

RECLAIMING VIRGINITY, LIBERATING DESIRE
A Study of Three Women's novels

by

Sandra Cattich

A thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of Cape Town for the Degree of
Master of Arts

February 1998

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Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with thanks the grants received from the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Cape Town. All the opinions expressed and the conclusions reached in the thesis are my own.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their patience and support, and to my friends for their encouragement and assistance.

Abstract

In my study of Brontë's Jane Eyre and Rhys's Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea, I adopt a reading of Luce Irigaray's concept of virginity to explore these writer's search for an identity beyond that defined by patriarchy.

Traditionally, virginity is informed by a series of dichotomies (for example, man/woman, active/passive, day/night, etc.) associated with silence and stasis, which I term static virginity. In her project of resymbolisation, Irigaray reconceives this definition in terms of a utopic goal that will provide women with the mobility or incentive to represent and articulate themselves in their own terms, which I distinguish as dynamic virginity. This paradigm allows me to interpret the dual roles that the female characters of these novels assume, on the one hand miming a discourse which implicates while it alienates them, and on the other hand struggling to articulate an authentic 'voice' beyond the confines of patriarchy.

The discovery of an autoerotic awareness linked to the mother-daughter relationship, introduces virginity as a legacy of spiritual embodiment enjoyed by all women at all stages of their lives. The autoerotic becomes a means of distinguishing, representing, and therefore liberating feminine desire from its current predicate position within language. In the novels I study this process can be traced in metaphorical transformations which allow these women writers to simultaneously redeem their sexual

identities from a negative patriarchal definition and speak from a dignified collective.

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Abbreviations

TS	<u>This Sex Which Is Not One</u>
JTN	<u>Je, tu, nous</u>
IR	<u>The Iriqaray Reader</u>
<u>Speculum</u>	<u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u>
ESD	<u>An Ethics of Sexual Difference</u>
SG	<u>Sexes and Genealogies</u>
TTD	<u>Thinking the Difference</u>
SL	<u>Sleep it off Lady</u>
EG	Elizabeth Grosz
MW	Margaret Whitford
JE	<u>Jane Eyre</u>
VID	<u>Voyage in the Dark</u>
WSS	<u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>

Introduction

Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys in Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea are fascinated by the dual roles that women play within patriarchal control and beyond. On the one hand the female characters I study can be seen to mime a conventional discourse which inevitably results in feelings of self-alienation and on the other hand they struggle to articulate an identity or 'voice' that will establish a more satisfying relationship to themselves and the male characters they seek acknowledgment from.

An example of these bifurcated roles can be seen in Voyage in the Dark where Anna will experience an alarming sense of detachment in relation to her speech and actions when she is in the company of English men. Although her experience of English society is completely disjunctive with her memories of home in the Caribbean, she is able to relay the latter experience with a sense of authentic self-expression - particularly as the text begins to construct a metaphorical 'pathway' or representational structure for a 'voice' other than that prescribed by the Symbolic.

Although Brontë and Rhys do not - with the exception Rhys's Voyage in the Dark - directly represent virginity in their novels, Luce Irigaray's concept of virginity provides an appropriate tool for a textual analysis of women's bifurcated roles because she revises a patriarchal association of virginity, silence and stasis, which I shall refer to as static virginity, with a utopic¹ goal

¹ As my summary introduction to Irigaray's theory will show, Irigaray posits the existence of a feminine form of representation in order to evoke it. Hence the term 'utopia' which I adopt from

which will provide women with the mobility or incentive to represent and articulate themselves in their own terms, which I shall refer to as dynamic virginity.

The terms 'static' and 'dynamic virginity' therefore provide a means of referring to what is implicitly a resymbolisation of virginity and form part of a paradigm which explores the dual roles of the female characters and the 'voice' that these novelists create metaphorically. For Irigaray this voice can only be achieved if the mother-daughter relationship is transformed. Once feminine desire is socially represented, distinguishing mother and daughter as sexual subjects endowed with a spiritual inheritance, mothers and daughters alike will have 'reclaimed their virginity' and 'liberated their desire'. When I have developed my argument I focus on this relationship in Wide Sargasso Sea.

Before I provide an outline of how I adopt this paradigm in my reading of these novels, I present a brief summary of Irigaray's theory explaining some of her key concepts in relation to one another.

Irigaray's project of resymbolisation needs to be read in the context of a discursive strategy in which she engages with traditional psychoanalytic and philosophic discourses in order to expose women's subordination in this discourse. Announcing her strategy she draws attention to the political opportunity afforded by mimicry :

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the female role deliberately.

Margaret Whitford's book, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine, in which she introduces her analysis of Irigaray's philosophy with a chapter entitled 'Feminism and Utopia' (MW 9).

Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it.
(TS 76)

'[Thwarting subordination]' is part of Irigaray's larger aim to introduce 'sexual difference' into a symbolic order² where an ostensibly neutral (male) subject defines itself in relation to a female predicate³ which deprives women of an identity: 'instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our language, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality' (JTN 20-21).

The resymbolisation of virginity therefor addresses the problem of women's identity within the Symbolic by focusing on what Irigaray regards is the traditional role of the virgin as an object of exchange. In her essay 'Women on the Market', Irigaray describes the passage from nature to the social 'order' of the Symbolic in terms of the exchange of women-as-objects between men-as-subjects. In this 'market', 'women lend themselves to alienation in consumption' as commodities in a homosexual economy which ensures 'the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men' (TS 172). Irigaray is implying that the traditional

2 Although Lacan's concept of the symbolic informs Irigaray's critique of psychoanalysis, I do not analyse this relationship in my presentation of her theory. The term is, however, used widely in feminist literary criticism and I reproduce a broad glossary definition for the sake of clarity. According to Elizabeth Grosz in her book Sexual Subversions, 'it refers to the social and signifying order governing culture, to the post-oedipal position the subject must occupy in order to be a subject' (EG xxii).

In order to distinguish the general patriarchal application of this term from the possibility of an order which exceeds it, I designate the former with a capital 'S' in the course of this thesis.

3 Broadly speaking the predicate role will refer to women's object position within the language of the Symbolic (MW 44).

conception of virginity has more to do with men's representation of women than with women's relation to themselves:

[women as] commodities have always been dispossessed of their specific value. On this basis, one may affirm that the value of the commodity takes on *indifferently* any given form of use value. The price of the articles, in fact, no longer comes from *their* natural form, *their* bodies, *their* language, but from the fact that they mirror the need/ desire for exchanges among men. (TS 181)

Elsewhere Irigaray expresses the same idea more succinctly, emphasizing that a woman's value is alien to herself:

when women are exchanged, woman's body must be treated as an abstraction. The exchange operation cannot take place in terms of some intrinsic, immanent value of the commodity. (TS 175)

A natural consequence of a woman's role within patriarchy is thus an experience of inner division. Her '"natural" body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values', become two different things (TS 180).

Within the homosexual economy, the virgin's role can be distinguished from other traditional roles open to women. In relation to the mother and the prostitute, the virgin is '*pure exchange value*' (TS 186):

She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense her body disappears into its representative function. (TS 186)

As far as the other roles are concerned, the mother's reproductive powers are appropriated and excluded from exchange while the prostitute's value arises from her consumption and potential to be

continually consumed as a vehicle for relations among men. However, none of these patriarchal roles serve women's sexuality: 'Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has a woman any right to her own pleasure' (TS 188). This means that as the object of desire, a woman has no access to her own desire.

To resymbolise virginity is thus to represent women in relation to themselves and to provide them with an authentic (non-mimetic) 'voice'. It is part of reversing their pseudo-neutrality, 'a complex and painful process', but nonetheless 'a real conversion to the female gender' (JTN 21).

As I have mentioned the concepts of static and dynamic virginity provide a means of explaining Irigaray's project of resymbolisation. She rhetorically evokes an instance of static virginity in her essay 'When Our Lips Speak Together'. Addressing a traditionally reticent female audience/reader she empathises and encourages a response in the following way:

Speak to me. You can't? You want to hold back? Remain silent? White? Virginal? (TS 211)

This traditional association between virginity and silence is elaborated in John Little's essay 'Virginity and Hysteria in The Changeling' which draws on the writing of Irigaray. Little relates the notion of the silent virgin to the excess signified by a feminine speaking subject. In analysing the way De Flores prevents Beatrice from speaking about her modesty by saying 'Push, you forget yourself!/ A woman dipp'd in blood, and talk of modesty?', Little interprets Beatrice as a woman divided between 'paternal expectation, i.e., modesty, and the immodesty or excess that is signified by the existence of any female voice - *talk of modesty?*'

(JL 30). He reads De Flores as stripping Beatrice of any possible subjectivity and demanding an 'emblematic silence' (JL 31). He explains this in a quotation from Catherine Belsey:

To speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become a subject. But for women to speak is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy. (JL 30)

Women, Little is saying, do not have access to language and speech in the way men have. Irigaray makes this point when she lists a set of dichotomies, including the implicit whore/virgin dichotomy, in the system of differences which control the way in which women can and cannot speak:

How can we speak so as to escape from their compartments, their schemas, their distinctions and oppositions: virginal/deflowered, pure/impure, innocent/experienced ... How can we shake off the chain of these terms, free ourselves from their categories, rid ourselves of their names? Disengage ourselves, alive, from their concepts? Without reserve, without the immaculate whiteness that shores up their systems. (TS 212)

Posing a distinction between static and dynamic virginity in the context of breaking from traditions which have 'enclosed [women] in an order of forms inappropriate to [them]' Irigaray says:

[A woman] cannot be reduced to a single flower, as in the male image of virginity. In line with her own virginity, she is never completed in a single form. She is ceaselessly becoming, she 'flowers' again and again, if she stays close to herself and the living world. (JTN 110)

Irigaray evokes a dynamic continuity to heal the moral distinctions ('pure/impure') staged in the virgin/whore dichotomy and women's

social identity in general. It is in a sense a deconstructive dynamism which moves between and beyond the 'distinctions' and 'oppositions' of the patriarchal symbolic. In doing so it challenges a patriarchal belief in 'the necessity of stable forms', the view that 'everything [has] to be either one thing or another' (MW 59).

Before I elaborate on the deconstructive sense of dynamic virginity as it appears in Irigaray's two lips metaphor and the project of resymbolisation as a whole, it is useful to introduce her distinction between morphology and anatomy because the former elaborates the significance of representation in Irigaray's work and anticipates any criticism that Irigaray is an essentialist.⁴ The morphology/anatomy distinction itself is best approached through Irigaray's interpretation of the imaginary.

Irigaray points out that a specifically male imaginary pervades the Symbolic:⁵ 'The symbolic that you impose as a

4 Beneath a subtitle 'Womanspeak: a tale told by an idiot?', Toril Moi in her book, Sexual/Textual Politics, says the following: We have seen how Irigaray's attempt to establish a theory of femininity that escapes specul(ariz)ation necessarily lapses into a form of essentialism' (TM 143). Ironically, as Elizabeth Grosz points out in her book, Sexual Subversions, Moi acknowledges the very distinction which undermines her criticism: 'Irigaray's theory of 'woman' takes as its starting point a basic assumption of analogy between woman's psychology and her 'morphology' (Gr. *morphē*, 'form'), which she rather obscurely takes to be different from her anatomy.' (TM 143). Moi remains resistant to the subversive potential of the specular image and associates it one-sidedly with patriarchal, binary logic.

5 Although Whitford broadly defines the 'imaginary' as an equivalent of unconscious phantasy, she warns against restricting its interpretation to a Lacanian framework. She sees Irigaray drawing from Sartre and Bachelard a sense of the imaginary as a conscious function of the imagining mind and conflating it with the psychoanalytic definition of the unconscious phantasying mind. From Custoriadis, a critic of Lacan, Irigaray apparently borrows an interpretation of the imaginary as 'more primordial than that conceptualized by Lacan', as an attempt to understand the persistence of social formations and the possibility of changing them (MW 56).

universal, free of all empirical or historical contingency, is your imaginary transformed into an order, a social order' (Whitford quoting Irigaray, 90).⁶ Irigaray's main contention here is that the imaginary which informs our social order is masculine. This is the point at which 'morphology' is used to explain the sexuate nature of the imaginary - the way in which a particular representation of the male body comes to govern rationality. Morphology is distinguished from anatomy in that it has entered the domain of social representation. As such it does not entail an unmediated relation to the body or refer to an empirical body (MW 58). As Irigaray herself makes clear, morphology is a selective imposition:

Going back to the historically dated anatomico-physiological arguments is obviously out of the question, but we do have to question the empire of a morpho-logic, or the imposition of formations which correspond to the requirements or desires of one sex as the norms of discourse and, in more general terms, of language [*langue*]. (IR 96)

In her essay 'This Sex Which is Not One', Irigaray challenges this socially imposed morphology or phallogormorphism - and exposes the way it effects a negative representation of feminine sexuality.

6 I quote from Whitford when the original is not available.

Whitford points out that in so far as the imaginary relates to the Symbolic, it is also important to understand the former in a 'structural' rather than merely 'developmental' sense in Irigaray's work. In other words the imaginary is not something 'left behind' when symbolic castration introduces the child into discourse and meaning as a subject. In its structural sense, the symbolic is a prerequisite for the theoretical break from the imaginary. In other words since Irigaray regards the imaginary as pervasive in the Symbolic, no actual break is achieved. She looks at ways in which the Imaginary and the Symbolic inform each other. This is why Whitford makes the following statement: 'I would not agree with those who equate the imaginary in Irigaray's work with the archaic, maternal, pre-Oedipal space. From a structural point of view, the pre-Oedipal is produced by the symbolic, as well as informing it' (MW 91).

Traditional psychoanalysis poses a necessary opposition between '"masculine" clitoral activity and "feminine" vaginal passivity' as stages in the development of 'a sexually "normal" woman' (TS 23). Within this paradigm a woman's sex is perceived as a negative complement or as a relative 'lack' in relation to the phallus (ibid.).

In her essay, Irigaray describes the way the phallus as '[the] one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning' supplants 'while separating and dividing that contact of at least two (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched' (TS 26). Irigaray is implicitly criticising the way phallogormorphism deprives women of self-representation. The figure of a woman's sex becomes part of her critical apparatus to evoke a femininity beyond that of the patriarchal symbolic. She is not attempting to define a feminine identity through an unmediated relationship of female anatomy, but rather to describe, discursively, its absence or prohibition within the Symbolic.

Through the two lips metaphor, Irigaray is therefore evoking a positive representation of feminine sexuality - one which exceeds phallic categorisation and its immobilising effects. She defends and clarifies her use of this metaphor, expanding its allusion to a woman's speaking mouth and reminding us of its discursive role:

To seek to discover-rediscover a possible imaginary for women through the movement of two lips re-touching ... does not mean a regressive recourse to anatomy or to a concept of 'nature', nor a recall to genital order - women have more than one pair of two lips! Rather it means to open up the autological and tautological circle of systems of representation and their discourse

so that women may speak (of) their sex [*parler leur sexe*]. (Whitford quoting Irigaray, 173)

The two lips metaphor also has a deconstructive use which plays on the traditional notion of virginity as 'closure'. We see evidence of the latter in Irigaray's rejection of the idea of an enclosed 'volume' when she considers possible images to represent a female imaginary. The concept of an enclosed virginity is rejected because of its assimilability to a phallic maternal, in which the maternal is privileged over the feminine,⁷ and in which men compete with the mother for productive power:

By closing herself off as volume, [the phallic mother] renounces the pleasure that she gets from *the non-suture of her lips*. She is undoubtedly a mother, but a virgin mother [...] Granting her a certain social power to the extent that she is reduced, with her own complicity, to sexual impotence. (TS 30)

In Speculum of the Other Woman, Irigaray explains the notion of virginity-as-enclosure as an illusion which permits men to fuel the phantasy of a pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother. Virginity-as-enclosure is a means of denying the mother's independence or alterity:

Virginity, represented by the hymen, would thus be the thing which in this very figuration of the impossible, in its virtual role of negation, permits incest (she isn't my mother because she isn't a mother yet). (Speculum 33)

Irigaray exposes the ingenuity of this notion when she reproaches the patriarchal symbolic for stripping women of their 'openness' to ensure sexual passivity and possession: 'the fault only comes when they strip you of your openness and close you up, marking you with signs of possession' (TS 211).

⁷ The need to represent women beyond their roles as mothers is central to Irigaray's project. I return to this point later on.

Another aspect of Irigaray's discursive strategy is that it moves beyond a Symbolic preoccupation with the visual to include the sense of touch in its evocation of a female imaginary. Tactically this removes the Symbolic need to veil and unveil a woman's 'absent' sex (TS 210). Irigaray's statements about touch need to be read in this context:

Within [the logic of the Symbolic], the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. While her body finds itself thus eroticised, and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the 'subject,' her sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to see [... all of] which has to be excluded, rejected, from such a scene of representation. (TS 26)

Touch becomes useful as a discursive tool because it is difficult to conceptualise in dichotomous terms: 'Touch is a more subjective, intersubjective sense; it is somewhere between active and passive; it escapes the possessive, mechanical and warlike economy' (TTD 21). It also encourages a sense of 'autoerotic' containment - another key term in the construction of a female imaginary which will allow me to introduce the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in Irigaray's theory.

In An Ethics of Sexual Difference, Irigaray examines the 'love of self' from a masculine and feminine perspective. In this discussion, 'love of self' and 'autoerotic' or 'autoaffection' are terms used fairly interchangeably in an attempt to extricate women from their unacknowledged and unrepresented predicate role in the service of the male subject.

Traditionally, men's 'love of self' takes the form of an impossible 'return' to a non-desiring mother figure (ESD 60). In complying with this process women simultaneously eclipse their own autoerotic awareness and sacrifice their relation to their mother (ESD 66). Mother and daughter are thus 'fused' together. Irigaray refers to the 'abandonment'⁸ of the fusional state which fails to emerge as a subject', meaning that neither mother nor daughter enjoy a subject status (ESD 70).

As a step toward individuation⁹ and identity, it becomes necessary for women to be recognised beyond their maternal role as sexual beings (JTN 93, 94). This is why Irigaray distinguishes between 'mothers' and 'women' (IR 52). The step toward representation is difficult, however, because 'the desire of/ for the mother' is actively repressed or forbidden by the Symbolic (IR 36).

The prohibition of this desire is a matter of representational politics or what Irigaray refers to as a 'primary metaphorization' presently denied women. Within the Symbolic, a girl's identity is defined 'in terms of her devalued, object relation to the supremacy of the phallus' (Speculum 77-78). The boy can symbolise the loss of origin¹⁰ because he has a penis within a system of representations that is phallic, but

the girl does not know *what* she is losing in discovering her 'castration' or in the 'catastrophe' of

8 The french term for 'abandonment' is *déréliction* (MW 81).

9 Whitford regards it possible to describe this process using a term from Nancy Chodorow, despite differences in the latter's perspective of the mother-daughter relationship (MW 79). An Ethics of Sexual Difference contrasts this relation with the 'undifferentiation' of the mother-daughter relationship (ESD 101).

10 This terms refers to the representational relationship of the child to his/her mother.

her relationship first with her mother and subsequently with other women. She has then no *consciousness* of her sexual impulses, of her libidinal economy and, more particularly, of her original desire and her desire for origin. In more ways than one, it is really a question for her of a 'loss' that escapes any representation. Whence the impossibility of 'mourning' it. (Speculum 68)

In this framework, the 'fact' of a woman's castration prevents her from

imagining, fancying, re-presenting, symbolizing [...] her own relationship to beginning [...] the girl shuns or is cast out of a *primary metaphorization* of her desire as a woman, and she becomes inscribed into the phallic metaphors of the small male. (Speculum 83-84)

For this reason Irigaray sees the need for a transformation of mothering in the present symbolic:

we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters. In a word, liberate ourselves along with our mothers. (IR 50)

In other words, women have to give up their mothers and get to know them as women in a reciprocal, intersubjective relationship. These are the requirements for creating a genealogy of women, as women. When Irigaray describes virginity as a woman's 'fidelity to her identity and female genealogy' (JTN 18), she is expressing the idea that virginity belongs to all woman - mothers and daughters - at all stages of their lives (JTN 117).

With regard to women's spirituality, the concept of the sensible transcendental fully embraces women's sexuality. It heals the symbolic division attributing 'the material, corporeal, sensible, "natural" to the feminine, and the spiritual, ideal, intelligible, transcendental to the masculine' (MW 149).

Traditionally the division which the transcendental male subject relies upon has destructive consequences for women spiritually:

'Because of the split, women, as the body, represent sexuality, which is then cut off from the ideal or spiritual, and becomes a "lower" function, that which is to be transcended in the pursuit of the good' (MW 149).

The sensible transcendental, also a 'dynamic', deconstructive concept, therefore seeks to redress this imbalance. Its goal is evoked in Irigaray's description of a female *jouissance*¹¹:

Female *jouissance* would be of the order of the constant and gradual creation of a dimension ranging from the most corporeal to the most spiritual, a dimension which is never complete and never reversible.¹² (IR 190)

The incomplete nature of this sexual/spiritual dimension is part of Irigaray's notion of 'becoming', which represents a continuous spiritual aspiration, but also reflects the need to posit 'a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as *horizon*' in the representation of sexual difference (SG 61). Irigaray stresses the integral relation between divinity and gender in her interpretation of Feuerbach:

'God is the mirror of man' [...] Woman has no mirror wherewith to become woman. Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand. (SG 67)

The title of my thesis, 'Reclaiming Virginité, Liberating Desire', can now be understood as an evocation of feminine desire, exceeding the 'neutral' desire of the Symbolic.¹³ It is discursive

11 By this Irigaray is referring to 'an experience of sexuality more in keeping with [women's] bodies and their sex' (IR 45).

12 It is in this sense that I will use the word 'embodiment' in my thesis. I adopt the term from Whitford, p 149.

13 Irigaray uses the term 'desire' in a variety of ways. In her essay 'This Sex Which Is Not One', it refers to pleasure, sexuality, as well as representation - the respect in which women do not have access to Symbolic desire and therefore 'do not speak' (IR 51-52).

and creative in alluding to and beyond women's current representation.

When Irigaray uses the phrase 'liberate women's desire' it is in the context of warning that a radical power reversal for 'women's development' would only perpetuate phallogocentrism and that 'learning to undertake tactical strikes, to keep [...] apart from men long enough to learn to defend their desire' is a wiser philosophy (TS 32-33). As my summary introduction suggests, I will be interpreting 'virginity' and 'desire' in the context of representation. I read Irigaray's autoerotic as a means of evoking or representing feminine desire, hence my focus on the 'autoerotic' in my literary analysis.

With regard to my choice of literary texts, an Irigarayan perspective which addresses the imaginary foundations of the Symbolic, providing psychological insights into the power structures that inform patriarchal societies and the extent to which these draw upon women's predication within language, renders the different historical placings of the novels relatively unimportant. Irigaray herself '[descends] into the hell of history to seek traces of life', to trace a desire she surmises has 'doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks' (IR 213; TS 25).

Voyage in the Dark allows for a clear presentation of commodified virginity because of the heroine's role as a discarded mistress. The more codified allusions to static virginity in Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea (the image of the wedding veil and the figure of Rebecca in Jane Eyre; the white dress in Wide Sargasso Sea) are more potent in conveying the importance of this concept

and the need for its transformation for women as a collective. Before I provide an outline of how the project of resymbolisation illuminates a reading of Bronte and Rhys's novels, I explain the emphasis on imagery in my analysis in relation to Irigaray's own poetic style.

In my thesis I draw upon Irigaray as a theoretical source, but since I view the imagery in the novels I study as subtly transforming the discourse it is engaged with in order to evoke a feminine voice, Irigaray's own attempts to evoke the feminine through a discursive strategy that is poetic in style deserves attention. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer an analysis of Irigaray's poetic style, so I present some critical perspectives of the role that poetry plays in her work.

Grosz describes Irigaray's writing '[involving] new forms of discourse, new ways of speaking, a 'poetry' which is necessarily innovative and evocative of new conceptions of women and femininity' (EG 101). Distinguishing Irigaray's style from Julia Kristeva's 'critical style', she says Irigaray presents

constructive, poetic, exploratory texts capable of multiple readings and different associations. No two readings, even by the same reader, are identical. Her writings perform what they announce. (EG 102)

In so far as this style acts as a strategy, it reacts against women's predication within the static dichotomies of the Symbolic, where the notion of speaking in an alternate 'voice' is so difficult to describe. Irigaray says: 'there is simply no way I can give you an account of "speaking (as) woman"; it is spoken, but not in meta-language' (TS 144).

By metalanguage Irigaray is indirectly alluding to men's ability to abstract themselves from the corporeal through women, 'speaking through a rationality quite external to their bodies' and thereby creating a 'conceptual and self-reflective space' in which to analyse and distinguish between discourses (IR 49-51; EG 129). Phallogocentrism is thus able to 'police' its own discourse and guard against ambiguities that might undermine its values.

Poetry, with its ability to proliferate meanings, therefore has to be contained. Grosz explains its radical potential for feminism:

It is only when the poetic text threatens to insert itself into the very heart of 'serious' theoretical writings, blurring the borders between poetry, fiction and knowledge, that discourses more amenable to the positive inscription of the female body may be established and explored. (EG 130)

When Whitford introduces Irigaray's lyrical essay 'He Risks Who Risks Life Itself,' in which the figure of the poet is central,¹⁴ she suggests that the figure and style of the piece can be read 'as an intervention in the imaginary, an attempt to appeal directly to the psychic forces and resources for change' (IR 163). She again implies the suitability of poetry for exploring a female imaginary in the context of Irigaray's elemental vocabulary,¹⁵ suggesting that elemental figures are 'less constrained by the dominant imaginary, more open to other possibilities' (MW 62). In her essay, 'Divine Women', Irigaray contrasts the manner in which traditional philosophy and poetry perceive the elements. She

14 In this essay the poet seems to be a figure enacting the principle of the sensible transcendental, open to the 'other' that escapes representation and perceiving the world beyond the dichotomies of the Symbolic (IR 213-218).

15 This refers to the elemental imagery Irigaray uses in her book Elemental Passions as well as other of her more poetic works.

suggests the way this philosophy denies 'the material conditions of existence' or the way science 'endlessly [defines] new material particles that compose us [...] without our naming them or perceiving them, at least consciously' (SG 58). Irigaray also implies that poetry has a role in exploring our perception of the world through the sense of touch, a mediation she says is 'continually forgotten' (SG 59).

In the novels I analyse, the use of poetry to express an alternate voice is evident in instances where Brontë and Rhys provide densely figurative 'prefaces' in their narratives. When Annie Howells describes Rhys's diary account of a childhood experience, she says that 'Rhys first provides a 'preface' [...] delaying] the articulation of the formative incident for five-and-a-half pages while [she] establishes in her typically associative way the context for the story' (AH 15). Howells regards this as 'emblematic of [Rhys's] fictional methods, where her narratives are figured out more completely through image associations than through linear plot connections' (AH 15).

This not only reminds us of the dense imagery in Chapter 25 of Jane Eyre as Jane provides a 'preface to the tale' of Bertha for Rochester, but alerts us to Sections I and III of Wide Sargasso Sea where the densely figurative dream texts, cannot be 'contained' by 'Rochester's' narrative perspective as he struggles to maintain Symbolic coherence.

I now show how Irigaray's conceptual transformation of traditional virginity provides a means of analysing the novels' efforts at establishing a feminine 'voice', bearing in mind that I adopt the concepts of static and dynamic virginity as analytical

tools, but also refer to instances in the text where virginity is directly or indirectly presented.

In terms of the silence associated with static virginity, the figure of Adèle dramatizing a fable in which a rat is being urged to speak (with the attendant irony of her having been trained to pay more attention to intonation than to the meaning of the words she utters), becomes emblematic of women's silence as they mime patriarchal discourse (JE 89). In this respect Jane's discomfort and sense of detachment are represented in her response to her wraith-like wedding veil (a symbol of traditional virginity) and its disquieting association with an embodied Bertha (JE 242, 253). Irigaray's two lips metaphor provides a means of deconstructing Bertha's apparent opposition to Jane, facilitating the latter's eventual 'embodiment'.

I also relate the virginal figure of Rebecca in the 'bridewell charade' to the bracelet and chain imagery in the novel, reading in this metaphorical figure and frame, the inevitable silence that accompanies the virgin as a token of exchange and the inherent difficulty of honouring sexual difference within the Symbolic.

I draw a parallel between Irigaray's use of an elemental vocabulary and Brontë's own use of elemental imagery to redefine 'passion' and create a positive representation of feminine desire. The device plays a part in the deconstruction of Jane and Bertha's opposition, allowing for the evocation of a sensible transcendental in Jane's mysterious spiritual reunion with Rochester. In the reunion of Jane and a blinded Rochester at the end of the novel, Irigaray's emphasis on touch as a component of the autoerotic is

suggested in the new way that Rochester is constrained to 'perceive' Jane.

In chapter 2, I introduce the concept of the autoerotic, showing how it provides an insight into both writer's relation to patriarchal discourse in Rhys's *Black Exercise Book* and Brontë's 'Captain Henry Hastings'. I refer to the 'disruption' and 'reengagement' of the autoerotic in a rhetorical manner as a way of considering factors that either inhibit or encourage the representation of feminine desire. In my analysis of Voyage in the Dark I show how the novel employs the image of darkness to express the heroine's alienation in her codified and commodified existence as a mistress, but also the potential to reengage a sense of the autoerotic in memories of her Dominican home: 'It's funny how well you can remember when you lie in the dark with your arm over your forehead' (VID 129). In the latter sense the image of darkness encourages a self-awareness based on senses other than sight, as it does at the end of Jane Eyre. In so far as this autoeroticism introduces the figure of the mother, Rhys's efforts to represent this relationship positively were aggravated by the textual changes she was forced to make to her novel.

In chapter 3, my analysis of Wide Sargasso Sea focuses on the mother-daughter relationship as a necessary step in achieving the autoerotic representation implicated in resymbolising virginity. I present Annette as a patriarchal mother who, in miming the discourse that creates her social definition, is unable to positively mirror her daughter. This negative inheritance appears in Antoinette's dreams where she remains silent and immobile in the face of her tormentor, desperately trying to preserve her white

dress - a symbol of traditional virginity and the dichotomies that produce her fragile identity.

However, the text reaches for a form of representation beyond this role through the evolution of its metaphors. The figure of Christophine's dress deliberately trailing in the dirt on feast days reappears, hinting at spiritual embodiment, as does the sensuality associated with the red dress at the end of the novel (WSS 71, 151). This is the legacy that Christophine, Antoinette's black 'mother',¹⁶ offers in their relatively reciprocal relationship. It is an autoerotic quality that ultimately proves too threatening for Rochester, whose identity rests upon the predication of Christophine as black m/other - or the denial of her feminine and cultural specificity.

I provide an optimistic reading of the ending of Wide Sargasso Sea, tracing the reclamation of the autoerotic in Antoinette's reorganisation of maternal memories. Figurative transformations from darkness and silence to light and 'voice' accompany a redeemed sexual identity, dynamic and virginal in a sensual and spiritual awareness now immune to the destructive dichotomies of the Symbolic.

16 Antoinette's real mother is Annette, but Christophine, Antoinette's black nurse, provides an example of mothering closer to Irigaray's ideal of a reciprocal relationship, as I shall argue. I refer to them as Antoinette's 'white' and 'black' mothers respectively.

Chapter 1: Jane Eyre

That '*elsewhere*' of female pleasure might rather be sought first in the place where it sustains ek-stasy in the transcendental. The place where it serves as security for a narcissism extrapolated into the 'God' of men. It can play this role only at the price of its ultimate withdrawal from prospection, of its 'virginity' unsuited for the representation of self. Feminine pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language, in its own language, if it is not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operations. And so what is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure. (TS 77)

Women's desire has no plot to follow. (Gordon 264)

Unrepresentability is the text's main motif. (Azim 192)

This chapter focuses on the problem of articulating feminine desire in a Symbolic which does not afford it positive representation. In my introduction I sketched two roles available for women; one in which as virginal tokens of exchange they remain silent or mime patriarchal discourse at the expense of their own pleasure and the other in which a redefinition of virginity introduces the possibility of representing and articulating desires in their own terms, in line with a female morphology.

The heroine of Jane Eyre assumes or tries to assume both roles. She is able to provide the conventional responses proper to her sex and station as a governess, but also shows evidence of an originality which attracts Rochester in their conversations (JE 162, 114). Now conventional readings such as that provided by John Maynard, in Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality, read Rochester as instrumental in drawing out Jane's 'fire', as assisting - despite some blunders - in the heroine's sexual awakening (JM 122).

While it is likely that Rochester's ostensible function is to provide an audience for feminine desire, I support Firdous Azim's more skeptical interpretation of Jane submitting to Rochester's 'linguistic direction and control', listening and responding to his 'interrogation' and making her declaration of independence as a form of protest, 'a desperate effort to establish her own voice' (Azim 194). Azim believes this is evidence of a text whose main motif is unrepresentability.

I shall assume an intermediate position however, in the sense that while Rochester does encourage Jane to escape from the 'Lowood constraint', his character does not recognise the implications of this 'school' of patriarchal femininity (JE 121). Consequently he will find intimations of her distinctness as a subject very threatening.

In the opening quotation of this chapter Irigaray addresses the unrepresentability of feminine desire within the patriarchal symbolic. She is suggesting that feminine desire is alienated in a mind/body dualism which enables men to achieve spiritual transcendence through the predication of the female gender. The price of this arrangement for women is that they cannot prospect (discover or explore) their own sexuality. This virginity cannot be engaged to represent the feminine subject or articulate feminine pleasure. Yet since women are 'not simply [or completely] resorbed in this function', they are potentially able to maintain a mimetic stance that is consciously distinct from their conventional roles in the Symbolic (TS 76).

In the first section of this chapter, 'Obeying the Injunction to Speak', I therefore draw attention to moments in the text where

the command to speak is being explored in relation to the absence of adequate representation of women's desires. I look for instances which reflect women's mimetic role and observe the gestures (smiles, deliberate silences) that testify the existence of an alternate voice. The scene in which Adèle enacts a fable in which a rat orders a frightened 'colleague' to speak, as well as Jane's second interview with Rochester in which he issues the same the command, are examples of such.

In chapter 25, where the heroine struggles to express herself, establishing a preface or context in order articulate her feelings, the veil image forces a juxtaposition of an ethereal ideal of virginity with Bertha's undisputable corporeality.

In the second section of this chapter, 'The Figure of Rebecca, an Unconventional Virgin', I address the significance of Rebecca in the 'bridewell' charade and interpret the bracelet and chain imagery in the novel through this figure.

The choice of Rebecca is strategic, for in Genesis this figure possesses an unusual status in being given the freedom to decide whether or not she will marry Isaac. The biblical text is, however, open to interpretation on this point and the ambiguity is one which Brontë, I believe, exploits fruitfully. The expensive gold bracelets and nosering that Eliezer presents Rebekah¹⁷ on identifying her as Isaac's intended can be read either as a gift that leaves Rebekah free to decide whether or not she will marry Isaac, or as a means of procuring the passive virgin as a token of exchange among men in a homosexual economy.

17 I distinguish between Brontë's figure and that of the bible by using their respective spellings: 'Rebecca' and 'Rebekah'.

In the last section of the chapter, 'Redefining Passion through the Elemental', I expose the view of feminine passion as excessive and show how Brontë parodies conventional morality in this regard. Drawing on David Lodge's essay, 'Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's War of Earthly Elements', in which elemental images serve as objective correlatives to unite diverse themes of the novel, I argue for my own purposes that the elementary imagery takes on positive *and* negative connotations in relation to passion at different times, gradually and subtly evoking a positive representation of feminine desire. Irigaray's attempts to bypass the immobilising effects of the Symbolic by means of an elementary vocabulary that explores the life of the passions,¹⁸ provide another means of interpreting Brontë's use of elemental imagery in this regard.

In this section I also show how Jane's experience of the elemental incorporates rather than transcends the material world, creating an affinity between the sensual and the spiritual. By the time Jane is reunited with Rochester at the end of the novel, the elemental imagery has transformed any threat of the feminine as 'wraith-like' into a spiritual 'embodiment' (JE 242). In this process the sense of touch which Irigaray emphasises, has taken on a new significance in the way Rochester 'perceives' Jane.

Before I begin, I provide a commentary on Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic which takes its title from a reading of Jane Eyre in which the character of Bertha Mason as Jane's 'mad double' is a figure for the woman writer's literary

¹⁸ I shall be referring to Irigaray's 'Divine Women' in Sexes and Genealogies, pp. 57 -72).

imprisonment. I shall be drawing parallels between their approach and some of Irigaray's concerns.

Gilbert and Gubar set out to formulate a theory of women's literary creativity. In their study of women writers of the nineteenth century, they regard these women engaged in a struggle against a social confinement which is reflected in their figurative confinement within literature. Gilbert and Gubar attempt to make sense of the strategies these women writers adopt in terms of Harold Bloom's theory. If in this theory, each phase in literary theory consists of a 'strong action and [its] inevitable reaction], then women writers are 'acting out' male metaphors in order to understand their implications' (GG xiii).

Adopting Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence, they examine the belief that male sexuality is the essence of literary power, determining poetic influence through a filial relationship. For women the implication is that if she fulfills her sexual potential in a literary endeavour, she transgresses boundaries dictated by Nature.¹⁹ According to Bloom, a paternal creative metaphor implies that 'women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual objects' (GG 8). As such the woman writer is perceived as powerless and sterile. In a parallel fashion, Irigaray is exposing the centrality of male sexuality in language, showing how indispensable, if unacknowledged, women are in their predicate role.

19 The dilemma faced by the woman writer is something which Irene Tayler in her book Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, also draws attention to. Her thesis is that Brontë is faced with the choice between being loved and being creative. She regards the ending of the novel as a failure, because she sees Brontë choosing love and repudiating the notion of a celibate vocation (Tayler 169).

When Gilbert and Gubar explore the image of an enraged self that is imprisoned on the other side of the mirror/text they suggest the woman writer trying to express 'an invincible sense of her autonomy, her own interiority', a sense [...] of the authority of her own experience' (GG 16). The journey through the looking glass towards literary autonomy involves a metamorphosis which is anxiety provoking because a woman needs to embrace and transcend the angel/demon dichotomies which male authors have generated for her.

In Irigarayan terms Gilbert and Gubar are describing the need for a female imaginary, a means for women of relating to the world without becoming alienated and immobilised by the dichotomies generated by the Symbolic.

When Gilbert and Gubar look at how sterilizing images of female creativity affect the ways in which women 'attempt the pen' they ask whether women writers are engaging in an act of mimicry or whether they are finding a way of 'talking back' to these images (GG 46). This question is one which Irigaray's strategy of deliberate mimesis addresses in order to understand the implications of male metaphors and simultaneously thwart women's subjugation in the Symbolic.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, Bloom's anxiety of influence, which describes the male poet's fear that he is not his own creator, that he must engage in an Oedipal struggle with his precursor in order to become a poet himself, is transformed in the case of women into an anxiety of authorship. The woman writer's precursor is not only of a different sex, but one who attempts to imprison her within definitions 'which conflict with her sense of

self - her subjectivity, autonomy, creativity' (GG, 48). She fears therefore that the act of writing will isolate and destroy her, inheriting an 'infection in the sentence' (GG 52). To heal herself and achieve self definition, she has to exorcise the sentence which bred this infection. She does this by creating characters who 'enact [her] own covert, authorial anger' (GG 77). This is part of a process of unification in which the schism between angel and monster is healed.

An Irigarayan response to 'authorial anger' might well be the attention she draws to the danger of unrepresented drives²⁰ which in my interpretation of Jane Eyre, Brontë implicitly considers by creating a Jane/Bertha opposition that can be deconstructed in order to expose inadequate forms of representation for women. Toril Moi believes that Gilbert and Gubar 'persist in defining anger as the only positive signal of a feminist consciousness', but in their defence I think the operative word in their analysis is 'enact[ing]' anger, implying a representational issue rather than one of literal indulgence (TM 62). In my own reading, Bertha's role is primarily to create a legacy of embodiment for Jane as a step toward creating a female imaginary without which women remain inarticulate.

20 '*Socially*, [women] are 'objects' for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a 'language' that they have not produced; *naturally*, they remain amorphous, suffering from drives without any possible representatives or representations' (TS 189). 'A symbolism has to be created among women [...] Lacking this interval *of exchange*, whether of words or deeds, women's passions work on an animal or vegetal level, in a rather cruel manner' (ESD 104).

I Obeying the Injunction to Speak

Brontë exposes the irony attending the command for a woman to speak in a scene where Adèle enacts 'La Ligue des Rats' for Jane (JE 89). I read it as an example of how women are forced to mime the discourse of the Symbolic in which they are implicated but alienated.

I first provide a brief paraphrase of the fable to explain its significance in this context. In La Fontaine's 'La Ligue des Rats'²¹, a rat promises to assist a mouse by obtaining support from his colleagues to defeat the mutual threat posed by a cat which is terrorizing the neighbourhood. Although a group decision is reached to take action and eliminate this threat, they scatter fearfully as soon as the cat appears. The fable shares some of the characteristics of another of La Fontaine's fables, 'Conseil tenu par les Rats',²² which has as its moral that actions speak louder than words. Brontë selects the moment the rat appears out of breath before his friends to report the plight of the mouse, for Adèle's enactment. It becomes ironic in the child's mouth because her 'careful training' is at odds with the words she delivers (JE 89). She has learnt how to mime speech in order to satisfy a male audience. Her mother's profession as an opera-dancer, kept by Rochester as a mistress, provides a further irony. These skills however, do not necessarily include the opportunity for self expression:

'Was it your mama who taught you that piece?' I asked.
'Yes, and she used to say it in this way: "Qu'avez vous donc? lui dit un de ces rats; parlez!" She made me lift

21 I refer to Jean La Fontaine's fables in Fables Choisies, p. 394.

22 I refer to Fables Choisies, p. 61.

my hand - so - to remind me to raise my voice at this question. Now shall I dance for you?' (JE 89)

The object of the performance is to please the audience and not to communicate personal sentiments. As such it provides a powerful figure for mimicry.

For Jane in her second interview with Rochester, this type of discourse is readily available, as she shows by providing 'the established answer' (JE 108). Although Rochester takes trouble to discover what she, personally, thinks, he pursues a tone of command which recalls the figurative command to speak enacted by Adèle (JE 108, 105). He orders Jane to 'play a tune', 'fetch [him her] portfolio', 'answer [his] questions' and ultimately to 'Speak' (JE 108 -116). He defends this tone by explaining that he 'cannot alter [his] customary habits for one new inmate' (JE 108). These 'customary habits' introduce another of the novel's ironies, since Rochester will claim a need to be 'unconventional' with Jane, raising the issue of adequate forms of discourse that the novel is preoccupied with (JE 121). It is therefore necessary to distinguish between Rochester's impatience with convention and Jane's impulsive escapes from conventional strictures (JE 114).

This distinction allows us to understand the subtle allusion to Adèle's enacted fable. Jane (read as the mouse) in her mimetic role, cannot speak, and Rochester (read as the rat who proves cowardly in the face of real danger), although claiming the need for 'new statutes' will, I argue, fall back on the male privileges of Symbolic discourse (JE 120).

When Jane refuses the command to speak, the gesture of her 'not very complacent or submissive smile' is testimony to the existence of a very distinctive 'voice' (JE 116). This has the

effect of exposing the distance between the speaking role available to women generally and the possibility of articulating feminine desire.

Another occasion upon which Jane is silent when Rochester attempts to draw her out occurs in the 'Gypsy scene' in which Rochester disguises himself as a Gypsy to read Jane's palm. He encourages her confidence by observing that Jane's mouth is '[mobile] and flexible [...] a mouth which should speak much and smile often, and have human affection for its interlocutor' (JE 176). When the ploy fails to work, Jane does not admit the object of her 'musing' to Rochester (JE 178). When he asks the meaning of Jane's 'grave smile', her reply, '[wonder] and self-congratulation, sir', is ambiguous, particularly since she has admitted to the reader that her mind has been 'running on Grace Poole - that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries, as I considered her' (ibid.).

The gesture of Jane's (silent) smile plays a role in deconstructing the apparent opposition between Jane's ostensible freedom of speech and Grace's 'paid' silence as a 'singular', discreet servant (disclosing, in turn, Bertha's enforced silence as Rochester's 'mad wife' (JE 132)).

The image of women's mouths to represent the difficulty of articulating feminine desire has been established early in the novel. Under Mr Brocklehurst's sphere of influence at Lowood, Miss Temple assumes a 'petrified severity', her mouth is 'closed as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it' (JE 53). In this scene, however, where Mr Brocklehurst is insisting that the girls' hair be cut short, an image of dynamic virginity is subtly

evoked. The silent 'looks and grimaces' of the girls in response to this order, prompt Jane to say of Mr Brocklehurst:

it was a pity Mr Brocklehurst could not see them too; he would perhaps have felt that, whatever he might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was farther beyond his interference than he imagined. (JE 54)

The idea of a thwarted speech and sexuality recurs in the image of the mouth when Jane is called to tend Mason's wound and is forbidden to speak even though she fears Mason may be dying. It is here that Irigaray's two lips image assists in an understanding of how representation is linked to sexuality. I read the image of the wound in conjunction with women's speaking and sexual 'mouths' (mouth/vagina). In support of this association, Little observes that the link between female anatomy and the wound is quite common (mouth/vagina/wound). He quotes the anthropologist Hoffman Hays:

women by their recurring supernatural wound [i.e., their vulva] are set apart as aliens from the male norm. Sensitivity to contact and contagion is aroused and the symbol of the whole complex is blood, the powerful magic liquid on which life depends. (JL 35)

In this scene, the image of Mason's 'blue, still lips forbidden to uncloset' link Jane's (obedient) silence to Bertha's enforced silence through the image of the latter's 'purple' face and 'swelled and dark lips' later on (JE 184, 250). The suggestion of vaginal lips appears in the image of the 'trickling gore' (read as menstrual/ hymenal/ parturient blood) that Jane must continually wipe away and makes sense in the context of a denied sexual body or 'morphology'.

Jane encounters great difficulty in expressing herself on the eve of her wedding when she is anticipating an accession to womanhood as Jane Rochester, 'a person whom as yet [she does not

know' (JE 242). Troubled by the appearance of an unknown woman (Bertha) in her chamber, she struggles to relay the events of the previous night, telling Rochester 'No words could tell you what I feel' (JE 246).

For this reason Chapter 25 establishes a long 'preface'²³ which negotiates the dichotomies I associate with a silent, static

23 I provide a brief outline of Chapter 25 to assist the reader, since I shall be providing a contextual reading of the chapter which draws on images and scenes and precede and follow.

Chapter 25 opens as it closes, with Jane dreading her wedding day. The preparations for the honeymoon and the wedding dress itself provoke Jane's anxiety. She accounts for her mood in terms of the preparations themselves, her anticipation of change, as well as 'a third cause' - an incomprehensible event which she hopes Rochester will explain on his return from a business trip. Addressing the reader she says: 'Stay till he comes, reader: and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence' (JE 243).

She enters the orchard while the wind rages and gathers the apples that have fallen, dividing the ripe from the unripe. After bringing them inside, she prepares Rochester's place in the library, but feeling restless, runs outside to wait for Rochester. Worried about his safety and judging an event that occurred the previous night as a bad omen, she sets out to meet him.

When Rochester arrives, Jane joins him on his horse and embraces him joyfully. When they are settled together in the library however, she is overcome with a sense that everything, including Rochester, is unreal, unsubstantial and dream-like. She issues 'an extraordinary smile' confirming she is well but unable to express her feelings. At this point Rochester begins to comment on Jane's state of nerves. When pressed she recounts her experience the previous day.

Untroubled, she had thought of her life in relation to Rochester's and mused at the contrast of her own 'square of unembroidered blond' with the costly wedding veil Rochester has bought for her (JE 247). She falls asleep as the wind and 'a mournful undersound' begin to rise, dreaming that she carries a weeping child as she tries to follow the figure of Rochester (JE 248). Rochester hopes that the dreams are all Jane has to tell him, but she describes them as 'the preface' to her tale (JE 249).

Jane had woken to discover a stranger in her room, one who took her veil from the closet, tried it on in front of the mirror and then rent it in two. The figure then approached Jane in her bed and extinguished a candle before her eyes, causing Jane to faint. Jane has 'proof' that the event took place because of the torn veil. However, Rochester provides a 'rational' account of the event in terms of Grace Poole's strange habits and what he regards as Jane's 'imagination' (JE 251).

virginity (JE 242). The opposition of an ethereal femininity and a grotesque corporeality that I shall demonstrate in relation to Jane and Bertha, meet in the figure of the veil that the latter rents in two. I interpret the expensive 'vapoury' veil as a symbol of static virginity (JE 242). Signalling the possibility of a 'voice' beyond this, Jane's own 'square of unembroidered blond' suggests itself as an image of dynamic virginity (JE 247).

Before I address this preface, I draw attention to Irigaray's discussion of veiling in relation women's traditional speaking roles as well as some of the 'disembodied', ethereal projections that Rochester has already showered upon Jane. As an example of the 'father's projection and idealisation of woman', the virgin Athena described in Irigaray's Amante Marine bears many of the characteristics that the text of Jane Eyre is engaged with:

Athena is thus a motherless daughter, a passionless woman, preserver of patriarchal law and justice. Athena arbitrates conflicts, moderates passions. [...] Veiled from head to foot, the virgin figure conceals her beauty, her corporeality and her femininity, revealing only her face. This is her seductive power: veiling her corporeality, her lack, her sex, she speaks words that are not her own (they are her father's), she brings harmony to those around her. She promises status but has none in her own right. (EG 163-4)

Among the female characters of the novel, the text of Jane Eyre seems to be addressing the traits of Athena point for point, the

Jane is not satisfied with Rochester's 'solution of the mystery', but pretends to be: 'to please him I endeavoured to appear so' (JE 251). On Rochester's advice, she spends the night with Adèle but does not manage to sleep. In the morning Adele clings to Jane in her sleep, while Jane cries over her 'with strange emotion' (JE 252). Jane describes the moment: 'She seemed the emblem of my past life, and he I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day (JE 252).

exception being Jane's 'passion' which I devote more time to in the last section of this chapter.

In the role of an arbitrator of conflicts and a moderator of passions, Rochester perceives Jane as his divine 'instrument', the 'arbitress of [his] life - [his] genius for good or evil' (JE 192, 276). Although Jane is not beautiful, Rochester transforms her 'puny and insignificant' frame into an ideal of femininity which denies rather than conceals her corporeality (JE 228). In his eyes she is a 'strange', 'almost unearthly thing', his 'pale, little elf', his 'ministrant spirit', reminding us of the 'pale and spiritual aspect' of Helen Burns on her deathbed (JE 224, 227, 179, 209).

In these projections Rochester is inadvertently undermining his own efforts to elicit the 'audacity that wants chastising out of [Jane]' (JE 175). I say this because his character is unable or unwilling to associate the 'Lowood constraint' responsible for Jane's 'reticence' with this institution's efforts to generate ethereal feminine figures (JE 121).²⁴

In Chapter 25, the image of the veil builds upon the sable veil of Jane's 'third painting' - a colossal head against a polar background - where I read the veil as an image of traditional femininity responsible for the despair of the female figure. The 'bloodless brow', the iceberg and the incomplete figure suggest the disembodiment or denied sexual body that accompany static conceptions of virginity (JE 110). The white flame which crowns the colossal head is said to diadem 'the shape which shape had none', a

²⁴ I shall be referring to this in my discussion of the novel's redefinition of passion in section III.

central metaphor for the unrepresentability of feminine desire (JE 110).

In Chapter 25, the image of the veil is intended to evoke the ethereal qualities Rochester is in the habit of associating with Jane. Already feeling estranged from the role of wife that she is about to assume, Jane refers to 'the vapoury veil' as the 'strange, wraith-like apparel' and as a 'whitedream', shutting the closet to conceal them (JE 242). Metaphorically the veil *is* the poison or dagger that Rochester will joke lies wrapped inside it (JE 248). These feelings of alienation will only escalate on the morning of her wedding, when Jane hardly recognises her own reflection. For the moment she goes outdoors to feel the wind and reassure herself of her substantiality and reality.

It is because the veil fails to provide representation for Jane the 'ardent, expectant woman' as opposed to the 'cold, solitary girl'²⁵ that Jane dreads the coming marriage (JE 261). She speaks of there being 'no putting off the day that advanced' and wishes that 'this present hour [with Rochester] would never end' (JE 242, 246). She seems to associate becoming Rochester's wife with an ending or with death since she has to 'wait to be assured [that she would] come into the world alive' before owning her new garments (JE 242). She experiences this anxiety because without positive representation for her desire, there is no transition between girl and womanhood, no gradual, continuous unfolding of her sexuality.

25 It is necessary to jump forward in the narrative to trace the need for representation or 'voice' in this chapter.

While she waits for Rochester's return she goes into the orchard and *divides* the ripe from the unripe apples, as though pondering how and if she will 'accede' to her sexuality. This builds upon Edenic allusions that are already in operation in the text. I provide a brief background to establish a context which I suggest is again leading to a frustration with conventional representations of women.

In Jane Eyre, the Fall is one of the means that the text adopts to contest traditional presentations of women as sexually corrupt or as the 'downright Eve' Rochester warns Jane she will become if she asks too many questions (JE 230). One of the ways the text does this is by allowing Rochester to 'set Jane up' on one side of an artificial moral dichotomy - an abstracted purity associated with static virginity - so that the possibility of a fall becomes very likely. For example Rochester contrasts a sinister description of Thornfield in which he is indirectly alluding to his unchaste wife, with the orchard into which he introduces Jane when he tells her 'Now *here* [...] all is real, sweet, and pure' (JE 189). I read this as part of the text's way of exposing the impossible expectations and contradictions patriarchy projects upon women.

The association of the orchard as a Garden of Eden has also been established in Rochester's invitation to Jane to walk with him there late one evening. The sexual connotations are rampant in images of trees 'laden with ripening fruit' and the position of Eve as sexual temptress seems all too available (JE 219). Jane becomes 'ashamed of feeling any confusion: the evil - if existent or

prospective there was - seemed to lie with me only; [Rochester's] mind was unconscious and quiet' (JE 210).

So the 'division' of ripe from unripe apples in the orchard in which Jane '[seeks shelter]' in Chapter 25, also conveys the sense in which it is difficult for a woman to conceive of her own sexual maturation in the backdrop of traditional conceptions of Eve.

In this chapter the ethereality of the veil image as a symbol of static virginity is challenged by the presence of Bertha. She is terrifying because her undeniable corporeality - her 'red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments' - pose a stark contrast with the diaphanous veil she throws over her head (JE 250). This unwelcome 'embodiment' is confirmed by Rochester's first response to Jane's description of her: 'Ghosts are usually pale, Jane' (JE 250). The text is deconstructing the blood of Bertha's dark flesh with the 'bloodless' brow of Jane's 'third painting'. Jane says of the 'ghost': 'This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes' (JE 250).

As the text creates a metaphorical pathway for an alternate voice through the deconstruction of these figures, the heroine appears faithful to her predicate position in language. Disturbed as she is, she *asks* Rochester if she can elaborate her tale (JE 250).

I interpret Bertha's ripping of the veil as metaphoric refusal of a representation which denies feminine sexuality. It is later reevoked in the vision of the moon figure which addresses Jane's spirit in her dream of Gateshead later on. The figure of this vision penetrates the 'sable' folds of the clouds and waves them

away, undermining the power of the 'sable veil' that covered the despairing face in Jane's painting (JE 282, 110). As it takes form, evolving from light into a 'white human form [shining] in the azure [and] inclining a glorious brow earthward', 'the 'bloodless brow' of Jane's painting is subtly embodied (JE 282).

This vision implicates Bertha as it halts 'in the centre of an obscured ceiling' in Jane's dream, motioning in actuality to the ceiling which separates Jane from Bertha's chamber above. The range of this vision, which causes the roof to 'resolve' into clouds before assuming a human form and inclining earthwards, creates a mooring for the disturbing 'no land' of Jane's 'shipwreck painting' (JE 109). This process traces the mind/body dualism which Irigaray attempts to heal through her concept of the sensible transcendental.

Jane's confidence at the beginning of Chapter 25 - that she has a 'secret' she will share with the reader when Rochester returns - is echoed in the conviction of Jane's 'extraordinary smile' before she begins to recount her tale to Rochester (JE 246). I believe this gesture is another testimony to the existence of an alternate 'voice' or concept of the sensible transcendental that the text is evoking. This is confirmed by Jane's smile as she muses about teasing Rochester with her 'square of unembroidered blond' (JE 247). The evocation of dynamic virginity is not however, one that Rochester welcomes.

Rochester's 'rationality' as a transcendental subject refuses to grant any credibility to Jane's attempts to represent her experience. Rochester implies that Jane is not altogether sane to insist on Bertha's reality, claiming that the latter is the

'creature of an overstimulated brain' and that Jane's nerves 'were not made for rough handling' (JE 251). This dismissal in effect enacts Jane's 'figurative' abandonment in her dreams as she tries to follow a retreating Rochester carrying a crying child (JE 248, 249).

When Rochester tells Jane to sleep in the nursery with Adèle, he infantilises a woman seeking acceptance of her sexual identity. Rochester creates the impression that he wishes Jane to remain the non-desiring virgin he sees in the image of her as a 'little girl' or 'girl-bride', as a 'quaint, inexperienced girl', suggesting his fear of an embodied sexuality, distinct from his own (JE 118, 227, 125). In terms of Irigaray's theory this type of fear is well founded, since, as she says, the articulation of feminine desire threatens the logical underpinnings of the patriarchal symbolic (TS 77).

It is significant that the disclosure of Bertha's identity through Mason is connected to Jane's 'financial' inheritance (even though Mr Eyre is not yet dead at this point in the novel). The detail of Bertha's father's name as 'Jonas' transforms the imagery of floods, shipwrecks and drownings associated with the effects of patriarchal representations of women²⁶ into a more positive legacy. The 'destructive' desire enacted by Bertha achieves some validation, creating a medium for Jane's freedom.

The fictive representation of a legacy that passes between a dead woman and her vindicator is a technique that Brontë employs elsewhere in her fiction. Irene Talyer observes this in her

26 I shall refer to these in my discussion of Jane's other paintings and the role of the elemental imagery in the following two sections.

analysis of 'Captain Henry Hastings' where a seduced and fallen Rosamond is vindicated by the figure of Elizabeth who, in her relation to Sir William Percy, admits her passion but defends her virtue at the site of the former's grave which is inscribed with the word 'Resurgam'. This pattern then recurs codified in the text of Jane Eyre in the instance of Helen Burns's grave, as well as in the figure of Bertha, whom Tayler says is the established successor of the regal and intellectual character, Zenobia (Tayler 171, 175)²⁷. Tayler in fact presents Bertha as a protective force in relation to Jane (Tayler 175). A continuity between the two women is created, making Bertha's actual death insignificant to the issue of representing feminine desire.

II The Figure of Rebecca, an Unconventional Virgin

The figure of Rebecca is central to a discussion of representation in Jane Eyre since the text plays on alternate readings of the biblical story in which Rebekah may be viewed on the one hand, as a silent virgin, a token of exchange among men, or on the other hand, as a woman whose 'voice' is a natural consequence of sexual difference in the Irigarayan sense. I relate the bracelet and chain imagery in Jane Eyre to this figure, as symbols of a coerciveness and possessiveness characteristic of a patriarchal, Symbolic desire that cannot honour sexual difference.

I describe the biblical figure of Rebekah²⁸ as unconventional because of her freedom of choice in marriage. As Naomi Rosenblatt

27 Of Bertha's transformation in Jane Eyre, Tayler says: 'That the magnificent Zenobia should end [...] as a bloated animal suggests how very grim is Charlotte's estimate of the fate of the woman of intellect forced to live unloved' (Tayler 176).

28 To assist the reader I paraphrase Genesis, chapter 24.

observes in her book, Wrestling with Angels, freedom of choice in marriage was unusual for women in biblical times. In Genesis though, the possibility that Rebekah may not agree to be Isaac's wife is mentioned no less than four times in the context of the oath that Eliezer swears concerning Isaac's intended (Genesis 24, vv. 5, 8, 39, 57). As Rosenblatt remarks, 'Abraham takes special pains to ensure that Isaac's wife will not be coerced into the marriage' (NR 218). The interpretation is loaded in the biblical

When Abraham is very old, he summons his servant Eliezer (a traditional name that Brontë adopts), asking him to solemnly swear to seek a wife for his son Isaac. Abraham tells Eliezer that if Isaac's intended does not agree to follow him, he will be freed from his oath. Eliezer swears to this, takes ten camels, all his master's possessions and departs for Nahor.

Reaching the well outside the city, he prays that he will be able to recognise Isaac's bride as the woman who offers him and his camels water to drink. Before he has finished praying, Rebekah, described as a beautiful virgin, appears. Eliezer asks for water, remaining silent as she fulfills the prophecy. An ambiguous verse 22 follows: 'And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold'. Eliezer then asks who Rebekah's parents are and whether he may lodge in her father's house. Rebekah accommodates him and Eliezer thanks God in prayer.

Rebekah runs to her mother's house to tell her family what has happened. Her brother Laban (who appears to be in charge of the household) sees the earring and bracelets, hears Rebekah's account, and runs out to offer Eliezer hospitality.

Eliezer tells Laban of his errand, articulating the presentation of gifts in a more direct way; he has 'put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands' (Genesis 24: 47). When Eliezer asks Laban for an answer, the latter defers to spiritual authority, telling Eliezer to take Rebekah. Eliezer then brings more jewels and gifts for Rebekah, her mother and Laban.

The following day Eliezer begs leave. Laban and his mother ask whether Rebekah can stay a while longer. Eliezer pressures his host politely. At this point Laban and his mother call Rebekah and ask her whether she agrees to go with Eliezer. When she replies that she will go, they bless her and send her on her way.

Isaac now appears 'from the way of the well Lahai-roi' and sees Rebekah approaching as he is performing his evening meditation (Genesis 24: 62). Rebekah sees Isaac and gets off her camel, asking Eliezer who he is. When Eliezer tells her she covers herself with a veil. Eliezer tells Isaac what he has done. Isaac takes Rebekah to his dead mother's tent and makes her his wife: 'he loved her: and [was] comforted after his mother's death' (Genesis 24: 67).

context of the well as a symbol for 'fertility, female sexuality, and the subconscious wellspring of imagination' (NR 220). This freedom would seem to undermine the patriarchal practice of treating the virgin as a token of exchange. The whole future of Abraham's progeny ultimately rests, then, upon the utterance of a virgin's desire.

The only potentially problematic issue in interpretation is *how* Eliezer gives Rebekah the earring and bracelets. Is his action in the spirit of his oath or does he fasten the earring and bracelets upon her in the spirit of an economic transaction which excludes her rights as a subject? The latter possibility is partly supported by Laban's apparent fascination with the wealth of the jewelry.

Another commentary of this passage²⁹ observes that the story is probably 'a conflation of variant traditions' in which case Rebekah's freedom of choice becomes ambiguous. Furthermore, the etymology of Rebekah's name suggests there is reason for caution in interpretation, although it is intriguing for what I am arguing is a metaphorical play on 'Rebekah' as either a 'binding' beauty or as one who is 'bound' in marriage:

Older etymologies derive this name from the root פקד , 'to tie fast,' with reference to Rebekah's 'binding' beauty. But it more probably comes by metathesis from the feminine of the word צפון , 'cattle,' analogous to other names in the patriarchal narratives, such as Rachel ('ewe') and perhaps Leah ('cow') and Zilpah ('short-nosed animal').³⁰

On the one hand the figurative sense ('binding' beauty) might support a reading of Rebekah's freedom of choice, while on the

29 The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, p. 19.

30 The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, p. 14.

other hand 'to tie fast' with its possible animal derivatives, suggest women in the context of possessions that can be exchanged. The 'older etymologies' are interesting because they focus upon the action of fastening which leaves open to interpretation how Rebekah is won or courted. Conflated though the biblical version may be, Abraham, Isaac (who has no say in the matter), Eliezer and ultimately Laban's patience and acceptance in this regard are in harmony with Rebekah's acquiescent but independent utterance.

In Jane Eyre, the figure of Rebecca appears in the central 'tableau' of a charade for the word 'bridewell'.³¹ The charade is thematically related to the women Rochester is courting or married to, namely Blanche Ingram, Bertha his wife and Jane. Apart from the bracelet imagery which I read in relation to this figure, the oath that Rochester insists he must keep when he is pressing Jane to tell him how she feels ('and the oath shall be kept') is most likely an allusion to Eliezer's oath (JE 222).

In this tableau, Rochester is presented ambiguously as 'an agent or victim of the bowstring', as one who either benefits from or is unwillingly implicated in a patriarchal economy (JE 160). (There is also a sinister suggestion of silencing in the image of the bowstring - a Turkish method of execution by strangulation.) In terms of how Rebecca is approached, the charade appears to produce a 'positive' reading of the biblical story because Rochester/Eliezer prostrates his gifts at the Lady Ingram/Rebecca's feet and then fastens the bracelets on her arms. Yet significantly,

31 In chapter 18, Rochester and his guests enact a marriage scene, the encounter of Eliezer and Rebecca and finally the figure of a fettered or imprisoned Rochester. Each sequence evokes the metaphorical allusions of the word 'bridewell'.

the camels are 'wanting', rendering Lady Ingram a false bride according to spiritual prophecy (JE 161). Another 'complication' is the detail of Lady Ingram's 'crimson scarf' which would appear to identify her as 'false' *because* of her desire/sexuality, suggesting virginity in its static sense (JE 160). On a superficial plot level, she is false simply because she must pose a contrast with the worthy bride, Jane, and propel the narrative.

The final tableau, produced only because the audience cannot decipher that of Eliezer and Rebecca, presents the figure of Rochester in chains, implying that he is as much a victim of his marriage - or of patriarchal discourse - as his existing and prospective wife in Jane are. My own reading of Rochester's role will however emphasise the respect in which he falls back on the privileges of his patriarchal position, following a 'negative' reading of the biblical story of Eliezer and Rebekah. I read the jewels that he showers on Jane as evidence of a coercive courtship which fails to honour Jane's desire as distinct from his own.

Indeed Brontë systematically adopts the image of bracelets, chains and jewels in relation to a possessiveness that cannot honour sexual difference. The image of the bracelet is introduced early in the novel in Jane's painting of a shipwreck (JE 109). In this sinister context, a bracelet picked off a female corpse by a raven, seems in some way connected to the woman's demise. The brilliance of the bracelet poses a sharp contrast with the fair arm sinking below it, suggesting that as a representation for women, it is destructive. It reappears in the form of the jewels Rochester offers Jane, where their association with his mistresses as sexual possessions provides a degrading context (JE 126, 239). Once Jane

has declared her passion, the occurrence of the bracelet/ jewel/ chain image becomes more frequent, creating a sense of imprisonment and implying that Jane has not really declared herself as Rochester's equal because no such freedom exists in terms of representation (JE 223).

I first outline the literal incidents of fastening and then discuss the general coerciveness I read in their relation to Rochester. Rochester tells Jane he will put a 'diamond chain round [her] neck', 'clasp the bracelets on [her] fine wrists, and load [her] fairy-like finger with rings' (JE 228). Jane is 'his', because the 'ring' he tells Adèle he will place on Jane's hand is still 'under the disguise of a sovereign' (JE 236). The designation of a monetary sum degrades the symbolism of the ring in its suggestion of women's exchange value.

While Rochester ostensibly distinguishes Jane's 'originality' from the 'Grand Turk's whole seraglio', for Jane, the 'Eastern allusion [bites] *again*' because this is the metaphor connected to Rochester/Eliezer's evocation as 'the very model of an Eastern emir' (JE 237, 160, my italics). In other words, Rochester's inclination to view Jane as valuable *in a market context* is degrading. Hence Jane's criticism of the paucity of representation and the 'currency' it perpetuates:

'Oh, it is rich to see and hear her?' he exclaimed. 'Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not *exchange* this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio, gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!'

The Eastern allusion bit me again. 'I'll not stand you an inch *in the stead of* a seraglio,' I said; 'so don't consider me an *equivalent* for one. If you have a fancy for anything *in that line*, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay, and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you

'No: you must stay! I swear it - and the oath shall be kept.'

'I tell you I must go!' I retorted, roused to something like passion. (JE 222-223)

For his part, the oath that Rochester swears he will keep is not only an attempt to honour his original wife under extraordinary circumstances, but an allusion to Eliezer's oath, which he clearly cannot keep by pressuring Jane.

When Rochester does, rather sadistically, elicit an articulation of Jane's desire, he immediately regards it as a cue to embrace her. In the backdrop of his manipulative coerciveness it is doubtful whether he can perceive her originality as 'equal' but 'different'. He will later joke that it was Jane who made the marriage offer, betraying an awareness of his own advantage - that ultimately the onus for any moral risk in her passionate expression rests with her (JE 231). As Lyndall Gordon explains in a biographical context:

In an age when virtuous women were perceived as innately passive, they would not be expected to respond to any signal short of a proposal of marriage. The whole onus of misinterpretation would therefore fall on the woman.³² (LG 121)

After Jane's declaration, Rochester tells Jane 'your will shall decide your destiny', evoking the image of Rebekah 'mother of thousands of millions' (Genesis 27: 60). He is again, 'play[ing] a farce' as Jane fears (JE 223). It is now possible for Jane to be perceived in the same way that Blanche is presented, as a false

32 Gordon makes this observation in the context of Charlotte Brontë's correspondence with Constantin Heger. She comes to the conclusion that Charlotte's anger at not receiving a response and her belief that she had a right to a response, was well founded: 'For Monsieur [Heger] had, in fact, invited response - as he habitually played on the emotions of his girl pupils' (LG 121).

seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here (JE 237, my italics).

Maynard recognises that Rochester is forcing Jane's sexual development but regards this as a blunder which undoes the positive recognition he provides for her passion. To me the blunder is not so much a temporary blindness provoked by the anticipation of sexual consummation but part of a wider strategy to assert Jane's 'difference'. Rochester's seduction of Jane has in general been coercive. His manipulative strategies are far removed from the biblical Eliezer's patience, diligence and openness of purpose.

He has pressured Jane into a demonstration of her feelings by making her jealous through his open courtship of Blanche Ingram. He has created the bleakest view of her prospects once he is married to Blanche. When he emphasises the cold, wide ocean that will divide them, he emphasises the connection they share in terms that are stiflingly intimate - a 'cord of communion' that is 'so tightly and inextricably knotted' that its severance would create a bleeding wound - creating an all or nothing scenario that reduces Jane to tears (JE 222). Even if one tries to read this as Jane/Eve's creation or birth, the power play is unbalanced and Jane is 'obliged to yield' (ibid.). She must accept the definition of wife as possession that he is leading to, or none at all.

When Jane imagines she has no choice but to leave in the face of Rochester's immanent marriage to Blanche she says 'I must go', unlike Rebekah, who when asked whether she will accompany Eliezer, says 'I will go' (Genesis 27:58).

'My bride! What bride? I have no bride!
 'But you will have.'
 'Yes; - I will! - I will! He set his teeth.
 'Then I must go: - you have said it yourself.'

bride. The point is that he has '*made [Jane] talk*'; the text seeks to represent her *freedom* to talk (JE 27, my italics).

The image of the chain reappears in relation to St John where Jane will also experience a sense of coercion and bondage. St John's proposal creates a state of mind 'like a rayless dungeon, with one shrinking fear *fettered* in its depths - the fear of being persuaded by you to attempt what I cannot accomplish' (JE 357, my italics). St John regards Jane in the light of his own passions which he keeps under strict control. Jane asks him whether he is 'forging a fresh chain to fetter [his] heart' (JE 330). So in desiring her to become part of him, he cannot distinguish or appreciate her desire as unique.

Nancy Armstrong in her book Desire and Domestic Fiction³³ is, in accordance with Irigaray's principle of a homosexual economy, aware that the modern subject and the modern form of desire is one which neutralizes sexual difference because she stresses that gender divisions cannot precede their cultural representations, but

33 I provide a brief exposition of her thesis. The female subject of domestic fiction is inscribed with/by middle class values and has a role to play in maintaining the surveillance of this class, replacing the force that was once used by the aristocracy to maintain class divisions. Domestic fiction creates artificial distinctions between public and private, domestic and political spheres by creating tropes which allow economic realities to be translated and concealed in psychological terms. This works by assuming that gender divisions precede their cultural representations, when in fact political forces are merely creating a female subject that will serve their purposes. On the one hand Armstrong realises that this modern subject (of which the precursor in domestic fiction is female) neutralises sexual difference, for she notes that 'the Puritan household [of conduct books] consisted of a male and female who were structurally identical, positive and negative versions of the same attributes' (NA 19). On the other hand she regards the female ideal that emerged in conduct books and educational treatises that were often written by women, as having contributed to the power that middle-class women enjoy today (NA 255).

ultimately she seems to regard Brontë as unaware of how economic and cultural representations inform gender definition (NA 11). This is because she attributes the historical tenacity of the Brontës to the fact that they '[perfect] tropes to distinguish fiction from historically bound writing' (NA 187). These tropes 'translate all kinds of political information into psychological terms' and '[produce] new figures of desire that [detach] the desiring self from place, time and material cause' (ibid.). The techniques of the Brontë's [their 'figures of desire'] 'have suppressed the political identity along with the knowledge of self as such' (NA 191).

Armstrong is implying that these tropes are powerful but reductive:

By focusing on the issue of the heroine's authority over the emotions, Jane Eyre allows us to slip past a crucial detail that brings the story to a state of emotional gratification. More so perhaps than her virtue or passion, it is an endowment from Jane's wealthy uncle that makes her happiness possible. [...] with economic autonomy, she acquires the power to pursue sexual desires that magically claim priority over any social duty. (NA 47)

According to Armstrong, Jane decides not to marry St John not because 'he has offered her a life of poverty and self-denial, but because he has refused - in exchange for controlling her economic circumstances - to grant her sovereignty over his heart' (NA 47). She also initially regards Jane's marriage to Rochester as impossible, not because he is already married, 'but because she [has] no economic power to relinquish' (NA 47). Armstrong believes that '[by] representing this transaction as either a moral or an emotional imperative rather than as an economic necessity, Jane Eyre takes part in the larger cultural strategy underlying middle-class sexuality itself' (NA 47).

While I support Armstrong's view, I do not regard the issues of Jane's 'virtue and passion' as separate from 'economic necessity'. I believe that through the figure of Rebecca, Brontë is relating coercion through the image of bracelets to an economic, patriarchal reality which objectifies and silences women. The biblical figure of Rebekah is a means of evoking a woman whose sexual difference is respected in all spheres of society. Brontë's aesthetic process does not conceal economic realities or the problem of a neutralized subject.

III Redefining Passion through the Elemental

In the above sections I have discussed broad metaphorical structures that expose the inadequate representation of women's desires in Jane Eyre. On a finer level, Brontë's use of elemental imagery supports these structures, playing an important role in achieving a positive representation of feminine sexuality. I first provide an overview of the presentation of passion as 'excessive' and show how Brontë undermines this perspective by parodying conventional morality. I then address the ways in which the elemental imagery transforms the negative representation of passion in a way that evokes the 'voice' I associate with dynamic virginity.

Ann Mozley, a contemporary reviewer of Jane Eyre, refers to the articulation of women's emotions - by which she more than implies women's passion - in the context of an unguarded virtue:

She compares the baring of women's emotional lives to the public revelation of a woman's sex life and secrets. Women writers, says Mozley, betray their own cause when they show that women give away their hearts

unsought as often as they would have us believe. (Azim quoting Mozley, 97)

She betrays her support of a culturally prescribed passivity for women in her judgement of women writers giving away their 'hearts unsought'. This reading will show that Brontë is more than aware of the attitude Mozley espouses and at times uses the word 'passion' in a tentative, rather self-conscious way.

When Jane first defends her character as an adult she has to argue against the derogatory connotations of 'passion': 'My disposition is not so bad as you think: I am passionate, but not vindictive' (JE 211). When Jane is provoked into declaring her feelings for Rochester, she is 'roused to something *like passion*' (JE 223, my italics). In the mouth of Rochester, who has become threatening in an excessive demand for the fulfillment of his own passion, the word is balanced in a way that suggests its negativity: 'I think you good, gifted, lovely: a fervent, a *solemn* passion is conceived in my heart' (JE 278, my italics). The need to qualify this word also becomes evident when St John hesitates to use it in a description of Jane: 'I was about to say, impassioned: but perhaps you would have misunderstood the word, and been displeased' (JE 315).

Brontë is struggling to articulate feminine desire within the tradition of static virginity. In this context 'Passion' and 'Nature' are presented as uncontrollable and excessive. As a child, when Mrs Reed tells Jane she is 'passionate' she is asking her to admit to a fault (JE 30). She will refer to Jane's invective as the occasion on which she broke out 'all fire and violence' (JE 211).

'Nature' is also presented as excessive, requiring restraint and sacrifice. It is first used ironically when Jane is excluded, as a child, from the fire-side circle of Mrs Reed and her children because she cannot convey a 'lighter, franker, more natural disposition' (JE 3). Jane's first passionate speech is then read in terms of 'artifice' and 'duplicity' (JE 12). Appearing 'natural' or genuine thus become associated with restraint.

When Mr Brocklehurst objects to Julia Severn's curly hair, he exposes the difficulty women must negotiate, forbidden to 'openly' conform to the world (vanity), and forbidden to conform to nature (abandon). The following passage emphasises woman's natural body as excessive; hair is viewed as an 'abundant excrescence':

Why in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly - here in an evangelical, charitable establishment - as to wear her hair one mass of curls?'

'Julia's hair curls naturally,' returned Miss Temple, still more quietly.

'Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature; I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl's hair must be cut off entirely; I will send a barber tomorrow: and I see others who have far too much of the excrescence'. (JE 54)

To attain 'Grace', seen as inimical to nature in this instance, the only solution would seem a complete denial of the latter.

For St John nature is likewise something to deny. In the context of his feelings for Rosamond, he tells Jane how religion has transformed his character

turning the original materials to the best account; pruning and training nature. But she [religion] could not eradicate nature: nor will it be eradicated "till this mortal shall put on immortality". (JE 332)

In so far as Rosamond informs or represents nature for St John she must be denied, in accordance with the rules that govern the transcendental male subject.

Maynard offers a contrast of Rochester and St John as 'two versions of the polarities of sexual openness and sexual suppression [...] that distinction [...] between passionate, sexual love and some distortion of love' (JM 133). But whether Rochester is ready to appreciate and engage Jane's passion or St John is ready to recognise and suppress it along with his own, neither, I am arguing, recognise it as distinct from their own. Indulgence and denial do not preclude their perception of a woman's passion as excessive.

Karen Chase in her book Eros and Psyche, supports the view that Brontë is frustrated with existing forms of representation for women. Analysing Brontë's use of philosophical psychology³⁴, she claims that critics need to be careful in submitting Brontë's work to the Passion-Reason dichotomy, remarking that the force of moral abstracts 'is by no means as great as a casual reading might suggest' (KC 53). In her opinion Brontë is frustrated by the limits of technical vocabulary (the terms of philosophical psychology) and therefore turns concepts into conceits - producing increasingly elaborate figural presentations. She sees this frustration as a reason for Brontë's 'hesitations', never '[putting] the doctrines to systematic use' and at times '[assuming] a distinctly ironic attitude' (KC 57,8).

34 'Brontë had before her the Enlightenment tradition of philosophical psychology which had represented the human mind in terms of a few leading faculties: reason, judgment, conscience, memory, feeling, imagination' (KC 52).

I would go as far to say that there are traces of parody in certain passages, placing conventional morality in question. When Jane recounts her childhood experiences to Miss Temple in a way that will sound credible, she manages to suggest passion *within* moderation by exaggerating the effort: 'I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be *most moderate - most correct*' (my italics) (JE 60).

Planning to leave Lowood and praying for guidance, Jane appears to mock the prioritization of servitude. This is confirmed later, when, desiring the 'life, fire, feeling' she does not possess, she earnestly defends women's need for liberty and stimulus (JE 95):

I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!' Here a bell, ringing the hour of supper, called me downstairs. (JE 73)

The bell which answers her prayers is hardly an inspirational voice, although the image of the wind is introduced in relation to passion. When Jane compares Servitude to 'Liberty, Excitement and Enjoyment', its very lack of appeal as a means of salvation critically exposes the valuation of sacrifice or denial:

A new servitude! There is something in that [...] I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet; it is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: delightful sounds truly; but no more than sounds for me; and so hollow and fleeting that it is mere waste of time to listen to them. But Servitude! That must be matter of fact. Any one may serve. (JE 74)

Here the insubstantiality of sounds which we associate with the wind, their dismissal as 'hollow and fleeting' becomes ironic in the context of the role that the wind plays as an elemental image later on.

When Jane decides to leave Thornfield, the struggle between a personified 'Conscience' and 'Passion' is presented in a melodramatic way:

Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat, told her tauntingly, she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony. (JE 262)

The degree of punishment meted out to the 'dainty foot' that has 'but dipped' into the slough seems unreasonable. Karen Chase cites this as an example of Brontë's figural presentation of psychological concepts and remarks that 'conscience and passion are not only identified by gender but become associated with parts of the human body, conscience as an "arm of iron", passion as a "throat" and "dainty foot". Chase also remarks that the struggle between these figures 'carries hints of sexual sadism' (KC 54). The abstraction of the feminine form (the necessarily 'dainty foot' clearly incongruous with the slough) hints at the sexual perversity to which this abstract morality leads.

As a way of introducing Brontë's use of elemental imagery in relation to conventional morality, David Lodge's essay, 'Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's War of Earthly Elements' is very useful. He identifies two systems of value in conflict in Jane Eyre: 'the instinctive, passionate, non-ethical drive of Romanticism towards self-fulfilment at whatever cost, [...] held in check by an

allegiance to the ethical precepts of the Christian code and an acknowledgement of the necessity of exercising reason in human affairs' (DL 115). He suggests that

Brontë succeeds in uniting [these] diverse elements of her novel by employing a system of 'objective correlatives' susceptible of equally diverse treatment [...] At the core of this system are the elements - earth, water, air, and fire; these by a logical and linguistic association, are manifested in weather; this leads to images of nature as affected by weather, and the extensive use of the pathetic fallacy; finally the system incorporates the sun and moon, which affect the weather, and, traditionally, human destiny. (DL 120)

Lodge's essay concentrates on what he regards as the most important element, fire. Although he explores all the nuances of the fire imagery, including the positive, 'highly valued' nuances of fire as 'the inner life of passion and sensibility' and admits that 'the dominant energies and sympathies of the novel are on the side of passion', he ultimately refers to 'passion' in terms of 'control', suggesting that he reads it as excessive (DL 115).

Lodge is claiming that overall, the elements act as objective correlatives for the positive expression of passion. I wish to explore his statement that diverse elements of the novel are united by a system of objective correlatives 'susceptible of *equally diverse treatment*'. I interpret this as meaning that the elemental imagery or objective correlatives take on both positive *and* negative values at different times. I regard this as a strategy which subtly rewrites the conventional portrayal of passion as negative. I would like to suggest that in an overtly moral context, the word 'passion' appears to endorse conventional morality or is accompanied by destructive images of fire, but that 'unchaperoned' or unaccompanied by moral abstracts, the objective correlatives

endorse a positive definition of passion that makes the articulation of feminine desire easier to defend. (This does not preclude an argument for the role of the fire imagery in the heroine's need to learn how to moderate her passions; it merely complicates this reading in the context of feminine desire.)

As I have mentioned, in the context of Jane's unruly passions as a child, the fire imagery relays destruction. Mrs Reed refers to the occasion upon which Jane broke out 'all fire and violence' (JE 211). In the company of Rochester, Jane's 'fire-spirit' is admired as 'original' (JE 237). Rochester and St John use the word 'singular' and 'original' in recognition of Jane's forthrightness, both admiring the 'penetrating [quality] in her eye' (JE 114, 331 277). Yet there is some irony attendant in the description of Grace (and by association her 'keep', Bertha) as 'singular' (JE 132). This suggests to me that there are limits to the sanctuary even the most sympathetic characters provide in relation to a woman's passion.

Later in the text however, again in the absence of moral abstracts, we see an evolving use of the fire image. In an uncharacteristic moment for St John, it becomes life-giving. His icy, marble-like aspect is healed by fire in the presence of Rosamond:

I saw his solemn eye meet with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion. Flushed and kindled thus, he looked nearly as beautiful as she for a woman. (JE 322)

Jane's 'fire' becomes destructive when it is *not* allowed expression. As St John's wife she imagines the restraint of her passion in these terms:

at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked - forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital - *this* would be unendurable. (JE 361)

Irigaray's attempts to bypass the immobilising effects of the Symbolic by means of an elemental vocabulary that explores the life of the passions are useful in tracing how the text reaches for a positive representation of women's desire. Speaking of a contemporary trend of abstraction which 'forgets the matter it names and by means of which it speaks', Irigaray refers to the passions as 'a matter of fire and ice, of light and darkness, of water and drowning, of earth and finding or losing one's footing, and of breathing in the deepest and most secret aspects of our life' in the process of 'becoming' (SG 57-68). This is Irigaray's way of referring to the spiritual momentum of the sensible transcendental (SG 57,8).

In Jane Eyre, we witness the transformative power of the elemental imagery, in the mutability and mobility these images confer as they pass from one state into another and intermingle - more important perhaps than their surface representation of consuming passion or sexual denial in the images of fire and ice. Indeed it can also be argued that the destructiveness of the elements stems from the fact that they fail to interact.

Whenever Jane seeks a male interlocutor for the expression of her passion, she inevitably loses distinction as a woman. Metaphorically she becomes engulfed in what proves to be a stronger 'element'. As fire, Rochester threatens to engulf her with volcanic eruptions (JE 190). As the ice and rock Rochester envisages her becoming after she has discovered his deception, she is later,

under St John's sphere of influence, threatened by the latter's 'avalanche' proposal (JE 265, 365). With both men she risks engulfment through the metaphor of water: as the shallow brook that runs into the deep sea of Rochester's existence, as the water that enters her soul until she feels 'no standing', rushing down 'the torrent of St John's will into the gulf of his existence' (JE 247, 262, 370).

When Jane represents herself as a contrasting element in relation to St John, fire to his ice, he refuses to interact, fearing 'infection' (JE 339). It is the male characters' refusal to grant Jane an independent existence beyond the dominance of the 'male' element that explains Jane's immobilization under St John's freezing spells. It accounts for her 'fettered' movements under his and Rochester's influence as well as the cold and hunger she would experience in Rochester's moon fantasy despite the fire associated with his volcanic power (JE 234-236).

Rochester reproaches Jane when he senses this 'difference' after the disclosure of his wife. When he accuses her of scheming to destroy him in 'his' and not 'her' sense of the word, the text is suggesting much more than moral rectitude on Jane's part (JE 264). This reflects Irigaray's thesis that the symbolic order is a homosexual economy. Jane desires an identity in relation to these men, but not to become part of them. When she tells St John 'I cannot marry you and become part of you', she is, from an Irigarayan viewpoint, admitting the impossibility of such an event, one which she has already refused Rochester (JE 361, 268).

The sensuality associated with elemental imagery - Jane's experience of the wind and rain - have also contributed to a

positive representation of desire. After Jane has posted a letter advertising for a teaching post she returns to Lowood 'through heavy rain, with streaming garments, but with a relieved heart' (JE 75). As I have mentioned, when Jane is waiting for Rochester to return to Thornfield and is experiencing a sense of self-estrangement, she goes outside to feel the wind blowing, to centre herself by experiencing her body: 'It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind, delivering my trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering through space' (JE 243).

Jane's departure from Thornfield to 'defend her virtue' is initially at least presented as an intimate and sensual relationship with the landscape, suggesting that her sexuality does not obey the dictates of patriarchal symbolic categories once it is in an open rather than a domestic space. Jane's recourse to 'the universal mother, Nature' can be compared to the erotic journey Naomi Woolf finds represented in the work of George Eliot and Emily Brontë (JE 285). Woolf remarks that:

'few literary coming-of-age stories by women include the erotic journey. But when it does surface, it is often masked by an encounter between the heroine and the landscape. The young Maggie Tulliver immerses herself in what George Eliot called 'the red deeps' in The Mill on the Floss; Catherine loses herself on the windswept moors in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. (Promiscuities 43)

In Jane Eyre our heroine describes her flight from Thornfield as follows:

I struck straight into the heath; I held on to a hollow I saw deeply furrowing the brown moorside; I waded knee-deep in its dark growth; I turned with its turnings, and finding a moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle, I sat down under it. High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that. (JE 285)

Jane's experience of the elemental, the way in which she 'reads' the natural atmosphere for guidance, interpreting 'presentiments', 'sympathies' and 'signs' in a sense which incorporates rather than transcends the material world, creates an affinity between the sensual and the spiritual (JE 193). For example, when Rochester has proposed marriage and expresses a 'savage exultation' upon hearing that Jane has no 'kindred to interfere', he attempts to justify his actions and appease his conscience by virtually claiming a divine prerogative (JE 225). At this point we are suddenly reminded of the natural atmosphere:

'I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment - I wash my hands thereof. For Man's opinion - I defy it.'

But what had befallen the night? (JE 225)

A description of the immanent storm follows. But the transition in the narrative creates the impression that a passional element which informs morality has been dangerously omitted.

Nature as a spiritual source provides a means of positively expressing passion through the objective correlatives of the elements. It is this kind of passion or feeling which informs Jane's morality. When she is reviewing the reasons which led her to leave Thornfield, she will say: 'But where am I wandering, and what am I saying, and above all feeling?', granting her passion moral dignity and authority (JE 318).

Towards the end of the novel the redefinition of passion is reasserted once again in a spiritual context at a moment when Jane is being pressured into a passionless marriage with St John. The mystical experience which reunites her to Rochester is 'a work of nature', a voice carried by the wind (JE 372, 396). Jane is careful

to distinguish this voice from the occult forces with which women's intuitive power is usually aligned and devalued (JE 372). She experiences it in very sensual terms, as an 'inward sensation', a 'shock of feeling' which 'trembles' and 'vibrates' in her 'startled ear' and 'quaking heart' (JE 373). The image of loosening bands is reminiscent of the 'invisible bond' that Jane bursts in childhood and evokes a metaphorical connection to Bertha's binding in a chair as well as the chain/bracelet imagery I explored earlier (JE 373, 30, 259). All of this conveys the importance of the corporeal within the spiritual.

When a blinded Rochester once again commands Jane to speak at the end of the novel he has to rely on a sense of touch to establish Jane's identity. I interpret the reason for Rochester's physical humiliation - the fact that he is blind and lame - in terms of the opportunity it provides for extending the use of elemental imagery and creating a female imaginary that Irigaray associates with the 'voice' of dynamic virginity.

In this context the indeterminate nature of Jane's being - which Rochester is forced to question: '*Who is it? What is it? Who speaks?*' (JE 383) - recalls the image in Jane's painting which I relate to the problem of representing femininity: 'the shape which shape had none' (JE 110). Now, however, the '[ghostly]' figure that reappears to Mary is altered by the necessity of her 'substantiality' (JE 382). Rochester will say:

'And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I cannot see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever - whoever you are - be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!' (JE 384)

Jane's omission in this instance to tell Rochester that she has experienced his presence 'mystically' is protective if, in Irigaray's terms, the articulation of feminine desire is prohibited because it underpins the logic of the Symbolic. In this respect Jane's role as embodied 'other' in Rochester's spiritual transformation is too threatening on the level of character and too audacious as a textual message for contemporary audiences.

Chapter 2: Voyage in the Dark

Scarcely does she know herself, scarcely does she begin to glimpse nostalgia for herself - her odyssey. To be able to tell her tears from those of Ulysses. Not because they were weeping the same loving tears, but because she took part in his quest for love for himself. Which does not come to the same thing. That might happen if woman also went in quest of 'her own' love. Successfully accomplishing her journey. (ESD 71)

when [a woman] is placed as an object by and for man, love of self is arrested in its development. (ESD 70)

She may try to love herself as innerness. But she cannot see herself. She has to succeed in loving the invisible and the memory of a touch that is never seen, that often she feels only in pain because she is unable to perceive its place, its 'substance' its qualities. (ESD 70)

In this chapter I introduce the notion of the autoerotic and show how Voyage in the Dark gives evidence of its disruption and reengagement as a step towards the resymbolisation of virginity. The dual path that offers itself to the heroine in Voyage in the Dark is, on the one hand, discovering herself predicated and silenced within social and written codes which commodify virginity, and on the other hand attempting, through her memories, to reengage an autoerotic experience of herself.

Just as Jane Eyre suggested that a natural process of sexual maturation had been arrested as the heroine dreaded her accession to 'womanhood' on the eve of her wedding, so Voyage in the Dark presents Anna arrested in the natural unfolding of her sexuality, alienated from herself in a society where she is a stranger to her own desire. In this society virginity becomes static, a commodified moment as opposed to a '[ceaseless] becoming'.... in which '[a

woman] "flowers" again and again if she stays close to herself and the living world' (JTN 110).

Anna's voyage consists of the two paths which Irigaray suggests are open for women when she refers to a '[nostalgic] odyssey' that must be distinguished from the role that women play in Ulysses's 'quest for love for himself' - in which they support men's autoeroticism instead of their own.

Accordingly Anna confronts two kinds of darkness on her voyage. She is faced with the darkness of her codification and silencing as a token of exchange. In the quotation above, Irigaray states that it is difficult for a woman to love her own 'innerness' because she cannot see herself. She adopts the image of blindness or darkness because she is alluding to that which is not yet represented (the Symbolic's denial of primary metaphorization). In the novel, I read this in the figurative 'blindness' Anna falls prey to at the start of her affair with Walter and in the '[meaning of the] dark streets' that become associated with her life as a mistress (VID 49).

Yet, according to Irigaray, a woman may encounter an autoerotic darkness which I associate with the resymbolisation of virginity, in which she endeavours to '[love] the invisible' and 'the memory of a touch that is never seen'. In Voyage in the Dark, Anna will experience this kind of darkness when she covers her eyes and remembers home: 'It's funny how well you can remember when you lie in the dark with your arm over your forehead' (VID 129). As I mentioned in my introduction the autoerotic is a way of alluding to unrepresented feminine desire, so the use of the terms 'engage' and

'disrupt' refer to factors that inhibit and encourage this unrepresented desire.

The process of remembering is confusing for Anna because in the absence of adequate representation, the memory of her first experience of sexuality - important because it is hinted at in the closing image of the novel, when she recalls 'the last thrust of remembering' - seems to act as a pathway not only to 'normal', 'adult' heterosexuality' but to invisible, because unrepresented, autoerotic desires associated with her childhood (VID 159). It is a memory which stumbles on the 'loss of virginity' and its attendant devaluation in patriarchal terms, but also on the potential reclamation of autoerotic desire.

Since I regard the text involved in this way with traditional representations for women, I reject a common critical perception of the 'victim mentality' of Rhys's work.¹ Like Deborah Kloepfer, I regard Rhys in charge of her own psychology when it comes to representing women in her fiction:

Critical evaluation of Rhys is often clouded by a refusal to accept her psychological and moral terrain. When the death in these novels is stripped of its emotional resonance, and the sense of victimization is read instead as narrative strategy, it becomes clear that Rhys is in control of these texts in a way that the women in the novels are not in control of their lives (Kloepfer 459).

In the first section of this chapter entitled 'Disruption of the Autoerotic', I examine excerpts from Rhys's autobiographical *Black Exercise Book* and Brontë's juvenilia to show how these

¹ This perspective is so common that I shall not list all those that adopt it. However, Deborah Kloepfer in her essay 'Voyage in the Dark: The Masquerade for the Mother', mentions Judith Kegan Gardiner's observation that 'Rhys's heroes ... repel many readers by their passivity' (Kloepfer 459).

writers register a disruption of feminine autoeroticism which is reworked in their later fiction. In the case of Rhys, a childhood experience of molestation is reworked in 'Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose', as well as Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea. In Brontë's case, moments of autoerotic disruption in 'Captain Henry Hastings' recall moments in Jane's seduction by Rochester in Jane Eyre.

In the second section, 'Commodification and Codification', I turn to the disruption of feminine autoeroticism in Voyage in the Dark evidenced through the commodification and codification of virginity. I trace this practice in the social interchanges between Anna and the male protagonists of the novel as well as in the written text of the letters that Anna receives from Walter and Vincent. I demonstrate how the novel registers the heroine's silence through her discomfort, 'incomprehension', and alienation in this process (VID 147).

In the third section, 'Remembering and Reengaging the Autoerotic', I consider the measure in which Anna's memories of her Dominican home are efforts to reengage, represent and liberate an autoerotic desire. I focus on the relative contrast of the associated sensuality these memories (leading to dynamic virginity or the creation of a female imaginary) with the figures of stasis and confinement (associated with the static virginity she inherits from and encounters in English culture).

In the final section, 'Complications in the Reengagement of the Autoerotic', I introduce the role of the mother in the representation of desire with the help of the Deborah Kloepfer essay mentioned above. Although my main focus on the mother-

daughter relationship is in the following chapter on Wide Sargasso Sea, where the characterisation of this relationship is more developed, I find it necessary to address here because the obstacles Anna faces in the reclamation of the autoerotic are related to her difficulty in remembering and representing her relationship to her mother positively. This is partly because on a textual level, Rhys was forced to make changes to her novel, but also because thematically, Anna's link to the maternal figures of her childhood - Francine and her original, white mother - is judged inferior by English society. The latter reason only compounds her predication as mistress/ prostitute/ 'dirty foreigner' (VID 95).

I Disruption of the Autoerotic

Excerpts from Rhys's autobiographical notes and Brontë's juvenilia suggest that the process of a woman's induction into the Symbolic disrupts the development of the autoerotic. In the case of Rhys, a childhood experience of molestation which has come to be known as 'The Mr Howard Story' is reworked in a short story called 'Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose' and can also be traced in Voyage in the Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea. It provides insight into the mother-daughter relationship in these last novels.

Annie Howells introduces fragments of the 'Mr Howard Story' from Rhys's Black Exercise Book in the context of a discussion on women's complicity in patriarchal discourses of sexuality and power. Mr Howard was a family friend who took Rhys for walks and engaged her in a serial story about love and sex. On one occasion he fondled her breasts and then bribed her with sweets before continuing their 'dialogue'.

The fragment itself reveals Rhys's awareness of her Symbolic 'indoctrination':

Would you like to belong to me?
 I don't know I gasped breathlessly heart beating
 looking into the eyes.
 It was then that it began.
 I'd seldom allow you to wear clothes at all - what
 would happen afterwards
 The serial story to which I listened for was it weeks
 or months?
 one day he would abduct me and I'd belong to him and we
 went home in a dream ...
 Always in the end punished - that is love - And only
 that. To give yourself up entirely hopelessly not for
 the fear of hell not for hope of heaven ...
 After 2 or 3 doses of this drug because that's what it
 was I no longer struggled ...
 But the terrible thing was the way something in the
 depths of me said, Yes, that is true: pain humiliation
 submission that is for me. It filled me with all I knew
 of life with all I'd ever felt. It fitted like a hook
 fits an eye. (Howells quoting Rhys 15)

Howells describes how Rhys sought an explanation for this experience through psychoanalysis and her reading of Freud. As to why women comply, Howells quotes from Gallop (discussing Irigaray's reading of Freud regarding feminine specificity) and sees in this the reason why Rhys continually reenacts the fantasy of falling in love in her fiction:

The law of the father gives her an identity, even if it is not her own, even if it blots out her feminine specificity. To give it up is not a 'simple' matter. It must be done over and over. (Howells quoting Gallop 19)

I reproduce this quotation because I shall be reading Anna's memories in Voyage in the Dark as attempted reengagements with the autoerotic (read as feminine specificity) that have, in a complementary manner, to be enacted 'over and over' in response to a Symbolic which requires that they be continually relinquished.

The coercive quality of this indoctrination suggested by Rhys's reference to it as a 'drug' will be echoed in Voyage in the

Dark and Wide Sargasso Sea where the power of its influence in literary texts and religious doctrines is described retrospectively by the narrative. Rhys's admission of a resonance to 'pain humiliation submission' in this induction process will reemerge in Anna's identification with the memory of a young girl's name on a slave list as she lies in bed with Walter. There is also a tentative association between sexual masochism and the mother's rejection of the daughter. I rely again on Howells's account of the Howard narrative spread 'in fragments over about twelve pages of the Black Exercise Book:

The account curiously gathers to itself the dream of sexual fascination and dread that appears as Antoinette's in Wide Sargasso Sea which Rhys tells as belonging to her adolescence, a subconscious continuation of the Mr Howard story after his departure for England. This dream is followed by an account of her mother's rejection of her in favour of her little sister, and then the final entry on Mr Howard: 'He said, How white your hands are against the grass - He said, Let her naked be, teaching the sheets a whiter hue than white. He said, I wouldn't often let you wear clothes you understand.' (AH 16)

I believe this association ('sexual fascination and dread' with the mother's rejection) is related to Antoinette's need in Wide Sargasso Sea, to submit to a cruel lover. I will suggest, with the help of Irigaray's theory, that the 'cruelty' of the 'patriarchal mother' contributes to an understanding of the 'pain' Rhys says 'has gone through all [her] life' (AH 16). In my reading, this pain conflates the figures of the mother and the lover in the absence of representation of feminine desire or because the desire of/ for the mother is prohibited. The final entry of the Black Exercise Book certainly suggests an image of virginity in its most destructive sense. Mr Howard's view of Rhys's hands 'teaching the sheets a

whiter hue than white' points to an abstraction which denies feminine desire.

Rhys reworks this experience in 'Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose' for which I now provide a brief summary. The story begins with a description of a young girl's awe in the face of 'adult attention' from an older male. The characters in question, Phoebe and Captain Cardew, go on excursions together with the girl's family's evident approval.

When the Captain fondles Phoebe, the event and her own response become eclipsed by or inadmissible in the light of the former's self-assurance and complacency. Phoebe is fascinated, shocked and often frightened by accounts of 'love' as 'violent' and 'cruel' (SL 28). He also describes a Byronic ideal of women as 'ethereal creatures' who only peck daintily at their food (ibid.).

The Captain's wife Edith is jealous but essentially accepting of her husband's behaviour, treating Phoebe as sexual competition and telling Phoebe's mother enough of what has transpired to create silence and suspicion between mother and daughter. When the Captain and his wife leave, the silence around the issue persists. Phoebe interprets the Captain's confidence as a sign of her own wickedness. Her passivity - the fact that she listened to him without trying to stop him - somehow inculcates her. Her misery feels like 'a dress that was much too big for her [... swallowing] her up' (SL 29).

Although she senses a 'vague irreparable loss' when she thinks of 'Chastity, in Thought, Word and Deed' as her 'most precious possession', she tries to transform her labelling as wicked (SL 29-

30). If her future as a wife with children seems unlikely, her prospects as a wicked girl seem challenging and exciting.

However, the numbness she has experienced after the Captain's departure suggests that her creativity has been damaged. A poem she has tried to write about the stars will never be completed. The story ends, in my interpretation, with a not so convincing resolve to be gay, bidding 'Marcus' and 'Rose' - the children she had imagined having - goodbye.

In addition to the immobility and silence² surrounding her molestation, a disruption of autoeroticism is suggested in a loss of the reflexive when she describes her relation to the subject of her poem, the first line of which had been:

'My stars. Familiar jewels'. But that night she knew that she would never finish it. They were not jewels. They were not familiar. They were cold, infinitely far away, quite indifferent. (SL 29)

Phoebe now feels completely detached from the stars and the allusion to jewels manages to convey her feeling of not being eligible to marry, not being able to identify emotionally with what is 'precious'.

The assured but insidiously coercive manner in which Phoebe's sexuality is inscribed by/into the Symbolic is paralleled by an excerpt from Brontë's 'Captain Henry Hastings'. I present a passage from each for comparison:

He never touched her again but all through the long bright afternoons Captain Cardew talked of love and

² Phoebe's confused silence recalls Jane's reluctance in following Rochester into the orchard - her shame in the face of his composure: 'I became ashamed of feeling any confusion: the evil - if evil existent or prospective there was - seemed to lie with me only; his mind was unconscious and quiet' (JE 278).

Phoebe listened, shocked and fascinated. Sometimes she doubted what he said: surely it was impossible, horrifyingly impossible. Sometimes she was on the point of saying, not 'You oughtn't to talk to me like this' but babyishly 'I want to go home'. He always knew when she felt this and would at once change the subject and tell her amusing stories of his life when he was a young man and a subaltern in India. (SL 27)

I'm obliged to you - I was beginning to think myself a very unskillful general - for, turn which way I would try what tactics I chose - the Fortress would never give me a moment's advantage - I could not win a single outwork. However, if there's a friend in the Citadel, if the heart speaks for me, all's right - ' Miss Hastings felt her face grow rather uncomfortably hot - she was confused for a few minutes and could not reply to Sir William's odd metaphorical speech. The Baronet squinted towards her one of his piercing side-glances &, perceiving she was a trifle startled, he whistled a stave to give her time to compose herself- affected to be engaged with the spaniel - & then, when another squint had assured him that the flush was subsiding on her cheek, he drew her arm a little closer & recommenced the conversation on a fresh theme. (Maynard quoting Brontë 70)

In both excerpts, the girls' sexuality is engaged while their ability to express any discomfort seems immobilised or forfeited. The ingenious way Sir William affects to be 'engaged with the spaniel' is pure ruse on his part and reminds us of the way Rochester tells Jane to look at a moth when he is aware of her discomfort in following him into the orchard in Jane Eyre (JE 219). Sir William's remark about 'the heart speak[ing] for [him]' is ironic in a context where Elizabeth is too confused to speak. There is also a parallel between the relative freedom these men possess in transgressing women's mental (and sexual) space and the manner in which Rochester imagines he can, in his conversations with Jane, 'proceed almost as freely as if [he] were writing [his] thoughts in a diary' (JE 119).

II Commodification and Codification

For Irigaray the virgin as token of exchange within the Symbolic 'lacks specific qualities of her own' in becoming 'a sign of relations among men' (TS 187). In Voyage in the Dark the character of Anna is initially completely unconscious of her sexuality in these terms. Laurie will tell her 'Can't you manage to keep the door shut, Virgin, you silly cow?' (VID 15).

Yet as a narrator, Anna makes the reader aware of her simultaneous sense of exclusion from and experience as an object of a codified value system. When Walter first meets her and offers to pay for the stockings she is buying, he first looks her up and down 'in *that way they have*' (VID 19 , my italics). Accompanying Anna and Maudie home, Walter and Vincent are reluctant to state their names and describe their backgrounds in order to maintain the 'discretion' associated with illicit sexual arrangements. The names 'Jones' and 'Jeffries' parody this custom. Moreover Mr Jones (Vincent) is classifying women according to a value system when he clarifies Walter's enquiry after Anna's age:

[Mr Jeffries] knew you'd be either eighteen or twenty-two. You girls only have two ages. You're eighteen and so of course your friend's twenty-two. Of course. (VID 12)

Anna becomes aware of a depersonalizing system of appraisal that is not as discrete as it appears:

[Mr Jeffries] didn't look at my breasts or my legs, as they usually do. Not that I saw. He looked straight at me and listened to everything I said with a polite and attentive expression, and then he looked away and smiled as if he had sized me up. (VID 12)

When Walter later sends Anna a letter inviting her to dinner, Anna gives it to Maudie to read, suggesting that she is finding trouble understanding English 'conventions' or what Laurie refers to as the necessary 'etiquette' in relating to men (VID 17). Anna is oblivious of her 'commodity value' as a virgin; Laurie's facetious suggestion that Anna tell Walter to bring a 'tin-opener' in her reply, goes over her head (VID 17).

Anna's simultaneous exclusion from and identification with the process of predication in the texts of the letters she reads and the literature available to her is established early in the novel. Reading the novel Nana, a story about a woman who becomes a prostitute, Anna describes the cover-illustration of a woman brandishing a wine-glass while sitting on the knee of a formally dressed man. The suggestion of the woman and the wine as commodity articles will be taken up in Anna's first 'romantic' dinner with Walter. Walter will kiss her after the dinner, but the memory of him smelling and rejecting 'corked wine' precipitates a feeling of hatred causing her to repulse him (VID 20).

The suggestion of the hypnotic effect of the text of Nana - one which engages the reader insidiously - reminds us of the way Rhys describes her participation in Mr Howard's 'erotic narratives' as a 'drug':

The print was very small, and the endless procession of words gave me a curious feeling - sad, excited and frightened. It wasn't what I was reading, it was the look of the dark, blurred words going on endlessly that gave me that feeling. (VID 9)

There is a suggestion of a similar effect later in the novel, when Anna recounts the childhood experience of listening to the litany

and 'falling into a stupor' as the it ended (VID 37). In relation to Nana, Anna will claim that 'Bits of it are alright', but Maudie will introduce a cynical view of this and other books written by men about women as a case of 'just someone stuffing you up' (VID 9).

Anna's sense of alienation in relation to her codified role - the way she hears her own voice 'going on and on answering Walter's questions' while the latter seems not to believe what she is saying extends to her mirror image and her experience of her own body: 'It was as if I were looking at somebody else'; 'I felt as if I had gone out of myself, as if I were in a dream' (VID 19, 21).

After the 'unsuccessful' first evening Anna has with Walter, he sends her a letter with money and she immediately goes out to buy clothes. When she returns home, she attempts to decipher the letter, '[reading] it through very carefully, sentence by sentence, to find out what each sentence meant' (VID 26). Anna is unable to fully comprehend or articulate a response to her codification. The landlady, on the other hand, 'interprets' the situation by identifying and expelling Anna as a tart. Anna immediately experiences a sense of confinement and stasis: 'I believe this damned room's getting smaller and smaller (VID 26). She refers to 'the rows of houses outside, gimcrack, rotten-looking, and all exactly alike' (ibid.).

By the time Walter and Anna have become intimate, money has determined the path that their relationship will take. The purchase of her virginity is made clear in spite of Walter's feeble protestations to the contrary:

When I sent you that money I never meant - I never thought I should see you again, he said. [...] Then he started talking about my being a virgin and it all went - the feeling of being on fire - and I was cold. (VID 32)

For Walter there is no contradiction between regarding virginity as 'the only thing that matters' and his ability to pay for it (VID 32). Anna's momentary arousal as Walter places his hand on her knee is extinguished by his 'valuation' of her virginity as 'the only thing that matters' (VID 32). When he kisses her she begins to cry and suddenly wants to leave. But her instincts betray her or rather, they have been betrayed by her codification:

'I must go,' I thought. 'Where's the door? I can't see the door. What's happened?' It was as if I were blind. (VID 32)

The image of blindness introduces the theme of a darkened or disrupted autoerotic. It is also figured in the dark streets Anna walks into after having sex with Walter (VID 35).

After Walter pays Anna for sex, the novel begins to suggest women's financial predication in more general terms. Maudie warns Anna not to fall in love with Walter and tells her what 'any girl' knows - that 'the thing with men is to get everything you can out of them and not care a damn' (VID 39). She understands femininity in terms of creating the right appearance in order to survive in a money-fueled market, calculating the potential success Anna can achieve with the clothes she possesses. In so doing, the commodification of sexuality is always close enough to present demeaning comparisons which parody the concept of 'being a lady':

She looked at my dresses and kept saying, 'Very lady-like. I call that one very ladylike indeed. And you've got a fur coat. Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat she has something, there's no getting away from that.'

My dear, I had to laugh, she said, 'D'you know what a man said to me the other day? It's funny, he said, have you ever thought that a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them?'. (VID 40)

Achieving the appearance of a lady would appear vital to obtaining financial security. Maudie is 'sure she could get [a man] to marry her if she could smarten herself up a bit' (VID 136).

Anna's problem with regard to her codification and commodification is that she is not born, like her 'predecessor' 'knowing her way about' (VID 44). She despises the collusive intimacy between Walter and Vincent when they are discussing Germaine's reaction to her dismissal as Vincent's mistress ('I hated the way they were looking at each other'), but at the same time fails to understand how she has 'given herself away' by telling Vincent that she met Walter while working on stage at Southsea (VID 71, 74).

Gradually Anna's suspicion toward written texts is aroused:

Everybody says the man's bound to get tired and you read it in all books. But I never read now, so they can't get at me like that, anyway. (VID 64)

The text of the letter that Walter tells Vincent to write when the former decides to break off the affair, brings home to Anna the realisation that her codification has very personal repercussions. When she receives the letter, she has a disturbing memory of her uncle's false teeth sliding out of his mouth as she is reaching for a magazine lying next to him. This suggests an awareness of her codification as dangerous or possessing 'teeth' which can harm her.

Ironically Vincent encourages Anna to read in his letter, emphasising the very 'point of view' that his/Walter's dismissal is obliterating:

I was sorry when you told me that you never read because, believe me, a good book like that book I was talking about can make a lot of difference to your point of view. It makes you see what is real and what is just imaginary. (VID 80)

In the letter any vestige of social respectability that Anna's virginity once conferred upon her is traded upon. Vincent will rely on her not to make trouble by reminding her that she is 'a nice girl' capable of 'understanding' and 'caring' for Walter's situation (VID 80).

From this point, Anna's attempts to articulate her feelings only underline her lack of a social voice or the extent to which her codification ensures silence:

It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask, and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under the water. And how do you know what it's like to try to speak from under water when you're drowned? (VID 84)

The image of trying to speak from under water conveys the difficulty of trying to communicate a sexual specificity or 'point of view' that is denied representation.

When Anna attempts to write letters to Walter, the scope of her literary knowledge only demonstrates the extent of her entrapment within the Symbolic³. She imagines that she can convey a sense of her authenticity through her sexuality:

³ A parallel can be drawn with Jane in Jane Eyre, who tells Rochester 'I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends' (JE 229).

My dear Walter I've read books about this and I know quite well what you're thinking but you're quite wrong because don't you remember you used to joke because every time you put your hand on my heart it used to jump well you can't pretend that can you you can pretend everything else but not that it's the only thing you can't pretend. (VID 90)

Anna finally admits to herself the impossibility of making herself understood to men like Walter and Vincent. When she needs money for an abortion she describes her encounter with Vincent in the following way:

'Poor little Anna,' making his voice very kind. 'I'm so damned sorry you've been having a bad time.' Making his voice very kind, but the look in his eyes was like a high, smooth, unclimbable wall. No communication possible. You have to be three-quarters mad even to attempt it. (VID 147)

Once Laurie begins to market Anna to men as 'not seventeen' and the distinction between Anna as kept woman and prostitute begins to blur, Anna is finally able to recognise her 'status' within this patriarchal 'code':

'I picked up a girl in London and she ... Last night I slept with a girl who ...' That was me. Not 'girl' perhaps. Some other word, perhaps. (VID 106, 135)

III Remembering and Reengaging the Autoerotic

In this section I present the other face of Anna's dark voyage - the sensual contrast that her memories of Dominica pose with her experience of alienation within English life. Anna describes her experiences of Dominica and England as completely disjunctive. There are times when she cannot distinguish which constitutes a dream and which reality; she can 'never fit them together' (VID 8). The sense of a disjunctive experience (echoed in Antoinette's dream/reality experience of England in Wide Sargasso Sea) parallels

the effect of the silent gestures I discussed in Jane Eyre (WSS 67). Each novel intimates an awareness of an alternate experience and 'voice' to that represented by the Symbolic in these moments.

The experience of codification and commodification that I have described in relation to Voyage in the Dark suggests that the image that opens the novel - the curtain that falls 'hiding everything [Anna] had ever known' - is rather sinister (VID 7). However, the potential for transformation is an integral part of this experience and for this reason she says: '[it] was almost like being born again', introducing the image of darkness in its dual aspect (ibid.).

I have described Anna as largely unconscious of the value of her sexuality in patriarchal terms and therefore vulnerable to its social 'value'. Yet from Laurie's perspective Anna displays a form of resistance to her patriarchal induction even though the former regards this as a sign of immaturity: 'You can pretend to be a virgin for the rest of you life as far as I'm concerned' (VID 111).

Anna's first sexual experience also reflects this disjunction. I interpret the representation of this scene as a metaphorical allusion to the darkness of the Symbolic, but also as an autoerotic darkness disclosing a childhood desire - one which Irigaray advises women to learn to defend (TS 33). When Anna first sleeps with Walter, she feels 'cold and as if [she] were dreaming', but experiences warmth when she gets close to Walter:

Of course you've always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly, except that you've always known it. Always - how long is always? (VID 32)

The experience precipitates a memory of something she has '*always remembered, always known*' (VID 32). In later experiences of sex with Walter this memory seems to be something which is continually arrested or disrupted by the Walter-Vincent 'alliance' now associated with her codification:

Let's go back to the hotel, anyway,' [Anna] said. (You shut the door and you pull the curtains over the windows and then *it's as long as a thousand years and yet so soon ended* [...])

'My God, yes,' [Walter] said. 'That reminds me. Vincent must be there by now. I expect he's waiting for us.' I had forgotten about Vincent.

'Come on.' Walter said.

We got up. *I felt cold, like when you've been asleep and have just woken up.* (VID 68, my italics)

Yet the autoeroticism evoked here becomes associated with the sensuality of Anna's memories of Dominica and a new way of 'seeing' or remembering as she covers her eyes and remembers home (VID 128). I should point out that these memories are not wholly idyllic. As I have mentioned they already contain a discourse which codifies women - Anna's memory of the litany is such an example. Hester's embarrassed reaction to the start of Anna's menstruation, precipitating feelings of confinement and airlessness is another (VID 59). However, in terms of the title metaphor, they provide a 'positive' contrast to Anna's English experience.

Anna's sense of estrangement and detachment from her actions in her relationship with Walter, her feeling cold and dreamlike, is contrasted by memories of heightened sensory experience in Dominica (VID 31). Smells, sights, sounds, sensations seem to provide her with the reference point that she never manages to achieve in England:

When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple as Tyre and

Sidon. Market Street smelt of the wind, but the narrow street smelt of niggers and wood-smoke and salt fishcakes fried in lard. (When the black women sell fishcakes on the savannah they carry them in trays on their heads. They call out, 'Salt fishcakes, all sweet an' charmin', all sweet an' charmin'.') It was funny, but that was what I thought about more than anything else. (VID 7)

The sensory impressions of Market Street are met in England by the 'grey-yellow light' of Anna's lodgings and the tastelessness of English food (VID 9, 50). The mention of black women in parenthesis already mimics a textually denied 'other' and suggests Anna's identification with this group.

Anna's impression of the English landscape: 'divided into squares like pocket handkerchiefs, a small tidy look [...] everywhere fenced off from everywhere else' becomes associated with images of walls and enclosures that prohibit communication (VID 15). It is contrasted with the Dominican landscape where the sun and earth merge: 'And the sky close to the earth. Hard, blue and close to the earth' (VID 36).

Images of stasis that characterise Anna's sense of entrapment or codification ('Everything was always so exactly alike'), together with images of arrested clocks which create a sense of death/suspension in life are contrasted with the sense of perpetual movement and growth at home:

Everything is green, everywhere things are frowning.
There is never one moment of stillness - always
something buzzing. (VID 152, 30, 129)

The absence of any sun or vitality in England ('There was no sun, but the air was used-up and dead') is contrasted with 'the heat pressing down on you as if it were something alive' and the 'terrible' power of the sun at home (VID 65, 27, 63).

Sun-heat and warmth are images that Anna uses in relation to Francine, the black maternal figure of her childhood. She draws a stark distinction between her experience of Dominica and England through a racial categorization: 'Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad' (VID 27). In this regard, there is a suggested contrast between the sensuality associated with Francine and the sexuality she enjoys with Walter. During one of her evenings with Walter she at first seems to content to enjoy an identification with the memory of Maillote Boyd, a black slave girl, although images of death and immobility occur to her as she lies 'still' after sex (VID 48). Leaving his house, however, she thinks of Francine, her black nurse, in terms more sensual than anything she expresses in relation to Walter:

And the smell of Francine - acrid-sweet. And that hibiscus once - it was so red, so proud, and its long gold tongue hung out. It was so red that even the sky was just a background for it. (VID 49)

Anna's intimacy with Francine is confusing and threatening to Hester because together they are indistinguishable: 'I never could tell which of you was speaking' (VID 56). Since Hester cannot classify Anna safely, she infers that Anna's original mother was coloured as a part her motivation to disinherit her (VID 56).

Nonetheless, Anna's classification as a 'Hottentot' in English society becomes a potential resource in her act of remembering (VID 12). A 'pact' between Anna and Francine has in fact been cemented. When Anna was about to leave Dominica and feared the limitations of her relationship with Francine ('I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white'), she decided to surrender herself to the sun even though she was getting ill:

The sun at home can be terrible, like God [...]
 I stood there until I felt the pain of the headache
 begin and then the sky came up close to me. It clanged,
 it was so hard. The pain was like knives. (VID 62-63)

In Anna's resulting fever, she spoke, to Hester's annoyance, 'a great deal about Francine' (VID 63). Through this act of remembering, Anna has deliberately strengthened her connections to Dominica and to Francine.

Anna is not able to convey the sensuality she associates with Dominica to Walter. When she begins to talk about the heavily scented flowers at home in relation to the small little English flowers of Savernake Forest, she feels detached and dream-like, unable to '[fit the two things together]' (VID 67, 78). Part of the reason she experiences the English landscape as dead ('It was as if the wildness had gone out of it') is because Walter can only appreciate her within the narrow, but familiar limits of his experience of women: 'I've wanted to bring you to Savernake and see you underneath these trees ever since I've known you' (VID 67).

Yet memories of Dominica provide a source of the autoerotic to heal the effects of Anna's codification. When she receives a letter from Vincent breaking off her affair with Walter, the frightening memory of her uncle's false teeth is positively balanced by the memory of the blind piano tuner. The latter encourages Anna to perceive things on the sensory/touch basis Irigaray associates with the self-reflexive, in the same way that Brontë's blind Rochester in Jane Eyre must learn to perceive Jane in a new way:

I went on thinking about the false teeth, and then about piano-keys and about that time the blind man from Martinique came to tune the piano and then he played and we listened to him sitting in the dark with the

jealousies shut because it was pouring with rain and my father said, 'You are a real musician.' (VID 81)

The sensuality of autoerotic darkness is therefore an integral part of Anna's 'dark voyage'.

IV Complications in the Reengagement of the Autoerotic

The autoerotic voyage is also figured in the journey to Constance Estate, Anna's original mother's home which she describes in the sensual style we associate with her evocation of Dominica. Anna details the smells of the sea, the horse, the 'green', the water and the sound of the mountain whistler (VID 129). The road to Constance Estate remains unclear ('do you turn to the right or to the left?'), as the text attempts to establish the autoerotic groundwork for an alternate 'voice' (VID 129).

The reengagement of the autoerotic through the mother is difficult to accomplish for Anna because her matrilineage is threatened by social prejudices. This reflects, in theoretical terms, the fact that static virginity hinders the desire of/ for the mother. In addition, the textual changes Rhys was forced to make to the novel diminished her ability to represent the heroine's relation to the maternal figure.

I have already mentioned that Anna's aunt Hester portrays Anna's relation to her maternal figures, Francine and Anna's white mother, in the worst possible light, implying that Anna has little chance of becoming a lady. This is compounded by the degrading context in which Anna relays her matrilineage to Walter.

In a scene where Walter mentions Anna's 'predecessor' (his former mistress), Anna gets drunk, sensing that her relationship with Walter is deteriorating. When Walter insinuates that her

appreciation of whiskey is part of her heritage - or rather due to a lack of it, she quickly confirms his statement, telling him that she comes from a family where everyone drinks too much (VID 44). On his cue, she admits that she was always a 'rum' child who wanted to be black (VID 45). She announces her genealogy in the following way: 'I'm the fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side' and proceeds to tell Walter about a young girl's name on a slave list (ibid.).

The text therefore blurs Anna's 'mistress-predecessor', her 'tainted' matrilineage, and the documented identity of the slave girl in the presence of a 'discreet English gentleman'. Anna creates the impression that she really is cursed by grasping at the hope that as part of the 'fifth' generation, she escapes the sins of the fathers 'visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation' (VID 46). In a sense she participates in her own codification, although social prejudices make it difficult to honour the relation to her mother.

Deborah Kloepfer in her essay, 'Voyage in the Dark: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother', is of the opinion that Rhys's efforts to represent the heroine's relation to the maternal figure were diminished by the changes the latter was forced to make to the final version of her novel. In terms of Julia Kristeva's theory, she views this as part of 'the denied access to the mother' which the novel is dealing with. Since this last is also an Irigarayan concern, I provide a synopsis of Kloepfer's essay.

Kloepfer introduces the idea that Rhys's fiction operates around an 'economy of loss' - a 'loss of language, loss of homeland, loss of economic and sexual power' in which what women

'want' is either 'displaced or represented in some kind of substitute' (Kloepfer 443). The absence she explores is that of the 'space vacated by the mother' (Kloepfer 444). She asks how the mother, associated with the pre-verbal period which subverts structures of representation, can empower the writing daughter. In her analysis of Voyage in the Dark, she adopts Kristeva's concept of the semiotic to trace maternal inscription within the Symbolic. She posits that the dead or absent mother is not only textually and biographically central in Rhys's work but that any subversion of maternal contact influences the female character's ability to function effectively within discourse. She theorizes that a maternal presence is required, if the daughter is to posit herself as a speaking/writing subject and reads the image of the dead mother as a means of representing the silencing or failure of the female speaking self (Kloepfer 447).

For the purposes of this discussion I reproduce the changes Kloepfer cites from the original version of Voyage in the Dark. In terms of plot, the original version ends with Anna's 'death', while in the published version she survives her abortion. I present the original and final endings for contrast as well as the original introduction to Part IV which Rhys regarded as a necessary omission/revision to the final draft and which forms part the rationalisation for Kloepfer's argument:

And the concertina-music stopped and it was so still, so still and lovely quiet very quiet like just before you go to sleep and it stopped and there was the ray of light along the floor like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out and blackness comes ... (Original ending quoted by Kloepfer 456)

When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again... (Published ending, 159)

I quote from Kloepfer's description of the other changes made to the text. The introduction to part IV that she cites, was excised:

The first draft of part four begins not in the English boarding house but in the islands where the child Anna is having her picture taken: 'SMILE PLEASE THE MAN SAID not quite so serious' (VD, TS, p. 1). The photographer, however, is not quite successful in seducing the child into compliance. He turns to the mother for aid: 'You tell her to madam' (VD, TS, p. 1). Anna tries to smile as her mother bids, but she is unable to please either her or the photographer:

Now keep quite still Mother said
I tried but my hand shot up of its own accord
Oh what a pity she moved now it'll have to be done
all over again
I began to cry
Now now now the man said

A big girl like you I'm ashamed of you Mother said
just one second and you are ten years older. Meta was
fanning her with a palm leaf fan to keep the flies away
and she was too young to die Meta said with tears
running down her face but I was only thinking of my new
white dress and the wreath I would carry.

The song went

Ma belle ka di maman li
Petit ke vini gros

I can play that tune on the piano
She can she picks out all the nigger tunes by
herself
But this one's very melancholy Hester said and the
words don't seem to me to make any sense
I said it means My beautiful girl is singing to her
mother(VD, TS. pp. 1-3) [Kloepfer 457, 8]

In terms of Kloepfer's argument, in the published version of the novel, the heroine is denied the right to represent her own

silencing within the Symbolic. She observes that in having to repeat the doctor's sarcastic words ('She'll be all right [... ready] to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt'), Anna is not 'saved', 'for in Rhys's world men do not save or represent women' (VID 159; Kloepfer 458). Kloepfer claims that 'the (male) literary establishment's insistence upon Anna's affirmation at the end of the novel [kills] her textually' (Kloepfer 458, 9).⁴

Kloepfer's main point is that this textual murder entails the denial of access to the mother and to the mother-daughter dialogue contained in Anna's song. According to Kloepfer, in the original introduction to Part IV, the daughter takes the failure to please her mother upon herself, producing the image of the mother's death. The child's 'shame' is quickly transformed into the image of Meta fanning the mother's corpse. However, in the next transition, from the corpse that the child cannot mourn to the song that Anna sings to her mother, Rhys 'turns from the mother to the maternal, in which the body is transmuted from flesh to voice, in which the mother's absence is finally inscribed' (Kloepfer 458). As regards the logic of the changes that are made: if the daughter's voice is denied, the mother's disappears and vice versa, since the writing self and the mother intersect (Kloepfer 458). Kloepfer believes that Rhys was

ultimately kept from the textual voyage she set out on, denied the darkness of her vision [...] refused her (dark) matrilineage - allowing the daughter to replay the mother's death in her own [...] Rhys's encoding of Anna's death would have been a more significant way of talking about her position as both daughter and speaking subject. (Kloepfer 459)

⁴ Howells makes the same point. In repeating the doctor's words, Anna is 'deprived of anything except a textual existence that is almost over' (Howells 91).

I support this reading of the changes that were made, particularly since the 'death' and 'darkness' of the original ending is associated in my interpretation with an autoerotic linked to the mother. Irigaray's perspective of Freud's study 'Mourning and Melancholia' is related to the representation of the mother-daughter relationship rather than to literal mourning. It is nonetheless relevant for this analysis and shows how the daughter is denied the right to represent her relationship to the mother (Speculum 66).

Irigaray finds that the symptoms of the little girl upon discovering her she and her mother are castrated match those of melancholia: passivity, lack of self-esteem, and an incapacity to love (Speculum 66). She claims this is *because* the girl cannot mourn or represent her relation to the mother. In other words, since she is deprived of a primary metaphorization which would enable her to represent her 'original desire and her desire for origin' she is constrained to perceive herself in terms of a devalorised castration (Speculum 68). Since she do not possess the means of mourning her separation from the mother, she remains in a state of melancholia.

In Voyage in the Dark, the published scene that relates the funeral of Anna's mother's death conveys the sense in which static virginity prohibits the mother-daughter relationship precisely in the context of Anna's 'devalued virginity'. The funeral fragment appears just after Walter has broken off the affair. Anna has asked to meet with Walter and is struggling to articulate her feelings:

I imagined myself saying, very calmly, 'The thing is that you don't understand. You think I want more than I do. I only want to see you sometimes, but if I never see you again I'll die. I'm dying now really, and I'm too young to die.'

... The candles crying wax tears and the smell of stephanotis and I had to go to the funeral in a white dress and white gloves and a wreath round my head and the wreath in my hands made my gloves wet - they said so young to die ... (VID 83)

In the context of Anna's 'lost virtue', the image of the white dress at a funeral brings home the prohibitive dichotomies of static virginity. The memory is of 'having' to go in a white dress and white gloves which she cannot (but should) be keeping dry as she carries a wreath. The metaphorical implication is that she should not (or cannot) weep for her mother. Anna does in a sense seek to identify with her mother as she thinks of 'dying young', but no representational means offers itself in the scene which follows.

In the original version containing the funeral fragment, the Symbolic prescription for 'feminine' stasis is suggested by the photographer's demand for a still pose. The child's ability to mourn her mother seems prohibited by the attention she must pay to her white dress, but, as Kloepfer observes, the mother's absence is then inscribed through the song that Anna sings. This together with Anna's disobedience before the camera allows the heroine to move beyond a patriarchal mother-daughter relationship.

From the above we can see that any allusion to the loss of virginity in the closing scene is important to the novel's themes. In the published version, the images of light and dark allude the 'last thrust of remembering' in a way that diminishes the theme of an autoerotic remembering contained in the italicised text in which

Anna claims to experience something '[she has always known]' (VID 32). In the repetition of the phrase 'starting all over again', Anna seems condemned to a death-in-life existence, miming her traditional role as best she can (VID 159).

By contrast the original ending links the figure of autoerotic memory with a peaceful sensuality. The suspension of the concertina music evokes a fertile darkness in keeping with an alternate way of perceiving. It announces the mother's presence and the daughter's voice in a subtle allusion to the 'dark' voyage of remembering.

Rhys's efforts to reclaim an autoerotic and represent the mother-daughter relationship are indeed diminished by the revisions, but the text has introduced the possibility of an alternate 'voice' associated with a different conception of virginity through the dual perspective offered in the title image.

Chapter 3: Wide Sargasso Sea

Virginité must be rediscovered by all women as their own bodily and spiritual possession, which can give them back an individual and collective identity status (and, among other things, *a possible fidelity in their relationship with their mother*, which would thereby escape the commerce between men). (JTN 117, my italics)

In this chapter I focus on the mother-daughter relationship in Wide Sargasso Sea as an indispensable part of achieving the autoerotic representation involved in Irigaray's project of resymbolisation, expanding on the role of the mother introduced in Voyage in the Dark.

I begin however, by considering the measure in which the texts of Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea themselves establish a mother-daughter dialogue, a means of 'mothering' the mother text, drawing upon the mother text for support and offering the daughter text the opportunity to inscribe itself within the mother text. I present some critical views on this issue relating them to Irigaray's theory. In terms of my thesis, tracing Irigaray's project of resymbolisation through metaphorical transformations that will evoke a 'voice' beyond that prescribed by the Symbolic, I shall be arguing for continuities between the novels.

Broadly speaking, the criticism I present falls into two 'camps'. The first regards the relation between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea as largely antagonistic, the daughter text indicting the mother text for its cultural insensitivities. The second regards the relationship more in terms of an ambivalent, but constructive mother-daughter relationship, in which the daughter text validates, while displacing, the mother text.

Some of the former⁵ claim that Rhys set out to rectify the dehumanised version of Bertha Mason offered by Charlotte Brontë. These critics frequently use excerpts from Rhys's letters to prove how angry she was at Brontë's treatment of the 'mad' Creole.

Gayatri Spivak⁶ for her part sets out to expose Jane Eyre as an imperialist text which replicates feminist individualism. She credits Rhys with problematising the issue of 'social subject-production' (GS 193). Spivak interprets Wide Sargasso Sea as providing a framework to re-read Jane Eyre as the 'orchestration and staging of the self-immolation of Bertha Mason' that will secure the status of Jane Eyre as a 'feminist individualist heroine' (GS 194, 185).

From the same 'camp' of critics, Ellen Friedman, in her essay 'Breaking the Master Narrative', reads a strategy of delegitimisation which results in 'a breakdown of the integrity of Brontë's [text]; the mother-text is maimed and in essence, disarmed' (Friedman 119). In this interpretation the two texts are essentially at odds with each other. The connections to the mother text are seen as rather superficial 'devices' which have to be artificially 'grafted' onto the novel and which in any case eventually 'rupture the boundary between them' (ibid.). Friedman's argument draws upon Rhys's letters as though the intentions they express offer an authoritative interpretation of the finished text. Ironically one of the quotations used could in fact be read as an

5 Kathy Mezei's '"And it Kept its Secret": Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea' and Ellen Friedman's 'Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea' are such examples.

6 Gayatri Spivak, 'Three Women's Text and a Critique of Imperialism'.

imagined invitation by Brontë to revise or decode her work: 'Sometimes I have wondered if Miss Brontë does not want her book tampered with' (Friedman 118). There is also an irony in the fact that, contrary to the aim suggested by the title of her essay, Friedman interprets the ending of Wide Sargasso Sea literally and pessimistically as Antoinette's readiness to assume the fate that the master narrative has determined. As my own reading of Rhys's novel will show, the only sense in which I regard Rhys as 'breaking the master narrative' is in so far as the creative elaboration or reworking of Jane Eyre involves an act of iconoclastic interpretation.

In the second camp of critics, more easily aligned with the Irigarayan perspective I adopt, Judith Kegan Gardiner, in her book Rhys, Stead, Lessing, and the Politics of Empathy, views Wide Sargasso Sea as a text which mothers the mother text. This allows one to view the novel developing the themes of Jane Eyre while simultaneously drawing strength from its own reinscription in the mother text:

Rhys deliberately looks to the female tradition within the English novel, seeming less anxious about influence than anxious to be influenced, and validating her forebear's prior importance at the same time that she wishes to displace it: she mothers her mother text by creating its fictional antecedents. Rather than being overwhelmed by the sense that it has been said before, she tells us what has never been said or said falsely. (Gardiner 125)

The ambivalence of the woman writer to her predecessor can be explained in terms of the paradigm Elizabeth MacNabb creates in her essay 'The Textual Mother as Unmothered Daughter'. MacNabb adopts a Chodorowan perspective to understand the relationship between mother and daughter texts, developing the idea that women writers

need to provide another stage of parenting for themselves *and* their mothers.⁷ This is an idea that Irigaray espouses when she says women need to liberate themselves along with their mothers (IR 50).

MacNabb's interest is not in Brontë and Rhys, but in Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and two later feminist texts, Kate Millet's Sexual Politics and Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic. She interprets De Beauvoir's work as an instance of the 'unmothered daughter' who adopts the masculine trait of separation from and disparagement of the mother. She sees The Second Sex regarding its textual parents as male and identifying with a masculine perspective which denigrates women.

MacNabb then interprets Millet's book as combining a mixture of male and female traits - masculine in so far as it refuses to openly acknowledge or connect with De Beauvoir's work (even though it adopts the latter as a model), and feminine in so far as it alternately rejects and identifies with the maternal text.

By contrast, MacNabb interprets Gilbert and Gubar's work as primarily feminine in that it fully acknowledges its debt to De Beauvoir, but subverts one of the anecdotes it borrows from The Second Sex:

Performing what its authors call elsewhere 'a subversive transfiguration' (102) of De Beauvoir's passage, The Madwoman in the Attic announces its connection to the mother while at the same time rewriting it. Showing the power inherent in female myths and the woman writer's response to those myths,

⁷ MacNabb's epigram from a poem by Anne Sexton expresses this cogently:

A woman is her mother.
That's the main thing.

A woman needs to provide her mother with an acceptance that she herself has never received. She does this as she struggles to identify with her mother.

Gilbert and Gubar point out what is lacking in the mother text, filling in the gaps she has left behind. (MacNabb 181)

The issue of owing a debt to the mother is central to Irigaray's view that the mother is completely unacknowledged and unrepresented in the predicate role she assumes in the Symbolic (IR 47-52)⁸.

Gilbert and Gubar stress the importance of the woman writer's realisation that the source of her strength lies in her maternal inheritance. This emerges in their discussion of how foremothers relay authorial anxiety to their daughters. They provide an anecdote by Annie Gottlieb, an American poet and essayist in which the latter relates a dream in which she has to defend her creative success from a sterilizing mother figure by brandishing a knife that is covered with writing. In her Gottlieb she cries,

Do you know what you are doing? You are destroying my femaleness, my *female power*, which is important to me *because of you*. (GG 52)

As Gilbert and Gubar explain, despite the debilitating inheritance a woman writer receives, she must 'seek, not seek to subvert' her lost literary matrilineage (GG 53).

Teresa Winterhalter is a critic who could be aligned with the

⁸ Ironically Irigaray found herself in a situation with De Beauvoir where the latter behaved in a manner characteristic of the masculine traits MacNabb observes:

When I sent [De Beauvoir] Speculum, in which I wrote an inscription to her as if to an older sister, she never replied. I admit this saddened me. I was hoping for a careful and intelligent reading from her, a sister, who would help me with the academic and institutional problems I was having because of this book. Nothing came of this, unfortunately! The only gesture she made was to ask me for some information concerning Le Langage des Déments when she was writing on old age. Not a word passed between us on women's liberation. What can we make, then, of this distance kept up between two women who could, indeed should, have worked together? (JTN 10-11).

first camp of critics in the mother-daughter debate since she opposes 'revisionist' or 'recuperative readings' that seek to reclaim a lost 'voice' - critics I associate more with a 'genealogical' aspiration (TW 214-215). I mention her because she implicitly addresses a point I have raised in the interpretation of Irigaray's writing, namely, that in trying to envisage a role for women beyond the Symbolic, it is necessary to posit the existence of a female imaginary or of feminine desire, in order to move towards it.

In her essay 'Narrative Technique and the Rage for Order in Wide Sargasso Sea', Winterhalter claims that Rhys's complex narrative style which speaks across oppositions of race, gender, and class, goes unappreciated in revisionist readings. She claims (rather than argues) that these readings sustain the cultural and gender oppositions that the text is attempting to deconstruct and that their approach of 'reading for reversals' and allowing the silenced other to speak, itself creates 'another silence about the complex interrelationships among cultures and between genders' (TW 215). Winterhalter believes these readings merely rely on an unquestioned belief in an authentic self, which makes the recuperation of 'autonomous repressed voices' plausible (TW 215).

Responding to her attack on Ellen Friedman and Judith Gardiner,⁹ I believe her criticisms aptly describe the former's methodology only. Many of the criticisms she levels, without relating them directly to these women's works, are simply not true. Gardiner, for example, does not 'merely confer narrative authority

⁹ My response is also informed by Gardiner's essay 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women'.

upon [formerly oppressed] speakers' or assume that there are 'voices on the other side of silence merely waiting to be rendered' (TW 215). One of the central concepts Gardiner adopts is a feminine identity founded through empathy, through relationships with others, which by definition cannot rest upon the belief of authentic selfhood.

Another claim Winterhalter makes is that these readings neglect the actual process through which the speaker recuperates voice, yet the notion of 'process identity' is another key concept Gardiner explores. Gardiner's reading does not posit an unproblematic recuperation of voice, but reads Wide Sargasso Sea as a struggle to achieve this identity or voice:

I suggest that for these writers [Lessing, Stead and Rhys], empathy is necessary to change history and so establish a meaningful female identity. This 'identity' is not bourgeois male autonomy but a concept representing a process, part of which, one's sense of self, may involve a longing for coherence even as it represents itself as divided. Because female identity forms partly through relationship based on mother-daughter bonds, it is defined in terms of the world, not merely of the self. (Gardiner 18)

The sense of self that Gardiner refers to here is that which Irigaray reaches for in her concept of the autoerotic - possible to evoke through the daughter's relation to the mother as the following analysis of Wide Sargasso Sea will show.

I have singled out critics like Friedman and Winterhalter because they risk, in theoretical practice, falling into the trap that Irigaray is so cautious to avoid - the failure to acknowledge the mother which characterises the power struggles of the Symbolic. In doing so they diminish the possibility of intersubjective relations between women. I turn now to an analysis of Wide Sargasso

Sea where it will become evident that Rhys, like Brontë, is concerned with the search for representations that will create legacies or female genealogies through her exploration of the autoerotic and her efforts to spiritualise and embody the feminine within the Symbolic.

In my reading of Wide Sargasso Sea, I present Antoinette's relationship to her 'white mother', Annette, as one which relays the traditional neglect and silencing of the daughter within patriarchy. In contrast, I present Antoinette's relationship with her 'black mother', Christophine, as one which provides an example of a reciprocal, intersubjective relationship between mother and daughter. I show how the autoeroticism fostered by this relationship threatens the heterosexual relationship Antoinette shares with Rochester.

The struggle for power between Rochester and Antoinette - between 'his way' and 'her way', may be seen on the one hand involving a patriarchal definition of desire which relies on the prohibition and predication of the mother in the service of the male subject, and on the other hand as an emerging feminine desire informed by an autoerotic attachment to the mother (VID 76-77).

In the opening quotation to this chapter, Irigaray says that virginity can give women 'a possible fidelity in their relationship with their mother, which would thereby escape the commerce between men'. In doing so she is contrasting the possibility of a reciprocal, intersubjective mother-daughter relationship with a traditional one in which mother and daughter are 'fused' together in a predicate category.

As I mentioned in my introduction, mother and daughter traditionally compete for the ultimate predicate role - that of the non-desiring (virginal) mother. This role affords them a vicarious, alienating form of representation which leaves them vulnerable to 'the commerce between men'. It is the inevitable consequence of the prohibition of the desire of/for the mother upon which male subjectivity in the Symbolic is predicated.

However, fidelity in the relationship to the mother becomes possible when this fusion is resolved - when mother and daughter achieve distinction through the representation of their sexuality or, in Irigarayan terminology, when women are able to symbolize their relation to origin through a process of primary metaphorization. In Wide Sargasso Sea, I trace this in a series of evolving metaphors - the white dress Antoinette wears as she follows her dream tormentor silently becomes the red dress that releases sensual memories, allowing the heroine to value herself in her own terms; the figure of Coco the parrot's refrain mimicking¹⁰ women's traditional voice ([*'Qui est là?' 'Ché Coco'*]) becomes part of the affectionate, intersubjective exchange between Antoinette and Christophine (*'Doudou, ché Cocotte'*); the destructive fire that destroys Coulibri becomes the spiritual fire through which Antoinette can ultimately reclaim her virginity and 'voice' (WSS 35, 61).

In the first section of this chapter, 'Specificity versus *Déréliction*', I look at how Rhys subverts a state of *déréliction* or

¹⁰ Graham Huggan's essay, 'A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Uses of Colonial Mimicry', alerted me to the significance of this figure in the novel, although he does not relate it to Christophine's greeting.

non-representation by creating a sense of feminine specificity *within* the neutralizing groupings of the Symbolic.

In the second section, 'The Neglected Daughter', I present Antoinette's relationship to her real mother Annette, as an instance of how the 'patriarchal mother',¹¹ miming the discourse that defines her socially, inevitably neglects the daughter.

In the third section, 'Flat and Specular Mirrors', I provide an explanation for this neglect with the help of Irigaray's distinction between flat and specular mirrors. This (discursive) metaphorical device contrasts the patriarchal definition of a woman's sex as a negative counterpart to the 'positive' form of the male penis ('the flat mirror reflects the greater part of women's sexual organs only as a hole'), with the possibility of evoking feminine sexuality beyond these dichotomies, as a specular interiority capable of self-reflection (Speculum 89, TS 151).

In the fourth section, 'Commodified Spirituality and Autoerotic Engagement', I address the spiritual component of feminine sexuality. I show how the spiritual dogma of the convent which commodifies virginity competes in Antoinette's memories with autoerotic experiences expressed in images of heat and fire.

In this section I consider different ways of interpreting the fire imagery. The burning of Coulibri by the colonised black class advances a desperate but destructive reversal of master/slave, subject/predicate relations, which I believe the text of Wide Sargasso Sea is exposing in order to challenge. So, on the one hand

11 I use this term to distinguish it from the kind of mother Irigaray envisions - one whose identity extends beyond her maternal role and who is therefore able as a distinct, gendered subject to positively mirror her daughter.

the fire represents the violent consequences of non-represented specificity. On the other hand, it alludes to the autoeroticism prohibited along with the desire of/for the mother which ultimately has to be reclaimed in order to achieve the 'voice' I associate with dynamic virginity.

In the fifth section, 'The Threat of the Autoerotic', I analyse Rochester's response to his wife's relationship with Christophine. First I illustrate the strengths of this relationship, showing how Antoinette's intimacy with Christophine informs her sexuality with a power that Rochester finds alluring but ultimately very threatening. The fact that Antoinette's allure stems from intimacy with a black maternal figure only increases the threat she poses for Rochester since his colonial status rests upon the predication of Christophine as black m/other - upon the denial of her feminine and cultural specificity.

In the last section, 'Lighting the Passage', I trace a metaphorical transformation from darkness and silence to light and 'voice' as Antoinette organises the conflicting memories of her black and white mothers and redeems her sexual definition as 'intemperate and unchaste' (WSS 152).

Déréliction versus Specificity

Irigaray uses the term *déréliction* to describe the state of unrepresented fusion that exists between mother and daughter in the patriarchal Symbolic. This state of fusion is a reflection of the artificial 'Sameness' or pseudo-neutrality of the female subject which Irigaray is attempting to expose in the Symbolic (JTN 21). It is an 'undifferentiated condition [...] from which man, or humanity

extracts for free what he needs for food, lodging, and survival' (ESD 103-104). It is possible to extend the concept of *déréliction* to illustrate the neutralization of individuals in racial, gender and other social groupings in Wide Sargasso Sea. Rhys exposes the central female characters' specificity by emphasising their 'displacement' from these groupings as beautiful.

An example of this reductive perspective which denies individuality occurs when Rochester is barely able to distinguish his bride at his reception. Ironically servants and guests are blurred in Rochester's memory of inebriation where the distinction of black and white 'colours' crudely masses women and servants together in similar ways:

Palm leaf fans, a mob of servants, the women's head handkerchiefs striped red and yellow, the men's dark faces. The strong taste of punch, the cleaner taste of champagne, my bride in white but I hardly remember what she looked like. Then in another room women dressed in black. Cousin Julia, Cousin Ada, Aunt Lina. Thin or fat they all looked alike. Gold ear-rings in pierced ears. Silver bracelets jangling on their wrists. (WSS 65)

Rochester is only able to distinguish signs of commodification; the 'Gold ear-rings' and 'Silver bracelets' identify the women in terms of material wealth or exchange.

Later when Rochester responds to Antoinette, he betrays a need to perceive her within a familiar category: 'Looking up smiling, she might have been *any pretty English girl* and to please her I drank' (WSS 60, my italics). In the sense that Rochester projects his own sexuality upon Antoinette when he fears that 'She thirsts for *anyone* - not for me ...', he discloses a desire for a 'type' of woman as opposed to an individual subject (WSS 135, my italics).

Against this reductive perspective, the text emphasises the central female characters' displacement from dominant groupings as valuable in itself. None of the central female characters - Annette, Antoinette, or Christophine - belong securely to a racial or social category, yet the novel opens with an image of exclusion associated with rare sexual beauty. Antoinette and mother cannot 'close ranks' with the Jamaican ladies because the Annette, labelled as 'a Martinique girl', with its implications of (racial) impurity, is 'pretty like pretty self' (WSS 15).

Antoinette will describe her mother as 'so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either' (WSS 30). Similarly, Antoinette, neither a white cockroach nor a white nigger, wonders 'who I am and where is my country and where do I belong' (WSS 85). Christophine will tell Rochester '[Antoinette] is not *béké* like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us either' (WSS 128). The 'us' Christophine refers to is not secure either, because she is 'not like other women', but 'much blacker' despite her 'thin face and straight features' (WSS 18). She dresses like 'no other negro woman' and despite 'taking care to talk as they talked' is ostracized and feared by the negro community for her obeah power. Yet Antoinette will defend Rochester's view of her as 'lazy' by pointing out '[she] seems slow, but every move she makes is right so it's quick in the end' (WSS 72). The text will use the same 'deconstructive/specific' device to describe Sandi, Antoinette's only protective lover, as 'more handsome than any white man' (WSS 103). So while the text blurs the boundaries between races and classes, it portrays this 'displacement' as highly specific and valuable.

In a 'non-racial' context, albeit still one of a social displacement that evokes specificity, Pierre in his emblematic silence is all the more special for his handicap: Antoinette thinks of his 'cure' in the following way:

Mr Mason had promised to take him to England later on, there he would be cured, made like other people. 'And how will you like that? I thought, as I kissed him. 'How will you like being made exactly like other people? (WSS 31)

One of Pierre's problems is an inability to speak distinctly, but the text is suggesting that the desirability of 'being made exactly like other people' is questionable thereby creating a 'space' for the unrepresented voice.

II The Neglected Daughter

So what is a mother? Someone who makes the stereotypical gestures she is told to make, who has no personal language and who has no identity. But how, as daughters, can we have a personal relationship with or construct a personal identity in relation to someone who is no more than a function? (IR 50)

The painful effects of the non-representation of the mother-daughter bond become evident in the relation between Annette and her daughter. The valuation of the phallus, which favours the mother-son relationship - that 'privilege accorded to the attraction of son for mother, mother for son' which is for Freud 'the most perfect configuration love can take'- deprives Antoinette of adequate mothering and exposes the extent to which Annette is dependent upon her son for a sense of identity (ESD 102) .

When the doctor has presumably told Annette that her son's stammer and speech problem will not improve, her whole behaviour changes radically:

I don't know what the doctor told her or what she said to him but he never came again and after that she changed. Suddenly, not gradually, she grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all. (WSS 16)

Annette's first thoughts are always for her son, Pierre. When Antoinette has a nightmare, she insensitively remarks that her daughter will have made enough noise to disturb Pierre (WSS 23). After she marries Mason, Annette wants to leave Coulibri because 'it is not safe for Pierre' (WSS 29). After Pierre's death Christophine tells Rochester 'when she lose her son she lose herself' (WSS 129).

The contrast of Annette's excessively protective stance towards Pierre with her cold neglect of Antoinette is evidence of the fact that a mother

has only nurturance [...] through which she may gain social recognition and value. She risks choking or smothering the child with an excess that fills it to the point of freezing, or leaves it starving for more. (Grosz referring to Irigaray's *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, 121)

One can read Antoinette as an example of the child left 'starving for more', spending most of her time in the kitchen where she eats alone (WSS 17, 29). Annette does not seem aware of her safety:

Late or early [Antoinette and Tia] parted at the turn of the road. My mother never asked me where I had been or what I had done. (WSS 20)

Annette's cruelty in telling her daughter to leave her alone, to not 'pester and bother her' when the latter looks for affection, as well her neglect of Antoinette's emotional and material needs are something which Christophine vociferates clearly:

But Christophine told her loudly that it shameful. She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care. (WSS 17, 18, 22)

Annette's behaviour suggests how harsh women can be in their unmediated relations with one another (ESD 104).

The measure in which Antoinette places Annette's patriarchal 'status' as a mother in question by showing her awareness and care for her mother's unhappiness, exposes the illusion of feminine subjectivity in a phallic economy. When Antoinette tries to comfort her mother as people stare and laugh at her, Annette becomes angry:

she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself. (WSS 17)

Annette cannot admit her misery - least of all to a culturally devalued daughter. It is as though receiving mothering from a female child is very poor compensation for her social placing.

When Annette uncharacteristically shows affection for Antoinette in a suffocating embrace, the underlying intensity of the mother-daughter fusion becomes evident. In the following passage Antoinette visits her mother after the fire. Annette almost smothers her daughter before looking for Pierre:

She held me so tightly that I couldn't breathe and I thought, 'It's not her.' Then, 'It must be her.' She looked at the door, then at me, then at the door again. I could not say, 'He is dead,' so I shook my head. 'But I am here, I am here,' I said, and she said, 'No,' quietly. Then 'No no no' very loudly and flung me from her. (WSS 40)

Pierre would vicariously provide Annette with an identity, since the mother-son relationship is socially represented in Irigaray's

terms. Following the logic of the Symbolic, Antoinette is his negative counterpart - 'figuratively' absent in this scene.

Annette's alienation from the very code which determines her priorities is revealed in the parallel the text draws between herself and her pet parrot, Coco. Coco acts as a figure for the mimetic quality of femininity (and colonised races) within the Symbolic. The trained response it provides to the artificially posed question of its identity is a mockery of prescribed social roles. Antoinette remarks that the parrot, like Pierre, '[does not] talk very well, he could say *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and answer himself *Ché Coco, Ché Coco*' (WSS 35).

Annette's identification with the bird is fierce and demonstrates itself in a silent, physical resistance when Coulibri is burning and she tries to run back and save it. She struggles against her husband, Mason's, restraint, 'twisting like a cat and showing her teeth' (WSS 35). After the fire, however, the inherent mimicry of the bird/Annette's prescribed behaviour is disclosed. Annette no longer provides the established answer when she screams:

'Qui est là? Qui est là?' then 'Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward, hypocrite. I'll kill you.' (WSS 39)

III Flat and Specular Mirrors

The problem, then, is that the daughter has no 'woman' with whom to identify; the mother has no self to mirror to her daughter. This can be explained in terms of the figures of 'flat' and 'specular' mirrors Irigaray uses to distinguish representations of women's sexuality within and beyond the Symbolic.

Discussing her discursive battle with(in) Symbolic philosophy - the mimetic (dis)obedience of her 'fling with the philosophers' - through images of mirrors, Irigaray draws attention to the dangers of being able to 'copy', to 'receive all impressions, without *appropriating them to oneself, and without adding any*' in the service of the (male) philosopher's subjectivity (TS 151). She is speaking of women's lack of the self-reflexive in their role as mirrors for male subjects. This mimetic role 'entails safeguarding *those components of the mirror that cannot reflect themselves: its backing, its brilliancy, thus its dazzlements, its ecstasies*' against the prescribed role in which women '[ultimately avoid] self-exploration: [adopting] a virginity incapable of self-reflection. And a pleasure that is wholly "divine"' (TS 151). Irigaray is using virginity in its static sense and mocking the ostensible 'pleasure' of this 'divine' role. However, the implicit redefinition of virginity as a specular interiority that women have yet to explore and possess for themselves becomes clear in her emphasis on 'the radiance of an interiority, an intimacy [... words which] make us smile today' (IR 151).

When Irigaray speaks of female beauty she remarks that traditionally it is never perceived as an expression of an interiority - a word which becomes associated with autoerotic desire and virginity in its new sense. Speaking of the image produced by the flat mirror she says

the mirror almost always serves to reduce us to a pure exteriority - of a very particular kind. It functions as a possible way to constitute screens between the other and myself. In a way quite different from the mucous membranes or the skin that serve as living, porous, fluid media to achieve communion as well as difference, the mirror is a frozen - and polemical -

weapon to keep us apart [...] The mirror freezes our becoming breath, our becoming space. (SG 65)

Rhys, like Irigaray, adopts mirrors and the mirroring of eyes to express instances of static and dynamic virginity - the sense in which mirrors divide women from a love of themselves and each other, but also the sense in which they can offer each other confirmation of a positive interiority and representation of their desire. Without an identity of her own Annette fails to mirror her daughter, she '[looks] away [...] over [Antoinette's] head' whereas Christophine possesses a quality that relays self-assurance when she says 'Now look at me. Look into my eyes' (WSS 147, 96).

Annette's absorption in the patriarchal mirror ('[planning and hoping ...] every time she passed a looking-glass') has little to do with the sense of self or self-reflexive required to mother (WSS 16). While Annette is making extreme material sacrifices - selling her last ring to buy the yards of muslin that will help attract a husband - Antoinette becomes vulnerable to her mother's 'phallic' gaze. When Antoinette comes home one day wearing Tia's 'dirty' dress (after the latter has stolen Antoinette's), she clearly does not fit into the world of '[visitors]' and 'beautiful clothes' that Annette is anxious to enter (WSS 21). Ironically, Annette engages in the very perspective which will undermine her and is unable to distinguish Tia from the other black children in the neighbourhood: 'But why are you wearing Tia's dress? Tia? Which one of them is Tia?' (WSS 22). In the argument between Annette and Christophine that ensues, over finding another dress for Antoinette, the text is already laying the groundwork for the deconstruction of static virginity. Christophine will say: 'She got two dresses, wash and

wear. You want clean dress to drop from heaven? Some people crazy in truth' (WSS 22). Christophine's anger and Annette's refusal to meet her daughter's eyes (which the latter interprets as her mother's shame of her) precipitate Antoinette's first nightmare. In this dream the mutual entrapment of women (of mother and daughter) fused together in inadequate representations is hinted at against the background of the clean/dirty dress:

I dreamt that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying, The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me. (WSS 23)

The immobilizing power of static virginity is in place. As I show in the next section, reading this nightmare continuously with the dream that ends Part I, the hateful pursuer can be interpreted as the non-reflecting mother. Ironically this 'patriarchal' mother is instrumental in relaying the prohibition of feminine desire.

The mirror image first appears in an ambivalent sense when Coulibri is burning and Antoinette is grasping for any possibility of identity or kinship. Although it acts divisively, it suggests a specular quality beyond the logic of the Symbolic:

As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (WSS 39)

Here the stone acts as the divisive patriarchal mirror, rupturing the possibility 'to be like' in an intersubjective sense. However it also provides the necessary rupture of an unrepresented

'fusion'. Tia cries as soon as she realises the harm she has caused, suggesting, unlike the black man who abuses Annette, the potential to recognise her own and Antoinette's common subjection and repressed difference as feminine/black 'others'. The stone becomes the means of mutual recognition - blood and tears are the sensual details (not belonging to the logic of flat mirrors) through which the girls recognise each other and themselves. Like Irigaray's change in focus from sight to touch in her criticism of traditional psychoanalytic theory, these details suggest a sense of the self-reflexive required for the representation of feminine desire.

The fact that the stone produces a scar which later *does* (for Rochester) spoil Antoinette on her wedding day suggests that her momentary autoerotic insight will not be in harmony with her role as passive wife (WSS 110). For these reasons I regard the stone-throwing incident as an initiation into dynamic virginity or as part of the way the text attempts to represent feminine desire.

At the end of the novel the text again presents the heroine seeking to establish a sense of identity through mirror images. This time the (patriarchal) mirror has been removed, prompting Antoinette to remember her childhood efforts to love herself:

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us - hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (WSS 147)

The image of Antoinette watching herself brush her own hair suggests an awareness of her object status as incomplete - 'not

quite [herself]'. She remembers the glass as divisive ('hard' and 'cold'), but also 'misted over with [her] breath' suggesting a sensual potential for the self-reflexive.

IV Commodified Spirituality and Autoerotic Engagement

In Antoinette's account of her stay at the convent, spiritual dogma interspersed with details of deportment, compete with fleeting and receding memories of autoerotic experience. The latter emerge in images of heat and fire - now inextricably linked with the burning of Coulibri and the repressed black/feminine other, or in Irigaray's terms the desire of/for the mother. Expressed alternately, the commodified spirituality Antoinette receives corrodes her efforts to remember her mother positively. These last are only possible through the figure of Christophine, Antoinette's 'black mother', who offers her an experience of reciprocal mothering, as I shall show later.

At the convent, Mother St Justine, '[not a very intelligent woman]', reads the girls stories from the lives of the Saints while she teaches them how to be ladies (WSS 44). Her supposedly senile associations eventually lead to Antoinette's rejection of her spiritual education in order to feel 'bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe' (WSS 48). Antoinette's potentially autoerotic relation to her body is gradually schooled out of her as she listens to Mother St Justine's lesson. She has to remember '[quickly], while [she] can, 'the hot classroom', 'the heat of the bench striking up through [her] body, along [her] arms and hands', the 'sticky' needle that 'swears' as it works the canvas, the 'fire-red' silk that she chooses to stitch her name in (WSS 44).

While the girls embroider, Mother St Justine reads out the lives of the saints - to the exclusion of St Innocenzia whose skeleton lies under the altar (and ironically whom one might successfully associate with virginity): 'We do not know her story, she is not in the book' (WSS 45). Instead, Antoinette listens to stories of 'beautiful and wealthy' saints all loved by rich and handsome young men. Although the girls are eager to hear details which might relate the tale to their own lives, Mother St Justine substitutes the possibility of sensual details with stark recommendations for the girls' toilette:

'... more lovely and more richly dressed than he had ever seen her in life,' drones Mother St Justine. 'She smiled and said. "Here Theophilus is a rose from the garden of my Spouse, in whom you did not believe." The rose he found by his side when he awoke has never faded. It still exists.' (*Oh, but where? Where?*) 'And Theophilus was converted to Christianity,' says Mother St Justine, reading very rapidly now, 'and became one of the Holy Martyrs.' She shuts the book with a clap and talks about pushing down the cuticles of our nails when we wash our hands [...] 'When you insult or injure the unfortunate or the unhappy, you insult Christ Himself and He will not forget, for they are His chosen ones.' This remark is made in a casual and perfunctory voice and she slides on to order and chastity, that flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended. Also deportment. (WSS 45, my italics)

Spiritual doctrine is expressed in a 'casual and perfunctory voice' and 'slides' onto order, chastity, and deportment, invoking divine power for the submission and silence that underlies a commodified virginity.

The spirituality which Antoinette tries to evoke through the memory of her mother is corroded by a dualistic doctrine which perceives everything in terms of 'light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell' (WSS 48). The sensual detail through which

Antoinette tries to conceptualise a sense of the spiritual must, like her mother (who is being now being cared for as a lunatic) be forgotten:

Then there was another saint [...] she lived later on but still in Italy [...] Italy is white pillars and green water. Spain is hot sun on stones, France is a lady with black hair wearing a white dress because Louise was born in France fifteen years ago, and my mother, whom I must forget and pray for as though she were dead, though she is living, liked to dress in white. (WSS 46)

The figure of Louise - a model of seemingly effortless patriarchal femininity - assumes a position of authority on the same, if not superior, level to that of the saints and the memory of Antoinette's mother. The fact that Antoinette remembers her mother as someone who 'liked to dress in white' indirectly suggests that Antoinette hopes to redeem the memory of her crazy mother through the 'correct' racial and moral categories - irreproachably white and chaste.

The convent's requirement that the girls learn how to wash under a chemise and dress with modesty, is ultimately implicated in Antoinette's inability to feel '[bold, happy and free]' (WSS 48). Antoinette's narrative presents them as artificial conventions ('tricks') which prohibit the development of physical self-knowledge:

I soon forgot about happiness, running down the stairs to the big stone bath where we splashed about wearing long grey cotton chemises which reached to our ankles. The smell of soap as you cautiously soaped yourself under the chemise, a trick to be learned, dressing with modesty another trick. Great splashes of sunlight as we ran up the wooden steps of the refectory. (WSS 47)

Yet, Antoinette's memory also undermines the effects of this conditioning. The image of '[great] splashes of sunlight' as the

narrative proceeds, deconstructs the 'darkness' with which the girls are encouraged to associate their bodies. The mobility or play of light suggested by this figure is elaborated in the image of 'shifting shadows' in the garden and opposes the 'perpetual light' of prayer for Antoinette's mother (characteristic of a binary spiritual perspective):

But after the meal, now and at the hour of our death, and at midday and at six in the evening, now and at the hour of our death. Let perpetual light shine on them. This is for my mother, I would think, wherever her soul is wandering, for it has left her body. Then I remembered how she hated a strong light and loved the cool and the shade. It is a different light they told me. Still, I would not say it. Soon we were back in the shifting shadows outside, more beautiful than any perpetual light could be, and soon I learnt to gabble without thinking as the others did. (WSS 48)

Nonetheless, Antoinette's resistance - her desire to maintain a spiritual and emotional link to her mother - is broken down. She learns to mimic a patriarchal discourse which prohibits the mother-daughter bond through the denial of the autoerotic and is soon 'gabbling without thinking'.

In the predominant spirit of materialism associated with the convent, the dress, locket and bracelet which Mason brings to Antoinette are only nominally prohibited. His physical appraisal of Antoinette, holding her 'at arm's length looking at {her} carefully and critically' is part of the condoned 'laxity' of the nuns in preparing a girl for marriage (WSS 48, 49). In this context Antoinette experiences the announcement of her intended in terms of a betrayal which she is unable to articulate:

It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me. [...] It was like that morning when I found the dead horse. Say nothing and it might not be true. (WSS 49)

Her sense of a betrayal is compounded by the curiosity of her friends who 'all [know]' and by the 'cheerful faces' of the nuns which Antoinette resents for the first time (WSS 50). It is at this point that Antoinette has her dream for the second time.

The key to this dream lies in the first line: 'Again I have left the house at Coulibri' (WSS 50). What has or is being left behind is the autoeroticism associated with the denied specificity - feminine and black - of Antoinette's 'mothers'. The figure of the mother as well as the incident of the fire are conspicuously absent from Antoinette's account of the dream. Their association (mother and fire) has been formed in the slightly nostalgic evocation of the sky as Antoinette and her family are returning home for the last time before the house is burnt: the sky and the sea were on fire when we left Bertrand Bay at last' (WSS 28). Coulibri burns creating a 'yellow-red sky [...] like sunset', but the autoeroticism associated with the desire of/for the mother has the potential to be reenacted with each following sunset. Antoinette has also embroidered her name in 'fire-red', 'née Cosway', during her stay at the convent, linking the key to her identity to the autoerotic memory of her mother (WSS 44).

What I shall interpret as the narrow dichotomies responsible for the violence of Antoinette's dream have also been evoked in the details of Coulibri's burning. Antoinette's hesitant placing as 'one of the righteous' or one of the 'damned', the ambivalent means in which she relates to Mr Mason as 'white pappy', 'glad to be like an English girl', but missing Christophine's cooking, suggest how

difficult it is for her to create a safe frame of reference for herself in a web of racial and gender dichotomies (WSS 28, 29, 30).

The episode of the black man who ignores Aunt Cora's rational appeal on behalf of a badly hurt child by saying '[so] black and white, they burn the same' is a forceful instance of the binarism which informs patriarchy (WSS 37). He is proposing a desperate but destructive reversal of power relations, not a solution which transcends a logic of master/slave, subject/predicate relations. Aunt Cora's contained response however, suggests that the text is trying to see beyond binary logic.

In the dream that closes Part I, Antoinette follows the prescriptions of the Symbolic. I interpret the 'patriarchal' mother's role in this process as a key to understanding Antoinette's slavish passivity in the face of her pursuer and the factor which has temporarily obliterated her sense of the autoerotic.

When Antoinette recounts her dream walk in the forest, she describes the way her movements are hampered by the pure white dress she holds up to keep from soiling. So the absent figure of Antoinette's first dream, the impossibly 'clean' dress that Annette and Christophine fought over, reappears here as the white dress. Antoinette's efforts to keep it clean show her attempting to follow her traditional role as a woman in which she must preserve the dichotomies of static virginity. Her behaviour is in keeping with the prescribed passivity or predication of her sex that Irigaray is so critical of: 'I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen' (WSS 50).

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The image of the man Antoinette follows as 'black with hatred' condenses the denied specificity of Antoinette's 'black' and 'white' mothers (WSS 50). Antoinette persists in following him because, as I have suggested, her predication has already been relayed by a 'patriarchal' mother. If she seeks the love she is familiar with, she has no choice but to follow him; her 'masochism' is 'logical'. Antoinette has no interiority or sense of self to survive her pursuer's gaze. When he looks at her she begins to cry and leaves her dress to trail in the dirt. Ironically she has, from a Symbolic perspective, lost a virginity that never belonged to her in the first place. As a healing counterpart to this presentation of virginity, the description of the hem of Christophine's dress deliberately trailing in the dirt when she goes to mass later on, promises a spiritual acceptance of women's corporeality and sexuality.

The theme of anticipation, of a maturing future which has two sides reappears in this dream. It is a theme related, on the one hand, to a patriarchal conception of sexuality which relies upon the predication of women in language, and, on the other hand, to an emerging feminine specificity beyond the logic of the Symbolic. It is reflected in the different ways male and female characters use the phrase 'not yet'. When men use it, it becomes associated with an ominous, inexorable fate which threatens women. The boy that pursues Antoinette on her way to school tells her that one day he will catch her alone, threatening some form of sexual humiliation

threaten him with her 'whims and fancies' and her 'sidelong look', he thinks: 'Not now [...] Not yet' (WSS 75).

For Antoinette, however, it holds the promise of a spiritual/sexual becoming - a mystery which Sister Maria Augustine implies has not yet been revealed. In the dream, Antoinette's intimated destination is delayed by the menacing male figure. Yet after a while 'a strange voice' announces the journey's end (WSS 50). The patient persistence of this voice also manages to suggest a peaceful interiority or haven:

I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. 'Here, here,'
But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways
and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I
cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand
years. 'Here, in here,' a strange voice said, and the
tree stopped swaying and jerking. (WSS 50)

When Antoinette wakes up she remembers her mother's funeral and the fact that she was unable to cry or pray. As in Voyage in the Dark, the representation of the mother-daughter bond in a symbol of traditional virginity is related to an unsuccessful attempt to mourn the mother. Antoinette realises that the thought of her mother is 'mixed up' with her dream (WSS 51). She recalls her mother trying to wave at the end of the cobblestone road, one of the few direct signs that show Annette wanting to communicate with her daughter. However, Antoinette's spiritual education has seriously undermined her ability to represent her relationship to her mother through the sanctioning of an autoerotic awareness.

The 'Threat' of the Autoerotic

Since I attribute Rochester's paranoid perceptions, of the island women in particular, to the fact that his wife does not entirely

conform to the maternal feminine principle upon which his subjectivity and sanity rely, I shall be focusing on the cause of this non-conformity - the autoerotic component of Antoinette's relationship with Christophine. I regard the military metaphor which opens Rochester's narrative of Part II with its intimation of a consummated, completed sexual transaction, as a dark irony in what is only the beginning of his encounter with a highly specific feminine sexuality.

So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations. Everything finished, for better or for worse. (WSS 55)

Rochester's position as 'Colonial Master' on the island is undermined by the sense in which he feels 'bought' by his wife's dowry and disinherited by his father (WSS 59). Rhys is on this level exploring his 'feminine' position.

Part II is characterised from the start by Rochester's feeling of insecurity in the presence of women, with Amélie, the black servant he eventually sleeps with, with his wife's 'dark, alien eyes' and then with Christophine and the latter's intimacy with Antoinette (WSS 56). He expresses his anxieties in general through his responses to these women. Of Amélie he says: 'A lovely creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place' (WSS 55).

The 'threat' of Antoinette's autoerotic strength emerges from a positive, reciprocal mother-daughter relationship with Christophine who is a more intimate source of sensual and maternal intimacy than Annette. When Antoinette visits Christophine after the latter has left Granbois, Christophine's familiar smell immediately comforts her. Yet she immediately thinks of the fact

that Rochester does not enjoy the unfamiliar smells of the island people, including the scent Antoinette wears in her hair (WSS 66). Describing the smell of Christophine's clothes and the sight of her with the other washing women Antoinette says:

[Christophine] smelled too, of their smell, so warm and comforting to me (but he does not like it). The sky was dark blue through the dark green mango leaves, and I thought, 'This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay.' (WSS 90)

It is this sensuality which gives Antoinette a sense of belonging to the land and which eventually becomes too threatening for Rochester.

Christophine has done her best to preserve the mother-daughter bond between Antoinette and Annette. She has been exclusively present (on Antoinette's insistence) when the latter visited her mother and she protects this bond when Antoinette is at her most vulnerable to Rochester:

Listen *doudou ché*, plenty people fasten bad words on you and on your mother [...] The man not a bad man, even if he love money, but he hear so many stories he don't know what to believe. (WSS 94)

Despite their intimacy, Christophine maintains a healthy sense of distinction between herself and Antoinette and tries her best to instil pride and independence in the latter while conveying a sense of reciprocity by sharing the sexual and emotional wisdom she has gained:

All women, all colours, nothing but fools [...] But look me trouble, a rich white girl like you and more foolish than the rest. A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out. Do it and he come after you. (WSS 91)

Get up, girl, and dress yourself. Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world. (WSS 84)

Rochester is apparently not secure enough in himself to respect the love between his wife and Christophine, in part because he is excluded from their interchanges. Christophine and Antoinette greet each other with a song-dialogue reminiscent of that between Anna and Francine in Voyage in the Dark¹². It is a positive counterpart to the pseudo-dialogue, the voice which mimes patriarchal discourse, enacted by Coco the parrot. Christophine greets Antoinette with the familiar '*Doudou, ché cocotte*'. The first word is a lullaby type word, but 'cocotte' carries the sexual connotation of a fashionable prostitute. So, unlike Annette, who simply wishes to gear her child with the external appearance required to procure exchange value within the Symbolic, Christophine provides a recognition and legitimisation of her daughter's sexuality. When Rochester hears Christophine's greeting, he '{looks} at her sharply' and although Christophine '{seems} insignificant to him, she has the self-possession to meet his gaze (WSS 61).

Rochester is unable or unwilling to relate to Christophine's style of language. He regards it as 'horrible' simply because he judges it from a superficial standard of English gentility (WSS 71). Offering him coffee, Christophine exposes the hypocrisy or hollowness of the English ladies' speech, attempting to 'earth' her words in a sensual reality:

'Taste my bull's blood, master.' [...] 'Not horse piss like the English madams drink, she said. 'I know them. Drink, drink their yellow horse piss, talk, talk their lying talk.' (WSS 71)

12 "'Sometimes [Francine] told me stories, and at the start of the story she had to say 'Timm, timm,' and I had to answer 'Bois seche.'" (VID 61).

Later, when Christophine tries to warn Antoinette not to go to England, she relays a need to experience through the senses what is so quickly abstracted by language. In this regard her character shares Irigaray's view of men's habit of '[speaking] through a rationality quite external to their bodies' (IR 51). Pondering whether England is a 'real' place, she explains her doubts to Antoinette by saying: 'I don't say I don't *believe*, I say I don't *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it' (WSS 92). Tia seems to share this view of English culture and language when Antoinette claims to be able to turn a somersault: 'I never see you do it [...] only talk' (WSS 21).

In her relation to Rochester, Antoinette appears ambivalently as a child whom he can exploit easily for sex, but also as a woman whose sexual allure - the Creole girl with 'the sun in her' - eventually becomes threatening (WSS 130). As the child-woman, Antoinette's need for mothering leaves her vulnerable to Rochester while it undermines the latter's masculinity as a traditional male:

This was Antoinette. She spoke hesitatingly as if she expected me to refuse, so it was easy to do so. (WSS 57)

Occasionally he is able to provide genuine reassurance to the woman he recognises is a child. When Antoinette tries to tell him of her past, he is moved: 'Her mouth was set in a fixed smile but her eyes were so withdrawn and lonely that I put my arms round her, rocked her like a child and sang to her' (WSS 70). Yet Antoinette's 'pleading expression' has annoyed him from the start of their marriage and his reassurance becomes mechanical, serving partly to

ally his own fears and completely at odds with the detached sexual desire he has for her:

It was at night that I felt danger and would try to forget it and push it away.

'You are safe,' I'd say. She'd liked that - to be told 'you are safe.' Or I'd touch her face gently and touch tears. Tears - nothing! Words - less than nothing. As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did. (WSS 59, 78).

As a sexually mature woman infused with an autoeroticism fostered by Christophine, Antoinette does not provide the traditional predicate position which Rochester's subjectivity relies upon. This emerges in the power struggle that ensues between the two.

All day she'd be like any other girl, smile at herself in her looking-glass (*do you like this 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?' I'd say.

'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 she laughed.

But at night how different, even her voice was changed. Always this talk of death. (Is she trying to tell me that is the secret of this place? That there is no other way? She knows. She knows.) (WSS 76-77)

Antoinette's insistence on her 'way' is related to a desire connected with the maternal figure. The songs which Antoinette teaches Rochester are songs of parting and love for this figure. Her preoccupation with the subject of death at night suggests that she is trying to enlist Rochester's aid to move beyond her

inevitable silence within 'his' discourse ('She'd be silent, or angry for no reason'.) At the convent thoughts of death seemed the only way to attain the 'transcendent beauty' that the nuns spoke about (WSS 48).

Rochester's 'way' relies on sexual subjugation and finds Antoinette's blurring of dichotomies dangerous:

It was not a safe game to play - in that place. Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness.
(WSS 79)

For this reason he denies the active component of Antoinette's sexuality - the sun which the novel associates with her sensual specificity:

'Die then! Die!' I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers'. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight. In the long afternoons when the house was empty. Only the sun was there to keep us company. We shut him out. And why not? Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was - more lost and drowned afterwards. (WSS 77)

It is possible to trace the 'threat' of the autoerotic in the way Antoinette's sexual allure - expressed through the flower imagery - affects Rochester's Symbolic lucidity or coherence. At first, Rochester identifies the island flowers with Antoinette's beauty. When he picks orchids for Antoinette he tells her: 'They are like you' (WSS 82). Initially Rochester will enjoy watching 'the sky and the distant sea on fire' - an image associated with her autoerotic link to the mother (WSS 74). He will '[wait] for the scent of the flowers by the river', seemingly open to the idea of a sexuality that is not simply a negative counterpart of his own when he says: 'What I see is nothing - I want what it *hides* - that is not nothing' (WSS 74, 73).

Yet even early in the relationship there are signs that Antoinette's sensuality is threatening. When the honeymoon couple enter their bedroom, there are two wreaths of frangipani lying on the bed. Rochester asks Antoinette:

'Am I expected to wear one of these? And when?'
 I crowned myself with one of the wreaths and made a face in the glass.' I hardly think it suits my handsome face, do you?'
 'You look like a king, an emperor.'
 'God forbid,' I said and took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it. The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass fanning herself with a small palm-leaf fan coloured blue and red at the edges. I felt sweat on my forehead and sat down. (WSS 62)

Rochester's embarrassment with his image as a 'king' wreathed with flowers is ambivalent. It could suggest his dismissal of 'alien' cultural trappings or the fear of appearing feminine in Symbolic terms. It could also suggest a fleeting awareness of the absurdity of playing out his colonial status. Yet seeing Antoinette's self-possession in this instance (she is relatively relaxed as she fans herself while his senses are flooded with the scent of flowers), he feels unwell and has to sit down. His reaction reminds us of Hester's reaction to the scent of pop-flowers in Voyage in the Dark, where her intolerance for the flowers is also associated with the denial of an autoerotic 'other'.

It is because Rochester cannot mediate his experience through his wife that the landscape seems intense and invasive and Antoinette appears as 'a stranger':

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 [Antoinette] is a stranger. (WSS 59)

The turning point arrives when Rochester receives a letter from Daniel insinuating that Antoinette is racially and sexually impure and following in the footsteps of an insane mother. Until now he has found it 'difficult to think or write coherently' as he tells his father in a letter (WSS 64). He comes to his senses by trampling an orchid into the mud, symbolically destroying Antoinette's sexual power (WSS 82).

Since Rochester cannot admit Antoinette's difference or distinctness from himself and is not open to a way of being beyond the dichotomies which define his subjectivity, to an 'otherness' 'not for [him] and not for [her]', he tries to establish his power through a series of humiliations (WSS 107). He rejects Antoinette sexually and emotionally, refusing to admit 'another side' to Daniel's gossip (WSS 106). He sleeps with Amélie within hearing of his wife's room, desperate to re-establish his sexual and colonial authority by the only means he knows - denying feminine and cultural specificity. Despite Amélie's complicity, he is able to commodify her by paying her. At the same time he is able to humiliate Antoinette and damage her sense of belonging. Antoinette tells him:

Do you know what you've done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. (WSS 121)

Yet in spite of his aggressive determination, he appears at his most vulnerable when Antoinette re-enacts her mother's actions, warning him aggressively not to touch her:

it seemed to me that everything round me was hostile. The telescope drew away and said don't touch me. The trees were threatening and the shadows of the trees

moving slowly over the floor menaced me. That green menace. I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me.

I listened. Christophine was talking softly. My wife was crying. Then a door shut. They had gone into the bedroom. Someone was singing '*Ma belle ka di*', or was it the song about one day and a thousand years? But whatever they were singing or saying was dangerous. I must protect myself. (WSS 123)

What Rochester finds most threatening is the intimacy which exists between Antoinette and her mother(s). The patois songs he hears ('*Ma belle ka di*' and the song which evokes a sense of timelessness illogical to Symbolic logic) are 'dangerous' and his fear only makes him more destructive. To disrupt any possibility of a maternal genealogy - the '[long line of (women) who know the secret and will not tell it]' - Christophine is threatened with prison, while Antoinette is renamed and removed from her homeland (WSS 121, 141, 142). Only by enforcing their predication and silence can he regain a secure identity.

When Rochester says: 'She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it', the text manages to comment ironically on the opening of his narrative, in which sexual consummation in terms of static virginity becomes reductive (WSS 141). The irony registers the loss/ absence/ silencing of a feminine voice.

VI Lighting the Dark Passage

The question of identity or of a form of representation beyond the dichotomies of the Symbolic is presented in an apparently dissociated flow of memories and dreams in the last section of Wide Sargasso Sea. In order to rediscover an autoerotic awareness and

find her voice, Antoinette is left to reorganise her memories and see beyond the dichotomies which have immobilized and silenced her.

Part III opens with an italicised narrative in which Grace Poole expresses qualms about her instructions not to gossip about her 'keep'. She creates the impression that despite her complicity in this silence, rumours of Antoinette Bertha Mason cannot be contained:

[The servants] were sent away but how could [Mrs Eff] stop them talking? If you ask me the whole county knows. (WSS 146)

This is one of the ways the text indirectly confirms a need for representation and voice. Clearly the heroine at this point is not afforded any opportunity to speak. Locked in a cold, dark attic which Antoinette refers to as a 'cardboard world' where the colours have 'no light', she can only wonder what she would say to Rochester if she had the chance (WSS 148). This seems unlikely because part of Rochester's instructions concerning his wife express the wish not to hear anymore about her.

Antoinette struggles to communicate her desire in a style that will please her brother, remembering that he 'did not like long letters' (WSS 149). Yet she also regrets not having tried to communicate this desire in her own terms by wearing her red dress when he visited her.

The possibility of achieving a voice beyond the Symbolic by engaging an autoerotic perception is readdressed in the now evolved images of mirrors, dresses and fire. Antoinette's red dress, the 'colour of fire and sunset', evokes the autoerotic maternal, deconstructing and dissolving Antoinette's labelling as

'intemperate and unchaste' (WSS 151, 152). The substantiality of the red dress as 'something you can touch and hold', releases the memory of fire associated with Antoinette's mother. Through the image of the flamboyant flowers, it embraces the supposedly corrupt sexuality that links Antoinette to Annette as the '[infamous] daughter of an infamous mother' in a spiritual dimension (WSS 152):

As soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers. 'If you are buried under a flamboyant tree,' I said, 'your soul is lifted up when it flowers. (WSS 151)

The red dress also stirs memories of the dress Antoinette wore when she last saw her cousin Sandi, directly confronting the rumours of her promiscuity and apparently validating Daniel's gossip about this liaison. Antoinette's sexual and Sandi's racial predication are together implicated as denied specificities of the Symbolic. Their 'life and death kiss' therefore challenges the intimation of a forbidden sensuality in the '[biblical]' garden of Antoinette's childhood where the mixture of smells emanating from living and dead flowers inspired so much fear (WSS 152, 17). Now the kiss is associated with the images of 'the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames', moving beyond a fallen sexuality that is inevitably a part of static virginity (WSS 155). The dichotomies of a commodified spirituality are therefore healed by engaging the fiery images associated with a maternal autoerotic.

This is confirmed by the metaphorical transformation which occurs in Antoinette's third dream, the themes of which have been moving toward a form of resolution (WSS 92, 153). Earlier I suggested that the ambiguous identity of Antoinette's menacing

dream companion conflated the 'patriarchal mother' with the patriarchal lover who both deny the daughter/woman her sexual specificity or her specular, dynamic virginity.

In this dream, someone chases Antoinette 'laughing' (WSS 153). Antoinette does not turn around because she does not want to see 'the ghost of a woman who they say haunts this place' (WSS 153). I regard this figure as a development of the 'patriarchal mother' '[looking] away from [Antoinette], over [her] head just as she used to '(WSS 147). Antoinette has already 'recognized' the image of her mother in a tapestry by the incongruous, but 'corporeal' detail of Annette's 'bare feet' in an evening gown (WSS 147). This (specular) recognition is possible because the surface of the tapestry cannot reflect her image in the logic of flat mirrors. In Antoinette's dream, it is only once Antoinette has started a fire that she '[knows]' the figure in the gilt frame:

It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it. (WSS 154)

The threat of too close an identification with a 'patriarchal mother' seems, temporarily at least, mediated by the figure of Christophine who embodies the ideal of reciprocal mothering.

When Antoinette goes on to encounter images which suggest a remembering of her disparate 'white' and 'black' selves in the 'picture of the Miller's Daughter' and the figure of Tia, I read her decision to jump as a readiness to assume an autoeroticism relayed to her through her mother figures (WSS 155). As a 'red sky'

beckons, Antoinette accepts her childhood playmate's challenge (WSS 155). She actively explores the intimation of autoerotic awareness that Tia's stone had once shocked her into experiencing - feeling blood on her face and seeing herself '[like] in a looking-glass' (WSS 38). When she wakes up from her dream, she lights her way along a dark passage, self-possessed and filled with purpose.

Conclusion

In my thesis Irigaray's project of resymbolisation allows me to trace the way in which Brontë and Rhys represent their relation to a Symbolic which values them in terms they find divorced from an incipient but unrepresented awareness of themselves. The dichotomies which inform static virginity produce female characters that mime a discourse which confines them to a predicate position in language. However, the texts of these novels employ metaphorical structures which transform women's traditional roles. Evolving figures engage, while they disrupt, the dichotomies which prohibit the representation of feminine desire, creating a dynamic space for a reconceived virginity and 'voice'.

In Jane Eyre, Brontë's use of elemental imagery subtly rewrites Jane's labelling as 'passionate' while it supports the figure of Rebecca as an unconventional virgin. If Jane's silence concerning her mystical experience in the face of Rochester's frailty at the end of the novel intimates the limits in representing a feminine voice, these appear realised in the case of Voyage in the Dark where Rhys was forced to make textual changes to her original manuscript. However, the published version subtly undermines the figure of Symbolic darkness to introduce the heroine into a journey of autoerotic awareness.

The representation of this reflexive awareness is explored in the presentation of an alternate, reciprocal mothering in Wide Sargasso Sea. In this novel, Antoinette reclaims her virginity in the autoerotic insights she gains from a literal and figurative

imprisonment. The characterisation of the mother-daughter relationship has developed from Voyage in the Dark to Wide Sargasso Sea to the extent that the latter novel is able to respond as a mother and daughter text to Jane Eyre. As a daughter text it inherits the drive to represent women's spiritual embodiment through an independent means. As a mother text it perceives the broader implications of Symbolic dichotomies which privilege a male sex and deny cultural specificities. Yet in different ways and in different measures, the figural evolutions of all three novels challenge the traditional meaning of virginity and evoke a simultaneous representation and liberation of feminine desire.

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