

# In Which She Becomes What She Has Read

Parody in the Work of Modernist Women Writers

by

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# Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

### Fathers, Daughters and the Importance of Parody

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‘Yes,’ he would often say to his children, looking at them with that sharp, side-long, shrewd glance that makes fathers so fearful and so aged to their children. Not that he, Dehning, was ever very dreadful to his children, but there is a burr in a man’s voice that always makes for terror in his children and there is a sharp, narrow, outward, shut off glance from an old man that will always fill with dread young grown men and women. No it is only by long equal living that their wives know that there is no terror in them, but the young never can be equal enough with them to really rid themselves of such feeling. No, they only really can get rid of such a feeling when they have found in an old man a complete pathetic falling away into a hapless failing.

- Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*

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Throughout the twentieth century, women writers enacted through parody the dynamic between the young and old described in Stein’s *The Making of Americans*. By reading the patriarch Dehning as a figure for Western literature, we see the “father,” who is mired in the mores of the nineteenth century and once contained “a burr” in his voice that “always makes for terror in his children”—a terror because it represents his authority over their lives—begin to become “pathetic.” The children can never “be equal” with their father, however they may rid themselves of “terror” in seeing his authority is undermined by his “hapless failing.” What once seemed imposing is now pathetic. The parodic text may be seen to relate to its precursor in a similar way. Like one’s father, the imitated text is older, formative, and imposing in its authority. The work of parody must then confront its precursor to create an opening for its production and to do so portray the precursor as “pathetic,” or outdated. We may see in the parodies by the authors in this discussion—Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and Djuna Barnes—the enactment of the

metaphorical father's "complete pathetic falling away into a hapless failing" and the assertion of the daughter, both her voice and her story, into the field of literature.

All born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the women at the center of this paper grew up in a different world from her parents. Opinions, relationships and the political rights of women were rapidly changing both in England and America. For instance, at the time that all three were born, women could not vote and all died with full voting rights in the eyes of the law. Coming out of a century which held "piety, purity, and submissiveness" as the ideal and inborn traits of women, the authors flouted the rules of their society as many women did in these times, choosing greater personal and intellectual independence over their parents' more conservative roles and outlooks (Cott 365). By the 1920s, the period in which Rhys, Barnes and Woolf began publishing their work, their parents' generation had begun to pass away.

The father figure was not only beginning to die in a historical or metaphorical sense. It was a common trope in Modernist women's fiction for the father to pass away in the course of the book and, in doing so, initiate the process by which his daughter comes into her own as an independent agent outside of the family structure.<sup>1</sup> Novels of the period that provide evidence for this claim include *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, the *Pilgrimage* novels by Dorothy Richardson, *Mary Olivier: A Life* by May Sinclair, *Lolly Willowes* by Sylvia Townsend Warner, and *Near to the Wild Heart* by Clarice Lispector, among others. The death of the father served as the impetus for the daughter to enter the public sphere. Based on the number and variety of novels in which

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<sup>1</sup> The death of the father may also be substituted with his economic failing, as the father was primarily defined by his ability to be a stable provider for his family.

this plot device plays out, it seems that it was in some way *necessary* for the father to die for his daughter's story to be told.

We may be assisted in our reading of the father as a metaphor for literature itself in the work of Gilbert and Gubar, who write, "In patriarchal Western culture...the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, the equation of paternity with authorship has a long history in literary theories, primarily in the mimetic aesthetic that for so long defined the function of literature (5). As a result of the equation of maleness and authorship, Hélène Cixous has proposed that writing has been entirely dominated by male-centric systems. Cixous writes that,

I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is the locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman never has *her* turn to speak" (879)

In this passage, Cixous casts language as a medium through which "the repression of women has been perpetuated." It is the servant of a "libidinal and cultural economy" that has men's interests in mind. The connection between maleness and authorship has led to a male colonization of the written word and the power that comes with it.

However, language has a dual power: it is the medium through which the current order is expressed and therefore upheld but it is also flexible enough to allow for its own resignification. The novels discussed in this project all contain a critique of the authority of the metaphorical dying father, which is achieved by a re-visioning in the sense proposed by the late Adrienne Rich, who defined the term as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of enter-ing an old text from a new critical direction” (18). For the purposes of this discussion, I define parody as repetition of a precursor text with a difference (Hutcheon). In the novels at issue here, the difference between the original and the “repetition” is frequently both formal and socially ameliorative, endowing the novels with satirical intent.

In Virginia Woolf’s 1928 *Orlando*, the author takes on the work of her actual father, the biographer Leslie Stephen, in order to explode the limitations he had imposed upon the representation of the human subject. Djuna Barnes’s *Ryder*, published in the same year as *Orlando*, imitates a wide range of literary texts in a retelling of the story of her own family, while inserting narratives of womanhood into the framework of a tradition controlled by men. Two of Jean Rhys’s novels, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, take on foundational social texts concerning gender and race with first-person narration, demonstrating the way in which these discourses mediate personal experience. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is written as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and while this intertextual engagement would seem to have more to do with the mother-daughter relationship, Rhys’s engagement with her precursor highlights *Jane Eyre*’s upholding of patriarchal social structures. All of these novels recode the discourses that

they take up, exposing them to be guilty of partial representation despite their authority. In doing so, these writers change the way in which such repressive texts can be read.

Parody offered a way for these women to create a space for themselves to write. In showing the authoritative texts of their culture to be undergoing “a complete pathetic falling away into a hapless failing,” they suggested that there was a need for new stories to be included in the realm of literature. Part of the importance of parody lies in its ability to make an opening into which new narratives could be inserted.

It is in this opening that we may become cognizant of the equal importance of autobiography in the work of these women. All three drew upon their personal experience in the creation of their literary texts. *Orlando* not only takes to task the genre of biography, but also has a direct connection to Woolf’s life as her father was the creator of these tenets and the character Orlando is known to be based on Woolf’s lover at the time, Vita Sackville-West. The structure of family described in *Ryder* is similar to that of Barnes’s, the dissolution of which is dramatized in the novel. Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* was founded upon three exercise books that Rhys wrote after the traumatic breakup of her first love affair and her abortion soon after. The life of the heroine of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also very similar to Rhys’s childhood in the West Indies. In all of the novels, autobiography serves as an important counterpoint to the texts that are being imitated.

We may look to Paul De Man’s discussion of the relationship between autobiography and fiction to preface some of the points that are to be made about the use of the personal in these texts.<sup>2</sup> He writes that on the one hand, “Autobiography...is not a

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<sup>2</sup> Although revelations about de Man’s wartime writings allowed for a bracing reconsideration of his theoretical work, his key insights into the complexities of autobiography still underline many theories of the form.

genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of the understanding that occurs, to some degree in all texts” (70). De Man asserts that all fiction is autobiographical. When a book is known to be written *by* someone, it may be understood to some extent by that fact. On the other hand, “just as we seem to assert that all texts are autobiographical, we should stay that, by the same token, none of them is or can be” because even the autobiographical “The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of the self” (70-71). The autobiographical element of fiction points us to the fact that “tropological structures” mediate personal experience—our conception of the self is manifested in a linguistic structure that alters our perception of experience.

De Man’s deconstruction of the supposed difference between autobiography and fiction can bring us back to the patriarchy’s hegemonic control over literature. If tropological structures indeed mediate cognition, then we will not be going too far afield in positing that because men have had the upper hand in creating these structures in literature, they have been able to control one’s perception of experience. The parodic elements of the texts also point us to this idea. In their combination of parody and the personal, the texts also seem to posit that experience is altered by linguistic structures and that the gendered hegemony over literature is oppressive for women, who do not have a hand in literature. They highlight that these structures do not describe all experience by virtue of the fact that they are written by men. The infusion of the autobiographical into these parodied and male coded discourses serves as an important revision of these very discourses. The autobiographical in these texts represents narratives that have previously been ignored in literature. The inclusion of the personal makes the claim that women’s

experience is *worthy* of literary treatment, despite its elision in the past. This leads us to the claim to authority, which is emphasized by the inclusion of the personal. Having deemed their precursors to be in a state of “complete pathetic falling away into a hapless failing,” the novelists bring forth new narratives, the structures of which they are more qualified arbiters by virtue of their gender.

For the most part, the autobiographical aspects of the novels are not my primary focus in this discussion. Although I use autobiographical information about the authors, I have tried to keep the texts at the forefront of my arguments, paying more attention to the parodic elements and their functions throughout the texts. However, it is important to maintain a sense of the interdependency of parody and autobiography in the novels, keeping in mind that the critiques to be found in the parodic elements of the texts are bolstered by and manifested in their autobiographical elements.

My first chapter demonstrates how a reading of *Orlando* might be assisted by a sense of Woolf’s relationship with her father, pointing to the importance of the parody of the biographical genre in understanding the novel’s project. The second chapter situates *Ryder* in conversation with the Biblical patriarch and looks at the alternative narratives of women within the novel. Finally, my discussion of Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* attempts to point out a distinct connection between the two novels and to demonstrate how Rhys uses the relationship of her own texts to the social discourses they revise in order to structure her novels. I hope to leave the reader with a sense of the importance of parody in the woman writer’s attempt to make a space for women’s voices in literature.

## I

## “Unenticed by Flowers” *Orlando* as Parody of the Father’s Life’s Work

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The writer of the *Dictionary* must be “historical, not conversational or discursive...he must put what he has to say in a pithy and condensed form.”  
- Leslie Stephen, as qtd in Cooley

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Virginia Woolf’s 1928 novel *Orlando* is not as frequently read in the light of her relationship with her father, biographer Leslie Stephen, unlike some of her other novels of the same period. For instance, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) contains a rather direct character study of her father. The content of *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) may be read as partly inspired by Woolf’s anger with her father for his decision not to send her to college. Both novels directly reference “fathers.” However, I would argue that in *Orlando*, Woolf wrote a *textual* revision of her father’s work. In *Orlando*, Woolf parodies the form pioneered by her father in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by writing a mock biography, expanding the definitions of time and personhood upon which her father had structured his own work. The text is of course, about other things—in fact biographical readings of it generally focus on the connection between Orlando and Vita Sackville-West—but in many ways Woolf’s understanding of her father and their relationship shapes its form and main thematic concerns. Written about a quarter of a century after her father’s death, the text expresses Woolf’s need to re-write her father and his work in order to gain a sense of artistic autonomy. It was during this period that Woolf wrote in her diary:

Father’s birthday. He would have been 96, yes,

today; & could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable. I used to think of him & mother daily; but writing *The Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true—that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.) (Lee, 475)

Woolf expresses in this passage the psychological freedom given to her by writing her father's character in *To the Lighthouse*, which was published a year before *Orlando*. His mortal and symbolic existence in her life is presented as repressive. Stephen's ghostly reappearances perhaps imply a continuing inspiration from her father, although he is "differently" expressed and becomes more of a metaphorical figure. And thus, the figure of the father is less pointedly Leslie Stephen as his daughter remembered him in *Orlando* than in *To the Lighthouse*. It seems that in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf deals with the character of *her* parents specifically, while her method of revision in *Orlando* is broadened to the genre of biography, but also narrowed by its textual, rather than personal scope.

Hermione Lee suggests that we might read Woolf's personal act of liberation from her family and specifically from her father through the writing of *To the Lighthouse* served as the inspiration for both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, a theme which Hermione Lee makes a similar point of in her biography of Woolf:

Only in *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* does Virginia Woolf free herself, through the idea of a woman's writing, from the pressures of the family, the doom

of fate, the prison of madness. Both books work playfully through literary periods and come out with an idea of a new, modern freedom. (Lee 521)

This freedom is tied to revision of old forms of literature, temporal modernity and newness. In this chapter, I will look at several critical approaches to Woolf's biographical relationship with her father in order to elucidate certain aspects of the father-daughter relationship as it is played out in *Orlando*.

Virginia Woolf's father Leslie Stephen was a prominent intellectual of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, writing many of the entries until his health failed him under the stress of the work, and a well-respected literary critic of conservative taste. Simultaneously lovable, pathetic, and tyrannical (particularly after the death of his wife and Woolf's mother), Stephen favored Woolf over her other siblings and seems to have picked her out as his literary successor.<sup>3</sup> Stephen was alternately supportive and oppressive intellectually; he educated his daughter in literature, history and biography, but did not allow her to attend university. Woolf's relationship with her father before and after his death has been the subject of many academic works and much speculation. Through a review of several critical perspectives on Woolf's relationship with her father, I aim to show that the effect of Stephen on his daughter's work was not simply a matter of complete identification or complete rejection, rather a mix of the two and in part defined by the competitiveness inherent in the literary father-daughter relationship.

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<sup>3</sup> See Hill, Katherine C. "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution." *PMLA*.

Leslie Stephen was fifty years old when his third (second by Julia Duckworth Stephen) daughter, Adeline Virginia Stephen, was born. Ginia, as he called her, later wrote of their relationship through her childhood that,

Yes, certainly I felt his presence; and had many a shock of acute pleasure when he fixed his very small, very blue eyes upon me and somehow made me feel that we two were in league together. There was something we had in common. ‘What have you got hold of?’ he would say, looking over my shoulder at the book I was reading; and how proud, priggishly, I was, if he gave his little surprised snort, when he found me reading some book that no child of my age could understand. I was a snob no doubt, and read partly to make him think me a very clever little brat. And I remember his pleasure, how he stopped writing and got up and was very gentle and pleased, when I came into the study with a book I had done; and asked him for another. Indeed I was often on his side, even when he was exploding. (Woolf 111-12)

It seems that Woolf perceived their relationship as characterized by “pleasure” and that they were on one another’s “side” or “in league together” based on “something we had in common,” which the passage implies was a shared intellectual interest. However, the deprecating tone of the older Woolf implies that the intellectual interest originates not wholly in the daughter, but rather in the “pleasure” that her reading gives her father and the high estimation she is rewarded with, and also emphasizes the conscious quality of the performative imitation.

In her essay, “Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution,” Katherine Hill sets out to revise and supplement prevalent understandings of

the relationship between the father and daughter based on such early experiences. Her course is to assert that although “Leslie Stephen made it difficult for Virginia Woolf to write...he also gave her the tools she needed to write. He was determined that she should become his literary and intellectual heir” (Hill 351). Hill goes on to describe the outlines of Leslie Stephen’s early identification with his daughter on these terms, stemming from their physical similarities and extending throughout Virginia’s childhood as her temperament began to resemble her father’s more and more.<sup>4</sup> Stephen often wrote to his wife with Virginia particularly in mind and often expressed his identification with her, as when he wrote, “she is certainly very like me, I feel” (Stephen as quoted in Hill 352). Woolf also apprehended their similarities, writing in a letter many years after Stephen’s death that, “I was more like him than her, I think: and therefore more critical” (Woolf as quoted in Hill 352). Hill goes on to argue that because Stephen saw these aspects of himself in his daughter, particularly his identity as an author, he was driven to educate her, “to give her the tools to write.” Janice Stewart writes in her article that Stephen’s attachment to Woolf, particularly in its literary manifestation, is an example of Melanie Klein’s formulation of projective identity as “the ego which projects itself, or aspects of itself, onto an external other and then identifies with the object which it has imaginatively filled itself” (Stewart 138).

However, the problem that I find in Hill’s article is her dismissal of the prohibitions that Leslie Stephen placed on his daughter.<sup>5</sup> What Hill does not include is the lived experience of Virginia Woolf in the house of her father, which prevented her

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>5</sup> There is some intimation in the article that this dismissal is to work as a counter to the many writings on Stephen as tyrannical father, prevalent at the time?

from seeing herself practically as an author until the death of her father. When his beloved second wife died, Leslie Stephen was sixty-three and Virginia was thirteen. Much of the maternal and wifely burden of the Stephen family fell on Stella Duckworth, Julia's daughter from her first marriage, until she too passed away two years later. The death of Stella turned Virginia's older sister, Vanessa, into Leslie Stephen's "next victim," what Woolf refers to as an "inheritance" in "Reminiscences" (Woolf 55, 54). Stephen's poor treatment of his daughters is well-known and often written about, but it is necessary to complicate Woolf's close identification with him in her early years, when she was "on his side, even when he was exploding," with her frustration, her intense love and intense hatred for him. Woolf writes of the time after Stella's death that,

when Nessa and I inherited the rule of the house...it was the tyrant father—the exacting, the violent, the histrionic, the demonstrative, the self-centred, the self-pitying, the deaf, the appealing, the alternately loved and hated father—that dominated me then. It was like being shut up in the same cage with a wild beast.

(Woolf 116)

Here we may see the portrait of a man who was completely self-possessed but lacked self-control entirely, who wreaked havoc upon the lives of his young daughters. It is not a simple case of either complete identification or complete rejection that is at work in Woolf's later understandings of her father.

Stewart reads Woolf's relationship with her father within a Freudian framework, but specifies that her view of the Oedipal complex is, "a girl's desire for *something* her father has, and which her experience of reality has indicated she cannot or should not have had" (Stewart 142). Stewart believes that it is Stephen's death that allows Woolf,

through artful object identification and splitting of the ego, to become an author.<sup>6</sup> While not denying the importance of Stephen's projected identification with his daughter, Stewart writes that, "The identity of author, while embodied in her father was not—could not—be hers; but the loss incurred by his death impels a recuperative gesture whereby she takes into herself the capacity of authorship—takes into herself part of her father" (Stewart 140). With the death of Leslie Stephen, Woolf subsumed into her own ego the lost father-object as the figure of the author. In doing so, Woolf tended towards the connection that the two shared—their intellect, their love for reading and their talent in writing—and that she later remembered fondly as discussed above. Woolf thus takes on the role that she perceived as held from her as long as her father lived. Woolf's reaction to the death of her father led to the complex dynamics of gender in her fictions and non-fictions. Part of the legacy of this act, Stewart contends, is Woolf's refusal of a "binary division of gendered creative labor" and her understanding of the socially created, "severely constraining calculus" of this division within the female imagination that inhibits women from creating (Stewart 147).

In her biography of Woolf, Hermione Lee proposes another way of viewing the relationship, focusing more upon their interpersonal relationship rather than Woolf's intrapersonal resolution of that relationship. Lee writes that Woolf was dramatically shaped by both wanting to do whatever her father did and "*nothing* that father did" (Lee 72). The dialectic between her imitation and her rejection of Leslie Stephen, sparked by her understanding of their many similarities, led Woolf to become the author that she did,

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<sup>6</sup> Woolf sent in her first article for publishing nine months after her father's death. BUT it is also important to remember that Woolf's "first publication in book form was her unsigned contribution to Maitland's biography [of her father]—fulfilling the expected role for the family's woman historian" (Lee 57).

shaping both her self and her writings. In part, Stephen's domination of the women in his household and Woolf's helplessness in the face of his "egotistical exploitation of power" "became the basis for Virginia Woolf's analysis of the tyranny and hypocrisy of the Victorian fathers. It established the fundamental framework for her feminism" (Lee 146, 136). In addition, Lee writes that Woolf held onto "a more practical resentment of the irrational meanness...[that] prevented him from paying for her education as he paid for his sons" (146).

In these various readings, Woolf's relationship with her father comes to explain, in part, her writings of fathers and daughters (symbolic and biological) in her writing. What is missing from these critical assessments of the relationship is the *competitiveness* inherent to a literary daughter's memory of literary father and its effect on the shape of her work. If Stewart is correct in that the daughter's family complex is the perception of a lack that is prohibited by the presence of the father, then part of the struggle of the writer daughter is to overcome and overshadow the legacy of the writer father. Woolf's use of satire in *Orlando* expresses this tension, exposing the authoritative text's blind spots and allowing a destructive revision of the text for the purposes of the newcomer. It is an intentional and pointed misreading of her father's work (Bloom). By reading *Orlando* as an expression of this competitiveness, I would like to attempt to show how they achieve their victories over the father's established legacy and thereby enable "a new, modern freedom" (Lee).

Much of Virginia Woolf's childhood was spent under the shadow cast by the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As discussed above, not only did her father serve as

the first editor of the *DNB* but he also schooled her with a strong emphasis on biography, considering it necessary for an appreciation of literature (Hill 351). Later on, this training engendered in Woolf a lasting interest in life-writing, often reading memoirs, biographies, and collections of letters. The *Dictionary of National Biography* is in many ways a summation of Victorian era life-writing; it was an exhaustive study of great figures of British history, eventually including 63 volumes and 29,120 lives. These short biographies often focused on the public acts of great men, eschewing complication, abstraction and behavioral oddities, famously adhering to the credo “No flowers by request” (Annan 77).<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this type of life-writing became increasingly critiqued under the rebellious eye of the Modernist movement. In her essay, “The Art of Biography,” Woolf wrote that, “the majority of Victorian biographies are like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street—effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin” (Woolf xx). The work of Lytton Strachey, Woolf’s friend and fellow Bloomsbury member, as well as Woolf’s own published and unpublished works speak to the Modernists’ dissatisfaction with the Victorian style of life-writing as well as an interest in the unwritten sides of the subjects’ lives. Of life-writing, Woolf wrote in her own short, unfinished memoir ‘A Sketch of the Past’:

Here I come to one of the memoir writer’s difficulties—one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom

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<sup>7</sup> A phrase that is directly referenced at the beginning of Chapter 2, just before Orlando’s gender transformation, when the biographer writes that he has been “unenticed by flowers” up to that point (49).

things happen. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: 'This is what happened'; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened. (Woolf 75)

At the time she wrote this, Woolf had also been struggling with a biography of her friend Roger Fry, particularly with whether or not it was appropriate to include Fry's extramarital affairs and his bisexuality. While she did not include these more unconventional aspects of Fry's life, Woolf clearly grappled with the boundaries of biography, which it seems she was only able to challenge directly when writing fiction, as in *Orlando* and *Flush*. In the passage, Woolf focuses on what is omitted from life-writing, what is "left out" and "difficult to describe." She sees that in writing about oneself it is necessary to include what one was like at that time and that this is the piece left out in the current style of life-writing. In *Orlando: A Biography*, Woolf creates a narrator who identifies himself as a "biographer" and constantly comments on his duty as such while giving his audience impossible access into the mind of his subject. The subtitle, "A Biography," immediately points to the genre that is being taken to task.

However, in her criticism of the superficial tradition of biography, Woolf is not only looking at the genre but also at her father's life's work, giving this abiding interest of hers a familial and psychological valence. I would argue that in *Orlando* lies Woolf's resistance to the memory of her tyrannical father. It was necessary for Woolf to explode the standards that her father had created for the *DNB*, exposing their claim to represent a person to be utterly ridiculous. Throughout *Orlando*, the biographer comments on the boundaries of the biographer's job, what is and is not appropriate to comment on, and

then quickly proceeds to transgress these limits, examining the “person to whom things happen” in great detail.

The biographer’s first reference to his own limits occurs in the first pages of the novel. Describing Orlando’s physical form, he writes that:

Directly we glance at eyes and forehead, thus we do rhapsodize. Directly we glance at eyes and forehead, we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore. Sights disturbed him, like that of his mother, a very beautiful lady in green walking out to feed the peacocks with Twitchett, her maid, behind her; sights exalted him—the birds and the trees; and made him in love with death—the evening sky, the homing rooks; and so, mounting the spiral stairway into his brain—which was a roomy one—all these sights, and the garden sounds too, the hammer beating, the wood chopping, began that riot and confusion of the passions and emotions which every good biographer detests. (13)

The passage begins with a repetition, “directly we glance at eyes and forehead,” which already marks a floridity of prose style that counters the concise biography of the Victorian era. The verb “glance” connotes a sensory experience of the subject, which would imply the biographer’s ability to physically interact or at least observe with his subject—an absurd proposition for a modern biographer writing about a young boy in the Renaissance. This absurdity is part of the fantastical agenda of *Orlando*, in which the biographer is allowed knowledge about his subject that no “good biographer” would pretend to have. With the phrase “thus we do rhapsodize,” the biographer attempts to maintain some unbiased distance by using the first person plural pronoun, but this show

of objectivity is quickly undercut by the word “rhapsodize,” meaning to write about someone with great enthusiasm or delight, thus indicating the biographer’s pleasure in his subject’s physical form. This pleasure is modified by the sentence that follows, in which Orlando’s “eyes and forehead” are said to represent “a thousand disagreeables” for the “good biographer.” While the biographer acknowledges that according to an implicit hierarchy of biography the relationship between sensory experience and individual emotions should be ignored, he immediately goes on to discuss such abstractions as exaltation in natural beauty. The descriptions are particularly evocative. For instance, the first description begins with an identifier that is personal, “his mother,” but goes on to generalize the image so that the reader may picture Orlando’s mother as a “very beautiful lady in green.” The biographer also figures Orlando’s mind in physical terms: “the spiral stairway” and the “roomy” brain are both renderings of the unseen and abstract as distinctly knowable and, in fact, habitable. The comparison of the mind to a type of building is an engagement in abstractions that biographers are meant to “ignore” (as we have just been told in the preceding sentence). The question is then, is this biographer any good at his job? By conventional standards, as the biographer himself sets up, the answer would be no. However, he takes us deep into his subject’s mind, describing intimately “the person to whom things happen”, with a force that implies that we perhaps require a new, more imaginative set of standards which allow for the biographer to grapple with questions and abstractions within their subjects.

Further on in the novel, the narrator discusses what he believes to be the proper relationship between the biographer and the reader. He writes that:

For though these are not matters on which a biographer can profitably enlarge it is

plain enough to those who have done a reader's part in making up from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of a living person; can hear in what we only whisper a living voice; can see, often when we say nothing about it, exactly what he looked like, and know without a word to guide them precisely what he thought and felt and it is for readers such as these alone that we write—it is plain then to such a reader that Orlando was strangely compounded of many humours—of melancholy, of indolence, of passion, of love of solitude, to say nothing of all those contortions and subtleties of temper which were indicated on the first page. (54-55)

The passage begins with a question of what is and is not “profitable” for a biographer to “enlarge.” There are two meanings for the word profitable which are appropriate in this context: one meaning to yield financial gain and the other meaning generally beneficial or useful. The tension between the two meanings brings out an important question of the biographer's aim—is he attempting to write a conventional “Life” to make money or is he grappling with the identity of his subject? Because of the narrator's consistent declarations of necessary omissions and subsequent inclusion of the supposedly off limits, his aim is unclear. The passage is another example of the biographer's pattern of self-contradiction. He sets up a communion between the reader and the biographer in which the role of imagination is entirely handed over to the reader, spurred on by the “bare hints” of the biographer. The act of reading is dramatized as an act of transmutation, in which “bare hints,” “whisper[s],” and sometimes “nothing” become the “whole boundary and circumference of a living person.” There is also a sense that by describing his preferred audience, the biographer creates it, “for readers such as these

alone we write,” thus telling his “readers” how they are expected to engage with the provided text. However, soon after he has described the imaginative job of the reader, the biographer tells his audience exactly what he had expected them to surmise: “Orlando was strangely compounded of many humours” and then he lists Orlando’s many strange humours. Again, the biographer has declared his incapability and then proved his extraordinary abilities in the next moment, simultaneously humbling himself in front of the reader while also proving his mastery, through fiction, of his subject.

The biographer often excuses his omissions by imbuing his narrative with a sense of time passing, thus implicating the narrator in one of the greater themes of the novel: Time. He writes that “we must not pause a moment” or “to pause therefore...is out of the question” as a way to avoid complexity, to not have to “seek the reason of things.” These comments give the reader a sense of time passing as the story is being written, which can be compared to the time passing in Orlando’s life or the time passing for the reader as he reads the novel. The biographer mentions the “present” date twice: once at the beginning of the novel when it is 1 November 1927, and again towards the end and it is 11 October 1928, implying that almost a year has passed in the composition of the biography. The distinct, logical sense of time passing for the biographer contrasts with Orlando’s fantastical flouting of the conventions of time, in which one page can contain half a century while the next can span just a few minutes. Although the biographer’s time seems to pass in a conventional way, he draws attention to the difference between natural and perceived time:

But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality has no such simple effect on the mind of man. The

mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation. But the biographer, whose interests are, as we have said, highly restricted, must confine himself to one simple statement: when a man has reached the age of thirty, as Orlando now had, time when he is thinking becomes inordinately long; time when he is doing becomes inordinately short.

The passage asserts that there is an objective time, which passes with “amazing punctuality” in nature and on the clock; and a subjective time, which passes in “the mind of man.” The biographer’s musings on “Time” focus on its “strangeness” and the “queer element” of the human “spirit” and its workings, quite clearly territory beyond the good biographer’s “interests.” Again, the biographer asserts the restriction of his “interests,” which excludes a “fuller investigation” of the nature of the discrepancy between these two times; while also asserting a rather profound and personal statement (called by the biographer “one simple statement”) of Orlando’s perception of time. Later on, the biographer brings his own assertion of the “strangeness” of man’s engagement with time directly into contrast with the *Dictionary of National Biography*: “The true length of a person’s life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute. Indeed it is a difficult business—this time-keeping.” This is the only direct mention of the *DNB* in the book and it is telling that the biographer defines his method of

“time-keeping” in opposition to the *DNB*. In doing so, the biographer asserts that truth, one of the “Austere Gods who keep watch and ward the inkpots of the biographer,” is opposed to the established method of time telling and to the *DNB*. This seemingly casual reference is in fact a less than casual assertion of the truth of subjective perception over the previous century’s trust in the truth of an objective reality. The direct reference to the *DNB* points to how Woolf uses the theme of Time and all of its manifestations to call into question the certainty on which her father’s work and life-writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general were founded.

The final rejection of the tenets of 19<sup>th</sup> century biography occurs in the last section of *Orlando*, in which the very notion of a single self is exploded. It is important to note that the explosion of character is necessarily tied to the “present moment,” and Orlando is shown to be doing a particularly modern thing, driving a car. The biographer reports,

After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping small of body and mind, which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment. Indeed we should have given her over a person entirely disassembled were it not that here, at last, one green screen was held out on the right, against which the little bits of paper fell more slowly; and then another was held out on the left so that one could see the separate scraps now turning over by themselves in the air; and then green screens were continuously held on either side, so that her mind regained the illusion of holding things within

itself... (225)

Here we see the complete disarticulation of the subject whom we have come to know as Orlando. Both body and mind become fragmented, “like scraps of torn paper.” One might imagine that the original piece of paper had something written on it but with the tearing of the whole into parts, it ceases to make sense and whether the original exists or not comes into question. The comparison of Orlando’s disassembly to “scraps of torn paper” intimates that textuality is inherent to consciousness and that the mind is made up of the scraps of texts that one can remember. When the whole comes back together again aided by the ambiguous “green screens,” it is notable that Orlando’s mind did not “hold things within itself” but rather “regained the *illusion* of holding things within itself.” It is an “illusion” of singularity which one must present to oneself and to the world, when in fact the self is liable to become so disaggregated that its existence may be called into question. The biographer goes on to question the singularity of character, writing that:

For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many people are there not—Heaven help us—all having lodgment at one time or another in the human spirit? Some say two thousand and fifty-two...it is not altogether plain sailing either, for though one may say, as Orlando said (being out in the country and needing another self presumably) Orlando? still the Orlando she needs may not come; these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will (and for many of these things there is no name) so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains... (225-6)

This nation of selves that exists just beneath the surface are unmanageable and often unnamable, changing as quickly as the weather or the second hand. The self is divided into selves and among these many selves exist subconscious laws and particularities, of which the “single self, a real self” is only vaguely aware (229-30). There seems to be some continuity that unites these selves in “the human spirit,” but who can say exactly what the human spirit is? The biographer then reflects on his own craft, explaining that, “since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand” (226). This comment exposes the narrowness of the biographical enterprise. Where biography considers itself to be complete is in fact the smallest portion of the full picture. It is a doomed quest as long as it remains within its low expectations. The biographer perhaps gives biography too much credit, for it seems to me that a biography cannot even hold within it the tension of two selves, let alone six or seven. It must be able to assert that the single name it gives to its subject applies to a single self which singularly explains the actions that the body given that name takes; there is little room for contradiction. With this explosion of what it means to be a self, or selves, *Orlando* uses, questions and makes ridiculous the implied factuality of the biography, asserting a fluidity of what it means to be a person over a singular self.

Throughout the novel, we are faced with the sense that the biographer is not in control of his subject. In *Orlando*, Woolf uses parody to destabilize the tenets that her father set up for biography, claiming that they are insufficient for the representation of their proposed subject. In doing so, Woolf creates for herself a space to begin to define the subject and the tenets of its representation anew, proposing greater flexibility in the definitions of personhood.

## II

### Eve's Curse

#### Biblical Discourse and Alternative Cosmologies in *Ryder*

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1.1: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

1.2: And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

1.3: And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

- *King James Bible*, Genesis

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Djuna Barnes's *Ryder* was published in 1928 and was briefly a bestseller in America. Looking back, this seems shocking—the language is obscure and dense, its material is racy, and its plot is deliberately hard to follow. The novel tells a story of the progress and eventual dissolution of an unconventional family much like Barnes's own. Like her father Wald Barnes, the Wendell Ryder of the story has two wives, who live with their children in one home, and is supported by his mother, who was once a famous *salonnière*. Julie, Wendell's daughter by his legal wife Amelia, is generally read as a figure for Barnes herself and part of the novel's plot deals with Julie's increasing disillusionment with the family structure.

The family story is transformed by a vast number of parodies, including the work of Chaucer, the King James Bible, Richardson, Fielding, Rosetti, and George Eliot. In addition to these literary sources, the novel imitates oral forms, including, as Marie Ponsot points out,

the sermon, anecdote, tall tale, riddling, fable, elegy, dream, epigram, vision, parable, tirade, bedtime story, lullaby, satiric couplet, parallel structuring, ghost

story, debate, sententia or aphorism, and emblem or epitome activated as epiphany. (94)

The novel's parodies point to perhaps the essential fact about *Ryder*: it is a story about a story. And the wide range and variety of these imitations points to this: *Ryder* is a parody of the story that man (as opposed to woman) tells about himself. By both recreating the figure of man put forth by Western literature and radically undermining that figure in a number of ways, the novel proposes that man creates his world with the literature he writes and that his discourse is fundamentally flawed. Including the experiences and voices of women, the text highlights the integral aspects of humankind's narrative that have been erased or ignored in man's rendering because they threaten his understanding of, and therefore authority over, the world. This confrontation with the literary past is achieved with the dramatization of Eve's curse, explicit rewritings of Genesis and Western history, the unraveling of the family chronicle, the gorging of linguistic parodies, and the ambiguity of the daughter's plot. As a family chronicle, the novel's primary theme is heredity, a motif which links it to Genesis and allows it to explore the foundational narrative of the family defined by its patriarch, depicting the ultimate untenability of this structure.

In this chapter, the primary subject of analysis will be Wendell, the novel's patriarch, rather than his direct relationship with his daughter Julie. There has been a lot of work done on Julie as she appears in the text, primarily because she is often read as Barnes' self-portrait. The claim that the novel is at least semi-autobiographical is based upon several similarities between what we know of Barnes' life growing up and the plot of the text. The correspondence between the author's biography and her text have colored

many readings of the texts and in some cases, I believe, have blinded some readings to certain aspects of the text. This has been taken so far that on the back of my edition of the novel, the publishers claim that Julie *is* the narrator of the text, an inference which is in no way indicated at any point. While Julie is a central character in the text, however, I believe that it is more important to this discussion to explore the ways in which Wendell Ryder is presented as both an upholder and failure of patriarchal values. This interpretation of the text is largely divorced from a reading of Barnes' personal history and the ways that it informed the story.

Julie's story points to an experience that the patriarchy's discourses overlook. As Ponsot claims, Julie's plot orbits around an unanswerable ambiguity in Chapter 24:

It begins and continues with dream, nightmare and vision flowing in Julie's mind, and ends in an abrupt leap to brief realistic dialogue between Sophia and Wendell, who are suddenly beside Julie as she sleeps. It's not the beginning but the end, of an event *Ryder* nowhere describes. If we ask, 'What happened?' we get no answer. That blank enlivens the question and makes it, though hidden, central to the novel. (97)

Though it is hidden and remains, in my opinion, quite clearly unanswered in the text, this question has been the crux on which many arguments about *Ryder* have focused. Because she is read as an representation of Barnes, critics have often related the character to Nora of *Nightwood* and Miranda in *The Antiphon*, also considered self-portraits. Such a reading has allowed numerous scholars to find the answer to the question of the nature of Julie's dream in Barnes' biography and in *The Antiphon*. Thus, the answer to the question is often that the dream is an expression of sexual mistreatment of Julie, most likely by

Wendell. While I do not think that this reading of the text is necessarily wrong, I do think that it is important to keep at the forefront of the discussion that this reading does not come from the text and to keep the fact that the text *does not answer* the question of “What happened.”

I believe one could more effectively read the scene in the context of its title, “Julie Becomes What She Read” and its preface, which reads, “In which Julie is many children, suffering the tortures of the damned, kneeling at the parent knee, in all ages, all times and all bindings, becoming what books make of a child” (Barnes 106). Both of these introductions to the chapter emphasize the textual element of Julie’s dream, marking the subconscious as the place in which Julie may become “what she had read.” The word “bindings” is fruitful, as it both connotes the binding of a book and a tight fastening of one thing to another. The word intimates that the stock character of the girl, presented in the dream as Arabella Lynn, is prescriptive for a young girl like Julie, perhaps stiflingly so. The chapter can be then read as describing the textual makeup of Julie’s subconscious. Her father’s statement at the end that she is “deriding” him directly ties Wendell to the dream and to Julie’s rebellion against the roles that are allotted to girls in a patriarchal society.

Julie’s story is a question because her actions go beyond the masculine discourses that the novel takes up. Having accused her father of wrongdoing during the fight between his mistresses, Julie does not appear again. She is spoken about but ceases to act. In rejecting Wendell, she has left the fold of her father and of the narratives available to describe her experience. Like Eve’s curse, Julie’s experience has been ignored. However, because she has rejected her father and therefore the family itself, her story goes beyond

the novel's scope. This chapter will focus on the discourses that cannot include Julie in conjunction that with my argument that the meaning of Julie's progress is intentionally left open-ended.

*Ryder* opens with a sermon called 'Jesus Mundane,' which warns the reader to be wary of those that claim to have knowledge of the world and its workings. The chapter's subtitle, "By Way of Introduction," points to the importance of the unknown narrator's doctrine to the rest of the text. The sermon opens with an imperative, warning the reader:

Go not with fanatics who see beyond thee and thine, and beyond the coming and the going of thee and thine, and yet beyond the ending thereof,—thy life and the lives thou begetttest, and the lives that shall spring from them, world without end,—for such need thee not, nor see thee, nor know thy lamenting, so confounded are they with thy damnation and the damnation of thy offspring, and the multiple damnation of those multitudes that shall be of thy race begotten, unto the number of fishes in thin waters, and unto the number of fishes in great waters. Alike are they distracted with thy salvation and the salvation of thy people. Go thou, then, to lesser men, who have for all things unfinished and uncertain, a great capacity, for these shall not repulse thee, thy physical body and thy temporal agony, thy weeping and thy laughing and thy lamenting. (3)

The passage warns that the "fanatics" who claim to have knowledge of life, of those who are damned and those who are not, actually have no knowledge of the intricacies of daily life. The structure of the passage implies that the "fanatics" reject the "physical" and "temporal," contrasting those that "see beyond thee and thine" with "lesser men," who

have “a great capacity” for “all things unfinished and uncertain.” The philosophers are “confounded” and are unable to see or understand “thee,” thus undermining any claims to experiential evidence for their knowledge of the “world without end.” The sermon goes on to exhort its reader not to question the ways of God, but to focus on one’s relationship with the material world: “small comforts, like to apples in the hand, and small cups quenching, and words that go neither here nor there” (3). The sermon is explicitly targeting the Church, but can also be read as a denunciation of those who claim to have knowledge of God’s way in general. Among those that do claim the authority of philosophy and knowledge of the world is Wendell Ryder. The opening of the novel functions as a warning for the reader about Wendell and his philosophies.

The illustration accompanying the chapter depicts Wendell astride his horse and backed by ten women with fists lifted (fig. 1). Wendell is the “fanatic” that ‘Jesus Mundane’ warns its reader against, constantly engaged with the hidden workings of world, a point emphasized by the fact that his horse treads on clouds while the women stand firmly upon the ground. While Wendell is rendered uniquely, the bodies of the women are exactly the same, though their faces are individualized. The similarity of their forms foreshadows Wendell’s treatment of women throughout the book as breeders for his progeny. However, the particularity of the women’s faces subtly claims that these women are different from one another despite their singularity of position, perhaps pointing to the individuality of women in contrast to their typecasting as wives and mothers in both society and literature.



Figure 1: Illustration for 'Jesus Mundane' (Barnes 2)

The illustration emphasizes Wendell's view of himself as uniquely important and central in a world of unquestioning, supportive women. In addition, it initiates the portrayal of Wendell as Biblical patriarch, a depiction that Wendell himself upholds but is also consistently undermined throughout the text. Under the aegis of freethinking reform, Wendell's guiding philosophy may be read as an experiment in the biblical imperative "be fruitful and multiply." As with many of the men in the Old Testament, this occupation is used to rationalize Wendell's polygamy, infidelity and mistreatment of women. He tells one of his many lovers that, "I, my love, am to be Father of All Things. For this was I created, and to this will I cleave. Now this is the Race that shall be Ryder" (210). He believes that his task is to "father" a new race that will populate the earth. As

he delineates the qualities of this race, he echoes the systrophe of Genesis—his multitude of offspring will include: “those that can sing like the lark, coo like the dove, moo like the cow, buzz like the bee, cheep like the cricket...” as well as “prophets, some sophists, some scoundrels, some virgins, some bawds, some priests...” (210). Wendell describes himself as a latter day amalgamation of Adam and Noah, whose shared task is to (re)populate the earth. Wendell not only sees his children as taking on the many roles of humans, but also usurping the noises of animals; the comparison of his children to animals works doubly, serving to dehumanize his children and de-animalize animals.

In Chapter 10, “The Occupations of Wendell,” Wendell’s obsession with procreation is compared to completing a deck of cards or a chess set. The metaphors imply that Wendell does not see his progeny as humans in their own right, but rather as “Another castle, horse or pawn” or “a deck of daughters and of sons/Aces and spades, y-hearts and diamonds” (54). The likening of sexual conquest to a game suggests that his efforts are not so much out of a love of fatherhood but rather out of strategic interest—a need to alter the world order to better align with his own interests. The chapter is written in an imitation of Chaucerian English, thus Wendell is not only compared to the biblical patriarchs but is also connected to the origins of the English literary canon.

In a conversation with Dr. O’Connor, Wendell explicitly confuses himself with God, thus allowing O’Connor to demonstrate the claims upon which Wendell’s lifestyle is based. The two meet outside of the home of Molly Dance, who has just given birth to a child that may be Wendell’s. Wendell obliquely inquires whether the child resembles him and then asks the doctor, “Do you believe in heredity?” (201). To which O’Connor replies, “Heredity is absolute and conclusive proof of God and the father” (201).

O'Connor's response implies that when a child is born it either resembles its father or does not, thus causing a confusion of its heredity. For O'Connor, God is faith and is created from this need for faith, as O'Connor states that God is the only thing man can be sure of "when he is not sure of himself" (201). O'Connor believes that, "a man is... Only a child who has walked within the circle of the need of God" (204). Man is defined by his need for God and vice versa. It seems that O'Connor defines God as the external system with which man can understand an inexplicable world when he responds to Wendell's claim that in another world God may not exist:

It is impossible...for the reason that in another world man will be man, and will also have need, perhaps in increasing proportion, of behaviour; for when you reach subtleties, and fine shades of conduct, manners become still closer the heart's need; therefore you will find God there also. (201-2)

Here, I believe that "behaviour" and "manners" are defined as concepts that man imposes upon himself when the "subtleties" of life cannot be answered. Unlike O'Connor, Wendell conceives of God as external to man, rather than being born out of man's need for an explanation of the world. Because of this confusion, Wendell is "smote" by jealousy when O'Connor tells him that Molly's daughter is a child of God. Unable to understand the concept of God, Wendell assumes that because he has slept with many women and fathered many children, he might reasonably replace God as the progenitor of children with questionable paternity, asking O'Connor: "So if I am not the father, on your own premises, why am I not then God?" (202). Wendell's conception of O'Connor's statements demonstrate the crux of the doctor's explanation of the difference between men's suicides and women's. Whereas a woman who kills herself believes that the

circumstances leading to the act are external and thus of God, a man believes that it is necessary to explicate the reasoning for their death because “It is to him the death of God *and* the father” (203). O’Connor’s argument implies that men understand God as an extension of themselves, a belief clearly upheld by Wendell throughout the novel.

Wendell’s claim to his status as patriarch is undermined by what Sheryl Stevenson calls a “generic cross-dressing” (72). Wendell is frequently said to have “a body like a girl’s” and is shown in “The Tree of Ryder” illustration, which prefaces the book, holding a child in his arm—a position imitating that of the Madonna and Child (Stevenson 72). Stevenson writes that, “though he frequently appears in the garb of ‘masculine’ styles, this man who would be ‘Father’...is thrust into the quintessential image of Mother” (73). These gender-bending representations of Wendell serve to question the legitimacy of Wendell’s claim to be “Father of All Things.”

Wendell’s position as patriarch is destabilized by his complete abstention from the world of work. While he occasionally employs himself with small crafts like whittling and he thinks quite a lot, Wendell is not once shown to act in support of his family. Rather, it is his mother Sophia who is shown to enter into the public sphere in order to provide for her son’s family. The task of going out into the world to feed one’s family was at this point in time commonly understood to be men’s work and Wendell’s rejection of gainful employment essentially disqualifies him from being a father in the contemporary sense of the word. While in many Modernist novels by women the father’s death or financial decline is often the impetus for the daughter’s entrance into the public sphere, in *Ryder* Wendell has *never* been a provider. The swapping of stereotypical gender roles serves to further undercut Wendell’s claim to be Father of All Things and

asserts that it is Sophia who *actually* takes on this role in the family, that it is the mother's role to provide for the family in both the public and private spheres.

In Chapter 7, Sophia's fabrication detailing her "infusion" by Beethoven, which resulted in Wendell, positions her son as a Christ figure. Because we know the myth of Wendell's genesis to be an outright lie which Sophia tells Wendell out of pride, the chapter is a significant undermining of both the biblical immaculate conception and Wendell's claims to exceptionality and authority. Sophia claims that Beethoven "came toward me, melted into me on my human side, and came out upon my marvelous, without so much as a 'by your leave,' or 'if it please you, madame,' or a pass at the weather, and in nine months, by the Christian calendar, I was delivered of you" (36). The comic genius of the scene is to cast this event as rude, a revision of Mary's unasked for "infusion" by an artist-god. The scene revises immaculate conception as a sort of rape, because although the infusion does not entail sexual penetration, it does have the unintended consequence of pregnancy. Sophia plays on the word "deliver" by including "of," thus ironically activating the sense of the word meaning to save or rescue from, a manifestation of the novel's insistence on connecting childbirth to death. By tying Wendell's origin story to Christ's, the novel allows Wendell's earthly doctrine of promiscuousness, which we learn more of in the following chapters, to comment upon the ethereal, celibate doctrines of the Church.

Wendell's authority is additionally undermined in Chapter 33, in which Elisha "chisels" Hannel, a revision of the story of Cain and Abel. Elisha, son of Kate-Careless, takes a chisel to the head of Hannel, son of Amelia, in a field near the family's home. An argument between Kate and Amelia ensues and Wendell enters the scene soon after.

Wendell decides that Elisha is guilty but also blames Amelia and her children for the degradation of the house. At this point, Julie enters the scene and attacks Kate “as the disease as the manifestation of such emanating directly from her father” (143). The violence between brothers in a field creates a clear parallel to the story of Cain and Abel. Here Wendell is placed in the position of God as his wives look to him to pass judgment upon the scene. While in the Bible, God is omnipotent (thus endowed with prior knowledge) and an appropriate judge of the scene, Wendell only pretends to have such knowledge:

Wendell appeared, walking calmly as was his wont in such cases.

‘What is all this rumpus about?’ he demanded, and could not hear a word that as said, for both Kate and Amelia began talking at one and the same moment; the pitchfork and the chisel were so altogether amalgamated in their destruction, that he could make nothing of the explanation, but came forward nevertheless, and seeing Hannel the most bloody (for Elisha was quite unruffled and unhurt), cuffed the poor mortal so heartily that he again went down, for to him that hath, etc., and said, ‘There’s nothing right in this house, or on this land, because of you and your children!’ (142)

In the Cain and Abel episode, God infers that Cain is guilty because he sees blood on the ground, just as Wendell makes his judgment based upon the comparative bloodiness of his two sons. Although the narrator makes clear that the testimonies Wendell receives are unintelligible and “he could make nothing of the explanation,” Wendell still condescends to mete out physical and verbal scoldings. However, while God exiles Cain, Elisha exiles

himself and denounces his family, thus usurping the role of the Father. As a self-exile, Elisha calls into question God/Wendell's judgment.

Unlike most family chronicles, *Ryder's* plot depicts the unraveling, rather than the strengthening, of the family unit. In the final chapter, as they face having to choose one of Wendell's wives over the other, Wendell and Sophia are described as having been "unfathered" and "unmothered," respectively (239, 237). Wendell chooses Kate over Amelia, who is forced to leave the farm with her children (including Julie). The novel ends with the final dissolution of the family unit and an indictment of Wendell as a failed Adam. Having told Amelia that she must leave, Wendell goes out into a "wide field where the night was all among the grass and about the animals" (242). As he stands in the field,

The little mice of the fields fled about him, and he gave them his unchanged position, and the night birds murmured above and he moved not, and the creeping things he had not numbered or known, looked at him from a million eyes, and his eyes were there also, and the things in the trees made walking and running on the branches, and he spoke not. (242)

This passage places Wendell in the position of Adam, as the phrase "the creeping things he had not numbered or known" implies that there are "things" which Wendell has taken upon himself to number and know—Adam's first occupation. The passage strives to show how Wendell is a part of the earth, "his eyes were there also," but also concentrates on what Wendell has not known or cannot know. The dichotomy undermines both Wendell and Adam's task as patriarchs that claim to "number," or name, the world around them. Wendell is in a passive position, "he moved not" and "he spoke not," as the

unknown world moves about him. His stasis seems to be a further indication of his failure—he has given up trying to “number” an unknowable world. Each paragraph in this final section of the book is followed by the refrain, “Whom should he disappoint now?” which ties together the sense of the unknown world with the failure of Wendell’s project (242). The novel’s final paragraph heightens this connection:

And everything and its shape became clear in the dark, by tens and tens they ranged, and lifted their lids and looked at him; in the air and in the trees and on the earth and from under the earth, and regarded him long, and he forbore to hide his face. They seemed close ranged, and now they seemed far ranged, and they moved now near, now far, as a wave comes and goes, and they lifted their lids and regarded him, and spoke not in their many tongues, and they went a far way, and there was a little rest, and they came close, and there was none. Closing in about him nearer, and swinging out wide and from him far, and came in near and near, and as a wave, closed over him, and he drowned, and arose while he yet might go.  
(242)

Surrounded by all of the beings of the earth, Wendell is indicted by their multiplicity. One might remember Wendell’s boast about his children, discussed briefly above, that his children would take on the role of all of the animals of the earth. Wendell’s belief that his procreative impulse could create a new race of beings is made ridiculous in the final passage as the sheer multitude of beings overpowers him as he stands in the field. By subjecting Wendell to the gaze of “everything and its shape,” the text reverses the typical Western epistemological assumption that the world is created by the perception of man, first allegorized by Adam naming all of the earth in the Garden of Eden.

Wendell's views are additionally undermined by the presence of women's voices in the text. Wendell sees women as breeders rather than as individual human beings, a view which is implied in the illustration of "Jesus Mundane." Wendell articulates this conception of womanhood when he tells Dr. O'Connor:

All women...are equal, until one dies in child-bed, then she becomes as near to saints as my mind can conceive. Why is that? you ask; because they die at the apex of their ability. But short of that they are, as we are, only now and again, great, for if they live, they come down, as we all come down, from their nobility, and must pursue life again in its own rounds... (202).

Wendell's argument understands childbirth as a holy activity, albeit one that is commonplace unless the woman dies, in which case she is beatified in his eyes. His comments imply that he sees "the apex of [women's] ability" as their status as breeders—a view that is confirmed by his treatment of women throughout the novel. Wendell idealizes not only childbirth but the death of the mother in the act, demonstrating a profoundly harmful understanding of women's mortality as well as a complete lack of empathy. Wendell has no concern for the end of the woman's life: women are only important to him in their "ability" to give birth to his children (and his immortal memory).

One of *Ryder's* most significant rewritings of Genesis acts opposition to Wendell's views. While Eve's curse is ignored throughout the Bible, *Ryder* focuses much of its attention upon the intimately linked phenomena of childbirth and maternal death, thus following through the story of God's curse upon Eve and interrogating beliefs based

on an idealized representation of motherhood. In contrast with the “angel in the house” vision of woman as martyr, women are shown as physically suffering from birth and both Amelia and her mother propose “selfish” self-preservation through celibacy over motherhood to their daughter. In giving advice which Amelia later echoes when talking to Julie, Amelia’s mother tells Amelia:

‘Never let a man touch you, never show anything, keep your legs in your own life, and when you grow to be a woman, keep that secret from yourself. And God forgive me!... For making you mortal; if you live you will be a fool. It takes a strong woman to die before she has been a fool. No one has the imagination; I did not, you will not.’ She went out of the room uncrying. (32)

The warning proposes both the necessity of celibacy and independence in maturity, as implied by the negative imperatives, as well as the inevitability of violating that doctrine: it is the paradox of mortality which Amelia’s mother laments. The negative statements are paralleled by the actions of the mother who goes out of the room “uncrying,” perhaps implying a bravery in passing on life (in motherhood). The word “uncrying” is something of a linguistic paradox—the prefix “un-” suggests that the thing does not exist, but the word that un- is attached to is still activated and colors the scene. It seems that Amelia’s mother is described as “uncrying” in protest of a general assumption that a woman would or should cry in the context of the scene.

The first death we see—that of Sophia’s mother—takes place on a bed described as “a terrible suffering centre without extremities” (7). The paradox of a center point without end is a confusing but in some ways accurate description of the frightening world of pain, in which the physical sensation is the focal point contains within it the rest of the

world. It could also be read as a description of the female anatomy while giving birth. The theme of motherhood and death is continued in Chapter 13, called “Midwives’ Lament, or the Horrid Outcome of Wendell’s First Infidelity.” The chapter is a short poem written in iambic pentameter, worth quoting in full:

And died so—in pitched child bed, ere the North  
Gave up its snowy custom, and came down  
To waters in the heavy watered sea,  
These turned to roaring on the sands of her  
Who died as women die, unequally  
Impaled upon a death that crawls within;  
For men die otherwise, of man unsheathed  
But women on a sword they scabbard to.  
And so this girl, untimely to the point,  
Pricked herself upon her son and passed  
Like any Roman bleeding on the blade—(77)

The poem begins with a conjunction and ends with a dash in order to emphasize the sense of endlessness of the predicament; the unknown woman’s death in childbirth is made specific by the chapter’s title but the poem itself highlights the universality of the experience. She has died “as women die”—this death is specifically gendered and men are excluded from the terror. But despite this gendered specificity, the woman’s death is ennobled as she is described to have “passed/Like any Roman bleeding on the blade.” The word “pitched,” here meaning a “violent confrontation involving large numbers of people,” gives the poem a militaristic context, which serves as a point of comparison. By

likening the woman's experience of childbirth to the death of the Roman soldier, her bravery comes into focus, in contrast with a sense that childbirth is quotidian. The unjustness of the woman's sacrifice to her unborn child, "a death that crawls within," is made clear by the adverb "unequally" as compared with men who "die otherwise." The connection between childbirth and the death of the mother directly challenges Wendell's philosophy of free love for the purposes of unending progeny (and thereby allowing for the immortality of the father's memory, who will never be forgotten by his children for better or for worse). As the poem tells us, the death of the unknown woman is a threat that faces all women, but it does not imperil the father. We are shown that the consequences of Wendell's irresponsible fathering is the death of the mother.

Wendell is further aligned with literature's patriarchy by his constant storytelling throughout the book. Wendell's storytelling is central to his identity—at one point he tells Dr. O'Connor that his role as a father is to "tell [his children] everything," implicitly asserting his own mastery of "everything" (203). Wendell also uses his ability to protect his lifestyle, as in Chapter 47, when he fabricates a tale about the fictive father of Kate's children in order to hide his polygamy from his angry neighbors. In instances such as these, Wendell's stories function as a way to perpetuate the injustices that take place in his home, analogous to the use of certain fictions throughout literature. One of Wendell's stories describes the life of a bull, Pennyfinder of Pearls-Hoof, who "was be-sainted in the town he ran," and then dies, after which his body is eaten by the townspeople (62). The bull seems to act as a metaphor for Wendell. All of the bull's simplest acts are of the utmost importance—even his defecation is consecrated—and when he dies, "the whole

town began to weep and rave” (64). While censors have edited out the reason for Pennyfinder’s death, thus posing a challenge to interpretation of the passage; it seems that the story is a parable of the central importance of the patriarch in society and the risk he runs of being forgotten as Pennyfinder is.

Like Wendell, both Amelia and a character called Molly Dance tell stories, however, the two stories that I will discuss here constitute alternative cosmologies, which *revise* rather than uphold the patriarchy’s traditional narratives. The stories are closely related because they each begin with the phrase, “In the beginning,” therefore bringing them directly into conversation with Genesis, which opens with the phrase as well.

Amelia’s revision of Genesis in Chapter 27, ‘Kate and Amelia Go A-Dunging,’ echoes the theory of God that Dr. O’Connor puts forth in his conversation with Wendell. Amelia and Kate-Careless have gone up to the garret in which Wendell keeps his pigeons in order to “do up the dirty mess” (114). As they clean, Kate asks, “can you...tell me the reason that Wendell has fancies and we have the cleaning?” (114). The question allows Amelia to offer her version of Genesis, which pits the prayer of man, his words, against the prayer of the beast, its droppings. She tells Kate,

In the beginning was the jungle, and there you had turds of some account, beasts paying back the earth in coin new minted. And the Lord be praised said the trees, and the Lord be praised said the green grass, and the Lord be praised said the creeping vine, and the Lord be praised said the great rush, and the Lord be praised said the small rush and the lily and the buds in general that we know not of. And pray for us, said the great rush, and pray for us said the small rush, and pray for us said the great trees, and pray for us said the small trees, and pray for us said the

short grass, and pray for us said the grass that was not yet, and down thudding came the supplication of the wild beasts. But what... can prevail now that we put floors and pots beneath it, and the mammoth goes down never from behind, but only man goes head foremost, offering a word. And what is there in a word that is magnificent or of help to the land? (115)

While the beginning of Amelia's story begins with an allusion to Genesis, it proposes that the forms of the world already exist and call God into being, rather than God creating the world out of nothingness. The setting of "the jungle" is Eden, but it is not created by God, instead it co-exists with him. And while the story of Eden glosses over its excremental component, Amelia's "jungle" is defined by the cyclical relationship between the "beasts" and "the earth." This rhythm is rendered in economic terms, "the beasts paying back the earth in coin new minted." The connotations of the phrase tell us that the beasts take the earth and remake it, or "mint" it, and repay the earth with it. They are mutually dependent upon one another. The beasts' "turds" are also their "supplication," a prayer that is far more fertile than that of man. When man comes into the narrative, he interrupts the relationship between beast and earth, demonstrated by the ceasing of the repetitions in the first part of the passage. Amelia devalues man's intellectual relationship with God, questioning why "offering a word" is helpful to the processes of the earth in contrast with "the supplication of the wild beasts." She figures the separation between man and the earth with the "floors and pots" that keep man's excrement from fertilizing the ground. The "floors and pots" are symbols for civilization, a connection that is continued with Amelia's claim that "I never had much education... so the jungle was never scratched off my heart" (115). Amelia's assertion, which serves as the reason for her authority on the

subject, suggests that humankind is born in a state of innocence in which the heart is permeated with knowledge of the jungle. On the other hand, “education,” or civilization, distances children from this knowledge and displaces it with other ways of knowing that are at a remove from the jungle.

In her story, Molly Dance presents a relativist philosophy, believing that “Bottom up or head up...it’s all one to the Lord. He never said we were all to come to, in one position” (198). She tells Wendell the story of man’s origin, a mix of Biblical and historical sources that explains the creation of land, the evolution of man, the development of nations and the origins of poetry among others. Like Amelia, she begins this story with the phrase, “In the beginning,” thus signaling another revisionist telling of Genesis. As in Genesis, the world is covered with water “in the beginning,” however Jonah, the passive repudiator of God in the whale’s mouth, is cast in the role of Adam. Rather than an imitation of God, Jonah comes out of the whale’s mouth a chimera—half-man, half-fish. As a hybrid figure, Jonah’s progress from fish to man echoes the movements of evolution: “When Jonah’s scales dried in the sun, they turned to feathers, and a bit later, the feathers turned into furs of all sorts and kinds, and after the fur Jonah got down to his skin, which was as good as a hint at the human” (195). Following Jonah’s evolution, he procreates with a siren:

‘...and before you could say nip and tuck, the place was swarming with the human race. There immediately was the tribe of Dance, and likely enough the Ryders, and the MacMullens, and the O’Ruaks, and the Norsemen, and the French, and the Germans, all talking with a difference. The Romans riding around and around in chariots, and martyrs playing the lyre, and the Jesuits tuning up on

their jew's-harps, and Rome burning, and flags rising and falling like chaff in the wind, the Egyptians a thousand thousand years dead, all in the wink of an eyelash, and God tossing up the sun every minute, which was day, and it falling back again, which was night, because things moved swiftly, that the nations might get started. And the Jews all running up and down and wailing and rending their clothes because they could not play with it also. Then the Italians began breeding for themselves, and the Norsemen began talking of age and death, and down in the cornfield Cain suddenly slew Abel, and no sooner had the murder been discovered, than Cain's frontal bone split asunder, and poetry began walking up and out of the place, and everyone began to sing.' (196)

Molly's story brings together multiple strands of history, some of it based in historical accounts ("Rome burning," "the Egyptians a thousand thousand years dead") and some of it based in her immediate surroundings (hence her inclusion of her family and the Ryders in the original tribes). The tale ignores any unity of time or place—the world seems to occur simultaneously and in fast-forward. Such a way of storytelling subverts traditional history's emphasis on chronology and factual accuracy. Molly tells her story using casual figures of speech, such as "before you could say nip and tuck," "rising and falling like chaff in the wind," and "all in the wink of an eyelash." These euphemisms serve to contrast her narrative style with the strict, formal speech of historians.

Molly's final revision is of Original Sin: "Original sin...was not at all as your biographers make it, no more than half the queens in the story-books died as they are said to, for I have the truth direct from her as got in, in a vision new laid—so I dare say it's the best—none other than Mary Flynn, the midwife, she who has fits" (198). Molly

describes Mary Flynn's vision, telling Wendell that, "a calf's foot came toward her, with wings on the shin bones, and little wings fluttering all about it, and a moth speaking from the midst, saying: 'Mary, tell your people, and the people of them begotten, that the original sin was not a woman's...It was an apple, surely, but man it was who snapped it up, scattering the seeds, and these he uses to this day to get his sons by'" (198). The claim is a complete and important reversal of man's story of Eve. Not only does the story absolve Eve, but it also claims prophet-like status for a midwife, in contrast with the all-male cast of the Bible. Molly's evidence is of course questionable, but her philosophy allows for that, as she says, "For if it's a lie...what do I care? It was good enough for the man that told it, and that suits me'" (194). Molly's outlook is pragmatic, based on what is "good enough" rather than what is true or false.

Molly's confident belief in her history offends and exasperates Wendell. He claims that his exasperation derives from the story's inherent wrongness. But Molly's alternative cosmology presents a greater affront to Wendell than he expresses—it subverts the story of mankind that gives Wendell his power.

These direct subversions of the foundational myth cycle of Western culture bring us back to the larger project of *Ryder*. The novel simultaneously recreates the figure of the Biblical patriarch in Wendell and problematizes this figure by juxtaposing him with women's narratives. *Ryder* dethrones the Biblical patriarch and replaces his stories with those of his women and children, gesturing to a future that will find its voice in the wayward and ambiguous daughter.

### III

## Memory, the Mirror and the Dream

### Textual Revision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

-Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

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*Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) may be read as Jean Rhys' first and last novels, respectively. The chronological placement of *Voyage in the Dark* is not straightforward—it is derived from notebooks that Rhys wrote after the breakup of her first love affair in 1910, which she later used to write the novel. It was published in 1934, after she had put out two collections of short stories, *Quartet* (1928), and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930). Almost thirty years after her last novel was published and she had disappeared from the literary scene, Jean Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of the “madwoman in the attic,” Bertha Rochester. The novel brought Rhys critical acclaim and international fame. However, one might look back to *Voyage in the Dark* as an early example of the rewriting that Rhys more fully achieves in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While in *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys attempts to imbricate a disparate variety of texts to demonstrate their impact on the silenced young woman, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she uses the framework of a single and foundational Western text, *Jane Eyre*, to give a voice to a similarly

silenced woman and in doing so exposes the social stakes of the silencing that the original novel performed.

*Voyage in the Dark* is told from the point of view of Anna Morgan, a young woman born and raised in the West Indies, who works as a chorus girl in England at the beginning of the novel. It tells the story of Anna's first love affair and her subsequent passage into a life of semi-prostitution, resulting in pregnancy and her subsequent death of a botched abortion. Anna's narration swings between current events and her memories of her childhood in the West Indies. Her voice concatenates generally discrete texts concerning race, religion, sex and death. Indeed, it is the presentation of these texts through her first-person narration that re-contextualizes and resignifies these discourses; her seemingly unmoored associations constitute the novel's central insight. Memory is shown to be the primary cognitive function linking the disparate scenes and discourses. In analyzing *Voyage in the Dark*, I will discuss three scenes that foreground the matrix of texts that mediates Anna's experience of her world: the first contains a reference to Émile Zola's *Nana* and the ensuing conversation concerning it, the second scene takes place after Anna and her lover Walter have sexual intercourse, and the third is the book's last scene, which contains Anna's "last thrust of remembering" before her death.

In the first pages of the novel, Anna is reading *Nana*, the ninth installment of Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* cycle. Émile Zola was the founder and most celebrated member of the French naturalist movement, which applied to literature the theory of determinism, "the belief that character, temperament, and, ultimately behavior are determined by the forces of heredity, environment and historical moment" (Encyclopedia Britannica). Zola is best known for the *Les Rougon-Macquart* series,

which he subtitled “the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire” and of which *Nana* is a part. *Nana* tells the story of an eponymous stage performer (whose close resemblance to *Voyage in the Dark*’s heroine is emphasized by the similarity of their names) who began her career as a prostitute and was picked up by the manager of a theatre, called Bordenave, prior to the novel’s opening. Nana’s life as a stage performer is not far from her life as a prostitute: Bordenave insists on calling his theatre his “brothel” and Nana continues to have sexual intercourse as her primary income. Zola’s novel is written in the third-person using free-indirect discourse—the portrait of Nana is exteriorized and she is presented from the beginning as a thing to be watched rather than an agent with a voice of her own. *Nana* opens with a portrait of its eponymous character from afar, first of her less than mediocre but licentiously inflaming performance on stage. Throughout the course of the novel, Nana is involved with a number of men and she destroys each one economically and emotionally. *Nana* ends with its subject’s death from smallpox. The reader does not see Nana in the months leading up to her death; it is instead reported through the conversations of various characters. Nana’s dead body is described as, “a charnel-house, a mass of matter and blood, a shovelful of putrid flesh, thrown there on the cushion” (Zola 408). Zola seems to relish the grotesque description of Nana’s corpse and recreating her final objectification, referring to her as a “mass,” a “shovelful” to be “thrown” upon a cushion. He refers to her sexual power as “the virus gathered by her in the gutters” and suggests that it was “as if” this “virus” “had ascended to her face and rotted it” (408). Zola’s novel posits that Nana’s sexual power gives her economic power over men, allowing her to destroy them, and she is condemned for her abuse of this power and punished with her death.

The reader of both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Nana* would be able to make immediate connections between the two. From the opening of the novel, we know that Anna is a chorus girl and we have already seen Anna and her friend Maudie wrangle themselves a room in a boarding house that doesn't "let to professionals," the implication being that they have sex for money. The novels both go on to describe very similar sexual economies, in which women may be bought like objects for the pleasure of men and the heroines' final deaths are related to their participation in the sex trade. The novels quite clearly differ however, because *Voyage in the Dark* is written in the first person, giving a direct voice to the type of woman that Zola could only describe from afar. Rhys revises the terms with which the tart is described, altering the narrative of the woman presented in Zola's story in order to give an emotional life to the heroine.

The rejection of *Nana* as an accurate portrayal of the "tart" is well put by Maudie, Anna's fellow chorus girl and roommate, who says of the novel, "I know; it's about a tart. I think it's disgusting. I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that—just somebody stuffing you up" (Rhys 5). The word "tart" refers to "a female of immoral character" or a "prostitute" derived from a lower class term for girlfriend or wife (OED). In this context, we may read it as referring to a woman who has sex before marriage and possibly for money. Maudie's comments question the ability of a man to write the story of a "tart"—her disgust seems to concern equally the nature of the material and the gender of the author. Maudie's indictment concerns "all books," although perhaps more particularly books by men about women, and so her comments also calls attention to the novel's textuality—that it too is "stuffing you up." This itself is an interesting phrase. "Stuffing you up" is a

colloquial way of expressing that you are being lied to, however it also brings to mind a doll or stuffed animal, that must be “stuffed” in order to be given weight and reality. The phrase implies perhaps that while novels may be “lies,” they also *create* and give substance to humans; they mediate experience. This tension in the phrase between “lies” and creation is expressive of the novel’s relationship to *Nana*: it both identifies the novel as a lie and demonstrates the way in which such a “lie” still brings the “tart” existence. Maudie’s comments point us to the purpose of *Voyage in the Dark*: to revise the narrative of the “tart” by giving her a voice.

The reference to *Nana* is important not just because it signals the type of narrative that the novel sets out to revise: *Nana*’s death foreshadows Anna’s at the end of the novel. We may see Anna’s sense of the inevitability of the “tart’s” fate in her comments on the novel:

It was a paper-covered book with a picture of a stout, dark woman brandishing a wine-glass. She was sitting on the knee of a bald-headed man in evening dress.

The print was very small, and the endless procession of words gave me a curious feeling—sad, excited, 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. (Rhys 4)

The description of the woman as “dark” sets up a theme that runs throughout, connecting femaleness to darkness. The man is “bald-headed” and likely to be much older than his companion, another echo of Anna’s entanglement with older men. The “endless procession” highlights the inevitability of the story, but Anna disconnects it from “what” she was reading. It is not so much the plot, but rather the inevitable “procession” of words, like events, occurring without end that gives Anna the “curious feeling.” Anna’s

description of this feeling, “sad, excited, frightened,” is telling: “excited” and “frightened” give it a sense of anxious anticipation and “sad” could be read in connection to the foreknowledge that the book presents and the inescapable nature of a life that has already been written. The reference to *Nana* operates complexly. On the one hand, it serves to call attention to the biases of the original novel, revising its male vision of the “tart.” On the other, it brings Zola’s narrative *into* the text, allowing its heroine’s fate to tell us something about Anna’s.

While the use of *Nana* in the text is exteriorized (the book exists in the moment, outside of Anna’s consciousness and is reacted to), Rhys also demonstrates the way in which social texts function in Anna’s memory, internally mediating her experience of reality. Midway through the novel, Anna lies in bed after having had sexual intercourse with her first lover, Walter, and quotes several texts from her childhood:

‘Children, every day one should put aside a quarter of an hour for meditation on the Four Last Things. Every night before you go to sleep—that’s the best time—you should shut your eyes and try to think of one of the Four Last Things.’

(*Question*: What are the Four Last Things? *Answer*: The Four Last Things are Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven.) That was Mother St Anthony—funny old thing she was too. She would say, ‘Children, every night before you go to sleep you should lie straight down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut and say: “One day I shall be dead. One day I shall lie like this with my eyes closed and I shall be dead.”’ ‘Are you afraid of dying?’ Beatrice would say. ‘No, I don’t believe I am. Are you?’ ‘Yes, I am, but I never think about it.’

Lying down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut.

‘Walter, will you put the light out? I don’t like it in my eyes.’

*Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18...But I like it like this. I don’t want it any other way but this.*

‘Are you asleep?’

‘No, I’m not asleep.’

‘You were lying so still,’ he said.

*Lying so still afterwards. That’s what they call the Little Death. ( Rhys 34)*

In this scene, Rhys creates a pastiche: she lays seemingly unrelated discourses next to one another and they become connected through Anna’s voice. The first textual reference is striking, as the religious teaching is substituted for the moment of orgasm, tying Anna’s sexual pleasure directly to a religious discourse of mortality. The parenthetical quotation of the catechism brings into play the moral chord that lies at the heart of most religious discourse, reminding us of impending “Judgment” and its two results, “Heaven and Hell.” It serves to highlight the potentially blasphemous context of the passage according to the discourse presented in the memory. Anna remembers her school friend Beatrice asking her if she fears death, a question that in this context implies a fear of sex as well as death.

Anna then quotes from a slave list she came across as a child, which she earlier remembered in conversation with Walter. At the time of the conversation, Anna remembers one slave in particular, “...Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. The sins of the fathers Hester said are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation—don’t talk such nonsense to the child Father said—a myth don’t get tangled up in myths he said to me...” (32). Hester’s remembered comments imply that Maillotte

Boyd was the child of one of Anna's ancestors and also that Anna and perhaps her father are doomed because "the sins of the fathers...are visited upon the children." Her father classifies the statement as "a myth," marking Hester's superstition as a religious fiction that attempts to control miscegenation. As Deborah Kloepfer rightly points out, Hester acts as "a representative of repressive cultural and linguistic structure" that deem Anna unfit (449). Hester here serves as a representative of a social discourse, which rather widely polices and shames miscegenation. By placing the memory of Maillotte Boyd *after* Mother St Augustine's lessons, it is suggested this is Anna's version of saying, "One day I shall be dead." Maillotte Boyd has become a memento mori for Anna. She reminds Anna of her inescapable fate and the possibility of early death, to the point that Anna must respond to the thought of Maillotte with a negative, "but," turning her thought into a life-affirming rebuttal against the remembered text. The memory of Maillotte brings a racial register into the series of memories, implying that Anna's position as a woman, who can be bought and sold, is analogous to that of a slave girl.

The second italicized line, "*Lying so still afterwards. That's what they call the Little Death,*" emphasizes the sexual context of the scene. The phrase "Little Death" is a common metaphor for orgasm and it is here an explicit concatenation of women's sexuality and death. The moment of orgasm, the "Little Death," becomes a reverberation of the real death at the end of the book.

As with the reference to *Nana*, the Little Death scene uses the first person narrative to link two sides of paradox in the condition of women: there is on the one hand the social rhetoric condemning women's sexuality, symbolized by the Catechism; and on the other women's position in an erotic economy in which the single woman can only

have access to money if she agrees to become a monetized, sexual object, represented by the reference to the slave Maillotte Boyd. The concatenation of these usually discrete texts is also their revision: it questions the truth of their separation in most social discourses. It posits that these texts in fact structure the liminal social space in which the “tart” resides. By imbuing the scene of sexual satisfaction with Anna’s recognition of her own mortality through these texts, Rhys suggests that this paradox which structures women’s lives ultimately condemns them to death.

This suggestion is further strengthened in the final scene of the novel in which Anna dies of a botched abortion. These discourses are again played out in the field of Anna’s memory. Here, however, physical texts are not directly referenced as in the previous two moments. Instead, Rhys weaves together remembered conversations and scenes that are imbued with the same social discourses that the texts in the other scenes represent. This suggests the extent to which these social discourses’ have structured Anna’s perception of reality.

There are two endings of *Voyage in the Dark*: Rhys rewrote the ending of *Voyage in the Dark* at her editor’s request to make the novel end less obviously with Anna’s death. There have been debates about the “correct” or “real” ending—Rhys herself worried that the changes would “mutilate” the novel, but did not have it changed back when the novel was republished years later.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I will use the original ending, as it brings out more clearly, because of its lengthened form, the themes and effects at issue.

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<sup>8</sup> For a defense of the published ending, one may look to Elaine Savory’s chapter on *Voyage in the Dark* in her *Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys* (2009).

The chapter intertwines Anna's perception of the abortion as her friend Laurie and her housekeeper Mrs. Polo attempt to save her life with Anna's memories of recent sexual encounters and her childhood. The scene takes up the narratives of race, sex and mortality present in the Little Death scene while also heightening the sense of performance and inevitability through these memories. While the scenes that occur in the moment are punctuated, Anna's memories flow uninterrupted by punctuation, emphasizing their connection to one another.

For instance, we may take the series of memories set off by Anna overhearing Mrs. Polo saying "They die sometimes:"

I'm not here I'm there I'm not here I'm there they die sometimes

Are you afraid of dying Beatrice said no I said I don't believe I am are you yes she said I am but I never think about it I said haven't you ever wanted to die you know when you look down into deep water and see the trees upside down haven't you ever wanted to quickly like that Beatrice said that's a sin to want to kill yourself the nuns say that's a sin but there are two sins presumption and despair what's to happen to anybody who's sinned them both

And I kept saying stop stop please stop will you stop he said I thought you'd say that and he laughed and it sounded funny and his face was very white and his nostrils going in and out

Come and look at the masks Hester said some of them are really well done some of them are almost lovely look at the costumes I wouldn't have believed niggers could dress up like that why some of the costumes are quite perfect (Rhys 385)

Mrs. Polo's expression of her fear causes Anna to attempt to go back into the world of her memory, as demonstrated by her incantation "I'm not here I'm there." The repetition of the phrase gives the following memories a sense of desperation and escape, although it seems from the content of the memories that Anna cannot escape the knowledge that she is dying. With the recognition of her possible death, Anna remembers her conversation with Beatrice, a repetition from the Little Death scene. The repetition strengthens the link between the moment of orgasm and death. In a part of the conversation not included in its first iteration, Anna expresses not only her lack of fear of death but also her wish for death, which she expresses as a Narcissus-like urge to become like the reflection of trees in deep water. This memory becomes colored by a religious discourse, as Beatrice tells Anna that it is "a sin to want to kill yourself." Anna's urge to kill herself causes her to become disconnected from a religious discourse that classifies such thinking as a "sin." Anna then replies in the present, asking "but there are two sins presumption and despair what's to happen to anybody who's sinned them both," implying that she has now "sinned them both."

From there, Anna remembers an interaction with one of her clients, in which she asks him to "stop" and whose "very white" face becomes linked to the Masquerade. A moment of interrupted sexual intercourse becomes the connection between Anna's religiously condemned expression of suicidal thoughts and her memory of watching a Masquerade with her family. The Masquerade memory is rife with a racialized commentary, as Anna remembers her family's discussion of the appropriateness of the black community's play at whiteness. For instance, the unattributed comment, "Why some of those men are almost naked it's not decent or respectable it ought to be

stopped” or Anna’s Uncle Bo’s comment, “You can’t expect niggers to behave like white people all the time Uncle Bo said it’s asking too much of human nature” (386) The man’s comment, “I thought you’d say that,” expresses an impertinent prior knowledge of the “part” that Anna plays in their interaction, which further connects the scene to the irreverent imitation of whiteness in the Masquerade. It heightens the sense that Anna is forced to perform a role that predates her. Because these memories are placed in succession, the social discourses of religion, gender and race become intimately related. The imbrication of the scenes with words such as “and” and the lack of punctuation posit that there is a hidden link between each, demonstrated by their relation to one another in Anna’s memory and further emphasized by the subtleties of language.

The chapter employs the repetition of words and phrases to create both a formally rhythmic tone and a thematic connection between the diverse memories. For instance, the name of an instrument used in the Masquerade, the “chak-chak,” is descriptive and onomatopoeic, so that with its repetition, the words recreate the sounds of the Masquerade. The repetition embodies formally the connection between Anna’s own thoughts and the Masquerade, suggesting that the sequence of Anna’s memories is a type of interiorized carnival.

Several of the chapter’s thematic elements are brought to light by the use of the word “stop.” Like the “chak-chak,” the repetition of “stop” has an aural sense—it sounds like the beating of a drum—which connects the repetition to the music played in the Masquerade, a memory which dramatizes the chapter’s harmony of sound (music) and body (dancing). The repetition of the word begins in earnest with Laurie’s comforting words to Anna, “It’ll stop in a minute,” referring to the bleeding as well as the pain (384).

This highlights that the word's consistent use is tied to Anna's bodily torment, which is physically pushing her to the brink of consciousness. The repetition of the word highlights that Anna's memories are connected to one another and also to her wish for her bodily pain to "stop."

Because of their relation to Anna's physical pain, the word "stop" is in addition an expression of her wish for death, which is voiced in her conversation with Beatrice, quoted above, that Anna remembers immediately after she hears Laurie's words Anna uses the word "stop" next in a memory, as she begs a man in bed with her, "stop stop please stop will you stop," most likely referring to forced sexual intercourse.

The sexual connotation of the word becomes connected to her family's commentary on the Masquerade. An unnamed member of the party believes that, "It's all very well the colours are marvelous but this isn't a decent and respectable way to go on and it ought to be stopped" (385). Hester says, "It ought to be stopped...it's not decent and all these Roman Catholic priests and nuns in an English island ought to be stopped too" (386). As "stop" has already been used in connection with Anna's body and also with the sexual act, the text here appropriates a discourse regarding blackness to shed light on a gendered problem, linking the position of women to that of black people. According to the symbolic matrix of the chapter, the comments that the Masquerade "ought to be stopped" also refer to Anna.

"Stop" is used throughout the chapter in reference to an ideal future in which the subject of the utterance will have ceased. The similarity gives the repetition momentum. However, towards the end, things begin to stop. The first full stop is of a horse, which earlier was used as a figure for Anna's father's imminent death. Anna remembers that,

“The horse stopped dead and shot me right over his head” (389). The rhyming of “dead” and “head” has a singsong tone, as if it were out of a children’s story. And of course, the rhyme repeats what is happening in the chapter: we are in Anna’s “head” as she moves towards death. The next full stop is initiated by the doctor, who has come to check on Anna and orders Laurie to “Stop the gramophone” (389). Anna then records that, “It stopped” (389). There is a sense that things in the physical world are gradually halting in time with Anna’s consciousness. The beginning of the novel’s final paragraph reads, “And the concertina music stopped and it was so still so still and lovely like just before you go to sleep and it stopped” (389). After the gramophone is shut off, the music in Anna’s head from the Masquerade stops as well—the aural silence represents the swiftly approaching full stop. The final use of the word in the phrase “and it stopped” refers to an unknown, thus widening the referential net of the pronoun “it.” “It” implies that everything has “stopped,” signaling both Anna’s death and the end of the book itself.

We may see here the narrative context of the word “stop.” When things begin to stop, the narrative stops too—the repetition of the word gives the reader the sense of an ending that coincides with the end of Anna’s life. The word both formally and thematically intertwines the variety of discourses that Anna remembers in her final moments. This final parallel between the end of both the text and Anna’s life proposes that Anna’s body acts in some way as a text, which through memory has been inscribed with a variety of discourses that structure her existence and ultimately cause her death.

As we can see in a heightened sense in this final section, *memory* is the thematic device that serves to connect the disparate scenes throughout *Voyage in the Dark*. Describing the origins of the novel in her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, Rhys

writes that memory served as the impetus for the creation of the text. The novel's "foundation" was three and a half exercise books that Rhys wrote in after the end of her own love affair and abortion (156). In *Smile Please*, Rhys's unfinished autobiography, the author describes this moment of creation: "I pulled my chair up to the table, opened an exercise book, and wrote *This is my Diary*. But it wasn't a diary. I remembered everything that had happened to me in the last year and a half. I remembered what he'd said, what I'd felt" (129). In the passage, Rhys emphasizes the fact that what she wrote in the diaries was not "diaristic," it was not a recording of her daily travails. Rather, she focuses on the writing being an act of remembrance.

Rhys conceived of the content of the novel as also being related to memory. At the time of the novel's publication, Rhys wrote of the text in a letter to Evelyn Scott, saying that, "The big idea—well I'm blowed if I can be sure what it is. Something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists—side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was—is." (Letters 24). These comments highlight the importance of the novel's rigorous fusing of present events with the past, emphasizing they occur "side by side" rather than one after the other. Memory is, of course, the cognitive function that allows "what was" to occur simultaneously with what "is." It is this device that allows Rhys to imbue Anna's sense of the present with the multiplicity of discourses that shaped her past, demonstrating the way in which social texts continue to operate in the present through memory. Memory explicitly places the personal in the social.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the story of *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Rochester, Edward Rochester's Creole mad wife in the attic. In a letter to Diana Athill, Rhys wrote of the impetus behind her novel, saying that, "I came to England between sixteen and seventeen, a very impressionable age and *Jane Eyre* was one of the books I read then...I remember being quite shocked, and when I re-read it rather annoyed. 'That's only one side—the English side' sort of thing" (Letters 296-7). In other letters, she referred to the character of Bertha as a "paper tiger' lunatic" and "a fat (and improbable) lunatic" (Letters 262, 149). Rhys thus set out to "write the story as it might have been" (qtd. in Harrison 128). Rhys's novel revises *Jane Eyre* in a number of ways, one of the most glaringly obvious is the changes she made in the character's names: Bertha is renamed Antoinette, who only becomes "Bertha" at her husband's whim, and leaving Edward Rochester "carefully" unnamed, transforming him from an Byronic, individualist hero, to a representation of every man (Letters 297). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's existence legally prevents Jane from marrying Rochester. In Rhys's version of the story, Antoinette and Jane are shown to be much more similar than they first appear. Though she grows up Jamaica, Antoinette, like Jane, is rejected by an unloving mother figure, she is closely attached to her nurse, Christophine, who, like Jane's Bessie, serves as a surrogate mother, and she attends an ascetic religious school up until the end of her adolescence. The similarities in their stories depart, however, when Antoinette is forced by her step-family to marry Jane's future husband. *Wide Sargasso Sea* goes on to expose how Bertha/Antoinette came to be the bellowing "maniac" imprisoned in the third floor of Thornfield, implicating Rochester and a wide variety of social discourses, including marriage property laws and British imperialism, in her descent into madness (Brontë

250). Whereas the explanation for Bertha's madness is hereditary and congenital in *Jane Eyre*, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* it becomes contextualized, embedded in a variety of other discourses that structure experience.

Like *Voyage in the Dark*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is told in the first person, switching between Antoinette and her husband, and in doing so it brings to light the positioning of its precursor. However, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s overt textual intervention is with a single text, as opposed to the wide variety taken on in Rhys's earlier novel. Therefore, it follows that the important cognitive and figurative devices used in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are singular. In discussing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, critics have often pointed to the widespread use of the dream and of mirrors within the text, which also act as figurations of the novel's relationship with its predecessor, *Jane Eyre*. Both figures highlight that *Wide Sargasso Sea* constitutes a repetition of *Jane Eyre*, but with a difference that exposes the social context of the original's silencings. In contrast to Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Bertha Antoinetta Rochester as Jane Eyre's "truest and darkest double" and Charlotte Brontë's dramatization of her "own self-division," the novel posits that "the madwoman in the attic" represents a culturally imperialist and gendered repression of women's voices (360). The figures of the mirror and the dream both dramatize the *difference* between the two texts that allows the stakes of Antoinette's silence to come to light.

In his article on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, R. McClure Smith clarifies the relationship of the dream within the novel to the connection between the text and its precursor, *Jane Eyre*. He points out that consciousness and unconsciousness are shown to be permeable states throughout the novel. For instance, Antoinette has a dream that recurs throughout the novel in which she walks through a forest following a man who "turns and looks at

me, his face black with hatred” and then finds herself in “an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees” (493). The setting is echoed as Rochester himself walks into a similar setting during his own narration later in the book, as he too walks through a forest, explaining that he:

began to walk very quickly, then stopped because the light was different. A green light. I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile. The path was overgrown but it was possible to follow it. I stood still, so sure I was being watched that I looked over my shoulder....A track was just visible and I went on, glancing from side to side and sometimes quickly behind me...The track led to a large clear space. Here were the ruins of a stone house and round the ruins rose trees that had grown to an incredible height. (520)

The similarities between the two scenes are striking: both are set in the forest, Rochester, a man who hates Antoinette, continually looks behind him, and both end at the ruins of an old house surrounded by trees. It seems that Rochester has stumbled into Antoinette’s dream, a conjecture that is strengthened by Baptiste the groundskeeper’s denial that the “large clear space” with “the ruins of a stone house” exist.

Rochester is also interrupted himself by Antoinette’s narration in a scene when he confronts Antoinette’s childhood nurse Christophine. The scene is studded with italicized and parenthesized statements that begin with Rochester’s unspoken responses to Christophine’s statements, as when she says, “all you want is to break her up,” which is followed by “*(Not the way you mean, I thought)*” (552). Rochester’s thoughts then begin to echo Christophine’s words: she says, ““So you pretend to believe all the lies that dam bastard tell you,”” followed by Rochester’s thought, “*(That damn bastard tell you)*”

(552). Rochester seems to be losing control of his consciousness to Christophine, but he maintains a semblance of control, thinking that “Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head.” Finally, Antoinette’s narration from a previous scene, which Rochester did not witness, intrudes: “*I lay awake all night long after they were asleep and as soon as it was light I got up and dressed and saddled Preston. And I came to you. Oh Christophine. O Pheena, Pheena, help me.*” (553). The external narration slowly permeates Rochester’s waking thoughts.

Of the bleeding of the separate characters’ unconscious and conscious thoughts, Smith writes that, “the scrimmage for control of the unconscious process in the intratextual realm of character is also repeated in the intertextual relation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*” (118). Smith then points to the similarity between Jane’s dreams in the precursor novel and Antoinette’s. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane narrates her dream to Rochester, telling him that, “I was following the windings of an unknown road... I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop—but my movements were fettered” (Brontë 281). She then tells him of a second dream in which, “Thornfield hall was a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls. I thought that of all the stately front, nothing remained but a shell-like wall, very high, very fragile-looking. I wandered, on a moonlight night, through the grass-grown enclosure within” (281-2). Throughout both of these dreams Jane is holding an infant. In Jane’s dream, as in Antoinette’s, we find the unknown road, the dreamer following a figure in front of her, the stone wall and the enclosed garden. In including the same symbols in both dreams, Rhys creates a bleeding of Jane’s unconscious into Antoinette’s, suggesting that as Antoinette’s dream becomes more and

more fleshed out throughout the book, she goes further and further into the world of *Jane Eyre*.

Smith also suggests that in Antoinette's final dream, she puts "herself directly into the precursor text, literally into the *passages* between its *cardboard* covers" (120).

Antoinette says of her surroundings in this final section,

It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it somewhere before, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow and has no light in it. As I walk along the passages I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard. (568)

Smith is, however, focused on describing the unconscious relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* within the framework of post-structuralist theories of intertextuality and feminist theories of object relations, positing that in the re-vision of the precursor text, the work was "itself on occasion short circuited by the unforeseen activation and subsequent play of a more profoundly subversive *textual unconscious* whose various subterranean affects Rhys was scarcely in a position to anticipate or control" (121). In contrast, I would argue that Rhys was aware of the infiltrating elements of *Jane Eyre* on her work, and that this can further be elucidated by the figure of the dream. Rhys herself described her novel as a "dream book" and at one point thought of entitling the book "*Dream*" (Letters 214, 208). I believe that this points to Rhys's *conscious* acknowledgment of the novel's dream-like connection to its precursor. So let us take dreams first: a dream is a transformation of the events of the dreamer's prior life—it is dependent upon these events for its content. The awakened dreamer is left to interpret the dream in the context of his or her prior knowledge. And so, in this analogy,

the dreamer's waking knowledge is *Jane Eyre*, the content of which *Wide Sargasso Sea* transforms and interprets symbolically, like a dream. This transmutation, which to light repressed aspects overlooked in the original text, is then given to yet another interpreter, the reader, who has knowledge of both the prior text and the "dream text" or parody.

A reading of the final section of the text highlights the sense that Antoinette has been fully inserted into the fold of "their world" as well as her knowledge of a driving purpose that is not entirely her own (568). She wonders, "why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it I must do?" (567). The "reason" is of course that the end of her life has already been written, that while she has enjoyed an autonomous existence up to this point, she has now entered another "world." Her life has been subsumed into the precursor text, as she remembers that in her dream, after she has set fire to the house and sits on its battlements, "I turned around and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it" (574). Antoinette sees "all my life" in the sky, symbolically pointing to the fact that the text exists inside of its precursor, that for all of its dream-like transmutation, Antoinette's life is dependent upon the content of the original text. There is also an interesting pun here, in which the word "red" denotes the fire's coloring of the sky, but also is homonymically related to the past tense of "read." The relation further implies that Antoinette's fate has already been "read," that she has now entered into a world that is circumscribed by *Jane Eyre* as well as the reader's prior knowledge. Antoinette's sense in this final section of having entered into a "cardboard" world in which her fate is not entirely her own, points us to Rhys's acknowledgement of her text's final, dream-like dependence upon its precursor.

A small detail mentioned by David Cowart in his discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* points to the close relationship between the dream and the mirror: in Rochester's narrative, he states that he watches Antoinette "holding her left wrist with her right hand, an annoying habit" and at the end of the novel Antoinette says that in her final dream she "held my right wrist with my left hand and waited" (535, 573). The careful reversal of this habit in the dream, which Rochester earlier highlights for the reader in his characteristically dismissive manner, is interesting because it subtly tells us that Antoinette's dream also serves as a mirror-image of the preceding text. As I have shown, Antoinette's final dream signals her final and complete containment within *Jane Eyre*. This reversal suggests that Antoinette has also gone into the other side of the looking glass as she enters into the other text. Which side of the mirror that Antoinette comes out on is hard to determine. Antoinette is shown to be dissociated from her *Jane Eyre* self (Bertha) in this section of the novel, as she sees "her—the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (573). The "gilt frame" is of course a mirror and Antoinette is looking at herself in this moment. The Antoinette of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is here being confronted with an image of herself, which she cannot recognize because she has outwardly become the Bertha of *Jane Eyre*. We can then perhaps read the figure of the mirror as operating in a similar way to the dream throughout the text. Like a dream and like parody itself, a mirror-image is a repetition with a difference—it is like the thing that it reflects but it is crucially not that thing. Antoinette voices this difference as she remembers looking at herself in her youth:

I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me.

The girl I saw was myself but 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. (568)

Antoinette's memory emphasizes the function of mirroring throughout the text, which works on multiple levels throughout the text. *Wide Sargasso Sea* often takes two events that seem unlike and implies a connection between them by placing the scenes on opposite sides of a mirror. The events are simultaneously similar and unlike.

A striking example of this can be found in Antoinette's identification with Tia, her childhood friend, as she flees the burning Coulibri. She remembers that,

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. 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. (483)

Antoinette believes that her childhood relationship with Tia, which ended with Tia calling her a "white nigger" and stealing her clothes, represents a time before she had been cast out of the Eden-like Coulibri. We see here a similar appropriation of a discourse of blackness into a discourse of womanhood as in *Voyage in the Dark*. However, crucially, the figure of the "looking-glass" implies that there is indeed a difference between Antoinette and Tia, although Antoinette seems to believe that Tia is somehow "like" her reflection. Gayatri Spivak refers to Tia as "the Other that could not

be selfed, because the fracture of imperialism...intervened" (250). In her comments, Spivak posits the mirror, which here *divides* Antoinette from Tia, is the division that imperialism created between its subjects. The metaphor of the mirror here serves to make clear Antoinette's misplaced attempt at identification as well as the "fracture of imperialism" that runs throughout the novel.

David Cowart points out the intricacy of the mirroring, as exemplified by the symmetrical structure of the novel's plot. Cowart's comments posit that the mirroring in the text is not simply a formal device. Indeed, Cowart suggests that the mirroring structure of the text is related to its archetypal resonances in its complex rewriting of Biblical history. Reading the fire at Coulibri as a figure for the Fall and the fire at Thornfield as the Apocalypse, he writes that while Coulibri may work in this framework as Eden, it is "paradisal yet oppressive, a creepy Eden after the fall" (Cowart 63). The outcome of this is,

The burning of Coulibri...will find its mirror image in the burning of Thornfield, for the novelist suggests that the colonial paternalism responsible for the first cataclysm is the mirror image of the patriarchalism that obtains within Western society and robs Antoinette and other women of their autonomy. (Cowart 61)

This understanding of the novel's symmetrical structure points us to one of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* revisions of its precursor. Cowart rightly points out that Coulibri is a tainted Eden, that Rhys "allows the reader to see that the paradise of the West Indies fell from the first colonization" (Cowart 63). What he does not mention is that the apparent symmetry of the fires within the plot is uneven—the fire at Coulibri is prefaced by an exposition of the spoiled paradise whereas the fire at Thornfield ends the text. Thus we might read the unevenness as an implicit comment upon the apparent happy ending of *Jane Eyre*. The

mirroring of the two fires thus suggests that Jane's happy ending, which is dependent upon Antoinette's unhappy one, is also in some way false, having been built upon a similar oppression.

In these ways, we can see how the figure of the mirror and of the dream function in such a way throughout the text so as to both highlight similarity but also posit difference between characters, between scenes, and between the two books themselves. They bring to light the social contexts that are at issue, particularly patriarchy as it is manifested in the colonies and in gender relations.

Rhys embeds in her novels' structures, formal elements, thematic figurations a sense of their textual realities in order to further indicate the way in which they revise the social discourses that are their subjects. In *Voyage in the Dark*, memories are rendered in such a way that we are left with the impression that "the past exists—side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was—is." (Letters 24). Rhys emphasizes how one's socialization as a child structures and mediates one's existence in the present and demonstrates the potentially fatal effects of these discourses' repressions. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys uses mirrors and dreams as structuring devices for the novel, in order to both dramatize the relationship between her text and *Jane Eyre*, bringing to light the stakes of the differences between the two. In these ways, we can see how Rhys includes the method of revision into the texts themselves.

# Looking Back

## The Possibilities of Parody

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Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have every known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.  
- Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"

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Throughout the course of this project, I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which these three women, who are all very different and all categorized under the heading "Modernist," attempted to "know" and read "differently" the texts of their forefathers. These authors come to terms with "the writing of the past" by revising it and, in doing so, voice their "refusal of the self-destructiveness of male society." By rewriting the texts of the patriarchy, the authors question and problematize the authority of their precursors. They also make space for new narratives, particularly those of women, that are not colored by the repressions that inhere to the discourses of the patriarchal order. Parody may be seen as an attempt both to "understand the assumptions in which we are drenched" as well as a way to recode these "assumptions."

How, one might ask, can change be effected in literature when it will always already be tied to a language that has been systematically repressive? We may use as an example *Wide Sargasso Sea's* alteration of the character Bertha Rochester of *Jane Eyre*. The story is based on a foundational text of Western culture, *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's novel offers an alternative to Bertha's story in Brontë's text in which Bertha is in fact named Antoinette and has been driven to madness by external social forces, rather than her

heredity as Rochester proposes in the original novel. Each time that the character “Bertha/Antoinette” is referenced in literature, it refers back to and includes the story of *Jane Eyre*. Although Bertha and Antoinette remain discrete within their story worlds, there is also an intertextual Bertha/Antoinette who exists within Western culture and the mind of the reader.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, each time Bertha/Antoinette is used as a character in a text, the intertextual character, a constellation of the Berthas/Antoinettes that exist in the cultural imagination, is profoundly changed. One cannot re-read *Jane Eyre* having read *Wide Sargasso Sea* in between and retain the same understanding of the madwoman in the attic. The signs which constitute Bertha/Antoinette are not only constructed in their meaning but they are also constantly changing, pointing to a multiplicity of being, rather than a unified self from moment to moment.

Paralleling Bertha/Antoinette’s transformations, every literary act of translation and imitation constitutes an alteration to the canon.<sup>10</sup> Barnes, Rhys, and Woolf have all written re-visions into the canon that they have inherited. They have created parodies of old forms of writing, which were allied to a patriarchal tradition, and in doing so rewrite

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<sup>9</sup> Kristeva describes the intersection of the reader and society in “Word, Dialogue and Novel:” “The addressee [the reader], however, is included within a book’s discursive universe only as discourse itself. He thus fuses with this other discourse, this other book, in relation to which the writer has written his own text. Hence horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of word (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read... any text constructed is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 37). Here, Kristeva emphasizes how the reader and his or her cultural context, which includes the whole of preceding literature, are inextricable and therefore a text or a word is always multiple.

<sup>10</sup> T.S. Eliot articulates this idea in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” writing that “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered...” (5).

these traditions in order to make clear their preoccupations, privilegings and downfalls. The moment of reading or understanding the distanced imitation alters the original text for the reader so that, like Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, it may never be read in the same way again.

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