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The Transposition of the Other to the Place of the Subject: Jean Rhys's and Angela Carter's Re-Structuring of the Oedipal Text

by

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A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Lehigh University

September, 1991

This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

Sept 17, 1991

Date

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Elizabeth Fifer for introducing me to the works of Angela Carter and for providing me with a foundation on which to base my argument. I am also grateful for her invariably enthusiastic support during the writing of this paper. I would like to thank Gladys Torres for her friendship and for providing me with a refreshingly pragmatic analysis of some of the various situations of women within our cultures. I owe special thanks to my father Ali Sharaf and my sister Sherien Sharaf for their never ending confidence and patience. Most of all I wish to thank my mother, Sonia Elgezeri, who has consistently provided me with a positive image of woman and a positive reflection of myself.

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Abstract

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Bloody Chamber*, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter write against "master narratives" or canonical versions of Gothic stories which are well known by most readers. Rhys subjects Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* to a modern critique of its racist and xenophobic discourse by humanizing the Creole "madwoman" Bronte so readily dismisses. And Carter's text oscillates from parodying to radically deconstructing the masculine discourse contained within classic fairy tales. Both of these authors reject the supposed "happy endings" of the canonical works. They reveal that success and failure are arbitrary terms which have been constructed by the dominant culture and, therefore, do not apply to those *others* who stand outside this culture. A "happy ending" within the original texts entails, without exception, only success for the masculine characters, as only their desires are fulfilled by the narrative structure. The classic narrative structure, as Teresa de Lauretis explains in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, is an Oedipal one in which the will of the mythical subject, man, is imposed upon the mythical object, woman. Therefore, although a story may ostensibly be about *her*, most often it is actually about *him*, as the feminine character's Oedipal journey leads her always to the masculine--to marriage, to confinement, to repression and/or to madness. Thus the task of Carter and Rhys in their works is to continuously reveal whose desire motivates the original narratives and to deny Oedipal desire within their own. In moving a way from the Oedipus, the feminine characters of both authors *regress*, in a

Freudian teleology but *progress* in a feminist sense, to forming a reconciliation with their first love objects, their mothers. The maternal ethos is a source of empowerment for these characters which explodes the many false myths associated with "evil stepmothers" and "mother devourers." Through the simultaneous deconstruction of the myths of Oedipus and the evil mother, the feminine protagonists of both works are able to exchange the position of object they occupy in the canonical narratives and claim the position of subject in Rhys's and Carter's re-structured versions of the texts.

Introduction

A beautiful young woman with long streaming hair runs through an enclosed darkened space. Her delicate fingers attempt to protect the waning flame of her candle. She glances behind her and with horror observes his quickening approach. Her gown trails on the floor inhibiting her quick escape. He overcomes her. She is his. Or, . . . from behind the door of an unnoticed chamber emerges Prince Charming and rescues her from the clutches of the villain and the evil stepmother. She is his.

This jumble of Gothic cliches evokes familiar scenes, no doubt, as the formulaic treatment of women in the Gothic is impossible not to recognize. The feminine characters of the traditional Gothic occupy either the position of the vulnerable heroine in need of rescue--which she may or may not receive--or the position of the evil monster-woman, the witch or--the contemporary equivalent--the bitch. Such a dichotomous representation of the feminine is the result of the Madonna/Whore split which has been so tenaciously inculcated by past and present culture. In the position of the Madonna/heroine, the feminine character is constructed to be worshipped and idealized, while in the position of the Whore/witch, she is constructed to be scorned and ultimately destroyed. Both extremes are constructs of a masculine ideology and are the objects of men's desires and fears. In other words they represent either what men want or what they fearfully imagine women to be--neither are *real* women but both together are the symbols which define woman. Thus I as a *real* woman reading this symbol in a text should not be able to locate myself within it--I should not recognize this symbol as being myself. Yet, I have often *mis*-recognized myself in such texts as have most women to various degrees.

In order to counteract this negative "symbol-identification," women need to destroy or to demythologize the old symbol. We also need to, not as Cixous declares create New Woman, but to create New Women--that is multiple viable symbols or models for women.[1] The Gothic genre is clearly apropos to such an endeavor, for it relies heavily on symbology. Furthermore, its structure has proven especially congenial to women writers; as the world it represents is one of nightmare-dread and alienation, it easily expresses the "nightmare [that] is created by the [female] individual in conflict with the values of her society and her prescribed role" (Fleenor 10). Margaret Anne Doody declares, "it is in the Gothic novel that women writers could first accuse the 'real world' of falsehood and deep disorder" (560). And indeed such accusations permeate the texts of two twentieth-century Gothic writers, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter. In the following, I will explore how both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Bloody Chamber* challenge the hegemonic infrastructure of society and how both Rhys and Carter frame what is, in part, the essential question of the Female Gothic--"whether masculine control is not just another delusion in the nightmare of absurd historical reality in which we are all involved?" (Doody 560).

The Bloody Chamber and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are both made up of a series of short narratives which not only relate *her* story but her story as it has been told by *him* or a masculine *them*. Clare Hanson points out that the short fiction form is one which has often been used by culturally marginalized writers.[2] This is because the short narrative must make its point quickly, as if the narrator or author has not the power to demand more time or space. Thus in the works

of these two writers the ideological bias of the short narrative method enhances the feminist ideology reflected throughout the texts. Most of Carter's short tales are re-workings of classic fairy tales which have been ironically labeled as the stories of girls or women when in actuality, as Carter poignantly demonstrates, they are again and again the tales of men's desires. In the ingenious nexus she constructs in *The Bloody Chamber*, she oscillates between satisfying the readers expectations and destroying or exploding these expectations altogether. Such a strategy is reflective of the "singular moral function" of the Gothic tale--"that of provoking unease" (Carter *Fireworks* 133). With unease potentially comes doubt, doubt in men's reductive stories of women and ultimately doubt in "the word as fact" (*Fireworks* 133).

Jean Rhys perhaps even more clearly creates doubt in "the word as fact" in her novel which offers primarily two versions of what is ostensibly the *same* story--the story(s) of Antoinette Cosway or Bronte's Bertha Mason Rochester. Although *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not, like Carter's work, a series of short tales, Hanson's comments on the significance of the use of short narrative nevertheless apply. For the text of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is provided by more than one narrator, and each narrator has only a limited space in which to relate her/his narrative. Both Rhys and Carter are working against a "master narrative" or a canonical version of a story which is well "known" by most readers.[3] We as readers "know" the narrative plot, but each of these writers upsets this knowledge. Rhys provides us with a part of a story which we did not know and thought we did not need to know, while Carter often parodies what we "know" and then offers us a

completely new knowledge of a very old story. Subsequently, I will argue that both artists' works are vitally dependent upon contextual readings and that their narratives operate in specific yet shifting historical frames. Rhys and Carter both reflect the historicity and temporality of their narratives through the use of intertextual and intratextual allusions which make both writers' ideological understandings of the texts they are rewriting clear. Rhys, as Ellen Friedman states, "transverses Bronte's text with an otherness that postdates it" (119). By confronting Bronte's novel with the Creole ethos that Bronte ignored, Rhys not only exposes the ethnocentric, imperialistic cultural milieu which is reflected in Bronte's work but subjects *Jane Eyre* to a modern critique of its racist and xenophobic discourse. Similarly, Carter's iconoclastic rendering of classic fairy tales ruptures the crystalline hegemony of the historical versions and proffers instead an exceedingly contemporary discourse, one which is reflective of the contemporary culture and ideology of the "Gothic times" in which we live, as Carter states (*Fireworks* 133).

Rhys and Carter, however, do not effect their provocative re-envisionings solely through plot changes but, much more significantly, through structural changes. In the "Afterword" to *Fireworks*, Carter explains that the tales of which she is most fond are those "narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious" (132). In order to better understand Carter's and Rhys's rendering of the unconscious in their texts, it would be helpful to recall Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic.[4] The semiotic includes, in part, sexual drive and subjective desire, which generate, in the works of these two authors, a seeming chaos of incongruities

often hidden or unexplored in the master narratives of the symbolic order. Critics such as Ellen Friedman and Mona Fayad, for example, have alerted us to the "semiotic presence introduced through the wild nature imagery, the Creole ethos, and the 'madness' of Antoinette" as well, of course, as through Antoinette's dreams in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Friedman 121).[5] And within *The Bloody Chamber*, the semiotic is easily perceived through Carter's sensual explorations of beastiality and the "profane." Both texts may thus be read as semiotic discourses struggling against master narratives or as feminine discourses struggling to gain power in and from the masculine symbolic order.

As stated above, both Rhys's and Carter's works tell *her* story and, it may be added, they tell it in *her* way. The feminine narrators and/or protagonists of both works attempt to achieve the power of being the subjects of their own stories and attempt to reject the silencing domination of being the objects of others' stories about them. In other words, they strive to exchange the position of object they occupy in the canonical narratives and claim the position of subject in the new versions of the texts.

As the majority of these narrators and/or protagonists are successful in achieving the power of this subject position, I would like to explain initially from which definition of power I am working. Barbara Bellow Watson urges, "instead of looking for success and failure in the outer events of the story, in fiction or historical fact, we should look for the meanings of success and failure, the meanings of power" (114). In contemporary feminist ideology, power does not entail "power over" or dominance but

"power to...".[6] Thus it is necessary to "read the language of characters who have abilities and energies without having or even seeking dominance over other people. These characters are not always recognized as exemplars of power" (Watson 114). Because Rhys's and Carter's feminine characters often display power ambiguously, Watson's definition is essential. This is especially true when considering Beauty's controversial denouement, for example, and even more vital when considering Antoinette's struggle to assume the subject position. For Antoinette's narrative may easily be read as pathos--as a story of a poor hysteric driven to madness and supposedly suicide by the brutalities of the dominant culture. I will, however, demonstrate that Antoinette's struggle is successful, because she reveals a poignant self-consciousness and understanding of her position in society, and because even in the midst of her "madness," Antoinette remains lucid enough to tell her story. As Watson emphasizes, it is crucial that we "observe women in literature acting and perceiving, not only as acted upon and perceived. It may be only this distinction between subject and object that can counter without dishonesty the personal sense of hopelessness engendered by the facts of history and the facts of fiction" (Watson 115). Therefore, my criteria for a successful transition to the subject position will be the degree to which a character determines the narrative and rejects being determined by it.

The subject's successful determination of her narrative does not signify that a feminine subject will simply replace a masculine one in a traditional narrative structure. The traditional Gothic

structure according to critics, Eino Railo and Montague Summers, is that of a quest narrative.[7] The Gothic hero commonly engages in a re-creation of the pre-lapsarian struggle against evil and by so doing is eventually led away from his community. Only if the hero is successful in combating this evil will he be granted a return; if not, he will often take on the role of the Gothic villain (but he may nevertheless remain a sympathetic character i.e., the Faustian or Prometheus-type villain). In either scenario the measure of the hero's success or failure is most often a woman--a failed hero, or villain, will victimize a woman while a successful hero will save her (note the cliched introductory example). What is important to remember is that while often a Gothic tale is ostensibly a tale of a woman, say "Sleeping Beauty" or "Beauty and the Beast," it is actually a tale of a man's success or failure. Teresa de Lauretis deals extensively with this dilemma, and I will quote her in length, as her discussion is fundamental to my own. Lauretis explains,

> the end of the girl's journey, if successful, will bring her to the place where the boy will find her like Sleeping Beauty, awaiting him, Prince Charming. For the boy has been promised by the social contract he has entered into at his Oedipal phase, that he will find woman waiting at the end of *his* journey. Thus the itinerary of the female's journey... is guided by a compass... pointing to the fulfillment of the promise made to "the little man,' of his social contract, *his* biological and affective destiny--and to the fulfillment of his desire.
>
> (133)

Numerous critics and theorists including de Lauretis and Peter Brooks--working, in part, from the theories of Jacques Lacan--have demonstrated that the motivating factor in narrative is desire.[8] Like

de Lauretis, the critic, in attempting to determine whether or not a work comprises a feminist discourse, should analyze precisely whose desire motivates the narrative. Therefore, replacing a masculine hero with a feminine hero may not necessarily result in *her* story, for her narrative may still be motivated by his desire. In such a case, as de Lauretis explains, *her* story would become one which has been repeated again and again throughout literature--*his* story, which is essentially the story of Oedipus:

> Whose desire is it that speaks and whom does that desire address? The received interpretations of the Oedipus story, Freud's among others, leave no doubt. The desire is Oedipus's and though its object may be woman, (or Truth or knowledge or power), its term of reference and address is man: man as social being and mythical subject, founder of the social order, and source of mimetic violence.
>
> (112)

* * *

> The connection between narrative and the Oedipus, desire and narrative, not only appears to be incontestable but... urges a reconsideration of narrative structure or narrativity.
>
> (104-105)

Both Rhys and Carter accomplish a "reconsideration of narrative structure" with their narrative strategies. I will demonstrate that these two authors effectively counter the Oedipus by utilizing some or all of the following methods: avoiding the quest mode in order to avoid the linear rigidity of the Oedipus narrative, denying closure to a story so as to deny absolute fulfillment of Oedipal desire, substituting--either implicitly or explicitly--masculine desire with feminine desire, and, finally, creating feminine subjects who

"regress" to a pre-Oedipal desire which operates independently of man.

The concept of "regression" merits further comment, as I will be presenting it as a primary force linking the works of Rhys and Carter. De Lauretis describes feminine "regression" as a means of curtailing masculine desire by moving not towards but away from the Oedipal stage. She notes that the term "regression" derives its meaning from a Freudian teleology where a woman's healthy maturation process is viewed by her progression to the Oedipal phase (142). Thus when I use the term "regression," it will remain within quotation marks to emphasize that it is a Freudian understanding, not my own, of the meaning of a woman's rejection of the Oedipus. The term "regression" refers to a woman's return to her first love-object, her mother, and as Luce Irigaray among others has emphasized, this movement is one which women need to make.[9]

Relationships between mothers and daughters has been treated harshly in literature as well as in psychoanalysis, and Elizabeth Grosz, in her interpretation of Irigaray, explains why:

> if the child's pre-Oedipal relation with the mother is 'the dark continent' of psychoanalysis, then the mother-daughter relation must be 'the dark continent of the dark continent, the most obscure area of our social order.' Shedding some light on this dark cultural space would then pose a threat to the social order which so resolutely ignores the debt that children, men and culture in general owe to the maternal.
>
> (120)

The most subversive aspects of both Rhys' s and Carter's narratives are precisely those which "shed light" on the"'dark continent'" of mother-daughter relations. Both authors expose the brutal

interference of the dominant culture with the bond formed during the pre-Oedipal phase, an interference which results in the two women being posed as rivals--hence the abundance of evil stepmothers in literature. Rhys and Carter not only expose patriarchy's duplicitous motives for encouraging a rival scenario, but also offer in some manner a reconciliation between the mother and daughter. This reconciliation is the most positive--or, for the dominant culture, the most threatening--aspect of their work, for it strengthens and enhances the feminine subject position. This is because a healthy relationship with the mother provides the daughter with a positive reflection, a mode for identification which is vital, for as de Lauretis explains: "identification is itself a movement, a subject-process, a relation: the identification (of oneself) with something other (than oneself)" (141). And if this identification--even if it is a belated one--is with the mother, then the daughter will eventually learn to resist the ideological imperative that encourages her to despise her mother, or more to the point the *lack* her mother is supposed to represent.

Thus in the following analysis, I will show that the majority of Rhys's and Carter's feminine characters are eventually able to resist the compulsion towards Oedipus and "regress" to loving the mother, or what the mother actually represents for them, woman, a symbol which has been constructed by the dominant culture throughout literature and which Rhys and Carter work to deconstruct. I will also demonstrate how these authors in demythologizing the symbol of woman as mythical object, tendentiously create new and fluid symbols of woman. De Lauretis points out that "women continue to

become woman," and so if this is true, then we should at least determine an acceptable range of possibilities for the creation of these new symbols (186). Ricarda Schmidt has offered such a list of considerations:

> First, the new symbol must show woman as part of humanity, not raise her above it or place her below it. Second, it must ensure that woman does not have the status of an object but of a subject. Third, it must appreciate woman's difference sympathetically instead of making it a reason for estrangement. Fourth, the symbolic meaning of woman remains open."
>
> (71)

I have kept these delineations in mind, especially the condition of openness or fluidity, when considering the degree to which each of these authors successfully offers us healthy symbolizations of woman.

I will begin my discussion with an analysis of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for she chronologically precedes Carter, and I wish to end with a contemporary literary reflection of women and woman. Rhys's novel begins with Antoinette's narration and covers the period from her childhood to her marriage. From the initial sentence, Antoinette's and her mother, Anette's, alienated positions as Creole women in an environment hostile to them is amplified. The mother and the daughter are presented as being divided from one another, and I will demonstrate how Antoinette's search for reconciliation and identification with her mother becomes the vehicle for her consciousness of self. I will also focus on Antoinette's dreams as the

vehicle to her self-consciousness and as evidence of her increasing progress in obtaining the subject position.

I will then discuss the second, unnamed narrative, which we may safely assume to belong to Rochester. The contrast between Antoinette's and Rochester's narratives is striking, and the two narratives may be said--in a masculine lexicon--to be engaging in a battle between the semiotic and the symbolic for power in the text. I use the term "battle" in order to portray Rochester's defensive point of view, when he abruptly takes over the narrative from Antoinette and his eventual offensive point of view, when he succeeds in temporarily silencing her.

I will end my discussion with a comparison between Antoinette's initial narrative and her final one. Specifically, I will draw attention to the effects of the ideology of domination, enforced in the symbolic realm of Rochester's narrative, on Antoinette's power to speak. I will demonstrate how Antoinette struggles through madness in order to articulate the final words of her story, and I will further demonstrate how her successful attempt to regain power in the text marks her final rejection of the Oedipus as well as affirms her subject position--despite "the external facts of the fiction."

In the next chapter, I will discuss *The Bloody Chamber* and, in keeping with Carter's chronology, I will begin with an analysis of the title story. I think it is vital that Carter begins her work with a tale of a young woman who is saved at the final moment from the clutches of the Gothic villain by her mother--who charges in on a horse and wears a transfixing Medusa expression no less. The image is powerful and liberating and informs the rest of the tales, for it

dramatizes the possibilities for women who reject the Oedipus and seek reconciliation with the mother.

I will then discuss the two "Beauty and the Beast" stories, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride," as representative of Carter's dual purpose of parodying the traditional Gothic tale and offering a new one in its place. The plot of "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" differs little from the traditional tale, and thus it exposes the destructiveness of the woman-equals-commodity formula common in literature and society. "The Tiger's Bride" deals much more intensely with the grotesque and the elements of the animal in human sexuality. It is perhaps one of the most controversial tales, as such critics as Patricia Duncker argue that the protagonist's denouement is nothing more than "the willing victim of pornography" succumbing to the demands of her oppressive society (7). However, I will demonstrate that this protagonist is actually one of the most powerful in *The Bloody Chamber,* because her action is a clear affirmation of her subject position, as it demonstrates her rejection of the Oedipus, in part, by demonstrating her rejection of the hypocritical mores of her culture.

I will also offer an analysis of "The Snow Child" and "The Lady of the House of Love," for both these tales provide for significant discussion of the mother-daughter relationship. In "The Snow Child" we are given a traditional representation of the mother and daughter as rivals. The tale is short and brutal and poignantly demonstrates the effects of the dominant culture's incessant encouragement of mother-daughter rivalries. "The Lady of the House of Love" dramatizes the consequences of a mother's and daughter's identical

confinement, as a woman/vampire constantly garbed in her mother's wedding dress is compelled to follow in a patriarchal tradition she loathes.

Finally, I will discuss the "Little Red Riding Hood" stories, "The Company of Wolves" and "The Werewolf" which, like "The Tiger's Bride," explore the intricacies of tabooed sexuality. In both these narratives, as Ellen Cronan Rose demonstrates, the feminine protagonists discover the grandmother and the wolf to be one.[10] This engenders a unique and erotic reconciliation with the maternal. This reconciliation provides both feminine characters with a healthy reflection or identification and leads them to a consciousness of self and sexuality.

Chapter 1: Jean Rhys's and Antoinette Cosway's Narratives of Rebellion

> 'When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life,' [Rhys said to Elizabeth Vreeland].
>
> (Harrison 128)

Nancy Harrison and Ronnie Scharfman emphasize that the significance of Rhys's creation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies in what it reveals about women reading. Scharfman states, "if language is authority, then a feminist aesthetic can shed new light on it by dramatizing . . . the possible bonds between the text as mother, and the daughter-reader it produces" (106). Almost any restructuring of a canonical text implies some sort of dissatisfaction with the master or *mothe*r narrative on the part of an author. As Rhys read *Jane Eyre*, she was confronted with a symbol of woman which she recognized to be false--a lie created out of an imperialistic and xenophobic culture. In order to correct this misrepresentation, Rhys decided not to "tell" or "give" but to *write* Bertha a life, as Harrison notes (128). Significantly, Rhys felt it necessary that Bertha's narrative, like Jane Eyre's, be a written first-person account. For Rhys, the mother text failed to provide a legitimate context for the symbolic-object position that Bertha occupies, and so she provided Bertha/Antoinette with her own text in which the character may assert her subject position.

Thus *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes an ingenious postdated context to *Jane Eyre* that in the fictional chronology actually predates Bronte's work. Jerome Meckier argues, however, that such a narrative strategy distorts Bronte's novel, for it fails to comprehend Bertha's symbolic importance.

> Unfortunately, as Rhys increases reader sympathy for Bertha, the latter ceases to be the mysterious madwoman Bronte's novel required. Rounding out this demonic pyrotechnist with a complete history humanizes her at the expense of *her* emblematic effectiveness. . . . Meant to signify something else as well as to exist on its own, a symbol has a range of meaning beyond itself that automatically contracts if the symbolic object or person is made to assume too much literal import.
>
> (Meckier 3)

Meckier is correct to address the effects of *Wide Sargasso Sea* on *Jane Eyre*, for Rhys wrote the work specifically, in part, to affect our rereadings of this novel: " 'it might be possible to unhitch the whole thing from Charlotte Bronte's novel, but I don't want to do that,' " Rhys said (Friedman 417). Meckier is further correct in pointing out that the symbolic purpose of Bertha, that of serving as an aspect of Jane's self, is jeopardized by Wide *Sargasso Sea*. In her work, Rhys questions what the use of a Creole woman to symbolize madness in the persona of an English woman conveys about the relationship between the two cultures. She explores the racial politics involved in the use of such a symbol and forces us to reevaluate the problematic success of Jane Eyre's quest--a success which is based upon the misery and death of an*other*.

In response to the imperialistic aspects of Bronte's text, Rhys's work deals extensively with race and culture relations. Antoinette's narrative begins with an explicit delineation of her precarious cultural position: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said" (Rhys 17). This initial passage immediately reveals the alienating effects of various hierarchical divisions, including sexual divisions which result in women being posed as rivals by the dominant culture. The cultural divisions are multifaceted and are in part due to various groups' reactions to the Emancipation Act of 1838. Antoinette's family formerly owned slaves, and so they are scorned by the new rich English imperialists. The other former slave owners also do not include Antoinette and her mother, Annette, in their "ranks" because Annette is a Creole woman from Martinique, and this difference is enough to isolate them. Furthermore, they are alienated from the Black community, which calls them "white cockroaches," because of the deeply rooted antagonism between whites and blacks engendered by slavery. The divisions existing between the various groups in this novel are extreme and are emblematic of a society poisoned by hierarchical constructions designed to perpetuate exclusion. Sexism and racism, concomitants of one another, permeate *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as each character at some point vies to cast another character in the role of the *other*.

Rhys portrays the diseased society as an effect of an overwhelming and almost *a priori* universal condition. The cause of

this condition is clearly implied but is never explicitly discussed, which signifies that the depravity is ancient and its beginning cannot be pinpointed. Such a strategy is apropos to Rhys's purpose, for *Wide Sargasso Sea* is largely an exploration of the other, of the one who has never known any other state except for that of alienation. Rhys emphasizes this point symbolically through Antoinette's childhood garden at Coulibri:

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible--the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root.
> (19)

This rather Gothic emblem of chaos belies the Endenic premise of innocence. Rhys asserts that for us--for women, for people of color,--there was never an Eden from which we fell but rather we are innately "fallen" creatures and that the garden of innocence is a false myth, a lie. In Rhys's garden, the *real* garden, the "twisted root" of patriarchy already exists, and thus the notion that there ever could have been a state of innocence or "non-otherness" is rejected. Mona Fayad, in quoting Mary Daly, points out that women " 'begin life in patriarchy, from the very beginning, in an injured state' " (439). Consequently, Antoinette's narrative of her childhood is the genesis not of a quest to gain admittance into the mythical garden, the garden of the dominant culture, but to escape from it.

Rhys heightens the significance of the garden metaphor in her portrayal of Antoinette's upbringing. For the early part of her childhood, Antoinette is largely without parental supervision. She spends most of her time alone and outdoors until Christophine finds a black friend for her, Tia. The sphere of friendship shared by the two girls seems almost a paradise in the midst of their hostile environment. They swim naked in the river together and cook and eat primitive meals outdoors. This phase of near Endenic bliss, however, is brief, for the "twisted root" of the garden is latent but nevertheless present within their relationship. When Antoinette in anger calls Tia a "cheating nigger," she reveals her internalization of the racism around her (124). Antoinette uses her limited and indeed ultimately impotent power as a white individual to label and humiliate her supposed cultural inferior. She gives way to prejudice and uses the weapon of otherness which has alienated her to alienate another. Her inability to identify with Tia's "otherness" is reflective of her inability to identify in general. She possesses an extremely fragmented persona and is unable to recognize various aspects of her self, including those aspects represented by Tia--her double.

The measure of Antoinette's growing self-consciousness will be her ability to identify with Tia, which is, however, dependent upon a much more fundamental process of identification--the one between Antoinette and Annette. "The mother figure represents the first external mirror, eventually internalized, into which a girl-child looks to discover her identity" (Scharfman 89). As a young child, Antoinette constantly regards her mother in the manner that Annette regards herself in the mirror. Antoinette explains, "once I

made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe. But not any longer. Not any more" (22). Her discontinued process of identification is a result of Annette's rejection of her: "she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her" (20). As brutal as this rejection seems, it is important to note that within the context of Annette's material needs, Antoinette is indeed useless to her. Not surprisingly, therefore, Annette devotes her care and attention to her son Pierre, for within this cultural milieu only a male child has the potential to effect for her a reconciliation with the community from which she has been ostracized. Ironically, however, Pierre is an idiot child, inarticulate and unable to participate in much less master the power to which he is entitled by virtue of his sex.

Although Annette's misplaced devotion is understandable, for she is a reflection--as is literally symbolized by her dependence on a mirror--of her society, the consequences of her rejection prove devastating for Antoinette. Scharfman states,

> that Jean Rhys' novel . . . is the narrative of a subject's painful inability to constitute itself as an autonomous identity, to belong to a place in any secure way, to be inserted into a larger community, even to have a name, can be read as a direct function of the non-reciprocal pre-Oedipal bond.
>
> (99-100)

It is my belief, however, that Antoinette is eventually able to establish and recognize her autonomous identity by reestablishing the bond with her mother. Fayad explains,

> if [Antoinette's] mother is her mirror, then she must

> seek to define her mother in order to define herself. But her mother eludes definition because there is no criterion other than the patriarchal by which to define her. Antoinette is thus forced to spend her life searching for that mother who will provide her with her own reflection.
>
> (440)

Although Antoinette does seek mother substitutes, namely Christophine, her primary response will be to work towards defining or rather re-defining her mother. Antoinette's narrative attempts to discover and comprehend the mother image reflected in the patriarchal looking glass and to disassociate this image from the actual woman. She strives to discover the "truth" of her mother's existence and in so doing attempts to relate the "truth" of her own story. Scharfman points out that as Antoinette's search for her mother progresses, the line between her story and her mother's diminishes. She argues that eventually Antoinette over-identifies with her mother and is unable to distinguish her mother's fate from her own. Although this extensive identification is in part a tragic one, I believe that for Antoinette it is necessary and the only means by which she may overcome her passivity. Her "over-identification" not only allows her to reestablish the severed bond with her mother but also provides her with the power to act in the final scene.

Antoinette's childhood and adolescence is spent for the most part within a matriarchal environment. At Coulibri she is provided with a mother substitute, Christophine, and after Coulibri is destroyed she is surrounded by her aunt and the nuns at her convent school. Although she feels relatively safe within these environments, she realizes that it is a false sense of security, for her

feminine world may be violated at any time. This is because both Coulibri and the convent are structures created by the dominant culture--Coulibri is the architecture of racism while the convent is the architecture of sexism--and hence they are vulnerable to infiltration by their "protectors." One example of such an intrusion occurs, significantly, at the same time that Antoinette insults Tia. Mr. Mason, whose racism ignores and underestimates the power of the Black community's indignation, intrudes upon the feminine world of Coulibri and the result is destruction. Christophine immediately anticipates the damage that Mason will cause: " 'Trouble walk into the house this day. Trouble walk in.' . . . No more slavery! She had to laugh! 'These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing' " (26). The violation of the semiotic ethos by the symbolic "Letter of the Law" will literally result in an explosion which will engulf and destroy Antoinette's childhood.

Antoinette also realizes the "trouble" Mason represents, for he laughs at her, and laughter in this novel is always a forboding element. Significantly, it is on this day--the day she rejects Tia and the day of Mason's arrival--that Antoinette has her first dream:

> I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying.
>
> (26-27)

The use of the dream as prophecy is a typical Gothic device. The expressions of fear and helplessness are also typical of the Gothic, and it is important to note that Antoinette only begins to take on this

role of the helpless "persecuted heroine" when Mr. Mason arrives. Her dream reflects the terror she is as of yet unable to comprehend but which will become clearer to her with each successive dream. When Antoinette wakes from this nightmare her mother is standing over her, and although she refuses to comfort her, Antoinette, for the moment, feels safe because of her presence. In the morning, however, this sense of security leaves her, and she can no longer deny that because of Mason's intrusion "nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing" (27). Her prophecy of course proves accurate, for not long after this dream Annette marries Mr. Mason, and Antoinette Cosway becomes Antoinette Cosway Mason--the first in a series of name changes which fragment her fragile identity. The most poignant blow to her undeveloped sense of self, however, comes with the destruction of Coulibri brought on by Mason's presence. For with the loss of her childhood home and the subsequent madness of her mother, Antoinette's island self is shattered, as is signified by her double's--Tia's--violent rejection of her during the fire.

Mr. Mason's second violation of Antoinette's feminine world occurs when he pays her a surprise visit at the convent. This time it is not his laughter but his smile that signifies impending danger to Antoinette: "it may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me" (59). It is after this visit that Antoinette has her second dream:

> Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt

> of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. . . . He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. . . . We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. . . . There are steps leading upwards. . . . 'Here, in here,' a strange voice said.
>
> (59-60)

Within this dream, as within her first, Antoinette is being terrorized by a man, Rochester, who hates her. Her passivity, as Fayad notes, is emphasized by her attire--the trappings of ideal femininity (440). It is also reflected by her refusal to resist the hateful man's manipulation of her, for Antoinette's fatalism, or, more to the point, the constraints imposed by Bronte's text--"this must happen"--will not allow her, for the moment, to assert her own will. The consequences of such passivity is reflected in the dream by the increasingly smaller spaces to which she ascends. The actual location of these areas, which are never specifically named, are part of Rhys's nexus of intertextual allusions which are dependent upon our knowledge of *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette begins in the vast and familiar forest of her childhood, then emerges in an unfamiliar, enclosed garden--the garden at Thornfield Hall--and finally comes to a stiflingly small enclosure--the attic at Thornfield. Juliann Fleenor explains that generally the use of increasingly smaller spaces by women authors signifies "repression, segregation, and dichotomy" (15). "Spatial imagery," according to Fleenor, "suggests either the repressive society in which the heroine lives or the heroine herself, and sometimes, confusingly, both" (12). This nightmare symbolically

reflects Antoinette's feelings of being suffocated and choked with loss when Mr. Mason informs her that she will be leaving her "refuge," the convent (Rhys 56). It signifies her repression and her silence which occurs immediately after this dream--when Rochester appropriates the narrative.

Antoinette's narrative, with its multitude of exotic nature references and subconscious experiences, emphasizes the semiotic aspects of her world which directly conflict with the world Rochester's narrative represents. Her language may be described as a feminine one engendered by her feminine surroundings. Antoinette thinks and speaks in images which differs extensively from Rochester's much more rigid application of language. For example, Antoinette states,

> Italy is white pillars and green water. Spain is hot sun on stones, France is a lady with black hair wearing a white dress because Louise was born in France fifteen years ago, and my mother, whom I must forget and pray for as though she were dead, though she is living, liked to dress in white.
>
> (55)
>
> * * *
>
> England, rosy pink in the geography map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking.
>
> (111)

For Antoinette, words do not remain arbitrary symbols but must reflect images, which are often times independent of the denotative values of the words themselves, in order for them to signify meaning or truth. The dichotomy between the word England signifying something "rosy pink" and it signifying other "heavy looking" words

is the essential dichotomy between her language and Rochester's, between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Antoinette's expression of the semiotic is the most significant aspect of her feminine world, and thus the most poignant violation of the feminine sphere occurs when Rochester violates her text and imposes his own narrative. At this point, Rochester "deprives her of her 'I,' appropriating the signifier for his own narrative without any transition from her story to his, which is the first linguistic clue to the delirium which escalates throughout the rest of the novel" (Scharfman 102). As Scharfman notes, Rochester's narrative begins abruptly with an objectification of his surroundings--everyone and everything is viewed as other to his subject position. He immediately categorizes the island and the people on it as being "sly, spiteful, [and] malignant" (65). This is strikingly different than Antoinette's narrative which begins with a description of her own otherness and alienation. Even more telling is that we may only assume this "man's" narrative to be Rochester's, for he is never explicitly named within the text. Fayad explains that this is "because he is his own 'subject' and thus free from objectification by naming and also because by not being named he becomes omnipotent, the god-like creator of Bertha's narrative text" (443). This point is vital, for "names matter," as Antoinette states and as Rochester realizes when he uses his "god-like" authority to rename Antoinette, Bertha (Rhys 180). His renaming further fragments Antoinette's self and attempts to deny her the problematic but necessary identity with her mother. He effects this fragmentation by severing the linguistic bond between the two women, Antoinette and Annette. He also

renames Antoinette "Marionette" and "Marionetta," implying of course that she has become his silent puppet which he may manipulate through his linguistic authority (154).

Rochester's dependence on his power as the subject of the symbolic order derives from his refusal or inability to acclimate himself to the semiotic discourse of the island. Nancy Harrison points out that the frequent refrain running throughout Rochester's text, "Dear Father," signifies his desperate desire to assert patriarchal mastery over that language which he is unable to comprehend. Rhys symbolically represents Rochester's incomprehension through his surreal journey in the forest. Harrison notes that Rochester's journey is synchronous with Antoinette's. But whereas Antoinette eventually emerges at the home of Christophine--the maternal emblem of feminine discourse--and declares " 'this is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay,' " Rochester becomes lost and panicked (108). He states,

> I began to walk very quickly, then stopped because the light was different. A green light. I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile. . . . How can one discover truth I thought and that thought led me nowhere.
>
> (104)

It does, however, lead him somewhere; it leads him to enter Antoinette's childhood nightmare. During his walk, Rochester thinks he sees a young island girl in the forest who becomes terrified by his presence. This girl represents the Antoinette of Coulibri, the island part of her self, the part of which Rochester is the most jealous and fearful. For him, the island is a "beautiful place" but he, unlike

Antoinette, sees "nothing" in it. He pleads, "'I want what it *hides*--that is not nothing'" (87).

The reason he is able to discover "nothing" of the *secret* of the island is because of his unwillingness to surrender the symbolic order. For example, if we compare his language process with Christophine's, then we can see the consequences of his rigidity. Not surprisingly, Christophine's relationship to language is similar to Antoinette's, as she serves as Antoinette's teacher. When Antoinette asks Christophine if she believes in the existence of " 'a country called England,' " she responds, " 'I don't say I don't *believe*, I say I don't *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it' " (111-112). Christophine reveals an extreme doubt in "the word as fact" and emphasizes the preeminence of subjective imagery (Carter *Fireworks* 133). From the outset, Rochester rejects this, and indeed, as Fayad points out, his primary difficulty with Christophine concerns her language. He tells Antoinette, "I can't say I like her language," and "her language is horrible," ostensibly referring to Christophine's use of obscenities but much more accurately referring to her feminine language--the language to which he is never able to make a successful transition (Rhys 85). Thus, as Harrison explains, his narrative concludes with misunderstanding and literally with the word "nothing," because "he sees 'nothing,' (p. 142) having tried to accomplish his 'seeing' exclusively in words" (Harrison 174).

It is Rochester's confrontational attitude towards the island which prohibits him from understanding its language. At one point he tells Antoinette, " 'I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side' " (129). Rochester views his situation as a battle and constructs

a barrier between himself and the maternal world of Granbois. He declares,

> I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it.
>
> (172)

Because Rochester cannot know the secret of the island, he wishes to destroy the one who does, Antoinette:

> Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough. They can be recognized. White faces, dazed eyes, aimless gestures, high-pitched laughter. The way they walk and talk and scream or try to kill (themselves or you) if you laugh back at them. She's one of them. . . . I too can wait--for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away and like all memories a legend, or a lie.
>
> (172)

Rochester's narrative thus becomes an attempt to deny the existence of the secret or the truth concerning Antoinette and the island. His narrative is a "legend" based on a lie, and he forces Antoinette to assume the role of the victimized heroine within this legend. His task is facilitated by his privileged status within and his privileging of the symbolic order. Christophine, for example, is disposed of by his threat of submitting her to the "Letter of the Law," and Daniel's letter serves to legitimize his accusations against Antoinette. His letter claims to relate the "truth" concerning

Antoinette's mother and thus the "truth" about Antoinette. When she, however, attempts to provide Rochester with the actual story of her mother's madness and her own story, Rochester refuses to listen:

> 'Daniel tells lies about us and he is sure
> that you will believe him and not listen to the
> other side.'
> 'Is there another side?' I [Rochester] said.
> 'There is always the other side, always,' [Antoinette
> responded].
>
> (128)

Indeed Rhys's novel as a whole, with its inclusion of not only "Bertha's" side but of Rochester's as well, demonstrates that "there is always the other side." But Rochester is unable to make the transition to "the *other* side" and Antoinette comes to realize that "words are no use" (135).

As Rochester believes the "legend" of Antoinette's mother, and because this work is motivated by her story--the story of the maternal--Antoinette is dismissed as a liar, a whore and a madwoman. Ironically, at this point, Rochester encourages a connection between Antoinette and her mother, "infamous daughter of an infamous mother," the very connection he linguistically attempts to sever through renaming (Rhys 186). However, it is important to understand that the mother-daughter connection Rochester wishes to destroy is the one which exists between the real women Antoinette and Annette, and the one he wishes to construct is that between Annette the whore and Bertha "the madwoman in the attic." In other words he wishes to sever the bond which is based on truth and to force the bond based on lies.

Meckier believes that this is the most distortive aspect of Rhys's work, because "a Rochester who appears to welcome Antoinette's insanity and who demystifies his wife by calling her Bertha will never bring Jane happiness, although Rhys did not write her prelude to underscore this suspicion" (4). On the contrary, I believe that Rhys indeed wished to cast doubt on Jane Eyre's "happy ending," and that this is not the most distortive but the most subversive and thus liberating aspect of *Wide Sargasso Sea.* By casting doubt on the character of Rochester, Rhys casts doubt on Bronte's narrative structure as a whole. Bronte, who--as Fayad states--"collaborates with Rochester," constructs a narrative where the feminine hero's journey leads her to the destructive man who has desired her throughout the text. Rhys's novel reveals that because the successful fulfillment of the woman's journey is evidenced by her marriage to a dominating, blinded man, *Jane Eyre* is essentially a repetition of the Oedipal narrative encouraged by the dominant culture. For example, if we recall Teresa de Lauretis' explication of the Oedipal narrative structure,[1] then we see that in Bronte's novel, "the female's journey . . . is guided by a compass pointing . . . to the fulfillment of the promise made to 'to the little man,' of his social contract his biological and affective destiny--and to the fulfillment of his desire" (de Lauretes133). Rhys's portrayal of an almost sadistic Rochester thus becomes enlightening, for it helps us to better recognize the false narrative foundation on which Bronte structured her work.

The potential detriment to Jane Eyre which could result from her involvement with Rochester is manifested in Antoinette's

diminishment. Rochester's manipulation of Antoinette successfully transforms her, at least for a time, into the stick-figure woman whom he literally draws when devising his plan for imprisonment at Thornfield Hall (163). De Lauretis revels that often with the feminine hero, "the myth of which she is presumed to be the subject, generated by the same mechanism that generated the myth of Oedipus, in fact works to construct her as a "personified obstacle" (133). Rochester's narrative constructs Antoinette as an obstacle to be silenced, as within Bronte's work she is constructed as the obstacle to the fulfillment of Rochester's desire. He thus strives to obliterate Antoinette's existences as a subject, and he triumphantly declares, "I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the gray daylight" (170). Antoinette becomes, like her mother, a "doll [with] a doll's voice" and "silence itself," as he succeeds in reducing her into the inarticulate "ghost" who haunts Bronte's text (171; 168). Because of Rochester's narrative of domination and because of his constant imposition of the "legend" of the mother onto the daughter, Antoinette, like her mother, who had "ceased to become a subject and therefore was subjected to the inventions of others . . . grows increasingly silent. Unable to assert her existence as subject, she is turned into a ghost 'seen' by others but unable to see herself" (Fayad 442).

Antoinette does, however, eventually reject her position as the object within the Oedipal narrative by struggling through her madness to finally and triumphantly "see herself" and assert her subject position. In the final section of *her* story, Antoinette states,

"I saw her-- the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (188-189). The "gilt frame" surrounds a mirror in which Antoinette sees her reflection. Although this reflection is also that of her mother--the mad woman Antoinette has become--her positive affirmation, "I knew her," signifies that she is able to recognize and comprehend the dual image confronting her. By affirming that she *knows*, similar to Christophine's use of this word, Antoinette implies that she *sees* the truth of her identity as well as that of her mother's. She *knows* the truth of her mother's "infamy," that its origins may be found in a cultural malady not in a hereditary one (Scharfman 103-104). She is also able to *see* and explain the origin of her own "infamy" or skewed identity. "Names matter," declares Antoinette, "like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass" (180).

Her struggle to retrieve this lost identity involves addressing each violation that has fragmented her. By reasserting her power in the text--by voicing the final words of her story--she overcomes the most brutal violation. This is because Antoinette refuses to allow Rochester and his narrative to ultimately succeed in objectifying her. She rejects his attempt to render her story leagend and is thus enabled to overcome the violations she experienced as a child, as becomes clear through the final scene of her dream:

> I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it . . . . I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames . . . . I heard the parrot call as he did when he

> saw a stranger, *Qui est la? Qui est la?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! . . . I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there and she beckoned to me. . . . I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke.
>
> (189-190)

In recalling the nature imagery of Coulibri, Antoinette is recalling her island self as well as the most perplexing problems of identity she suffered as a child. Her mother's parrot, the one that died in flames at Coulibri, literally speaks her mother's language, the patois of Martinique, and poses the haunting question of feminine identity that the child Antoinette overhears her mother repeating while in a mad rage. This connection between the two "mad" women is vital, because it shows that Antoinette has repeated her mother's madness or perhaps "over-identified" with her mother but that through this identification, she has been able to move beyond her mother's reflection and realize her autonomous identity. In fact, Antoinette has already answered the parrot's question, "who is there"--when she affirmed, "I knew her," after seeing her reflection in the mirror. The proof of this affirmation is the presence of Tia within the dream. For whereas after the fire at Coulibri, the fragmented Antoinette runs towards Tia only to be rejected, now Tia calls to Antoinette, who is able to recognize this call and move towards her. Antoinette's ability to heal this fragmented aspect of her self is reflective of her new subject position, for, as de Lauretis' states, "identification is itself a movement, a subject-process" (141).

Thus the self that was shattered when Mason violated her Coulibri existence has now been made whole. Although the cost of this wholeness is tragically extreme, Antoinette's dream and

especially her burning of Thornfield within it should be read as a triumph. By destroying Thornfield, Antoinette symbolically destroys the source and emblem of the imperialism and sexism she encountered at Coulibri and the convent. Instead of being further victimized by these two oppressive and repressive ideologies, she demonstrates her ability to act against them--to act instead of being acted upon (Watson 115). This is a sharp contrast to her passive behavior in her two earlier dreams where she stated, "I cannot move" and "this must happen" (27; 60). As Harrison explains, through her burning of Thornfield, Antoinette is finally enabled to "write [her] name in fire red," as she dreamed of doing as a child (53).

And though the "facts of the fiction" may suggest that in so doing Antoinette has "lost," we should remember what the meanings of success and failure are for a character like Antoinette. Watson states about Edna Pontellier, the hero of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, that "the power that wins battles is out of reach for this hero. The power that judges and acts, the power of one who cannot be reduced to an object, is hers" (116). If we apply this criteria to Antoinette, then clearly we see her success, for she asserts her power to resist silence and repression and to bravely affirm her subject position. Although her affirmation takes place only within the dream, this is enough--as the dream is reflective of her mental progress--to assure us of the end to her passivity.

Through our knowledge of Bronte's work we may of course assume that Antoinette realizes her dream, but Rhys's refusal to confirm this assumption is vital, because it reveals the rebelliousness

with which *Wide Sargasso Sea* operates in relation to *Jane Eyre*. We should read Rhys's relationship with Bronte as being similar to Antoinette's relationship with Rochester, for as Antoinette resists being determined by Rochester's narrative, Rhys resist being determined by Bronte's text:

> What Rhys seeks above all is to avoid that single compartmentalizing vision in favor of one that opens up the realms of possibility. The finality of death is dispelled in the conclusion, to be replaced with a multiplicity that makes the death of the heroine . . . part of a cycle that cannot succumb to simplification. What Rhys achieves, then, is a break with the limitations imposed by the cardboard walls of a language that seeks to close woman and enclose her 'safely.'
>
> (Fayad 451)

In denying closure to Antoinette's story, Rhys also denies any "safe" conclusions regarding the success of Jane Eyre's journey. This is because Rhys's text not only questions but explodes the very notion of a quest narrative in which success is signified by the death of a miserable Creole woman, and the hero's marriage to the man who played a part in this *other* woman's misery. Rhys's novel makes clear that despite those aspects of *Jane Eyre* which may be claimed as feminist, the work is nevertheless based upon a problematic scheme--that is the Oedipal scheme where the woman's journey leads her to fulfill the man's desire. By exploding the constraints of Bronte's text, Rhys calls into question the desire which motivates Bronte's novel--is it Jane Eyre's or Rochester's? Thus the value of *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies not only in its transformation of an inarticulate symbolic object to a linguistically powerful subject but in

its de-legitimatization of the quest narrative which promotes such objectification.

Chapter 2: Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale of Oedipus

In her discussion of desire in narrative, Teresa de Lauretis begins with an analysis of the following declaration by Laura Mulvey: "'sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end'" (de Lauretis 103)[1]. For de Lauretis, this statement is significant of the Oedipal narrative in which masculine desire motivates and dominates the structure of the discourse. It is also significant of the content of much of this narrative in which the will of the masculine subject is imposed upon a feminine object in view of the subject-identifying audience. For my discussion of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, both of these aspects of the "sadistic narrative," structure and content, will be scrutinized, as Carter's work seems to irresistibly lend itself to Mulvey's framework.

Like de Lauretis, we should, however, note that Mulvey's statement refers to a specific genre, the thriller film. Nevertheless, the implications of this statement are poignantly relevant for a discussion of the nature of narrative in general and of Carter's narrative genre, the fairy tale, in particular. This is because the fairy tale, with its obsessive, simplistic representation of reality as a linear structure motivated by causal agents, resembles many aspects of the Thriller. The most relevant of these aspects is power, for is not the fairy tale, like the Thriller, essentially a narrative of "victory/defeat"-- the victory of the powerful and the defeat of the powerless? Patricia Duncker asserts that "fairy tales are, in fact,

about power and about the struggle for possession, by fair or magical means, of kingdoms, goods, children, money, land, and--naturally, specifically,--the possession of women" (4). What Duncker sees reflected in Carter's tales is "the sexual model which endorses the 'normal and natural sadism of the male, happily complemented by the normal and natural masochism of the female'" (Duncker 10). Or, in other words, what she sees, when--for example--she declares Carter's work as being "unoriginal," is the traditional masculine narrative, the Oedipal narrative, in which power is reserved for the mythical subject, man, who uses it to brutalize the mythical object, woman (Duncker 8). Indeed Carter's work, abundant with figurative and literal images of Sadeian characters, seems to beg the question of violent and abusive power, the question, "does Sadism demand a story," or as de Lauretis alternatively phrases it, "does a story demand sadism?" (134). According to Duncker, in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, sadism's demands are most certainly and most affirmatively answered by Carter's discourse at the expense of woman and women.

Before discussing whether or not Carter's tales do in fact fulfill the same Sadeian purpose as the original texts about power, it will first be helpful to understand why the fairy tale genre has so readily lent itself to Sadeian or Oedipal discourse. One factor is the simplistic structure of this type of narrative which has rendered it a recognizably ideal medium for the transmission of cultural mores. Traditionally, or at least since the time of Perrault--the late seventeenth century--fairy tales with their ostensibly unambiguous morals worked to reenforce existing societal roles, discouraging any

transgression of the boundaries inherent within these roles.[2] The fairy tale was most often, to use today's political jargon, a source of dis-information emerging from the dominant culture's propaganda nexus. They often served and still serve to seduce and/or to coerce the powerless into unquestioningly accepting their lot. I will demonstrate, however, that it is precisely in this function--despite Duncker's assertions to the contrary--that Carter's tales most clearly differ from and subvert traditional fairy tales. For *The Bloody Chamber* is nothing else if not one long and persistent questioning of the ideology underlying the degraded sexual and economic status of women.

Duncker argues,

> the characters [Carter] re-creates must, to some extent, continue to exist as abstractions. Identity continues to be defined by role, so that shifting the perspective from the impersonal voice to the inner confessional narrative, as she does in several of the tales merely explains, amplifies, and re-produces rather than alters the original, deeply, rigidly sexist psychology of the erotic.
>
> (6)

I agree, in part, with Duncker that some of the characters in *The Bloody Chamber* do in fact "continue to exist as abstractions." I will show that they do so, however, precisely because Carter exaggerates their roles and attributes to such an extent that they become satires of the traditional characters. The ironic aspects of Carter's feminine characters reveal how they have been falsely portrayed in previous fairy tales. I will also demonstrate that these characters are not "determined by their roles," as Duncker argues, but that their identities are actually formed in spite of them. For the majority of

the feminine personae in *The Bloody Chamber* are not passive, as their roles *should* dictate, but are active, wise and powerful. Furthermore, I will explain that one of the most significant indicators of this change in the traditional character types is the use of the inner confessional mode that Duncker so readily dismisses. The first-person narrative demonstrates the new found voice of characters who assert themselves in texts which formerly demanded their silence. It is as if some of Carter's most powerful female subjects are, in a sense, rewriting their own stories, denying the legitimacy of the traditional tales, and declaring, "now it is my turn, and this is how it should really happen." And those feminine subjects who do not tell their own stories, through their actions, at least, reject others stories of them, exploding--rather than amplifying as Duncker asserts--the sexist ideology at the core of the traditional discourse.

I

Carter begins her work with a witty and inspiring revision of the classic Bluebeard story. As Duncker points out the traditional Gothic elements of the tale, the remote castle, the brutal villain and the virgin heroine are all present within Carter's version in a slightly modernized form. Although all of the ingredients for the well known horror story are used by Carter, we immediately understand that this time the story will be different. This is, of course, because "The Bloody Chamber" has a first person narrator, the would-be victim who has survived to tell her version of the events. And even more significant is that this survivor is a frank and unabashed speaker who understands the social ramifications of her and her rebellious accomplices' actions: "we know we are the source of many

whisperings and much gossip but the three of us know the truth of it and mere chatter can never harm us" (Carter *Bloody Chamber* 40). It is precisely "the truth of it" that this narrator sets out to tell, even when the truth reveals some stark and unflattering realities about the narrator herself. For example, she admits that once she discovered her husband's previous wives had not been virgins, she planned to use the conflated value of virginity within her sexist culture to demand special treatment:

> then I realized, with a shock of surprise, how it must have been my innocence that captivated him--the silent music, he said, of my unknowingness. . . . To know that my naivety gave him some pleasure made me take heart. Courage! I shall act the fine lady to the manner born one day, if only by virtue of default. (19)

This rather humorous passage is brimming with honesty, for no matter how ridiculous it sounds, the "default scenario" is one which has been etched into our cultural milieu. After all, we still hear the old warning "he will date *those* girls [*sic*] but he won't respect them." Indeed this young narrator is quite perceptive, and although she participates in the various hypocrisies, she does so with a consciousness and ironically unhypocritical honesty that in the end will prove to be her salvation.

The importance of frankly exposing the narrator's complicity with the dominant culture is emphasized by Carter in order to reveal the reasons why so many women wittingly and unwittingly "connive at [their] own exploitation" (Watson 117.). The primary reason behind the narrator's actions, economic seduction, is a common one in societies which offer women very few economic opportunities. And

once again this narrator admits, unabashed, that she fostered no illusions about the nature of her marriage:

> Into marriage, into exile; I sensed it, I knew it--that, henceforth, I would always be lonely. Yet that was part of the already familiar weight of the fire opal that glimmered like a gypsy's magic ball, so that I could not take my eyes off it when I played the piano. This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth, his scent of Russian leather--all had conspired to to seduce me so utterly that I could not say I felt one single twinge of regret for the world of tartines and maman that now receded from me. . . .
> (12)

Not long after arriving at the castle, however, she begins to question her decision:

> Were there jewels enough in all his safes to recompense me for this predicament? . . . . And what, precisely, was the nature of my desirous dread for this mysterious being who, to show his mastery over me, had abandoned me on my wedding night?
> (22)

The nature of her capitulation consists in her desire for economic security--for which she participates in the commodification of her sexuality. In making this exchange the narrator enters into a very dangerous game, one in which the rules have been created by and function in the service of the Marquise, the game-master, and, therefore, are aimed at her annihilation.

In retrospect the narrator realizes that the gravest threat she faced at the castle was not her husband's wrath at her disobedience but the danger of loosing her self and becoming the embodiment of his desire: "I was not afraid of him; but of myself. I seemed reborn

in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes" (20). The Marquise is a "connoisseur," a "gourmand," a "purchaser," who "unwrap[es] his bargain" by stripping the narrator so that she becomes the"living image" of the pornographic etching in his collection (11; 15). His proprietary gaze carries the entire weight and force of centuries-old social and literary traditions, and thus his regard works to transform her essence into a fluid entity subject to his will. She explains,

> I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab. I'd never, seen, or else had never acknowledged, that regard of his before, the sheer carnal avarice of it. . . . And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me. . . . And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away.
> (11)

The narrator's corruption is not of the libertine type that the Marquise envisages, but rather it consists in her temporary internalization of the social myths which lurk behind his gaze. The ramifications of her lapse, however temporary, prove to be permanent. This is because, as she soon discovers, a woman cannot succeed in winning the patriarchally-created power game which has been specifically designed to oppress her:

> I had played a game in which every move was governed by a destiny as oppressive and omnipotent as himself, since that destiny was himself; and I had lost. Lost at that charade of innocence and vice in which he had engaged me. Lost, as the victim loses to the executioner.
> (34)

The narrator comes to realize that the terms of the sexual-economic bargain into which she entered finally have nothing to do with her or her desires. Her innocence, like her corruption, has been manufactured in order to ensure her confinement and subordination. She comes to see that the myths of the Virgin and the Whore--which the Marquis so readily interchanges--are no different, as they are part and parcel of the same myth. And this myth is, of course, known by one name, "woman"--that false creation and object of masculine desire which is subject to the transforming whims of the masculine gaze.

As the narrator becomes "woman," her domination becomes almost irresistible, and, therefore, her destruction should be assured. What saves her, however, from reenacting the destinies of the *others* who have gone before her is that upon entering the Marquise's Oedipal game, she does not sever her pre-Oedipal bond with her mother. Even Duncker admits that in "regressing," or in returning to the mother in order to defend against the dominating will of the father, Carter' s work "giv[es] the lie to Papa Freud's Oedipal realities" (12). For example, when the narrator anticipates her sexual initiation, she never completely gives her self over to her Oedipal destiny: "in the midst of my bridal triumph, I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife" (7). Her recognition of the subtle dangers of the Oedipal journey lead her to rely upon, instead of to abandon, the strength she has always known to be a part of the maternal. And indeed it is the maternal which inspires her to discover the truth of the Oedipus: "my mother's spirit drove me on,

into that dreadful place, in a cold ecstasy to know the very worst" (28). And once she "knows the worst," it is the maternal which encourages her, "when I thought of courage, I thought of my mother," to attempt to delay her husband's "punishment" and to effect an alteration of events which seemed inevitable.

The assertion of the mother in a discourse which has traditionally debased the maternal signifies a radical change in this classic fairy tale. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Marquise is shocked when confronted by the narrator's mother, for he has, in a figurative sense, enacted his crimes for centuries without complication (39). The narrator wittily explains his dismay:

> it must have been as if he had been watching his beloved Tristan for the twelfth, the thirteenth time and Tristan stirred, then leapt from his bier in the last act, announced in a jaunty aria interposed from Verdi that bygones were bygones, crying over spilt milk did nobody any good and, as for himself, he proposed to live happily ever after. The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last , saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns.
>
> (39)

Within the Marquise's game, rebellion by the pawns is impossible, and, therefore, he is necessarily defeated by the one who stands outside the game--the "indomitable mother" (7). His death is the product of his incomprehension of the existence of a powerful alternative to his Oedipal construction of reality. Thus, for the "transfixed" Marquise, the mother becomes the deadly Medusa, and we realize that the he has been defeated by the product of his own

imagination (39). The Medusa is after all a masculine creation, a myth which has been propagated by the dominant culture's fear and misunderstanding of women's power. The result is that just as Tristan leaps from his bier, the narrator leaps from her position as the victimized object and asserts herself as the subject of her own story. The narrator's tale, through the mother's strength and actions, becomes a powerful rebellion against the classical narrative, avenging the injustices perpetrated against all of the previous victims of all of the previous Bluebeards.

Freed from the deadly clutches of this Gothic villain by "*maternal telepathy*," the hero of the tale becomes free to pursue a relationship with the blind Jean-Yves (40). His symbolic castration signifies that the narrator has not repeated the near-fatal mistake she made when getting involved with the Marquise. This element in the plot, however, should not be interpreted as another version of the "reader, I married him" scenario in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* , as Duncker argues (Duncker 11). For this narrator, unlike Jane Eyre, does not split her inheritance--the product of years of corrupt aristocratic exploitation--between her family members, but instead gives it to charity. And, furthermore, she does not marry Jean-Yves but rather flies in the face of social custom and "set[s] up house" with him (41). This signifies her rejection of the cultural myths which almost brought about her death and her immunity from duplicitous social customs.

As previously noted, however, the most vital indicator of the narrator's healthy recovery is her truthful revelation of the events surrounding her marriage. The mark of this truth is, of course, the

bloody heart-shaped imprint on her forehead which no amount of "paint nor powder, no matter how thick or white, can mask" (41). Although this may be interpreted as a sign of self-hatred, I agree with Kari Lokke, who states, that the narrator's "acknowledgment of shame and guilt seems a healthy coming to terms with herself, an acceptance of responsibility rather than destructive self-deprecation" (12). In admitting her complicity, the narrator does not lessen the guilt of the Marquise, but rather warns women of the consequences of entering into the Oedipal game. Thus her "mark of shame" is not only healthy for her own understanding of self but for women in general, for it is vital that we understand the reasons why "women continue to become woman" (de Lauretis 186). De Lauretis states,

> women *must either* consent *or* be seduced into consenting to femininity. This is the sense in which sadism demands a story or story demands sadism, however one prefers to have it, and hence the continuing significance, for feminism, of a 'politics of the unconscious'; for women's consent may not be gotten easily but is finally gotten, and has been for a long time, as much by rape and economic coercion as by the more subtle and lasting effects of ideology, representation, and identification.
> (134)

Therefore, to admit with honesty that women contribute in their own exploitation is not a reenforcement or amplification of the sexist ideology of our culture; rather it is a means of understanding and eventually rejecting the system of seduction and coercion that has all too often suppressed our desires.

II

As in "The Bloody Chamber," Carter, in the "Beauty and the Beast" stories, illustrates the struggle of the feminine subject to liberate herself from the constraints imposed by the dominant culture. "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" together comprise a comprehensive critique of the oppressive psycho-social, political, and economic contingencies which govern our cultural and literary realities. Initially, Carter presents us with a close model of the classical tale, using subtle parody to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the original story's philosophy. Carter then shocks her readers by offering a radical alternative to this model, effecting for her feminine character a direct rebellion against the position she had been condemned to occupy within literary tradition.

Like most traditional fairy tales, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" is told by an omniscient narrator and the point of view is most clearly a masculine one. Even the title of the tale, as Sylvia Bryant points out, contains only a reference to the masculine experience (446). And although the narrator begins with a description of Beauty, we immediately realize that this story belongs to the Beast. Beauty, as her name implies, is merely a reflection of the male gaze, literally little more than a photograph to be handed from "beastly father to fatherly beast" (Rose 223). We, therefore, come to understand her only as she relates to him. Initially, she is "his Beauty, his girl-child, his pet," the "his" in this case signifying the father (41). By the end of the tale, she becomes Mrs. Lyon, his wife, and "her" Oedipal destiny is termed complete with the phrase "Mr and Mrs Lyon walk in the garden" (51). This "happily ever after" type of ending is, of course, meant to be ironic, as it is clearly not Beauty's but the Beast's

Oedipal destiny which has been fulfilled. His metamorphosis from beast to man signifies the completion of his Oedipal journey, and their marriage marks the fulfillment of "his biological and affective destiny. . . his desire" (de Lauretis 133).

Carter reveals Beauty's willingness to accept the Beast's destiny as her own as the product of one of culture's most prominent false myths, the myth of female martyrdom. The narrator of the tale assures us that despite *appearances*, Beauty actually chooses to sacrifice for the men in her life: "do not think she had no will of her own; only, she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree and, besides, she would gladly have gone to the ends of the earth for her father, whom she loved dearly" (45). Later in the story, Beauty is once again possessed, this time by a "thrust of conscience" and, therefore, sacrifices for the Beast as she sacrificed for her father (50). Readers are not to consider her actions as such, however, because she performs them "gladly," and, what is more, when she is not sacrificing, she feels guilty and begins to lose her beauty: "her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered exquisite, expensive cats" (49). Thus the story reveals that the value of a woman is measured by the extent to which she martyrs herself--a beautiful woman is one who denies her own desire and a non-beautiful woman is willful and destined to struggle with a troubled conscience.

Sylvia Bryant points out that "The Tiger's Bride," however, puts the lie to this myth by portraying a feminine subject affirmatively expressing, in the first sentence of her story, where the guilt belongs: "my father lost me to The Beast at cards" (Bryant 448;

Bloody Chamber 51). The narrator does not attempt to reduce her father's guilt by making a pretense of daughterly obligation; instead she exposes her father's "love" for what it is, a material and oppressive reality:

> My father said he loved me yet he staked his daughter on a hand of cards. . . . You must not think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at no more than a king's ransom. (55)

This narrator, who significantly remains unnamed, recognizes her position as a commodity within her society. And unlike Beauty, she does not "gladly" capitulate to this role but rather criticizes it and eventually rejects it. At one point the narrator states, "my mother did not blossom long; bartered for her dowry to such a feckless sprig of the Russian nobility that she soon died of his gaming, his whoring, his agonizing repentances" (52). Understanding that her mother's death is the product of a culture based on material privilege and hierarchy, she will choose to rid herself of this culture by peeling off her clothing, the remnants of her socialized identity. But not to leave patriarchy without compensation for her escape, she will send the robot maid "to perform the part of [her] father's daughter" (65). This maid who "carries a looking glass in one hand and a powder puff in the other" is about as real as most man-made women, about as real as the Beauty in the previous story (59).

Patricia Duncker, however, views the narrator's scheme, her "strip[ping] of artifice" as "the ritual disrobing of the willing victim of pornography" (7). She states that in stripping, the narrator "reveals herself as she is, the mirror image of his feline predatory sexuality"

(7). Yet, it is only before her metamorphosis that the narrator is the object of the repressive gaze of her culture: "it seemed my entire life, since I had left the North, had passed under the indifferent gaze of eyes like hers [the clockwork maid]" (66). What is even more significant is that, as Sylvia Bryant argues, just as often as the narrator is subject to The Beast's gaze, he is subject to hers (448). Both of these characters share an "otherness" they are forced to disguise in terms dictated to them by their culture. The Beast awkwardly wears a cloak and a mask in order to imitate human social customs. And in her clothes, the narrator is merely the "clockwork girl" living an "imitative life amongst men" (63). It is only when both of these characters shed their camouflage do they escape the repressive gaze of society, and the narrator becomes "at liberty for the first time in [her] life" (64).

Unlike in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," the focus in this tale is on the fulfillment of the female subject's desire, as Bryant states:

> The transformation in 'The Tiger's Bride' indeed centers on the girl, not The Beast, thus presenting a narrative challenge to the Oedipal myth that, as de Lauretis describes such re-patterning, 'represent[s] not just the power of female desire, but its duplicity and ambivalence.' This female subject is not so readily categorized as her fictional predecessors; she is, in fact, the antithesis of Mrs. Lyon.
>
> (448)

Whereas in the previous story, the Beast undergoes a metamorphosis, in this tale the narrator transforms her "nature." And just as Mr. Lyon's transition from beast to human signifies the fulfillment of Oedipal desire, this narrator's movement in the opposite direction again, as in "The Bloody Chamber," symbolizes a

rejection of the Oedipal myth. In shedding her socialized identity, the narrator offers the possibility of a "peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be [her] extinction" (67). That is, she presents an alternative where the assertion of self and sexuality violate the constraints imposed by the duplicitous psycho-social ethos of her culture and, thus, liberate both her and The Beast. In this narrator's much more complex and, therefore, honest construction of "happily ever after," there is no marriage, no suppression of desire and, thus, no "extinction" of the feminine subject.

III

Perhaps one of the most brutal examples of how the feminine subject can be rendered "extinct" occurs within the "The Snow Child." In this, Carter's version of "Snow White," the Count, the symbol of masculine privilege, constructs the "child of his desire" (92). As she temporarily takes the place of the Countess, the tale explores the classic mother-daughter rival scenario. Unlike the traditional story, however, the daughter and not the mother is destroyed in this tale, as Duncker points out:

> Carter removes the supposedly comforting denouement to the tale in which the mother is destroyed and the child successfully navigates the dangerous transition into sexual maturity. But she doesn't question the ideology implicit in the story, that the Mother and Daughter will--necessarily--become rivals for the Father's love and be prepared to countenance one another's destruction.
>
> (7)

She goes on to say that "the division between Mother and Daughter, and between Sisters, is one of the cornerstones of patriarchy" (7).

Duncker is, of course, correct in recognizing the damaging consequences of women being posed as rivals and the need to portray women as supportive of one another. Indeed Carter herself is aware of this need, as is clear from her creation of the powerful relationship between the mother and daughter in "The Bloody Chamber." What is important to remember, however, is that Carter's purpose is first and foremost not to create new myths but to expose the false myths which have oppressed women (Bryant 441). Such a narrative strategy is effective, for it makes explicit what is often times subtle and, therefore, unrecognizable.

De Lauretis states,

> the most exciting work in cinema and in feminism today is not anti-narrative or anti-Oedipal; quite the opposite. It is narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus.
>
> (157)

Carter's text exposes the rival scenario for what it is, "Oedipus with a vengeance"--a brutal creation of masculine culture. And it is important that we as readers distinguish between the discourse of her text and the Oedipal discourse she is undermining. As Barbara Bellow Watson urges, we should "not confound the showing of woman as sex object by an author with the showing that woman is viewed as sex object by one or more characters" (114). Carter's tale clearly reveals that it is the Count who imposes the rivalry, for just as the virginal Snow Child is his creation so too is the Countess, or the wicked step-mother, the creation of a false cultural and literary

tradition. Because Carter transforms the Prince Charming of "Snow White" into the sadistic and necrophilic Count, and because she does not allow the virginal and "good" daughter to overcome the "evil" mother, she rejects those aspects of the traditional tale which can seduce women into believing a false myth. Her tale is stripped of everything but its savagery, making unmistakable the violence inherent in the traditional tale.

IV

A tale which also exposes false myths, "The Lady of the House of Love," is an untraditional Gothic vampire story. Carter's feminine vampire is "both death and the maiden"; or, as Duncker describes her, she is "both the Sleeping Beauty and the Vampire Queen" (*Bloody Chamber* 93; Duncker 9). Indeed with her "unnatural beauty" and her "whore's mouth," this daughter of Nosferatu embodies the two extremes of mythical femininity, the Virgin and the Whore (94; 101). To further heighten her rigidified feminine role, Carter garbs this "vampire beauty" in her mother's wedding dress. This is, as Robert Rawdon Wilson states, "the most poignant motif of all: the symbol of women's voicelessness, subordination and narrowly limited expectations, their unelected social roles handed down, in a patriarchal society" (112). The wedding dress is significant of a tradition in which women are bound to marriage as their only destiny, as is clear from the young vampire's response to the cyclist: "see, how I'm ready for you. I've always been ready for you; I've been waiting for you in my wedding dress, why have you delayed for so long" (103). Although the feminine vampire is often seen as a Gothic symbol of power and sexual liberation, this

character's constant uniform shows that, like her mother, she too is confined by the constraints imposed upon women in her culture. In her wedding dress, the vampire is "a ghost in a machine," a "doll," and an "ingenious piece of clockwork . . . powered by some slow energy of which she has no control" (100; 102; 103). Significantly, Carter is repeating the image, in "The Tiger's Bride," of the clockwork maid who "lives an imitative life amongst men" (63). This vampire also lives an "imitative life," as she is dominated by her patriarchal ancestors "who come and peer out of the windows of her eyes" (103). Therefore, it is no surprise that "she does not possess herself" but is rather possessed by them (103). And, as Carter illustrates, the vehicle to her self assertion cannot be the transfer of ownership from her ancestors to the cyclist, Prince Charming. Although in the traditional tale, "a single kiss woke up the Sleeping Beauty," Carter's discourse rejects this myth (97). For this fairy tale's Prince Charming, a soldier on his way to war, brings not life but death. He cannot free the vampire from the false myths she embodies, as he is part of them. Carter's concentration on the role of the ancestors makes clear that the only cure for this somnambulist's condition is a dismantling of the tradition which has created her problem not a reaffirmation of it, which is what the cyclist represents.

V

Throughout *The Bloody Chamber* we notice Carter's poetic and sexually charged language. In no other tales, however, is her discourse more erotic than in the "Little Red Riding Hood" stories,

"The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves." Patricia Duncker argues,

> heterosexual feminists have not yet invented an alternate, anti-sexist language of the erotic. Carter envisages women's sensuality simply as a response to male arousal. She has no conception of women's sexuality as autonomous desire.
> (7)

I would suggest, however, that the metaphor which informs the entire collection, that of the Bloody Chamber, "the closed system," is precisely about exploring feminine heterosexuality as autonomous desire (114).[3] The journey of most of Carter's feminine subjects involves, specifically, a discovery about those aspects of feminine sexuality and the female body which have been rejected by male-centered discourse. The womb, the symbol of birth and death, is most often the target of masculine repulsion and hence the myths associated with "wicked mothers" and "mother devourers." In "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves," Carter relates sexual maturity with a renewed bond with the maternal, signifying her reassignment of the womb as a positive symbol.

The adolescent girl in "The Werewolf" begins her sexual journey at her mother's insistence and her destination is her grandmother's house--"the bloody chamber." Ellen Cronan Rose explains that after arriving at her destination, Little Red Riding Hood is initially repulsed by her discovery. The girl discovers, of course, that the wolf and the grandmother are one, meaning that the animal, the sexual, is an aspect of the feminine which must be acknowledged (Rose 225). Society, which traditionally suppresses feminine

sexuality, endorses Little Red Riding Hood's repulsion by labeling the grandmother a witch. This is a common fate for sexually powerful women, and thus the grandmother, the sexual beast, is killed by the girl with the assistance of her community.

As Rose further explains, although Little Red Riding Hood partially overcomes her initial apprehension and "lives in her grandmother's house," her complete acceptance of the grandmother takes place only within "The Company of Wolves" (*Bloody Chamber* 110). In this text, she not only occupies the grandmother's "bloody chamber" but "sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (118). Rose explains that "making love with the wolf, in a 'savage marriage ceremony,' she is also embracing her grandmother and thus acknowledging and affirming her adult female sexuality" (227). Thus Little Red Riding Hood's adolescent journey leads her not to a sexual encounter in masculine terms as the Oedipal narrative would dictate. Quite to the contrary, it leads her back to the maternal--from her mother's womb to her grandmother's--and in this process she comes to terms with her own feminine desire and sexuality.

In an interview with Ann Snitow, Carter states,

> 'I'm from that generation that believed if you could actually find some way of making a synthesis of Marx and Freud you'd be getting towards a sort of universal explanation. Although I don't believe in universal explanations as such, I really don't see what's wrong with that.'
>
> (Snitow 14)

Carter's dual focus on Marx and Freud leads her in *The Bloody Chamber* to attempt a comprehensive critique of women's position in society. True to her belief, however, this critique does not yield universal explanations but rather dismantles them. Her evocation of Freud, for example, results in a questioning if not a complete debasing of his theory of the Oedipus, as she offers possible alternatives to his model of feminine sexual development. And her materialist analysis of class and sex privilege lead not to sweeping remarks about women's economic disadvantages but to frank discussions about some women's experiences and some women's complicity in their own exploitation. Most importantly, Carter's tales, at all levels, debase the universal explanation of "woman," exposing her mythological goodness and badness as arbitrary labels and rejecting the rigidified constructions of women in history and literature.

Conclusion

Like Carter, I will refrain from attempting any "universal explanations" in this conclusion. I do not think it is wise--or even possible--to "sum up" women's experiences by making grandiose remarks about the feminine characters discussed in the previous two chapters. I would, however, like to briefly point out what has been most important for me in reading these two authors. Barbara Bellow Watson states,

> a sense of hopelessness is engendered by the parade of female characters seduced and abandoned in new worlds and old, victimized by psychotherapy, by marriage, by the whole spectrum of social forces. (114)

Indeed I'm sure many of us have been frustrated by the constant image of the woman as victim in fiction. And clearly we would like to read about more feminine characters who develop into heroes instead of martyrs. This is precisely why I feel Carter's and Rhys's texts are so essential, for their feminine characters are admittedly at times ambiguous but are not powerless. Their characters defy traditional literary and cultural mythologies and reject passivity within their stories. Although they are not always successful in terms of the "external facts of the fiction," their ability and willingness to act--their assertions of their subject positions--is what I feel alleviates that "sense of hopelessness" that has been all too often many of our reactions to fiction about women.

What strikes me as even more liberating about Carter's and Rhys's works is that they portray their feminine subjects with

honesty. They do not conflate, either positively or negatively, their subjects to mythological extremes. Rhys's Antoinette is not a martyr and her discourse is not glorified pathos. Similarly, Carter's feminine characters are by no means positioned as "feminist ideals"--if there is such a thing--but simply as subjects who, in rejecting Oedipal domination, are only beginning to comprehend their own ambiguous desires.

In citing Cixous's famous declaration, "'you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and She's laughing,'"[1] De Lauretis states,

> the problem is that to look at the Medusa straight on is not a simple matter, for women or for men; the whole question of representation is precisely there. A politics of the unconscious cannot ignore the real, historical, and material complicities even as it must dare theoretical utopias. (135)

Indeed the "whole question of representation is there," for to look at the Medusa "straight on" is to defy a representation of "woman" which has so tenaciously attached itself to our culture that we would often rather create new myths than to "really look" at this one. The importance of the Medusa is that in defying this representation of "woman," we work toward dismantling the myth of "woman" altogether. The difficulty becomes that in this process we must not only reject her legendary deadliness but her legendary beauty as well. I think, however, both Rhys and Carter overcome this common apprehension in their attempts to view the Medusa "straight on," as what they realize when they approach her is not that she is deadly

or that she is beautiful but that she is not there and never really was.

Notes To The Introduction

1. See Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa." Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, trans., *Signs* (1976): 875-893.

2. See Clare Hanson, "Each Other: Images of Otherness in the Short Fiction of Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys and Angela Carter." *Journal of the Short Story in English* (Spring 1988): 67-82.

3. I am indebted to Ellen Friedman's emphasis on the ambiguity inherent in what we "know." See "Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*. Ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), 117-128.

4. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Margaret Waller, trans., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Or for a helpful guide to Kristeva's work, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

5. See Mona Fayad, "Unquiet Ghosts: the Struggle For Representation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Modern Fiction Studies* (Autumn, 34, 1988): 437-452.

6. I am specifically referring to the distinctions made between the two forms of power in Marilyn French's *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (New York: Summit Books, 1985).

7. See Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle: a study of the elements of English Romanticism* (London: G Routledge & Sons, 1927), and Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: a history of the Gothic novel* (London: The Fortune Press, 1968).

8. See Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." *Yale French Studies* (vol. 55-56, 1977): 280-300.

9. See Luce Irigaray, "'Meres et filles vues par Luce Irigaray' *Liberation* (21 mai). For a helpful interpretation of this work, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

10. See Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales" in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (New Hampshire: UP of New England for Dartmouth Coll., 1983), 209-227.

Notes To Chapter 1

1. See my discussion of the Oedipal narrative as interpreted by de Lauretis in her work *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema.* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1984) in the "Introduction" to this paper.

Notes To Chapter 2

1. De Lauretis is citing Laura Mulvey's, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 14.

2. See Patricia Duncker, "Re-Imagining The Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers." *Literature And History* 10 (Spring 1984): 5.

3. The argument that follows evolved directly out of a discussion I had with Professor Elizabeth Fifer, who alerted me to the significance of the bloody chamber/womb motif.

Notes To The Conclusion

1. See Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa." Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, trans., *Signs* (1978): 875-893.

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Vita

Born under the sultry sun of Alexandria, Egypt on November 18, 1966, I made my way across the Atlantic at the age of five with my parents Ali and Sonia Sharaf Eventually, in 1985 to be specific, my studies led me to The Ohio State University where I decided to dedicate myself to literature, and in 1989 I graduated with a BA degree in English with a minor in Arabic. I entered Lehigh University with a scholarship from the Graduate School in the fall of this same year and began working towards my mastery of English. My particular area of interest being Twentieth-Century literature, I soon discovered a fascinating story, originally published in **Playboy** magazine, and presented a paper (**"When Winning by the Rules is Losing: Why Women Shouldn't Play the Game"**) about this story and this controversial publication in February, 1991 at **Sub/Versions: Disruptive Voices in Literature and Film**, a Graduate Student Conference at the University of Colorado at Boulder.