MIRROR IMAGES: FEMALE INTERRELATIONSHIPS IN *JANE EYRE* AND *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*[1]

Shade of a shadow in the glass
O set the crystal surface free!
Pass – as the fairer visions pass –
Nor ever more return, to be
The ghost of a distracted hour
That heard me whisper, 'I am She!'

The Other Side of the Mirror" Mary Coleridge

The general notion when it comes to the "community of women writers" is of a universal "sisterhood". Yet the interrelationships within this network is defined as often by misunderstanding and hostility as by any inherent loyalty. In fact, some of the best reviews on work by women writers by their "literary sisters" were those that declaimed rather than acclaimed (Moers, 42). Thus, this "sisterhood" consists of "sibling rivalry", as much as sibling loyalty (Moers, 43). Yet, all the while, women writers have more in common with each other than with any male writer, for both nature and social circumstances have deemed them "sisters-under-the-skin". In light of this, the thesis that women are sometimes depicted as mirror images of each other is apt, for, although we tend to see a reflection as an exact replica of the mirrored object, it is, in fact, the diametrically *opposite*. This mirror image (same-yet-opposite), has been a mode of literary presentation when it comes to women characters since the time a queen stood gazing into her looking glass planning the destruction of her step-daughter who was reflected in it when, all the while, what she saw was part of her own hidden self (Gilbert & Gubar, 37/8).

In literary history, some novels by women writers have been paid tribute to by their "literary sisters" in the form of sequels.[2] In this genre, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), holds a special interest, as this novel was inspired, not as homage to its predecessor, namely, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), but as a protest (Athill, i). Thus, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is an inversion of the characters we had met in *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre*'s antagonist Bertha Mason is made

[1] The writer gratefully acknowledges the interest and time taken by Dr Carmen Wickramagamage to help bring this paper into its present form.
[2] Actually, *Wide Sargasso Sea* cannot be considered a "sequel" in the technical sense of the term as the story is not a continuation of *Jane Eyre*.

into the victim Antoinette Cosway, while the victim Edward Rochester is presented as the unnamed anti-hero who victimizes a helpless wife.

The female interrelationships within, and between, the two novels, too, reflect this conversion of images. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have seen the mad Bertha as "Jane's dark double" (Gilbert & Gubar, 360-2). There are, indeed, a lot of similarities between these two antithetical characters. Jane is small-made, fair, and loved by Rochester; Bertha, big-built, dark, and hated. Contrasting the two, he says, "Compare those clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk" (*JE*, 306), and later, "When I think of the thing that flew at my throat this morning, hanging its black scarlet visage over the nest of my dove ..." (*JE*, 322).[3]

For all the madwoman's repulsiveness, however, she is what Jane subconsciously desires to be. To see what one covets and is unable to get as repulsive and exaggerated, according to psychological theory, is a form of rationalization. Take Jane's own derogatory descriptions of Bertha, for instance: "bloated features" (*JE*, 305), "purple face" (305), "thick lips", "thick and dark hair" (295), "the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments" (295), "a big woman ... and corpulent besides" (305). That Jane suffers from an inferiority complex because of her paleness and puniness is emphasized throughout the novel. Even at the very commencement of her narration, she tells us that she "was humbled by ... [her] ... physical inferiority to Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed" (13). Jane admires Blanche Ingram's height ["tall as poplars" (181)], and darkness ("dark as a Spaniard", "dark eyes and black ringlets" (181)]. Both Blanche and Bertha are majestic. Of Blanche, Jane tells us, "... she was the very type of majesty" (317). Both can sing and dance, which Jane cannot. Above all, Blanche is considered Mr Rochester's bride-elect, while Jane is hopelessly in love with him. There is a suggestion that Bertha is Jane's hidden desires vulgarized, whereas Blanche represents them in their true light. A further link between Bertha and Blanche is that they appear most often clad in white while Jane's dresses are mostly black. Jane first sees Bertha as a reflection in a mirror wearing *her* veil. This scene, which spells out the antagonism between rejected wife and to-be-wife of the same man, at the same time, mirrors a curious bond between the two. Earlier on, Jane has told us that she cannot imagine herself wearing that particular veil; on her

[3] Here, one is reminded of the "looking-glass scene" in "Snow White". What the queen sees *through* the looking glass, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, is an image of the two females as seen *by* the looking glass (male/king). (Gilbert and Gubar, 37/8). Their argument is that rivalry between women is caused by men. Elsewhere in this essay, too, I refer to a number of instances where a male functions as the mirror that causes empathy/enmity between women.

wedding day, at Sophie's bidding, she looks at herself in the mirror, dressed as a bride, but with a more modest veil. (Bertha has prevented the occurrence of what Jane could not "imagine".) The veil is a symbol of the wife's subjectivity to the husband; Bertha tears and tramples on it. Jane ultimately does not subject herself to Rochester even when she marries him.

Jane's first encounter with, and consequent terror of, Bertha, closely resembles an earlier experience when, as a little girl, she was terrified on seeing a ghost – namely, herself, in the mirror in the red-room. In both instances, she is rendered unconscious. Though timid, Jane is a passionate being. If provoked, she can use both gestures and language, to fight back (Harrison, 158). We get an early example of this in her retaliation against John Reed, and later, the verbal reprisal against his mother. Bertha, according to Rochester, used "foul language" before her condition deteriorated into its non-verbal stage. She assaults both Rochester and Richard. After her "madness", little Jane is locked up in the red-room. Bertha is locked up in the third story – both places where used and discarded objects are kept, signifying the "uselessness" of the respective characters. Both are watched over by female servants, who hold the keys to the rooms. Jane faces the threat of being bound to her stool unless she stops her "violent behaviour"; we see Bertha being tied to a chair after her violent attempt on Mr Rochester. Jane dreams Thornfield Hall destroyed; Bertha makes it happen. Thus, Bertha can be seen as a manifestation of Jane's repressed desires, as well as an activator of the other's imagination. In spite of their opposite personalities, the two characters have certain aspects in common. Bertha is described as "savage" and a "creature". At one time, however, she has been "beautiful" (317). Rochester calls Jane "savage, beautiful creature" (303). Bertha is described as a witch: "the mad lady who was cunning as a witch" (443). She is a latter-day version of the "bulky" witch in *Rapunzel* who blinds the Prince and separates the two lovers. In fact, she meets with the traditional "punishment" for witches by being burnt. Yet, witch-like characteristics are attributed to Jane too. Recalling their very first meeting, when he falls off his horse, Rochester asks Jane whether she "bewitched" the animal (130). Later, he ascribes his infatuation for her, to "witchery" (271); the inn-keeper's language at the "Rochester Arms", too, hints as much: "... and you see, when gentlemen of his age fall in love with girls, they are often like as if they were bewitched" (442). Bertha's movements are those of a wild animal: "...it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours" (304), and the noises she makes are animal sounds: "...it snatched and growled like some strange, wild animal" (304). At one stage, Jane, too, is reduced to an animal-like existence. She wanders in the open fields, eating berries, begging, in a dog-like manner, food meant for pigs, and sleeping in the open air. At this point, "madness" is not very far from her either: "I was weeping wildly as I walked along my solitary way; fast, fast, I went like one delirious ... I fell but I was soon up, crawling ... on my limbs and

knees" (304). Jane, the child, is unable to speak out the injustice meted out to her in the red-room and screams just as Bertha does later. Just as the madwoman paces backwards and forwards restlessly in the third story, so too, does Jane. Jane's restlessness, which makes her ask herself questions, is followed by the other's laugh as if in answer to her internal monologue.

Brontë's Jane and Rhys' Antoinette, too, are mirror images. Both are marginalized. The opening of *Jane Eyre* is: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day ... Out-door exercise was now out of the question. I was glad of it" (*JE*, 9) (Spivak, 178). *Wide Sargasso Sea* opens with: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (*WSS*, 17). Thus, the characters' marginalization is emphasized at the very outset of both novels. Both characters grow up in a deprived environment. As children, both are abused by other children for being "different" and, therefore, "inferior": Jane, by John Reed, as a "poor orphan", and Antoinette, by Tia, as a "white nigger". Both suffer from non-placement. Being a poor relation in a rich family, Jane belongs with neither the affluent Reeds, nor with the working-class poor. Antoinette is neither black nor white. This is the dilemma of Woman, who, as Sherry Ortner says, is caught between hierarchical strata (Gilbert & Gubar, 19) – neither man nor child. Both undergo a period of illness after which they are sent to school. Both learn the same subjects -- Religion, Geography, Needlework, Deportment. Both are destined to marry the same man. Both back off at the last moment, and are persuaded by the suitor, to go ahead with the marriage, though in *this* case, Antoinette relents, and Jane stays firm.

Their fates are similar in another matter. At a time of financial deprivation, Antoinette is "rescued" by a "father-figure", in the form of her stepfather, Mr Mason, from whom she inherits wealth. It is this "wealth" that attracts the "Rochester" family into seeking a marriage alliance with her. Such was the lot of many a young girl in the West Indies (Wyndham, 12). At a time of hardship in *her* life, Jane, too, is given a "father-figure" – her paternal uncle, John Eyre, who offers to adopt her and take her to the same part of the world young Antoinette lived in. If not for Sarah Reed's spiteful lie that Jane had died, Jane, too, would have been taken to the West Indies. If so, could she not have been sought after by a family in England, for the same reason that Antoinette was? Thus, could it not be that Aunt Reed prevented Jane a fate that would have resembled Antoinette's?

In the first part of *Jane Eyre*, little Jane sees herself in the mirror, and is frightened by the "ghost" that is herself. Towards the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette sees herself in the mirror, and discerns a "ghost" – again, herself. Just as Jane is locked up in the red-room for her "mad" behaviour, so too, is Antoinette, for

hers. Their experiences and emotions, too, are curiously interrelated. This interrelatedness, on occasion, is reflected in the style of writing of their respective creators, as well. For instance, Antoinette, the day after her marriage, relates to her husband an experience she has had:

> This night I can remember was very hot. The windows were shut but I asked Christophine to open it because the breeze comes from the hills at night ... It was so hot that my night chemise was sticking to me, but I went to sleep all the same. And then suddenly I was awake. I saw two enormous rats, as big as cats, on the sill staring at me ... I could see myself in the looking glass the other side of the room in my night chemise ... staring at the rats, and the rats ... staring at me. I woke up again suddenly ... and the rats were not there but I felt very frightened ... (*WSS*, 82,83)

The day before her marriage, Jane relates, *to the same person*, the man that is to be her husband, an experience *she* had:

> On waking, a gleam dazzled my eyes. I thought – oh, it is daylight! But I was mistaken; it was only candlelight. Sophie, I supposed, had come in. There was a light on the dressing-table, and the door of the closet ... a woman tall and large ... I know not what dress she had on; it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell ... she took my veil from its place ... she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features ... in the dark oblong glass ... It drew aside the window-curtain and looked out; perhaps it saw dawn approaching, for, taking the candle, it retreated to the door. Just at my bed-side the figure stopped: the fiery eyes glared upon me – she thrust up her candle close to my face and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness ... I became insensible from terror. (*JE*, 294,295)

Antoinette sees herself, clad in white, reflected in the mirror; Jane sees Bertha/herself, clad in white, reflected in the mirror. The creatures Antoinette sees are big (for their species); so is the creature Jane sees. Both stare at the narrator. The references to the maid (Christophine/Sophie), the window, the night, the narrator being in bed, and the animals, too, connect the two incidents. It may also be worth noting that Jane, as a child, is referred to as "rat", and "like a cat", by John and Bessie respectively: " ... he called me 'Rat! Rat!' " (*JE*, 17) and " ... she's mad

like a cat" (*JE*, 18). What Antoinette sees reflected in the looking glass are rats *like* cats.

From the number of times we see Antoinette looking into the looking glass, we associate with her a form of narcissism (which, too, is a type of madness), if not downright vanity. Although it is not so obvious, Jane, too, often looks at herself in the mirror. Although a preoccupation with beauty is not presented as a "weakness" in her, her constant regret at not being attractive, every time she catches herself in a mirror, hints at vanity, too.

Both Jane's and Antoinette's "father-figures" – John Eyre and Mr Mason – bestow upon them wealth made in the West Indies, and which have a major impact on their respective marriages – one positively, the other negatively. To Jane, this gives her an independence within marriage – to Antoinette, it leads to dependence vis-à-vis her husband while (as I have mentioned earlier) also being the "reason" she fell into the "trap" of marriage to "Rochester" in the first place.

The most striking feature of the Jane-Antoinette relationship is the dreams they have in common. Dreams are the most intimate aspects of a person's emotional and psychological make-up, for no two individuals dream the same dream. But in the dreams these characters have, there are uncanny resemblances (suggesting their "oneness?). Both dream the destruction of Thornfield Hall. The descriptions of these dreams, too, echo each other:

> ... I stumbled over a marble hearth, and ... a fragment of cornice. Wrapped up in a shawl, I still carried the unknown little child. I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired were my arms – howevermuch its weight impeded my progress, I must retain it. I heard the gallop of a horse at a distance on the road; I was sure it was you; and you were departing for many years, and for a distant country. I climbed the thin wall with frantic, perilous haste, eager to catch one glimpse of you from the top; the stones rolled from under my feet, the ivy branches I grasped gave way, the child clung to my neck in terror, and almost strangled me ... the wall crumbled; I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee, I lost my balance, fell, and woke. (*JE*, 294)

> I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold onto it. But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. (*WSS*, 60)

> It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress ... so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me, and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful, and I don't wish to get it soiled. He smiles slyly ... and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dir my beautiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall ... (*WSS*, 59-60)

> When I was out on the battlements it was cool ... But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri ... Someone screamed and I thought *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke. (*WSS*, 189-90)

In both Jane's and Antoinette's dreams, the narrator is following Rochester. The child in one is the dress in the other. Both have in common the difficulty and the sense of agony though one is passionately pursuing Rochester while the other is tagging along, passively. The endings of Jane's dream and Antoinette's too, are similar. In one, 'I lost my balance, fell, and woke'; in the other, 'I called "Tia!" and jumped and woke'. Thus, the dreams, too, reflect the mirroring (same-yet-opposite characteristics) in the two females.

The moon is said to have an impact on lunatics. Whether Jane is "mad" or not, she, too, is influenced by the moon. It is the moon, for instance, that advises her to flee Thornfield Hall—advice she follows. Antoinette is chided by Christophine for sleeping on the verandah in the moonlight during the full moon.

The resemblance in each other's mentality is also shown in the "screaming" Jane hears in the early part of *Jane Eyre*, and that which Antoinette hears towards the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In both instances, neither realizes, at first, that it is she herself that screamed. Jane's reaction to her scream is "a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings" (*JE*, 23), while Antoinette's, to hers, is "Someone screamed" (*WSS*, 290).

Just as "witchery", as I have mentioned earlier, is associated with Jane, as well as with Bertha, so, too, is it with Antoinette. Daniel Cosway tells "Rochester", " ... you bewitch with her" (*WSS*, 98); Rochester teases Jane of using witchcraft on him: "I ... had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse" (*JE*, 130), and accuses Antoinette of practising Obeah: "As I stepped into her room I noticed the white powder strewn on the floor ..." (*WSS*, 136).

Another "mirroring" of female characters is found between Brontë's Bertha Mason and Rhys's Antoinette Cosway. Whereas in the Jane-Antoinette mirroring, opposite characters were considered doubles, here, the same fictional character is seen as two different people. Even their names are different, the only connection between the two being given by the male "Rochester".[4] Both wear white; both are fond of looking into the looking glass. Antoinette, before the advancement of her illness which would have resulted in her gaining weight, as well as the lack of exercise due to her confinement within a single room turning her into a "bulky" Bertha "and corpulent besides" (*JE*, 305), had been a shapely woman once, as attested to by the male "Rochester": "... the thin wrist, the sweet swell of the forearm, the rounded elbow, the curve of her shoulder into the upper arm" (*WSS*, 138). Bertha, in keeping with the German meaning of her name, is the "vampire" (*JE*, 295) that "suck[s] ... the blood" (*JE*, 222) off Richard Mason, and that Jane sees reflected in the mirror (*JE*, 295). Antoinette, on the other hand, is a figure of tragedy, her name recalling the French Queen Antoinette, who was harassed by the plebeians. This historical figure was, in the same way that Annette and her daughter Antoinette were, " ... abandoned, lied about, helpless" (*WSS*, 21-22) – abandoned by her subjects, lied about by historians,[5] helpless in the face of Destiny. Bertha is cruel to servants: "No servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders" (*JE*, 318) says Rochester. Antoinette is exceptionally lenient to servants. She considers Christophine a friend, and defends Hilda against "Rochester's" mockery. She pleads on behalf of the boy who wants to go to England with them, and is always liberal in giving food and money to the domestic staff. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester found fault with Bertha for her harshness towards servants; in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he finds fault with Antoinette for her generosity towards them.

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[4] In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the link in the two names is explained in Antoinette's comment to Christophine:

> 'When he passes my door he says, "Good-night, Bertha". He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name.' " (*WSS*, 113).

The "it" here seems to refer to "Antoinette". The mother's name is Annette, and it could be that "Rochester", who dislikes the mother, also dislikes the name "Antoinette", which sounds like "Annette", and therefore, calls his wife "Bertha", instead. However, Nancy Harrison's interpretation is that he calls her "Bertha" *because* it is the mother's name (Harrison, 184). This paper will go by Harrison's theory.

[5] Her well-known suggestion to the poor, to eat cake if there was no bread, is now seen as having been misrepresented.

Both Bertha and Antoinette are Creole but, whereas the definition of the former's race is vague, in the latter's, it is specific. Bertha, being merely functionary, is given but a cursory sketching. She comes from the faraway West Indies. In fact, the description of her points towards a black/coloured/mixed individual ("thick lips", "purple face", "dark brow", etc). Antoinette, on the other hand, is "pure white". Her ancestors come from England. Her difference from Jane is cultural, not biological.

The mother-daughter relationship is another aspect that is mirrored in the two texts. In *Jane Eyre*, the absence of the mother plays a prominent role in the heroine's life. In time of mental turmoil, it is the moon that manifests itself as a mother. In her dilemma as to whether she should agree to live as Rochester's mistress, or "flee temptation" (*JE*, 322), Jane goes back in time to the day she was locked up in the red-room at Gateshead. (Childhood is associated with Mother). The light Jane saw that night returns in the form of the moon – as a "white human form" and advises her, "My daughter, flee temptation", and "Mother, I will" (*JE*, 322) is Jane's answer (Harrison, 177). Here, the "white human form" that "*gazed* and *gazed* on me", and which "spoke to my spirit" (*JE*, 20), is, of course, Jane herself (emphasis mine). This form Jane sees as a child is *reflected in the mirror*. The adult Jane's conscience tells her that to "flee temptation" is the right thing to do – thus, it is she herself that decides to leave Thornfield Hall. Hence, the Mother here is her better Self.

Antoinette's being "rejected" by society – as Creole, as Madwoman – is paralleled by the lack of warmth in her relationship with her mother whose preference for the son, over the daughter, instills in Antoinette the notion of being alone in the world – a notion she carries with her throughout her life. Even in her "vision" of her mother, Antoinette sees her looking *away* from her, "over my head just as she used to" (*WSS*, 180). The daughter's madness too, is closely linked with the mother's. Although the mother dies in the First Part, she lives on in the daughter.

Annette Cosway is a misunderstood person. From the very first paragraph of the novel, we are told that the Jamaican ladies did not like her "because she pretty like pretty self" (*WSS*, 17); "Rochester" plans to "punish" Antoinette for what he sees as her vanity: "Vain silly creature ... she'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking glass" (*WSS*, 165). That both are good-looking, however, and are aware of this fact is reflected in the many instances they are seen looking into the looking glass. Says little Antoinette of her mother: " ... perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass"(*WSS*, 18); says "Rochester" of

Antoinette, "All day she'd ... smile at herself in her looking glass" (*WSS*, 91). The daughter inherits her mother's physical appearance, as well as her mental make-up. Says Antoinette of her mother: "A frown came between her black eye-brows, deep – it might have been cut with a knife" (*WSS*, 20); says "Rochester" of his wife: " ... the cut between her thick eye-brows, deep, as if it had been cut with a knife" (*WSS*, 138). (Once again, in both the above instances, "Rochester" is a "link" between the two females. What Antoinette sees in Annette is mirrored in what "Rochester" sees in Antoinette). Both are tall, with long black hair, both are broken by social injustice, and end their lives locked up, and at the mercy of their caretakers. Antoinette, following her mother's footsteps, takes to alcohol to drown her loneliness, thus becoming, in Mr Rochester's words, " '... a madwoman and a drunkard' " (*JE*, 303). Both are deserted by their respective husbands once they are pronounced "insane". What the mother says about herself, " '... abandoned, lied about, helpless' " (*WSS*, 21-22) later becomes the theme song of the daughter's life.

Although the mother is mentioned only *once* in Part III – "Looking at the tapestry one day, I recognized my mother, dressed in an evening gown, but with bare feet" (*WSS*, 180), -- her unacknowledged presence is strongly felt at the end of the novel. Of Antoinette encountering the "ghost" of Thornfield Hall: "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" (*WSS*, 180-9-), Gayathri Spivak says that Antoinette recognizes herself in the mirror (Spivak, 184). Yet Antoinette always associates her mother with Coulibri: "She was part of Coulibri" (*WSS*, 47). When she sees the "ghost" in the mirror, Antoinette also remembers Coulibri – Tia, Christophine, Coco, the pool, the trees and the mountains of her childhood home. Thus, it could be that what Antoinette sees in the mirror, is the *mother* in herself, for it seems that, unconsciously, her thoughts become associated with her *mother* (representing childhood), after seeing the reflection.[6] At this stage in Antoinette's life, she would have been the age her mother was when she knew her as a child. Not having access to a mirror during her incarceration at Thornfield Hall, (fifteen years, if we are to go by *Jane Eyre*) it is natural that she would not recognize herself in the looking glass, but see the reflection as her mother, instead.

Hence, for all the lack of warmth in their relationship, the mother is with Antoinette as she rushes to her last leap from the battlements of Thornfield Hall. It is the thought of the *mother* that triggers the hallucination of Coco's voice calling "*Qui est la?*" ("Who's there?"), to which the answer is "Bertha", for now "Rochester" is calling, "Bertha! Bertha!" ("Bertha" is also the mother's name.) This recollection of the parrot, prompted by the thought of the mother, ties up the

[6] Harrison, too, says that Antoinette identifies the image in the mirror with her mother, 173.

ending of the story with the beginning, by recalling a similar incident of house burning. As Coulibri burns, Coco tries to escape by flying, but its wings having been clipped by Annette's husband, it falls down, burning to death. At the end, Antoinette *is* that parrot, her "wings", too, (the symbol of freedom) having been "clipped" by *her* husband.

Antoinette has another "mirror" in Tia. Tia is the only playmate Antoinette has in Coulibri. They are of the same age, and also, probably, of the same size: They can wear each other's clothes. In Tia's last appearance in the novel, she is likened to a reflection in the looking glass: "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*, 45). Allusions to this, indeed, can be seen throughout their relationship. In spite of their enmity, they have, at one point, been playfellows. One is white, the other black; one comes from the ruling-class, the other, from the working-class. Tia expresses her hatred of Antoinette by stealing her clothes and spitefully leaving her, her own rags. Yet, on a symbolic level, wearing one another's clothes is a mark of sisterhood. In wearing Antoinette's clothes, Tia reveals her hidden desire to be Antoinette, while Antoinette, in wearing Tia's, assumes, for the time being, the other's personality. (While she is in Tia's clothes, Antoinette enters the house through the back entrance.) In what Tia says, too, she reflects Antoinette's personality, like the Queen's "mirror-on-the-wall". When her mother does not speak to her, Antoinette recalls Tia's taunts, and sees herself through the words of the "looking glass": "She [Annette] is ashamed of me, what Tia said is true" (*WSS*, 26). Tia calls Antoinette a "white nigger". These very words are echoed by the crowd on the night of the riot, and they are the words by which Antoinette sees herself all her life. The thought of Tia comes back to Antoinette at the end of the story, and her name is the last word we hear Antoinette speak. In fact, Antoinette's calling "Tia" comes after Coco's "*Qui est la?*" ("Who's there?") and the name can also be taken as an answer to the parrot's question. It is Antoinette "who is there". "Tia" sounds like a shortened form of "Antoinette". Thus Antoinette, in this last instance, is identifying herself with Tia, as well as being identified (through "Rochester's "Bertha! Bertha!") with her mother.

Amelie is Antoinette's other rival who yet functions as a "double". In the scene in which they come closest (physically), they are locked in a vicious battle, in the male-created stereotypical image of women fighting, slapping each other, and pulling each other's hair. This scene, significantly, is seen by "Rochester" reflected in the looking glass. (The male chauvinistic perspective of women's fights?) In this instance, Amelie echoes Tia's insult in calling Antoinette a "white cockroach", and the latter, once again, identifies herself with that definition. " 'That's me' " (*WSS*,

102), Antoinette tells "Rochester", soon afterwards, referring to Amelie's song about the "white cockroach". The "sisterhood" between these two rivals is implied in other instances, as well. "Rochester", in fact, suggests to himself that Amelie could be a biological sister to Antoinette: "For a moment she [Antionette] looked very much like Amelie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, even probable in this damned place" (*WSS*, 127). Linking Antoinette with Bertha Mason, *Wide Sargasso Sea* highlights the protagonist's tendency to bite people: "I ["Rochester"] managed to hold her [Antionette's] wrist with one hand and the rum with the other, but when I found her teeth in my arm I dropped the bottle" (148); ... " 'You [Antionette] rushed at him with a knife, and when he got the knife away you bit his arm' " (183). This trait is hinted at in Amelie, too: "Amelie, whose teeth were bared, seemed to be trying to bite [Antoinette's arm]"(100). At a certain stage, Amelie asks "Rochester": " 'Do you like my hair? Isn't it prettier than hers?' " (148). Antoinette asks him, " 'Is she so much prettier than I am?' " (147). Just as Tia comes close to Antoinette in her spiteful act of stealing/wearing her clothes, Antoinette comes even closer in stealing/sleeping with her husband.

There are mirrorings between such disparate figures as Antoinette and Grace Poole, as well. For all that their relationship is defined by one's keeping watch over the other – in the manner of jailer over prisoner – Grace Poole and Antoinette, too, share the same dream (Harrison, 158), thus, assimilating into the same personality. Even in their thoughts, a mirroring of words can be discerned. Antoinette says of herself: "I wish to stay here in the dark ... where I belong" (*WSS*, 136). Grace Poole sees her as "the girl who lives in her own darkness" (*WSS*, 178).

Even between such females as Christophine and Grace Poole, who have never met, there are curious mirrorings. One is black, emotionally involved in Antoinette's welfare, and takes her side against "Rochester". The other is white, lives on the other side of the globe, looks upon Antoinette in purely mercenary terms, and is paid by "Rochester" to be Antoinette's "jailer" – and thus, is, technically, on *his* side. Yet, there is an interesting play on words between these two totally different characters. Christophine believes in "spirits" and, in her meagre understanding, mixes it up with the Christian God: " 'In your Bible it say God is a spirit' "(*WSS*, 158). It is a "spirit" she invokes to protect Antoinette. Later, Antoinette, bereft of any protective figure, is yet observed by Grace Poole thus: "I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit" (*WSS*, 178). The "spirit", after all, *does* protect Antoinette.

While considering the "mirrorings", as reflected in female interrelationships between as well as within the two novels, one cannot ignore those between the two

texts themselves – *Jane Eyre*, the "mother-text", and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the "daughter-text". The inspiration for the "daughter-text" itself was a feeling of injustice done a Creole woman by a white middle-class "sister", reflecting Moer's theory that women are brought together more by enmity than empathy. Earlier on in history, angry women took to writing to "correct the Pen", in a bid to revise male images of women. Yet, the "pen" Rhys intended to "correct" was a *female* pen. In this instance, what we see is not a daughter denying the father in what Elaine Showalter describes as the stance taken by "pioneering ... feminist critics", but a "recalcitrant daughter" rebelling against her mother. Thus, for all the similarities shared by the two texts, there is also a tendency for the "daughter" to claim her independence of the "mother".

Jane Eyre, the "mother-text", is a thirty-eight-chapter book; *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the "daughter-text", is less than half its length. The opening of the third part (given in italics, and in the voice of Grace Poole) is the umbilical cord that connects *Wide Sargasso Sea* with *Jane Eyre*, for it is at this point that we "enter" Brontë's text. Also, Grace Poole is the only character (apart from the very minor figure of Leah) that is also Brontë's, as *her* version gives it, the other characters being associated with those in the "mother-text", through the reader's prior familiarity with the book. (Even Antoinette, for all her identification with Bertha Mason, is a "different" character: In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's father is Jonas Mason, and her mother, Antoinetta Mason; in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's father is Mr Cosway, and her mother, Annette Mason, nee Cosway. Mr Mason is Antoinette's stepfather, not her biological father, and Richard Mason, her stepbrother, not her own brother. We call Antoinette's husband "Rochester", through our association with him from the corresponding character in the "mother-text", quite forgetting his name is never mentioned at all). So too, is Thornfield Hall. Thus, for all the resemblances between the two texts, *Wide Sargasso Sea* also asserts its claim to be treated as a novel in its own right.

In *Jane Eyre*, there are many instances where a looking glass is mentioned; in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there are no less than twenty. This recurring metaphor of the looking glass is in keeping with a mirroring which can also be discerned *within* each text, as well as *between* them. In *Jane Eyre*, the first part of the narrative sees Jane living with three cousins (on the maternal side), who dislike her, and she, them. Of the cousins, one is a male, and two are female. We always see Jane in that set-up looking out of the window. Later she is turned out of the house, into the cold, rainy darkness of the world outside, disowned by her relatives. In the second Part, she is looking from the cold and rainy darkness outside into a homely scene through a window, is taken in, and lives with three individuals (one male and two female),

who are fond of her, and she, of them. The two males on either side of the "mirror" have their names in common. One is John, the (generic) man; the other, St John, the "apostle". One is flabby and dark, cruel and self-indulgent; the other is tall and fair, philanthropic and self-denying. One lives an irreligious life, and dies in defiance of Christian mores – by committing suicide. The other devotes his life to religion, and will die the death of a true Christian. Yet, all along, the two Johns have an uncanny resemblance to each other, in their anti-social behaviour. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the first Part consists of Antoinette Cosway's narration of her childhood and early youth in her "mother-country" (the country associated with her mother and other mother-figures like Aunt Cora, Christophine and Sister Marie Augustine). The narrative of the second Part is taken over by the male "Rochester". The third Part, again, (except for the italicized section), is related by Antoinette, now in England, the "father-country". (In Jamaica, Antoinette sees England as the country where her "grandpappy" came from). In the "father-country", she is an insane woman, locked up in a room. As I have pointed out earlier in this essay, in *Jane Eyre*, the wealth bestowed upon the narrator, by the "father-figure", is seen in a positive light, while the same in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is seen in a negative light. Thus, while *Jane Eyre* identifies, to some extent, with the father, *Wide Sargasso Sea* does, with the mother.

This reversal of "sides" is also reflected in the inversion of the mother/daughter names, within, and between, the mother/daughter texts. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's mother is Antoinetta Mason, while the daughter is Bertha Antoinetta Mason (Harrison, 184-5). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the mother is Bertha Annette Mason, and the daughter is Antoinette Mason. This reversal of names between the two texts, as well as between each, reflects the relationship between the "mother-text" and the "daughter-text", in which, in both instances, the daughter is named after the mother: *Wide Sargasso Sea* owes its very birth to *Jane Eyre*, but it was written as a retaliation against Brontë's portrayal of Bertha Mason, and, consequently, rebels against the "mother-text". The daughter claims her independence of the mother by asserting her autonomy: Facts in *Wide Sargasso Sea* do not tally one hundred percent with those of *Jane Eyre*. As I have already mentioned, Antoinette is a different character to Bertha, with a "different" parentage: Bertha's mother was alive at the time of her marriage, whereas Antoinette's was dead; *Jane Eyre*'s Rochester is ugly while his counterpart in the later novel describes himself as "handsome" (*WSS*, 73). When it comes to chronology, we see yet another discrepancy between the two texts. *Jane Eyre* is set in the latter end of the eighteenth, and beginning of the nineteenth, centuries (*Brodies Notes*, 15). At the time Jane leaves Gateshead for Lowood, the time is at

the turn of the century (*Brodies Notes*, 15).[7] *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, is set in the 1830's (*WSS*, 12): Antoinette is studying at Mount Calvary Convent in 1839. [She writes under her embroidery, " 'Antoinette Mason, nee Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839' " (*WSS*, 53)]. Thus, Brontë's Bertha Mason dies a long time before Rhys's Antoinette first comes to England. All these seem to deliberately distance the two texts and give *Wide Sargasso Sea* "her" own "identity" as a novel in "her" own right, independent of the "mother".

Wide Sargasso Sea, published after a long silence on the part of the writer brought Rhys a fame that rescued her other work, too, from obscurity (Wheeler, 99), just as the counter-text rescued Bertha Mason from her neglected corner, both within the text of *Jane Eyre*, and in the field of Women's Fiction and Feminist Literary Theory, extending the female interrelationships to writer, text and characters. It is interesting to note that *Wide Sargasso Sea* entered the world of Literature at a time when feminist critics were beginning to be aware of the racial bias of white middle-class women writers. Thus, Antoinette stands as a memento of that particular misunderstanding within a community that ought to have more empathy for their lesser known "sisters-under-the-skin" in order to stand up to the common enemy in the form of patriarchy.

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[7] This has been worked out according to the date of publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion* (1808), the "new publication" (*JE*, 384) St. John brings Jane during her short phase as a schoolmistress in Morton. According to Brontë's text, it is also around this time that Bertha Mason kills herself.