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WHOSE DESIRES ARE THEY?: THE POLITICS OF SUBVERSION IN WORKS BY E. M. FORSTER, NATHALIE SARRAUTE, AND JEAN RHYS

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By

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WHOSE DESIRES ARE THEY?: THE POLITICS OF SUBVERSION IN WORKS BY E. M. FORSTER, NATHALIE SARRAUTE, AND JEAN RHYS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Introduction

> It is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects that are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.
>
> —Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience"

This is a study about the ways in which we read representations of the feminine subject in works that have been deemed complicit in strengthening hierarchies of race and gender. The impetus for this inquiry occurred several years ago when I was teaching at an urban community college near Houston. After class one day, as I was packing away papers and my 2000-page anthology, one of my World Literature II students asked to speak to me. Umme, who had taken a course with me the semester before, explained that she wanted to thank me for an "empowering" class. She had been particularly affected, she said, by class discussion on Nawal al-Sa dawi's "Growing Up Female in Egypt," but also by our discussions on excerpts from Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropisms* and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*.

"Growing Up Female in Egypt" is the first chapter in al-Sa dawi's autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of a Female Physician,* and chronicles a young al-Sa dawi's resentment over favoritism shown toward her brother, unrelenting focus on her looks, her limited freedoms, and familial sexual abuse. The chapter reveals how al-Sa dawi grew to internalize her family's views, began to hate her femininity, and vowed to liberate herself. Umme, smiling, was pleased to share with me that she had been so inspired by the class, and by "Growing Up Female" in particular, that she had refused the arranged marriage brokered by her family—her family who had since barred her from their home.

Like most educators, I am grateful for those moments in the classroom of, as Maxine Greene puts it, "Ah, this is just how things are, and I didn't know it" (240), and, like Elaine Showalter, I believe that "we want students to learn a set of critical reading skills they can apply to the world of language, literature, and culture around them throughout their lifetime" (26). Yet my reaction to Umme's announcement that she had broken ties with her family was one of conflict, more unease and less exhilarated feminist solidarity. I reassured myself that these class discussions had been student-centered. After all, I had been trained by my professors to reject the "banking method" of teaching literature, to use the "multiple lenses approach," to require students to place literature in historical contexts, to welcome Spivak's idea of "interruptions: in the classroom."[1] In Showalter's *Teaching Literature*, in the section on teaching anxiety dreams, she discusses the challenges of teaching "dangerous" subjects and also surmises that "[p]erhaps teaching literature feels especially unsettling because, unlike physicists or economists, we are not confident of our authority. Moreover, we believe that what we say in the classroom reveals the deepest aspects of ourselves" (3). In the face of Umme's declaration and despite my attempts at self-assurance, I was left with the nagging question: Who am I to teach these texts?

This event led me to inquire about the relationship between the possibilities of a text's "subversive voice" and how we read/write about/teach such texts. Umme had cited as inspiring literature written by an Egyptian activist, an Antiguan novelist who has been criticized for blaming absentee nationalists as vehemently as imperialists, and a French woman who firmly rejects the label "feminist." In fact, the latter work, *Tropisms*, had

[1] See Freire 59 and Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic* 241.

similarly inspired me when I first discovered it in an undergraduate class. Just as Monique Wittig recalls being "on the street reading *Tropisms* by Nathalie Sarraute for the fist time, after that writing and reading were never the same" (45), I read as empowering Sarraute's satirical depictions of legions of women compelled to embark on shopping missions and telling themselves in mindless refrains that doing so was good for them. Only later would I learn that Sarraute—whose mock epics of women shoppers I saw as strikingly similar to Rosalind Coward's analyses of popular culture in *Female Desires: How They are Sought, Bought, and Packaged*—rejected "Women's Lib" and that feminists had rejected her in kind ("Making Bricks" 35).

What value can we retrieve from such texts, and what is at stake when we identify these works as "consciously" or "unconsciously feminist"?[2] What connections—between, for example, my experience of *Tropisms* and Umme's experience of the same text—can we validly draw across race, class, and national lines? Further, how are our desires to make such identifications complicated by authors like Jean Rhys or Nathalie Sarraute who both deny being "feminist" despite the seeming "unconscious feminism" of their novels? What difference does it make when we read/write about/teach works by E. M. Forster—whose well-known Adela Quested seems to be both "rebel against patriarchy" and imperialists' hysterical scapegoat responsible for one of the most famous homoerotic break-ups in modernist literature—when we learn that he thinks "most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested whether they sympathize with one another or not" (Furbank xx)? [3]

[2] See Gallez 8.

[3] For more on Sarraute as "rebel against patriarchy," see Barbour 60.

In the following study, I attempt to address these questions through an analysis of Forster's *A Passage to India*, Sarraute's *Tropismes*, and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I use as a starting point of my analysis the concept of the feminine subject as theorized by Rita Felski and Tamir Katz, and I, too, analyze the "extent to which writers of an earlier period imaginatively constructed subjects as feminine in historically specific ways" (Katz 14). Though I consider others works by Forster, Rhys, and Sarraute in my discussions, I focus on their most often-anthologized texts because of my interest in teaching them and in order to more closely investigate the complexity of their representations of the feminine subject and the critical trends of studies addressing these representations.[4] Also, each of these works are currently being re-examined by feminist scholars because of recent events. V. S. Naipaul's proclamation that *A Passage to India* is "rubbish"—and that Forster was "a homosexual [who had] his time in India" and, thus, "didn't know Indian people"—has led critics to re-evaluate Adela Quested's crucial role in separating Aziz and Fielding, East and West. Likewise, there has been a resurgence of interest in Nathalie Sarraute's work. Since her death in 1999, critics have begun to reflect upon Sarraute's influence on feminist thought in light of her well-known rejection of the feminist movement. A "new polarization" of criticism has also emerged in studies on Jean Rhys, whose Creole identity has caused many to question whether her prequel to *Jane Eyre* challenges or reifies the racist attitudes of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s main characters (Mardorossian 83). *A Passage to India, Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *Tropismes* call for further investigation not only because of their hotly debated representations of the

[4] See also Johnson-Roullier's 1-24. In *Reading on the Edge,* Johnson-Roullier defines a strategy for "border reading" and comparing texts while reading against critical trends.

feminine subject but also because, whether lauded for breaking with patriarchal and/or imperialist discourse or criticized for "silencing" "other" voices, these works continue to be read as unproblematized reflections of the authors' own experiences. As Rhys herself complains in a letter to her daughter, "For them, [the critics], "I" is "I" and not a literary device. Every word is autobiography" (*Letters* 187). In other words, the question for scholars as they continue to interrogate the textual politics of works by Forster, Sarraute, and Rhys has become: Who is he/she to write about these "other" subjects?

In the first chapter, I consider the response to Naipual's controversial statements about Forster's politics and question the validity of reading Adela Quested as mere scapegoat. Building on feminist studies of the New Woman, I emphasize the important role Adela Quested plays in both disrupting and maintaining colonial power in Forster's imaginary Chandrapore. Focusing on Forster's interrogation of "home" as contrasted to the Indian landscape, I argue that—while the author portrays women as taking an active role in maintaining power within an imperial economy—he also examines the ways in which the feminine subject is constructed in a colonial context and how those constructions are used by both men and women to justify imperial interest.

In Chapter 2, I complicate my analysis of representations of the feminine subject with a discussion of Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropismes*. I examine how Sarraute's rejection of traditional characterization coupled with her claim to be an "androgynous" writer have made reading *Tropismes* problematic for many feminist scholars. In the same way that Forster has been accused of marginalizing the characters Adela and Aziz and of not taking his critique of colonialism far enough, Sarraute's seminal *Tropismes* has been perceived as undermining feminist aims. Through close readings of passages in

Tropismes which specifically challenge received ideas of "woman," I argue that Sarraute effectively works to defamiliarize myths about what women "want" and that she also explores how living up to such myths is made desirable.

In Chapter 3, I move the discussion to the most challenging, as well as the most elucidating, of the three texts—*Wide Sargasso Sea*. I begin the chapter by questioning critics' conflation of Rhys with Antoinette and the resultant conclusion that Rhys's work is at best apolitical and at worst thoroughly racist. I argue that this conclusion is reductive and does not take into account Rhys's complex, if conflicted, understanding of her own identity. Like Forster and Sarraute, Rhys's understanding of constructions of the feminine subject can be considered ahead of its time. Also like Forster (with his border zone of the Anglo Indians' re-created England in an Indian landscape) and Sarraute (with her use of the tropism), Rhys depicts "contact zones"[5] (homes and homelands) where such constructions are contested.

I use *Wide Sargasso Sea* as the subject of the concluding chapter because of the way that Rhys, through her novel's interrogation of the feminine subject, provides the female characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* an imagined commonality which does not erase the shared, if contentious, histories of those subjects who are unequally oppressed. In aiming to show *how* someone like Rochester, "not a bad man" (114), can justify his actions toward Antoinette/Bertha and eventually lock her in an attic, Rhys uncovers the ways in which Antoinette and Rochester both want the same thing, to be "somewhere else, something else" (28). By showing how easily Antoinette can take up Rochester's

[5] See Pratt 27.

position, Rhys challenges her readers to examine our own desires to be "somewhere else, something else" at another's expense.

In different ways, the novels I discuss investigate concepts of "woman." By examining the critical reception histories of these works and then offering close readings of the authors' depictions of their female subjects, I aim to show how E. M. Forster, Nathalie Sarraute, and Jean Rhys resist facile equations of their works with their personal experiences and distance themselves from their protagonists in order to productively challenge stereotypical notions of what "woman" should be.

Romance, Rape, and Modernism in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

> Adela thought of the young men and women who had come out before her, P. & O. full after P. & O. full, and had been set down to the same food and the same ideas, and been snubbed in the same good-humored way until they kept to the accredited themes and began to snub others. "I should never be like that," she thought, for she was young herself; all the same she knew that she had come up against something both insidious and tough, and against which she needed allies.
>
> —E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

> How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What *difference* would such a procedure make? The stories resulting from such an investigation would not, I surmised, be completely alien or unrecognizable ones, given the complex entanglement and mutual imbrication of men's and women's histories. But they might well throw some significant new light on that seemingly exhausted issue, the aesthetics and the politics of modernity.
>
> —Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*

Reading Forster's Feminine Subject: What to Do with Adela Quested?

In 1924, only months after the publication of *A Passage to India*, a reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian* congratulates E. M. Forster on his "fairness of sympathy" that "constitutes a conscious virtue" (7). Comparing Forster to the novel's Adela Quested, the critic uses Forster's "own words [describing] Miss Quested" to describe the novelist; Forster is "'no longer examining life, but being examined by it.'" Like Adela, the article continues, Forster "has been examined by India, and this is his confession." Despite this connection, though, the reviewer goes on to reveal that he thinks little of Adela Quested. Acknowledging that the "action of the story is provided by outsiders; two travelling Englishwomen," he finds it difficult to decide if the well-known failure of Aziz and

Fielding to remain friends is the fault of India, a place that stirs up "feelings which rise from the deeps of racial personality" or if the blame falls on Adela who "loses her head and accuses Aziz of having insulted her—in effect, an hallucination":

> At the trial, before a native magistrate, Miss Quested withdraws her accusations and Aziz is acquitted; but in the following turmoil Fielding, against his will, is true to his blood in sheltering Miss Quested, and he and Aziz drift apart. "Why can't we be friends now?" he says at the end. "It's what I want. It's what you want." But India answers: "No, not yet…. No, not there." (C. M. 7)

It is Adela Quested who takes a passage to India in Forster's famous novel, but, as her surname implies, it is also Adela Quested who takes us, the readers, on our journey. From the time of her arrival, Adela's desire to see "the real India" is the device that drives the plot from mosque to cave to temple. She is the reason that Fielding and Aziz meet and also the one who comes between them by the end of the novel. It is Adela's imagined rape which culminates in the dramatic court scene, a scene in which Aziz is absolved of the crime much to the disappointment of Chandrapore's British sahibs.[1] And, certainly, during the last twenty years, critics have examined Adela's role more thoroughly than early newspaper reviewers who depicted the feminine subject as providing the novel's litmus test and who saw the novel as an endorsement of "the weight of blood" over the harmonious "blending of races" (7). Yet, the general consensus regarding her role in the novel remains—Adela has traditionally been read in terms of frigidity and as a "prig and a bore" who undermines the relationship of Fielding and Aziz, and, by extension, the relationship between East and West.[2] Like the 1924 reviewer,

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[1] See Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text,* 113-137. Sharpe offers an insightful response to feminists' readings and questions whether a rape actually occurs by comparing the published manuscript with an unpublished version in which Adela was raped but fights her attacker.

[2] The characterization of Adela is that of David Lean, known for his film version of *A Passage to India*. See also Dauner 61-64 and Perry 294-96.

many critics continue to note Adela's crucial role as "exemplary seeing subject" while at the same time discounting her as the novel's—and as Forster's—scapegoat.[3]

However, Forster's characterization of the feminine subject is being re-examined. Ironically, many scholars are revisiting Adela Quested because of a fervent reaction to V. S. Naipaul's controversial denouncement of *A Passage to India* in London's *Literary Review.* In his well-known interview, Naipaul claims that Forster's novel is "false," "a pretence" and "utter rubbish" with "only one real scene, and that's the foolish little tea party at the beginning." Naipaul goes on to explain what he sees as the "background to all the mystery and the lies":

> Forster, of course, had his own purposes in India. He is a homosexual and his time in India, exploiting poor people, which his friend Keynes also did. Keynes didn't exploit poor people, he exploited people in the university; he sodomised them, and they were too frightened to do anything about it. Forster belonged to that kind of nastiness really. ("Interview: Farrukh Dhondy" 33)

According to Naipaul, while Forster knew tea parties, he "didn't know Indian people." Rather, Forster only knew "the court and a few middle-class Indians and the garden boys whom he wished to seduce" (33). Naipaul's comments provoked critics such as Tunka Varadarajan, Rukun Advani, P. J. M. Scott, Rustom Barucha, and Quentin Bailey to come to Forster's defense even as they qualify their endorsements and acknowledge the ways in which Forster was, after all, "a man of his time" and that "*A Passage to India* is not free of serious flaw" (Scott 151). There is a common denominator in these articles: How do we read Forster's representation of gender and sexuality—in terms of the problematic portrayal of Adela as "spoiled, vapid, hysterical, and virginal" (Hitchens 225) and in terms of the homoeroticism between Fielding and Aziz? For Naipaul, who

[3] See, for example, Davidis, who offers a helpful explication of Forster's code of chivalry but reads Adela's role as ultimately a stand-in for the figure of imperial male explorer.

argues that "most people don't actually read it," the answer would be for everyone else to stop reading Forster altogether.

For scholars such as Advani, Varadarajan, and Barucha, giving up *A Passage to India* is not an option. Advani criticizes Naipaul's conflation of homosexuality with imperialism and points to homophobia as an explanation for the Nobel Prize winner's virulent ad hominem attack, especially ironic in light of Naipaul's positive valuation of Kipling's *Kim* during the same interview. "It ought to take a lot more than the prejudices of Naipual," contends Advani, "to blind us to what remains valuable within the outlook and ideas of E. M. Forster" ("Two Cheers"). In "India, Invective, and a Quarrel with a Classic" Varadarajan agrees and argues that—even though the novel is "flawed" in its representation of Indian subjects—*A Passage to India* remains a "profound exercise in social inquiry." Rustom Barucha further contends that "[w]hat is so astonishing about *A Passage to India* is that it resonates with colonial attitudes and tensions while remaining a novel 'set out of time'" (111). Indeed, Forster often undermines imperialist discourse with both Aziz's nationalism and with Adela's refusal of the gender constraints that would render her a Mrs. Turton, a representation of both the patriarchal domination of women and the colonial domination of the feminized racial other.

What is less controversial in Naipaul's statements about *A Passage to India* is his claim that the novel's "central murk" is the mystery of what happens to Adela Quested in the Marabar caves since, despite Adela's initial accusation that Aziz had raped her, she later recants and proclaims Aziz's innocence (Varadarajan "India, Invective"). Yet, long before the ill-fated expedition to the cave, Adela's position in Anglo-Indian Chandrapore was that of outsider. Her resistance to marrying an Anglo-Indian official and her

condemnation of Anglo-India's racist, colonialist attitudes set her apart. Forster's ambivalence toward marriage in the novel, argues Elaine Showalter in "Marriage Fiction," reveals how Anglo-Indian women were victims of the "enforced togetherness of marriage and cultural isolation" which 'stunted' their development" (Showalter 5-6). Indeed, throughout the novel Forster reveals that the "something both insidious and tough, and against which [Adela] needed allies" was *both* the racism permeating Anglo-Indian society and her seemingly inevitable role as wife. Showalter's analysis of Adela elucidates the cultural assumptions that allowed for what critic Quentin Bailey calls the "unspeakable wall between domestic issues and colonial experiences" and points not only to how those assumptions are depicted by Forster in the fictional Chandrapore but also how those same assumptions are often left unexamined in critical analyses of *A Passage to India* (22).

From the time *A Passage to India* was first published to the current debate since the 2001 Naipaul controversy, critical studies of the novel have revealed critics' uneasy desire to either endorse or denounce both novel and novelist. A considerable body of postcolonial criticism on *A Passage to India* deems questions of Forster's complicity as the "predictable flipside of mythologization" which reify false binaries of periphery/center, life/art, East/West. Yet, Forster cannot seem to escape the rhetoric of blame. In a current reference book on the Victorian novel, for example, *A Passage to India* is described as promoting a "confident ahistoricality" and, thus, as "critiqued by Marxists, feminists, post structuralists, New Historicists, queer theorists, and postcolonialists" (O'Gorman 29). Contradictorily, Lauren Goodlad points out, the novel is also seen as Forster's "rumination on gender and ethics" and "can be seen to anticipate

the postcolonial and feminist critiques of liberalism in our own day" (215). Though Goodlad's article on Forster's perspectives of feminine writing was published in 2005, even as early as 1971, June Levine pointed to the tension between Forster's perceived "ahistoricality" and his seeming proto-feminism, and she contended that scholars had been frustrated by the novel because "they have expected a tidy and consistent schematization and endorsement of the philosophical views held by one of the characters" (165). This desire to present Forster as subscribing and therefore endorsing his own "tidy and consistent" philosophical or spiritual views is made more problematic by Forster's use of irony and by his concomitant refusal to offer such a schematization. In fact, in letters and interviews, Forster resists being assigned Fielding's consistently sympathetic view. In one letter, Forster writes to Masood that although *Passage* had been intended as a "bridge of sympathy … my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested whether they sympathize with one another or not" (Furbank xx).[4] But for scholars such as Davidis and Showalter, "defending" Forster becomes in large part a matter of examining Forster's representation of Adela Quested and showing how this representation is not completely unsympathetic.

Adela's role is central, and such characters, as Rita Felski argues in her influential *The Gender of Modernity*, call for a "careful engagement with the voices of the past." In an argument similar to Jenny Sharpe's—that critics should read sexual and racial constructions of colonial women and native men "without reducing one to the other" (28)—Felski addresses the problem of reductive readings. For Felski, "rather than

[4] Forster dedicated *A Passage to India* to Masood. In "Heroes and Homosexuals: Education and Empire in E. M. Forster," Bailey argues that Forster's and Masood's lengthy relationship, including Forster's declarations of love in 1910 and 1911, provides the material for Forster's *Maurice*.

simply subsuming the history of gender relations within an over-arching meta-theory of modernity articulated from the vantage point of the present, feminist critics need to take seriously past women's and men's own understandings of their positioning within historical and social processes" (8). With Naipaul's public repudiation and with renewed interest by feminists and queer theorists, new questions regarding Forster's use of modernist aesthetics emerge, and "meta-theories proliferate" as many continue to associate masculinity with modernity and the feminine with a repressive Victorian past (Felski 2). Thus, Adela remains the hysterical Victorian woman who can access power only by assuming the masculine role of the traditional male explorer—representing the "old chivalry" of the heterosexual, imperial Victorian past—and who undermines the relationship between Aziz and Fielding—representing a "more modern" new chivalry of homoeroticism and anti-imperialism (Davidis 260-261).

Here, Rita Felski's notable critique of Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* is helpful. Felski cites Berman's choice of Faust as the hero of the modern age as just the type of critique that evokes such meta-theories. Goethe's Faust, Berman contends, represents the revolt against established authority and active desire to dominate nature—the contradictory social and individualistic modern impulses. To this Felski responds:

> And what, one might ask, of Gretchen, the young village girl who is seduced and abandoned by Faust in the course of his striving for new experiences and unlimited self-development? Berman notes that Faust is at first "enthralled by her childlike innocence, her small-town simplicity, her Christian humility" but gradually finds that her "ardor dissolves into hysteria, and it is more than he can handle." "Drawn impatiently towards new realms of experience and action," Berman explains, Faust "has come to feel her needs and fears as more and more of a drag." Although Berman is aware of some of the complexities of Gretchen's position, his sympathy clearly remains with Faust and his inevitable rejection of the closed,

> narrow world that Gretchen represents. Woman is aligned with the dead weight of tradition and conservatism that the active, newly autonomous, and self-defining subject must seek to transcend. (2)

Further, what happens when the girl is no longer left in the village? In light of analyses by scholars like Felski, Tamar Katz, and Gail Finney, who argue for the centrality of the feminine subject in modernist literature, how are we to read Adela, a "New Woman" who herself travels and experiences the world, a colonial world *both* romanticized and criticized by Forster? Like Gretchen, Adela is at times innocent, simplistic, and hysterical. She is at turns shocked and bemused by the snobbery which props up the civilized façade masking the racial injustices of Chandrapore. Her ardor to "see the real India" is only "theoretical" and lapses into hysteria (22, 47). And it is her hysteria, often read solely in terms of repressed sexuality, which begins to unravel the tenuous thread of friendship between Aziz and Fielding. For Berman, Gretchen serves as "sacrificial victim exemplifying the losses which underpin the ambiguous, but ultimately exhilarating and seductive logic of the modern"(2), and it would be easy to read Adela as merely the author's scapegoat who, like India's landscape itself, separates Aziz and Fielding, "East" and "West." But this reading leaves unexamined the active roles Adela and the other women in *A Passage to India* had in both disrupting and maintaining colonial power in Forster's India. Nor does such a reading address to what ends Forster portrays women's relationship to social changes as both diverse and complex.

The New Woman in Forster's Chandrapore

Forster's characterization of Adela Quested resonates with early depictions of the New Woman. *A Passage to India* was published twelve years after Forster's own expedition to India and at the height of anxiety regarding women's postwar emergence into political and professional circles. Also, during this period a sense of empire's end brought about both nostalgia for Britain's glory days and an increasing sense of uneasiness. *In Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, Antoinette Burton examines the intersection of these societal changes. She argues that scholars have largely ignored early feminists' employment of imperialistic tropes and these feminists' subsequent roles as "shapers" of imperialist rhetoric and ideology (5). Drawing on Burton's examination of "the Indian woman" in the Victorian press, Susan Hamilton focuses on the "slippage" between the English woman and an Oriental other. In her analysis of activist Francis Power Cobbe's periodical writing, Hamilton identifies "the ease with which these historically and culturally distinct figures were united under the generalized category of Other":

> This imperialist trope … serves two primary functions. First it produces an image of the unemancipated, enslaved woman as the primary sign of a degraded race. This sign in turn both pointed to the risks of denying emancipation to English women and urged emancipation for English women in the name of their very difference from this now-dismissed figure. Secondly, it represents Indian women as the object of humanitarian intervention by English feminists. This intervention grounded itself in sisterhood and was used to prove the necessary role of English women in the work of Empire, thus supporting the argument for Englishwomen's political rights. (443-44)

Pointing to Cobbe's use of imperialist rhetoric to negotiate a public identity for women activists, Hamilton offers Cobbe's views on "Celibacy and Marriage" published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1862:

> The Englishman of the twentieth century will abandon those claims of marital authority, whose residue he inherits from days when might made right, and from lands of Eastern sensuality, where woman is first slave of her own weakness, and then inevitably the slave of man. (444)

As such, the political implications of what Sharpe calls Anglo women's "double position"—as inferior because of sex while at the same time superior by race (28)—was already being used by early feminists to negotiate for political power. When Sharpe criticizes feminists readings of *A Passage to India* from the 1980s and 1990's for limiting their critiques to patriarchal gender relations and establishing the Anglo woman as "privileged signifier for Otherness" (29), she could also be describing a critique of Cobbe and like-minded women activists writing at the end of the nineteenth century. Cobbe's use of imperialist rhetoric to promote domestic freedom for British women played a prominent role in debates of the mainstream Victorian press on the Woman Question. In fact, as Hamilton points out, the trope of the "woman of the east" was so often used to articulate the need for female empowerment that scholars of the Victorian press like Antoinette Burton contend that the "colonial female Other was one of the conceptual foundations of Victorian feminist thinking" (qtd. in Hamilton 441).[5]

These notions were fully in circulation by the 1920s when Forster wrote *A Passage to India.* Fielding, in fact, relies on similar rhetoric when he attributes India's purdah system to the native's inability to self-govern:

> Away from us, Indians go to seed at once. Look at the King Emperor High School! Look at you forgetting your medicine and going back to charms. Look at your poems….what do they say? Free our women and India will be free. Try it my lad. Free your own lady in the first place, and see who'll wash Ahmed, Karim, and Jemila's faces. A nice situation! (360)

[5]See also Sullivan's *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1937-1913,* Brown's *Victorian News and Newspapers,* and Laurel Brake's *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century.*

With logic similar to that in Cobbe's "Wife Torture in England," the lack of female freedom in India is a symptom of India's position as that of a "degraded race." Interestingly, earlier in the novel, before growing more complacent about Britain's presence in India, Fielding had asked bemusedly how Aziz could envision acquiring independence when Indian women are themselves locked away (154). Throughout the novel, Forster repeatedly associates Adela's desire for domestic autonomy with Britain's difficulties managing India's nascent nationalism. Specifically, Forster links Adela's disruptive desire to avoid marrying Ronny, Chandrapore's most eligible Anglo-Indian official, with her equally disruptive desire to "know India." In a telling example after Adela's arrival, she protests Ronny's racist depiction of Aziz. Ronny views Aziz's willingness to speak to an Anglo woman as "impudent" and even criminal. For Ronny, Adela's "liberal" ideas are a "serious matter" and a possible threat to their engagement. He is forced to question the plausibility of their match if Adela "started out crooked over the native question" (31). Not only does the term "native question" evoke the Woman Question, but, because it is used in reaction to fear of native men approaching Anglo women, the term also registers an awareness of the anxiety produced with the merging of the "Woman Question" with the "native question."[6]

From the beginning, Adela's role is an active one. Fearing that she will develop the same "racial feeling" as the matriarchal Mrs. Turton and the Anglo-Indian women who follow the older woman's lead, Adela requests to meet the natives of Chandrapore (65). The result is the disastrous "Bridge Party." Mrs. Turton immediately finds the idea

[6] On Forster's awareness of feminist debates on the Woman Question, see *The Feminine Note in Literature.* This essay was first presented in October 1910 to the all-male Cambridge Apostles, a group including John Maynard Keynes, and Leonard Woolf. He revised the essay before delivering it two months later to the Bloomsbury Group, with an audience including Virginia Woolf (then Virginia Stephen) and Roger Fry. See also Hoffman and Ter Haar.

of "the Aryan Brother in a topi and spats" absurd and distasteful," but Mr. Turton, the viceregal "little God of Chandrapore," goes ahead with the party in order to "amuse" the visiting Miss Quested. In fact, the name "Bridge Party" ("not the game, but a party to bridge the gulf between East and West") was an expression of "his own invention and amused all who heard it" (26). The book's extreme racism is portrayed to be for the men a sort of bureaucratic necessity and paternal in nature:

> Meanwhile the Collector had been going on his rounds. He made pleasant remarks and a few jokes, which were applauded lustily, but he knew something to the discredit of nearly every one of his guests, and was consequently perfunctory. When they had not cheated, it was bhang, women, or worse, and even the desirables wanted to get something out of him. He believed that a "Bridge Party" did good rather than harm, or he would not have given one, but he was under no illusions, and at the proper moment he retired to the English side of the lawn. (45)

Reactions to the Burra Sahib are mixed, both gratefully admiring and resentful. Adela's potential fiancé, like Turton, feels a duty to "hold [the] wretched country by force." For Ronny, the failure of the Bridge Party is a "side-issue." On the British government's behalf, Ronny says to both Adela and his mother, "We're not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do" (52). The issue of racism, for the Anglo-Indian men of Chandrapore, is a trifle.

Adela's attempts to argue for more civil, fair-minded relations with both Hindu and Muslim set her up as a foil against the novel's other women, whose own racism is part of that "insidious and tough" "something" Adela feels threatens to overcome her. Ronny reassures himself that the newness of India will wear off and, with it, her discomfort over the treatment of the "Mohammedans and Hindus." Mr. Turton, too, sees Adela's attitude as that of a naive newcomer, a "natural mistake" (27). British men, it would seem, come out knowing that inequality is necessary to their imperialistic project.

Their female counterparts must experience the harsh nature of Chandrapore and its native inhabitants before their romantic ideals of equality are effectively dispelled. Forster provides the reader with the Muslim natives' similar assessment; whether or not "it is possible to be friends with an Englishman" comes down to the attitudes of their women:

> "I do not think so. They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he a Turton or a Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any Englishwoman six months. All are exactly alike. Do you not agree with me?"
>
> "I do not," replied Mahmoud Ali, entering into the bitter fun, and feeling both pain and amusement at each word that was uttered. "For my own part I find such profound differences among our rulers. Red-nose [Ronny] mumbles, Turton talks distinctly, Mrs. Turton takes bribes, Mrs. Red-nose does not and cannot, because so far there is no Mrs. Red Nose."
>
> "Bribes?"
>
> Did you know that when they were lent to Central India over a Canal Scheme, some Rajah or other gave her a sewing machine in solid gold so that the water should run through his state?"
>
> "And does it?"
>
> "No, that is where Mrs. Turton is so skillful. When we poor blacks take bribes, we perform what we are bribed to perform, and the law discovers us in consequence. The English take and do nothing. I admire them." (8)

A telling aspect of this passage is the inversion of the typical colonial perspective. Recent critics have looked to Forster's writing in which Muslim subjects satirize the British as examples of Forster's ability to "anticipate the postcolonial and feminist critiques of our own day" (Goodlad 215). The desire to rule native inhabitants and accumulate possessions—as seen in novels by Joseph Conrad, H. Rider Hagard, and George Orwell—is in this passage told from the viewpoint of the inhabitants rather than the colonizers; thus, Forster undermines the "all-seeing" perspective of the colonizer that Aziz, by the end of the novel, recognizes as a form of claiming ownership. At the same time, the discussion of the gold sewing machine, a symbol of women's corrupt desire for goods which enable their exported cult of domesticity, implies that Anglo-Indian women

actively negotiate to achieve real political effects within the imperial economy. Long before the publication of *A Passage to India*, early modern authors of the late eighteenth century had well-established the idea that imperialism was a way to answer women's new commodity fetishes of fine bone for corsets and exotic feathers for their dresses. From Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* to Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, early modern texts repeatedly linked women's demand for consumer goods to colonial practice. Yet, unlike the feminine subject of early modern novels, Anglo-Indian women are implicated not only because of their desire for possessions but because of their role in acquiring them. In fact, Ronny is perceived as incapable of taking bribes (he "cannot and does not") because he has yet to marry, "because so far there is no Mrs. Red Nose." However, Mahmoud Ali is aware that the other Anglo-Indian officials will work to marry Ronny off; it is part of the colonial process to find Ronny a "Mrs. Red Nose." Aziz's worldly friends consider English women to be the ultimate cause in the British corruption that fuels the imperial project.

The novel's British men also see women's role as active in British-native relations. Forster describes the men's more humanitarian inclinations as being hindered by women's desire to recreate England in an Indian space—with all the accompanying material comforts to be provided. The narrator explains that at the Bridge Party, the men had intended to "play it up better" but had been "prevented from doing so by their women folk, whom they had to attend, provide with tea, advise about dogs, etc." (47). Forster contrasts Mr. Turton's attitude toward Indians with the more visceral and mean-spirited disgust Mrs. Turton displays. His approach is described, like Ronny's, in more pragmatic, paternalistic terms. Both men are aware of the official roles they play for

England but also believe that they and their fellow bureaucrats are providing the natives with a better and more modern society. Ronny's role as court magistrar is seen by the men as necessary to maintain control over the ineffectual and morally undeveloped natives. Ronny "spoke sincerely," Forster writes, and "[e]very day he worked hard in the court trying to decide which of two untrue accounts was the less untrue, trying to dispense justice fearlessly, to protect the weak against the less weak, the incoherent against the plausible, surrounded by lies and flattery" (52). As Rita Felski writes, "The idea of the modern was deeply implicated from its beginning with a project of domination over those seen to lack this capacity for reflective reasoning. In the discourses of colonialism … the historical distinction between the modern present and the primitive past was mapped onto the spatial relations between Western and non-Western societies" (14). Turton is the father who, shaking his head in amused disapproval, mutters, "Well, well. All as expected" before getting on with the task of controlling his native "charges." The reader is left with the impression that the red-nosed Ronny, should he find a wife, is well on his way to becoming the next "little god of Chandrapore."

Yet, when East attempts to meet West across the gulf of the club's tennis lawn, it is Mrs. Turton and the other "high ladies" who prevent the party's success by snubbing their non-Western guests. Mrs. Turton remonstrates Adela and Mrs. Moore, reminding them that they are "superior to them, [the natives], anyway" (42). It is not in the interest of fairness and justice that Mrs. Turton interacts with the native women:

> Advancing, she shook hands with the group and said a few words of welcome in Urdu. She had learnt the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms and of the verbs only the imperative mood. As soon as her speech was over, she enquired of her companions, "Is that what you wanted?"

> "Please tell the ladies that I wish we could speak their language, but we have only just come to their country."
>
> "Perhaps we speak you're a little," one of the ladies said.
>
> "Why, fancy, she understands!" said Mrs. Turton.
>
> "Eastborne, Piccadilly, High Park Corner," said another of the ladies.
>
> "Oh yes, they're English speaking!"
>
> "But now we can talk: how delightful!" cried Adela, her face lighting up.
>
> "She knows Paris also," called one of the onlookers.
>
> "They pass Paris on the way, no doubt," said Mrs. Turton, as if she were describing the movements of migratory birds. Her manner had grown more distant since she had discovered that some of the group was Westernized, and might apply her own standards to her. (42-43)

The notion of Chandrapore natives applying "Westernized" standards to Anglo-Indian women unnerves Mrs. Turton. Unlike the naive newcomers Adela and Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Turton and her friends do not consider that India belongs to the Indian women. Perhaps not surprisingly, despite the importance Forster places on feminism as it relates to Adela's characterization and despite Fielding's references to purdah, there is no mention by Forster's characters or the narrator of the burgeoning women's movement among native women in India, the prominence of the All-India's Ladies' association, or the equally well-known reformer Sultan Jahan of Bhopal during her reign from 1901 to 1926.[7] Rather, the Anglo-Indian women in *A Passage to India* consider Chandrapore their own. By force of will they maintain "home" in India's landscape. Throughout the novel, Muslim and British men note that British women are at the core of the maintenance of power in Chandrapore. The Turton women attempt to maintain their power through their transplanted cult of domesticity—with tea and dogs and servants. Further, while the 1920's saw continued debates on the Woman Question, legislation in favor of women's rights, and advancements in women's sexual autonomy including

[7] On the prominence of Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum as politician and reformer during her reign (1901-1926), as well as the influence of the All-Indian Ladies' Association, see Siobhan Lambert-Hurley's "Fostering Sisterhood: Muslim Women and the All-Indian Ladies' Association."

contraception rights, the consequential decline in family size provided women with freedom difficult to yield as they were forced back out of the workplace between the wars. As a result, "marriage was portrayed as a career for women, housewifery was elevated to a craft, management of family and home became a professional activity demanding scientific skills to which women, by their nature, were deemed particularly suited" (Haste 89). The Turton women create an Anglo-Indian institution through their housewifery. It is this level of local detail, of the domestic associated with women's lives, that allows for Forster's harshest criticism of Britain's imperial practices in India. At least in the beginning of the novel, the men's intentions seem unfortunate and misguided; Forster seems to criticize little more than the "sentiment" of the colonizing men. Because of her association with gold sewing machines and bribes, the novel's feminine subject opens a space for a more subversive discourse.

Fielding, often read by critics as Forster's autobiographical double, has been interpreted by many as proving Forster's "agonized" and limited liberalism because of the character's inability to maintain a friendship with Aziz at the novel's end (Boehmer 101).[8] Fielding is first introduced to readers in terms of his relationship to the wives of Chandrapore. The men liked him despite his pro-native leanings:

> [I]t was their wives who decided that he was not a sahib really. They disliked him. He took no notice of them, and this, which would have passed without comment in *feminist* England, did him harm in a community where the male is supposed to be lively and helpful. Mr. Fielding never advised one about dogs or horses, or dined, or paid his midday calls, or decorated trees for one's children at Christmas.... He had discovered that it is possible to keep in with the Indians and Englishmen,

[8] Forster has been read as Fielding's double not only because of his trips to and writing about India but also because of his now well-documented relationship with Syed Ross Masood. Interestingly, in a 1958 interview Forster rebukes Wilfred Stone's identification of Forster with Fielding, refuses to elaborate on Masood, and thwarts Stone's repeated attempts to learn more about the then only-rumored novel, later revealed as *Maurice*, which openly depicts homosexual relationships.

> but that he who would also keep in with the Englishwomen must drop the Indians. The two wouldn't combine. [my italics] (65-66)

Away from "feminist England," not only are Adela's choices limited, but so are Fielding's. He must choose between the Englishwomen and the Indians. Forster's mention of "feminist England" is key. A term first widely circulated in the 1910s, feminism became associated both with the cause of women's rights and the activism in social movements with which women were involved. By the end of the decade, British feminism had expanded beyond a general association with established movements like socialism and the labor movement. Among activists' and popular accounts, "feminism" included not only demanding the right to vote and access to birth control but also "redesigning the home and the very structure of domesticity, experimenting with dress reform and new fashions, and pursuing nontraditional careers" (Elizabeth Francis xv). [9] Importantly, as Marie Jenney Howe, founder of Heterodoxy, explains in a 1914 definitional essay, feminism in the early 1900s had been linked to a modernist ethos of individual enlightenment:

> No one movement is feminism. No one organization is feminism. All woman movements and organizations taken together form a part of feminism. But feminism means more than these … Feminism is not limited to any one cause or reform. It strives for equal rights, equal laws, equal opportunity, equal wages, equal standards, and a whole new world of human equality. But feminism means more than a changed world. It means a changed psychology, the creation of a new consciousness in women. (qtd. in Elizabeth Francis xvii)

Women and men, artists and activists alike, extensively addressed feminism and, as Francis notes, the "utopian possibilities and the cultural anxieties it produced" (xv).

For Adela, India offers utopian possibilities. In the tradition of the New Woman, Adela seeks "something" "sublime" in India (145), something that the recreated "home-

[9] Francis bases this discussion of nascent feminism on the scholarship of Nancy Cott and Mari Jo Buhle.

front" of Anglo-India does not offer. But her desire to "see" India is dangerous and scandalous by its very nature. Her freedom to travel as an unmarried woman in Anglo-Indian circles is not questioned, and even her ambivalence toward marriage is accepted. However, those rights do not extend beyond the narrow confines of the club. When, for example, Ronny finds Adela alone with Aziz and Godbole, Ronny becomes angry that Fielding allowed an "English girl left smoking with two Indians" (83). Ronny's implication of what could happen to Adela foreshadows the ill-fated cave expedition. As he had upon learning that Aziz had been alone with his mother Mrs. Moore, Ronny becomes infuriated. In reaction to his own fear and contempt of the prospect of racial "contamination," Ronny often employs a stereotype of gender confusion as a normative strategy, ridiculing Aziz because of his "unmanly" dress and accusing him of "the latest dodge," a "show" of "manly" independence (33). To Fielding's assertion that Miss Quested has a right to smoke with whom she wishes, Ronny rebuts that such equalities are only "all right in England" (83).

Aziz's perceived lack of reflective thought, part of the justification of domination in imperial rhetoric, simultaneously justifies restricting Adela's movements; the "New Woman," who could travel with only Mrs. Moore to India in order to decide whether or not to marry, must have a British escort when Aziz takes the two women to the Marabar Caves. The lack of a British moral guide—Fielding misses the train while helplessly the others must continue on their journey—precedes the sublime experiences leading to Mrs. Moore's existential crisis and to Adela's imagined sexual attack. Both women, without the stabilizing presence of Fielding and away from the tenuous façade of "home," come face-to-face with the echoing "evil" that emanates from the core of India (317). In

Forster's novel, feminism is represented—like so many other social reforms—as having no place in India.

England, it would seem, is a place where civil freedoms are "natural." The story of the modern is one of equality and fraternity but only within certain borders. Even so, Forster does not simply contrast modern Britain's Anglo-Indian re-creation—with its cars, clubs, modern plays, machines, military and judicial might—against a primitive India of elephants, thousand-year-old poetry, squalid dwellings, mob justice, and prehistoric caves. He does so in a way that women play a defining role. In their discussion of women's part in the formation of British-Indian friendships, Aziz's friend Hamidullah argues that such friendships are possible only in England:

> Aziz joined in. "Why talk about the English? Brrrr…! Why be either friends or not friends? Let us shut them out and be jolly. Queen Victoria and Mrs. Bannister were the only exceptions, and they're dead."
>
> "No, no, I do not admit that, I have met others."
>
> "So have I," said Mahmoud Ali, unexpectedly veering. "All ladies are far from alike." Their mood was changed, and they recalled little kindnesses and courtesies. "She said 'Thank you so much' in the most natural way." "She offered me a lozenge when the dust irritated my throat." Hamidullah could remember more important examples of angelic ministration, but the other, who only knew Anglo-India, had to ransack his memory for scraps, and it was not surprising that he should return to "But of course all this is exceptional. The exception does not prove the rule. The average woman is like Mrs. Turton, and, Aziz, you know what she is." (9)

Modernism looks "surprisingly different," writes Christopher Schedler in *Border Modernism*, "when one leaves the metropolis and stands not in the province (which denotes for the ideology of modernism the narrowness of a bourgeois culture and outmoded traditions), but on the border—that marginal space (the frontier, the colonial periphery, the borderlands) beyond the metropolitan center, where distinct cultural groups come into contact and conflict" (xi). Where the borders are changing, as in the case of

Forster's sublime Indian landscape and the mystical Chandrapore, the European city had to be recreated. The Anglo-Indian women of the novel define that space. They recreate "home" in India's landscape. And though their attempts are at turns described as vindictive, strained, and absurd—their tea, Christmas decorations, and annual stage productions all effectively separate the club-going Anglo-Indians from the "real" Indians whom the outsider Adela longs to encounter. Forster creates a sexual economy in which power resides with women who are married and those, as Maria M. Davidis puts it, are "on the market" (261). Within this sexual economy, the feminine subject in *A Passage to India* limits and defines the relationships among the colonial sahib and the Indian native.

Private Spaces and Public Places in Forster's India

As the reader discovers, Adela—because of her accusation of rape and the resultant threats of riots and pre-emptive strike by the British—becomes far more dangerous than the novels' Anglo-Indian Turton women. Christopher Schedler's discussion of "border modernism" (like similar concepts of "contact zones," "border/borderlands," and "shadow lines") is helpful when analyzing this active role of the feminine subject in Forster's novel.[10] Facing the same questions of subjectivity and the same search for a new aesthetics to explore such questions, the modernist attempting to write a space, like Chandrapore, outside the metropolis had to engage with cultures on the border. In border modernism, explains Schedler, "the external world is seen as constitutive of the self, and identity is explored through association with those defined as

[10] See Pratt 34, Anzaldua 3, and Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*.

culturally different" (xiii). This influence of Europe's overseas dominions on modernist writers is the subject of Edward Said's "A Note on Modernism." In a move similar to feminist critics who posit the importance of the feminine subject in modernist writing, Said writes that two factors, the "contending" native and the fact of other empires shaped "formal dislocations and displacements" in modernist culture. As an example, he cites Forster's *A Passage to India* and points out the "precision and discomfort" with which Forster explores the relationships between India's nationalism, as represented by Godbole and Aziz, together with the conflicts between the British and Mogul Empires (188). Said links this discomfort, characteristic of modernist writing, to the fact that the European could no longer take for granted a national destiny of empire (189). It is worth noting that by the time Forster published his novel in 1924, colonials world-over, especially educated elites, were staging an early nationalist period—and they were writing works of fiction, poetry, journalism, and social and anthropological histories to further their causes. Even if the results were far less pronounced than in later nationalistic periods, these nationalists were increasingly a presence in the metropolis (Boehmer 100). Therefore, as Said explains, the European writer had to re-imagine his own position:

> When you can no longer assume that Britannia will rule the waves forever, you have to reconceive reality as something that can be held together by you, the artist, in history rather than in geography. Spatiality becomes, ironically, the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination, as more and more regions—from India to Africa to the Caribbean—challenge the classical empires and their cultures. (189)

Feminist scholars point to a similar discomfort that the European male could no longer take for granted women's political isolation within the home. Focusing on exploring the feminine subject as cultural "other" in modernist literature, these critics note the influence of the women's rights movements and the emergence of the New Woman in

particular. [11] They argue that modernist authors were influenced by the circulation of "key symbols" of the modern in the nineteenth century, symbols of "the public sphere, the man of the crowd, the stranger, the flaneur … that were indeed explicitly gendered " (Felski 16). After all, as Felski contends, "There could be, for example, no direct equivalent of the flâneur, given that any woman who loitered in the streets of the nineteenth-century metropolis was likely to be taken as a prostitute":

> Thus, a recurring identification of the modern with the public was largely responsible for the belief that women were situated outside processes of history and social change … located within the household and an intimate web of familial relations, more closely linked to nature through her reproductive capacity, woman embodied a sphere of atemporal authenticity seemingly untouched by the alienation and fragmentation of modern life. (16)

Yet, the nineteenth century also saw a blurring of the divisions between public/private, masculine/feminine. Felski points to three major developments as undercutting the ideology of separate spheres: the movement of women into the industrialized marketplace and a concomitant anxiety registered by many writings of the time as the fear of a sexualized workplace, the movement of mass-produced goods entering the "interiority" of the home and the related movement of women into the public world of department stores, and, finally, the visibility of feminist and activists who sought political change. Because of their status as theretofore outside the processes of political and social corruption, women "simultaneously appealed to a distinctively feminine moral authority as a justification for their occupation of the public sphere." Images of femininity were to play a progressively more important role in "prevailing anxieties, fears, and hopeful imaginings of the 'modern age'" (19).

[11] See Ardis, Hill, Felski, Katz, and Finney.

For Forster, one modern impulse is to present the "historical distinction between the modern present and the primitive past" as mapped onto the spatial relations between Western and non-Western societies, while another is to interrogate the placement of the feminine subject into a separate domestic space. Said and Felski both correctly argue for a special relationship between modernism and modernism's others, the colonial subject and the feminine subject respectively.[12] Indeed, *A Passage to India* is particularly interesting because of the way it links women's rights movements and emerging movements for colonial reform. The novel's questionable Miss Derek provides an interesting example of how Forster yokes these two political issues. Miss Derek is the main character in the club's production of *Cousin Kate*. After her performance, an "unkind notice had appeared in the local paper, 'the sort of thing that no white man could have written.'" Miss Derek, the critic had written, "'though she charmingly looked her part, lacked the necessary experience, and occasionally forgot her words'" (40). Forster's narrator tells us that newcomers Mrs. Moore and Adela find the play "conventional" and "sentimental" (41). They are surprised when Ronny, who had "scorned" the play when he had seen it in England, now praises it "in order to hurt nobody's feeling." The bad review insults the high ladies of the club and Ronny alike. The play, chosen by the Turton women, is part of their exported "England." To criticize the play is to criticize the British. The club-goers thus imagine that a "black" must have written the notice.

Yet, the Anglo-Indians' sense of kinship with Miss Derek is limited. While not comfortable with a native disparaging the actress, they recognize that "Miss Derek did not belong in Chandrapore" (42). She is a drifter who joins plays at the last minute when out of money, and she drives a car she proudly reports she has stolen from the Maharaja.

[12] For more on these "other" modernisms, see Huyssen, 44.

Importantly, none of the Anglo-Indians comment on Miss Derek's practice of travelling without a male escort—even as she travels among, works for, and even lives with the native rulers. On the other hand, though Adela is not liked by the Turton women, they are genuinely horrified to find that she and Mrs. Moore traveled alone with Aziz on the cave expedition. Adela's freedom to travel alone is not acceptable in India, only in England. Miss Dereks's travels and "adventures" go without comment. Similar to the prostitute-actress of the nineteenth century, "she is 'a figure of public pleasure' whose deployment of cosmetics and costume bore witness to the artificial and commmodified forms of contemporary female sexuality" (Felski 19). Miss Derek functions outside the conventions of "home."

As scholars of the New Woman movement of the 1890s point out, the New Woman rejects the domestic isolation of the Victorian Angel in the House. However, when she leaves home, she is still perceived as somewhat angelic. Building on Felski's argument that women were not in simple opposition to the rationalizing logic of the modern but constructed through it (20), Katz writes that "[w]e must register too that such immersion hardly cancels out the powerful notion of woman's interiority. Indeed modern woman can promise to reform her society precisely because she remains unspoiled by the corruption she sees around her" (11). For Katz, Felski, and Finney, the New Woman becomes a "precursor and model for modernism's claim to absorb and stand apart from a commodified world":

> She thus exemplifies the way a subject's immersion in the world's messy details might be reconceived as a form of cultural virtue; and she transfigures and extends the unwordliness that was so central to the earlier domestic woman.… And as center for literary experiment, this figure's complex relation to domestic interiority begins to suggest the way that

> modernism itself might draw upon a domesticity—and a Victorian cultural tradition—it seems to disdain. (Katz 11-2)

Forster's characterization of Adela draws upon these circulating notions of the traveling domestic angel.

Adela's position as outsider and foil to the Turton women would seem to allow for a critique of not just the "sentiment" but the system of imperial rule. By contrast, Fielding focuses on the truth of "mood" and ignores the system to befriend whomever he wants. Still, he finds "something theoretical" in Adela's concern and desire to see the "real" India (47)—a sentiment that rings true in light of Adela's hysterical charge of rape. Throughout the novel, her critique of the corrupt colonial system in India is mitigated by her naiveté. In one telling passage, Aziz proudly tries to impress Adela with a fictitious account of India's technological accomplishments. Forster explains that Miss Quested "accepted everything Aziz said as verbally true." "In her ignorance," Forster writes, "she regarded him as 'India' and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India" (76).

Adela and Mrs. Moore feel a constant push and pull between the dulling falsity of the Anglo-Indian Chandrapore, representing the social obligations of "home," and a vision of the "real" India's landscape, signifying home's "other" that both women are desperate to explore. They realize they will never find India among their own:

> Mrs. Moore, whom the club had stupefied, woke up outside. She watched the moon, whose radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England the moon had seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all the stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the old woman and out, like water leaving a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind. She did not dislike *Cousin Kate* or the National Anthem, but their note had died into a new one, just as cocktails and cigars had died into invisible flowers. (29)

Signs of the club, and of British nationalism, *Cousin Kate* and the national anthem do not offer the mystical promise of India. Later in the novel's Bridge Party chapter, Forster again highlights this tension between India's sublime landscape and the Anglo-Indians imaginary England:

> Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites passed the mass of a vulture, and with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not colored deeply but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again.…
>
> They spoke of *Cousin Kate.*
>
> They had tried to reproduce their own attitude to life upon the stage and to dress up as the middle-class English people they actually were. (39-40)

Forster does not just juxtapose India with England; he juxtaposes a version of the Indian landscape with a version of England's domestic sphere. The roles that Mrs. Moore and Adela are expected to play upon the stage of Anglo-India stifle the women. However, Forster's anthropomorphic India presents no alternative. With the absence of the native woman, no model is available except purdah, representing the most severely restrictive domestic role—as Fielding notes with his comments, "Free your own lady in the first place, and see who'll wash Ahmed, Karim, and Jemila's faces. A nice situation!"

Though Mrs. Moore is taken with India's landscape, the narrator makes it clear that that Mrs. Moore's impressions of India, like Adela's, are unreliable. "Accustomed to the privacy of India," the narrator elaborates, "she could not realize that India, seemingly so mysterious, contains none, and that consequently the [social] conventions have greater force" than in England (50). Ronny states that "[n]othing's private in India" (32), and the narrator makes similar claims throughout the novel. Seemingly more reliable than any of the other characters—all of whom are consistently thwarted by misperceptions—the narrator relates that "no Indian animal has the sense of an interior" and that "nothing in

India is identifiable, the mere mention of a question causes it to disappear or merge into something else" (91). Prompted by her visions, Mrs. Moore overtly challenges her son's unjust treatment toward natives. But these questions merge into the "real serious subject that had caused her visit to India"—her aim to see Ronny and Adela married (54).

While Mrs. Moore's political protest is displaced by an exploration of her role as mother and matchmaker, so, too, does Adela explore her own identity through an engagement with the native "other," the character of India's sublime landscape. Startled by the intense sensuality she reads into the Indian countryside, which produces a stifling "vision of her married life," Adela tells Ronny that she cannot marry him. Later, when Ronny and Adela take a nighttime car ride with Miss Derek, the darkening terrain functions as a reflective backdrop against which Adela examines her relationship with Ronny. Forster writes that "[i]n vain did each item in [the countryside] call out, 'Come, come'" (93). But, in the next sentence the reader is told that there "was not enough god to go around." The landscape continues to play a role in Adela's decision-making:

> When the darkness began, it seemed to well out of the meagre vegetation, entirely covering the fields each side of them before it brimmed over the road. Ronny's face grew dim—an event that always increased her esteem for his character. Her hand touched his, owing to a jolt, and one of the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom passed between them, and announced that all their difficulties were only a lovers' quarrel. (94)

The same anthropomorphic landscape—which later physically separates Aziz and Fielding in the famous last scene—here draws Ronny and Adela together. The "real" question, whether or not to marry, is now answered for Adela and for Mrs. Moore. As predicted by Aziz's Muslim friends, Ronny's future Mrs. Red Nose develops an indifference to Anglo-Indian politics. With their roles now rigidly re-defined, it is at this point in *A Passage to India* that both Adela and Mrs. Moore are suddenly unconcerned

with their expedition to the Marabar caves. Rather, they feel apathetic, inside life's "dull" "cocoon" of "social obligations" (146). Adela is "vexed now because she was both in India and engaged to be married, which double event should have made every instant sublime" (146-47). When the faults of the Turton women are brought into conversation, Adela tries to see their side of things and is no longer willing to criticize them. Her former fascination with Aziz becomes a perfunctory politeness. Her criticism of Anglo-India, Fielding would argue, had proven to be "theoretical" (47). Her concern for the other had been all along a concern for her own freedoms.

Though Adela's engagement precedes a sudden disinterest in Anglo-Indian politics, her subsequent walk with Aziz to the entrance of the Marabar caves marks her first outing "alone" in India and causes her to reevaluate Aziz. Her reaction to Aziz before entering the cave is reminiscent of women's travel tales as documented by scholars such as Mineke Bosch. In "Colonial Dimensions of Dutch Women's Suffrage: Aletta Jacobs's Travel Letters," Bosch explains how women such as Aletta Jacobs negotiated between positions of radical feminism and Dutch "lady traveler" with all the nationalist and imperial discourse the latter position carried. According to Bosch, Jacobs's feminism is necessarily fragmented as it reflects her feminist order to be "organized along lines not just of sex but also of class ands color" (22). Jacobs's letters, with their pseudo-anthropological depictions of African and Asian men, reveal her desire to see them as physically undesirable. They also reveal how often Jacobs uses the normative strategy of gender confusion to maintain her sense of "racial superiority" (20). Maria M. Davidis notes a similar dynamic between Aziz and Adela as they approach the cave:

> As an adventure, this outing permits her to ponder sexual issues, which women in Anglo-India, in keeping with their Victorian present, seem not to do. For Adela to be able to think, "What about love?" breaks all the rules and opens up treacherous paths for her mind to follow. The rock she is climbing, "nicked by a double row of footholds," suggests to her an arduous road for her impending marriage.… Disaster and hallucination are triggered not by penetrating the cave, but also by considering an alternative forbidden to Ronny. About Aziz, Adela thinks, "What a handsome little Oriental he was … [S]he guessed he might attract women of his own race and rank…." Her attraction is tempered by the feeling that "[s]he did not admire him with any personal warmth, for there was nothing of the vagrant in her blood." (267)

Adela's objectifying assessment of Aziz, similar to those described by Bosch, stems from her violation of Anglo-India's racial boundaries; her attraction brings about a fear of racial contamination and provides the catalyst for hysteria.

Historian Christina Simmons has argued that the myth of Victorian repression was a response to the power women were claiming at the turn of the last century. Gail Finney agrees and presents the feminist and the hysteric as the resulting symbols of modernist gender politics—the feminist who actively works to affect social change and the hysteric whose rejection of society is marked by an inability to articulate, passivity, and self-destruction (163). "Yet both figures," writes Felski "are equally implicated in modern systems of thought and representations: the apparently private, irrational behavior of the hysteric was itself a socially determined phenomenon, an index of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with sexuality as the truth of the self that found expression in the emergent doctrines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis and their hysterization of the female body." She goes on to explain that representations of the feminist and the hysteric were "regularly blurred in much of the writing of the period, which constantly sought to reduce the political actions of suffragettes to the irrational outbursts of a group of deranged and dangerous women" (3). Forster explores this

connection between an identification of Adela as feminist and as sexually repressed female. When Aziz and Adela approach the cave, Adela's mind is on marriage. Prompted by her surroundings and confronted by the racial-sexual-cultural otherness of the "maternal cave, embedded in India as site of otherness" (Dekoven 186), Adela contemplates at turns her "animal contact" with Ronny, her resolve to neither rail against nor succumb to Anglo-India, and the physical appeal of her guide Aziz as he holds her hand. Aziz loses Adela in the cave. He only later learns that she has scrambled in hysterics to Miss Derek's car and accused Aziz of rape. In this act, Adela, the feminist/hysteric, causes more harm than any of Turton women whose influence she feared.

When Adela finds herself attracted to Aziz, Forster undermines received stories of interracial rape in which "white" women are always the object of the native men's desire, stories prevalent especially during the aftermath of the Amritsar massacre. Aziz, it is important to note, expresses his distaste for Adela whom he sees as "not beautiful" with "practically no breasts" (130). Thus, Adela can be read as the "mannish" New Woman who signals a crisis in gender definition and who is "barely distinguishable" from "lesbian, or indeed, the homosexual." In 1895, Edward Carpenter defines this "inverted-sexed" New Woman as "naturally largely drawn from those in whom the maternal instinct is not especially strong; also from those in whom the sexual instinct is not preponderant, inclined to attachments to their own," and he argues that "some are ultrarationalizing and brain-cultured" (qtd. in Pykett 17). However, Adela's position as "superior" to Aziz in terms of race also places her as the "seeing" subject who observes him with the anthropological interest of an imperial explorer. After all, as Ronny informs

to his mother, "Nothing is private in India" (32). "The idea of omniscience is merely a strategy of colonial authority," argues Amardeep Singh, "It is precisely Ronny's job to make sure there is no privacy, at least among the Indians in his jurisdiction. The mission of Ronny, and the Anglo-Indian establishment more generally, is to produce a relationship of power where it is the Indians who are looked-at, while the English are the spectators, the inspectors, the people who hold total knowledge," ("Crowds and Passages").

Adela had rejected Ronny and criticized his paternal brand of racism ostensibly because of her position as outsider, but such a position cannot be maintained as Adela finds no place within India to call her own. In *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, David Harvey questions this type of romantic identification of an "other" subject position as "somehow more authentic and less corrupt":

> Is there a movement from a real "space" one might call "home" (a secure but in some ways restrictive environment in which to grow and become according to strict rules) to a metaphorical "place" that is open to a different kind of becoming, open to the multiple forces pulsating throughout the world? And if so, how is this metaphorical place constituted? There are two dangers. The first is to … transform that metaphorical place into a windowless space supposedly sufficient unto itself because it internalizes these effects from outside.… The second is to slide into an acceptance of a postmodern world of fragmentation and unresolvable difference, to become a mere point of convergence of everything there is as if openness is by definition radical. (104)

Forster's cave is not just the locus of reducing Adela's association with feminism to the "irrational outburst" of a "deranged and dangerous" woman. Caves are "enclosed spaces (like rooms) that are nevertheless exterior, public spaces," and, thus, they can "be thought to collapse inside/outside dualities," (Singh "Crowds and Passages"). Within the cave, the duality of private/public, interior/exterior—a duality through which Forster repeatedly links Adela's and Aziz's subject positions—does not hold. Ultimately, Adela's subject

position is revealed to be a process. At this point, Forster begins to make clear that her position as outsider—both to the club and to India—does not afford her a privileged standpoint outside of hegemonic rules. Instead, outside of the privacy of "home," Adela confronts India's "lack of an interior" and must negotiate her multiple subject positions as a woman within a colonial system.

The Inarticulate Woman/Native: Forster's Narrative Distance

Forster connects Adela's experience to Mrs. Moore's own existential revelations in the Marabar caves; both women are unable to articulate the meaning of the recurring echo, an "evil" emanating from the "core" of India (215). Mrs. Moore is "horrified by her physical contact which turns out to be an Indian baby, hears the leveling Irigarayan echo ('ah-boum'), and finds that it is the existential abyss" (Dekoven 185). During her epiphany, she thinks that the "crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life" (165). The echo causes Mrs. Moore to question her role in India:

> "Why can't I finish my duties and be gone? Why do I get headaches and puff when I walk? And all the time this to do and that to do and this to do in your way and that to do in her way, and everything sympathy and confusion and bearing one's burdens. Why can't this be done and that be done in my way and they be done and I at peace? Why has anything to be done, I cannot see. Why all this marriage, marriage?" (224)

Mrs. Moore's experience in the cave strips her of the "Christian feeling" that had previously been the basis of her desire to articulate her experiences in India. After her

Marabar experience, she rejects Adela's request to help make sense of their encounter with the "evil echo" of the cave:

> "Mrs. Moore, what is this echo?"
> "Don't you know?"
> "No—what is it? Oh, do say! I felt you would be able to explain it … this will comfort me so…."
> "Say, say, Say," said the old lady bitterly. "As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace. Not to die," she added sourly, "No doubt you expect me to die, but when I have seen you and Ronny married, and seen the other two and whether they want to be married—I'll retire then into a cave of my own." (222)

Mrs. Moore's "ramblings" lead Ronny to question whether she is unwell or willful. In response to her musings about love and marriage, her son asks her why she cannot express her thoughts in "simple language." She responds by requesting her "pack of patience cards" (224). Mrs. Moore no longer desires to stay and see Adela and her son married. Rendered unable to function in the very public space of India, she leaves for England though she dies before entering "home waters." On the way to the station, though, "India" talks to her. She longs to stop in Bombay "and disentangle the hundred Indias that passed each other in its streets." She is distraught and thinks that "I have not seen the right places" (232-233). Registering the cultural anxiety that the changing meaning of "woman" may reveal that the category "woman" actually holds no meaning, Mrs. Moore is disillusioned. She regards India's cultural other—repeatedly abstracted as the "other" landscape. Through this encounter, she ultimately rejects the idea that her sole purpose is to fulfill her duty to see her children married, the ultimate success of a mother. But the ageing Mrs. Moore has nothing to put in its place.

Before the expedition to the Marabar caves, Adela's and Mrs. Moore's roles as outsiders to Chandrapore's Anglo-India—as well as their identification with the natives'

limited freedoms—had allowed them not only to recognize but also to speak out against the established Anglo-Indians' racism. However, the women's desire to see political change is later revealed to be their own concerns regarding the limited gender roles they cannot escape. After the engagement to Ronny is announced, the resulting "stupefying dullness" does not change until they encounter the cave "embedded in 'India' as the site of otherness" (DeKoven 186). It is at this point that the women are rendered inarticulate. Yet, unlike Cassandra figures, their epiphanical encounters with the racial-sexual-cultural otherness of India do not leave them with a desire to attempt expressing their visions. In fact, as she lay having colonies of cactus spines removed, Adela is incapable of explaining her experience in the cave:

> She lay passive beneath their fingers, which developed the shock that had begun in the cave. Hitherto she had not much minded whether she was touched or not; her senses were abnormally inert and the only contact she anticipated was that of mind. Everything now was transferred to the surface of her body, which began to avenge itself and feed unhealthily. People seemed very much alike, except that some would come close while others kept way. "In space things touch, in times things part," she repeated to herself while the thorns were being extracted—her brain so weak that she could not decide whether the phrase was a philosophy or a pun. (214)

Both women are depicted as unable to evaluate, or even relate, what happened at the caves. Their perceptions are unreliable—from the snake that becomes a stick near the caves to the rape itself to the fact that "the name Esmiss Esmoor, with its linguistic dislocation (like 'god si live'), is (mostly) a joke" (Dekoven 186).

But if women are conduits of the evil echo—India is the source. Mrs. Moore realizes that the echo of India which began "in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life … managed to murmur, 'Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth … If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, then

comment would be the same—"'ou-boum'" (165). Here and elsewhere Forster draws parallels between the women's experience in India, and their search for their own freedom, with Aziz's ongoing struggle to articulate nationalism through poetry. In fact, Forster writes that for Aziz, whose "themes were the decay of Islam and the brevity of love," poetry always left him "thinking of women." His audiences "listened delighted, for they took the public view of poetry, not the private one which obtains in England. It never bored them to hear words, words; they breathed them with the cool night air, never stopping to analyze" (12). After the rape trial, just as Mrs. Moore and Adela leave Chandrapore, so does Aziz. The doctor gives up modern medicine. He moves to a rural area to practice and to write poetry protesting colonial injustices and the British presence in India. But his protest poetry remains unwritten:

> His poems were all on one topic—Oriental womanhood. "The purdah must go," was their burden, "otherwise we shall never be free." And he declared (fantastically) that India would not have been conquered if women as well as men had fought at Plassy. "But we do not show our women to the foreigner"—not explaining how this was to be managed, for he was writing a poem. Bulbuls and roses would still persist, the pathos of the defeated Islam remained in his blood and could not be expelled by modernities. Illogical poems—like their writer. (329)

Forster thus makes a distinction between the private literature of England and the public—and nonsensical—poems that do "no 'good' to anyone," poems that always leave Aziz "thinking of women" (114). The poems comprise a literary tradition that links pathos and political powerlessness to all things "feminine." Forster, criticized for his depictions of India-as-a-muddle and his for "agonized liberalism" (Boehmer 101), portrays the feminine subject and the colonial subject as fixated on "illusion" (223), illogical and inarticulate. Whereas his harsh portrayal of Anglo-India has subversive potential, his protagonist's inability to articulate place as anything more than

reconstructions of England or as formless space registers his sense that India is a "mystifying—if also self-regulating—confusion opposed to the West's control" (Boehmer 150). Forster writes:

> In Europe, life retreats out of the cold, and the exquisite fireside myths have resulted—Balder, Persephone—but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it because disillusionment cannot be beautiful. Men yearn for poetry though they may not confess it; they desire that joy shall be graced and sorrow august and infinity have form—and India fails to accommodate them. (234)

India, the passage seems to imply, can have no literary history, no Balder, no Persephone, no fireside myths which make up European literary tradition. In this "twinning" of literature and national heritage (Appiah 57), the colonizer's inability to comprehend the "other" is presented as the inability of the "other" to signify, and European poetry is essentialized as *the* poetry of value.

However, despite this denial of India's literary history through techniques of assimilation, Indian poetry *is* presented—but it is presented ironically. In one of several scenes in which "Indians" are reciting or discussing literature, the narrator describes Aziz's reading of a poem by Ghalib to an enthralled crowd:

> It had no connection with anything that had come before, but it came from his heart and spoke to theirs. They were overwhelmed by its pathos; pathos, they agreed is the highest quality in art; a poem should touch the hearer with a sense of his own weakness, and should institute some comparison between mankind and flowers. (113)

Here, Indian poetry is invoked only to alienate it as the opposite of European poetry. India's poetry—as presented by Aziz—is marked by a "feminine" and romantic pathos, not irony (it calls for a comparison between mankind and flowers) and, unlike Balder and Persephone, has no history ("no connection with anything that had come before," no tradition). European poetry is the only "real" poetry. Aziz's poetry is "sentimental," has

no political sway, "always" leaves Aziz thinking of women, and represents in part a turning away from the modern world.

Suzanne Clark, in *Sentimental Modernism*, explains that "sentimental" became a "shorthand for everything that modernism would exclude," (9). In the backlash against women writers entering the literary scene of the early 1900's, debates about the value of "feminine literature" focused on the personal subject matter within women's writing.[13] As "critics confined women to the personal life but rubbished it as suitable for good poetry," sentimental discourse, with its appeal through personal experience came to stand for that personal experience. Writes Jane Dowson, "therefore, all expressive writing is perceived as sentimental," and "consequently, marginalized groups are deprived of a valid discourse for representing their histories" (18). Fielding sees both Aziz's "forgetting" his medicine to "[go] back to charms" and his poetry of "pathos" and "sentimentalism" as a turning away from the modern and as the reason for Turtons and Burtons to stay in India (360). The opposite, modernist techniques of irony and self-questioning are used, but by Forster himself—not just to assimilate or alienate the unfamiliar (represented respectively by the narrator's comment on European poetry and on non-European poetry)—but also to valorize those aesthetics.

So, then, how are we to read Forster's feminine subject in *A Passage to India* given his characterization of Adela and Aziz as intrinsically sentimental and inarticulate *and* given his complex depictions of "woman" within a colonial system (a depiction which, according to Jenny Sharpe, allows Forster to move beyond the opposition of "either white man or white woman" but "never both/and" (119). According to Michael Orange, Forster's "crisis of meaning," his "distrust of the capacity of language to mean,"

[13] See, for example, the review of *The Verse Book of a Homely Woman* by Fay Inchfawn.

is the key to Forster's success as a writer. In "Language and Silence in *A Passage to India*," Orange begins by telling us that, in the end, Forster was "justified" in conveying language as powerless to unite Aziz and Fielding, Hindu and Muslim, European and Indian. He writes that Forster "goes incomparably farther than the *instinctive* [my italics] refusal to articulate that has so often accompanied the quest. Yet *A Passage to India justifies* this disengagement with language" [my italics]. The assumption behind this statement, and behind Orange's argument as a whole, is interesting. In a move that parallels Forster's valuation of European literature, Orange establishes Forster's work as a "masterpiece" *because* of the way that he *uses* language to show its "inability to mean":

> Forster reconciles an adept manipulation of his verbal structures to the complete insufficiency of language itself, without finding it necessary to rely on the crudity of utterance to make the crucial disavowal of literary expression's congruence to the mystical experience. This confident belief in his medium in opposed directions at the same time is the hallmark of *A Passage to India*. (It is pertinent to recall in this context that the British established their hegemony in India largely through the imposition of language. (59)

Certainly, to "reconcile' his own language to the "complete insufficiency" of language is no small feat on Forster's part. Forster, according to Orange, is able to articulate India even though India is beyond articulation. And there is a certain amount of irony in the fact that Orange reduces his discussion of imperialism to his particular parenthetical aside as he does not address Forster's (or Fielding's) role in British hegemony. Throughout the essay he describes the East as that-which-is-so-mystical-and-indefinable that we should applaud Forster for being able to define it. He ends his discussion by writing that Forster's work has an "essentially moral" dimension because of its "willingness to trust beyond language" (75). It is not possible for every reading to take into account every marginalized position. With an acknowledgment of difference comes the

acknowledgment that "all readings are also mis-readings, re-reading, partial readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings of a text is originally and finally never simply there" (Harraway 124). What is telling is not so much that Orange's is not a postcolonial reading but that, because of the subject matter, he had to *work at* avoiding the issue of imperialism. This distinction is an important one. Though not ready to jettison from the canon, most postcolonial or feminist scholars would find nothing "moral" but would find suspicious an attempt to celebrate the ability to trust "beyond language."

Critical reception history of *A Passage to India* foregrounds questions of the author's morality.[14] In an argument similar to the 1924 reviewer's, Orange offers that Forster's morality lies not in his critique of Anglo-Indian politics but in the novelist's ability to linguistically "know India." But Forster's "willingness to trust beyond language" is "achieved" by careful depictions of Anglo-Indians as private/ logical, if somewhat unjust, in contrast to the public/illogical Indians. As the narrator explains, "Most of the inhabitants of India do not mind how India is governed. Nor are the lower animals of England concerned about England, but in the tropics, in India, the indifference is more prominent, the inarticulate world is closer at hand" (123). The feminine subject, the arbiter and proxy of Forster's crisis of meaning, registers for these critics Forster's morality. These assertions provide an interesting contrast to V. S. Naipaul's claims of Forster's immorality and his association of Forster's homosexuality with the fact that Forster "did not know Indian people." The on-going debate regarding Forster's morality or immorality goes back to whether and to what extent he breaks away from imperial

[14] See Peter Childs' *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook for E.M. Forster's A Passage to India*.

England's hegemony.[15] These disagreements, argues Balachandra Rajan, are ultimately questions of "how to map its center-margin relationships" (47). The act of reading Forster's novel and analyzing the feminine subject within that same colonial context can only be productively read "*against* the backdrop of that enormous cultural simplification we call imperialism" (49). Addressing the conflict that continues to divide Forster scholars, Rajan writes, "Some works of literature resist this simplification, others comply with it, and others find resistance in compliance. Two of these categories are honorable today, but the third is not dishonorable and scholarship is not served when it is elided into the two" (49).

Like Naipaul, other scholars link Forster's controversial linguistic indeterminacy to homosexuality.[16] Unlike Naipaul however, these critics see Forster's sexuality as pointing not to complicity with imperialism but to potential subversion. Lynn Pykett, in *Engendering Fictions*, discusses the similarities shared by "the homosexual," "that other disrupter of conventional gender boundaries," and the oft-described "mannish New Woman." Not only were the terms "New Woman" and "homosexual" coined in the 1890's, but according to Pykett, the popular understanding of these figures was produced in relation to each other, from the same "complex of social anxieties," and within the same "network" of early twentieth-century discourses (18-19). In her analysis, Pykett alludes to the idea that Forster's novel reflects a rejection of "natural masculinity" (read Fielding's rejection of the club-goers masculine role "which would have passed without comment in feminist England") and thus a rejection of mainstream notions of

[15] This is not to say that other colonialist texts—and, more specifically, the readings of these texts—have not received similar approbation. We can look to Achebe's well-known accusation that Conrad was a "thoroughgoing racist" and his critique of the critics, "Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?" (257).

[16] See Bailey, Pykett, and Higgins and Silver

"purposive" or "productive" sexuality (read the Anglo-India's goal of providing their Ronnys with a wife). Quentin Bailey agrees and, by reading *A Passage to India* together with *Maurice*, further contends that in *A Passage to India* linguistic indeterminacy deflects historical injustices and therefore highlights how the "unspeakable" contaminates relationships involving race and gender (Adela and Aziz) and between two men (Aziz and Fielding):

> The terror of contamination from outside will finally be mastered only by a process that posits fractures within the Western consciousness itself. To put it bluntly, cultural alienation (conceived largely in terms of an "unspeakable" sexuality) constantly replaces the anxiety created by geographic displacement and its attendant politics of domestic brutality and imperial colonialism…. *A Passage to India* moves the debate beyond the realm of true-false dichotomies. "Ou-boum" is an utterance whose meaning can only be construed by subsequent act of appropriation. (326-27)

Maurice, on the other hand, ends with men of different classes recognizing their right to "form whatever union they see fit." According to Bailey, this achievement in *Maurice* is "paid for in canonical currency; unspeakable sexual identity makes possible the destruction of history and tradition, class and race, money and responsibilities" (343).

Forster connects instances of the unspeakable in the few scenes in which characters touch one another. With these images of intimacy, he aligns the well-known scene between Fielding and Aziz (Aziz inserts his own collar stud into Fielding's collar), Adela and Ronny (the touch during the car ride that elicits an "animal thrill"), and Adela and Aziz (before entering the Marabar caves). In each case, these contacts are misread by those around them or by the participants themselves. Ronny, not knowing that Aziz had offered his collar stud after Fielding lost his own, assumes that Aziz simply forgot to dress "properly." To Ronny, the presumed "inattention to detail" represents "the fundamental slackness that reveals the race" (87). Adela mistakenly interprets the

"animal thrill" between herself and Ronny as evidence that their marriage should take place after all. Finally, Adela's imagined rape provides the novel's most pivotal scenes of confronting the unspeakable and the unreliability of perceptions that follow.

Davidis sees Adela's attack, imagined or not, as a "penalty for having refused to operate within the gendered discourses of imperialism" (267). Refuting the majority of scholars who portray Adela's "rape" as her fear of sex, Davidis argues that Adela has no position to take up other than that of traditional male explorer. Her desire to see the Indian landscape harkens back to travel literature, ethnographic stories of unfamiliar landscapes figured unpossessed and whose popularity indicates the extent to which colonization was not only a legalistic but also a cartographic and metaphorical exercise. Adela thus serves as a reminder that the days of grand imperial adventure were waning as "the empire had been mapped and civilized enough that even a woman could enter" (Davidis 259). Adela's scratching of the cave walls during her attack resonates with the markings left by imperial explorers, and Adela, the double-threat New Woman and colonizer, is met with a violent attack:

> What happens when a New Woman enters the picture is a different matter. In wanting to know the country she visits, she threatens to discard the feminine role expected of her and to usurp the position of the traditional male explorer. In wanting know the indigenous people in the country she visits, she becomes a sexual threat to the new chivalry in the novel, that is, to Aziz and Fielding. (200)

But, Adela's attack does not cancel out the competing images of Adela and the other female characters in *A Passage to India*. One has to be careful not to read Adela's rape as defining the feminine subject in the novel. As scholars such as Felski and Katz would likely point out, reading Forster's depiction of the feminine subject while looking for a single, unified, and overarching theory does not acknowledge the complexity with which

the author explores contemporary notions of female desire and agency. In Davidis' otherwise elucidating article, Adela is still Forster's scapegoat if one of a different kind than those who see Adela's cave expedition as a confrontation with her own frigidity.

However, Forster often challenges the type of imperialist discourse described by Davidis. He most explicitly does so when he shows how the characters themselves interpret the rape. The characters' views of what happened in the cave are what we are left with; the reader is not privy to what actually happens in the cave. Instead, Forster requires the reader to make sense of the attack through the characters' vantages. Until learning of Adela's later recantation, the reader has Mrs. Moore existential crisis against which to read the younger woman's experience. Importantly, though, we are privy to the radically different perspectives of the novel's Anglo-Indians. The sight of Adela's body, covered in colonies of cactus spines, was enough to make the Turton women consider the girl their "sister," their own "darling girl" (199). Before this point in the novel, Adela had been described as having "no physical charm" (169). Now the sight of her invokes descriptions of pathos. They reprimand themselves that "[i]f she wasn't one of them, they ought to have made her one, and they could never do that now" because with the "rape" "she had passed beyond their invitation" (199). All agree that while "Miss Quested was only the victim," Ronny, who plans to go ahead with the marriage, is a "martyr." For them, Ronny "bears the sahib's cross" as "the recipient of all the evil intended against them by the country they had tried to serve" (205).

Forster invokes the violence of Amritsar. Anglo-Indians begin "getting women-folk off to the hills," club-goers call for natives to walk backwards on their hands and knees, and officials envision "flogging every native" they see (202-205). Fearful of a riot

in response to Aziz's imprisonment, the Anglo-Indians congregate in the club. There, they gravitate around the sight of "one young mother—a brainless but most beautiful girl" (205). Unlike the plain-looking Miss Quested, whom both Aziz and Fielding found sexually unappealing but who was intelligent with "an advanced outlook and natural honesty of mind" (215), the "brainless" woman draws the attention of everyone in the room:

> [She] sat on a low ottoman in the smoking-room with her baby in her arms; her husband was away in the district, and she dared not return to her bungalow in case the "niggers attacked." The wife of a small railway official, she was generally snubbed; but this evening, with her abundant figure and masses of corn-gold hair, she symbolized all that is worth fighting and dying for; more permanent a symbol, perhaps, than poor Adela. (200)

This woman, the sexualized depiction of the mother, reveals Forster's understanding of the displacement of societal fears onto images of women's bodies. As the urge swells to preemptively attack the natives, writes Forster, "They had started speaking of 'women and children'—that phrase that exempts the male from sanity" (203). Forster clearly draws the connection between Adela, or their changing image of Adela, and their call for violence. Upon looking at the young mother on the ottoman, each man in the room "felt that all he loved best in the world was at stake, demanded revenge, and was filled with a not unpleasant glow, in which the chilly and half-known features of Miss Quested vanished, and were replaced by all that is sweetest and warmest in private life" (203). Talk turns back to women and children, and Adela's hysteria becomes the Anglo-Indians'. Further, when the Collector faces the futility of his occupation of India, he draws a similar conclusion:

> He retained a contemptuous affection for the pawns he had moved about for so many years; they must be worth his pains. "After all, it's our women who make everything more difficult out here," was his inmost

> thought as he caught sight of some obscenities upon s long blank wall, and beneath his chivalry to Miss Quested resentment lurked, waiting its day—perhaps there is a grain of resentment in all chivalry. (237)

Forster's depiction of the men's reactions to Adela's rape, as well as the ironic Baudelaire-esque depiction of the brainless blonde woman in the club, indicates Forster's understanding of the use of the feminine subject to justify imperial violence. He is well aware how the Anglo-Indians use the category "woman" to "exempt the male from sanity" (203). The narrator's assertion, that beneath the Collector's chivalry "resentment lurked" and that "perhaps there is a grain of resentment in all chivalry," suggests not that Forster merely uses the feminine subject a novelistic scapegoat, but, rather, that he interrogates the idea of feminine subject-as-scapegoat.

The Anglo-Indians' interpretation of the rape and their subsequent hysteria generate a counter-discourse, as does Adela's recantation. The colonialist cover-story of the men's paternalistic duty to manage the natives is exposed to reveal the men's self-interest. As I have already suggested, Adela's role is not a passive one. Forster reveals her outsider position as untenable and implicates her as participating in Anglo-Indian policy. Neither is she the novel's ultimate scapegoat. The Anglo-Indian women's sexual economy—symbolized by the gold sewing machine—does not exempt the men from the narrator's scrutiny; the narrator foregrounds the ways in which men create a narrative of the feminine subject's culpability. Likewise, though Adela realizes her worst imaginings of becoming like those "who had come out before her," her act of recantation undermines not only those in power but their claims to knowledge and truth, as well. In the act of declaring Aziz's innocence, Adela in effect collapses the differential system of knowledge set up by the sahibs. Their way of presenting the native subject is revealed as untrue in court, the very symbol of British judgment.

In "Periphrasis, Power, and Rape," Brenda R. Silver argues that by withdrawing Aziz's name as the guilty party while refusing to specify or deny the rape, Adela opens a space "between the material and the representational, between referentiality and textuality, where ideology and power are located, and she associates it with rape." For Silver, Adela's act of resistance in the unspoken or unspeakable suggests the problem of Forster's own position as he "spoke uneasily from within and without the discourse that appropriated his own sexuality" (133). Indeed, before Adela withdraws her accusation, while waiting in the courtroom, she notices the punkah-wallah pulling the courtroom fan. In response to his sexual appeal she then plays out her earlier interactions with Aziz outside the cave:

> Almost naked, and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway, and he caught her attention as she came in, and he seemed to control the proceedings. He had the strength and beauty that sometimes comes to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection that she has accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god …. (240)

Now in the "home" of an Anglo-Indian courtroom, Adela is able to consciously identify herself as superior in race and class in a way that was not possible alone with Aziz in the Marabar caves:

> Something in his aloofness impressed the girl from middle-class England, and rebuked the narrowness of her sufferings. In virtue of what had she collected this roomful of people together? Her particular brand of opinions, and the suburban Jehovah who sanctified them—by what right did they claim so much importance in the world? (242)

Adela recognizes her position within the courtroom. She has the power to speak though others—the punkah-wallah, Aziz's supporters—cannot. Unlike the figure of Aziz's wife, whose face indicated "how bewildering she found it, the echoing contradictory world"

(126), Adela is able to speak out to proclaim Aziz's innocence. But her ability to speak clearly is limited. Fielding asks her to explain her behavior in court:

> "Let us go back to the hallucinations. I was watching you carefully through your evidence this morning, and if I'm right, the hallucination […] disappeared suddenly."
>
> She tried to remember what she had felt in court, but could not; the vision disappeared whenever she wished to interpret it. "Events presented themselves to me in their logical sequence," was what she said, but it hadn't been that at all. (267)

Like Aziz, Adela, who had previously prided herself on being a sensible and logical, forgoes logic for superstition and believes that something supernatural, perhaps the ghost of Mrs. Moore, intervened. Later, she attempts to write Aziz an apology but asks Fielding to dictate when she cannot put the words together.

Forster's dynamic characterization of Fielding also indicates the complexity of Forster's feminine subject. By the end of the novel, he, too, is implicated and his character indexes how power in Anglo-India is maintained. Early in the novel, Aziz had discovered why Fielding was different than the others at the club:

> "Plenty of Indians travel light, too—sadhus and such. It's one of the things I admire about your country. Any man can travel light until he has a wife or children. That's part of my case against marriage. I'm a holy man minus the holiness….
>
> Aziz was charmed and interested, and turned the new idea over in his mind. So this is why Mr. Fielding and a few others were so fearless! They had nothing to lose. (131)

After the trial, Aziz mistakenly believes that Fielding has turned his back on their friendship by marrying Adela in England. He is unaware that Adela had taken up Mrs. Moore's role by playing matchmaker for Fielding and Mrs. Moore's daughter, Stella. When the Englishman returns to India, he rents the guest house on Aziz's property. In the manner of a sahib, Fielding asks a still-estranged Aziz to borrow boats so that Fielding's new wife can watch a Hindu celebration across the lake. Recognizing that

Fielding wants his wife to "see India," Aziz thinks, "This pose of 'seeing India' which had seduced him to Miss Quested at Chandrapore was only a form of ruling India; no sympathy lay in it" (343). Even after their reconciliation, Fielding admits to himself the implications of his new role as husband:

> All the stupid misunderstandings had been cleared up, but socially they had no meeting-place. He had thrown in his lot with Anglo-India by marrying a countrywoman, and he was acquiring some of its limitations, and already felt surprise at his own past heroism. Would he to-day defy all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian? Aziz was a memento, a trophy, they were proud of each other, yet they must invariably part. And anxious to make what he could of this last afternoon, he forced himself to speak intimately about his wife. (357-58)

The married Fielding now has "something to lose" (131).

Clearly, Forster's novel engages the fears, anxieties, and hopes evoked by the category "woman," but *A Passage to India* registers shifting and often opposed notions of female desire and agency. Like other modernist texts, *A Passage to India* anchors its narrative method and claims to truth on a complex mixture of dependence on women—as exemplary seeing subjects—and strategies of distance from them. *A Passage to India* is not unique in its portrayal of all-as-perception. More revealing are Forster's treatment of how perceptions of the "other" are created, altered, and deployed within systems of power.

Despite the many arguments of Forster's complicity, no one in *A Passage to India* is let off the hook—not the liberal Fielding, the nihilistic Mrs. Moore, the child-like and often foolish Aziz, nor the politically impotent Godbole. And Forster's characterization of Adela reveals and problematizes women's active role within imperialism, the ways in which the feminine subject is constructed in a colonial context, and how those constructions are used to justify imperial interests. Yet, Adela is full of contradictions,

contradictions that place her "in an unstable relation to the writers who drew on her complexity and developing new narrative forms to elaborate its effects" (Katz 12). As Katz elaborates in *Impressionist Subjects*, "Modernist writers might affiliate themselves with modern women as exemplary subjects. However, they also in the same gesture defined for themselves a professional expertise and cultural authority that could distance themselves from women. They defined the mastery of narrative form as a specialized skill that could exploit women's nature while standing above it" (12). While perhaps less "prey" than others to "prejudices of his historical moment," Forster's stereotyping of the woman/native "other" in terms of an inability to articulate casts the novelist as privileged observer. [17] He grounds his aesthetic on "knowing India" (the crux of debates about his morality/immorality) while those he depicts—Adela and even Aziz—are incapable.

Forster's dedication serves as a final gesture distancing himself from the sentimental, epitomized by the "vague sentimental sympathetic literary man," Fielding—who is in the end unable to extricate himself from the process of becoming a Mr. Red Nose and whose friendship to Aziz is denied by the Indian landscape saying, "No, not yet," and "No not there." In his dedication, Forster makes clear this difference evidenced by the novel itself:

> "To Syed Ross Masood and to the seventeen years of our friendship."

[17] See Peebles critique of feminist interpretations of male authorial voices, 2-7.

Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropismes*: There is No "Other" Woman?

> What [women] ought to find is to have all the possibilities of developing their mind and their initiative which men have …. They say they are different. Well, it's a bad joke if they're different—even from a scientific point of view. I ask myself, what is this feminine mind that has of yet done nothing, that is different?
>
> –Nathalie Sarraute

After the Feminine Subject?

As many feminists have discovered, examining the feminine subject in Nathalie Sarraute's writing is a risky undertaking. In her work, as well as in her numerous interviews, Sarraute repeatedly insists that "[a]ny good writer is androgynous" (qtd. in Minogue 216). There has been the sense all along that Sarraute's rejection of character in favor of a multiple subject in constant flux has revolutionized the novel. What feminist readers have continued to ask is—a revolution to what ends? While initially embracing Sarraute's search for an alternative to the socially "scripted" woman, many of her early contemporaries such as Simone de Beauvoir questioned whether the "neuter" voice put forth by Sarraute "sidesteps" patriarchal domination or reifies "real" women's subordinate position and concluded that Sarraute's novels amounted to an apolitical search for an "original" woman (Barbour 64). A brief examination of some well-known feminist takes on Sarraute is revealing. Monique Wittig, for example, recalls being "on the street reading *Tropisms* by Nathalie Sarraute for the first time, after that writing and reading were never the same," (45).[1] In *Against Interpretation* (1965), Susan Sontag offers a radically different response than the sense of empowerment described by Wittig:

[1] I use *Tropisms* rather than *Tropismes* to indicate references to Maria Jolas' 1963 English translation, for which Sarraute provides a forward.

"I do not see the privileged value of immersion. Skin-diving has its place, but so has oceanic photography, what Sarraute contemptuously dismisses as 'the aerial view.' Man is a creature designed to live on the surface. He lives at the depths at his own peril" (109). Sarah Barbour theorizes such visceral personal reactions to Sarraute's work by chronicling her own discovery of *Tropismes*:

> I was still responding personally to Nathalie Sarraute, the French woman writer. I was reading her work as what Patrocinio Schweickart would later call "a manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author—the 'voice' of another woman." Reading more about this woman I soon discovered a troubling remark she made in an interview: "Any good writer is androgynous, he or she has to be, so as to be able to write equally about men and women." This woman writer was denying what I felt to be her feminine specificity. That reading would unfortunately lead me to the same end as de Beauvoir, that is, to dismiss Sarraute for polemical reasons. (61)

For many, what made Sarraute's work less than revolutionary were not the themes or aesthetics of her writing but her commentary in critical articles such as those later published in *L'ère du soupçon*, articles in which she clearly dissociates her argument for radical change in the novel from feminist aims.

Take, for example, a lesson from a feminist theory class. The professor shows students a stylistic photographic image of a woman, nude except for chain links binding her to a chair. She has a crown of thorns slipped over apparently bloody eyes and a handkerchief stuffed in her mouth. How is this image to be read when/if the students assume the photographer is male? How does such a semiotic analysis change if the students are told the photographer is female? Do the same signifiers of women's oppression (patriarchal religious domination in the form of a crown of thorns, male suppression of a female voice in the form of a white handkerchief) become radicalized, then, by "a manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author—the 'voice' of another

woman" (qtd. in Barbour 61)? And how would such a reading be further complicated if a female photographer claimed the image but denied that her sex had anything to do with the picture she took?

This is the crux of the uneasy relationship between the works of Nathalie Sarraute and her feminist readers. Perhaps it is because the focus has been on this debate—whether (or to what extent) Sarraute's rejection of traditional characterization and her claim to be an "androgynous" writer affects the value of her texts—that critics have yet to fully explore those passages in *Tropismes* in which Sarraute presents not *Ils* but *Elles.* While Sarraute often blocks readers' assumptions about her "characters" by not including physical descriptions and by making it unclear whether these subjects are male or female, in the seminal *Tropismes* Sarraute does offer images of the feminine subject—shoppers responding to the stimulus of a "White Sale," a young girl being molested by an old man, mothers training their daughters to be pretty. An analysis of these passages reveals not a retreat from gender politics but an engagement with the intersubjective processes which work to define and limit *Elle*.

Sarraute's writing claims a sameness, in which surface differences are exposed as just that—all surface—and are thus discounted as "nothing but a conventional code that we apply to life" (*Tropisms* 7). According to Sarraute, tropisms lie behind this code made up of "the personality we seem to have, the person we seem to be in one another's eyes, the stereotyped things we believe we feel, as also those we discover in others" (*Tropisms* 10). The term "tropisms" is borrowed from bio-chemistry to denote the "movements made by certain living organisms under the influence of outside stimuli, such as heat or light" (*Tropisms* 9). For Sarraute, tropisms make up sensations and

impulses, on the borders of consciousness, enacted in the presence of others. "In the form of indefinable, extremely rapid sensations," such movements are "veritable dramatic actions, hiding beneath the most commonplace conversations, the most everyday gestures" (*Tropisms* 7-8). In *Tropismes*, Sarraute presents a series of disorienting tropistic movements, in medias res, in which a singular *Elle* can in the next line become *Ils, On*, or *Vous* or all of these in succession.

"Tropisme II" offers an example of the complexity of the Sarrautean subject and the dilemma this subject has created for feminist readers:[2]

> Ils s'arrachaient à leurs armoires à glace où ils étaient en train de scruter leurs visages. Se soulevaient sur leurs lits. "C'est servi, c'est servi," disait-elle. Elle rassemblait à table la famille, chacun caché dans son antre, solitaire, hargneux, épuisé. "Mais qu'ont-ils donc pour avoir l'air toujours vannés?" disait-elle quand elle parlait à la cuisinière.
>
> Elle parlait à la cuisinière pendant des heures, s'agitant autour de la table, s'agitant toujours, préparant des potions pour eux ou des plats, elle parlait, critiquant les gens qui venaient à la maison, les amis, "et les cheveux d'une telle qui vont foncer, ils seront comme ceux de sa mère, et droits; ils ont de la chance, ceux qui n'ont pas besoin de permanente." — "Mademoiselle a de beaux cheveux," disait la cuisinière, "ils sont épais, ils sont beaux malgré qu'ils ne bouclent pas." — "Et un tel, je suis sûre qu'il ne vous a pas laissé quelque chose. Ils sont avares, avares tous, et ils ont de l'argent, ils ont de l'argent, c'est dégoûtant. Et ils se privent de tout. Moi, je ne comprends pas ça." — "Ah! non, disait la cuisinière, non, ils ne l'emporteront pas avec eux. Et leur fille, elle n'est toujours pas mariée, et elle n'est pas mal, elle a de beaux cheveux, un petit nez, de jolis pieds aussi." — "Oui, de beaux cheveux, c'est vrai, disait-elle, mais personne ne l'aime, vous savez, elle ne plaît pas. Ah! C'est drôle vraiment." (5)
>
> [They tore themselves from their armoire mirrors in which they were examining their faces. Sat up in their beds. "Dinner is ready, dinner is ready," she said. She rounded up the family, each hiding in his lair, lonely, bad-tempered, exhausted. "But what is the matter with them, for them to always seem so tired?" she said when she talked to the cook.
>
> She talked to the cook for hours, fussing about the table, always fussing, preparing medicines for them, or special dishes, she talked on and on, criticizing the people who came to the house, their friends: "so-and-so's hair will darken, it will be like her mother's, and straight; they are

[2] While I have consulted Jolas' *Tropisms*, translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

> lucky, those who don't need a permanent." — "Mademoiselle has pretty hair," said the cook, "it's thick and pretty, even if it doesn't curl." — "And so-and-so, I'm sure he didn't leave you anything. They're stingy, they're all stingy, and they've got money, they've got money, it's revolting. And they're always cutting back. Me, I don't understand that." — "After all," said the cook, "after all, they can't take it with them. And that daughter of theirs, she's not married yet, and she's not bad, she has pretty hair, her nose is small, and her feet are pretty, too." — "Yes, pretty hair, that's true," she said, "but, you know, nobody likes her, she's not attractive. It's really funny."]

"Tropisme II," like most of the prose pieces, establishes what Barbour calls Sarraute's I/You dyad in which on an imaginary level a relationship is established between I-narrator and you-reader.[3] (It is important to note that Sarraute does not use first-person narration to present a facet of the multiple subjects she presents in *Tropismes.*) The reader becomes observer; *Elles, Ils, Elle*, or *Il* becomes the one observed and talked about (64-65). Sarraute's depiction of the one being observed, *Elle*, prevents the reader from identifying with this mother-figure. *Elle* provides a parody of the institution of housewifery (cooking, fussing about, preparing medicines, managing the day) and all its meaninglessness. She talks on and on, beginning with the claim that so-and-so had ugly hair and ending with the acknowledgment that so-and-so had pretty hair but is unattractive.

The reader is able, in a sense, to listen in on the conversation in which the women fixate on "women things" such as the qualifications for marriage—pretty hair, a small nose, pretty feet. However, as Barbour points out, Sarraute's "I/You dyad initially assures the reader a secure position and announces a communicative, descriptive function, but as the reader seeks to 'comprehend' the text, the narration sets up a network of deferred referentiality and takes on a creative power of its own … the communicative

[3] In her discussion of observer/observed, Barbour is building on the criticism of Annie LeClerc who wrote *Parole de Femme.*

description becomes a performative one" (65). The next passage of "Tropisme II" exemplifies this process:

> Et il sentait filtrer de la cuisine la pensée humble et crasseuse, piétinante, piétinante toujours sur place, toujours sur place, tournant en rond, en rond, comme s'ils avaient le vertige mais ne pouvaient pas s'arrêter, comme s'ils avaient mal au cœur mais ne pouvaient pas s'arrêter, comme on se ronge les ongles, comme on arrache par morceaux sa peau quand on pèle, comme on se gratte quand on a de l'urticaire, comme on se retourne dans son lit pendant l'insomnie, pour se faire plaisir et pour se faire souffrir, à s'épuiser, à en avoir la respiration coupée … (4)
>
> [And he felt coming out of the kitchen, humble, grimy, time-marking human thought, marking time in one spot, always in one spot, going round and round, in circles, as if they were dizzy but couldn't stop, as if they were nauseated but couldn't stop, the way we bites our nails, the way we tear off dead skin when we're peeling, the way we scratch ourselves when we have hives, the way we toss in our beds when we have insomnia, to give ourselves pleasure and make ourselves suffer, until we are exhausted, until we have taken our breath away.…]

With no stable narrator to offer a means of interpretation, the reader is forced to shift from the sense of intimacy created by the I/You dyad in the previous and first section of "Tropisme II." The reader is first made privy to the conversation between the mother figure and the cook; the irony used to describe these two subjects evokes skepticism and distance. The cook's and *Elle's* more traditional dialogue, though unmarked by descriptions of the two subjects, is juxtaposed with sous-conversation [sub-conversation], or interior dialogue. As A. S. Newman argues in "For a New Writing," the irony in Sarraute's work foregrounds questions of "énonciation: to whom can opinions expressed be attributed—author, character (which one?) or neither" (124). Is the reader now to identify with *Il* who also recognizes the meaninglessness of the women's conversation, their "la pensée humble et crasseuse" ["humble and grimy thought"]? If so, how does the reader respond to the newly introduced *on*? The reader now would seem to be implicated in the repetitious analogies—the "comme on se ronge les ongles" ["the way we bite our

nails"], "arrache par morceaux sa peau quand on pèle" ["tear off dead skin when we are peeling"], "retourne dans son lit pendant l'insomnie" ["toss in our beds when we cannot sleep"].

Yet this paragraph ends in much the same way that the conversation between the cook and the mother figure does; it comes back to its beginning and the "*on"* used to refer to the percolation from the kitchen finally refers to those who "pour se faire plaisir et pour se faire souffrir, à s'épuiser" ["give ourselves pleasure and make ourselves suffer, until we are exhausted"]. Thus, as Sarraute often does, she overturns the psychological reality of *Ils,* initially observed in bed and also exhausted, since *Ils*—like *on*—are assimilated. Through deferred referentiality, through repetition and analogy, *Elle, Ils, Il,* and *on* are linked to the surface movements of the interior drama Sarraute describes. The passage implies that we all give ourselves pleasure and make ourselves suffer in this manner; the cook's and *Elle's* gendered interpolations of these inner movements, according to Sarraute's definition of tropistic movement, are merely expressions of the same socially constructed code:

> "Mais peut-être que pour eux c'était autre chose." C'était ce qu'il pensait, écoutant, étendu sur son lit, pendant que comme une sorte de bave poisseuse leur pensée s'infiltrait en lui, se collait à lui, le tapissait intérieurement.
>
> Il n'y avait rien à faire. Rien à faire. Se soustraire était impossible. Partout, sous des formes innombrables, "traîtres" ("c'est traître le soleil d'aujourd'hui, disait la concierge, c'est traître et on risque d'attraper du mal. Ainsi, mon pauvre mari, pourtant il aimait se soigner…"), partout, sous les apparences de la vie elle-même, cela vous happait au passage, quand vous passiez en courant devant la loge de la concierge, quand vous répondiez au téléphone, déjeuniez en famille, invitiez des amis, adressiez la parole à qui que ce fût. (5)
>
> ["But maybe for them it was something else." This was what he thought, listening, lying on his bed, while like some sort of sticky slaver, their thoughts spread into him internally.

> There was nothing to be done about it. Nothing to be done. To draw back from it was impossible. Everywhere, in countless forms, "deception." ("The sun is deceptive today," the concierge said, "it's deceptive and you risk catching your death. That was how my poor husband, and yet he liked to take care of himself…") everywhere, in the guise of life itself, it grabbed you as you went by, when you hurried past the concierge's door, when you answered the telephone, lunched with the family, invited your friends, spoke a word to anybody, whoever it might be.]

The point of reference again shifts. At this point *Il* reacts to being absorbed by those who dominate him. Here and throughout *Tropismes*, the boundaries between subjects are blurred, a concept that Jean Blot calls the indistinction of Sarraute's novels. Characters desire to be unified with the "other" while at the same time they fear being assimilated or annihilated by the other. This anxiety is the basis of the interactions between subjects in Sarraute's writing. In *Nathalie Sarraute: Fiction and Theory*, Ann Jefferson builds on Blot's theory of difference and argues that, for Sarraute, "differences always imply and implicate an other whose existence largely accounts for the unstable character of their operations" (41). The reader of "Tropisme II" is privy to *Il*'s inner "reality," a disorienting apprehension of increasing threat as boundaries between *Il* and the passage's feminine subjects are blurred.

Finally, Sarraute brings you, *Vous*, into the sous-conversation. Everywhere, in the guise of everyday life, the sensations that Sarraute describes grab *you,* when *you* answer the telephone, lunch with family, invite your friends, speak a word to anybody, whoever it might be [my italics]. At the beginning of "Tropisme II," the I/You dyad establishes a relationship between reader and writer as the reader observes *Il* and becomes increasingly distanced from the ironically portrayed women. However, the women are made analogous to the intermediate *on* when the description of the women, (in the kitchen as "la pensée humble et crasseuse" [humble and grimy thought]), shifts directly from

"comme s'ils avaient mal au cœur mais ne pouvaient pas s'arrêter" [as if they were nauseated but couldn't stop] to "comme on se ronge les ongles" [the way we bite our nails]. Without direction from the author, the list describing the women merges into a list describing *on*. Boundaries between subjects continue to blur as *on* becomes *Ils* and then, importantly, *Vous*.

The result in *Tropismes* is an oscillation between violence and a desire to deny or hide difference. As *Vous* shifts to the indeterminate o*n*:

> Il fallait leur répondre et les encourager avec douceur, et surtout, surtout ne pas leur faire sentir, ne pas leur faire sentir un seul instant qu'on se croyait différent. Se plier, se plier, s'effacer, "Oui, oui, oui, oui, c'est vrai, bien sûr" voilà ce qu'il fallait leur dire, et les regarder avec sympathie, avec tendresse, sans quoi un déchirement, un arrachement, quelque chose d'inattendu, de violent allait se produire, quelque chose qui jamais ne s'était produit et qui serait effrayant.
>
> Il lui semblait qu'alors, dans un déferlement subit d'action, de puissance, avec une force immense, il les secouerait comme de vieux chiffons sales, les tordrait, les déchirerait, les détruirait complètement.
>
> Mais il savait aussi que c'était probablement une impression fausse. Avant qu'il ait le temps de se jeter sur eux—avec cet instinct sûr, cet instinct de défense, cette vitalité facile qui faisait leur force inquiétante, ils se retourneraient sur lui et, d'un coup, il ne savait comment, l'assommeraient. (5)

> [We had to answer them and encourage them softly, and above all, above everything, we couldn't make them feel, for a single second, that we thought we are different. Be submissive, be submissive, be unassuming. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, that's true, that's certainly true," that's what we must say to them, and look at them with warmly, with affection, otherwise a rending, an uprooting, something unexpected, something violent would happen, something that had happened before, and would be frightful.
>
> It seemed to him that then, in a sudden surge of action, of power, with great strength, he would shake them like old soiled rages, would wring them, tear them, destroy them completely.
>
> But he also knew that this was more than likely a false impression. Before he would have time to leap at them—with that confident instinct, that instinct for defense, that easy vitality that gave them this worrisome force, they would turn on him and, all at once, they would knock him senseless.]

Acknowledgment of difference is equivalent to "un déchirement, un arrachement" ["a rending, an uprooting"], "de violent" ["something violent"]. *Il* questions whether his sense of "reality" is the same as theirs, whether "maybe for them it was something else."

Sarraute's depictions of intersubjectivity have led scholars to further interrogate the politics of her writing. Does the subjectivity of *Il* represent, for example, Lyotard's notions of *différend* and enact conflict arising from the possible incommensurate versions of reality represented by the fragmented subject(s) in "Tropisme II"? How is the reader to approach questions of the internalization of oppression as experienced by *Il*? John Phillips argues in *Metaphor, Fairy Tales, and the Feminine of the Text* that "the Sarrautean subject rejoices in a scattering of itself, denying any attempt to fix identity in an inauthentic way. Significantly, fragmentation is but a prelude to the ecstasy of total oblivion afforded by experience of what Sarraute would call 'le neutre.'" He cites an interview with Sarraute to further his point:

> Simone Benmussa—Tu m'as souvent dit que tu te sentais neutre, ni home ni femme. [You have often said to me that you feel yourself to be neutral, neither man nor woman]
> Nathalie Sarraute—Rien, ni vieux, ni jeune. Cela vous donne une grand liberté. [Nothing, neither old, nor young. That gives you a lot of freedom] (qtd. in Phillips 76).

However, "une grande liberté" seems elusive for the fragmented subjects in *Tropismes* who find sameness threatening or disgusting. In Sarraute's writing, traversing borders between sameness and difference evokes anxiety. Therefore, the well-known question posed by Cranaki and Belaval so early in Sarraute's career remains—"Que faire avec Nathalie Sarraute?" Are we to read "Tropisme II" against Sarraute's declaration that "[a]ny good writer is androgynous?" Sarraute's writing not only brings into question notions of identity and representation, but she also "confronts feminist theory's

representations to itself as a sexed subject" (Peebles 135) and the feasibility of appeals to the lived experience of "real" women when "real" women exist for Sarraute only as fictional or lived stereotypes. An examination of the often-overlooked gendered subjects in *Tropismes* brings to light the ways in which Sarraute attempts to "neutralize" and thus challenge conventional representations of the feminine subject.

Critics of "the Feminine" and Sarraute's Feminist Critics

To understand Sarraute's interrogation of gender differences in *Tropismes*, it is helpful to examine further her critics' often visceral reactions to/identifications with Sarraute as "woman writer." In 1981, for example, interviewer Ruth Ann Halicks asks Sarraute about the origins of *Tropismes*. To preface her questions, Halicks notes that by the 1939 publication of *Tropismes* the author "had already found [her] own voice, and [her] own style."[4] (Sarraute does later write that *Tropismes* contains "in nuce all the raw material" that she continued to use in her later works.)[5] Halicks' first question to Sarraute is telling: "What are the literary, social, and political currents that have influenced your development?" To this, Sarraute responds flatly, "Social and political currents—there were none." The author, however, does catalogue her literary influences and cites Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Proust, and Joyce (14). After discussing the nature of tropisms, Halicks again asks about the relationship between Sarraute's writing and politics: "There were no other influences? I was thinking of social influences; perhaps

[4] Sarraute began writing *Tropismes* in 1932.

[5] See *Tropisms* 6.

what was going on in the world." Though Sarraute explains that her writing is "totally removed" from socio-politics, Halicks cannot help pressing Sarraute for a different answer and returns to her original line of questioning a bit later in the interview by asking whether or not Sarraute sees her oeuvre as a "literature of liberation" (14-16). Sarraute answers that "it's a question of going elsewhere, of not copying the masters, of trying to look for something, good or bad, for oneself. To enter this liberated state of mind one cannot copy others. One looks for something that is one's own. This is already a liberating attitude for the mind. It can then turn to politics" (16). The *nouveaux romanciers*, Sarraute asserts, do not need to write *littérature engagée* in order to be political:

> RH: You are writing during a period of feminism. What do you think of this movement and have you taken part in it?
>
> NS: I did take part in the feminist movement before the war when French women did not have the right to vote, when they were trying to fight in order to gain access to all the professions. I believe that is feminist when it has to do with the equality of rights, the woman's need to work, to make a living, to earn the same salary, to be helped to the maximum with her children by day-care centers, the collaboration of the father, etc. What I cannot follow is that women say they have a "nature," a "feminine writing," because I do not know what meaning that has. This aspect of the feminist movement I am absolutely against. I think it's almost suicide on their part to say they are different, that they don't know their own language well because it was made by men.

Halicks responds to Sarraute:

> RH: I think they are looking for their own voice.
>
> NS: Yes, that's it. They may be mistaken, but it's better that they look for it rather than not to look at all.
>
> RH: But I hope we will find something else. (18)

Halicks' attempts to identify Sarraute as a feminist writer are consistently frustrated by Sarraute's refusal to be labeled a "woman" writer and by Sarraute's disassociation from the feminist movement of the 1980s. When Halicks responds that "I hope *we* find something else," it is as if something was lost for Halicks (for feminists?) through

Sarraute's act of renouncement. And Halicks would hardly be alone in this regard. Sarah Barbour's already-mentioned autobiographical narrative analysis details her own critical desire, similar to Halicks', to identify with Sarraute as a feminist writer. Indeed, while early feminist critics either praised Sarraute as a "pioneer" for "feminine equality" and read Sarraute's isolated position among the *nouveaux romanciers* as linked to her gender or presented Sarraute's works as expressions of the feminine, Sarraute's numerous interviews and critical essays made it more and more clear that the writer rejected such a facile equation of her writing to her lived experience.[6] The result was that feminists such as de Beauvoir and Sontag (and, for some time, Barbour) rejected Sarraute's work as a fruitless and irresponsible rejection of a social and historical context.

Therefore it is helpful to situate Sarraute in the feminist politics—in which she did indeed participate—of the 1930's, the decade *Tropismes* was begun and finally published. As recent scholars of French women's history have elucidated, the issues of maternity and childcare—listed by Sarraute in her interview with Halicks—placed French feminist organizations in a precarious position. French women strategically elaborated motherliness and maternalism as reforming French society while at the same insisting on support for mothers and working mothers, in particular. By the 1930's demands were being made for a Ministry of Maternity and legislation was being enacted to provide women workers and wives of low-paid workers social insurance (Offen 743-746). However, putting forth the importance of the mother-as-educator/reformer was one that was often co-opted by state officials to urge women to leave the workplace and return home.

[6] See Rous-Besser, p. 8. This reading is especially ironic since *Tropismes* predates by decades the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor.

To make matters more difficult for secular feminist organizations, new organizations such as the Union Nationale pour le Vote des Femmes, or UNVF, and the Union Féminine Civique et Sociale, or UFCS, were pursuing certain legal rights for women while demanding that French society recognize that motherhood remain the mission of women and, therefore, that women should stay in the home to fulfill that mission. The right to vote was seen as access to political say regarding maternity issues, but these organizations drew the line there and loudly protested the activist feminisms that they felt denied women from fulfilling their God-sanctioned duty as mothers (Offen 745-746). It is in this context of fractured feminisms—in which "egalitarian feminist" groups were forced to articulate a position *distinct* from the pronatalist politicians and Catholic groups who discouraged women's employment while striving to help poverty-stricken married mothers, curb child abandonment, and/or secure the right to vote—that Nathalie Sarraute wrote *Tropismes.*

Sarraute's texts largely had gone unread in the years immediately following the 1939 publication of *Tropismes.* Though Sarraute would go on to reject what she saw as Sartre's limiting if laudatory description of her work as "anti-roman," she would become most commonly associated with, in Roger Shattuck words, that "constricted" "literary experiment" of the New Novel (957).[7] The 1956 publication of *L'ère du soupçon* garnered critical interest in Sarraute's writing, and she became associated with the New Novelists because of a shared desire to innovate the novel. Like the New Novelists, Sarraute saw art in the *moraliste* tradition to be "immoral" in its "negligent, conformist, insincere or disloyal attitude with respect to reality" (qtd. in Rous Besser 163). With an argument similar to Sarraute's—that it is enough to "liberate" the mind so that it can

[7] During this time, both Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir supported Sarraute's writing.

"then turn to politics"—Robbe-Grillet and Bernard Pingaud argue that a writer's responsibility lies in exposing the shadowy, uncertain relationship between the reader's "experience" and the "reality surrounding him" (Rous Besser 163). However, for Sarraute, comparisons between her writing and that of the other New Novelists should stop there. In an interview with Germaine Brée, Sarraute describes the loosely affiliated group:

> It was at that moment [in 1956] that [*L'ère du soupçon*] attracted the attention of Alain Robbe-Grillet, who had himself written novels in an entirely different vein. He thought it would be interesting for us to form a group and to create something which has since been called nouveau roman by the critics. I believe it was Emile Henriot who used this expression when *Tropismes*, reedited by the *Editions de Minuit*, appeared or, rather, reappeared at the same time as *La Jalousie.* After that Michael Butor, who had published *L'emploi du Temps* and *Passage de Milan* with the Editions de Minuet, joined our group and so a connection was established between people who had practically nothing in common except the desire to change the novel—such changes had already been made in music and painting. Each of us had his own style, and we didn't work in the same area. (142)

Sarraute goes on to further dissociate herself from the New Novelists by contending that she and Robbe-Grillet are "almost at opposite poles" ("Interview with Two French Novelists" 142).

Though later critics would agree with Sarraute's assessment of her writing as differing substantially from Robbe-Grillet's and Michel Butor's, Armand Hoog—writing for the *Yale French Studies'* Women Writers edition (1961)—places Nathalie Sarraute front and center in the *nouveaux romanciers* school and predicts the debasement of the modern novel at the hands of the New Novelists, and of Nathalie Sarraute, in particular.[8]

[8] For example, Roger Shattuck notes the differences between Sarraute and the New Novelists in his witty portrayal of a debate between Sarraute and the "commissars," Robbe-Grillet and Jean Ricardou, at a colloquium on the French New Novel in Normandy. Shattuck imagines the debate as a battle and writes, "Sarraute was developing observations she had been making for as long as some of the other New Novelists in the room had been alive. Nevertheless, that loyalty to her own steady growth as a writer

The title of Hoog's essay, "Today's Woman—Has She a Heart?", is telling. In a manner similar to W. L. Courtney's in *The Feminine Note in Fiction* (1904), Hoog yokes modern women with the devaluation of the French novel, specifically the French novel's "powers of fictional re-creation" (Hoog 68). While Courtney—who argues that it is "the neutrality of the artistic mind which the feminine novelist seems to find difficult to realize" and who prompted Virginia Woolf to counter with a scathing review of *The Feminine Note*—portrays the modern woman as catalyst to the "disappearance" of the novel, Hoog does not place the blame exclusively on women writers.[9] Rather, Hoog locates the failure of the modern novel in its representation of the feminine subject, and he focuses on Sarraute's writing to provide his evidence:

> But what of Nathalie Sarraute or Robbe-Grillet's women in love? Are they more genuine or representative women because their "hearts" have become invisible for the photographic lens? I will not pronounce on this. But to raise the question leads one to reflect on the concept of woman and of love that is embodied in the French novel of today. (68)

Hoog defines the novel's "traditional aim" and the place of the feminine subject within that tradition: "The novel, whose traditional aim has always been to examine the passion of love and consequently the female heart, had a dual vision of woman. On the one hand she was a transparent personage whose secret workings could be observed through a

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amounted to an awkward, even scandalous breaking of ranks with current doctrines. The commissars were ready at their posts. Ricardou discharged a fusillade of Saussurian linguistics at Sarraute. She brushed aside his jargon as an affair of linguistics and told him that 'un moderne décrit quelque chose sans le nommer'" (958).

[9] See Pykett 164-65. In response to Courtney's argument that "the novel as a work of art is disappearing and giving place to monographs on given subjects, or else individual studies of character" because "more and more in our modern age are written by women for women," Woolf argues that the "woman novelist extinguishing the novel" is highly doubtful and asks, "Is it not too soon after all to criticize the 'feminine note' in anything? And will not the adequate critic of women be a woman?" By 1929, however, Woolf would begin to define a "feminine note" when she writes that "[i]f then, one should try to sum up the character of women's fiction, at the present moment, one would say that it is sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman's book is not written as a man would write" ("Women and Fiction" 146). Interestingly, Sarraute—who has cited Woolf as a key influence on her writing—would surely counter Woolf's evolving notion of a "woman's writing" with her argument that "good" writing is androgynous.

glass envelope." Hoog continues, "But on the other hand woman provided the underpinnings for every mythology of love, those mythologies denounced with such fury by Madame de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*." (68) Attributing the problem of the modern novel to the rejection of the "heart that speaks" (read traditional depictions of women in the novel) and its replacement with "privet hedges" and "the world of surfaces," Hoog cites Sarraute's *Tropismes* as exemplary of the degrading influence of photography and film on literature.

Nathalie Sarraute, according to Hoog, is chief suspect among the *nouveaux romanciers* who portray the "heart of the woman" as "impenetrable." This obfuscation of the feminine subject (Hoog again cites *Tropismes* to make his point though he includes the "anti-novelists" in his conclusions) amounts to "threatening" the "balance of physics and mythology" between which "the vision of woman ceaselessly oscillates" (68-69). For Hoog the women of *Tropismes* are "singularly revealing." He cites the following passage from "Tropisme X":

> Et elles parlaient, parlaient toujours, répétant les mêmes choses, les retournant, puis les retournant encore, d'un côté puis de l'autre, les pétrissant, les pétrissant, roulant sans cesse entre leurs doigts cette matière ingrate et pauvre qu'elles avaient extraite de leur vie (ce qu'elles appelaient "la vie", leur domaine), la pétrissant, l'étirant, la roulant jusqu'à ce qu'elle ne forme plus entre leurs doigts qu'un petit tas, une petite boulette grise. (16)
>
> [And they talked and kept talking, repeating the same things, going over them, then going over them again, looking at them from all angles, kneading them, continually rolling between their fingers this unsatisfactory, meager substance that they had extracted from their lives (what they called "life," their domain), kneading, pulling it, rolling it until it ceased to form anything between their fingers but a little pile, a little grey pellet.]

Ignoring Sarraute's politicization of the feminine subject, Hoog instead cites this passage as an example of how "these 'surface' novelists belong to a generation which has seen

literary expression roundly defeated by the techniques of journalism, photography, and film" (67).

Yet, one can imagine Sarraute taking pleasure in the fact that her writing blocked Hoog's attempts to understand gendered identity as fixed or authentic and in his assessment that she had changed the trajectory of the traditional novel. Before the acclaim she received with the publication of *L'ère du soupçon*, Sarraute saw her writing as "going in the right direction" and found it "impossible to give in and write in the traditional manner" ("Interview with Two French Critics" 141). But she also thought that any innovations brought to the genre "comme aussi toutes les autres, paraîtra un jour prochain ne pouvoir plus décrire que l'apparence. Et rien n'est plus réconfortant et plus stimulant que cette pensée. Ce sera le signe que tout est pour le mieux, que le vie continue et qu'il faut non pas revenir en arrière, mais s'efforcer d'aller plus avant" ["like all others, will one day seem to describe nothing more than appearances. And nothing is more comforting than that thought. That will be the sign that all is for the best, life continues and that we must not go back, but force ourselves to go onward"] (*L'ère* 147). Sarraute's theatricalization of women's roles reveals how inauthentically constructed gender roles can result in "un petit tas, une petite boulette grise" ["a little pile, a little grey pellet"]; Hoog misses the irony and derides her "so honest style" (67).[10]

The interrogation of difference as exclusion is prevalent in *Tropismes*, and Sarraute argues repeatedly in her essays and interviews that definitions of sexual difference are used to exclude. Such is the "bad joke" whether made by proponents of *écriture féminine* or by theorists on the "feminine note" in literature such as Courtney and

[10] Hoog is referring to Sartre's praise of Sarraute's "so honest style" in Sartre's preface to *Portrait d'un inconnu*.

Hoog—all of whom Sarraute sees as dangerously reading women's writing as coextensive with biology. This complaint she has in common with one of her most vocal critics—Simone de Beauvoir. Many critics have examined the relationship of de Beauvoir and Sarraute—including their well-known feud that began in the late 1960s—in order to illuminate the Sarrautean subject. Both women were activists for women's right to vote and for women's economic independence, and both recognize the potential of "those vague essences the Eternal Feminine and the Eternal Masculine" to marginalize women (de Beauvoir 717). Thus, they reject the notion of "a feminine writing" or a "feminine nature." [11] De Beauvoir is well-known for her "Bible of feminism," *The Second Sex* (Mahon x), and her equally well-known position that "[o]ne is not born a woman, one is made a woman." And like Sarraute, de Beauvoir argues not only that women's roles are socially constructed but that the contemporary woman "stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endued with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as self and as other, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences" (de Beauvoir, "Conclusion," *The Second Sex* 718). As Sarraute emphasizes in *Tropismes,* the result is a desire to be the "charming woman" who becomes complicit in her own oppression.

And yet, despite these similarities, the friendship between Sarraute and de Beauvoir that had begun in the 1940s had devolved to the point that in 1967, after de Beauvoir's negative review of Sarraute's writing, Sarraute dissociated herself from de Beauvoir in an interview entitled "Nathalie Sarraute ne veut rien avoir de commun avec

[11] For commentary on how de Beauvoir's recently found diary entries have put into question traditional readings of *The Second Sex* as an application of Sartrean existentialism and have instead shifted the focus to the ways in which de Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay* served as philosophical source for *Being and Nothingness*, see Margaret Simons. See also Kate and Edward Fullbrook.

Simone de Beauvoir" ["Nathalie Sarraute does not want to have anything in common with Simone de Beauvoir"] (qtd. in Willging 278). Both women explore the confusion over what is meant by "woman," but, for de Beauvoir, a woman must consciously, explicitly articulate her commitment to avoid leading a "false life" ("Simone de Beauvoir" 79). She is then able to confront the conflict arising from the seeming "warmth and companionship" of conventional women's roles with the effort and loneliness de Beauvoir sees as a possible result of avoiding the temptation to be complicit (Simon 2). Margaret Simons, who with Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir and Barbara Klaw recently transcribed de Beauvoir's hand-written diary, cites de Beauvoir's entry on this very issue. De Beauvoir writes, "Yesterday, how I envied M. de Wendel so pretty and so simple! [W]ithout pride as without envy, I cried thinking of the lot which was reserved for me, and of all the force, and the tension required so that I could find it preferable to any other." Simons notes the ambiguity in de Beauvoir's recognition of her role in the face of changing conceptions of gender when de Beauvoir notes, "Friday, I established the force of life's program; in such instants my solitude is an intoxication; I am, I dominate, I love myself and despise the rest.… But I would so like to have the right, me as well, of being simple and very weak, of being a woman.… I count on myself; I know that I can count on myself. But I would prefer to have no need to count on myself" (qtd. in Simon 2).

By contrast, Nathalie Sarraute argues that "forgetting oneself," which de Beauvoir finds difficult if not impossible for a woman to accomplish, is possible through the writing process itself. In fact, Sarraute claims that when writing she is invisible: "Je ne vois pas" ["I do not see myself"]. She is also invisible when lecturing. Sarraute explains

to Simone Benmussa, "[J]'ai l'impression, que là où je suis, il ya comme une place vide. Je ne peux jamais imaginer que, quand je quitte des gens, ils parlent de moi. Cela me donne beaucoup liberté," ["I have the impression that where I am there is an empty seat. I can never imagine that, when I leave people, they talk about me. This gives me a lot of freedom"] (qtd. in Jefferson 100).[12] The gaze for which the "charming woman" performs has little effect for Sarraute when she writes even though incessantly her characters must negotiate that gaze. Sarraute finds a sense of neutrality attainable through writing; unlike women on stage or in front of the camera who must "acquiesce to the image of woman projected onto them (by men and women alike), the woman who sits down to write can simply vanish from sight. And as she disappears from view she begins to acquire the 'status of human being'" (Jefferson 101). The debate between Sarraute and de Beauvoir amounts to more than de Beauvoir's critique of Sarraute and the *nouveaux romanciers* as "signing manifestos" by day and then shutting themselves up in their "old ivory tower" *and* to more than Sarraute's disdain for the "conformist" and "didactic" writing of de Beauvoir and Sartre (de Beauvoir, *Forces of Circumstance* 622). For Sarraute, writing seems to offer the possibility of achieving gender neutrality and circumventing projected images of, as de Beauvoir calls them, "false treasures of her 'femininity" (*The Second Sex* 720*)*.

Leah D. Hewitt offers perhaps the most telling analysis of Nathalie Sarraute's and Simone de Beauvoir's relationship. Hewitt cites de Beauvoir's description of Sarraute in *Force of Circumstance* as emblematic of critics' specious readings which directly link Sarraute's writing to her experience-as-woman:

[12] The translation is Jefferson's.

> Before the war, an unknown woman had sent Sartre a copy of her little book *Tropisms*, which had gone unnoticed and whose quality struck us both; this was Nathalie Sarraute […]. In '41 she had worked in a Resistance group with Alfred Peron; Sartre had seen her again recently, and I had made her acquaintance. That winter I went out with her a lot. She was the daughter of Russian Jews exiled by the czarist persecutions at the beginning of the century, and it was under these circumstances, I suppose, that she owed her restless subtlety. Her vision of the world spontaneously accorded with Sartre's own idea: she was hostile to all essentialism, she did not believe in clearly defined characters or emotions, or, indeed, in any ready-made notions. In the book she was writing at the time, *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, she was determined to recapture, beneath its commonplaces, life's ambiguous truth. She was very reticent and talked mostly about literature, but with passion. (qtd. in Hewitt 55)

Hewitt points out that de Beauvoir's reading of Sarraute's "character," though providing interesting facts about Sarraute, is nonetheless also the type of "objective" description that Sarraute's writing calls into question.

Of the book-length studies on Sarraute published from the late 1960s through the late 1970's, Gretchen Rous Besser's *Nathalie Sarraute* (1979) further develops this notion that the originality of Sarraute's work stems from Sarraute's Russian background.[13] However, for Rous Besser, Sarraute's position as "woman writer," as "adventurer" into the "untracked paths of feminine equality," provides the main explanation for the development of Sarraute's unique style (8). Rous Besser, who portrays Sarraute as the New Novelists' feminist pioneer, refutes de Beauvoir's claims that Sarraute's writing is apolitical. Rather, Rous Besser considers Sarraute's exploration of the anonymity of subjects' lives and the subsequent movement of Sarraute's reader to the center of the literary stage to result in moral purpose.[14] Even as Rous Besser

[13] Other book-length works by Cranaki and Belaval, René Micha, and Ruth Levinsky include discussions about possible origins of Sarraute's unique characterization without specifically addressing Sarraute's representations of the "feminine" or Sarraute's position as "woman writer."

[14] Jefferson offers an excellent analysis of Sarraute's comments on the stage and argues that ultimately Sarraute sees uses the stage as revealing how a woman's gender "constitutes an obstacle to identity" (110).

acknowledges that Sarraute denies a moral message in her work, the critic argues that "Sarraute delineates experience at so fundamental a level that she transcends the limitations of political or social boundaries and attains that deeper degree of 'morality' that consists in attesting to the bonds of common humanity" (164). Connections between the "character" of Nathalie Sarraute (her Jewish background and "restless subtlety," her role as feminist pioneer) and Sarraute's perceived lack of political purpose—and the implications of such claims for feminists—are connections re-examined by more recent critics as they confront what Catherine M. Peebles considers to be "the most important challenge of reading Sarraute in the light of feminism"—"to take seriously her writing's insistence that it has no place for sexual difference" (151).

Indeed, while during the 1980's feminists rejected Sarraute's writing as apolitical, more recent feminist scholars have "rediscovered" Nathalie Sarraute. Barbour, Peebles, Jefferson, and Hewitt all have reassessed Sarraute's writing and all to varying degrees call into question Gretchen Rous Besser's proclamation of Sarraute-as-feminist-pioneer, as well as Rous Besser's insistence on the "morality" of Sarraute's words. In fact, Sarraute compels the reader to hesitate before making any sure statements about what a "woman writer" should be. In *Autobiographical Tightropes*, for example, Hewitt describes how Sarraute's collection of critical essays on the novel, *L'ère du soupçon,* further complicates feminists' readings of *Tropismes*.[15] In these essays, Sarraute constructs her argument for innovations in the novel, innovations she sees as necessary to express a tropistic reality. She argues that the novelist should "le priver le plus possible de tous les indices dont, malgré lui, par un penchant naturel, il s'empare pour fabrique des trompe-l'œil" ["deprive the reader as much as possible of all details which, in spite of

[15] Jefferson refers to *L'ère du soupcon* as Sarraute's literary User's guide.

himself and because of a natural tendency, he grabs in order to manufacture illusions"] (*L'ère* 92-93).[16] In the last of the essays, she creates a fictitious male writer who, like Sarraute, is "haunted" by the almost inaccessible fluid movements of tropisms. According to Sarraute, the always present "new psychological matter" is not accessible through conventional character analysis. Her writer tries to present tropistic movements to his reader in the hope of allowing that reader to experience the same hidden interactions. Sarraute's writer thus aims to facilitate readers' exploration of "these 'darker sides' of human interaction" that have always existed "beyond clear-cut identities, unambiguous situations, and conventional dialogues" (Hewitt 59). "Although Sarraute does not specifically use the term "tropisms" to describe the barely detectable interior movements that the novelist recreates in *L'ère du soupçon*," Hewitt argues, Sarraute's anonymous male writer is a "third-person description of her own preoccupations, experiences, and struggles in writing," a displacement that Sarraute herself acknowledges in the preface to the 1964 edition of the well-received essays. Hewitt concludes that:

> The initial displacement of her own concerns onto a fictive male writer would appear to be a protective measure to ward off personal attacks and a means to make her arguments more compelling, untroubled by the particularities of the female author, especially at a time when her works remained unread. In a 1984 interview, she adds that writing *The Age of Suspicion* was a way of convincing herself that what she was doing in literature was a valid enterprise. Despite these justifications, however, it is hard not to read the imposition of a male figure in the place of a female author as a fundamental negativity, the denial of the female gender. (60)

Sarraute forces readers to confront "questions about the sex of writing," and "the sex in writing"; further, she prompts us to consider "Christine Rochefort observation 'that even

[16] Barbour cites this comment as explaining in large part early critics' frustration with Sarraute's work as they attempt in their readings to create a character "out of her novels or out of Sarraute herself" (33).

today, 'A man's book is a book. A woman's book is a woman's book,' (Peebles xii). The analyses put forth by Barbour, Hewitt, and Peebles foreground the way that Sarraute has consistently required critics, despite their wariness or even disapproval of the politics of her writing, to ultimately question the *épaisseur subjective* [subjective thickness] of their own analyses.[17]

Yet, it is difficult to imagine that a male author's choice of a female novelist would be equivalent to the denial of the male gender. In fact, Sarraute has repeatedly insisted that this line of argument validates her reliance on the use of male pronouns, a choice which stems from her attempt to create a "neutral voice" that the feminine pronoun cannot achieve because of preconceived notions of "woman." As Sarraute says when describing the writing process for *Le Portrait d'un inconnu*:

> I don't like obscurity for its own sake. I even considered putting a name in, but I saw that it was impossible. It ruined everything because as soon as I gave it a name, "Jeanne said, for instance," I found myself standing at a distance.… I was no longer at the center. There, there are no names, there is nothing. There's a kind of anonymous substance that functions on its own. It's worked that way every time. ("Interview with Two French Novelists" 146)

Her frequent preference for the masculine pronoun would seem to allow for the "universality" of the *drames intérieurs* Sarraute wishes to portray. However, *Tropismes*—with its numerous, if largely overlooked, deviations from a reliance on the more "neutral" masculine—undercuts the notion that Sarraute's writing amounts to a "fundamental negativity," to the "denial" of the female gender.

[17] Elaborating on Raffy's notion of Sarraute's characters as comprised of "synchronic references to different systems of meaning" (Raffy 2), Sarah Barbour identifies what she considers to be the repression of questions of sexual difference in critical analyses as part of the feminist critic's "*épaisseur subjective."*

The Feminine Subject and the Family Dance: Whose Desires Are They?

Sarraute disallows the "misfiring" of the name of woman.[18] As Peebles argues, "It is as if [Sarraute] were saying with her 'there is no sexual difference in my writing': If you want to see 'real men and women,' look elsewhere (and they are paraded around in no small numbers); in here, it's something else that's being written" (152-153). As far as *Tropismes* is concerned, critics have looked elsewhere to better understand Sarraute's representations of gendered subjects. Feminist studies on Sarraute often focus less on *Tropismes* and more on her later works, such as *Portrait d'un inconnu, Martereau*, or even the controversial *Enfance*. With its unnamed subjects, default masculine pronouns, *and* seemingly disparate prose pieces, Sarraute's first work—though seminal and her most often anthologized work—especially complicates analyses of its gender and sexual politics. "Tropisme I" provides a more specific example of the complex gender/sex system inhabited by the Sarrautean subject(s) in *Tropismes*. The reader is first introduced to an amorphous *Ils* who "sourdre de partout" ["spring out from nowhere']. They flow, seep, and stretch out in what Sarraute describes as dark clusters between dead houses. *Ils* gravitate to a storefront and emanate "une sorte de satisfaction désespérée" ["a sort of desperate satisfaction"]. The reader must read further to learn the identity of the seeping and stretching *Ils*. Only in the second paragraph does it become clear that *Ils* make up a crowd of window-shoppers. *Ils* carefully examine the window display's "White Sale" linens and a doll with eyes that "à intervalles régulier, s'allumaient, s'éteignaient, s'allumaient, s'éteignaient, s'allumaient, s'éteignaient, toujours à intervalles identiques, s'allumaient de nouveau et de nouveau s'éteignaient" ["at regular intervals, lit up, went

[18] Peebles cites Spivak's discussion of the "misfiring" of the name of woman. See Spivak's "Feminism and Deconstruction, Again."

out, lit up, went out, lit up, went out, always at the same interval, lit up again and went out again"]. Sarraute includes her readers in the experience as we observe with *Ils* through repetition "exemplified" (not merely depicted) by the words describing the doll's blinking eyes (Minogue 10). As the passage continues:

> Ils regardaient longtemps, sans bouger, ils restaient là, offerts, devant les vitrines, ils reportaient toujours à l'intervalle suivant le moment de s'éloigner. Et les petits enfants tranquilles qui leur donnaient la main, fatigués de regarder, distraits, patiemment, auprès d'eux, attendaient. (3)
>
> [They looked a long time, without moving, they remained there, in offering, in front of the shop windows, they waiting for the next interval to leave. And the calm little children, who held their hands, tired of looking, listless, waited patiently next to them.]

The repetition in these phrases, the strings of modifiers (seeping, dead, cloggings, desperate, tired, listless), and the indistinction of subjects evoke anxiety.

In "Tropismes II," housewifery and gossip exceed the positions of *Elle* and the cook to become analogous to the hopelessness and fear felt by *Il(s), on,* and *Vous*. In this passage, too, gender stereotypes are invoked and then checked. After all, Sarraute is aware that "malgré lui, par un penchant naturel" ["in spite of himself and because of a natural tendency"] the reader latches onto her subjects who are devoid of typical physical descriptions and attempts to ["fabrique des trompe-l'œil"] ["manufacture illusions"]. Who are *Ils*? Who responds to the stimulus of a "White Sale," window shops for dolls and linens and holds their children's hands while doing so? Sarraute's self-conscious readers—implicated as they are in the process of making meaning and addressed by an author whose multiple subjects often become *Vous*—cannot be certain.

As Barbour warns through her autobiographical narrative analysis, critics who extend from the woman author to her characters "the psychology of oppression, the psychology of women living under patriarchy" will find Sarraute's texts difficult (98).

Just as Sarraute presents *Il* who becomes *Elle* and a cook, a feminine subject hiding in her room from a hostile universe (that encourages her to consider motionlessness natural) becomes you, the reader, when you undertake nothing and keep as still as you possibly can (9). In effect, readers of *Tropismes* are forced to cross gender lines. Sarraute who does not like "obscurity for its own sake" uses *he* rather than *she* "because *he* is neutral and *she* is only female" (Sarraute, "Art of Fiction" 161). While many passages in *Tropismes,* with its Chinese box of subject positions, make examining the work's gender and sexual politics problematic, it is important to examine more closely those instances in *Tropismes* in which Sarraute chooses not to portray the neutral but to depict a feminine subject, *Elle*.

In "Tropisme X," which Hoog claims is evidence of the downfall of the French novel, Sarraute underscores the inauthentic nature of "real" women's gendered identity. At midday, "elles sortaient ensemble, menaient la vie des femme" [they went out together, led the life that women lead]. Sarraute's pronouns have a clear referent, and "elles, elles, elles, elles, toujours elles" are described as "voraces, pépiantes et délicates" [voracious, chirping, and delicate]. The repetition of *Elle*s reinforces the idea that these multiple subjects' self-representation as the "charming woman" reduces them to being different from men but less than human. In fact, *Elle*s are repeatedly described as birds, part of a "chirping aviary." Sarraute's treatment is clearly ironic. "Ah! Cette vie était extraordinaire" [What an extraordinary life it is] to go to tearooms, eat cakes, and discuss "difficult" problems:

> Il y avait autour d'elles un courant d'excitation, d'animation, une légère inquiétude pleine de joie, le souvenir d'un choix difficile, dont on doutait encore un peu (se combine-rait-il avec l'ensemble bleu et gris? mais si pourtant, il serait admirable). (15)

> [There was a current of excitement and activity about them, a slight disquiet filled with joy, the memory of a difficult choice, about which they were not so certain (would it go with the blue or the gray outfit? Why, of course, it would be remarkable).]

The faces of the women are mask-like, "raidis par une sorte de tension intérieure, leurs yeux indifférent glissaient sur l'aspect, sur le masque des choses, le soupesaient un seul instant (était-ce joli ou laid?) puis le laissaient retomber. Et les fards leur donnaient un éclat dur, une fraîcheur sans vie" (16) ["stiff with a sort of inner tension, their indifferent eyes skimmed slightly over the aspect, the mask of things, weighed it for an instant (was it pretty or ugly?) then let it drop. And their makeup gave them a hard brilliance, a lifeless freshness"]. In *Tropismes,* subjects are preoccupied with performances, masks, scenes, spectators, roles, and marionettes. Sarraute, like de Beauvoir, considers the stage to represent that specular arena on which constructions of gender are produced. The women in the tearoom have internalized the gazes of those spectators witnessing their performances and act accordingly. Whether it is a pregnant widow at a funeral who sticks out her belly a bit farther to look more grievous or the tearoom women, Sarraute's feminine subjects often suffer as a result of acting in ways that they conceive "a woman" *should* act:

> Elles allaient dans des thés. Elles restaient là, assises pendant des heures, pendant que des après-midi entières s'écoulaient. Elles parlaient: "Il y a entre eux des scènes lamentables, des disputes à propos de rien. Je dois dire que c'est lui que je plains dans tout cela quand même. Combien? Mais au moins deux millions. Et rien que l'héritage de la tante Joséphine … Non … comment voulez-vous? Il ne l'épousera pas. C'est une femme d'intérieur qu'il lui faut, il ne s'en rend pas compte lui-même. Mais non, je vous le dis. C'est une femme d'intérieur qu'il lui faut.… D'intérieur.… D'intérieur.…" On le leur avait toujours dit. Cela, elles l'avaient bien toujours entendu dire, elles le savaient: les sentiments, l'amour, la vie, c'était là leur domaine. Il leur appartenait. (16)

> [They went to tearooms. They talked for hours, while whole afternoons went by. They talked: "They have terrible scenes, disputes over nothing. I must say that he's the one I feel sorry for in it all. How much? Oh, at least two million. And if only that she had inherited from her Aunt Josephine … No … how could it? He won't marry her. What he needs is a good housewife.… Housewife.… Housewife.…" They had always heard it said, they knew it: the sentiments, love, life, these were their domain. It belonged to them.]

Tea, cakes, and chit-chat make up *Elle*s' "false treasures." These things "belonged to them." The fact that *Elle*s accept the "little grey pellet" because "they had always heard it said, they knew it" works in tandem with Sarraute's understanding of the "invention of women's habits, intonations and mannerisms," an invention which is the "result of upbringing" (qtd. in Jefferson 99).

Sarraute further explores the influence of mothers training their children with images of "woman" in the mock epic of "Tropisme XIII." In this collection of scenes, legions of stiffly determined women (here, again, Sarraute chooses *Elles* over *Ils*) "frappant durement le trottoir … [a]vec leur sac sous le bras, leurs gantelets, leur petit 'bibi' réglementaire juste comme il faut incliné sur leur tête" (19) ["knocking hard against the pavement … with their bags under their arms, their gauntlet gloves, their little regulation 'bibis' at just the right angle on their heads"]. The target of their desires is "le petit tailleur bleu … petit tailleur gris" ["that little blue suit … that little grey suit"], and "[p]eu à peu il les tenait plus fort, s'emparait d'elles impérieusement, devenait indispensable, devenait un but en soi, elles ne savaient plus pourquoi, mais qu'à tout prix il leur fallait atteindre." (19) ["little by little it took stronger hold of them, it took hold of them commandingly, became indispensable, became an end in itself, they no longer knew why, but which we feel we have to attend to at all costs"]. For *Elles*, who no longer know why they so badly want the grey suit, there is no clear demarcation between an

"authentic" female experience and "one that along the way may have been 'man-made'" (Probyn 179).[19] Yet the women continue on their march, spurred on by the refrain of received ideas that repeatedly play in their heads:

> Ah! vous n'en avez pas? Mais où puis-je en trouver? J'ai regardé partout […] et elles souriaient tout de même, aimablement, bien élevées, bien dressées depuis de longues années, quand elles avaient couru encore avec leur mère, pour combiner, pour "se vêtir de rien," "car une jeune fille, déjà, a besoin de tant de choses, et il faut savoir s'arranger." (20)
>
> [Oh! You don't have any? Where on earth am I going to get it? I've looked everywhere […] and they smiled nevertheless, pleasantly, well brought-up, having been well trained, during the many years when they were still hunting with their mothers, to figure out how to "dress on nothing," "because a young girl needs so many things, and besides, you have to know how to manage."]

Elles validate their efforts by telling themselves that the process is somehow "good for them."

Throughout *Tropismes, Elles* are often complicit in creating and maintaining their own invisibility or meaninglessness. And the stimulus to which *Elles* most often respond are "Les choses! les choses!" ["Things! things!"] which represent their "force" ["strength"] and source of "puissance" ["power"] and which provide a false sense of purpose and control over their environments (10). In "Tropisme VI," *Elle* exercises that "power" by cleaning and performing her morning routine violently and frenetically. In the first lines, the reader is introduced to *Elle* who "courait dans l'appartement, âcre, serrée, toute chargée de cris, de gestes, de halètements de colère, de 'scènes'" (10) ["rushed around in the apartment, tart, tense, bursting with shouts, with gestures, with gasps of anger, with 'scenes'"]. *Elle* progressively becomes more agitated as she moves

[19] Probyn is referring to Rosalind Coward's argument in *Female Desires* that "our feminine positions are produced in response to the pleasures offered to us; our subjectivities and identities are formed in definitions of desire which encircles us" (16).

from “chambre en chambre, furetait dans la cuisine, heurtait avec fureur la porte de la salle de bains que quelqu’un occupait, et elle avait envie d’intervenir, de diriger, de les secouer” [“room to room, ferreted about the kitchen, knocked furiously on the door of the bathroom which someone was occupying, and she wanted to break in, to manage, to give them a shaking”]. Again, Sarraute’s feminine subject becomes invested in a social contract for which she plays a part; the fact that she is moving through “scenes” does not lessen her emotional investment in her performance. The other members of the household allow their breakfast to get cold, and it occurs to *Elle* that “qu’à ses yeux il n’y avait rien de plus méprisable, de plus bête, de plus haïssable, de plus laid, qu’il n’y avait pas de signe plus évident d’infériorité, de faiblesse, que de laisser refroidir, que de laisser attendre le déjeuner” (10) [“in her eyes there was nothing more contemptible, more stupid, more hateful, nothing uglier, there was no more obvious evidence of inferiority, of weakness, than to let breakfast get cold, than to come late for breakfast”]. *Elle* identifies those in dissent and evaluates them accordingly:

> Ceux qui étaient des initiés, les enfants, se précipitaient. Les autre, insouciants et négligents envers ces choses, ignorant leur puissance dans cette maison, répondaient poliment, d’un air tout naturel et doux: “Merci beaucoup, ne vous inquiétez pas, je prends très volontiers du café un peu froid.” Ceux-là, les étrangers, elle n’osait rien leur dire, et pour ce seul mot, pour cette petite phrase polie par laquelle ils la repoussaient doucement, négligemment, du revers de la main, sans même la considérer, sans s’arrêter un seul instant à elle, pour cela seulement elle se mettait à les haïr.” (10)
>
> [Those who were in on the secret, the children, came running. The others, who were carefree and negligent toward things, unaware of their power in the house, answered politely, in a perfectly natural, gentle manner: “Thank you very much, don’t worry, I quite like coffee that’s a little cold.” To these persons, these outsiders, she did not dare say anything, and because of this little polite sentence with which they rebuffed her gently, negligently, with a flick of the hand, without even

> taking her into consideration, without stopping to give her a moment's thought, for this alone she began to hate them.]

The invocation of difference which so often for the Sarrautean subject involves fear of repulsion (as differences are revealed) or of absorption (as differences are obliterated) becomes yet more complex for the feminine subject in this passage. For *Elle*, recognition of difference becomes linked to a jarring lack of validation and subsequent "othering"—the 'others" become "outsiders" as they refuse to participate in her perceived maintenance of power.

The indifference the "others" "negligently" reveal does not cause *Elle* to question her role in the family; in particular, she leaves unexamined the power differentials of family hierarchy and instead turns to those "Things! things!" to re-establish her sense of purpose:

> Les choses. Les objets. Les coups de sonnette. Les choses qu'il ne fallait pas négliger. Les gens qu'il ne fallait pas faire attendre. Elle s'en servait comme d'une meute de chiens qu'elle sifflait à chaque instant sur eux […] Même quand ils étaient cachés, enfermés dans leur chambre, elle les faisait bondir: "On vous appelle. Vous n'entendez donc pas? Le téléphone. La porte" […] Il fallait se précipiter, vite, vite, houspillé, bousculé, anxieux, tout laisser là et se précipiter, prêt à servir. (11)
>
> [Things. Objects. Bells that rang. Things that could not be neglected. People who could not be kept waiting. She used them like a pack of dogs that she turned on them at every instant […] Even when they were hidden, closed up in their rooms, she made them jump: "Somebody called you. Didn't you hear? The telephone. The door" […] We had to move quickly, quick, quick, berated, worn down, anxious, drop everything and rush forward, ready to serve.]

The "*Vous*" in the direct speech, already requiring more participation on the part of the reader, becomes a generalized "we." We all have to be ready to serve. *Elle's* hatred spurs her to plan for the outsiders "l'écrasement" ["a crushing defeat"]. However, given the incommensurate assessments of *Elle*'s "power," her own estimation of self-

importance juxtaposed with the indifference of *Ils* who refuse her breakfast, the reader becomes skeptical of the possibility of *Ils*' "crushing defeat." It becomes unclear whether the outsiders are the ones browbeaten with *Elle*'s demands or if "*Vous*" hiding in their rooms are the children who are "in on the secret."

Sarraute has said in interviews that her subjects all desire contact and are "looking for a whole" (qtd. in Brée 101). For *Elle*, that "whole" is a story she tells herself, a story made up of received ideas about her function within her family. Nonetheless, she reacts violently to the violation of expectations that occurs when that function is revealed to be, at least in part, a fiction as the others "negligently," and, worse, "politely" refuse the coffee she has prepared. *Elle* perceives that the outsiders have deviated from the script of their family dance and thus constitute a threat. Her reactions become even more violent (she hates them, wants to hurt them and shake them after that "one little statement") as she attempts to re-establish what she believes to be the family hierarchy within the household. Like the tearoom women and Forster's Turton women, *Elle* has come to believe the household is her "domain" and "belongs" to her. The "talk, talk, talk, talk," is necessary to maintain that fiction.

Here, Jeremy Bump's evaluation of the explanatory potential of the "family dance" within narrative is helpful. In his analysis of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Bump supports the argument of recent critics who question the usefulness of the "family romance" for literary analysis. The family romance is defined by Janet Beizer as "the attempt to rewrite origins, to replace the unsatisfactory fragments of a totalizing fiction that recuperates loss and fulfills desire" (qtd. in Bump 152). Bump argues that this fantasy—which along with the Oedipus complex is considered by many critics to be the

"basis of all storytelling"—has been criticized by, for example, many African American scholars who perceive:

> An unmistakable cultural bias toward Freudian principle—implicit in which is the notion of family structure already in place, and a notion of origin as ultimately knowable. However, the modern European definition of family plots has little relevance to a people displaced from their homeland, denied claims to origin, separated from one another, forbidden their language, and refused a part in the dominant discursive economy. (153) [20]

With an argument similar to feminists' critiques of Freudian analysis, Bump contends that the notion of a family dance accounts for more than the singular event or individual subject (mother, father, child). With its focus on intersubjectivity, argues Bump, the concept of the family dance provides a better understanding of emotional systems within literature as well within "social narratives," narratives such as those repeated by the Sarrautean subject(s) (20).

The family dance is predicated upon subsystems (spouse-spouse, parent-child, sibling-sibling) according to their relative dominance or parity (Knapp 13-15). The coping mechanisms developed as conflicts arise within families are "partly dictated by the specific culture in which they belong" and are marked by their collections of stories (Ariel 9), their "talk, talk, talk." In Sarraute's work, these stories, or family myths, are repeated to subject(s) and to the reader in direct speech and confronted by the subject(s) in sous-conversation. Sarraute's focus on "training" children—to shop for the perfect grey suit, to respond to "White Sales," to be "in on the secret"—emphasizes what Knapp considers to be the "critical influence" of transgenerational forces in maintaining family hierarchies (20). In *Tropismes*, Sarraute portrays social constructions of "real women" as one such family myth.

[20] See Heller's "Reconstructing Kin," -118 and McDowell's "Reading Family Matters."

In "Tropisme VI," Sarraute foregrounds the function of family as the matrix of identity. Because, as Jefferson puts it, passivity and violence are "related manifestations of the indistinction that the subject encounters in his dealings with others" (50), shifts in the Sarrautean subject's family dynamics frequently result in the expectation of violence. In the next passage, the subject's sous-conversation reveals her burgeoning realization that her sense of another subject (husband, father, lover?) as all-powerful is actually part of a cultivated family myth. In this passage, *Elle* is hosting a social gathering. In sous-conversation, she confronts her fear of *Il* and worries that she or the guests will say too much, interrupt him, anger him with "inferior" understanding, or challenge his intellectual authority:

> Pas devant lui surtout, pas devant lui, plus tard, quand il ne serait pas là, mais pas maintenant. Ce serait trop dangereux, trop indécent de parler de cela devant lui.
>
> Elle se tenait aux aguets, s'interposait pour qu'il n'entendît pas, parlait elle-même, sans cesse, cherchait à le distraire: "La crise … et ce chômage qui va en augmentant. Bien sûr, cela lui paraissait clair, à lui qui connaissait si bien ces choses.… Mais elle ne savait pas.… On lui avait raconté pourtant.… Mais il avait raison, quand on réfléchissait, tout devenait si évident, si simple" […] Tout allait bien. Il paraissait content. (11)

> [Especially not in front of him, not in front of him, later, when he will not be there, but not now. It would be dangerous, too indecent to talk about that in front of him.
>
> She was on the lookout, intervened so he would not hear, talked all the time, without stopping, tried to distract him: "The depression … and this increasing unemployment. Of course, to him that was clear, he being so conversant with these things.… But she did not know.… Somebody told her though.… But he was right, when we think about it, everything was so obvious, so simple" […] Everything was going well. He seemed pleased.]

Violence is often the result of the violation of expectation in the family dance, tropistic movements when differences are "found out" or denied. *Elle* fears being obliterated by *Il* when her difference—her inferiority—might unleash his anger. She begins to panic as a

guest makes the mistake of asking whether or not she had seen a recent Van Gogh exhibition. *Elle* then begins to fear for the guests as they assume she is qualified to delve into discussions of art. However, the reader is told that the visitors have a different sense of the encounter:

> Assez, assez maintenant, il fallait s'arrêter, ces gens ne sentaient donc rien, ils ne voyaient donc pas qu'il serait là, qu'il écoutait. Elle avait peur.… Mais ils ne s'en préoccupaient pas, ils continuaient.
>
> Eh bien, puisqu'ils y tenaient, puisqu'elle ne pouvait pas les retenir—qu'ils les laissant donc entrer. Tant pis pour eux, qu'ils entrent pour un instant, Van Gogh, Utrillo ou un autre. (12)

> [Enough, enough now, this would have to stop, did these people sense nothing, after all, hadn't they seen he was there, that he was listening to them? She was afraid…. But they took no notice of this, they kept on.
>
> Oh well, since they insisted, since she was unable to hold them back—they should be allowed to come in. So much the worse for them, let them come in for a moment. Van Gogh, Utrillo, or any other.]

In this passage as in those already discussed, a functional family dynamic—defined by Bump as one marked by successful individuation, love with detachment, flexible and clearly-demarcated boundaries —is absent (155).

The fear and anxiety associated with domestic domination, according to Knapp, lead family members "to create a pseudo-self whose inner feelings and outer feelings are incongruent" (16). Such is the case for *Elle* who then experiences a glimmer of recognition of the uniqueness of her psychological experience. *Il* is asked whether he has heard the story of Van Gogh's ear:

> Ah! Elle le lui donnait en mille, il ne devinerait jamais ce que Van Gogh pouvait tenir dans ce papier. Il tenait dans ce papier … son oreille coupée! "L'homme á l'oreille coupée!", bien sûr, il connaissait cela? On voyait cela partout maintenant. Et voila. C'était tout. Il n'était pas fâché? Il n'allait pas se lever, la repousser brutalement, marcher sur eux, le regard fuyant, honteux, la lèvre mauvaise, hideusement retroussée?
>
> Non, non, elle avait tort de s'inquiéter. Il comprenait très bien. Il était indulgent, amusé. (12)

> [Ah! She gave him a thousand guesses, but he would never guess what Van Gogh was holding in that paper. He was holding in that paper … his severed ear! "Man with Severed Ear!" He knew that? We saw it everywhere now. And so. That was that. He wasn't angry? He was not going to get up, brutally push her rise back, walk toward them with a devious, shamefaced look, his lip twisted in a mean, hideous grimace?
>
> No, no, she was wrong to be worried. He understood very well. He was indulgent, amused.]

Elle acts out the drama in which Sarraute's subjects are compelled to participate as differences are asserted or denied, representing for Bump familial differentiation and integration. *Elle* fears that her seeming inability to contribute to the discussion on art will reveal her as different and thus will result in the more powerful *Il*'s wrath, but she discovers both that those outside the family do not fall under *Il*'s power and that *Il* actually finds pleasure in her difference; *Il* expresses "un sentiment placide de certitude, de douce sécurité, de contentement" (12) [a peaceful feeling of certainty, of calm security, of contentment]. *Elle*, who at some point had been taught to expect a more violent reaction, was now merely playing a role for *Il*. This incongruence of the Sarrautean subject's *drames intérieurs* and outer expressions of emotions results in the emphasis on performance in *Tropismes.*

Sarraute continues to explore the myth of women as intellectually inferior in "Tropisme XV." Sarraute, whose father believed that girls "had something in their brains that reduced their intelligence" (qtd. In Jefferson 98), reveals the violence associated with engendering that particular family myth. *Elle* listens admiringly to the old gentleman who comes to family dinners. He then speaks to her alone and mockingly mines her knowledge of literature:

> Il l'avait agrippée et la tenait tout entière dans son poing. Il la regardait qui gigotait un peu, qui se débattait maladroitement en agitant en l'air ses petits pieds, d'une manière puérile, et qui souriait toujours, aimablement: "Mais oui, je crois que c'est bien ainsi. Oui. Vous prononcez bien. En

effet, le t-h … Tha … Thackeray.… Oui, c'est cela. Mais certainement, je connais *Vanity Fair*. Mais oui, c'est bien de lui?"

Il la tournait un peu pour mieux la voir: " *Vanity Fair? Vanity Fair*? Ah, oui, vous en êtes sûre? *Vanity Fair*? C'est de lui? " (22)

[He had grabbed her and was holding her entirely in his fist. He watched her as she flung about a bit, as she struggled awkwardly, childishly kicking her feet in the air, while maintaining a pleasant smile: "Why yes, I think it's like that. Yes. You pronounce well. Indeed, the t-h … Tha ….Thackeray.… Yes, that's it. But certainly I know *Vanity Fair*. Oh yes, it is by him.]

He turned her round a little, to better see her: *"Vanity Fair? Vanity Fair?* Ah! Yes, you're sure of that? *Vanity Fair?* It's by him?]

While the feminine subject in "Tropisme VI" fears challenging *Il* by participating in an intellectual discussion about art, the girl struggling to properly pronounce "Thackeray" is in the process of learning that she should not trust the old man's interest. The language of sexual violence continues as does the questioning:

Il n'y avait pas moyen de s'échapper. Pas moyen de l'arrêter. Elle qui avait tant lu … qui avait réfléchi à tant de choses.… Il pouvait être si charmant…. Mais il était dans un de ses mauvais jours, dans une de ses humeurs bizarres. Il allait continuer, sans pitié, sans répit: "Dover, Dover, Dover? Hein? Hein? Thackeray? Hein? Thackeray? L'Angleterre? Dickens? Shakespeare? Hein? Hein? Dover? Shakespeare? Dover?" tandis qu'elle chercherait à se dégager doucement, sans oser faire des mouvements brusques qui pourraient lui déplaire, et répondrait respectueusement d'une petite voix tout juste un peu violée: "Oui, Dover, c'est bien cela. Vous avez dû souvent faire ce voyage?… Je crois que c'est plus commode par Douvres. Oui, c'est cela … Dover." (22)

Seulement quand il verrait arriver ses parents, il reviendrait à lui, il desserrerait son poing et, un peu rouge, un peu ébouriffée, sa jolie robe un peu froissée, elle oserait enfin, sans craindre de le mécontenter, s'échapper. (22)

[There was no way to escape. No way to stop. She who had read so widely … who had thought about so many things.… He could be so charming.… But it was one of his bad days. He would keep on, without pity, without respite; "Dover, Dover, Dover? Eh? Eh? Dover? Thackeray? England? Dickens? Shakespeare? Eh? Eh?" while trying to free herself gently, without daring to make any sudden moves that might displease him, and answer respectfully in a faint voice that was a bit husky: "Yes, Dover, that's it. You must have traveled that way often.… I think it's more convenient by Dover. Yes, that's it … Dover."

> Not until he saw her parents arrive, would he pull himself together, would relax his grip, and a bit red, a bit disheveled, her pretty dress a bit mussed, she would finally dare to displease him, escape.]

He is charming, she has been taught; old gentlemen like him you can always talk to because they knew so many things and have met so many interesting people, she had always been told. His hand had once been kissed by an Empress, she knew. With her emphasis on intersubjectivity rather than individual or idiosyncratic experience, Sarraute presents a feminine subject who engages the often contradictory and unstable family myths that in large part construct the identity of the Sarrautean subject. Yet, lest we read these passages as evidence of Sarraute's status as a "rebel against patriarchy," it is important to recognize that—while the "scenery" of the received stories Sarraute's subjects tell themselves (tell us, accuse us of telling) may vary—the intersubjective processes which govern them unfailingly remains the same. Whether the weapons are "things" or "Thackeray," Sarraute's subjects are consistently threatened.

All in *Tropismes* (whether *Elle, Il, Ils*, or *Vous*) are "condemned in their dealings with each other to an alternation between indistinction and rebuff, contact and exclusion" (Jefferson 59). To what extent Sarraute's, Morrison's, or any other author's textual "mimicry of chaos and severe communication deviance" can help "prevent the reader from escaping and denying the reality of life in such a family" is debatable.[21] Yet Sarraute's blurred boundaries, shifting referents, and lack of traditional characterization do indeed work to defamiliarize these myths as subjects confront such stories at the level of the tropism. *Tropismes* does "have something to say" about the feminine subject. Resolutely and repeatedly, Sarraute insists that her sex has nothing to do with *how* she writes—even as she acknowledges in interviews that she is "thrilled when a young male

[21] See Bump 163.

reader tells her he identifies with an old aunt's obsession with doorknobs" (Hewitt 36) and that she is delighted when a working-class man recognizes his aunt in one of Sarraute's *haute bourgeoisie* characters. Writing at a time when "Cherchez la femme" and "Vive la différence" were becoming rallying cries, Sarraute already recognized the potential of such proclamations to be reclaimed for conservative purposes.[22] *Tropismes*' gendered myths—with their potential for exclusion, confusion, and violence—become interchangeable with other received stories experienced by *Il, Ils, On, Nous*, *Vous* … until Sarraute's readers are able to take all that "talk, talk, talk," and "roulant sans cesse entre leurs doigts cette matière ingrate et pauvre qu'elles avaient extraite … jusqu'a ce qu'elle ne forme plus entre leurs doigts qu'un petit tas, une petite boulette grise" ["continually roll between their fingers this unsatisfactory, meager substance … until it ceases to form anything between their fingers but a little pile, a little grey pellet"] (16). As Sarraute reminded us long before girls of the third wave warned that embracing a feminine essence or a feminine style is counterproductive, to engage these received stories with an acknowledgement of the appeal of sameness and the threat of difference is to rewrite them—"This is already a liberated state of mind."

[22] See Marks, p. 836. Also, for an excellent analysis of aims and conflicts of intergenerational feminisms, see Jennifer Purvis' "Grrrls and Women Together in the Third Wave: Embracing the Challenges of Intergenerational Feminism(s).

Looking Glass Places in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

SLEEP IT OFF LADY
the night nurse is here,
dressed in rain forest colors,
used stars in her hair.
Drink this final dark potion
and straighten your night-dress,
wear your transparent slippers
you must look your best.
For you just might go dancing
atop hard-headed trees
With a man who is virile
And anxious to please.

Sleep now Miss Rhys.
—Lorna Goodison, "Lullaby for Jean Rhys"

Reading "the Feminine" in Jean Rhys's Creole Subject

In "A Jean Rhys Lady," Caribbean poet Lorna Goodison evokes images of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* protagonist, Antoinette, who in Goodison's poem laughs "eerie drunken notes" with "Claws clutching/ twisted mouth sucking/ at promises in luminal/ liquid sleep" (30). Goodison compares the violent dreams which precede Antoinette's rebellious act of setting fire to Thornfield Hall with those of Jean Rhys, the writer whose "fanning flames/ in her head" result in her retelling of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[1] Goodison's second and more well-known poem about Jean Rhys, "Lullaby," contains little of the violent imagery of the first, though both poems—like Olive Senior's "Meditation in Red" and Derek Walcott's "Jean Rhys"—incorporate events from Rhys's life that underscore what recent critics consider to be Rhys's "fragile" identity position as

[1] Readers of *Wide Sargasso Sea* discover that Rochester renames Antoinette "Bertha" after convincing himself that Antoinette is insane, promiscuous, and dangerous just as her infamous mother Annette is rumored to be. Unless otherwise noted, I use the name "Bertha" to refer to the West Indian character in *Jane Eyre* and "Antoinette" to refer to the female protagonist in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

"white Indian" (Donette A. Francis 4). In an interview with Frank Birbalsingh,[2] Goodison was asked to explain this change from "A Jean Rhys Lady" to her later "Lullaby for Jean Rhys":

> Obviously you consider Jean Rhys important, or you feel strongly about her. But in the first poem ["A Jean Rhys Lady"] the images of claws, flames, drunkenness, representing violent or destructive features are in sharp contrast to the second poem, a lullaby about sleep.

In answer, the poet reveals what motivated her to write "Lullaby":

> "Lullaby' was just before Jean Rhys's death. It's the same kind of thing that would make me do the "Jamaica 1980" poem. It's about a dreamer's attempt to make something right in a world over which I have no control. (155)

Goodison's response, with its reference to the 1980 killing of 800 Jamaicans in that year's election, directly addresses a key point of debate among feminist scholars of *Wide Sargasso Sea*—the possibility of the text's subversive voice, what Goodison considers the "most writers can do with their writing" (qtd. in Birbalsingh 155).

Goodison's "Lullaby" gets its all-capitalized opening line from Jean Rhys's "Sleep it Off Lady," the title story of Rhys's 1976 collection. A fictionalized version of a draft first written as autobiography, "Sleep it Off Lady" is the tale of Mrs. Verney. Like Rhys when writing the story, Mrs. Verney is elderly and in poor health. Terrified of death, which she envisions as a Super Rat hiding in a nearby dilapidated shed, Mrs. Verney compulsively cleans house and ritually deposits the debris by the outbuilding in an effort ward off Super Rat. When one day, paralyzed from a stroke, she collapses and falls against the "hateful shed," her only hope of salvation is the "cynical-eyed" twelve-year-old neighbor girl who refuses to get help:

[2] For additional commentary on this noteworthy interview see Thorunn Lunsdale's "Literary Allusion in the Fiction of Jean Rhys."

> "It's no good my asking mum. She doesn't like you and she doesn't want to have anything to do with you. She hates stuck up people. Everybody knows that you shut yourself up to get drunk. People can hear you falling about. 'She ought to take more water with it,' my mum says. Sleep it off lady," said this horrible child, skipping away. (385)

By first addressing the object of her poem with the line "SLEEP IT OFF LADY," Goodison simultaneously aligns herself with the "horrible child" who spent much of her time studying the old woman with "cynical" and accusatory eyes *and* with the author Jean Rhys, who wrote her own "Sleep it Off Lady" and with whom Goodison identifies as a fellow dreamer attempting "to make something right in the world" over which she "has no control." While "Lullaby" is part tribute, the poem's references to "look[ing] your best," "transparent" Cinderella slippers, and dark potions—and especially its image of Jean Rhys taking up Antoinette/Bertha's role by reenacting the character's surrealistic suicide—point to the widely reported difficulties with men and with alcohol that Rhys encountered in her lifetime (62). The poem links what Mary Lou Emery calls Antoinette's "uniquely female vulnerability" and "feminine defense of beauty" (15)—a defense, it should be noted, that Rhys clearly recognizes as futile given Antoinette's end—with Rhys's much noted "obsession" with her appearance, an obsession seen as charming but tragic to those creating a cult of personality around the author who was rediscovered in her seventies with *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s publication.[3] The "lack of control" experienced by Antoinette is revealed as inseparable from that experienced by Jean Rhys. The poem's images, then, bring into question the significance of the novel's

[3] In her extensive Rhys biography, for example, Carole Angier writes of the blitz of photographs taken of Rhys to publicize *Wide Sargasso Sea* and subsequent re-issues of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*: "Unconsciously and unerringly—just when she'd written ['Petronella'] twenty, thirty and more years before—Jean had struck straight to the heart of her fear: that however much she tried to make herself look like a chocolate box of beauty, the 'rotten, sneering bitch' would come through. She liked only one of Ander Gunn's photos: the last one, which 'has a bit of defiance and "in spite of all" about it.' This is her plucky side, the gallant, disaster-defying side that also lifts her writing. She wanted the photographs to hide her ugliness: but also to hide her despair. She couldn't be brave, but at least she could look it." (583).

much-debated ending. Read together, Goodison's "A Jean Rhys Lady" and "Lullaby for Jean Rhys" can be seen as emblematic of the mixture of resentment and admiration often found in the feminist criticism of Rhys's writing, criticism in which the tendency has been to fuse Jean Rhys with her heroines.

Wide Sargasso Sea's Antoinette is often read as Jean Rhys's autobiographical double, and, thus,—despite Rhys's well-documented desire to provide a radical revision of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*—Rhys's most well-known novel has been considered less than subversive by many feminist critics. However, assessing the possibility of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s subversive voice requires a reevaluation of the character "Jean Rhys"—passive "feminine" victim with a child-like understanding of her Creole identity. Such a reevaluation brings to light both Rhys's keen critical understanding of Brontë's homeless Bertha and the complexity of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s characters who themselves strive to define "home" and "homeland" in their Caribbean setting.

Indeed, as also exemplified by Lorna Goodison's poem, we cannot read Brontë's Bertha the same way after discovering Antoinette. When Rhys rewrites the canonical *Jane Eyre*, she gives Bertha, Brontë's West Indian madwoman-in-the-attic, a story of her own. Rhys disrupts the imperialist narrative technique of literally renaming colonized peoples and landscapes in an effort to control discursively the potential danger of unfamiliar territories and resistant natives by giving Bertha a name—Antoinette—and, thus, an origin.[4] Rochester, on the other hand, is not referred to by name in Rhys's version; his brutality and racism, obfuscated in Brontë's work, is brought into the open. Ultimately, though, Antoinette/Bertha ends up in the same attic.

[4] See Mary Louise Pratt's seminal *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Therefore, Rhys has been seen as doubly complicit even as her novel works to deconstruct the dichotomies of good woman/bad woman, English/Creole, and Jane/Bertha put forth by Brontë. Criticism of Rhys's work after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* would follow a pattern, similar to that of Forster's and Sarraute's, correlating with the ascendancy of feminism and postcolonial studies. As Veronica M. Gregg puts it, the "problems of placing Jean Rhys subtend problems of reading her writing" (3). In much the same way that Sarraute confounded feminist critics with her declarations that "any good writer is androgynous," Rhys's classification of herself as Creole, as "not even English," and as "white Indian" complicates how we read *Wide Sargasso Sea*.[5] How do Rhys's statements in her autobiography and in her interviews—that she was unwilling to be "a recruit" for the Negritude movement, that she "wasn't for women's lib," or that she changed the title of *Wide Sargasso Sea* from *Creole* because the term "Creole" had come to mean a Caribbean of "mixed race"—affect our assessment of her ability to produce a radical revision of *Jane Eyre*?[6]

Nicola Nixon points out that feminist critics who "created a satisfying bildungsroman out of *Jane Eyre*" seemed hesitant to celebrate its prequel because "ostensibly it is a tale of a victim, Antoinette Mason (nee Cosway), who, unlike Jane, is not rewarded by marriage but victimized by it" (275). While the "still hotly contested" debates of Gyatri Spivak, Benita Parry, Kamau Brathwaite, and Peter Hulme have moved the argument beyond an understanding of the novels' sexual politics as mere metaphor for racial politics or vice versa (Lunsdale 43), debate nonetheless still centers around

[5] See Plante 238-84.

[6] See respectively Gregg 2, Rhys's "Making Bricks without Straw" 36, and Raiskin 98.

Rhys's "fragile identity position," or the "terrified consciousnesses"[7] of her position as "white Creole" and West Indian exile. The issue has become, "Who are the 'real' victims in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?" Or considering Antoinette's end, "Who are the most victimized—'white Creole' Antoinette/Bertha (Jean Rhys?) or 'black natives' Chrisophine, Amélie, and Tia?" That, of course, depends upon whom you ask. Elaine Campbell, for example, praises Rhys for her "erasure of racial barriers with a resultant free flow between black and white identities" (47). Likewise, critics such as Parry, Elaine Campbell, and Lucy Wilson consider Rhys a West Indian writer who foregrounds African-Caribbean women and their cultural practices. On the other hand, Brathwaite, Spivak, Gregg, and Emery all find Rhys's representation of black West Indians problematic. These scholars contend that Rhys's descriptions of black and mulatto characters, as well as her emphasis on obeah practices and Afro-Caribbean oral tradition, amount to racialist usurpation. For Brathwaite, Rhys's "sociocultural background" makes impossible any productive understanding of black subjectivities on Rhys's part. He contends that the unity Antoinette envisions when her childhood friend Tia beckons Antoinette to jump at the novel's end is illusory. The ending reveals that Rhys fails to recognize the cultural and economic barriers making such a friendship unattainable (10). Gregg and Emery, like Spivak, read Rhys's interests as so aligned with those of the "white Creole" Antoinette that Rhys is unaware of the racialist, colonialist ideologies affecting the lives of women in positions similar to Christophine, Tia, and Amélie. Therefore, the black female characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are props for their author

[7] I am referring to Kenneth Ramchand's explication of Frantz Fanon's term and Ramchand's widely held conclusion that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an exploration of the contrast of Rhys's two worlds, European and West Indian. See Ramchand 223-236.

who writes "in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" 253).

In "Uncovered Stories: Politicizing Sexual Histories in Third Wave Caribbean Women's Writing," Donette A. Francis puts forth a similar argument that the depiction of Antoinette as "sexually ravenous white Creole woman" naturalizes the sexual violations faced by the women in the novel. For Francis, implications that Antoinette's mother is sexually assaulted by a black attendant resonates with the regulating colonialist stories of black men raping "white" women and presents the struggle for emancipation as "played out on the white woman's body since her body becomes the site where black masculine power is violently asserted" (65). Francis, too, sees the novel's ending as key. Tia's call for Antoinette to jump and come "home" is Rhys's "passionate plea for a place for white Creoles within a Caribbean nation-state." According to Francis, the place itself and the native women of Rhys's West Indies provide both catalyst and justification for Rochester's cruel actions:

> It is his tenure there, coupled with the sexually insatiable Caribbean women, that leads to his insanity, martial infidelity, and which in due course turns him into a callous husband capable of locking Antoinette in the attic. Inadvertently, Rhys's representation reifies the tropes of the sexually ravenous white Creole woman and the sexually alluring mulatto woman, and as a result, sexual violations against these female characters do not register as abuse but rather are attributable to their deserved punishment, sexual cunning, or debauchery. Therefore rather than layering the portrayal of Caribbean women's sexuality, *Wide Sargasso Sea* ultimately serves to strengthen hierarchies of race, gender, and color based on sexual stereotypes of women in the tropics. (65)

For these critics, Rhys's Christophine is the "black mammy," Amélie is the over-sexed mulatto, and Tia, the childhood friend who steals Antoinette's dress and her money, is the cheating "nigger." Rhys's supposedly static Afro-Caribbean characters are evidence of Rhys's privileging "white" Creole interests in the face of nascent nationalist movements.

Carrine Melkom Mardorossian aptly summarizes the "new polarization" of criticism stemming from Rhys's ambivalent textual politics:

> What has now become a subject of debate among Rhys critics, however, is whether Rhys herself meant to highlight the ways in which racist assumptions permeate her two main characters' perceptions of the black Creoles or whether these stereotypical notions are present in the text because the author herself—albeit unconsciously—adhered to them. (83)

Whether claiming for Rhys a "colonial sensibility" or a "sensibility" stemming from "national origins" which shaped her "Caribbean identity" (Tiffin 328, Rodriguez 109), critics continue to struggle with categorizing the politics of Rhys's "place feelings."[8] Thus, they continue to struggle with whether (and/or how) to claim Jean Rhys, the author whom Brathwaite in his *Wasafiri* debate with Peter Hulme has dubbed the "Helen" of our culture wars.

Such analyses rely on assumptions about the extent to which Jean Rhys can be considered "Caribbean." As Lunsdale notes while discussing the influence of Rhys on Caribbean writers, it would be a shame if the author whose *Wide Sargasso Sea* reclaims a Creole subject's silenced history were herself "abandoned by history because she is not deemed sufficiently 'Caribbean'" (43). While the tendency to argue in favor of one social context over another—gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class—has for the most part given way to examining how these subject positions are interconnected, Rhys's own ambivalent identity as Creole continues to serve as the "test case" for analyzing Rhys's portrayal of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s female characters and whether or to what extent Rhys

[8] Rodriguez likens "place feelings" to protonationalism though Rhys's affiliations with place, like her depictions of place, are highly ambiguous.

was aware of the "matrix of domination" experienced by women like Christophine or Amélie, or even by that supposed "avatar" of herself, Antoinette.[9] [10]

It is important to point out that Rhys, who identifies herself as Creole in her autobiography and letters, well understood what Benita Parry calls the "variousness" of the term (qtd. in Raiskin 98). In fact, Rhys explains in her notes that she changed the original tile *Creole* to *Wide Sargasso Sea* only after deciding that "Creole" had lost its association with the strictly "white Indian" class and had come instead to describe West Indians of "mixed" race (Raiskin 98). The term had also come to signify the common language of the Caribbean, West Indian culture, and even anyone born in the West Indies. The slippery definitions of Creole—resulting in large part from the sexual relations of Europeans, "white Creoles," and blacks as described in *Wide Sargasso Sea*—would later be embraced as part of *créolité*, a political and literary movement by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant who saw a need to "reach Caribbeanness" through an "unconditional acceptance of [their] creoleness" (qtd. in Murdoch 253). Though approaching the notion of Creole at a different angle, Rhys also saw a need to reclaim what it meant to be Creole. Despite her stated reasons for rejecting *Creole* for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys knew that as the daughter of a Welsh doctor and a Creole mother—her status as Creole meant that "purity" was not to be had for the taking. Born in 1890 in Dominica, Rhys moved to England in 1907 to attend the Perse School for Girls where her family was advised to help her "conquer" her Caribbean accent (qtd. in Angier 49). Along with other "white Indians," her position was both as educated elite who was thus able to perform a highly visible nationalist entrance into the metropolis *and* as

[9] See Patricia Hill Collins's, *Black Feminist Thought* 18.
[10] See Carr 98.

marginalized Creole defined as illegitimate—a tension she identifies in a 1959 letter to Francis Wyndham when she reveals, "As far as I know I am White—but I have no country now" (*Letters* 172). By this time, Rhys had already articulated her intent to re-present Brontë's Bertha. Rhys writes, "The Creole is the important one, the others explain her.… Take a look at *Jane Eyre*. The unfortunate death of a Creole! I'm fighting mad to write her story" (*Letters* 157). Rhys is "vexed at [Brontë's] portrait of the 'paper tiger' lunatic" in "all wrong Creole scenes" (262) and further explains her desire to rewrite *Jane Eyre's* "impossible monster":

> I've read and re-read *Jane Eyre*.… The Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure—repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry—off stage … [S]he must be onstage. She must at least be plausible with a past, the reason why Mr. Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the reason why he thinks she is mad and why of course she goes mad, even the reason why she tries to set everything on fire, and eventually succeeds. (*Letters* 156)

As Rhys points out, Brontë's construction of Bertha-as-Creole is a plot device, and the character has often been read by critics as victimized by both Jane and Brontë, as well as by Rochester. Rochester locks Bertha in the attic to go mad and Jane the protagonist regards Bertha as a travesty of the "normal" wife, while Brontë, it is argued, represents her as savagery and excess sexuality personified in order to define the "natural" English woman—and thus a woman suitable for marriage despite her class status—as Bertha's opposite.[11] Brontë's depiction of the "other" setting of the West Indies works to provide relational definitions, as well. It is a place where, Nixon argues, "the young English gentleman can sow his wild oats and gain economic independence through the exploitation of rich foreign heiresses; but it is equally a place from which he must depart

[11] See, for example, Nixon and Myer.

with a renewed respect for English custom and an experiential contempt for the savage colonial" (273).

Like second-wave Caribbean women poets adding an interrogation of women's identities to the metaphor of unearthing lost history as put forth by Aimé Césaire and Kamau Brathwaite,[12] Rhys connects socio-economics to the "hole" in Creole women's history:

> I believe and firmly too that there was more than one Antoinette. The West Indies … rich in those days for those days.… The girls [West Indian Creole women who married Englishmen] … would soon once in kind England be Address Unknown. So gossip. So a legend. If Charlotte Brontë took her horrible Bertha from this legend I have a right to take Antoinette. (qtd. in Gregg 83)

Given the fact that Rhys consciously sets out to explore Antoinette's "fragile" subjectivity—to explore the invisibility of Brontë's Creole woman, the connection between Antoinette's place and Antoinette being placed, the link between madness and lack of agency, and the processes of abstraction that take place for Rochester (and Brontë's readers) to justify Bertha's captivity—the either/or current debate in Rhys scholarship is particularly interesting. The question of whether or not Rhys "herself meant to highlight" empire-driven racism in her most famous novel *or* if she was "unconsciously" perpetuating that racism seems an odd one to ask considering the "in-betweeness" of Creole subjects as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha.[13] Rather, though one cannot expect that Rhys's place of birth, her childhood in Dominica, or her status as exile would allow her to transcend sociopolitics—it is equally important to read *Wide Sargasso Sea* without glossing over the author's conscious desire, as Goodison puts it, to make

[12] See Goodison's "Mother The Great Stones Got to Move," Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond*, and Ramabai Espinet's "Barred: Trinidad 1987."

[13] See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*.

something right in the world over which she has no control. An analysis of Rhys's representations of place in her rewrite of Brontë's "all-wrong Creole scenes" brings to light *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s complex interrogation of identity construction and reveals that Rhys cannot easily be aligned with either colonialist Rochester or Creole Antoinette.

Making Bricks without Straw: Placing the "Rhys Woman"

Reducing Rhys's aim to write back to the level of the unconscious is reductive and stems from a long-standing practice of conflating Jean Rhys with the "Rhys woman." To better understand the current debate, it is necessary to understand the background and development of this Rhys woman who, writes V.S. Naipaul, "knows sensuousness, a delight in the body, in clothes, in remembered tropical landscapes" and who is always a "victim," (56). This passive feminine subject, read by many to develop throughout Rhys's novels and culminate in Antoinette/Bertha, has also been seen as Rhys's autobiographical double and would eventually make up the "Rhys Lady"—the character of Jean Rhys herself—characterized as patriarch's (and imperialism's) victim—prostitute, alcoholic, mad woman. In his influential "An Inconvenient Novelist" (1950), Francis Wyndham portrays Rhys as a European writer whose Caribbean landscapes are imagined cartographies, and he concludes that the female characters in Rhys's novels are actually versions of the same woman written at different stages of Rhys's career. Following Wyndham's theory of the Rhys heroine, critics and biographers began to conflate Rhys and her heroines (Antoinette, in particular) in a "psychobiography" so resolutely as to "border on cruelty" (Gregg 3) These critics freely and authoritatively

speculate that Rhys chose to get drunk rather than attend to her dying infant son, that she enjoyed the "game" of trading sex for money from men, and that her skillful writing could be attributed to instinct since, in Thomas Staley's words, her writing "developed out of an intensely private world—a world whose sources of inspiration were neither literary nor intellectual" (36). Yet, the emerging picture of Rhys as naïve, uneducated, and passive woman required critics to find an explanation for the power and political insights of her work, especially after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Like Sarraute's tropistic poetry, Rhys' works have been viewed as empowering and revolutionary as they were complicit. *Wide Sargasso Sea,* in particular, has been considered alternately to redefine modernism, offer feminine resistance, and throw light on the fiction of England's superiority over its colonies—even as Rhys has been deemed unaware of such subversion.

By the time *Wide Sargasso Sea* garnered Rhys her late-in-life success, the composite heroine theory gaining ground since Wyndham had crystallized into the "Rhys woman" or "Rhys heroine" and compelled critics such as Elgin W. Mellown to attempt explaining the discrepancies between Jean Rhys, author of the "tour de force" *Wide Sargasso Sea* (103), and the otherwise interchangeable Rhys woman who has "no particular talents" and "drift[s] along the edges of artsy-bourgeois" (Bamber 93). In "Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys," written the year after *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s publication, Mellown commends Rhys for her "perfect correlation between technique and content" (116). Nonetheless, he finds fault with her first novels because "her point of view is so patently that of the main female character and so biased in her favor that the abrupt shifts into the thoughts of another character—often the one against

whom the heroine's reacting—destroy the continuity of the narrative and weaken its psychological reality" (111). Mellown downplays Rhys's understanding of her material and sees as feminine "bias" Rhys's innovative, disruptive *sous-conversation*. He writes that "Rhys seems only gradually to have learned which of her own experiences properly belonged to the character whom she was to sketch over and over in her novels" (106). Attributing many of her writing techniques as "probably picked up from [Ford Maddox] Ford," (111), Mellown indicates that she did not always know when or how to use these techniques "in the Ford manner." Mellown also offers his understanding of the development of the Jean Rhys woman:

> In his *New York Times* review of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Walter Allen pointed out that Charlotte Brontë's Mrs. Rochester summed up the nature of the heroine who appears under various names throughout Jean Rhys's fiction…." Remembering the early novels not quite accurately, he continued, "she is a young woman, generally Creole in origin and artistic in leanings, who is hopelessly and helplessly at sea in her relations to men, a passive victim, doomed to destruction." The woman upon whom Rhys centers her attention is indeed always a victim. Stella Bowen saw this quality in the novelist herself and described her as being "cast for the role … of the poor, brave, desperate beggar doomed to be let down by the bourgeoisie." There is never an escape for the Rhys heroine: happiness is always followed by sadness, and her last state is always her worse than her first." (106)

While Mellown comments on Allen's inaccuracies regarding the early novels, his main point of contention is that the "figure of the degraded woman is not static, but develops from novel to novel." Each character is "woman" in an archetypal role. Still, the Rhys woman is least dynamic in her relations with men:

> Instinctively knowing that her man will desert her, the woman increasingly debases herself in a desperate attempt to hold on to him, the inevitable result being that her abandoned position increases his revulsion. The Rhys woman may be a mistress in name, but in fact she is always a victim of love because she is at the mercy of her controllable desires. (106)

Mellown does not comment on the fact that Allen uses as the basis of his definition of the Rhys woman not Rhys's representation of Creole cultural identity but Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Creole as animalistic and repulsive, a depiction of a Creole who "shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry" in what Rhys considers Brontë's "all-wrong Creole scenes." Though Mellown attempts to qualify Bowen and Allen's generalizations, he, too, elides any question of difference between Brontë's and Rhys's Creole subjects, discounts the fact that Rhys was "fighting mad" to challenge and counter Brontë's Bertha, and effectively puts Bertha/Antoinette/Jean Rhys back in Brontë's attic.

The fact that Mellown's article was republished in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys* more than twenty years after the article was written attests to the influence and persistence of theories of the Rhys woman. Also telling is his *Critical Perspectives* "Author's Note," in which Mellown makes apologies for the original publication's erroneous biographical information—incorrect dates and name misspellings—and notes without further comment that "since that time more accurate information has become available" (103). In fact, as Veronica M. Gregg contends in *Historical Imaginations*, Wyndam's composite heroine theory—cemented by the Rhys woman scholars posited after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*—has been "the single most influential approach to Rhys's texts" (3). Even in 1970's pop culture, Jean Rhys had become the Jean Rhys woman. By this time the near-mythical Jean Rhys once thought to be dead was drawing fans and interviewers to her tiny English cottage. In her 1972 "Interview with Jean Rhys," *Mademoiselle* reporter Mary Cantwell reveals that she is a "cult" fan of Rhys's novels (171). Cantwell goes on to recount that meeting Rhys "was to be simultaneously introduced to Sasha, Julia, Mayra, Anna, even Mrs. Rochester" (206).

Missing what I believe might be the irony in Rhys's responses, Cantwell asks questions about women's economic conditions and sums up Rhys's sense of political protest: "Jean Rhys women think a lot about their clothes. A fur coat, a nice black dress may change their lives. You're okay, the world says you're okay, if you've got a fur coat and a nice black dress. Who can touch you when you're armored in good clothes?" (206)[14] Cantwell consistently compares "Rhys's women" to Rhys and portrays the author as naive and child-like. When a discussion between Cantwell and Rhys's daughter about the "inflation that has replaced Vietnam and sex in the great American dialogue" elicits "Stop, please!" from Rhys, Cantwell concludes, "We had frightened her" (208).

Like Staley and Mellown, feminist critic Linda Bamber draws on the Rhys woman, and she argues that "Rhys's novels, all of them autobiographical, have one subject: the victimization and self-victimization of a woman." In "Jean Rhys" (*Partisan Review* 1982), Bamber interweaves quotes from Rhys's fictional characters without explanation:

> Notably absent from Rhys's account of her heroine is any analysis of her plight in political terms. The Rhys heroine is a natural victim, not a victim of sexual politics or class oppression. As an exile of obscure origins she is more or less classless; and although she certainly feels brutalized by men, she insists that "she is more afraid of women." The problem is extremely general: "People are beasts, such mean beasts," says the heroine of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. Elsewhere the formula is simply "life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people." The social analysis of Rhys's work stops with the assertion that there are outsiders and there are insiders, and that the one is entitled to resent the other. (93-94)

Bamber cites Sasha's comments from *Good Morning, Midnight* and seamlessly applies them to Julia from *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and then Marya from *Quartet*. The passivity on the part of this Rhys heroine is then linked to Rhys's depictions of place:

[14] Cantwell also writes, "Jean Rhys's women never have a cent. They live on their looks and a certain charm, trade them for the pounds and francs they promptly blow on clothes and liquor" (206).

> Another notable absence in Rhys's work is sense of place. We are told that we are in Paris rather than London, or vice versa, but it seems to make little difference. The outside world has withdrawn from the Rhys heroine. As long as there is a room, a street, or a restaurant for her to occupy, she doesn't bother much about the details. That is, *of course*, Rhys herself, in sympathy with her heroine's depression, makes no effort to find correspondences between the inner and outer life. [my italics] (94)

The "of course" is telling. Bamber uses the elision of Jean Rhys's politics and those of the Rhys woman as grounds to support her argument that Rhys's work is far from subversive. Instead, choosing "cads and gigolos," the Rhys heroine is the cause of her own unhappiness (93). In her study of West Indian intellectuals, Helen Carr explores this response to the treatment of female sexuality in Rhys's works. Despite the more liberal outlook on sexuality in the 1960's, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* publication and the resultant renewed interest in Jean Rhys "predated the reaction against the 1960's simultaneous hyper-sexualization and infantilization of women" and "Rhys's own reliance as a young woman on her sexual attractiveness—in this she was undoubtedly like her heroines—as chorus girl, artist's model, mannequin, and mistress necessarily meant that she could not be considered as a thinker" (98). Carr concludes the "sordid" nature of Rhys's writing, scandalous in the 1920s and 30s but acceptable in the 1960s, nevertheless negatively affected her status as intellectual. For feminist critics like Bamber, the Rhys heroine's interiority and her reliance on men, her "sexual desperation," define her lack of political purpose.

Early feminist readings of the novel portrayed the Rhys woman as falling willingly into the trap of a patriarchal tradition, and biographers of the 1990s like Carole Angier marveled at how modern *Wide Sargasso Sea* is given that that Rhys "knew so little, and wrote only about herself" (218). Even those critics more attentive to how Rhys has been seen a "unable to live up to collective stereotypes" because of her

"'problematic' class and gender affiliations," rely on the Rhys woman. In *Ethnic Modernisms* (2002), for example, Delia Caparosa Konzett—while arguing for an approach to *Wide Sargasso Sea* that does "justice" the novel's concurrent presence of modernist, postcolonial, and feminist concerns with mass culture—relies on an understanding of the "Rhys woman, and her serialized isolation and disconnection from her surroundings" as a basis of that argument (133). While critics such as Bamber and Konzett aptly make the connection between Rhys's emphasis on place as intricately connected with the identities of her female characters, the notions that these characters are mere transcriptions of her experiences—that "of course" Rhys herself is "in sympathy with her heroine's depression"—downplays Rhys's clearly oppositional aims in rewriting Brontë's "'paper tiger' lunatic."

Despite the long-standing myth of Rhys as having an "amazing" instinctive rather than thoughtful understanding of Caribbean and English sociopolitics, Rhys well understood that just as Brontë created "her Creole," critics and interviewers were creating their own Creole—the Rhys woman. Her analysis of this process is the topic of her witty "Making Bricks without Straw":

> The question and answer game goes on. I realize I am being gently pushed into my predestined role, the role of victim. I have never had any good times, never laughed, never got my own back, never dared, never worn pretty clothes, never been happy, never known wild hopes or wilder despairs. In short, I have never been young or if I was I've forgotten all about it. Waiting, I have gone from tyrant to tyrant: each letdown worse than the last. All this, of course, leads to Women's Lib. (22)

Rhys goes on to explain what leads up to a published article that the reader of the corrective "Making Bricks without Straw" might already have read, and she satirizes the type of feminist take on her life and work that Bamber and Cantwell elaborate:

> It's all so different now," she says (this one's a woman).

> "Don't you think it still depends a bit on the individual? But I suppose it's all different now," I add and suggest a drink….
> I empty my glass, pour another, and this is where I begin to talk wildly, the real reason for the inaccuracies about me.
> "I don't like suffragettes much," I say.
> "Don't you?" she says, shocked.
> "Not much, when you posted a letter you never knew when it would get there. They used to set fire to post boxes, things like that. Such a nuisance."
> Silence.
> "You know the one who threw herself in front of the horse?" I say. "Well, I felt so sorry for the horse."
> "But the woman was a martyr," the interviewer said.
> "Perhaps she wanted to be a martyr, but the horse didn't. He had to be shot." (35)

Her depiction of the interview is full of premonitions, and she includes in her story what is ostensibly the published account of the interview. According to Rhys, the journalist wrote, "Miss Rhys was very old and frail, has been living alone in a small remote bungalow for years and years, she says. She insists that she is not brave, but faithful and rather coyly refuses to explain what she means by that!" (36). "Making Bricks without Straw," like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, offers what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls the subversion and the pleasure of the "twice-told tale." Rhys attempts to settle the score. Much the same way she undermines the inevitability of Brontë's ending, Rhys also undermines the construction of Jean Rhys as one of her characters—and even asserts defiantly at the end that "[f]or the most part I don't turn a hair" (37). Instead, she writes back.

"Alien" Landscapes, "Alien" Women

Rhys clearly sets out to put Bertha "onstage." *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only a prequel but also a reading of Brontë's text, a reading/revision of *Jane Eyre* which brings to light, as Said puts it, "what is silent or marginally present" (66) and which offers an analysis of Brontë's imagined cartography of the West Indies which defines England, or "home," as center and reduces Creole women to passing references and plot devices. In order to challenge the portrait of *Jane Eyre*'s West Indian woman and, more importantly, to interrogate the "how" and "why" of Brontë's Bertha, Jean Rhys interrogates the politics of place. Separating Antoinette, the supposed late-stage Rhys woman (though *Wide Sargasso Sea* was being written as early as 1945), from Jean Rhys allows for a reading of place which reveals Rhys's keen understanding of the connection between naming/managing/owning a place and the displacement of women like Antoinette to English "addressees unknown."

Rhys writes in her letters, "I have a very great and deep admiration for the Brontë sisters. How can I of all people say [Charlotte Brontë] was wrong? Or that her Bertha was impossible? Which she is" (272). To put Bertha onstage, Rhys has to give her a story, a "place-to-be-from."[15] The insufficient, "impossible" back-story provided by Brontë, however, reveals much about place and the circulation of colonialist images of "other" lands against which "Englishness" was defined. Just as Jane Austen's passing references to the Bertram's Antiguan estates function as more than mere allusions—a fact most likely obvious to an Antiguan reader of *Mansfield Park*—the placelessness of Brontë's Bertha that left Dominican-born Jean Rhys fighting mad does not indicate a

[15] See Lee 143-58.

remoteness from imperial concerns. Rather, the character's placelessness indicates a certain taken-for-grantedness of imperial involvement and the idea that "with Britain at the helm all was right with the world," (Boehmer 24). But imperial involvement can never be too taken-for-granted if it is to maintain its peripheries. Indeed, novelists like Brontë were adding to the imaginative cartography offered up by earlier interpreters of the colonies (who had already worked to establish the European as authoritative observer) by defining England, or "home," as center. According to Edward Said in his discussion of Jane Austen, novelistic reductions of the real horrors of the plantation colonies to passing references and plot devices strengthen the authority of the metropolis "which gets its authority to a considerable extent by the devaluation as well as the exploitation of the outlying colonial possessions." (59). But, as Rhys was well aware, *Jane Eyre* provides a picture of Bertha that ultimately cannot contain its identifications with the sufferings of Brontë's "savage" woman or of the slaves with which Bertha is associated. In the context of post-emancipation England, at a time when the British West Indian colonies were rapidly failing, Bertha is linked to the West Indian slave population throughout *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is consistently described by Brontë as "dark" and "swarthy," her family wants her to marry Rochester because he is "of a good race," and, perhaps most significantly, her rebellious fire-starting links her to the Jamaican antislavery rebels, the Maroons:

> The story of Bertha, however finally unsympathetic to her as a human being, nonetheless does indict British colonialism in the West Indies and the stained wealth that came from its oppressive rule. When Jane wonders, "what crime was this that live[s] incarnate" in Rochester's luxurious mansion "which [can] neither be expelled nor subdues by the owner" the novel suggests that the black-visaged Bertha, imprisoned out of sight in Rochester's luxurious British mansion, does indeed "incarnate" a historical crime. (Meyer 71)

Bertha comes to stand for more than the English woman's opposite. She registers England's fear of losing its overseas holdings. This story, sublimated in Brontë's text, is what Rhys brings to the forefront in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys does not allow Mr. Rochester, who becomes nameless in Rhys's version, to maintain the lie that Bertha is simply "there" in England but instead reveals the quest he took to those outlying denizens before enslaving Bertha in his attic.

From his pecuniary interests in going to the West Indies, to his search for the "hidden" "treasure" of its landscape (169), his fate of isolation and illness, and finally his colonizing gesture of claiming Antoinette by re-naming her "Bertha"—Rochester's journey to Granbois is reminiscent of early colonialist travel narrative. For Rochester, the landscape is overwhelming, full of scheming natives, "enemy trees" and "secret" dangers (105, 87). As with Forster's emphasis on the "muddle" of India in the imaginary Chandrapore, the horror of the emptiness of the African bush in Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, and the great blank spaces of "darkness" on the maps of Africa which fascinate Conrad's Marlow, the landscape as perceived by Rochester is mystifying and registers his immediate and extreme sense of alienation. But while the writers of imperialist travel narratives which provide many of the traveling metaphors of colonialist discourse in the works of Conrad, Forster, and Schreiner—and interrogated by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* —may have considered unknown lands to be unfamiliar spaces, these landscapes were not "blank spaces" (Boehmer 52). Instead, the new world held the promise of exotic flora, fauna, and vast riches to be classified, recorded, and collected. These ethnographic accounts worked to serve several imperial functions: they made the unfamiliar, and, therefore, potentially dangerous, landscapes seem manageable through

systematic scientific or legalistic discourse; they worked to justify colonization by often writing the landscape as unpossessed, unoccupied, and unhistoricized even by the travelers themselves.[16] They worked to establish the authority of the European observer, and they fuelled future expeditions. These pseudo-anthropological tales played a significant role in adding to the exchange of colonialist images of "Englishness" and "other" lands, nations, and races. These images were not fixed or stable, but were often contradictory notions—of the savage and the noble savage, of the English woman as innocent onlooker and as complicit beneficiary of colonialism, of landscapes unpossessed and landscapes teeming with cannibalistic natives. Such contradictions resulted in the threat and allure, or in Homi Bhabha's terms, the "desire and derision" of the European for the potentially uncontrollable colonized.[17]

But what happens when, through her setting of neocolonial West Indies during the erosion of British imperial holdings, the contradictions of place depicted in those early travel narratives are brought out into the open, when the received ideas of unpossessed landscapes and teeming natives collide? Rochester's journey takes place after the collapse of the plantation/slave economy, an economy which necessitates that Rochester and those like him cannot keep the native woman at the margins. Instead, he must marry her to acquire property and money. Yet, after reading scenes in which Rochester observes the interior landscape on the 2,000 feet up to Granbois, one gets the sense that Rochester's is a travel narrative gone, for him, nightmarishly awry. He describes the "alien" landscape as contrasted to England's, "the woman" his wife becomes confused in

[16] Both Pratt and Boehmer offer extensive analyses of European travel writers' depictions of colonized landscapes.

[17] See Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 67.

his thoughts with place and property, and he begins his justifications in a mental "letter" back home:

> Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks. I looked down at the course mane of the horse.… Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manœvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, after all is it such a bad bargain? The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet….(70)

The abundance of the landscape is juxtaposed with his equally "unnatural," mysterious, and beautiful wife Antoinette. In one such instance during the trip, Rochester discerns that his wife's becoming hat "shadows her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (67). Like the traveler, merchant, or novelist whose encounters with unfamiliar landscapes were themselves readings, Rochester reads and attempts to classify the landscape, of which Antoinette is a part, in an effort to justify his ownership and control. But his intimate connection to Antoinette (he finds it hard to believe that the woman by his side is actually, after all, his wife), her money, and matrilineal home Granbois—all bring into question his self-sufficiency and his identity as English gentleman. Rochester is forced to wonder who has bought whom.

Rochester struggles to create a parallel or mirror image of England. Following moments of "discomfort and melancholy," (67) Rochester sees Antoinette as though "she might have been any pretty English girl" and he thinks the honeymoon house at Granbois

"an imitation of an English summer house." At other times, too, he feels "peaceful" when his sense of place fits easily with received ideas of the colonies and its connection to plantation labor in its rightful place—when, for example, he sees in the streets the "woman with small hot loaves for sale, the woman with cakes, the woman with sweets" and the woman calling "*Bon sirop, Bon sirop*" (69). But such moments are fleeting. Rochester cannot assure himself that he has the acquiescence of the Afro-Caribbean people, or the acquiescence of his Creole wife, to allow an easily recreated England in this Caribbean place:

> "After this we go down then up again. Then we are there."
> Next time she spoke she said, "The earth is red here, do you notice?"
> "It's red in parts of England too."
> "Oh England, England," she said mockingly, and the sound went on like a warning I did not choose to hear" (71).

Of course, as readers, we are in on the warning and know what Rochester's England has in store for Antoinette and that the tables will be turned. At this point in Rhys's narrative, Antoinette is confident and comfortable. She considers Granbois her own and describes her sentiments to Rochester: "I love this place more than anywhere else in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person" (89). Antoinette leads the way to Granbois, proudly shows her new husband how to drink the mountain water from leaf cups, and then authoritatively introduces him to the household staff even though later she will be progressively stripped of her identity until she cannot recognize herself in the mirrors at Thornfield Hall. Yet, "here," in the West Indies, Rochester is under threat. He is the one being warned of what will happen. Rochester, too, will be changed. He will turn from a gentle man who, even if parenthetically, plans to "make provisions" for his Creole bride to one who will attempt to violently deprive Antoinette of any sense of belonging.

Rochester's desire to create a mirror image of England is hindered by the too blue landscape on the journey to Granbois, and it is even more of a failure once "home." If the transplanted cult of domesticity enacted by Forster's Turton women in *A Passage to India* represents the desire to recreate England overseas on the domestic front and reinforces a sense of English superiority, Antoinette's domestic autonomy at Granbois represents the inverse. Seeing his Creole wife in charge of managing the household is an affront to Rochester. He finds it perverse when she gives out money to the help without counting or offers meals and rum to the "unfamiliar faces that appeared and disappeared" (92). Perhaps most disturbing to Rochester is the relationship between Christophine and Antoinette. Rochester describes how his desire to see Antoinette as an appropriate feminine subject (that is, a pretty English girl) is thwarted by her relationship with the older woman and by what he perceives to be the secret knowledge they withhold:

> All day she'd be like any other girl, smile at herself in the looking glass (*do you like the scent?*), try to teach me her songs, for they haunted me.
> *Adieu foulard, adieu madras*, or *Ma belle ka di maman li*. My beautiful girl said to her mother. (*No it is not like that. Now listen. It is this way*). She'd be silent, or angry for no reason, and chatter to Christophine in patois.
> "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?"
> "Why not?"
> "I wouldn't hug and kiss them," I'd say, "I couldn't."
> At this she'd laugh for a long time and never tell me why. (91)

Especially at Granbois, the place that Antoinette says she feels most free and like herself, Rochester feels unsure of himself. Others in the household, too, constantly remind Rochester of the fictive nature of his "English" lifestyle. As scholar Robert Kendrick argues, the people at Granbois act as Rochester's "unreflective mirrors" (241). When, for example, Amélie mockingly welcomes Rochester to his "sweet honeymoon house," Rochester realizes she is laughing at his expense. Argues Kendrick, Amélie's laughter

"is not affirmation of his position and the power attached to it, but rather a demonstration of his own dependence upon her recognition of this power and position if it is to maintain its status as the 'real'" (239). Rochester is unable to convincingly recreate England upon a West Indian stage.

At the beginning of the "honeymoon," Antoinette is able to confidently challenge Rochester's sense of place and, thus, challenge Rochester's meta-narratives of "Englishness." In a scene that evokes Brontë's text, she questions Rochester:

> "Is it true," she said, "that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up."
> "Well," I answered annoyed, "that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream,"
> "But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?"
> "And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?"
> "More easily," she said, "much more easily. Yes, a big city must be like a dream."
> "No, this is unreal and like a dream," I thought. (80-81)

The sentence, "I want to wake up," serves as a jarring premonition in this section of the narrative which is ostensibly told from Rochester's point of view. Resonating with Antoinette's imprisonment in England, Rochester's experience at Granbois leaves him feeling tapped in a dream, in a dangerous place ("the green menace"), and he thinks, "[E]verything around me is hostile. The telescope drew away and said don't touch me.… I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew. Nothing to comfort me" (149).

Upon arrival at Antoinette's matrilineal home, Rochester had read the landscape as "wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness" and thought, "What I see is nothing—I want what it *hides*—that is not nothing" (87). Both his wife and the landscape seemed unreal. Yet the longer Rochester stays at Granbois the

more the conflict shifts from whose perception of "real" is correct to who has the power to define the "real." After Daniel Cosway sends the letter accusing Antoinette of being the insane daughter of an insane mother, Rochester feels vindicated. Kendrick argues that Rochester accepts the veracity of Cosway's letter, in which Antoinette is falsely accused of tricking Rochester into marriage partly because Cosway "believes in the fiction of 'Edward Rochester, English Gentleman'" (Kendrick 242).

However, while the note does legitimize Rochester's position, his belief in the veracity of the letter is not once-and-for-all. Though the letter aligns with Rochester's colonialist notions about his wife's "Creoleness," Cosway's accusations are not supported by Rochester's memories of Antoinette's actions or his own actions. Rochester must continue to convince himself, to preserve his narratives of self-definition. In interior monologues, he pushes aside uncertainties, such as the memory of Antoinette calling off the wedding or his role in convincing her to go through with the ceremony at which he had given a "faultless performance" (77). Soon after receiving Cosway's letter, Rochester thinks, "If these mountains challenge me, or Baptiste's face, or Antoinette's eyes, they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal (England must be quite unreal and like a dream she said)" (103). Cosway's explanation of Antoinette's biologically-determined inferiority fits well with Rochester's received ideas about Creole women and on one level "justifies" his foreshadowed act of taking Antoinette to that "cold-thief place" England, yet he is unable to correlate these ideas with what *his wife* has told him, and he cannot completely rid himself of the knowledge of his own motives for coming to the West Indies (112). Like Antoinette's disruptive "I must wake up" during the couple's telling exchange about which nation/place is "real," remembrances of Antoinette's words seep

with increasing frequency into Rochester's thoughts. Rochester must work harder to ignore Antoinette's position and to maintain the fiction of his "rightful" place at Granbois.

Before confronting Antoinette, Rochester experiences a waking nightmare which parallels Antoinette's childhood visions. In this dream-like scene, Rochester wanders off the path leading from Granbois and ventures into a place in the forest reminiscent of the Antoinette's childhood home, Coulibri—from the pavé roads to the overgrown Edenic garden. He comes to the "ruins of an old stone house" resembling the former plantation home from which Antoinette's family fled during the former slaves' fiery riot (105). There, he encounters a young girl (Antoinette as a child?) who screams upon seeing him. After the girl runs away in sobs, Rochester becomes "lost and afraid among [the] enemy trees" (105). [18] He is unable to find his way back but eventually spots Baptiste who escorts Rochester out of the forest. Along the way, Rochester questions Baptiste about the girl and the pavé roads, but Baptiste "obstinately" denies the existence of the place that Rochester attempts to chart. He is told that no such road exists in the forest and no young girl lives in the area. Shaken, Rochester finds himself asking "Is there a ghost, a zombie there?" (106). In the face of the histories Rochester glimpses in that place, he once again turns to the written word—this time in the form of an anthropological "study" of obeah—to reassure himself of what is "real":

> I drank, then took up the book I had been reading, *The Glittering Coronet of the Isles* it was called, and I turned to the chapter "Obeah":
> *"A zombie is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombie can also be the sprit of a place.*

As the passage continues, "knowledge" of obeah is put into colonial context:

[18] In "The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway," Elizabeth Baer argues that Rochester enters the "place" of the dreaming child Antoinette.

> "So I was told, but I have noticed that negroes as a rule refuse to discuss the black magic which so many believe. Voodoo as it is called in Haiti—Obeah in some of the islands, another name in South America. They confuse matters by telling lies if pressed. The white people, sometimes credulous, pretend to dismiss the whole thing as nonsense. Cases of sudden or mysterious death are attributed to a poison known to the negroes which cannot be traced. It is further complicated by…." (107)

As with the Sarrautean subjects in *Tropismes*, the fear of differences denied—as Rochester struggles to retain his separatedness from his Creole wife—results in an increasing sense of threat and resultant violent hatred. The threat Rochester perceives to emanate from the alien and alienating landscape becomes inseparable from the threat he convinces himself is posed by Antoinette.

Places of Little Sense in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

In "Double (De)colonization," Mardorossian argues that too often Rhys scholars "rel[y] on the discourse of exile which constructs a simplified binary logic between an alienating 'here' and a romanticized 'there'" (86). She contends that this focus has led to readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* which depict Antoinette as privileging one or the other side of her divided self: "Rhys's paradoxically fixed identify as an in-between, as a mediator between two cultures, has been evoked as a justification for her or her critics' exclusive focus on the opposition between the white Creole ex-elite and the English colonizers in *Wide Sargasso Sea* " (7). In fact, Rhys's depictions of place in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are far more complex than a simplified *ici* and *la*. Rochester, the destitute youngest son of a wealthy father, feels he has no legitimate place in England before acquiring Antoinette's wealth, yet he is equally unsure how his marriage to a Creole will

affect his standing upon return. While invested in positioning "England" as "real," he becomes increasingly violent as his received ideas of "Englishness" are challenged, as he struggles to maintain the fiction of his "proper place" in society, his self-recognition as European male subject.[19] From Antoinette's narrative of girlhood in Coulibri and in the convent, to Rochester's narrative of Granbois (often interrupted by Antoinette's thoughts), to Antoinette's dream narrative of her time in Thornfield Hall—the structure of the novel links place to narrative voice. These places represent more than a movement from patrilineal home, to matrilineal home to the "other" place, England. Each place is a site of contestation, where the material conditions of Antoinette's life threaten to undermine her sense of "home." At the beginning of the novel, for example, Antoinette describes Coulibri as a debased Eden, tainted by its history of slavery:

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had grown wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered—then an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it. (19)

Antoinette has a different sense of Coulibri than her emotionally distant mother Annette. Annette feels "marooned" on the decaying former plantation estate while Antoinette recalls that the wild nature of the place "never saddened her" because she knew no other way (18, 19). For Antoinette, Coulibri provides some measure of safety. When, as a child, Antoinette dreams of walking in the forest and sensing the presence of someone who "hates" her (a premonition of the "meeting" with Rochester), she reassures herself

[19] See also Kendrick's "Edward Rochester and the Margins of Masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea."*

with a mental map of the island and her place on it: "I lay thinking, 'I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall with green moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers'" (27). Antoinette's familiarity with her surroundings serves as a "cognitive map," or the "highly subjective organized images of a person's spatial environment onto which that person ascribes meanings the same way one ascribes meanings to symbols on a paper map" (Ryden 54). The imaginative organization and management of place are Antoinette's defense against becoming trapped in someone else's construction of reality.

While Antoinette sees her "terrified" mother plan and hope "every time she passe[s] a looking glass" to restore their home and, thus, their social standing, the daughter finds solace in the maternal "obeah woman" Christophine (30). After Annette remarries the English Mr. Mason, Antoinette must take up the role of an English girl. She no longer meets Tia at the bathing pool, and the Masons treat Christophine as more of a servant and less as a member of the household. Critic Erica L. Johnson points to the importance of Mr. Mason's "reterritorialization" of Coulibri Estate in creating a segregated "English" geography with boundaries that Tia cannot cross, boundaries that would later set the stage for the "black community's rebellion against the boundaries of white ownership" (95). But, for Antoinette, place is shaped more by the narratives accompanying these changes: "It was [the new servants'] talk about Christophine that changed Coulibri, not the repairs or new furniture or the strange faces. Their talk about Christophine and obeah changed it" (31). Antoinette then imagines obeah objects hidden in her room and can no longer feel safe there; she is displaced from "home" long before

the former slave community burns the estate. Later in the novel, an adult Antoinette makes clear the effects of such internalized narrative refrains when she translates for Rochester one of Amélie's patois songs: "It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born in the first place" (102). The "reality" of place can be changed by "talk."

The notion of public history is questioned throughout the novel as Rhys highlights the ways in which people construct self-definitions through familial and local histories, while at the same time she draws attention to the ways in which—for Antoinette, Rochester, Christophine—records and verifiable memories are in constant tension with received versions of history. When, for example, Antoinette struggles to ward off her newfound fears after her home takes on the trappings of an "English" estate (new servants, new English dresses, and the portrait of "The Miller's Daughter" hanging in the dining room), she recognizes the implications of this change: "In some ways it was better before [Mr. Mason] came though he'd rescued us from poverty and misery…. The black people did not hate us quite so much when we were poor" (34). Mr. Mason—whom Antoinette considers "so sure of himself, so without a doubt English"—is disconnected from Coulibri before he remade it into an "English" household. Perceiving the place unhistoricized, he does not heed Annette's warnings to leave (36). He considers the people in the Afro-Caribbean community to be "children" who would not "hurt a fly" (35). Young Antoinette, though, recognizes the danger of their situation and thinks, "I wish I could tell him that out here is not like English people think it is" (34). But having

infantilized those in the surrounding community whom he sees as not "white," Mr. Mason does not recognize the mounting racial tensions until it is too late. His "official," colonialist understanding of the West Indies competes with his wife's understanding of local conflicts and personal histories, including Annette's position of outsider on the island because of her identity as "Martinique girl" (17). The servants' talk, the letter accusing Christophine of breaking the law, Cosway's letter redefining Antoinette's family history and proclaiming her dangerous and mad, *The Glittering Coronet of the Isles*, Rochester's letters to his father, and Amélie's song—all are narratives which, with real effects, compete with another subject's psychological reality.

The place for Antoinette is defined by its social interactions, and, hence, her understanding of place is defined as much by her Caribbean experiences as by the colonizing figures of Mr. Mason or Rochester. In the convent, for example, young Antoinette reviews her geography lesson and reveals her conception of what characterizes place: "Italy is white pillars and green water. Spain is sun on hot 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). France resembles Antoinette's Martinique-born mother and her friend Louise. Significantly, in a scene foreshadowing Antoinette's fate, Rhys presents Louise's beauty, like Annette's, as a false treasure: "Ah but Louise! Her small waist, her thin brown hands, her black curls which smelled of veviter, her sweet high voice, singing so carelessly in Chapel about death. Like a bird would sing. Anything might have happened to you, Louise, anything at all, and I wouldn't be surprised" (55). The gardens of Coulibri are wild and tainted with the

history of slavery but are also marked in Antoinette's memory by her father's death, her beautiful mother's sad and isolated life, and her connections to Tia and Christophine. Granbois, inherited from Annette's side of the family, represents both happier familial memories and the fiction of any future of financial independence for Antoinette (on the journey there, Antoinette tells Rochester, "This place belongs to me and everything is on our side"). Later, Rochester pledges to leave her with "nothing" and is backed by English law when he sells the property and takes his wife to England (74, 170).

Rhys undermines Brontë's representation of the West Indies as peripheral—and undermines colonialist depictions of "other" landscapes as cartographic symbols, expanding borders, and vast expanses of supposedly unchartered territory—by focusing on what Kent C. Ryden calls "places of little sense." Though Ryden uses the phrase specifically in relation to regional folklore, his discussion helpfully distinguishes Rhys's depictions of the West Indian landscape (marked by everyday, localized experience and emerging from conversation) from those images circulating in colonialist discourse marked by sweeping distances and surfaces, incomprehensibility, and make-believe cities.[20] According to Ryden, place is associated with personal, local histories. This local history, writes Ryden, does not necessarily "concern itself with the important and prominent events of 'official' history, of the sort which gets commemorated by statues, plaques, and history books." Instead, Ryden maintains, "landmarks are remembered and found significant because of something striking that once happened there to the person

[20] In such make-believe cities, those lived experiences, conversations, customs described in great detail can only be mirrors held up to the colonizer, not the colonized. As Allen Greenberger argues in his discussion of Kipling, "It was not that Kipling knew Burma, but rather that it preeminently offered room for the practice of the ideals he valued." Greenberger goes on to write, "For Kipling, and virtually his whole generation of writers about the Indian scene, the existence of British rule was important chiefly as an outlet for action" (36).

doing the remembering, because they provided the physical context for significant social connections and relationships, or simply because of their perpetual presence in the course of daily life" (61). That is not to say that writers like Rhys are not concerned with notions of space and its relation to larger sociopolitical issues which shape these notions. On the contrary, tropes of maps and borders are prevalent in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rather, Rhys's representations of landscape entail a constant tension between a focus on "places of little sense" in which the personal and the local is emphasized, and space, in which the larger patterns formed by many local experiences are examined and symbolized. The twisted roots of the "tree of life" in the Coulibri slave plantation, the "bad roads" between the community of Spanish Town and Coulibri Estate, and the "dangerous sea" which provides Rhys her title are all examples of the latter (17, 115).

Rhys explores this tension between Antoinette's sense of place as informed by familial island history and Rochester's perceptions of the island as a site of his colonialist notions of "Creoleness." Before Rochester makes the decision to take Antoinette to England, she tries to defend herself against Cosway's accusations by explaining her personal history. When Rochester, reluctant to hear her side of the story, tries to end the conversation, Antoinette expresses her sense of urgency, as if aware that her narrative time is running out. She challenges Rochester, "I may not be able to tell you in any other place, at any other time. No other time, now. You frightened?" Rochester again feels threatened by place:

> "Of course I will listen, of course we can talk. If that's what you wish." But the feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong. "I feel very much a stranger here," I said. "I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side."

> "You are mistaken," she said. "It is not for you or for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else." (129-130)

At the heart of the conflict is the question of Annette's "madness," a condition Rochester tells himself was hidden from him so that he would go ahead with the marriage. Antoinette, in a lengthy story, attempts to explain the causes of her mother's condition, causes such as Annette's economic vulnerability, her isolation at Coulibri after the death of Antoinette's father, and the death of her son. Rochester does not accept Antoinette's account. The public acceptance of Annette's "madness" renders the "truth" of little consequence. Antoinette's looks might allow her to "pass" for English, but the family's now known history of madness, and the subsequent implications of overt sexual promiscuity, marks his wife in a manner that explodes the fiction of her husband's "Englishness." Acceptance of Antoinette's version of her experience constitutes a threat to Rochester's identity. In these Sarrautean passages, Rochester's anger at this fear of sameness results in disgust and amorphous anxiety; Rochester listens to Antoinette crying, Christophine whispering, and someone singing in patois and thinks, "Whatever they were singing or saying was dangerous. I must protect myself" (149). Thus, the love potion Christophine gives to Antoinette, a potion meant to make Rochester love Antoinette "again," cannot work and instead poisons him. The more indistinction between Antoinette's and Rochester's subject positions, as the boundaries between them are further blurred, the more Rochester fears being annihilated or assimilated by an "other."

Christophine had been correct in warning Antoinette against using the potion and had astutely pointed out that Antoinette's status as *béké* necessarily meant Antoinette's efforts at obeah would end in disaster. Rochester's reaction to indistinction is violent

hatred. Christophine confronts Rochester, who has now both claimed and rejected Antoinette by naming her "Bertha":

> "And then," [Christophine] went on in a judge's voice, "you make love to her till she drunk with it, no rum could make her drunk like that, till she can't do without it. It's *she* can't see the sun any more. Only you she see. But all you want to do is break her up."
> *(Not the way you mean, I thought)*
> "But she hold out eh? She hold out."
> *(Yes, she held out. A pity)*
> "So you pretend to believe all the damn lies that damn bastard tell you."
> *(That damn bastard tell you)*
> Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head.
> "So that you can leave her alone."
> *(Leave her alone)* (153)

Christophine recognizes that Rochester is *pretending* to believe Cosway. She accuses Rochester of being "jealous" of Antoinette because she has "better blood" and doesn't "care for money" the way he does (152). Christophine exposes Rochester's fears and motives. Finally, just as Antoinette had done when her husband had first begun to call her "Bertha," Christophine accuses Rochester of using his own form of obeah and of trying to annihilate Antoinette's sense of self:

> But you don't love. All you want is to break her up. And [the potion] help you break her up."
> (Break her up)
> "She tell me in the middle of all this you start calling her names. Marrionette. Some word so."
> "Yes, I remember I did."
> (Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta)
> "That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak."
> (Force her to cry and to speak)
> "But she won't. So you think up something else. You bring that worthless girl [Amélie] to play with next door and you talk and laugh and love so that she can hear everything. You make her hear."
> Yes, that didn't just happen. I meant it.
> (I lay awake all night long after they were asleep, and as soon as it was light I got up and dressed and saddled Preston. And I come to you. Oh Christophine. Oh Pheena, Pheena, help me.) (154)

Rhys's use of *sous-conversation* highlights the processes of intersubjectivity at work. Christophine reveals Rochester's intermittent narratives of self-acquittal to be lies he tells himself and others. From this point in the novel until the last brief section, in which Antoinette describes her nightmarish enslavement in England, Christophine's and Antoinette's thoughts interrupt Rochester's with less demarcation and with even greater frequency.

For Antoinette, Granbois is "spoilt." Legally, but also psychologically, Rochester takes it from her. She tells him, "I loved this place, and you have made it into a place I hate" (147). Antoinette no longer attempts to convince her husband of her innocence but grows distant and cold. Rochester finds himself wishing that Antoinette "break up" and give in. He thinks, "She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one tear, one human tear" and then decides, "I'll listen.… If she says good-bye perhaps adieu" (165-166). Otherwise disgusted by the sight of Antoinette, he has moments of desire for her only when he imagines her accepting the identity he has assigned her: "If she says it or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but *mine, mine"* (166). But Antoinette remains indifferent as Rochester takes his last look at the landscape surrounding his "honeymoon house":

> I hated the place.
>
> I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic. 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)

According to Erica L. Johnson, Rhys "pits" Antoinette's matrilineal ancestral home against Rochester's patrilineal ancestral home, "a move that makes Antoinette and Rochester's contest over which house is 'home' the crux of the novel" (97). And while

defining which house is "home" is indeed crucial, it is important to emphasize that Rhys presents not only Rochester as having destroyed Antoinette's "sense of safety and self-assurance" at Granbois (Johnson 97). Through the use of interior dramas and *sous-conversation,* the author explores the processes through which Antoinette internalizes other subjects' narratives (not just Rochester's but also those of the Afro-Caribbean community in Spanish town, the servants, "white" women, her mother) which alter her sense of belonging along racial/national/gender lines. As Christophine points out when confronting Rochester, the difference between Rochester and Antoinette in this contest of defining "home" is that Rochester has the backing of English law and its economic leverage. Yet Rochester is similarly altered. Having internalized Antoinette's and Christophine 's narratives, Rochester loses the certainty of his self-definitions. He is left with the "thirst and longing" for what he has lost before coming to the West Indies, before marrying Antoinette. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, place provides a tropistic level at which boundaries between subjects are repeatedly blurred and then redefined.

Rhys Romanticized

In nineteenth-century novels of manners, women writers often recruited colonized female subjects in an "imagined commonality" to reveal "home" as a construct used to police British women (Fraiman 816). While initially embraced by feminist critics, such "imagined commonalities"—between the unequally oppressed colonized "other" woman and Anglo women—would later be viewed by poets/theorists such as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors of *This Bridge Called My Back,* with justifiable skepticism.

Critics such as Gregg, Spivak, and Brathwaite make the argument that Rhys employs a similar "imagined commonality" of her own in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, other scholars counter Gregg's and similar assertions that Rhys enlists "the 'black people' of Caribbean" in order to "engender" Creole subjectivity (37).[21] Those critics arguing against such assertions, assertions which rely on an understanding of Antoinette's (and Rhys's) Creole subjectivity as a simplified split between Self and Other, point to Antoinette's relationship with Tia as key and attempt to "recoup [the] different readings of Antoinette's identification with Tia as either a unifying expression of mutual identification or an alienating attempt to identify with the Other" (Johnson 95). Mary Lou Emery's analysis, in fact, explores the ways in which the tropes of mirrors in *Wide Sargasso Sea* do not support an either/or position. For example, in the frenzy of the riot, Antoinette escapes intending to live with Tia rather than leave Coulibri, sees Tia with stone in hand, and recounts, "I looked at her and I saw her face crumple as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass" (45). Emery compares this example of mirroring to that of Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris and argues that the two writers alter the typical European notion of the double: "Rather than opposing a "good" self and a "bad" self, both writers draw on Caribbean psychology and multiplications of character. Rhys goes to the same sources to displace her characters so that doubling and displacing become twin methods of retrieving and reenvisioning the past, expanding beyond the individual" (qtd. in Johnson 95). Johnson adds to Emery's argument by explaining that the mirrors in Rhys's novel are not "transparent mediums of self-perception." Rather, Rhys's mirror images also include "the space surrounding the moment of mirroring" (97). Rhys places

[21] See Johnson, Emery, and Mardorossian.

those moments in their historical context of the neocolonial 1830s, and, thus, she does not employ Tia's status as mere metaphor for Antoinette's suffering.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s third and final section, Rhys offers a brief but compelling account of Antoinette's nightmare stay in England. If read with an accompanying assumption that Rhys's writing "reflects a retreat from bourgeois subjectivity and its exhaustive domestic focus" as evidenced by her use of the "'Rhys Woman' and her serialized isolation and disconnection from the world" (Konzett 133), Antoinette's dream sequence would seem to support Gregg's rather than Johnson's or Emery's conclusions. The "England" of Thornfield Hall—like Granbois—becomes just another place that Antoinette grows to hate. In Antoinette's waking/dreaming imagination, she does not believe she is in England but in a "cardboard house" others claim is England (181). Antoinette tells her guard Grace Poole that she does remember going to England:

> "You fool," she said, "This is England."
> "I don't believe it," I said, "and I never will believe it."
> (That afternoon we went to England. There was grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England. If I could be here I'd get well again, and the sound in my head would stop…). 183-184

This passage links Antoinette to Christophine as the older woman had warned Antoinette to run away to Martinique rather than be taken from the West Indies by Rochester:

> "England," said Christophine, who was watching me. "You think there is such a place?"
> "How can you ask that? You know there is."
> "I never see the damned place, how I know?"
> "You do not believe that there is a country called England?"
> She blinked and answered quickly, "I don't say I don't believe, I say I don't know." (111-112)

Antoinette, however, believes that there is "somewhere else" called England but that they had lost their way while crossing the sea. In the "cardboard house" of Thornfield,

Antoinette wonders, "What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (180-181). In succession, she envisions that she is in Aunt Cora's room, in the convent's rooms, at Coulibri Estate in the dining room with its portrait of the Miller's Daughter. Images of rooms from her past merge into one another as she makes her way to the roof before seeing Tia beckoning her to jump. Critics such as Linda Bamber cite such passages to argue that sense of "place" is absent from Rhys's work, that "[w]e are told that we are in Paris rather than London, or vice versa, but it seems to make little difference." Bamber's assessment of Rhys's absence of place ("The outside world has withdrawn from the Rhys heroine. As long as there is a room, a street, or a restaurant for her to occupy, she doesn't bother much about the details") supports theories that Rhys's work is ultimately complicit ("That is, *of course*, Rhys herself, in sympathy with her heroine's depression, makes no effort to find correspondences between the inner and outer life.")

However, Rhys does not present place as irrelevant but links women's economic vulnerability to *displacement.* The female subjects in *Wide Sargasso Sea* maintain a degree of imagined commonality because of the lack of control they have over their lives and their inability to affect change for other female subjects, because of their unstable relationships to house and "home." Annette loses her "home" and her status as sane, and she is unable to protect her children. Christophine's home is threatened and her ability to protect Antoinette is lost with Rochester's threat to call the police. Aunt Cora's story is particularly telling. Mr. Mason dislikes Aunt Cora because she did nothing to help Annette's poverty-stricken family. Antoinette explains to her stepfather that Aunt Cora's husband was English and expects Mr. Mason to accept her explanation as common sense.

After Mr. Mason replies that such an excuse is "nonsense," Antoinette attempts to explain once again:

> It isn't nonsense, they lived in England and he was angry if she wrote to us. He hated the West Indies. When he died not long ago she came home, before that what could she do? She wasn't rich."
> "That's her story. I don't believe it. A frivolous woman. In your other's place I'd resent her behaviour."
> "None of you understand about us" (30)

Rhys makes similar connections between Amélie and Antoinette. In an often overlooked scene, Rochester gives Amélie "a large present" after having slept with her. He feels "satisfied" and "peaceful" though he no longer wants to touch Amélie, whose "skin appears darker" and whose lips appear "thicker" in the daylight (140). Aware of the change in Rochester, she unsmilingly explains that she plans to leave Granbois. With her "present," she will go to Rio and marry a rich man. In this context, an amused Rochester, whose position at Granbois had been parodied by Amélie when he had first arrived, mockingly asks Amélie if she still feels sorry for him. When Amélie replies, "Yes, but I find it in my heart of be sorry for her, too" (140-141), Amélie claims a certain kinship with Antoinette in spite of the history of racial tension between the two women.

Yet despite this imagined commonality between the novel's female subjects, Rhys does not ignore the power differentials between these subject positions. *Wide Sargasso Sea* instead reveals the interrelation of racial, class, and gender inequalities. While Antoinette desires to live with Tia, to be part of the Afro-Caribbean community, she also takes part in the racist discourse which her sometimes "passing" Creole family employs to gain privileges associated with being "white" or "English." Rhys explores the effects of these inequalities with an emphasis on the exchange of money among the novel's female characters—the "stolen" coins which result in Tia calling Antoinette "white

cockroach" and Antoinette calling Tia "cheating nigger," the money exchanged between Amélie and Antoinette's husband, and the money Antoinette pays Christophine for the disastrous love potion. With the latter example, especially, Rhys implicates Antoinette as taking up Rochester's colonizing position. In this scene, Anotinette "throws" money at Christophine who has refused to perform the obeah that will only harm Antoinette. Christophine tells Antoinette she need not pay for her help. Upon leaving, Antoinette hears a cock crow and thinks, "That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor?" The next lines reveal that Antoinette is not thinking of marital betrayal: "She did not want to do this. I forced her with my ugly money. And what does anyone know about traitors, and why Judas did what he did" (118). Antoinette, though far more aware than Rochester of the divisive racial history of the islands, is also implicated as constituted within and by shared meta-narratives of imperialism and colonialism.

Indeed, the reappropriative power of Rhys's shrewd analysis—of her de-naturalization of the means (discursive, legal, economic) through which subjects dominate other subjects—closely resembles Jamaica Kincaid's theories of place and identity construction. For Kincaid—whose unambiguously Caribbean identity allows her, without controversy, to be described in world literature textbooks as a Caribbean postcolonial writer/theorist—addressing the colonizer becomes postcolonial project. In her brief but powerful *A Small Place,* Kincaid offers an acerbic narrator who addresses her readers in the second person to bring into question the binaries of colonialist/inferior "other," English/Antiguan. In her cognitive map of Antiguan social space, Kincaid takes no prisoners. The tourist, the colonialist, the absentee nationalist are all forced to "see" their parts in Antiguan history. We, the readers, are taken along and forcibly shown what

has been left out of expansion-era travel writing, British schoolbooks, nationalist speeches, and travel brochures:

> An ugly thing, that is what you are when you are a tourist, and ugly, empty thing, stupid thing, a piece of rubbish … it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just passed cannot stand you.…That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives. They are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go—so when natives see you, the tourist, they envy you your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself. (17-18)

In this passage, the idea of performance is key. Besides the fact that the text, performatively requires the reader to take part in Kincaid's real-time history play, she also—in content—reminds us of our multiple subject positions and how power resides in the act of taking a position. All tourists are natives, and all natives are potential tourists. Here the narrator points to the potential complicity in the colonialist discourse of adventure. By showing the ramshackle houses, the abandoned hospital, the waste water that runs into the tourists' drinking water, she explodes the idea of the native island as utopian chronotope and demands attention to the inequalities we "see" when reading *A Small Place*.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, too, place provides a tropistic level for interrogating identity construction. Rhys's portrayal of England as a dangerous place, mystifying and incomprehensible, undermines foundational colonialist depictions of colonized "other" landscapes. Aiming to show *how* someone like Rochester, "not a bad man" (114), can

justify his actions toward Antoinette/Bertha, Rhys uncovers the ways in which Antoinette and Rochester both want the same thing, to be "somewhere else, something else" (28).[22] As a child, Antoinette searches for such a place but must first pass the "places of little sense" which are marked with island history. She has to walk past the old sugar works wheel to parts of Coulibri that she hadn't seen before, where she can think of "nothing" and "where there was no road, no path, no track"—no history. Rochester, too, desires the same "secret," "hidden place" where "the magic and the dream" of a happy life with Antoinette "are true" (168). But Rhys's novel also provides a discerning exploration of the ways in which Antoinette abstracts England, the ways that—for Antoinette—England, like the hidden places at Coulibri, comes to represent "somewhere else, something else":

> I have been too unhappy, I thought, it cannot last, being so unhappy, it will kill you. I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me.… England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wood. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. (110)

Antoinette imagines England as swimming swans and flowers and snow falling like "torn pieces of paper" (110). Rochester, notwithstanding the fact that he responds viscerally to the "alien" landscape of the West Indies, recognizes and is frustrated by Antoinette's stereotyped images of England. He recalls, "I was certain that nothing I said made much a difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were

[22] Emery contrasts feminist discussions of "elsewhere" such as those of Luce Irigaray and Nancy K. Miller, with Rhys's "somewhere else" because of the latter's incorporation of the historical conditions of the people of the West Indies in relation to colonialism and imperialism.

fixed. About England and about Europe." He concludes that "nothing" he told her about England "influenced her at all" (94).

For Antoinette, England is a potential "somewhere else," a place to be "something else" and feel "well." However, like the tourists Kincaid forces her readers to "look at" in *A Small Place*, Antoinette is too poor, too poor to make "somewhere else" into "source of a pleasure" for herself. Similarly, Rochester's marriage to a Creole female subject intimately links him to the Caribbean community and, thus, disrupts his ability to maintain being "peaceful" and "satisfied" in his "somewhere else." *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not represent a mere reversal of England as "home" and the colonies as incomprehensible, alien places. Rhys, like Kincaid, deconstructs binaries of "black"/"white," male/female, and alienating "here"/romanticized "there" and provides the female subjects in *Wide Sargasso Sea* an imagined commonality which does not erase the shared yet divisive histories of those subjects who are unequally oppressed.

Rather than reflecting a "retreat" from "exhaustive domestic forms" through a "serialized isolation and disconnection from the world" (Konzett 133), *Wide Sargasso Sea* enacts an engagement with the intersubjective processes of defining "home," "homeland," and "somewhere else."[23] The complexity of Jean Rhys's representations of place and displacement undermines accounts of the "Rhys woman," passive "feminine" victim with a tragically limited understanding of her Creole identity. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*—as in the clever and equally subversive "Making Bricks without Straw"—Rhys interrogates the ways in which subjects are entrapped in others' narratives. Her use of the twice-told tale, like Kincaid's use of the second person, works as a method of

[23] One of Rhys's alternative titles, *The Wide Crossing Across*, aptly symbolizes this focus on the connection between place and the processes of intersubjectivity which shape a subject's identity.

incorporation and requires us to read differently as Rhys challenges the construction of Brontë's homeless, mad Creole woman. This is, as Goodison argues, "the most writers can do with their writing."

Conclusion

In 1970, Jan van Houts became one of the many admirers who made the pilgrimage to Jean Rhys's small cottage in Cheriton-Fitzpaine, England. The Dutch school teacher and writer spent five days with the elderly Rhys, and the visit resulted in her short story, "Who Knows What's Up in the Attic?" As the story begins, the unnamed protagonist hears a knock at the door and prepares herself for the task of rebuking Mr. Singh, the traveling clothing salesman who often persuades her to by useless, pretty things. The visitor, however, is not Mr. Singh but a young man named Jan. When they had met in London a year ago, Jan tells her, she had asked him to "call on her" should he ever come to England. "Trying to sound welcoming," she invites him in and, in spite of herself, comes to enjoy the company of her eager-to-please fan (368). Throughout the story, the protagonist indulges her visitor as he takes her to the sea, sings for her in the car, and buys her wine. She is flattered by Jan's attention. Rhys writes, "She was surprised at the security and happiness she felt. She very seldom felt safe or happy and if it was for this man whom she'd only met once over a drink and never expected to see again, why pull it to pieces?" (369). Rhys presents Jan as pleasant and kind but also a bit awe-struck and insecure. He asks the protagonist, "Tell me–what do you like best about me?", and he seems to be reassuring himself when he asks, "We recognized each other, didn't we?" By the end of the five days, he asks her to visit Holland. She refuses, and on the last day of his visit, tells him she's too tired for dinner and must say goodbye. Later, she reflects upon her decision to reject Jan's invitation:

> She went back into the kitchen and shut her eyes. "Why not, why not? Why shouldn't I walk out of this place, so dependent on the weather, so meanly built, for poor people. Just four small rooms and an attic. Like my life." She put her hand to her head and laughed. "And who knows what's up in the attic? Not I for one, I wouldn't dare look." (373)

The story concludes with a visit from Mr Singh, whom the protagonist now invites in rather than avoids. The elderly woman surprises him by picking from his collection of clothing two short nylon nightgowns, one in orange and one in black. As he leaves, Mr. Singh says that he will pray for her. As she shuts the door, she replies, "You do just that" (374).

Like "Making Bricks without Straw," "Who Knows What's up in the Attic" is a witty but poignant take on an aging literary star and those who try to know her. And, in this story, too, Rhys maintains the upper hand and blocks complete access. However, Jan van Houts' "The Hole in the Curtain" (1981) offers a radically different story based on his meeting with Jean Rhys. The visit to the cottage, singing in the car, the trip to the sea—all these events also occur in van Houts' story, and Jan clearly admires the writer Jean Rhys whom he refers to by name. But in van Houts' version, Jan does not ask what Rhys likes best about him, he does not confide that he and his wife have a cold and troubled relationship, and he does not try to reassure himself by asking "We recognized each other, didn't we?" (370). The Jan in "A Hole in the Curtain" is much more self-assured, and the woman Jean Rhys is the one more, as Goodison puts it, "anxious to please" ("Lullaby" 62). She dresses up for him in a pink twill suit, puts on eye make-up to please him, and wears a gaudy red wig that, because of her age, is "unfair to inflict" on the village. To him, she seems "both shy and assured, an elderly, reserved lady in dark glasses" (33). Unlike Rhys's short story, "A Hole in the Curtain" includes much discussion of Rhys's work, especially *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the autobiography Rhys was working on in 1970. The elderly writer confesses she has "trouble with titles" and is

at a loss for a name of the autobiography. In van Houts' account, Jean Rhys asks Jan to help name her life's story. Van Houts writes:

> He realized that she was opening another bottle in the kitchen. "Let me do it," he called. "That's a man's job."
>
> They sat in the kitchen table and she set down fresh glasses. "I work here," she said. "When I work.…" She looked a little sad and shivered. "Smile please," he said.
>
> "That's the title!" She stood up and clinked her glass against his. "See, you are good at titles."

In "The Hole in the Curtain" Jan is credited with providing the name for what would later become Rhys's unfinished autobiography*, Smile Please*, published posthumously in 1979.

Given Jean Rhys's "fighting mad" desire to take Antoinette/Bertha out of Bronte's attic and given Rhys's—like Forster's and Sarraute's—keen interrogation of what is meant by naming an "other," Jan van Houts' naming of what Rhys keeps up in the attic—that is, her "life"—is ironic. Reading "A Hole in the Curtain," which ends almost like a romance novel with Rhys wistfully saying goodbye to the departing van Houts, with Rhys's clever "Who Knows What's Up in the Attic?" reveals a great deal about van Houts' desire to "know" Jean Rhys.

Like the recent Naipaul/Forster controversy, the "rediscovery" of self-proclaimed "androgynous writer" Sarraute by wary but admiring feminist scholars, and the current call by many to dismiss Rhys because of her representations of Afro-Caribbean characters—the above example of van Houts' reading of "Jean Rhys" foregrounds the need for readers/critics/teachers to carefully analyze authors' representations of their female subjects *and* to inquire into the *épaisseur subjective* [subjective thickness] of their own analyses.

In this study, I have tried to highlight the complexity of representations of the feminine subject in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropismes*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. By examining the critical reception histories of these works and then offering close readings of the authors' depictions of their female subjects, I have attempted to show how these works have often elicited critics' "personal involvement" to the extent that the authors themselves are made into characters and their protagonists are read as unproblematized reflections of their own experiences.[1]

Indeed, as I have attempted to show, Forster is not Fielding. And the fact that Forster evaded questions about his own sexuality or that he once said that he did not care whether or not the English and Indians established a bridge of sympathy (while making it clear that in his writing and in his personal life he could establish such a bridge) does not negate the "what remains valuable within the outlook and ideas of E. M. Forster" (Advani 3). When, for example, Forster examines the Turton women's use of "housewifery," when he presents Aziz as recognizing that "seeing" is just another form of owning, and when he shows how images of a young mother's body are used to rationalize colonial violence—the author reveals a keen awareness of women's active role within imperialism, the ways in which the feminine subject is constructed in a colonial context, and how those constructions are used to justify violence. Similarly, we can accept that Sarraute considered herself an "androgynous writer," as she often made clear in interviews and essays, without ignoring the complexity of the representations of the feminine subject in *Tropismes*, representations largely ignored because of such seemingly "anti-feminist" statements. Sarraute's rejection of the label "feminist" had more to do

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[1] See Barbour 64.

with an awareness that embracing a feminine style can be counter-productive for women. Her tropistic interrogations—of the desires and myths that women accept are good for them (desires and myths still very much in circulation today), of women's complicity in their own oppression, and of the tempting pull to be complicit—were two "waves" ahead of her time. Like Sarraute and Forster, Rhys, too, offers her readers an investigation of the ways in which subjects are entrapped in others' narratives and how such entrapments can have "real" effects. An examination of *Wide Sargasso Sea* undermines theories of the naïve, passive "Rhys woman" and instead reveals a subversive account of how a subject—potentially any subject—can take up the position of someone like Brontë's Edward Rochester.

"Once we admit that teaching, and teaching literature in particular, constitutes a political act, we are driven," writes Kostas and Linda S. Myrsiades, "to a consideration of the character of that act in the production of knowledge" (ix). As my student Umme made clear to me, teaching works like those in this study—works which bring to light the ways that issues of gender are compounded by questions of race, nationality, and socio-economics—can affect others', as Deanne Bogdan puts it, "being-in-the-world."[2] Investigating the debates surrounding works like *A Passage to India*, *Tropismes*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* while analyzing such works' complex representations of "woman" (and what "woman" should be) serves as a reminder of what is at stake should we replicate the type of romanticized reading that van Houts offers with "A Hole in the Curtain" by accepting the "authority of experience" as the origins of inquiry.

[2] See Bogdan's introduction in "Reintegrating Sensibility: Situated Knowledges and Embodied Readers" 2.

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