<sup>21</sup> This violence is often the accompaniment to partitioning.

Brathwaite describes the colonization of the Caribbean as continuous exploitation for five hundred years since its 'discovery' by Europe. A violence has been done to the Caribbean by Europe. The Caribbean is, or at least was, a region of impressive natural resources, but Europe to its own advantage devised a divisive system socially and geographically ruinous for the natives.

Mercantilist system of trade in raw materials extracted from the region: gold, silver, tobacco, sugar, oils, bauxite, banana: owned, supervised and controlled by the metropole. In exchange the Caribbean received certain selected goods at steadily inflated and controlled prices. This system, quite naturally, inhibited the natural growth of the Caribbean economy, and created a dependence on expensive imported products.<sup>22</sup>

One such legacy of exploitation is the contemporary dependance of the Caribbean economy upon tourism - imports of exploiting people. Jamaica



Kincaid describes tourist fare in these terms:

A good guess is that it came from a place like Antigua first, where it was grown dirt-cheap, went to Miami, and came back. There is a world of something in this, but I can't go into it right now. <sup>23</sup>

Tourism is as exploitative as enslavement, and though less overt, it is more culturally insidious. Susan Sontag describes

Travel as accumulation. The colonialism of the soul...however well-intentioned. <sup>24</sup>

Tourism is a new commercial form of colonization. Jamaica Kincaid conveys vehemently

That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom... But... - most natives in the world - cannot go anywhere. They are too poor...so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy...your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. <sup>25</sup>

Trinh Minh-ha has this to say about the definition of the 'native':

language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and of unconscious servility. ... such is the relation between we, the natives, and they, the natives. ... Terming us the 'natives' focusses on our innate qualities and our belonging to a particular place by birth; terming them the 'natives', on their being born inferior and 'non-European'. ... As homonyms, these two natives sometimes claim to merge and other times hear nothing of each other. ... From "Forget who you are and

forget me not" to "know who you are and copy me not",  
the point of view is the same: "Be like us"... Don't  
be us... Just be "like" and bear the chameleon's fate. <sup>26</sup>

To be native is to claim status synonymous with the place of birth. Trinh points out the pluralities of meaning in the term 'native' are symptoms of an imperial power imposing upon the colony the inferior status of being marginal, a simulacrum rather than the Subject. When the natives of a colony are described, termed, and named 'Natives' with a capital letter, they are transformed into capital. The process of naming then becomes an artificial notion of 'acceptance' inclusive of barriers, therefore of meaning inclusive of divisive margins. Naming is a ritual of definition and protection. Antoinette says, "Naming is a form of obeah too" - and Rochester's insistence on calling her Bertha is the beginning of her metamorphosis into the character of the mad Creole conceived by Bronte. It is also significant that Antoinette calls herself after her mother Annette with 'Toi' - french for the second person - couched in between; and that Annie's mother names her daughter after her self. A name thus becomes a bequest of identification - self-identification as a mirror-image of the mother, and self-separation describing one's difference from the other. 'Annie' and 'Antoinette' are variations on the same name shared with their mothers. Of the significance of names, Susan Sontag cites Rainer Maria Rilke's description of

the naming of things, ... A tremendous spiritual preparation is required for this deceptively simple act of naming. <sup>27</sup>

Toril Moi suggests that the profundity of naming is a way of the Subject coping with the Other. Naming is an act of the Ego defining not just the



centre of the self, but the other personalities defining the margins of the self and therefore describing the ego as a whole.

To impose names is...not only an act of power, it also reveals a desire to regulate and organize reality according to well-defined categories. ... as Brecht put it in Mann ist Mann "When you name yourself, you name another". <sup>28</sup>

Trinh Minh-ha describes even more emphatically the status a name gives to one's cultural sense of being a person, part of the very fabric of humanity.

Naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation, and the unnamed remains less human than the inhuman or sub-human. <sup>29</sup>

Naming is a ritual endowing a right - and Rochester's renaming of Antoinette is a violation of her self. Not only is Antoinette forced by the English legal system to renounce her 'proper' name and take on his, he also forces her, by the imposition of his will, to change her most intimate and personal name resulting in the inner core of her emotional self giving way. Christophine, the embodiment of Pat Ellis's independent and resourceful Caribbean woman, has three children "each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. ... Law! The Mason boy fix it, that boy worse than Satan..." (WSS, p91) Christophine is the antithesis of the traditional role of the woman married according to English Law. She has only contempt for husbands and the legal system they embody. When Antoinette lives according to a norm alien to her, it culminates in the ultimate denial of herself. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe

woman's enforced denial of herself in more categorical terms:

For woman in our culture, a proper name is at best problematic...designating her role as her father's daughter...erases her own position... Her 'proper' name, therefore, is always in a way improper because it is not in the french sense, PROPRIÉTÉ, her own either to have or to give. With what letters, then can a woman...perpetuate the most elementary trace of her identity? <sup>30</sup>

This comment is confirmed by Xaviere Gauthier who quotes Monique Wittig:

Women...do not have a proper name: "That which identifies them like the eye of the cyclops, their single forename." <sup>31</sup>

Antoinette is denied even this insight; and Annie is but a repetition of her mother in the sense of the same shared name accompanied by the fixture of the husband and father - Mrs. Annie JOHN and Miss. Annie JOHN. As Antoinette says, "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window..." (WSS, p147). Jacques Derrida's insight is that the name is always under erasure anyway, because

the bestowing of the proper name, something no society can avoid, is inhabited by the structure of writing. For the phrase 'proper name' signifies a classification... Thus the proper name, as soon as it is understood as such, is no longer fully unique and proper to the holder. The proper name is always already common by virtue of belonging to the category 'proper'. It is always already under erasure.

...The narcissistic desire to make one's 'proper' name 'common', to be one with the body of the mother tongue; and simultaneously the Oedipal desire to preserve one's proper name as the analogon of the name of the father. <sup>32</sup>

But does woman have a choice as to where her narcissitic desires, focussed by her name, should lie and express themselves? Does she truly possess the Oedipal desire and choice for her name to be one with the father, or is it rather a 'choice' thrust upon her? To be one with the mother tongue, particularly as expressed by the metaphor of fluidity in texts such as those by Irigaray and Cixous, may be an exercise as the antithesis of the Language of the Father and thus an attempt to find her textual freedom. If woman is not even allowed the ritual right of owning her own identity in the form of a name - where, then, is her place in a culture, especially the creolized culture of a colony? Pat Ellis highlights matter-of-factly a pertinent point which is often overlooked by Freudian and Lacanian analysis;

All women play critical roles in culture. As child nurturers and teachers, they transmit the values of that society. <sup>33</sup>

Trinh echoes this with her statement "the mother's body is the link between culture and nature, and as such must play a conserving role..." <sup>34</sup> - this is especially shown in Annie John. Thus the key role a mother plays with the child is not simply only during the 'mirror stage' when the child's consciousness is at one with the mother, but continues through adolescence and adulthood. Therefore the role of women in culture cannot by definition be marginal - yet she is relegated to the borders of identity and given marginal meaning by being unnnamed. Therefore it is perhaps the term 'culture' itself which has to be defined, and with it the question to which culture does woman belong. Is it mainstream or marginal, or is she just shored up on the edge of the text? M.F.Montagu dicusses the origin of the concept of culture by probing its etymological roots:

The word 'Culture' derives from the Latin CULTURA and CULTUS,... Both words were used originally in an attributive, functional sense...cultivation of something. CULTURA occurs first in the composite AGRI CULTURA...cultivating of the soil... Middle Ages, occasionally worship of God referred to as AGRICULTURA DEI... Cicero speaks of CULTURA ANIMI, cultivation of the mind... Thus, common feature of all kinds of cultivation...control and organization, refinement and sublimation of nature.

In this way, attributive functional uses of CULTURA and CULTUS fused into the general and substantive term 'CULTURE'... This change from attributive to substantive significance implies a turn from the representation of CULTURA, cultivation, as an activity to the concept of culture as an established condition, state of being, civilized. <sup>35</sup>

When Pat Ellis comments that all women play a crucial role in culture, and when Trinh states that women are the actual conservors of culture, do they mean women are purely cultivators of children as nurterers and teachers (both roles often synthesised in the role of motherhood)? Or do they imply Montagu's description of the concept of culture as an established condition and state of being, which we have so far seen to be inherently and dominantly male. Also, 'civilization' in a colony is a white, imperial concept. Maurice Blanchot defines 'culture' in a similar vein:

Culture...is based on the notion of humanism...that man is naturally reflected in his works and never distinct from himself, that progress is continuous, an uninterrupted continuity which ensures the flow of past into present, since culture and accumulation go hand in hand. <sup>36</sup>

This brings to mind Susan Sontag's comment that travel as accumulation is the colonialism of the soul. Blanchot's definition of culture is material and textual (with regard to the 'works' of man) and optimistically

humanist. But what happens when 'culture' becomes a colonial imposition, a hybrid in a foreign and exploited land? Man himself became a source of accumulation, as in the Caribbean colonies where the black man was white man's capital. Women both black and white, were treated as chattel with the different status of the latter merely 'elevated' by the privileged label of marriage. Black people were forced to become distinct from themselves with no identities of their own. The black man was never perceived as a man distinct from his master and never allowed any rights as a self-regarding man. Like woman, he did not possess the ritual of a personal proper name. Antoinette, by becoming her husband's property, experiences a situation not dissimilar from that of the black man. Enslavement cannot be based upon the notion of humanism. The black man's 'progress' as a race was an enforced transplantation, consequent stagnation, and if anything, the regression of the status of his race, resulting in the stamping out of his identity. The flow of his past into his present promised his children no future beyond that of an inheritance of servitude. In a colonial/slave culture, the phrase "culture and accumulation" takes on an entirely different meaning when man is himself capital. Terry Eagleton comments astutely,

There is no document of culture which is not also a record of barbarism. ... there are times and places when Culture becomes...charged with a significance beyond itself...in nations struggling for their independence from Imperialism. ... Imperialism is not only the exploitation of cheap labour-power, raw materials and easy markets but the uprooting of languages and customs, ...the imposition of alien ways of experiencing...most intimate roots of speech and signification. In such situations, culture is so vitally bound up with one's common identity that there is no need to argue for its relation to political power struggle. It is arguing against it which would seem incomprehensible. <sup>37</sup>

The sense of their own cultural identity influences the language of a people, which becomes in turn, an expression of their culture. Language ultimately becomes a definition of culture. This is complicated by the fact that in the Caribbean, colonization has imposed a complex creolization of culture expressed in a hybrid of languages such as patois, an expression of a confusion of identity. It can also be said in the Caribbean that instead of culture forming a man's identity, it is his identity which forms his culture. For if a man was identified as black - even if he looked white but had the slightest 'taint' of black blood - his consequent culture was inexorably labelled and laid out for him. The question of identity also becomes simultaneous with the concept of language which expresses and defines the self. What language does the black man speak, is he made to speak? As Susan Sontag points out, "the simplest linguistic act: (is) the naming of things" <sup>38</sup> When women and black men have no names and therefore no identity, where is their place in the order of things? Is it always to be confined to the margins? Chris Searle describes the status of the Caribbean child in his

island nation - their people still speak in a language that takes them back to the past and their subjection and exploitation through centuries of slavery and colonialism. ... Their language speaks against them...

We find our identities through our language. That language must uphold us, give us confidence, tell us we belong to our world and each other... A man becomes absurd when his language divides him from his world and makes him speak of foreign things. It is his language that forges out and articulates his images of identity... <sup>39</sup>

It is this that Annie John unconsciously struggles for in her colonial classroom. She doodles in her imported English textbook and defaces the

white man's version of the 'history' of the West Indies. Annie mauls Christopher Columbus with her pen. On a more contemporary note, Lee Kuan Yew reminds himself of Singapore's colonial history in the classroom;

I have read all about the daffodils and the bumblebee, and heigh-ho, merry-oh and all the rest. It was part of my schooling. They pumped it into me. And I hated what they did, and I joined up with the communists to get rid of them. <sup>40</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew also quotes Nehru whose nation underwent a similar colonial experience and inheritance:

I cry when I think that I cannot speak my own mother tongue as well as I can speak the English Language. <sup>41</sup>

Roland Barthes comments on man's inheritance of language. Man's - and woman's - inheritance of language is woven into the very fabric of his textuality and his consequent definition of himself:

Thus is born the tragic element in writing, since the writer must fight against ancestral and all-powerful signs which, from the depths of a past foreign to him, impose Literature on him like some ritual, not like a reconciliation. <sup>42</sup>

Barthes' words are a summary of the colonial invasion of language. Neither is it a question of the black man becoming reconciled with the white man, but it is of him being reconciled with himself. The colonized man has no choice as to the ancestral signs he inherits, nor any woman - for the signs belong to the powerful who are the exploiters. These signs and symbols are the fabric of his culture, as John Blacking observes:

Though the material products of a society's culture may survive...and be given new meanings in the context of another culture...a culture itself survives only as long as people use it. A culture is always being invented and re-invented by individual decision-making...it really is...culture that is transient and dependent on human whim. <sup>43</sup>

However, in the case of the Caribbean colony, the dominant culture did not evolve through the choice of the majority of individuals, but through the choice of a minority of expatriate individuals in power. There was then no choice as to which culture was utilised in the daily detail of living; the culture of the white man was enforced - first through enslavement, then through education. P.M.Sherlock states that there is ample justification for the culture of the Caribbean to be not just that of the white man's. The culture of the Caribbean is a hybrid of other cultures, not least of all that of Africa.

the African past is a part of the heritage of the people of the Caribbean archipelago...people of African origin are in the majority... knowledge of Africa and African history will help to free us from the misconception that we inherited from the colonial period through a school system which either negelected Africa altogether or presented it as a primitive barbarous place.

...a substantial mythology about Africa was accepted and taught because it appeared to justify, or at least to explain, the enslavement of the African... In the same way that Caribbean history was treated as a footnote to European history so African history was treated as if it were the same as the history of the European colonisation of Africa.

...any scientific study of man's past must include a study of the past of Africa, because evidence indicates that man had his origins in Africa. <sup>44</sup>

The question of culture is ultimately the question of origins, and inheritance. In her essay on Hawaiian-American literature, Katherine



Newman makes some salient points about the marginality of literature derived from a hybrid of cultures. If 'Caribbean' is substituted for 'Hawaiian-American', her comments may be relevant to writing of Caribbean origin.

There is, strictly speaking, no Hawaiian-American literature. What there is, at present, is a Hawaiian CONSCIOUSNESS that pervades...striving to create a literary tradition that meets the needs of the Hawaiians, a people fragmented by the multiplicity of their origins, living on incredibly beautiful islands that are constantly devoured and recreated by sea and volcano...

As Hawaiian writers...rise, they are threatened by increasing waves of tourism and commercialism. ... A spirit must be forged, not of conformity or unity, but of harmony in a society where the "ethnics", the children and grandchildren of immigrants, are in the majority,...and the natives...are in the minority... 45

Questions, similarities and contradictions are provoked by a comparison of Caribbean literature with Hawaiian literature. The Caribbean shares with Hawaii an island nature with similar climate and vegetation, a history of fragmented transplantation of a diverse people, and an exceptionally American influence on the economic life of the island today. The Caribbean however is possessed of a British colonial inheritance, and the majority of 'immigrants' were unwillingly imported as slaves. However similar the Chinese coolie experience in the Hawaiian sugar plantations may be, they came technically of their own free will. Thus the climate may be the same, but the temperament is different.

Is there at present a literary Caribbean consciousness? With regard to the texts by Jamaica Kincaid, the answer is 'yes'; and although Jean Rhys lived in England all her adulthood, Wide Sargasso Sea is imbued with

consciousness which is more than mere 'native' flavouring and 'local colour'. Hers is the expression of a creole experience which is uniquely Caribbean. However, is there a literary Caribbean Tradition? Tradition, by definition, is built up from the past. The complex colonized past of the Caribbean has resulted in texts as diverse as those by Rhys and Kincaid, imaging different experiences of Caribbean culture, black and white, but with similarities more deeply inherent than the fact that the female protagonists share versions of the same name. They share the same coloured and creole experience of a colony. There may not be a Caribbean 'tradition' of writing but there may result a Caribbean 'canon' of texts.

Also, an island is a tangibly finite landmass. The awareness of the perpetual presence of the bordering sea defines the insubstantiality of land and the life it sustains which is especially heightened by the presence of volcanoes. Islands can be created and destroyed at whim from the depths of the sea. (In the Caribbean, St. Pierre in Martinique was destroyed by a volcano, remembered and described by Jean Rhys). It does not just require the presence of volcanoes to be aware that land is constantly being devoured and recovered by the sea. Annie John observes the rising of the sea in the Chapter The Long Rain. This awareness of the shifting shores of boundary, of the merging margin between sea and land; also the infinitesimal line of the margin of horizon between sea and sky, influence the island's textuality. Waves of tourism and commercialism also threaten to engulf every beautiful island. It seems to be a paradoxical 'natural' effect.

Yet, can texts by writers such as Rhys and Kincaid be truly described

as 'Caribbean'? Both women were indeed of Caribbean origin, born and childhoodbred but Rhys then lived in England, and Kincaid now lives in New York. Their lives are to some degree a description and definition of consciously imposed literary exile. The jeopardy of colonized origins may well be a literary advantage as described by the texts of Rhys and Kincaid. The literary text then becomes not just a textual transcending of borderlines, but the discovery of what these boundaries are, resulting in the creation of meaning from marginalities. J.K.Gardiner observes:

For the colonial woman writer...the exile that sends her from the colony to the cultural center must always be profoundly ambiguous... To be exiled from the periphery to the center of one's culture is not the traditional meaning of exile, yet these writers do not define this center as 'home'... as colonials, they can see English culture as a dominating discourse imposed upon their creativity; at the same time it enables that creativity by freeing them from...home as the family of origin. What being a colonial-in-exile does...is put into play an oscillation whereby no place is home...so there remains a missing point of origin in their works... (They are) simultaneously inheritors and antagonists to imperialism... the English literary tradition is the reassuring heritage of a mother tongue, but it is also somewhat alien...

...They perceive home - in both directions - as periphery and center, as individual colonial family and as dominant culture - as a site of oppression in which they learn to articulate that oppression. <sup>46</sup>

The point of origin therefore is both margin and centre - from both result an equivalent derivation of self-definition. Trinh Minh-ha is adamant that being a colonial woman writer is a summary of the status of jeopardy. She can never feel the complacency of central status held by the majority, but rather is fettered by the stereotype of her 'feelings':

Remember, the minor-ity's voice is always personal; that of the major-ity, always impersonal. Logic dictates.

Man thinks, woman feels. The white man knows through reason and logic - the intelligible. The black man understands through intuition and sympathy - the sensible. Old stereotypes deriving from well-defined differences (the apartheid type of difference) govern our thought.

But to write well, we must either espouse his cause, or transcend our borderlines. We must forget ourselves. We are therefore triply jeopardized: as a writer, as a woman, as a woman of colour. <sup>47</sup>

Colonization developing into creolization is a colouring of identity - often through literal adulteration. Thus 'feeling' is described by the dominant people as the marginal space occupied by the minority - but the whole sense of the people is made up of both the marginal space and central space of consciousness, symbolized as the stereotypes of 'feeling' and 'rationality'. The experience of the Caribbean involves such intersecting spaces of black, white and creole consciousness. Trinh illuminates other intersections of consciousness which is today's inheritance of exploitation:

To survive, 'Third World' must necessarily have negative and positive connotations: negative when viewed in a vertical ranking system - "underdeveloped"... and positive when understood...as a subversive, "non-aligned" force. Whether 'Third World' sounds negative or positive also depends on WHO uses it. Coming from Westerners, the word can hardly mean the same as when it comes from US members of the Third World.

..."Third World" commonly refers to those states in Africa, Asia and Latin America which call themselves "non-aligned" ie: affiliated with neither Western (capitalist) nor eastern (communist) power blocs. Exploited, looked down upon, and lumped together in a convenient term that denies their individualities...

...The Third World has moved West (or North, depending where the dividing line falls)... Third World dwells on diversity; so does First World. This is our strength and our misery...

...There is a Fourth World which, we are told, "is a world populated by indigenous people who still continue to bear a spiritual relationship to their indigenous lands." The colonialist creed "divide and

conquer" is here again... Agressive Third World (educated 'savages') must be classified apart from gentle Fourth World (uneducated 'savages'). 48

The Caribbean inherits its people from Africa and Latin America, and shares with Asia the colonial inheritance of exploitation. Trinh's rhetoric is a prophecy of present-day pertinence, and she emphasises that

The substitution of words like racist for sexist, or vice versa, and the established image of the Third World Woman in the context of (pseudo) feminism readily merges with that of the Native in the context of (neo-colonialist) anthropology. The problems are interconnected. 49

The substitution of words is one example of the intersection of consciousness, as is the intersection of experience between Third World Woman and Native. 'Third World Woman' and 'Native' share the experience of becoming the enforced marginalities of colonialism. There is another kind of intersection which has to be taken into account - that between texts, which Kristeva describes as 'intertextuality' in her essay "The word within the space of texts". Intertextuality manifests itself as

the intersection of language (the true practice of thought) with space (the VOLUME within which signification...articulates itself). ... We must first define the three dimensions of textual space or coordinates of dialogue...writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs both to writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior literary corpus).

...each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. ...any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity. ...

The word is spatialized so that it actually contains margins of meaning. The writing subject in the texts by Rhys and Kincaid is a woman of Caribbean origin voicing a Caribbean girl called Annie/Antoinette who is in part the image of her mother, and whose cause is the search for her self. Both texts especially share the inheritance of one particular exterior text - that of Jane Eyre which is part of the accepted literary canon of their mother tongue. The addressee is assumed to share the same mother tongue and literary inheritance. Kristeva implies each word is a text in its own right, and that each text is the "absorption and transformation of another". The same could be said of the culture of the Caribbean, where one culture is absorbed and transformed by another. The colonization of culture results in creolization - in this case, black culture is absorbed and transformed by the dominating culture of the white masters, and the process is called 'civilization' by them. The notion of intertextuality is thus an acknowledgement of marginalities. Marginalities are a necessary part of the textuality of a culture complicated by its colonial history. Terry Eagleton observes about textuality that

All literary works contain one or more...SUB-TEXTS...a text which runs within it, visible at certain 'symptomatic' points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to 'write' even if the novel itself does not. ... such subtexts...may be spoken of as the 'unconscious' of the work itself. The work's insights, as with all writing, are deeply related to its blindneses: what it does not say, and how it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings... 51

Such textuality therefore has consequences for culture. Jane Eyre is the obvious sub-text; and less obvious but perhaps more important is the subtext of British, American and African influences and origins on the culture and therefore literature of the Caribbean. Woman and the black man are inarticulate in a white man's language. Their marginality may be much more than a mere central clue to the text, but the key to the centre of the text itself. Susan Sontag discusses the relationship between text and marginality. Of the

marginal literary subject: an unimportant 'work' ... could be a marvellous 'text'. Considering something as a 'text' means...precisely to suspend conventional evaluations. ... notions of 'text' and 'textuality' charges the critic with the task of discarding worn-out meanings for fresh ones. <sup>52</sup>

Writing by women of Caribbean origin cannot, because of its circumstance of creolized colonial culture, be conventionally evaluated. Hence the marginality of their works lend themselves to their description as 'texts', not just 'works'. The analysis of these texts by Rhys and Kincaid has not so much been a discarding of 'old' meanings - but the illumination of the marginalities of meaning that DO exist by the very nature of the circumstances of their textuality. These works by Rhys and Kincaid which are not considered to be of classic importance according to the tenets of the traditionally white, male-dominated literary canon of their 'mother tongue', are the most marvellous texts. Their marginalities of meaning are profound. Toril Moi confirms this new method of criticism with regard to the 'text', bearing in mind all meaning is contextual, and every word is a text:

It is vital to study the context of each and every utterance. ... The only way of producing interesting results from...texts is to take the whole of the utterance (the whole text) as one's object, which means studying the ideological, political and psychoanalytical articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche,...with other texts. Kristeva has coined the concept of intertextuality. <sup>53</sup>

This is exactly what I have attempted to do with the these two texts by Rhys and Kincaid. Derrida has shown that a text can be taken to have any number of contexts. 'Context' should not be understood as a unitary phenomenon, isolated and determined. Inscribing a specific context for a text does not close or fix the meaning of the text - instead there is a boundless possibility of reinscribing the text in other contexts. Where then, does the future of writing by women of Caribbean origin lie? It lies in response to these words of Antoinette's;

So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all.

(WSS, p85)

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\* The abbreviation 'AJ' stands for 'Annie John', and 'WSS' for 'Wide Sargasso Sea'.

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