

# ‘This Cardboard House’

*A Parallel Study of Identity and Intertextuality in  
Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea and Charlotte  
Brontë’s Jane Eyre*

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the intertextual relationship between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). *Wide Sargasso Sea* has primarily been read as a protest against the exoticising and orientalist portrayal *Jane Eyre* gives of Rochester's Creole wife, Bertha Mason. However, I argue that the protagonists in these two novels, Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway, should be seen as parallels, rather than as opposites, and that both novels demonstrate through a recurring tendency of circularity and repeating patterns how their female protagonists have their identities and personal liberty circumscribed by the limitations of patriarchal conventions. Through close reading and the application of postcolonial, feminist and narrative theory, this thesis engages in a parallel study of these two novels, giving particular attention to the way in which the development of identity is conveyed through the means of narrative technique and use of symbolism, and how these novels, despite their apparent adherence to gendered traditions, can be seen to subvert established conventions in society and literature.



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# 1 Introduction

When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life. (Rhys, qtd. in O'Connor 144)

Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* has generally been read as a critique of the novel whose characters it borrows, namely Charlotte Brontë's classic *Jane Eyre* from 1847. This is supported by the fact that Rhys herself stated on several occasions, for instance in an interview in the *Paris Review* from 1979 excerpted above, that she wrote the novel as a response to the way *Jane Eyre* portrays and exoticises the Creole wife and Caribbean culture, and that she wanted to fill the gap in *Jane Eyre* where Bertha Mason's side of the story should be. Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams in 1890 to a Welshman and a Dominican Creole woman of mixed European and Caribbean ancestry. Having grown up in the city of Roseau on the island Dominica in the British West Indies, she had a personal interest in rectifying what she perceived as a gross misrepresentation of Creole and West Indian culture in the timeless classic *Jane Eyre*. In an interview printed in the British newspaper *The Guardian* in 1969, Rhys gave the following statement regarding her interest in *Jane Eyre*'s minor, but crucially important character Bertha Mason:

The mad wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced that Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn't really formulated the idea of vindicating the mad woman in the novel but when I was rediscovered I was encouraged to do so. (qtd. in Baer 132)

From Rhys' strong reaction against what she saw as a misrepresentation of her native culture, one may infer that she identified strongly with her West Indian background and heritage, and considered it to be essential to her own individual identity. This becomes manifest in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the way in which Rhys makes the issues of identity

and how identity is created, destroyed or supplanted, absolutely central themes in her novel. Furthermore, Rhys' reference to how she was 'rediscovered' requires some explanation. After having published five novels between the years 1927 and 1939, none of which achieved any widespread contemporary acclaim, though well received by Rhys' small readership, Jean Rhys disappeared into obscurity to such an extent that she was in fact by many supposed dead. Her novels went out of print, and having been divorced once and widowed twice in the course of approximately forty years, Rhys lived in obscurity and relative poverty in a cottage in the Cornwall town Bude, trying to write her next novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys had previously had problems with alcoholism, and describes her days in the Cornwall cottage in the following manner: 'As usual, I took refuge in bottles of wine, and would get pretty drunk every night' (qtd. in O'Connor 72). In the same way that feminist literary critics in the second half of the twentieth century sought to rediscover and raise from anonymity 'forgotten' female authors, Jean Rhys also became the subject of such a rediscovery when the British actress Selma Vaz Dias in 1957 wanted to make a dramatised radio production of Rhys' 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, and managed to trace Rhys' location and begin an irregular and sporadic line of correspondence with the by then almost forgotten author (O'Connor 73). In the perspective of revision, rediscovery and reinterpretation, it is therefore significant that only after having been rediscovered herself, Rhys published her only literary work that openly seeks to reinterpret and revise for the reading public one of the most classical and canonised works in English literature, namely Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In this respect it is also especially significant to observe that the preliminary title for the novel that would eventually, after many years of writing and revising, be published as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was *Le Revenant*, meaning significantly 'a person who has returned, especially supposedly from the dead' ('revenant', *OD*).

Because Rhys has explicitly declared that her motivation for writing her revisionist alternative story for Bertha Mason stemmed from a sense of injustice at the inaccurate representation of the West Indies, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has generally been considered to exist in opposition to the work it borrows from and seeks to amend. However, previous criticism has in my opinion not devoted sufficient attention to the similarities between the two works, and especially between the two protagonists, Jane and Antoinette. While much of the existing criticism on *Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with its relationship with *Jane Eyre*, this has mostly been directed at Antoinette as a humanised

and vindicated representation of Bertha Mason, as well as at the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette, England and the West Indies, coloniser and colonised (see for instance Gregg, O'Connor, Wolfe). Among those critics who *have* gone into any deeper analysis of these analogous characters are David Cowart and Elizabeth R. Baer, and in my interpretation of the two novels and their two protagonists, I aim to expand on their observations.

David Cowart's work *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* was first published in 1993 and deals with a number of works that Cowart contends engage in a special kind of intertextuality that he terms *literary symbiosis*. What is significant about this kind of intertextuality is that the connection between the different pairs of texts is made concrete and explicit, and that the literary symbiotic pairs almost always consist of one older work and one modern work, a feature that Cowart argues reflects a postmodern tendency towards self-consciousness and self-reflexivity. In his section on the symbiotic pair *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Cowart focuses on the way in which the latter subverts and displaces the ideological myth that the former upholds. He then briefly summarises the many similarities between the childhoods of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway. Further, he pays attention to the potential in *Wide Sargasso Sea* for psychoanalytic interpretation of the relationships between real and symbolic mothers, fathers, daughters and sons. In relation to this, he also investigates how the novel utilises the medium of dreams to portray the subconscious undercurrents of the mind. Lastly, he explores the significant instances of mirrors and mirroring in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Elizabeth R. Baer's essay 'The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway' appears in the 1983 publication *The Voyage In*, a collection of essays dealing in different ways with literary works on female development. In her essay, Baer comments on the way in which Rhys with *Wide Sargasso Sea* anticipates the movement of feminist revision, reinterpretation and rediscovery that emerged in feminist literary criticism in the 1970s. Baer contends that in the same way that *Jane Eyre* was a revision of 'Cinderella' for nineteenth century readers, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a revision of *Jane Eyre* for readers in the twentieth century. Baer emphasises a number of similarities that exist between the protagonists of the two novels, and argues that Rhys utilises this feature in order to humanise Antoinette/Bertha for readers who have by the ideology of *Jane Eyre* been compelled to sympathise with Jane and demonise Bertha. Baer pays particular attention

to the recurring dreams in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the symbolism that they contain and she also draws parallels between Antoinette's dreams and Jane's dreams.

What I find most significant in the observations of these critics is how they both recognise the parallel between Jane and Antoinette and also the way in which symbolism and dreams are emphasised. Adding to their interpretations, I would like to argue that these issues are highly relevant for what I find to lie at the heart of both novels, namely the issue of identity, and that through the means of narrative technique, repeating cyclical structures, and the dreams and symbolism Baer and Cowart recognise, both Rhys and Brontë are able to illustrate the development of identity in their protagonists and demonstrate how, despite their contrasting fates, both Antoinette and Jane are ultimately limited by the boundaries of patriarchy.

The premise for my thesis is based in the following facts: Both of the novels tell the story of socially marginalised, but not destitute women. Both Jane and Antoinette find themselves positioned at the margins of their social spheres, in the blurred *liminal* spaces between clearly defined social divisions, the word *liminal* meaning something which is 'characterised by being on a boundary or threshold, especially by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc.' ('liminal', *OED*). Jane Eyre's social class is ambiguous throughout the novel. She is born into an upper-class family, but is shunned and ostracised by her adoptive family when orphaned. Her position as a governess places her in between the roles of servant and companion, creating tension in her interaction with other people whose social positions are more firmly established (see Godfrey, Poovey, Peterson). Antoinette is born into the so-called plantocracy in the West Indies, making her part of the dominant domestic class of her society. However, in relation to the British imperialist rulers, she is socially inferior, but in relation to the former slaves and plantation workers, she represents the overthrown ruler. This positions her in an ambiguous in-between state, thus echoing Jane Eyre's liminal social position. Central to both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the issue of identity – creation of identity and destruction of identity, respectively. Common to Jane and Antoinette is that their ambiguous and liminal positions in the social hierarchy deny them the privilege of having authority over the creation of the narrative of their identities. However, while Jane is able to successfully break out of oppression and establish herself as an autonomous individual in her society, Antoinette is driven to madness and self-destruction. I would like to argue that while Jane and Antoinette are both victims of

oppression and marginalisation, Antoinette's oppression has a facet that Jane's does not have. Jane's oppression stems mainly from her sex and class, thus making her doubly oppressed. Antoinette, however, is in addition to her sex and class oppressed because of her status as an Other, that is, someone who appears foreign and exotic in relation to the British colonisers, in short because of her race and nationality. Antoinette is thus triply oppressed. This evokes a notion of the existence of an interrelation between the concepts patriarchy and colonialism. While the seemingly happy ending of Jane's story stands in stark contrast to the tragic outcome of Antoinette's life, I contend that it is important to notice the many similarities of their stories. This similarity is particularly emphasised by the recurring patterns of repetition that pervade the two novels. These patterns of repetition manifest themselves in several different ways in the two novels, for instance in the way that *Wide Sargasso Sea* begins and ends with a great conflagration, and in the way that *Jane Eyre* is structured as a *Bildungsroman* in which the heroine goes out on a quest and returns only to venture out and later return once again. The *Bildungsroman* is a genre of novels that portray 'the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood' (Baldick 27). As the name reveals, the genre originates in German literature, and translates to 'formation-novel' in English. Some of the most emblematic novels of the genre include Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-6), Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50), and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) (Baldick 27). In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, the determining factor of each of the protagonists' success comes down to the degree of oppression to which they are subjected. Jane is, by the stroke of serendipitous luck, able to eliminate the oppression of class, but her oppression as a woman in a patriarchal society remains, although this is not emphasised as a problem once she acquires her fortune. However, I argue that it is highly important to observe the fact that Jane's success is still contained within a patriarchal framework, the same framework that completely oppresses Antoinette's autonomy, and it conforms strictly to society's conventional ideas of domestic contentment and the division of genders this entails. In relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, The Creole/Other/race aspect of Antoinette's trifold oppression might thus be claimed to constitute the insuperable obstacle that completely precludes Antoinette's triumph. Cowart and Baer also recognise this fact and argue that 'Antoinette is a sacrifice on the altar of sexism and colonialism' (Cowart 64), and that Jane and Antoinette are both 'orphans in the patriarchy' (Baer 147). In this thesis I intend

to expand on this notion by exploring the ways in which narrative technique and the development of identity can be seen and interpreted as operating within, and/or attempting to subvert, the restricting structures of their patriarchal surroundings.

## 1.1 Theory

The theory applied in this thesis is to a great extent determined by the relationship between the two novels it explores. *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, a time when the British Empire was at its greatest, governing about four hundred million people. By the time of the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, on the other hand, the British Empire was virtually history as the supreme super power it once was. This contrast between the contemporary situations of the two novels makes it fruitful to apply the theories of the critical movement that arose in the wake of the extensive process of decolonisation that took place in the twentieth century, namely postcolonial criticism. In this thesis I will make use of some of these postcolonial critical perspectives primarily in my analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The theorists I will make use of include primarily Homi Bhabha and Edward Said.

Edward Said was among the first critics to establish the field of postcolonial criticism. In his famous work *Orientalism* from 1978 he argues that Western society has through a constructed *colonial discourse* produced and perpetuated ideas about the East, or the Orient, but in broader terms, about anything non-Western (Parker 293). He sees Orientalism as ‘a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient’ (Said 95). Said writes that through the interest of the Enlightenment in the Orient and the colonial expansions of the nineteenth century, the West has accumulated a ‘sizeable body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers’ (40) which establishes an image of the Oriental as ‘irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”’, and further as ‘lazy, exotic, ... cruel, promiscuous, seductive, inscrutable, dishonest, mystical, superstitious, primitive [and] ruled by emotion’ (Parker 294). This implies a dichotomy between the West and the East (Orient) and suggests that the West constitutes the other side of the binary pairs. This would make the West ‘rational, virtuous, mature, “normal”’ (Said 40), hardworking, kind, democratic, moral, modern, progressive, technological, individualist and at the center of the world’ (Parker 294-5).

Homi Bhabha's essay 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' is among the most influential writings in postcolonial theory and the terms he coins have become key concepts in this critical field. In this influential essay, Bhabha describes the destabilising effects the phenomenon of *mimicry* can have in a colonial setting. Mimicry occurs when the colonised people begin mimicking the colonisers and their cultural expressions, like language, dress and behaviour (Parker 298-9). Bhabha writes in his essay that mimicry is 'constructed around an ambivalence' (126), and that 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite* (126 emphasis in original). The potentially subversive effect of mimicry occurs when the coloniser sees himself reflected in the colonised, but slightly different. This creates an ambivalence that becomes a kind of mockery and has the potential to threaten the coloniser's sense of power by emptying his expressions of identity and superiority of meaning. Bhabha writes on the destabilising power of mimicry that '[t]he *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority' (129 emphasis in original).

Another critical perspective I will apply in this thesis is provided by the intertextual relationship between the two novels. Because the one, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, builds on the foundations of the other, *Jane Eyre*, I find it useful to explore the ways in which such literary dependency influences the works involved. Moreover, the relationship of dependency is further complicated by the fact that the plot of the latterly published novel is set to precede the plot of the previous one. In relation to this aspect of the novels, I will make use of the ideas put forth by the literary scholar David Cowart and his extensive work on what he has termed *literary symbiosis*. This is a term that is used to describe works of literature that to a greater or lesser extent build upon the foundation of a previous text, like *Wide Sargasso Sea* builds on *Jane Eyre*. This term will be explained thoroughly in section 2.1 below, when I apply this approach in my analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Seen in relation to postcolonial theory, one might draw a parallel to from Cowart's ideas of symbiotic texts and Bhabha's concept of mimicry. In order to create an interesting and successful guest text to a pre-existing host text, it is necessary to make certain changes and to put characters or plot into a slightly different perspective. For such a text to be worthwhile, a certain amount of distance is needed between the guest and the host texts. It is this distance that I would claim opens up for a kind of mimicry that may

contribute to the revaluation or subversion of apparently affirmed truths endorsed by the pre-existing canon and its readers.

The issue of literary symbiosis can also be defined under the term *intertextuality*. Intertextuality is a term used to designate the ways in which texts interact with other texts, for instance in allusion, parody, pastiche, adaption, translation, etc. (Baldick 128). Some literary theorists, among these Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, contend that all texts are intrinsically intertextual. This approach is called universal intertextuality and builds on the ideas about the narrative put forth by structuralist theorists like Tzvetan Todorov and A. J. Greimas, claiming that all narratives consist of varying combinations of the same constituents (Parker 77-8). On the other side of the spectrum we find critics that are more interested in intertextuality as a limited and non-universal phenomenon. Some of the more recent criticism dealing with limited intertextuality, like that of David Cowart, has dealt with the ways in which narratives that have been termed *postmodern rewrites* of earlier works through intertextual interplay retell the narrative matter of its 'model' in a manner which problematises, rather than imitates or glorifies the previous text (Moraru n.p.). The *postmodern rewrite* usually dismantles the ideology of the 'model' text by the means of intertextual rewriting. Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* can thus justifiably be considered to be a *postmodern rewrite* of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

In this thesis I will also refer to a number of terms from the field of narrative theory. These include character, identity, focalisation, and reliability. All of these issues are relevant for both of the novels studied in this thesis. My purpose in this thesis is partly to compare the protagonists of the two novels as *characters* and explore the ways in which they develop in the course of the respective plots. The term 'character' refers in the narratological sense to any participant, minor or major, in the storyworld of a literary work, that is, in the reality that the narrative presents as truth (Margolin 66). In the case of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the latter borrows a character from the storyworld of *Jane Eyre*, namely Bertha Mason, and presents her in its own storyworld as Antoinette Cosway. However, instead of presenting Bertha/Antoinette as the foil she is in *Jane Eyre*, that is to say a character used to emphasise the contrast in for instance virtue and moral between the foil and the hero/heroine, Rhys appropriates Brontë's minor character and places her in the role of protagonist and heroine of her own work. In connection with this we also find the issue of *identity*, which is a major point of focus for my thesis. Identity

as such is to a great extent contingent on the medium of the narrative in order to exist. According to Jerome Bruner, identity is created by ‘telling oneself about oneself’ (4), and that there is no such thing as an essential, constant notion of self inherent in every individual, because ‘we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter’ (4). Identity can thus be seen to be ever changing rather than constant and unvarying. In this thesis we will see how identity is both created and destroyed through narrative means, especially in the way Antoinette’s identity is erased and supplanted by Rochester’s insistence on calling her by the name of Bertha. This shows that identity is not only contingent on the story we tell *ourselves* about ourselves, or the story we tell *others* about ourselves (Bruner 4-5), but also the story others tell *us* about ourselves.

Because both of these novels have first-person narrators who are not only participants, but also the protagonists in the stories, so-called autodiegetic narrators (Phelan and Booth n.p.), the issue of *focalisation* is practically self-evident. The focaliser is the character through whose eyes the events of the story are ‘seen’, or experienced (Parker 71). In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, the different narrators, Antoinette and Rochester, and Antoinette’s apparent interruption into Rochester’s narrative cause problems in terms of focalisation. This will be explained in section 2.3 about the narrative technique in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Regarding the issue of *reliability* in a narrative, the presence of an autodiegetic narrator would immediately give rise to a certain suspicion in the reader. The reliability of the narrator is determined by the degree to which the narrator ‘speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work’ (Booth, qtd. in Nünning n.p.). Especially in the case of *Jane Eyre*, whose title page characterises the novel as ‘an autobiography, edited by Currer Bell’, the issue of reliability is especially relevant. The latter part of the subtitle is particularly significant in that it confesses that some amount of editing has been done, signalling to the reader that what is narrated may not be an entirely faithful representation of the events as they occurred. As for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the problem of reliability occurs in the same place mentioned in relation to focalisation above.

Lastly, my thesis as a whole and my approach to the analysis of the two works will be based on the critical ideas of feminism. While feminism today is a many-faceted and occasionally controversial subject, I will limit my focus to the primary principles of feminism, in accordance with the tentative and rudimentary feminism that the ideology

of *Jane Eyre* and consequently also *Wide Sargasso Sea* uphold. Feminist literary criticism is based on the notion that women have not been, and perhaps are still not considered the moral and intellectual equals of men. Feminism contends that women are suppressed physically and socially by society's tendency to favour men in positions of power. According to feminism, the systematic undervaluation of women is called *misogyny* and this tendency is perpetuated by a social order which favours men called the *patriarchy* (Parker 149). In my investigations of these two novels I will focus mostly on the notions of what is called *first-wave feminism*, which is a term used to describe the beginnings of the women's rights movement that advocated for the equal rights of women to vote, own property and to be considered man's intellectual equal. Among the feminist literary critics used in this thesis are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth R. Baer, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. I find this feminist approach appropriate not only because both novels are written by female authors and both novels have female protagonists, but more importantly because both works problematise to a great extent the issues of gender and conventions about gender roles. At the centre of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies the matter of more or less problematic relationships between men and women. Particularly significant is the fact that the same man, Edward Rochester, figures as the male half of both of these relationships, but the outcomes for the two women are diametrically opposite.

## 1.2 Method and Overview of Thesis

In my study of the two novels I will engage in close reading of the texts and my primary point of focus will be on the issue of identity and how the identities of the protagonists of the two novels develop as the plots of the novels progress. In relation to this, I will pay particular attention to the subject of names in the two novels. I have chosen two slightly different approaches to my analysis of the different novels. In my analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I have chosen to investigate three major recurring instances of symbolism, namely fire, mirrors and finally dreams and premonitions. In my analysis of *Jane Eyre*, I have chosen to focus mainly on the way the novel and its protagonist navigate physically between different geographical locations throughout the novel. In relation to this I will also explore how the novel fits into the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. However, because the novels are so closely linked, almost to the degree of being parallel, I have also

explored the same instances of symbolism as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The reason why I have chosen to do this has partly to do with the greatly different styles of the two novels. Compared to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is in terms of narrative style significantly more modern and unrestrained by literary conventions about writing, being, of course, published more than one hundred years later. Thus I find that the style of *Jane Eyre* is more appropriate for a physical, tangible approach, grounded in geographical location, whereas an analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* benefits from a more psychological and metaphorical approach. In this thesis I have chosen to devote one chapter to each of the novels, in reverse chronological order, thus having the analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* come before the analysis of *Jane Eyre*. I have chosen to arrange the chapters in this way not only because it conforms to the fictional chronology of the two works, *Wide Sargasso Sea* being written as a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, but also because I find it useful to be able to review *Jane Eyre* in the light of Rhys' *postmodern rewrite*.

The first chapter, dealing with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, will begin with a brief overview of the theoretical terms and perspectives I will apply. Then I will begin my analysis by exploring some of the events and issues in Antoinette's life that have the greatest influence on the establishment and development of her identity. Particular attention will be given to the issue of names and the important relationship between one's own name and one's own identity and sense of selfhood. Then I will go on to discuss the narrative technique Rhys employs in her novel, exploring the interpretative gaps that Rhys opens up for by being consistently ambiguous in her narrative style. Finally I will investigate the three important recurring instances of symbolism in the novel, namely fire, mirrors and dreams and premonitions, and the ways in which these might be interpreted in relation to the creation and eventual destruction of Antoinette's identity.

In the next chapter, I will conduct my analysis of *Jane Eyre*. After a brief introduction to the novel, I will explore the significance of names in the novel, be it real names, pseudonyms or sobriquets. Following this I will go on to analyse the physical and geographical movement of the protagonist Jane from place to place in relation to the development of her character and identity. In this part of the chapter I will devote a separate section to each of the five places in which Jane resides in the course of the novel. In the final and concluding chapter of this thesis I will on the background of my examinations in the two previous chapters explore the most prominent similarities

between the two works. I will also draw attention to the tendency of circularity and cyclical patterns that are part of the fundamental structures of both novels.

## 2 *Wide Sargasso Sea*

### 2.1 Introduction

In Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the issue of identity is a prevalent one. Throughout the novel questions of identity are brought forth by the ambiguity pertaining to the main characters and their backgrounds. In this analysis I will first briefly explore the novel from a postcolonial perspective, using primarily the theories of Homi Bhabha, but also to some extent Edward Said. My main point of focus, however, will be on Rhys' use of symbolism, and I will explore the most significant instances in depth. In doing so, I will discuss how these symbols might be interpreted in connection with the formation of the identity of the protagonist Antoinette. In my analysis I will draw mostly upon the analysis in David Cowart's study of parallel and symbiotic texts *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing*. In his work Cowart discusses a number of texts that he claims could be divided into what he terms *symbiotic* pairs. These pairs consist mostly of one older work and one modern work, in accordance with Cowart's claim that 'literary symbiosis is a largely contemporary phenomenon' (2). The term *symbiosis* is conventionally used in the field of biology to denote a relationship of dependency between two different organisms. The phenomenon symbiosis is in turn divided into three different categories: commensalism, mutualism, and parasitism. Into the first category fall symbiotic relationships in which 'only the guest organism benefits, but the host suffers no harm' (Cowart 4). The second category includes symbiotic relationships that are to the benefit of both host and guest, whereas the final category comprises symbiotic relationships that are solely to the benefit of the guest at the expense of the host. Applying this borrowed set of terms to the study of literature, Cowart draws attention to the notion that no writing exists outside of time, and is therefore never entirely independent from the influence of previous writing. This kind of literary influence may be unintended and implicit, although it may also be explicit and used consciously as a means of interacting with previous works of literature. According to Cowart's analysis, it is this kind of intertextuality that comes into play in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Although Rhys never explicitly mentions *Jane Eyre* or Charlotte Brontë in the text itself, she affirms the relationship in letters and other writings. In her novel, Rhys avails herself of Brontë's characters and uses them in order to elaborate and

develop her response to the host text *Jane Eyre*. Cowart asserts that such literary symbiosis enables authors to create ‘textual simulacra [that] allow them to engage in artful dialogue with—and often parody or subversion of—the aesthetic and philosophical assumptions of their precursors’ (12). In this way, literary symbiosis enables authors not only to engage with previous literature in a direct manner, but it also allows for new perspectives and reinterpretations of canonical texts by means of a *reconfiguration* of the literary canon. As to the category of the symbiosis, Cowart argues that most symbiotic works of literature are found in the category of commensalism, however there are also symbiotic works that provide mutual benefit for both host and guest, and others still that could be grouped in the category of parasitism, existing at the expense of and to the detriment of the host text (5). With regard to the category of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Cowart does not make any final conclusions, but I would like to argue that only a reader unfamiliar with *Jane Eyre* would be able to call *Wide Sargasso Sea* a commensal text, that is, not affecting the host text at all. For readers familiar with both texts, and perhaps most commonly with the host before the guest, I would argue that whether *Wide Sargasso Sea* benefits *mutually* with or *at the expense* of *Jane Eyre* is a matter of opinion. In his chapter on *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, Cowart gives a parallel and to some extent comparative analysis of the two novels and their symbiotic relationship of dependency. He pays particular attention to some of the most prominent symbols and symbolic occurrences in the novel, and I would consider these a fruitful starting point for further analysis of the development of Antoinette’s character and identity because I would argue that these symbolic instances, namely fire, mirrors and dreams, are Rhys’ paramount devices in conveying the establishment and eventual destruction of Antoinette’s identity.

In my analysis of the novel I will furthermore draw upon certain theories and terms from postcolonial criticism. Jean Rhys herself was born on Dominica of the British West Indies to a Creole mother and a Welsh father in 1890. She lived in the Caribbean until the age of sixteen, when she moved to England to attend school. This background gives her a special insight into the two sides of colonialism, having resided in both the colonised and the colonising countries. I would argue that her dual cultural background and the development of deterioration of the British Empire that Rhys witnessed during her lifetime could be claimed to give her a special competence to write about historical colonialism while at the same time applying postcolonial criticism. In my use of

postcolonial theory in this thesis, the main theorists are two of the most famous scholars within the field of postcolonial studies, namely Edward Said and Homi Bhabha.

## **2.2 Race, Class and Nationality – Questions of Identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea***

At the centre of *Wide Sargasso Sea* we find the Cosway family, consisting of the mother, Annette, and the two children Antoinette and Pierre. At a young age Antoinette experiences at least two important and dramatic changes in her family situation. Both can be claimed to exert influence over her identity, both as self-perceived and as observed from the outside. First we have the widowed mother's remarriage to the English Mr Mason. Due to patriarchal traditions, the family now goes from being called Cosway to being called Mason. Together with a new name also comes a new lifestyle. In an attempt to 'whiten' and anglicise his new family, Mr Mason brings with him traditions from England: 'We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings. I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking' (17). This instance brings to mind Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of mimicry, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. I would argue that the coloniser, in the form of Mr Mason, seeks to assert his power over his newly acquired family by making them adapt to his cultural customs and traditions. Admittedly, one might refer to this by the simpler term assimilation, however, since the homogenisation is willed from both parts, Bhabha's term is better suited. Antoinette finds pleasure in being 'like an English girl', and is thus complicit in the mimicry, but she is also a Creole by birth and thus finds herself missing the traditional local cuisine that the drab English food has replaced. This ambivalence of Antoinette's is what makes her, in the words of Bhabha, 'almost the same, but not quite' (126). Silvia Cappello remarks that the Englishness imposed on Antoinette as a child is nothing but a role and 'never a reality' (50). I argue that this imposed new identity as 'an English girl' can be seen as the first step towards the complete disintegration of Antoinette's identity at the end of the novel, exacerbated greatly by the second instance of imposed identity in the novel, namely Rochester's supplanting Antoinette's name and identity by renaming her Bertha. This will be discussed in detail below.

Antoinette remarks in passing upon her new family name when staying in the convent: 'We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple.'

Underneath, I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, néé Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839' (29). Although this acquisition of a new surname seems to be unproblematic and trivial, it constitutes one of many instances that lead to the fragmentation of Antoinette's identity. The subject of multiple names and/or identities will be given more attention later. Also significant is the foreshadowing that can be found in the way Antoinette writes her name in *fire* red, as though fire is something she identifies with and associates with herself. The choice of colour is significant as well, and as Veronica Marie Gregg points out, these colours are the very same that will repulse and overwhelm her future husband when he arrives in the West Indies: 'Everything is too much... Too much blue, too much purple, too much green' (42). His repugnance for the very colours Antoinette uses to 'emblemize herself, to represent her identity' (Gregg 86), foreshadows their fundamentally incompatible relationship.

Another pivotal moment in Antoinette's life comes when her home Coulibri is attacked and torched by an angry mob of local black people. At this point in the story Antoinette is beginning to truly understand the chasm that exists between white and black, *us* and *them*. A scene which illustrates this very clearly is the following, depicting a confrontation between Antoinette and her black friend Tia during the riot:

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. (24)

At the centre of this scene lies the fundamental racial conflict around which the novel revolves. Antoinette's existence in post-abolition Jamaica is greatly affected by the new racial and social hierarchy that arises in the wake of the disestablishment of the slavery on the plantations. Now being able to assert themselves in opposition to the former white slave owners of Jamaica, the black population insert themselves in the social hierarchy above the overthrown Creoles like Antoinette, but beside or below 'real' white people, that is, newcomers from Europe, especially Britain, whose funds are unaffected by the

new social order and whose hands are seemingly clean from the traces of slavery. This division is established in the very first sentence of the novel: 'They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks' (5). Antoinette thus finds herself in a liminal position between fixed social arrangements, shunned and excluded from both. On the hierarchical social ladder, she is floating in the limbo that exists between one rung to the next. Graham Huggan argues that from a postcolonial perspective, Antoinette's ambiguous status as a Creole can be seen to represent a destabilisation of the sets of binaries upon which colonial thinking is contingent (655). I would further argue that the ambivalence and ambiguity that permeates the novel is a result of this destabilisation of colonialist binaries like black/white, insider/outsider, us (English)/them (foreign) et cetera. The colonist, represented by Rochester, expects to find in Antoinette a cultural equal, but is bewildered when she instead turns out to exhibit elements from both her ancestral European culture and the West Indian culture in which she has grown up. This early break with his expectations precipitates the insecurity and suspicion that will eventually lead to his alienating and incarcerating his wife. In the following passage Antoinette describes, in conversation with her husband, the anxieties her intermediate position evokes: 'It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all' (64). The issue of 'white cockroaches' will be elaborated on below. From the passage above, it is obvious to see that Antoinette is struggling with the duality of her cultural background and the incompatibility of these respective cultures. While she feels drawn between the local culture of the West Indies into which she is born, and the imperialist European/English culture from which she is descended, it is precisely her claim to both of them that excludes her from either. Gayatri Spivak is one of the most central critics in the field of postcolonial criticism. In her influential article 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', which deals with Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, she writes the following: 'Antoinette, as a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native' (250). Antoinette's awareness of her family's in-between position might be traced in her wish to 'live with Tia and ... be like her', the

realisation of which would place her within a group, i.e. the black Jamaicans, whose social position is firmly established and confidently asserted.

However, even before the attack on Coulibri, Antoinette's friendship with Tia is constantly strained by their difference in race. The jibes and quarrels are more often directed at Antoinette than the other way around, something which serves to illustrate the reversal of their social positions following the abolition, as mentioned above. The following passage, when Tia and Antoinette are quarrelling over a bet and Tia hints at Antoinette's poverty, is particularly illustrative of this:

That's not what she hear, she said. She hear we all poor like beggar. We ate salt fish – no money for fresh fish. The old house so leaky you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger. (10)

In this rendering of Antoinette's family, one might infer that Tia considers them to be below herself because their poverty prevents them from being considered 'real white people', even though Tia herself is even poorer. This is interesting to note because it suggests an internalised notion of race and status which implies that white people are *supposed* to be rich, while black people are *supposed* to be poor, as though adhering to some natural order of things. When the seemingly racially white Cosway family breaks with this expected pattern, their status is, in the eyes of the black Jamaicans, reduced to the lowest position possible – to being 'white cockroaches'. Fiona R. Barnes argues that the black Jamaicans' ill treatment of the white creoles is a kind of vengeance for centuries of oppression (154). In relation to Antoinette's fragmented identity, Valerie P. Roper writes that '[Antoinette] is forced to realize that money was at the root of her problem of identity with each class. She sees that she was bound to one class by colour and to the other by culture but was isolated from one and rejected by the other because of poverty' (24). This status as in-between outcast makes the foundation for numerous taunts that Antoinette hears repeatedly while growing up in Jamaica: 'One day a little girl followed me singing, "Go away white cockroach, go away." I walked fast, but she walked faster. "White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away"' (9). One might argue that this kind of repeated abuse may to some extent serve to

indoctrinate in Antoinette her marginalised and liminal pariah status, which in turn contributes to the shaping and eventual disintegration of her identity.

The subject of cockroaches reappears once more in the novel, but at a much later stage. At this point Antoinette is married to the man one must for the sake of simplicity assume to be Edward Rochester and is living with him at her family estate Granbois. She has recently acquired from Christophine, a Martiniquan servant who came with Antoinette's mother Annette to Jamaica upon her marriage and who has served as nurse and substitute mother for Antoinette, an aphrodisiac *obeah* substance. Obeah is a kind of voodoo or witchcraft native to the Caribbean. Rochester has seemingly without preamble or explanation started calling Antoinette by the name Bertha. 'As I stepped into her room I noticed the white powder strewn on the floor that was the first thing I asked her – about the powder. I asked what it was. She said it was to keep cockroaches away. "Haven't you noticed that there are no cockroaches in this house and no centipedes? If you knew how horrible these things can be" ' (87). Considering this instance in relation to Antoinette's earlier experiences with being called a 'white cockroach', I would like to argue that this too is yet another step towards the dissolution of Antoinette's individual identity. It might be claimed that Antoinette senses that her Creole self is unsatisfactory and insufficient, indeed even threatening, to her husband. In order to make him love her, she therefore resorts to magical measures. By the means of Christophine's powder of unknown origin, Antoinette seeks to change not only Rochester's impression of her, but also to change herself. I would argue that the cockroach she claims to ward off is in truth herself and her Creole identity. If she succeeds in this act of self-destruction, by denying her Creole identity and acquiescing to her husband's insistent renaming (' "Not Bertha tonight," she said. "Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha." "As you wish," she said' (87)), Rochester might after all love her.

Rochester, on the other hand, has already made his first and most significant move by overbearingly renaming his wife, thereby replacing her French-sounding name with one that is of Germanic origin and which is unmistakably English: ' "Don't laugh like that, Bertha." "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?" "It is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" ' (86). Spivak writes on this that '[i]n the figure of Antoinette, whom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism' (250). Antoinette articulates Rochester's

power over her by comparing his redefinition of her identity to an act of obeah: 'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too' (94). Deborah Kimmey writes that '[i]n most linguistic traditions, naming is an exercise of appropriation' (117), and it is the prerogative of the powerful centre to 'impose meaning on (and construct meaning for) those at the borders of the discursive community' (117). Rochester's position of power thus enables him to appropriate Antoinette's identity and name by imposing upon her a new name. One might rightly point out that upon his marriage to Antoinette, Rochester has already obtained the right to supplant Antoinette's surname with his own, in accordance with English law. At this point in the story, Rochester's doubts and suspicions as to Antoinette's background have developed, spurred on by the letter from her cousin Daniel. He begins to realise that he does not at all know the woman he has married, and in his bewilderment and suspicion he finds it easy to pay heed to the rumours and insinuations presented to him. In the beginning, his mistrust has mainly to do with racial concerns. He fears that Antoinette's ancestry may not be as European and pure as he would wish. One of the first descriptions of Antoinette after he begins his narration reveals this anxiety: 'She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either' (40). This particular phrase brings to mind the previously mentioned theories of postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. In his definition of mimicry, he argues that the coloniser desires '*a subject of a difference that is almost same, but not quite*' (126 emphasis in original). This 'almost same, but not quite' seems to apply well to Rochester's assessment of his wife – she is at the same time both same and other, familiar and different. Antoinette might thus, despite her formerly superior status as planter, be considered to be the colonised.

On a later occasion Rochester observes his wife's features and is reminded of the local servant girl Amélie whom he later sleeps with, upon which he remarks the following: 'She raised her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth turned down in a questioning mocking way. For a moment she looked very much like Amélie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place' (81). This betrays his underlying suspicion towards his wife's racial ancestry, as well as his fear of any possible miscegenation. Rochester displays, however, that his moral principles are inconsistent and fickle by sleeping with Amélie, despite his disdain for

miscegenation. Moreover, it is interesting to note that when he afterwards observes her, he is struck by the same racial anxiety that he feels towards his wife; 'her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought' (89), even though Amélie's racial status has been clearly established by Rochester himself as 'half-caste' (39).

One might thus argue that Rochester's renaming of his wife is an attempt to keep these suspicions and doubts under control by reinventing Antoinette as Bertha. He is thus able to separate and suppress Antoinette's Creole identity and all the dangers that follow with it by imposing upon her the new constructed identity of the proper, English Bertha. Conversely, one might also argue that the act of renaming Antoinette is Rochester's way of dealing with the alienation he feels both in his marriage and in his relationship with his wife, as well as in the Caribbean culture and nature. Naming Antoinette Bertha is an attempt to make her more familiar, more English. In this way, he is ultimately also able to erase or suppress any guilt he may feel towards *Antoinette*, whom he leaves behind in the West Indies, when he brings his reinvented wife *Bertha* to England. Furthermore, one might also argue that Rochester creates a new identity for his wife because he realises that he does not truly know her. *Antoinette* is the sweet and timid Creole girl he thought he knew when he married her. *Bertha* is, or will become, the mad, wild and raving woman in the attic of Thornfield whom Rochester denies any real or legitimate connection to, as can be seen in his trying to marry again in *Jane Eyre*. In Part III of the novel, Antoinette articulates the important connection that exists between one's name and one's identity and the way Rochester's denial of her own name has influenced her identity: 'Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass' (117). By having to adopt a new name forcibly placed upon her, Antoinette is also divested of integral elements of her identity. Also significant in this passage is the mention of the looking-glass as preserver of identity. This will be further elaborated in the section on mirror symbolism below.

## 2.3 Narrative Technique

Although it is no secret that *Wide Sargasso Sea* builds upon the foundations and characters of *Jane Eyre*, a novel that in a way is both its predecessor and successor, Rhys makes sure to maintain a measure of distance between her own work and Brontë's, never

relying too heavily upon the canonical truth that *Jane Eyre* constitutes. This might be seen in the way she takes certain liberties as regards situating her plot in relation to historical events. By moving Rochester's marriage to Antoinette forward in time by approximately twenty years, if we assume, as Sue Thomas does in her essay, that the marriage of Jane and Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre* takes place in 1834 (Thomas 59), Rhys 'sacrifices a point of congruence with the host text to get the dating she wants' (Coward 59), and is thus able to make use of the consequences of the Emancipation Act of 1833 in her own narration. Another important issue in relation to loyalty to the host text is the fact that although it is implied, and any reader remotely familiar with *Jane Eyre* will draw the conclusion that the male protagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is indeed the Edward Rochester of *Jane Eyre*, Rhys never refers to him by this name, or indeed any name at all. Considering the lack of respect 'that man' (*WSS* 121) demonstrates with regards to names, one might wonder whether his namelessness is an act of revenge on the part of Rhys, for having heartlessly supplanted Antoinette's name and identity with Bertha (Coward 51). I would argue further that Rhys' inaccuracies with regards to the canonical text and historical events are actually carefully conducted and used as a device in the destabilisation of colonial truths and principles. By changing the timeline, Rhys disregards the definitive truth that the host text upholds and in doing so, she is simultaneously creating a separate space for her postcolonial interpretation of *Jane Eyre*. Once again we are reminded of Bhabha's definition of mimicry: something that is almost the same, but not quite. *Wide Sargasso Sea* can thus be seen as a subversive act of mimicry, building on the same principles and premises, but at the same time bringing to light the problematic elements in the host text that have for generations been overlooked in the shadow of the literary canon. This slightly askew rendering enables Rhys to evoke a sense of unease in the reader when he or she, upon reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, recognises the imperialist notions they had ignored in *Jane Eyre* and perhaps in themselves as well. In her essay 'Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: Metatextuality and the Politics of Reading in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*' Deborah A. Kimmey convincingly argues for the existence of a fascinating link between the reader and the unnamed man, presumed to be Rochester. Since *Jane Eyre* is such an important work in the canon of English literature, most readers will have read this work before coming to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and if they have not, they will at least be somewhat familiar with the story, be it through any of the numerous film and television adaptations or some other

source that references this classic novel. This kind of reverse reading, in the words of Kimmey, changes the dynamics of the reading process, because the outcome of the events is already known. Kimmey argues that this makes the reader complicit in Rochester's imperial act of renaming Antoinette, because 'the unnamed husband's renaming *only enacts what the reader has already thought*' (123 emphasis in original). Having read *Jane Eyre* and being aware of its connection to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 'the reader (reading in reverse) has already collapsed the white Creole woman into "Antoinette/Bertha"' (123), in the same way that Rochester does. Kimmey takes her argument further by making a connection between the unnamed husband in the text and the unnamed reader: 'Indeed, within the political economy of the text, only the reader is *always* present yet *always* unnamed. As the unnamed husband has final authority in relegating Antoinette to the attic, so the reader has final authority in how the text will be read and appropriated within the literary canon' (123). This ties into the dependency a guest text like *Wide Sargasso Sea* will always have to its host text. Indeed, although Rhys provides an alternative story of Mr Rochester's first wife, she steers it towards a conclusion that for the most part coincides with Bertha Mason's death in the host text *Jane Eyre*. A passage which calls for particular attention with relation to the issue of symbiosis can be found in the final scenes of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and goes as follows: 'Then I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it before somewhere, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it. As I walk along the passages I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard... This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England' (117-18). Gayatri Spivak remarks on this cleverly constructed passage that this might be read as a metatextual commentary on the symbiotic relationship of the two texts:

We can read this as her having been brought into the England of Brontë's novel: 'This cardboard house'—a book between cardboard covers—'where I walk at night in not England' (*WSS*, p. 148) In this fictive England, she must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that *Jane Eyre* can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. (250-1)

Kimmeley also remarks upon this that the brown, red and yellow colours mentioned in this passage ‘evoke the image of half-calf spines lining the shelves of a library’ (127). By phrasing this passage in this manner, I would argue that Rhys not only opens up for metatextual commentary on the symbiosis that exists between her work and its source of inspiration (i.e. Antoinette is trapped literally within the confines of the cardboard covers of a book, namely *Jane Eyre*), but she also draws attention to the problematic nature of the kind of monopoly of truth that the literary canon upholds. The word ‘passages’ can be interpreted to mean the actual, though fictional, dark hallways of Thornfield, but it might also be interpreted in a *literary* sense to mean the passages of text that exists within every single copy of *Jane Eyre* that was ever printed. I would like to argue that while walking through these passages (of text), Antoinette wishes she could look behind and go beyond the cardboard covers confining her to the house, to the pre-scribed text, to her predestined fate, and to the representation of herself as a deranged and dehumanised dangerous creature.

There are several instances of manipulation of the truth or reality in the text. One is found in the following passage, when Antoinette remarks upon the name of the village Massacre: ‘ “And who was massacred here? Slaves?” “Oh no.” She sounded shocked. “Not slaves. Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now” ’ (39). Despite the violent past of the West Indies, Antoinette, and by extension the population in general, are unwilling to acknowledge the recency of these events. One might describe this as a kind of conscious collective suppression, or a collective amnesia. Another instance of selective memory is found in Rochester’s account of his night under the influence of the obeah powder. Because this is told in the first person, one might also regard this as an instance of explicit manipulation of the narrative: ‘I remember saying in a voice that was not like my own that it was too light. I remember putting out the candles on the table near the bed and that is all I remember. All I will remember of that night’ (87). The last sentence of this passage implies a conscious choice of remembrance, or non-remembrance, and is in relation to the first person narrative an explicit admission of unreliability.

Another place in the text that points to the issue of reliability comes when Rochester confronts Antoinette with the contents of Daniel’s letter. Antoinette rejects the truth of his claims: ‘ “He tells lies about us and he is sure that you will believe him and not listen to the other side.” “Is there another side?” I said. “There is always the other

side, always” ’ (82). I would argue that Antoinette’s statement that ‘there is always the other side’ could in the light of the circumstances of the novel’s creation be seen to be emblematic of the novel as a whole, and as a kind of explicit justification of its existence.

In relation to the issue of reliability, I find it especially useful to look at the different narrators that participate in the telling of the events in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. First there are the main ones, represented by Antoinette and Rochester. Then there are two secondary ones, namely Antoinette’s cousin Daniel, whose narration is epistolary, and finally the woman hired to take care of Antoinette at Thornfield, Grace Poole. In a story that is wrought with secrets, suspicion and untold truths, such a fragmentation of the narration has a striking effect. Even though the story has four different narrators, their narratives are rarely overlapping, which makes it mainly a narrative of the kind that has been termed *singulative frequency*. In a narrative of singulative frequency, an event that occurred once is told once, as opposed to *repetitive*, in which an event which occurred once is told n times, or *iterative*, in which an event which occurred n times is told only once. (Rimmon-Kenan 59-60). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, each event in the story is only told once, by only one narrator. This is important for the reliability of the narration of the events related in the story because none of the main narrators are given the chance to refute or give nuance to what the others are telling, if or when their perception of truth and reality differs. Even though there is ‘always the other side’, the reader is never given more than one version of each part of the story. However, on multiple occasions in the novel the gossip of servants plays a part in diversifying the narrative. Events from Antoinette’s childhood related by Antoinette herself in Part I are repeated not only by Antoinette in her account of her past in Rochester’s part of the narration, but also by Daniel and Amélie. Due to the socially inferior positions of the two latter ones, as well as the fact that their perspectives occur within the narratives of the other characters, one might lend them less credibility than the main narrators. Significantly, the only time any overlapping of the main ‘authoritative’ narratives occurs is when it corresponds to the narrative in *Jane Eyre*. As though emphasising the main purpose of this prequel narrative, this makes it possible to cast doubt on the reliability and objectivity of the narrative in *Jane Eyre*.

One critic who has gone into depth regarding the different narrators of the story and the way in which Rhys moves from one narrator to the next without any explicit indication of who is currently speaking, is Teresa Winterhalter. In her essay ‘Narrative

Technique and the Rage for Order in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she pays particular attention to the unmarked narrative shift in Part II of the novel, which seemingly moves the act of narrating from Rochester to Antoinette for a few pages. Winterhalter contends that although Antoinette apparently interrupts Rochester's narrative in Part II, there is significant evidence to suggest that this part of the narrative is in fact not Antoinette speaking, but is instead an expression of Rochester's 'mounting self doubts' and his need to control not only his own narrative, but also Antoinette's (224). In support of her argument, Winterhalter contends that the voice of Antoinette that cuts into Rochester's narrative in Part II is so different to her voice in Parts I and III that they cannot come from the same source. Winterhalter argues that 'Antoinette's voice does not bear the cool, declarative tone' in these interruptive passages, but is rather 'desperate, almost hyperbolically revealing Rochester's own, projected longing' (224). Thus, according to these claims, Rochester appropriates the voice of Antoinette in his own narrative in an attempt to control her. In connection to the issue of (narrative) control, Winterhalter argues:

[T]he extremes to which Antoinette goes to fulfil her desire for Rochester reveal Rochester's encounter with himself and his desire to possess all that Antoinette represents. 'Her narrative' in the middle of his narration reveals the process by which he attempts to do this. Through the mask of Antoinette, Rhys allows us to hear just how uncertain Rochester is about his position as the man in control. (225)

Thus, by appropriating Antoinette's voice and presenting her through an imitation of her own voice as desperate and unstable, he asserts himself (to himself) as the steady and controlling power. This is significant in relation to the matter of identity that is prevalent in this novel, not only because Rochester's appropriation deprives Antoinette of her own voice, but she also loses control over her own actions, that is, of the reports of her own actions. As Winterhalter points out, in this part of the narrative, Antoinette goes to Christophine to ask her for advice on her unravelling marriage. Winterhalter argues that '[i]f this section of the novel is read as Rochester's imagination of how Antoinette tries to control her own destiny, then this context places him as the young, male hero in the fantasy of his own life' (224). Thus, by assuming Antoinette's voice and possibly imagining, or rather forging, what her actions may be, he is, in an extremely vain and

self-centred manner, able to justify his own unfair treatment of her: 'He re-creates her, more than anything else, as willing to risk extremes to secure his love' (Winterhalter 225).

I find Winterhalter's take on the issue of narrative reliability to be exceedingly interesting and important not only in the way that it opens the narrative up for a whole new range of interpretative possibilities, but also in the way that it can be seen in connection to the aspects of postcolonial theory I have previously mentioned. I would argue that by taking Winterhalter's stance on this section of Part II of the novel, one might also trace here Bhabha's mimicry and Said's orientalism. Considering the issue of mimicry first, I would argue that Rochester's unmarked appropriation of Antoinette's voice is clearly an act of mimicry. However, because his performance as Antoinette is slightly off-key – 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 126) – a discerning reader and critic like Winterhalter is able to recognise the deception and expose it. Furthermore, it represents an instance of orientalism in the way that Rochester projects onto Antoinette a voice and a behaviour which disparagingly exoticises her. Significantly, at the point where Antoinette seemingly interrupts Rochester's narrative, he is reading about zombies in a chapter about Obeah: 'A zombi [sic] is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead' (67). This ambiguity of the living and the dead signals to the reader that what follows might not be what it appears. I would argue that Antoinette can be said to be a kind of zombie because in the following pages, she appears to be the narrator and the active agent in the act of narrating, while in reality she is, by Rochester's appropriation of her voice, deprived of agency in the representation of herself and her narrative, almost like one who is dead. It is remarkable, then, that the next time we hear from Antoinette, she concludes her part of the narration by realising the manner in which she is to achieve her own destruction.

## **2.4 Motifs and Symbolism**

In addition to applying such untraditional twists to the narrative technique, Rhys also makes extensive use of motifs, symbolism and imagery in her novel. As well as such heavily biblical symbols as a cock crowing (41, 74, 105) to illustrate betrayal, and the mention of Antoinette's dowry of thirty thousand pounds (42) being resonant with the thirty silver pieces Judas was paid to betray Jesus, there are three recurring motifs and

symbols that I wish to pay particular attention to. These are fire, mirrors, and finally dreams and premonitions. In relation to the issue of identity, I find these recurring elements to be especially significant, in the way that they are all connected to the creation and perception of identity in different ways. As we have seen, Antoinette identifies with the element of fire, and a mirror is used as a reflector of one's own gaze, consequently as a representation and preservation of one's own sense of selfhood. Finally, dreams might be seen to represent the subconscious knowledge about the self and one's own identity. Furthermore, what I find particularly interesting is that these recurring motifs often occur not as separate occasions, but interwoven in each other – *fire* is for instance *mirrored* in the two burnings of Coulibri and Thornfield, and it also figures in Antoinette's *dream*.

### 2.4.1 Fire

A recurring motif in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is fire. Its first occurrence in the text comes when the mob of locals set fire to the Cosway estate Coulibri. During these dramatic scenes fairly early in the novel, we are given a very acute and precise foreshadowing of Antoinette's fate, represented by the death of the pet parrot Coco. First he is described in the following manner: 'Our parrot was called Coco, a green parrot. He didn't talk very well, he could say *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and answer himself *Ché Coco, Ché Coco*. After Mr Mason clipped his wings he grew very bad tempered, and though he would sit quietly on my mother's shoulder, he darted at everyone who came near her and pecked at their feet' (22). This description of a wing clipped domesticated creature of nature resonates with Antoinette's story. One might liken Mr Mason's clipping of Coco's wings to Rochester's attempts at taming and anglicising Antoinette, thus taking her out of her natural habitat and at the expense of her individual freedom, making her an object for his own amusement. Moreover, the phrases Coco repeats are a mix of French and local patois, something which echoes the two cultures Antoinette at the same time belongs to and is excluded from. The bad temper Coco develops following his violent domestication is mirrored in the supposed madness which is ascribed to Antoinette when she is removed to stifling conditions in foreign surroundings in the attic of Thornfield. Further on in the riot scenes there is a description of Coco's dramatic death in the fire: 'I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing to Coco on the *glacis* railings with his feathers alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell

screeching. He was all on fire' (22-3). Bearing in mind Bertha's death in *Jane Eyre*, as well as Antoinette's ominous dreams towards the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is clearly a connection here. Indeed, the parallel is made explicit when she dreams of hearing Coco: 'I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones' (123). Having had her wings clipped, or more specifically her spirit crushed, Antoinette/Bertha is ultimately unable to fly from the parapet of Thornfield. In one of the final scenes of the novel, in a half-conscious dream, Antoinette once again identifies with fire and the colour red, like she does when embroidering her name in the convent as a child: 'Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it' (123). Another scene that foreshadows Antoinette's death by fire is represented by the insects flying into the flames on the candlelit table: 'A great many moths and beetles found their way into the room, flew into the candles and fell dead on the tablecloth. Amélie swept them up with a crumb brush. Uselessly. More moths and beetles came... A large moth, so large I thought it was a bird, blundered into one of the candles, put it out and fell to the floor' (49-50). Antoinette shows great interest in these creatures that are boldly throwing themselves into the flames with fatal determination, foreshadowing the way in which she at the end of the novel finally realises what it is she has to do and picks up a lit candle before sneaking out from her imprisoning chamber.

#### **2.4.2 Mirrors**

The subject of mirrors, or *looking-glasses*, is also a prevalent motif in the story. According to J. E. Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols*, mirrors are commonly understood to symbolise self-contemplation and consciousness, as well as representing imagination and duality. The conspicuous presence of mirrors and instances of mirroring in the text can also be seen in relation to both Cowart's concept of literary symbiosis, as well as to Bhabha's notion of mimicry. A guest text that exists in a symbiotically dependent relationship to a previous text will always to some extent function as a mirror to this earlier work. In order to tie the new text to an older one, it is necessary to make a sufficient number of connections so as to be able to make use of the element of symbiosis fully. In this way, the guest text functions as a kind of mirror. Furthermore, one might

also apply the issue of mirrors to the concept of mimicry. An act of mimicry is a reflection of and possibly a subversion of actions and traits of a suppressor. This act of subversively reflecting something or someone may be seen as a kind of mirroring. As mentioned above, Antoinette looks at Tia during the riot and sees herself, '[I]ike in a looking-glass', which further emphasises Antoinette's twin-like sense of community with Tia that can be found in descriptions of their having 'eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river' (24). Mirrors are used in the text as a means of conveying Antoinette's gradual loss of her identity and her ultimate separation from the self.

Furthermore, the many similarities and repetitions between Antoinette and her mother Annette can also be seen as a kind of mirroring. Perhaps most obvious is the striking similarity of their names, *Annette* and *Antoinette*. The resemblance is so strong that it seems as if Antoinette is merely an extension or a continuation of Annette. Furthermore, as Veronica Marie Gregg rightly points out, the name *Tia* might also be used as a diminutive of Antoinette, a detail which further emphasises their mirrored qualities. On one occasion in the text, Antoinette expresses a desire to be united or even merged with her mother, a wish she later repeats with relation to her friend Tia: 'Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her sleep on the blue sofa – once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe' (8). Moreover, there is also an uncanny similarity between the way Antoinette describes her mother: 'A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep – it might have been cut with a knife' (7) and the way Rochester later describes his wife: 'The cold light was on her and I looked at the sad droop of her lips, the frown between her thick eyebrows, deep as if it had been cut with a knife' (88). Furthermore, David Cowart writes on the topic of mirrors and mirroring in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that Antoinette's habit of holding one wrist with the other hand, a habit Rochester considers to be 'annoying', is mentioned twice in the text, but reversed, as if reflected in a mirror (Cowart 60). On the first of these occasions, which occurs in Part II after Rochester has met with Daniel and is demanding of Antoinette that she tell the truth about her mother and her past, she holds her left wrist in her right hand. The second mention of this habit occurs in Part III and is embedded in the third repetition of her recurring dream and in this instance, the hand holding and the wrist being held are reversed: 'I held my right wrist in my left hand and waited' (122). In addition to being yet another instance of mirroring in the text, I would also like to point out that Antoinette's habit of holding onto her wrists could symbolise the manacles worn

by slaves to keep them from running away, and may by extension be seen as an illustration of the customary subjugation and the unequal power relations that marriage entails for Antoinette in particular and for women in the nineteenth century in general. Antoinette is, as it were, ‘manacled’ to her marriage and her husband, without any means of escape.

The instances of mirrors and mirroring mentioned up until now have been figurative or symbolic. However, actual mirrors, or as they are referred to in the text, *looking-glasses*, are also recurring. In the following passage, Antoinette relates how she as a child woke to find two rats sitting on the windowsill in her room: ‘“I stared at them and they did not move. I could see myself in the looking-glass the other side of the room, in my white chemise with a frill round the neck, staring at those rats and the rats quite still, staring at me” ’ (50). Antoinette is here able to recognise herself in a mirror, yet there is still something about this passage that suggests a feeling of fragmentation or feeling separated from one’s self. Interesting about this passage is that Antoinette is not frightened at the sight of the rats, but when she later wakes to find them gone, she is highly afraid. Commenting on this episode with the rats, Cowart remarks that ‘[i]t reminds us that what can be seen—rats on a window sill—is far less terrifying than what cannot be seen: rats that are out of sight, ill will nursed in the secret bosom, the evil at the heart of things’ (61). What Cowart does not mention, however, is that this can also be seen in relation to Rochester’s feeling of unease during his sojourn in the West Indies: ‘It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I’d find myself thinking, “What I see is nothing – I want what is *hides* – that is not nothing” ’ (54). Here, Rochester demonstrates the same fear of the unknown and the unseen that Antoinette displayed in the episode with the rats. Even though what he does see is greatly unsettling for him, he is even more anxious about what might lurk beneath the surface, hidden from sight. Rochester’s obsession with uncovering what he perceives as ‘the big secret’ might in turn be seen to contribute to his giving credence to the rumours he is told about his wife. In doing so, he achieves closure to his anxieties about being kept unaware of ‘the secret’ and finds a convenient target for his unwarranted blame. To refer to the saying, ‘better the devil you know’ et cetera, Rochester replaces his fear of ‘the devil you don’t’, i.e. ‘the secret’, by limning Antoinette as ‘the devil you know’. This can also be seen in relation to Winterhalter’s claim that Rochester appropriates Antoinette’s voice in order to demonise her to such an

extent as to legitimise his own unjust and irrational behaviour. In the final stages of the novel, the disintegration of Antoinette's identity has developed to the point where she can no longer recognise herself, in the mirror nor in reality. The plot of *Wide Sargasso Sea* has now reached the point where it overlaps with that of *Jane Eyre*, and a reader familiar with the latter will now recognise the names, e.g. Richard Mason, Grace Poole et cetera, as well as the setting in the upper floors of a large country manor. In the attic of Thornfield Hall, although unnamed in the text, Antoinette is denied access to a mirror, and by extension denied access to selfhood and individual identity:

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us – hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?' (117)

This is the second time Antoinette is denied access to her own reflection, the first time being during her time at the convent school: 'We have no looking-glass in the dormitory, once I saw the new young nun from Ireland looking at herself in a cask of water, smiling to see if her dimples were still there. When she noticed me, she blushed and I thought, now she will hate me forever' (30-1). This reveals that the absence of mirrors is part of the convent's doctrine, and the young Irish nun looking at and perhaps admiring her own reflection is viewed as a breach of the doctrine and a sin before God. Considering the mirror as an 'ancient symbol of the self and of self-knowledge', Cowart argues that 'Antoinette is denied a mirror at the convent school and at Thornfield because a patriarchal order, both religious and social, seeks to actively discourage self-knowledge among women, to stigmatize gazing into the mirror as vanity' (62). Antoinette has thus from an early age had the authority of her self-knowledge and her identity challenged. This is further exacerbated during her confinement at Thornfield as an adult. In the following passage, Antoinette is, in the third repetition of her recurring dream, secretly roaming the hallways at night during her captivity at Thornfield: 'Sometimes I looked to the right or to the left, but I never looked behind me for I did not want to see that ghost of a woman who they say haunts this place' (122). To the reader, it is obvious that the ghost is Antoinette herself, but she is unable to recognise herself in this description. Further on

in this scene, she walks past a mirror, but is still unable to recognise herself in the person she sees in the reflection: 'I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her' (123). Antoinette sees herself reflected in the mirror, but since her loss of identity is so great, she interprets what she sees not as herself, but as the ghost. However, the final sentence in the passage might be claimed to make her statement ambiguous – 'but I knew her'. On the one hand, this might be interpreted to mean that she identifies the reflected image as the ghost, whereas on the other hand, she might after all recognise herself both as the woman in the mirror and as the ghost of Thornfield. Spivak draws upon the myth of Narcissus by likening the mirror with the gilt frame to the pool of Narcissus: 'The gilt frame encloses a mirror: as Narcissus' pool reflects the selfed other, so this "pool" reflects the Othered self' (250). In other words, Antoinette's identifying experience is diametrically opposite to that of Narcissus. By looking in the mirror, she recognises herself, but as an Other, whereas Narcissus recognises the Other as himself. Thus, while Spivak calls Narcissus into play in her analysis, she does not utilise it fully on the perhaps most obvious parallel. The final instance of mirror-like imagery is found towards the end of Antoinette's roaming dream. In this segment of her dream, she is revisiting memories of her childhood home Coulibri and while standing at the edge of the parapet looking down towards the ground, she sees the pool in which she used to play and swim with her friend Tia: '[W]hen I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed' (123). Still keeping in mind the myth of Narcissus and the pool in which he sees his own face reflected, one might draw a parallel to the passage above. Considering especially Antoinette's early expressed wish to be or be united with Tia, one might interpret the presence of the pool in her dream to represent a kind of mirror. In the surface of the pool she sees reflected not herself, but rather her friend who functions as a kind of longed-for double or twin identity. When in her dream Antoinette jumps from the battlements of the house to meet her friend Tia, she is emblematising her desire for repossessing a whole and unfragmented identity by being united with someone with whom she identifies. The conflagration of Thornfield is in *Wide Sargasso Sea* only presented or explicitly predicted through Antoinette's dream, but a reader familiar with the work that it prefigures, namely *Jane Eyre*, will immediately recognise the events left untold after the final few sentences of the novel. Moreover, the fire at Thornfield also

finds its mirrored image in the burning of Coulibri. The torching of Coulibri occurs near the beginning of the story in Part I, whereas the actual burning of Thornfield occurs after the final paragraph of Part III. Not only does this repetition of devastating fires suggest at parallels and mirroring, but also their respective positions near the beginning and the end lend a cyclical characteristic to the story. Repeating patterns are also identified in Cowart's analysis. He argues that there is a repeated pattern that applies to the fates of Annette and Antoinette, beyond the similarity of their names and their misery at the hands of Englishmen (60). Antoinette's mother Annette is mad with grief over losing her handicapped son Pierre in the devastating fire at Coulibri and after she turns against him, her husband Mr Mason sends her away and 'hire[s] a coloured man and woman to look after her' (85). Through Antoinette's observations during a visit to her mother, we are made to understand that Annette is being abused and mistreated by her supposedly caregiving captors. In a similar way, Antoinette 'ends her story as a prisoner and madwoman with a male and female keeper, precisely as had her mother' (Cowart 60). Antoinette's male keeper is her husband Edward Rochester and the female keeper is the hired servant Grace Poole.

### **2.4.3 Dreams and Premonitions**

In harmony with the novel's tripartite structure, there is a three times recurring dream which occurs on three different stages of Antoinette's life. The first two are described in Part I, while the third makes up the larger portion of Part III. Form and content correspond to Antoinette's age and situation at the time of dreaming, and one might say that these dreams represent milestones in Antoinette's development from childhood to adolescence and finally maturity. On the first occasion the dream is very briefly described, then gradually as Antoinette grows up and the plot develops, the dream is elaborated and expanded upon, until in its final repetition, it predicts the calamitous destruction of Thornfield and Antoinette's final, fatal leap. Critics, such as David Cowart, Elizabeth R. Baer, Fiona R. Barnes and Deanna Madden, have given much attention to this recurring dream, and its possible interpretations. As can be seen towards the conclusion of the novel, Rhys 'allows oneiric vision to foreshadow her heroine's fate' (Cowart 53), and thus Antoinette's episodic dream turns out to be true. The dreams are significant not only in themselves, but also considering the events that precipitate them.

Elizabeth R. Baer argues that each of the recurrences of Antoinette's dream is 'triggered by an event that brings her closer to her imprisonment, and ultimate death, in Thornfield tower' (138). Taking this into consideration, one might look at the circumstances surrounding Antoinette's three dream visions. The first one occurs shortly after she has quarrelled with Tia and Antoinette has had her pariah position callously pointed out to her. Furthermore, her mother has at this time begun socialising with the newly arrived neighbours, and following these new acquaintances she is 'on the verge of involving herself with an Englishman as a refuge from poverty and isolation' (Barnes 164). Her mother's acquaintance and marriage with Mr Mason is the link that eventually, through her stepbrother Richard Mason, connects her to her future husband and that precipitates her miserable marriage. The dream is described as follows: 'I dreamed that I was walking in a forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying' (11). Contained within these few lines there is a strong sense of apprehension and dread, especially considering Antoinette's age at this time. The setting in a dark and dangerous forest is a recurring motif in traditional fairy tales, as pointed out by both Elizabeth R. Baer and Deanna Madden, and I would argue that one might easily imagine the child Antoinette as some kind of Little Red Riding Hood being lost in the forest while dreading the appearance of the Big Bad Wolf. While there is a danger of over-simplifying things, it is also easy to make the connection between the unknown hating presence out of sight with Antoinette's future husband. Taking into consideration Antoinette's awareness the following morning of something having irrevocably changed – 'I woke the next morning knowing that nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing' (12) – her dream seems even more ominous. This emphasises the notion that Antoinette's fate is predestined, and that from this point on, even long before they meet '[s]he and Rochester have begun their doomed and ineluctable journey toward each other' (Baer 138). However, this dream also holds the potential for other less obvious interpretations. Cowart argues that based on Freud's theories of dreams and their interpretations, one might look to the events of the day preceding the dream to find its source of inspiration. As mentioned above, Antoinette has her dream during the night following her argument with Tia, in which Tia challenges her to make a somersault under water, but refuses to accept Antoinette's attempt as successful and proceeds to take the money wagered. Cowart claims that this fight with Tia and its connection to being

submerged in water becomes 'a vague fatal dread in the dream, which expresses Antoinette's wish never to have been born' (53). The presence of 'someone who hated' her might thus be claimed to be Tia, but, as Cowart goes on to argue, it might also be claimed to be her neglectful mother. The footsteps of the unseen pursuer are therefore the mother's heartbeat as heard from inside the womb, and Antoinette's inability to move or escape is foetal; she is (as helpless as) a newborn baby (Cowart 53-4). I would argue that this ties in with the sense of inevitability that the dreams evoke and the circularity of the novel as a whole. Antoinette is subconsciously aware that her only chance, however impossible, of escaping her destiny, lies in never having been born. Deanna Madden, on the other hand, argues that the fear Antoinette feels in her nightmare and the setting in a forest reminiscent of fairy tales ties in with the female fear of rape. She claims that the dream represents Antoinette's acknowledgement of 'the threat to her body and her self by a hostile male force' (165). Bringing together the perspectives of Cowart and Madden, I would like to suggest that the events of the days preceding her dream, namely Annette beginning to associate with the new English neighbours, triggers in Antoinette, albeit subconsciously, an awareness and fear of her culturally determined dependency on men. Observing how her mother's only way out of destitution is to marry a rich husband, Antoinette is struck by the vulnerability and dependence that the patriarchal English society has allotted to her sex.

In order to console herself upon waking from her bad dream, Antoinette makes a mental inventory of the things that make her feel safe: 'I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers' (12). However, when she has her second dream at seventeen as a pupil at Mount Calvary Convent, several of these reassuring elements now feature as parts of her nightmarish dream. In this frequently cited passage, (Cowart 54, Madden 165, Baer 139), which I too will quote in full in order to better support my analysis, the tree of life of Coulibri is now an animate tree that she clings to, and the wall green with moss is now the walls of an enclosed garden:

Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear

but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet,' he says, and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but I know they are there and I think, 'It will be when I go up these steps. At the top.' I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. 'Here, here.' But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years. 'Here, in here,' a strange voice said, and the tree stopped swaying and jerking. (34)

This dream-passage is significantly longer and richer in detail as well as in symbolism. Looking again to the circumstances preceding the articulation of this dream, we find that Antoinette has just been visited in the convent by her stepfather, who tells her that he has invited friends from England to stay with them. Upon Antoinette's doubt that they will indeed come, Mr Mason reassures her that he is certain that at least one of them will, a statement which reveals that he has already arranged the marriage of Antoinette and Edward Rochester. Antoinette's second dream makes up the penultimate paragraph in Part I of the novel, and an ellipsis in the narrative brings us directly from the convent in the end of this first part to the honeymoon of Antoinette and Rochester in the beginning of Part II. Taking this into consideration, and this adolescent dream's intermediary position between childhood and maturity, one might easily extract evidence of sexual anxiety and/or awakening. Cowart points out that the setting, night and forest, are 'ancient symbols of error, perhaps specifically carnal error' (54). Her dress, too, holds great symbolic meaning in being white and beautiful, representing innocence and virtue, as well as suggesting a wedding, while at the same time being cumbersome and impractical attire for nocturnal trips in the forest, representing how the female role that patriarchy has forced upon her 'hampers Antoinette's growth into an independent and resourceful woman' (Madden 165). It also echoes the white muslin of her mother's dresses. Antoinette's concern about getting her dress soiled is symbolic of her fear of having her body and virtue despoiled. However, in accordance with the sense of determinism permeating the novel, Antoinette seems to acknowledge the inevitability of

her future, as suggested by her asserting that ‘this must happen’, and that she would refuse any help or rescue offered to her. Thus she ‘fatalistically accepts the besmirching of her dress’ (Coward 54) by letting it trail in the dirt, just like she accepts Rochester’s besmirching of her virtue. Moreover, Madden points out that from the first to the second dream the pursuit has been reversed. In the first dream, ‘someone’ is following her, whereas in this second dream, Antoinette is following a man, presumably Rochester, ‘like a dutiful wife’ (Madden 165), despite being ‘sick with fear’. I would argue that this reveals her sense of helplessness and lack of control over her own life and situation. Furthermore, it is important to note the trajectory towards domestication that the environments in Antoinette’s dreams reveal. Beginning in a forest in the first dream, moving from a forest to a walled garden in the second, until finally being contained within a house in the third and final dream. The symbolism of these spaces might be described as a movement from nature and wilderness in the forest, via nature subdued and controlled in the garden, and finally to culture and complete domestication in the house. Cirlot points out the connection between femininity and enclosed spaces in his section on *houses*: ‘Mystics have always traditionally considered the feminine aspect of the universe as a chest, a house or a wall, as well as an enclosed garden’ (153). Significantly, Coward mentions the walled garden’s association with woman, and the female body (54). This ties in with the traditional notion of the domestic female and the public male prevalent especially in Victorian Britain, which is the society that Antoinette is about to enter. This development of the dream environments also represents a movement towards increasingly closed spaces; from the open forest through the semi-confined walled garden, or as Spivak calls it the *hortus conclusus* (250), and ultimately to the prisonlike chamber within the nearly impenetrable stone walls of Thornfield Hall. Throughout her dream Antoinette is struck by a sense of foreboding, but she is as of yet ignorant of the nature of the impending danger. However, as she moves stumblingly to follow the man who hates her, seeing strange and unfamiliar trees and ascending a staircase at the top of which she knows something will happen, a reader familiar with the character of Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* will through Antoinette’s estrangement recognise the strange trees as the Northern European trees surrounding Thornfield and the staircase as the steps leading up to the attic in which she is kept captive. The unknown impending threat that Antoinette dreads might thus be assigned to her

vulnerable dependency as a woman in general, and her arguably inescapable disastrous marriage with Rochester in particular.

Moreover, parts of Antoinette's dream might also be claimed to expose her adolescent sexual anxieties. Cowart argues that according to Freud, 'the traversing of staircases...symbolizes sexual intercourse', and that Antoinette's repeated inquiry 'here?' reveals her obliviousness as to the nature of sex, and her pervading anxiety originates from her fear of the first intercourse (54). When she reaches the top of the stairs, her dress makes her stumble, i.e. she falls victim to sin, and the tree that she clings to for balance is decidedly phallic (Madden 165). The descriptions of the tree's swaying and jerking have unmistakable sexual connotations, and the culmination of this encounter when the tree stills its movements and 'a strange voice' confirms Antoinette's previous probing inquiries as to location by saying 'Here, in here', corroborates this interpretation. Although Madden and Cowart do not explicitly identify the tree as Rochester, it is arguably implied in the light of what awaits Antoinette. Elizabeth R. Baer, on the other hand, does identify the tree as Rochester's arboreal substitute, but she does not interpret the swaying and jerking as concerning the sexual act, but rather representing Rochester abducting Antoinette to her English marital prison by carrying her 'up the stairs to the third floor of Thornfield' (139). Either way, Antoinette's second dream anticipates and forewarns the misery and perils that inevitably await her in her marriage. It also exposes the sense of secrecy, sin, mystery and shame that has been associated with female sexuality. As Madden also points out, Antoinette's dream reveals what she fears her marriage will be like – entrapment, violation, devaluation and exploitation. Her marriage will ultimately lead to her own colonisation (Madden 165).

In her book *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* Teresa F. O'Connor argues that Antoinette conflates her vision of her dream with her memories of her mother and her mother's death. This is suggested by her beautiful white dress reminiscent of the dresses Annette used to wear, but more importantly by the similarities presented in the dream regarding what has befallen Annette and what is to come for Antoinette. Annette and Antoinette alike are 'driven mad and destroyed by their marriages to "strangers" from England' (186). Both of them also suffer exploitation by men, Annette 'by her caretaker, whose face is literally "black"' (O'Connor 186), while Antoinette is exploited by her husband, who could arguably be seen as her caretaker according to patriarchal traditions. The character prefiguring Rochester in Antoinette's dream looks at her with a face 'black

with hatred'. Looking at the scenes immediately following Antoinette's second repetition of her dream, we find that while drinking a cup of hot chocolate given to her by one of the nuns, Antoinette is reminded of her mother's funeral: 'While I am drinking it I remember that after my mother's funeral, very early in the morning, almost as early as this, we went home to drink chocolate and eat cakes... Now the thought of her is mixed up with my dream' (35). O'Connor argues that the sum of these parallels suggests that 'Antoinette has already begun a confounding of herself and her mother' (186). This is, as O'Connor points out, further demonstrated by Antoinette's madness in Part III of the novel, as well as by the third iteration of her dream.

In this third and final dream Antoinette sets fire to her prisonlike quarters, mirroring the torching of Coulibri and presaging the conflagration of Thornfield that lies beyond the end of the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but which is described in *Jane Eyre*. At this point of the narration the reader is able to recognise the prophetic nature of the previous dreams and might establish indubitably that the concealed 'someone who hated her' in the first dream is indeed her future husband. The foreign trees of the second dream are the trees surrounding Thornfield, and the staircase is a foretoken of the steps leading Antoinette up to her imprisoning chamber in the attic of Thornfield. This is also acknowledged by Antoinette herself, in the passage following: 'I know now that the flight of steps lead to this room where I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms' (122). The woman she watches is her caretaker Grace Poole. What is remarkable about this final dream, however, is the significant change in mood and ambience. While the two preceding dreams have been saturated with fear and anxiety, there is a distinguishable absence of both in this culmination of the dream sequence. In both of the first two dreams, difficulty of movement has been a source of stress and anxiety. In her first dream, Antoinette tries to move and escape the approaching threat, but is unable and remains immobile. In the second dream, it is her trailing dress that impedes her movements, making her stumble as she follows the menacing male figure up the stairs. In the third dream, however, Antoinette moves effortlessly and walks 'as though [she] were flying' (122), and despite being confined under lock and key, her freedom to move is now paradoxically greater than in any of the preceding dream visions. For the first time, she is moving of her own volition and desire, neither fleeing nor trailing any other person or being.

In addition to these prophetic dream visions, Antoinette also shows keen foresight, perhaps even prescience on several occasions while awake. The first of these instances occurs when she wants to cancel the wedding, and Rochester seeks her out in order to try to persuade her to marry him. This episode is narrated retrospectively by Rochester in Part II, after he and Antoinette have settled at Granbois. When Rochester asks her why she no longer wants to marry him, she replies: ‘I’m afraid of what might happen’ (48). This suggests that Antoinette has some kind of intuitive foreknowledge that her marriage will somehow be detrimental for her health and happiness. Nevertheless, Antoinette succumbs to Rochester’s persuasions and their marriage takes place. She is initially intoxicated with the felicity of being a new bride, but she is never quite able to free herself from the suspicion that her happiness is only transient, as can be seen in the following exchange: ‘ “Why did you make me want to live? Why did you do that to me?” “Because I wished it. Isn’t that enough?” “Yes, it is enough. But if one day you didn’t wish it. What should I do then? Suppose you took this happiness away when I wasn’t looking...” ’ (57). These anxieties will later prove to be warranted when her husband towards the conclusion of Part II decides in a fit of jealousy to relocate to England, bringing Antoinette with him to live as a ghost in the attic of Thornfield: ‘...she’ll have no lover, for I don’t want her and she’ll see no other’ (107). As Antoinette predicts, Rochester takes her happiness away by denying her his love and confining her to the attic of his house in England, a country that is strange and foreign to her, further heightening her sense of alienation.

One further detail that ties in with the issue of prescience is found in the following passage, in which Antoinette talks to Christophine about her future life in England: ‘... I know the house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago’ (70). What is particularly significant about this passage is the way that it not only foreshadows what will happen to Antoinette when she is at last confined in the third storey of Thornfield (both in *Jane Eyre* and in *Wide Sargasso Sea*), but it also emphasises the temporal chaos of a symbiotic novel, published more than a hundred years after its host text, but whose plot precedes that of the host, that is, as a prequel. Thus, when Antoinette says that ‘I have slept there many times before, long ago’, I would argue that it refers to the thousands of times *Jane Eyre* has been read in the interval between its publication in 1847 and the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. In all of these readings,

Antoinette, under the name of Bertha, has been cold and not belonging and has been sleeping in the red-draped bed. By implying that Antoinette is somehow aware of this, and by adhering to the prescribed narrative, Rhys emphasises the inevitable circularity that I contend permeates the novel.

Moreover, I find it significant to observe the stark contrast that comes to manifest itself between the fates of the two most important female characters in the novel, namely Antoinette and Christophine. Having begun her connection to Antoinette's family as a wedding gift from Antoinette's father to her mother, effectively being handed over as an object to possess, Christophine chooses to remain with the family even after the passing of the Emancipation Act, as a servant rather than a slave. In a private counsel between the two women after Antoinette has married Rochester and is feeling neglected and unhappy, Christophine reveals a fundamental difference between herself and Antoinette, and possibly between the amalgam that is Caribbean culture and the English culture Antoinette has now become part of: '[Antoinette:] "But I cannot go. He is my husband after all."' [Christophine] spat over her shoulder. "All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man"' (69). This reveals how highly Christophine treasures her independence, and when Rochester begins to threaten her autonomy, despite all the love she has for Antoinette, she 'walk[s] away without looking back' (104). It might thus be useful to observe how the trajectories of the lives of these two women seem to be diametrically opposite. Christophine begins her life in slavery and oppression, and when she is liberated she chooses to remain in servitude to the Cosway family, albeit never to a man or husband. When her independence is threatened by a representative of double oppression – as a man and as a coloniser, Christophine walks away independently. Antoinette, on the other hand, begins her life in liberty and affluence, until the social structures on which her prosperity is contingent are overthrown and she and her family become marginalised and displaced in society. The event which would seem to represent her rescue from this unhappy situation, namely her marriage to an Englishman, conversely turns out to be the beginning of her ultimate devastation and incarceration, echoing in many ways the slavery from which Christophine managed successfully to escape.

## 2.5 Chapter Conclusion

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys presents a story of a woman whose ultimately debilitating oppression leads to her tragic, yet possibly also subversive suicide. In this chapter I have shown how Rhys through the means of symbolism and narrative technique is able to convey in a subtle, yet strikingly powerful way, the obliteration of Antoinette's identity – both as an individual operating in the storyworld of the novel and as a character whose place is substituted by the character of Bertha towards the end of the novel and in the plot of its precursory 'sequel', *Jane Eyre*. The ambiguity that permeates the novel in terms of race, class, and nationality – in short in terms of identity – is emphasised by the increasingly ambiguous narrative voice that alternates without explicit indication between the two main characters Antoinette and Rochester, to the extent that the reader suspects, as Winterhalter suggests, that the narration is on one occasion deceitfully conducted through Rochester's appropriation of Antoinette's voice. The issue of identity stands as a central theme in these questions of narrative reliability, and is also what lies at the core of Rhys' recurring use of symbolism. As I have shown in this chapter, Antoinette's identity is to a great extent conveyed through the means of the three recurring motifs in the novel, namely fire, mirrors and dreams. Through these instances of symbolism, Rhys is able to at first establish Antoinette's sense of self and identity, before she uses the same motifs to illustrate the eventual disintegration of Antoinette Cosway. In light of the novel's intertextual origins, a pattern of repetitions and cyclicity becomes increasingly evident in the course of the novel. Because the novel moves towards the predestined conclusion prescribed by *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette's sense of predestined devastation gradually emerges before finally culminating in her resolve to commit the final and fatal predestined act by setting fire to Thornfield, thus conflating the plot of *Wide Sargasso Sea* with *Jane Eyre*.

# 3 *Jane Eyre*

## 3.1 Introduction

First published in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is undoubtedly one of the most canonical texts in English literature. Generally considered to be a *Bildungsroman*, *Jane Eyre* tells the story of the eponymous protagonist and her process of development from childhood to maturity. In relation to this aspect of the novel, I consider it especially important to explore the issue of identity and the ways in which Jane Eyre's experiences and circumstances contribute to the development and establishment of her individual identity. Just like the issue of identity is central in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I would argue that the closely linked notions of identity and individuality are also what lie at the heart of *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, I will in the following discuss some of the different aspects of identity, individuality and autonomy that are central to the development of Jane Eyre, both as a character, and the novel as a whole. While Jean Rhys' main device of conveying the importance of identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is achieved through the means of symbolism, I have chosen to explore the same issues in *Jane Eyre* in relation to what I would argue is fundamental to the structure and development of the novel, namely through the spaces and settings Jane occupies throughout the novel. However, because some of the most important instances of symbolism coincide in both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, I will discuss their significance in relation to the spaces and surroundings in which they occur. The progression of this novel's plot is closely linked to geographical location, and each of Jane's new situations represents development of both plot and character. Because of this strong correlation, I will explore the growth and development of Jane's character and identity in relation to the five different places where Jane lives in the course of the novel, that is, Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield Hall, Marsh End and finally Ferndean Manor. Common for these different places is that Jane's movement from one to the next is precipitated by a rebellion against patriarchal structures in general, and often against a male patriarchal figure in particular. I would thus like to argue that although Jane Eyre seems to represent a break with the conventions of patriarchal society, her movements towards liberation are still confined within the borders of patriarchal conventions. Considering the novel as a female *Bildungsroman* and in terms of fairy tale aesthetics, I will also study how the novel seems to be structured

around cyclical patterns of repetition in which it implicitly commends the perpetuation of the social structures that Jane seeks to defeat. In these explorations I will also examine how the issues of ambiguity and liminality in relation to identity and social position seem to be recurring elements in Jane's life and development. I will also explore some of the intertextual lines one might draw from this novel, especially with regards to how the novel alludes to and relies on fairy tale elements and formulas. By way of an introduction to these analyses, I will first discuss the significance of names in the novel and the important relationship that exists between names and identity, both in relation to an individual sense of selfhood, as well as to a sense of a shared common identity.

### **3.2 Titles, Names, Sobriquets – Questions of Identity in**

#### ***Jane Eyre***

The first issue to consider as concerns names and identity in connection to *Jane Eyre* is to be found in the shroud of anonymous ambiguity in which Charlotte Brontë enveloped her novel by publishing it under the pseudonym Currer Bell. The three writing Brontë sisters – Charlotte, Emily and Anne – assumed pen names retaining the initials of their true names, and published their works under the names of Currer Bell, Ellis Bell and Acton Bell, respectively. In the preface to the 1850 edition of her by then deceased sister Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte included a 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell', in which she explains their reasoning behind their pseudonyms:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. (qtd. in Flint 174)

Currer, Ellis and Acton are all quite uncommon names, and thus not unequivocally associated with either sex, thus allowing Charlotte, Emily and Anne to conceal their

identities without having to resort to outright deceit. Indeed, as Steven Earnshaw argues in his insightful essay ‘ “Give me my name”: Naming and Identity In and Around *Jane Eyre*’, ‘ “Currer” is a name that can be female or male’ (177). When exploring the paratextual wrapping surrounding *Jane Eyre*, it is also significant to notice how the novel is presented on the title page of the first edition as ‘*Jane Eyre* – an autobiography edited by Currer Bell’. Earnshaw points out that at the time of its publication, the general assumption as to the identity of the author, or the narrator, was that the author was Currer Bell, and not Jane Eyre, but that it contained autobiographical elements (177). Charlotte Brontë’s appellative disguise thus becomes doubly entrenched in anonymity, first in ‘Jane Eyre’ as an alias for ‘Currer Bell’, second as ‘Currer Bell’ as nom de plume for Charlotte Brontë, thereby creating a sort of frame narrative for the events related in the novel. The emphasis on the book’s autobiographical status might seem superfluous given the first-person narrator, as Earnshaw also points out (177), but it lends a promise of genuineness to the narration and a sense of proximity to the narrator that immediately evokes the reader’s confidence. This proximity between reader and narrator is intensified throughout the narration by the many apostrophic addresses from ‘Jane’ to the reader, most famously in the line ‘Reader, I married him’ (382). In terms of narrative technique, it should also be noticed that the first-person mode of narration, as well as this apparently close relationship between reader and narrator, persuades the reader to place a great deal of trust into the veracity of the narration. Although the reader is aware of the inevitable subjectivity of such a personal narrative technique as *Jane Eyre* employs, the high level of intimacy that the narrator tries to evoke in the narratee, that is, the implied recipient of the narration, may cause the reader to more easily accept the related events. On several occasions in the text the existentially self-aware narrator explicitly edits the narrative by for instance pointing out that elisions have been made, like in the following example:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (70)

A brief summary of the eight years mentioned follows this editorial note, before the narrator brings the focus forward to the now almost adult protagonist's situation. This manoeuvre compels the reader to accept such a significant ellipsis in the narrative as necessary for the progression of the story. Another interesting point in this respect is connected with the reliability of the narrator and the events narrated. In the following passage, in which Jane, now falling in love with Rochester, believes him to be preparing a courtship with Blanche Ingram, an aristocratic acquaintance and current guest of the house, whom Jane emphatically, though internally, declares unworthy of Rochester and his attention: 'Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy; she was too inferior to excite the feeling' (158). This declaration of *not* being jealous seems almost too eager to be believable, thus having the opposite effect of the one intended, and making the reader doubt the sincerity of the narrator. Furthermore, I would also like to argue that the female first-person narrator and the indication of the novel's autobiographical status in the paratext is also a significant contributor to the feminism that the novel sustains. Being both protagonist and narrator, Jane is given the opportunity to tell her own story. Because she has been constantly told by others, especially men, who she is, e.g. by her cousin that she is 'a dependent' (8), by Mr Brocklehurst that she is 'a liar' (56), by St. John that she is by 'God and nature intended ... for a missionary's wife' (343), the ability of being in full control of her own personal narrative is precious. This narrative technique enables Jane to have full agency of the narration and be fully in control of her own self-representation, thereby subverting the notions of female subservience and incapacity that a patriarchal society such as nineteenth century Britain upholds.

Another aspect to explore with respect to the narrative technique Brontë employs is the subject of focalisation. The novel is narrated by an autodiegetic narrator, i.e. a narrator who is also the main character of the story (Page 197). However, since the narration is conducted retrospectively, it is necessary to distinguish between the narrator and the narrated. This feature is also emphasised on several occasions in the text in instances where the narrator, the retrospectively narrating Jane, makes comments on the situation of the narrated Jane that are definitely unavailable to her in the current point in the narration, and thus distances her narrator self from her narrated self. An example of this is found when the narrating Jane revisits the traumatic episode in the red-room at Gateshead and tries to rationalise for herself and the reader the cruel punishment she receives there, shifting the perspective from the actions narrated, i.e. 'then', to the act of

narrating, i.e. 'now', by a change in the grammatical tense: 'I could not answer the ceaseless inward question—*why* I thus suffered; now, at the distance of—I will not say how many years, I see it clearly. I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage' (12). The paragraph following begins with a description of the receding daylight in the red-room, which brings the focus back to the narrated Jane's immediate physical and temporal surroundings as they are perceived by her ten-year-old self. One might thus say that although the focaliser of the novel is undoubtedly Jane Eyre, the focalisation is occasionally simultaneously divided between the young narrated Jane and the older narrating Jane. This duality opens for an ambiguity in terms of the reliability of the narrator, and the narrator's admission of significant editorial elisions, as mentioned above, contributes to this impression of ambiguity. When the narration catches up with the narrator's present time and tense at the conclusion of the novel, the narrator and the narrated are conflated. Remarkable here is the discrepancy between the adolescent Jane's ambitious visions of independence and liberty and the domestic, almost insular contentment that we see in the present of the narrating Jane. The fact that this passes unacknowledged in the concluding paragraphs may be indicative of a narrator who tries to persuade the reader that only what is told is important, as the eight-year-long ellipsis at Lowood illustrates, and that the professed happiness at the conclusion of the story is paramount to the events leading up to it. This discrepancy could also be claimed to tie in with the way in which the novel ultimately, despite its subversive qualities, adheres to the norms and conventions of the patriarchal society in which it operates, both in the storyworld, and as a work of fiction in the real world.

The principal title of the novel, 'Jane Eyre', is also worthy of comment. In his article, Steven Earnshaw points out the extraordinary nature of an eponymous *female* protagonist whose full name, both Christian and maiden name, is included in the title (174). He compares the brevity and simplicity of works with female protagonists, for instance Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* with more complex and elaborately identifying titles of works with male protagonists, like Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. By giving her protagonist's full name as the title of her novel, Charlotte Brontë breaks with this tradition, and in doing so she also emphasises her advocacy for even unmarried women's autonomy, disproving the notion that it is unnecessary for the reader to know the full name of a female heroine because 'such

information is regarded as irrelevant; what will be important for the reader is how the heroine gets to acquire the surname which is that of her husband' (Earnshaw 176). I would further like to argue that the feeling of absolute solitude that permeates Jane's early life may be seen to have established a stronger sense of identity and identification with her full name, 'Jane Eyre', because, being the only Eyre Jane knows of, her surname becomes as much an indicator of her individual identity as her Christian name. Jane is thus the only representative of the Eyre name, making the sense of identification with this name even stronger than if she were part of a larger family group of Eyres. Jane's strong sense of identification with her full name can also be discerned in the scenes leading up to the attempted wedding, in which Jane feels a measure of estrangement to the prospect of acquiring a new surname: ' "You blushed, and now you are white, Jane, what is it for?" "Because you gave me a new name—Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange" ' (220). Furthermore, on the eve of the wedding, while Jane is preparing her trunks for the honeymoon, this sense of estrangement from the name and notion of 'Jane Rochester' supplanting 'Jane Eyre' is even more evident:

[T]here were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber: tomorrow they would be far on their way to London: and so should I (D.V.),—or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on: they lay, four little squares on the drawer. Mr. Rochester had himself written the direction, 'Mrs. Rochester,—Hotel, London,' on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o'clock A.M.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to all her property. (234-5)

Crucial to these contemplations is way in which Jane distances herself as 'Jane Eyre' from the prospect of herself as 'Jane Rochester'. This discomfort has also been suggested by Jane's reluctance towards accepting the jewellery and fineries Rochester almost overbearingly bestows upon her, and when she prepares to flee Thornfield after the failed wedding, Jane leaves all of it behind: 'I encountered the beads of a pearl necklace Mr. Rochester had forced me to accept a few days ago. I left that; it was not mine: it was the visionary bride's, who had melted in thin air' (272-3). Also note here how the phrase 'thin air' coincides with Jane's own descriptions of herself as thin and little, hence

allowing for the homophonous interpretation 'thin Eyre'. Jane is thus not only unable or unwilling to identify with the name, but also with the image Rochester creates of 'Jane Rochester'. When the prospect of becoming the bejewelled and extravagantly apparelled Mrs Rochester is eliminated, Jane therefore reverts back into her old self, or rather, into 'thin Eyre', thus distancing herself from the alienating image of 'the visionary bride'. Moreover, the choice of the phrase 'Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist' seems significant considering how this particular statement will soon come to be disproven by the revelation that Mrs Rochester does indeed already exist in the figure of Bertha.

Moreover, when exploring the significance of names in this novel, one cannot disregard the possible symbolic meaning contained in the name of the eponymous heroine – Jane Eyre. Seen in relation to her characterisation and portrayal in the novel, Jane Eyre's name seems almost conspicuously appropriate. Jane is a given name that is so unmistakably common and unremarkable that it has given rise to expressions like 'plain-Jane', indicating a simple, modest, plain and/or unattractive woman. This is a definition that seems like it could have been based on Jane's own descriptions of herself repeated several times in the novel, see for instance the caption she plans for her self-portrait: 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain' (137), and her passionate speech to Rochester before his first proposal: 'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?' (216). Another expression connected with the name Jane is the placeholder name 'Jane Doe', derived from its male counterpart 'John Doe', indicating a person whose identity is unknown. When Jane is taken in by the Rivers family, she is essentially a Jane Doe to them, and in order to conceal her true identity, Jane assumes the false name Jane Elliott. Moving on to the second constituent of Jane's name, i.e. Eyre, the most striking feature is its potential for homophones that correspond remarkably well to the characterisation of Jane Eyre and her development. As Steven Earnshaw has pointed out, among several other scholars (for instance Gilbert and Gubar 342), 'Eyre' is homophonous with words like 'air', as mentioned above, and 'heir' (Earnshaw 187). Sharon Locy points out another, perhaps even more significant homonym, namely 'eyre', meaning 'the itinerary of circuit judges who journey from one court to another' (120). Seen in chronology, I would argue that the homophones connected to the name Eyre could be seen to summarise the entire novel: From the beginning of the story, Jane is marginalised and neglected, and on many occasions treated like *air*. She then sets out on a journey that consists of several

circuitous repetitions, like the *eyre* of circuit judges. Finally, by the fortunate stroke of serendipity, Jane is made aware that she is *heir* to a substantial fortune that enables her to claim for herself the happy ending that she previously declined for the sake of preserving her integrity. This happy ending is paradoxically what will eliminate the Eyre name from Jane's legal identity, through her marriage to Rochester. This transition, however, is not once mentioned in the ultimate chapter of the novel, as Charlotte Brontë foregoes entirely any mention of the title 'Mrs Rochester' that has proved to be problematic to Jane in the past.

Furthermore, in the penultimate chapter of the novel, in which Jane and Rochester are reunited, settle their feelings for each other and get engaged once more, a brief analysis shows that the name 'Jane' is repeated by Rochester a total of 56 times in the course of a chapter that is only sixteen pages long. Among these repetitions, two give the full name 'Jane Eyre', five take the form of the diminutive 'Janet', and in addition there are three iterations of 'Miss Eyre', as well as appellations that echo the novel's permeating fairy tale aesthetic that will be thoroughly explored below, like 'my fairy' (372), 'you mocking changeling' (373), and 'my sky-lark' (374). I would thus like to argue that this insistence on the name and identity of Jane Eyre, in addition to the lack of any mention of her married name in the subsequent chapter, seem to emphasise that Jane Eyre remains 'Jane Eyre'; as the person she always was *and* the person she has become through the course of her journey of maturation. Her identity remains the same even upon her return to Rochester, and in her marriage to him, even though she is in fact conforming to the patriarchal traditions related to matrimony and the conventional trajectory of a woman's life in a patriarchal society. Thus, in the concluding pages of her autobiography, Jane illustrates how a marriage does not have to mean a compromise of one's own autonomy, individuality or identity if it is founded on the premise of equality:

I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am; ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. (384)

According to Adrienne Rich, the harmonious nature of this union between Jane and Rochester is contingent on the acquisition of Jane's inheritance, which enables her to seize happiness for herself without compromising her principles or her integrity, or rather, as the explorations of Jane's identity and its essential constituents will illustrate in the following sections of this chapter, her 'Jane Eyre-ity': 'Coming to her husband in economic independence and by her free choice, Jane can become a wife without sacrificing a grain of her Jane Eyre-ity' (Rich 482). In their courtship, both leading up to the abandoned wedding and in the novel's final two chapters, I would argue that the lack of sentimentality and elaborate declarations of romance proves that their union is a marriage of equal minds more than anything else, but which admittedly is facilitated by the equalisation of their social statuses that enables them to meet as equals. Rich argues that '[w]e believe in the erotic and intellectual sympathy of this marriage because it has been prepared by the woman's refusal to accept it under circumstances which were mythic, romantic, or sexually oppressive' (482).

In relation to the metaphorical sobriquets Rochester applies to Jane, it is interesting to note that while many of them are connected with the realm of the supernatural, like the 'mocking changeling' mentioned above, 'witch' (127, 240), 'sprite' (234) or 'malicious elf' (234), a striking number of them are of an avian nature, like 'skylark' (374), 'dove' (264), and 'linnet' (266). Jane is also on numerous occasions likened to birds in more general terms, like in opening her eyes 'like an eager bird' (265), and struggling 'like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation' (216). During a conversation between the two of them, Rochester says he sees in Jane 'the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive there; were it but free, it would soar cloud high' (118-19). St. John describes Jane as a 'half-frozen bird' (297), and even Jane herself refers to herself as 'stranger birds like me' (209). In general, birds are commonly associated with the freedom inherent in their ability to fly, and they are also symbolic of spiritualisation (Cirlot 28). In addition to their liberty, however, birds are also seen as frail and vulnerable. It seems significant then, that at the very beginning of the story, the autobiographer is seen reading a work called *History of British Birds*, presaging, I would argue, the story of the British bird that is Jane Eyre, seemingly weak and vulnerable, who flies and flutters from one place to the next in search of liberty.

### 3.3 Spaces, Travel and the *Bildungsroman*

When describing *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman*, it is important to remember that at the time of *Jane Eyre*'s publication in the mid nineteenth century, the *Bildungsroman* was a genre almost exclusively reserved for male protagonists. This is of course connected to the discrepancy of the scope of opportunities for men and women in the nineteenth century in terms of social and geographical mobility (Locy 105). While a man could travel out into the world to make his fortune, a woman remained at home until any such man might arrive to bring her with him from her father's home to *his* home. One might thus see Charlotte Brontë's novel and its heroine as a subversive element in a genre that, by its nature and its function as reflector of society, both prescribes and describes the norms it upholds and adheres to. I would argue, however, that by casting Jane Eyre as virtually friendless, both of kin and companion, Brontë is able to ascribe to Jane an innate sense of independence and self-reliance that would otherwise have been deemed inappropriate by society, and certainly by some contemporary critics, had she had a father, brother, uncle or other figure of patriarchal authority to rule over her. Sharon Locy argues that '[t]he appropriation of the male pattern of development in *Jane Eyre* suggests that the female protagonist actually can develop "like a man," her physical mobility a structural paradigm for that maturation' (107). I would argue that this subversive appropriation of a male domain is in accordance with the proto-feminist ideology that for many is emblematic of this novel. However, while the unconventional nature of Brontë's heroine facilitates her appropriation of the traditionally male *Bildungsroman* genre, Brontë nonetheless retains throughout the novel the conflicting feelings of her heroine towards liberty versus confinement. This has the effect of simultaneously conforming to and subverting presiding social conventions.

According to Jerome Hamilton Buckley, the traditional *Bildungsroman* contains a young or adolescent hero who, after having suffered some kind of trauma, leaves the home and ventures out on a journey that will come to shape his character morally and psychologically. This would generally include schooling, apprenticeship, beginning a career, resisting temptation and experiencing subsequent moral growth, before returning to the home demonstrating the success of his development from childhood into maturity (qtd. in Locy 105). In the case of *Jane Eyre*, we recognise the same development as Buckley describes, with the exception that the location of the home to which Jane

returns, has changed during the course of her journey from Gateshead to Thornfield. Her journey commences when Jane, at the age of ten, is sent to school after having sustained a great psychological trauma. Through initial hardship, she acquires an education, goes into an apprenticeship as a teacher before beginning her career as a governess (Locy 107). Temptations ensue, and resistance is accomplished through moral perseverance. Upon the successful return of the heroine Jane Eyre, the novel diverges slightly from the *Bildungsroman* outline in that it emphasises the triumph of love as much as, if not more than, the triumph of character and morality. In this respect, Brontë lets her novel adhere to the conventional trajectory of the female protagonist by combining the structure of the *Bildungsroman* with the outcome of the courtship novel, cf. for instance the novels of Jane Austen, i.e. marriage. In the following I will also explore how the quest plot of the *Bildungsroman* is echoed by the fairy tale elements that permeate the novel both in structure and plot. Moreover, as suggested by Jane's ambiguity towards liberty and enclosure mentioned above, and as we will see in the following chapter, Jane's journey is not characterised entirely by spaces of increasing freedom and opportunity. Rather, as Locy puts it,

[t]he spaces Jane occupies from the beginning of the novel to the end do not ... evolve from narrowness and enclosure to expansiveness and freedom as they do in the male maturation story. ... They are, in the end, more typically the feminine space of the ordinary female *bildungsroman* where the woman's identity is first shaped and then subsumed legally by that of her husband and where she exists in a kind of protective custody under his roof. (108)

This is a factor that would seem to undermine the quest for autonomy that *Jane Eyre* has come to represent in the literary canon. However, it is important to keep in mind that there exists a significant nuance between subtle subversion and utter revolution. I would argue that *Jane Eyre* should not be seen as an attempt to revolutionise the social order, but rather as a subtle illustration of the current situation and how this situation might, by certain *un-revolutionary* changes, become more favourable to women. As we shall see in the following sections, Jane's journey does not lead to total independence, but rather towards marriage. Because the novel, as well as the character Jane Eyre, operate within the social boundaries of the predominantly patriarchal society of nineteenth century Britain, the scope of revolutionary opportunities is correspondingly limited – for

Charlotte Brontë as a female author, albeit under a male pseudonym, for Jane Eyre as a female protagonist and for *Jane Eyre* as a novel written, presumably, for a female intended audience.

### 3.3.1 Gateshead

From the very first sentence of *Jane Eyre*, the reader is struck with the sense of entrapment and immobility: ‘There was no possibility of taking a walk that day’ (5). This choice of an opening line is almost certainly intentional, as it establishes from the very beginning of Jane Eyre’s autobiographical story her sense of immobility and entrapment as well as her dependency on external forces inaccessible to her control, in this instance the relentless rain. Indeed, dependency is an issue that seems to permeate Jane’s early childhood, being an orphan, and hence the unwanted adoptive child of her cold and cruel aunt, Mrs Reed, at the manor house Gateshead. Although Mrs Reed has promised to uphold her late husband’s dying wish to raise Jane as one of her own children, Jane is persistently treated as an unwanted cuckoo in the nest and is constantly reminded of her inferior and dependent position in the household due to her orphanhood. Jane is therefore drawn between resentment towards the people who treat her unfairly and guilty gratitude towards the same people for not turning her out entirely. This leads to a conflict between the familial duty she feels as a niece and the vindictive anger at being treated so unfairly and unkindly. This position of liminality and marginalisation is, as we will see further on in this chapter, an issue that will be recurring in Jane’s life throughout the progression of the story.

Fear and torment are also issues that seem to pervade Jane’s existence, especially at the hands of her sadistic cousin John Reed: ‘He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice a day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near’ (8). Because her cousin is never punished or disciplined for his wickedness, and her two other cousins Georgiana and Eliza are always passively obedient to their tyrannous brother, the only course of action available to Jane is endurance. Entrapment, however, or rather enclosure, seems also to represent a notion of safety and shelter, which might be seen in the way Jane hides from the malicious taunts and brutal violence of her cousin, in a window-seat behind thick and heavy curtains: ‘Folds of scarlet drapery shut my view to

the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day' (5-6). In her curtained shelter, Jane seeks to escape from the reality of her miserable existence by immersing herself in the study of a book of British birds. However, her stolen moment of happy solitude is not to last, as Jane is once again the victim of her cousin John's habitual punishments. It is this particular episode that precipitates the first momentous change in Jane Eyre's life. John snatches the book from Jane, and after a bout of verbal abuse, flings it at her head, which causes a bleeding cut. Instead of submissively enduring her cousin's ruthless violence, Jane is overcome by the feelings derived from her naturally fiery temper and retaliates, albeit only verbally: 'The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded. "Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" ' (8). This will prove to be fateful both in the immediate perspective of the ten-year-old Jane, but also in the long-term development of her identity and the progress of her journey towards happiness and maturity at the end of the novel. Because of this outburst of suppressed rage, John attacks Jane and places all of the blame on her, claiming himself to be at the receiving end of the violence. Mrs Reed then orders two of the servants in the house to take Jane away to be locked in her late uncle's bedroom, also known as *the red-room*, by way of punishment. During her incarceration in the red-room, Jane is overwhelmed by superstitious fear of being imprisoned in the room where her late uncle breathed his last breath and lay in state. Because this episode will prove to be the decisive element in Jane's being sent away to school, it would be significant to note at this point how Gateshead seems to be dominated by two imperious and intimidating male figures. The first, John Reed, is intimidating because he is cruel and tyrannical, the second, Jane's dead uncle Reed, is threatening because he is dead, and the preservation of his bedchamber in its original state amplifies the sense of his paternal absent presence. In her essay 'Enclosing Fantasies', which is published in a collection of essays that revises and goes into dialogue with Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Madeleine Wood makes a fascinating observation (97) on this and the way in which the red-room is described as an unmistakably male space: its seclusion from the nursery and the kitchen, both conventionally female territories, its deep colours and heavy furniture, among these a white easy-chair that Jane perceives 'like a pale throne' (11). As we will see in the following discussions of the different geographical locations, the issue of patriarchal

male figures and Jane's interaction with them will, despite the wish for female independence that characterises the novel on the surface, prove to be important in the decisions Jane makes.

Concerning the issue of identity, one should notice the detailed description of Jane's gazing into the looking-glass of the red-room. In this description the reader gets a sense of the extent of Jane's marginalised state and her alienation from herself:

[M]y fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking in the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp[.] (11)

From this passage we see that Jane's notion of selfhood is blurred and ambiguous. I would like to argue that her likening her mirror image to spirits and phantoms is an expression of her utter alienation and feeling of not belonging among the Reeds, to the extent that she feels herself belonging instead to a different species, in a different reality. The symbolic significance of mirrors will be further elaborated in section 3.3.3 on Thornfield. In their influential essay 'A Dialogue of the Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress', Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar also remark on this that the red-room symbolises 'the spirit of a society in which Jane has no clear place' (340). Furthermore, Jane's identifying her reflection to supernatural creatures will later be echoed in the many teasing nicknames Rochester gives her during her employment at Thornfield, and will be explored in further detail below.

The unfairness of her punishment and the distressing nature of her surroundings evoke in Jane a sense of determination: "Unjust!—unjust!" said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power; and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die' (12). Upon this Adrienne Rich writes in her essay 'Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman', that '[i]t is at this moment that the germ of the person we are finally to know as Jane Eyre is born: a person determined to live, and to choose her life with dignity, integrity and pride' (471). I would agree with Rich in her observation of these essential traits of Jane's personality. Although these are the

desperate reflections of a ten-year-old girl, it is important to observe that such tenacity and determinedness, potentially allowing for spiteful self-destruction, are features that will come to determine Jane Eyre's character and that will influence the decisions she makes in the course of the story. The apparent maturity of such a sense of determination, however, is belied by the childish terror she experiences at the sight of a gleaming light stirring on the wall, believing it to presage some kind of supernatural being. After being refused release by the servants and her aunt, Jane eventually has a terror-induced fit and faints into unconsciousness. This experience of her fight with her cousin and the subsequent unjust punishment, as well as the treatment she receives afterwards, can be said to be the first accelerating factors both in the geographical movement of the plot, and the personal development of Jane's character. After this ordeal, Jane is for the first time in her life treated with kindness and respect by the servant Bessie and the apothecary Mr Lloyd, who is called in order to ascertain the state of Jane's health. Rich also remarks upon this: 'Bessie is the first woman to show Jane affection; and it is partly the alliance with her that makes it possible for the child Jane to maintain her hope for the future, her will to survive; which prevents her from running away—a self-destructive act under the circumstances—or from relapsing into mere hysteria or depression' (472). Her aunt, on the other hand, treats Jane even more coldly and forbids her to interact with her own children. She decides to send Jane away to school, and when interviewed by the supervisor of Lowood Institution, Mr Brocklehurst, she portrays Jane's character as low and deceitful. Jane cannot abide by such misrepresentation, and reacts in a manner that I would claim epitomises the contrasting struggle between endurance and revolt, as well as the implacable sense of justice, that will come to form the foundations of Jane's character and identity:

*Speak* I must; I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence:—'I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved *you*; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the liar, you may give it to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I.' (30)

Jane goes on to confront her aunt with the cruelty and ostracism she has suffered during her years at Gateshead with such tenacious vigour as to scare her aunt into displaying a

meek attempt at frightened friendliness. Jane, however, dismisses any attempt at appeasement: 'I am not your dear; I cannot lie down; send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I hate to live here' (31). Having thus declared herself, Jane effectively disowns her aunt and cousins before being sent away to Lowood and the miserable and niggardly conditions that await her there. Despite her bleak prospects, I would like to argue that going away to school represents not only Jane's first venture into the world outside Gateshead, but also the first step of her journey towards adulthood and independence. Furthermore, her experiences of abuse and mistreatment in her adoptive family contribute to the formation of at least two of Jane's fundamental characteristics – first, her strong sense of justice, or rather injustice of being treated unfairly, and second, her intense yearning for family and mutual kinship. It is within the latter of these that we find the potential for internal conflict of character for Jane. As she grows older, and is conditioned to conform to conventions, Jane begins to veer, perhaps unconsciously, towards, rather than away from representatives of the patriarchal structures that oppress her, in search of a notion of a male/female companionship contained in the idea of love. This yearning for love will on several occasions cause Jane to compromise on her principles, to the extent that her strong integrity is jeopardised. I would argue that it is this conflict of desires and emotions that forms the basis of most of the main developments in terms of geographical location, and as a consequence of the plot.

### **3.3.2 Lowood**

Being sent away from her aunt's home, Jane travels alone the distance of fifty miles between Gateshead and Lowood in a crowded public coach. Jane's first impression of life at Lowood Institution is dominated by displays of strict discipline, ignominious forms of punishment for disobedience, curtly spoken orders and girls quickly filing into neat rows. She learns that Lowood is a charity school for poor or orphaned girls managed by the Brocklehurst family, with the imperious Mr Brocklehurst, whom Jane has already met at Gateshead, as manager of the institution. Already in the first days of her time at Lowood, Jane is acquainted with the dismal living conditions the pupils of the school are obliged to endure. The breakfast porridge is burnt to a degree as to make it almost inedible, and on one particularly cold morning the water for the washbasins in the dormitory is frozen. Despite the general poverty prevailing at Lowood, Jane's existence

is brightened by her friendship with the older pupil Helen Burns and the young teacher and superintendent Miss Maria Temple. Helen Burns is a few years older than Jane and becomes a role model for her, as well as a source of comfort. Helen presents a peculiarly calm demeanour even in the most distressing of times, something which stands in stark contrast to Jane's own bouts of passionate outlet of emotion. However, as Rich describes it, Helen is 'strong of will, awkward and blundering in the practical world yet intellectually and spiritually mature beyond her years' (473). Helen even admits to her own vices in a curiously dispassionate manner: 'I am, as Miss Scatcherd said, slatternly; I seldom put, and never keep, things in order; I am careless, I forget rules; I read when I should learn my lessons; I have no method; and sometimes I say, like you, I cannot *bear* to be subjected to systematic arrangements' (47). Because she is convinced of her own faults, she is also better able to endure punishment for them. Furthermore, Helen is stoically convinced of the insignificance of earthly life and might thus easily endure the humiliating punishments of the physical world while waiting for the eternal salvation. Helen's tranquillity of mind and philosophical wisdom help Jane in overcoming the shame of Mr Brocklehurst's unjustly founded punishment. The following quotation is taken from a passage of conversation between Jane and Helen in the wake of Jane's demeaning punishment: 'If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends' (58). This conversation is important for the development of Jane's character and identity, as it teaches Jane that self-respect is paramount to being favoured by others. Jane's sense of self-respect might be seen in relation to her strong notion of justice and injustice that was, as mentioned above, established during her years at Gateshead. The newly found self-respect that Helen helps develop might be seen as a continuation of her sense of justice. Under the influence of Helen, Jane's fiery temper is somewhat subdued, and instead of Jane's naturally vengeful feelings towards those who have wronged her, Helen tries to instil in Jane the Christian notion of forgiveness and turning the other cheek. Having for a long time been suffering from deteriorating health due to consumption, Helen dies in a bout of fever, holding Jane motherly in her arms, and fervently anticipating the comfort of the afterlife.

Miss Temple is also an important contributor to Jane's comfort and development at Lowood. After Jane's arrival at Lowood, it soon becomes evident that the rigid frugality imposed on the girls is by order of Mr Brocklehurst, and not by any of the

teachers. Miss Temple is, unlike her employer, concerned for her students' health and welfare, and on the occasion with the burnt breakfast mentioned above, she goes against her instructions and orders a modest luncheon of bread and cheese to be arranged. She is later reprimanded for this breach of code during which chastisement Mr Brocklehurst emphasises his intention for the school: 'You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying' (53). The young girls are malnourished and cold and when a spell of typhoid fever breaks out at the school, many of them are not strong enough to withstand contracting the disease. Several girls die in the epidemic, and when the truth of the conditions at Lowood is made known to the public, Mr Brocklehurst is compelled to step down from his sovereign position as manager of the school and allow other, more compassionate benefactors to contribute in the running of the institution. This development is hugely beneficial for Lowood and its residents. Furthermore, it also teaches Jane that kindness and justice are possible in a world which has up until now treated her only with the opposite. Miss Temple is, as her name significantly suggests, described in terms of angelic grace and nobility. Gilbert and Gubar describe her as the model of the Victorian woman: 'Angelic Miss Temple, for instance, with her marble pallor, is a shrine of ladylike virtues: magnanimity, cultivation, courtesy—and repression' (344). They go on to argue that the carefully restrained calmness with which Miss Temple receives Mr Brocklehurst's admonishment reveals a repressed rage and desire for rebellion against his patriarchal power:

Miss Temple had looked down when he first began to speak to her; but she now gazed straight before her, and her face, naturally pale as marble, appeared to be assuming also the coldness and fixity of that material; especially her mouth, closed as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it, and her brow settled into petrified severity (53).

It might thus be argued that Miss Temple's stony severity is not, as it might at first seem, a display of passive deference to the imposing Mr Brocklehurst, but rather the result of strictly reined fury. From her friendship with Miss Temple during the eight years of her stay at Lowood – first as a pupil for six years, then as a teacher for two years – Jane comes to see her as both mother, governess and companion, and observes the following on Miss Temple's influence on her character and disposition:

I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character. (71)

However, when the calming presence of Miss Temple is removed from Jane's existence upon Miss Temple's marriage, Jane begins to feel uneasy and restless. Now being eighteen years old and having had a decent and thorough education, including such genteel subjects as drawing, music and French, she yearns for a bigger purpose in life. She feels the influence of Miss Temple begin to slip and the kindling of 'old emotions' when left alone in her 'natural element' (72). Without the influence of her friend and mentor, the monotonous habits, duties, rules and customs of Lowood make Jane begin to fear a future of impassive boredom. Jane's fiery nature re-emerges, and in a passionate outburst of desperate yearning for change, not unlike the one she had eight years before in the red-room of Gateshead, she articulates what I argue is to become emblematic to her character and identity, that is, longing for personal freedom: 'I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!"' (72). This urgently expressed wish for liberty reveals that a fundamental part of Jane Eyre's identity comprises autonomy and an essential desire for individuality and independence. Her yearning for a change of scenery and situation, and significantly for 'a new servitude' leads her to advertise for a position of governess in a local newspaper. It is this venture that will bring her to her next place of residence and that will precipitate the most dramatic elements of the plot's novel. Jane receives only one reply to her advertisement and accepts this accordingly. She leaves Lowood to take up her new post as governess for a French girl of about ten at a manor house called Thornfield Hall.

### **3.3.3 Thornfield Hall**

Thornfield Hall is a country manor that contains virtually all of the elements required of the typical gothic setting. Its remote location, looming and partially neglected

construction, dark and narrow passages, and finally the pervading notion of a hidden secret, concealing something that is not quite as it should be, all contribute to the impression that Charlotte Brontë wanted to make Thornfield Hall unmistakably gothic. Adding to all this, the archetypal gothic heroine – young, innocent and inexperienced – in the shape of Jane Eyre, arrives after nightfall and is unable to immediately assess her new surroundings fully, thus heightening her sensory impressions: ‘About ten minutes after the driver got down and opened a pair of gates; we passed through, and they clashed to behind me’ (81). One might here notice how the sound of the clashing gates seems almost foreboding in this setting. Jane’s first impression of Thornfield continues thus: ‘We now slowly ascended the drive, and came upon the long front of a house: candle-light gleamed from one curtained bow-window; all the rest were dark’ (81). The slow ascent to the house emphasises the sense of suspense and Jane’s nervousness. As soon as Jane is welcomed inside by the housekeeper Mrs Fairfax, however, the gloomy, gothic ambience is somewhat dissolved: ‘[S]he ushered me into a room whose double illumination at first dazzled me, contrasting as it did with the darkness to which my eyes had been for two hours inured; when I could see, however, a cozy and agreeable picture presented itself to my view’ (81). When first arriving at Thornfield, Jane is under the misapprehension that Mrs Fairfax is the mistress of the house, and the child for whom she is to be governess is her daughter. Mrs Fairfax quickly informs Jane that the master of the house, Mr Edward Fairfax Rochester, is absent, and that the little French girl, Adèle Varens, is his ward. In relation to the recent developments of character Jane has experienced, especially regarding the newly discovered yearning for something more, somewhere else, it would be worthwhile to note that even after having moved from the isolation and monotony of Lowood, her new existence, and the ‘new servitude’ she expressly prayed for, seems to be unsatisfactory. Within few weeks of her arrival to her new situation in life, Jane somewhat apologetically admits to having feelings that she surmises must by others be perceived as ingratitude and discontent. During spare moments, she gazes longingly into the distance from the roof of Thornfield:

Anybody may blame me who likes when I add further that now and then...I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out far over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never

seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, that was here within my reach. (93)

Gilbert and Gubar remark on this that the location of these meditations is significant. Jane is drawn to the attic of Thornfield when she is struggling between her rationality and irrationality (348-9). The presence of another being in the attic, whom others have deemed 'irrational', is as yet unknown to her, but it will come to signify the many similarities and instances of doubleness that exist between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. This notion of doubleness is also the main contention in Gilbert and Gubar's essay. Furthermore, looking back to Jane's alienated experience of looking into the mirror in the red-room at Gateshead, and somewhat anticipating the course of events, it is interesting to notice how this connection between estrangement and mirrors seems to be repeated on at least two different occasions, both of which tie in with the idea of Jane and Bertha Mason as each other's doubles. The first occurs when Jane is awoken by the presence of someone else in her bedroom and sees a figure of a woman handling her wedding trousseau, among this the costly lace veil Rochester forced her to accept. When recounting this episode to Rochester the following day, he asks whether she saw the woman's face, upon which she replies: 'Not at first. But presently she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At the moment I saw the reflection of the visage and the features quite distinctly in the dark, oblong glass' (242). The second iteration of this pattern is found when Jane is getting dressed on the morning of her wedding day, which is the day after she tells Rochester of her frightening nightly encounter. Jane is now looking at herself in the mirror dressed in her wedding gown: 'I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost like the image of a stranger' (244). The 'image of a stranger' echoes not only the estranged sensation she had while looking in the mirror of the red-room, but it also echoes the stranger she saw reflected in her own bedroom mirror a few nights earlier, and I would argue that her inability to recognise herself in her wedding attire is because that reflection – the image of Mrs Rochester – already belongs to someone else. Thus, the reflection Jane sees in the mirror, does not belong to herself, but to Bertha, who is Rochester's legitimate wife. Also significant, as Tamara Silvia Wagner points out (188), is the way Jane's alienated reflection as a child presages the appearance of Bertha, with her 'glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still

ha[ving] the effect of a real spirit' (11). In connection with mirrors and Jane's recurring inability of self-recognition with the image of herself as reflected in a mirror, the issue of the self-portrait she composes seems to emerge as particularly significant. The stimulus for commencing this task stems from self-approbation for having become enamoured with Mr Rochester, and endeavouring to stay as true to reality as possible, Jane dictates herself to 'draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity' (137). In order to further emphasise to herself her own plainness, she plans to paint Blanche Ingram, her rival for Rochester's interest, in fresh, clear tints that will contrast starkly with her own chalk portrait. Although this seems purely like an act of self-criticism, it is also the most pronounced instance of self-representation in the novel. This ties in with the self-representative aspect of the novel's position in the genre of (fictional) autobiography. However, as mentioned in the discussion of narrative technique above, one might question whether Jane's commitment to rendering faithfully and unforgivingly the aspect of her own countenance also applies to the recounting of the story. Nevertheless, taking these instances of mirrors and their representation of self and other into account, one might argue that while Jane is distractedly pacing the corridor of the third storey, she is not only giving release to her own repressed emotions and her feeling of entrapment, but also echoing or projecting the same emotions of the other woman who, unbeknownst to Jane, populates the same quarters and who already occupies the position that Jane is soon to fill, namely Mrs Rochester. I would argue that Jane's desire to see 'regions full of life' she has only heard of but never seen might also be understood as a projection of Bertha's longing for her native West Indies.

It is during one of these episodes of restless pacing in the upper floors of Thornfield that Jane articulates a declamation that could only be considered to be proto-feminist:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. ... Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings,

to playing and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (93)

In the entire novel, this passionate speech constitutes the most explicit criticism of the division of genders that patriarchy upholds in British society in the nineteenth century. This has made it a famous and often quoted passage, which in turn has made this passage emblematic of the novel *Jane Eyre* as a whole. It is therefore remarkable, however, that as soon as the absent master of the house unexpectedly arrives, Jane's agitation and yearning impatience seem to dissipate. The stark contrast to the fervent manifesto just quoted could scarcely have been much greater. On the one hand, one might interpret this to signify the great influential power Rochester has over Jane, as a man and an individual, already from the very beginning of their acquaintance. It should here be noted that Edward Rochester is the first man Jane meets as an adult, who, though their social positions are unequal, and his manner of social interaction is somewhat abrupt, treats her with respect and teasing benevolence. From his mere presence, Jane foregoes her own instinctive yearning for a bigger existence and seems content to experience the world vicariously through Rochester's stories and experiences of it:

I, indeed, talked comparatively little; but I heard him talk with relish. It was in his nature to be communicative—he liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world glimpses of its scenes and ways ... ; and I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imagining the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed, never startled or troubled by one noxious allusion. (125)

On the other hand, however, her apparent self-denial and ambivalent inconsistency might also be the result of being subjected to the norms and expectations of a strictly patriarchal society. However, it is also interesting to note, as Sharon Locy points out (114), that Rochester is the one who most plainly sees Thornfield as a symbol of the patriarchal system of primogeniture and his own victimisation by this system upheld by society and his father: '[I]t was his resolution to keep the property together; he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother Rowland. Yet as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage' (260). As for Jane, she has throughout her

schooling in childhood and adolescence been indoctrinated with lectures on her social position both as a woman and as a person existing in the marginalised and liminal position between the working-class and the aristocracy. The sum of these ambiguous indicators of identity is manifested in her position as a governess.

The ambiguities comprised in the profession of governess are numerous. A governess is expected to be raised in gentility and possess the skills and deportment of a lady, yet she is a paid employee – essentially a servant – and therefore at the same time part of the inferior working-class. Regarding the social relations within the household at Thornfield, at least initially, Jane is expected to be present, but not participating in the social intercourse. This is particularly evident during the chapters when there are visitors at Thornfield, and Rochester, too, is drawn between his role as overbearing master of the house and his role as Jane's friend. He requests her presence among his guests, but ignores her the entire evening, before finally, when she tries to slip away unnoticed, confronting her with her not coming to speak to him in company of his other guests. Had she so done, her behaviour would most likely have been derided as immensely inappropriate and a severe breach of etiquette, if not by Rochester himself, then certainly by the other guests present. M. Jeanne Peterson writes on the equivocal status of the governess that '[t]he governess was caught in the crossfire of conflicting social definitions and roles' (18). This is certainly true for Rochester and Jane, and matters are complicated further when the two of them fall in love. During the entirety of their courtship and engagement, Jane remains Mr Rochester's employee, and, despite their emotional familiarity, she persistently refers to him not by his name but by his professional relation to herself, namely 'master'. Thus, after the acknowledgement of their romantic relationship, Jane is drawn between the roles of governess and lover. Indeed, as Esther Godfrey also remarks, even after returning to him in his blinded and incapacitated state, she continues to use his title. In this respect, it is interesting to note the great contrast between how liberally Jane now applies this title to Rochester, and her spiteful refusal to assign the same title to her cousin John Reed – a refusal that precipitates her traumatic incarceration in the red-room. Keeping in mind Jane's ambivalence towards confinement versus enclosure and the way she vacillates between the two, I would argue that this can be interpreted to illustrate that Jane finds liberty in being able to choose whom she submits to. This is also suggested by the way her 'gasps for liberty' significantly culminates in a prayer for 'a new servitude'.

Looking again to the gothic features mentioned above, it might be argued that these initial gothic elements contribute to what could be argued to be a disproportionately great focus given to this part of the novel in the general readership, as well as in popular culture. Rich argues that the events taking place at Thornfield Hall might be condensed to make up a quintessentially gothic horror story, blended with Victorian morality (475). The main incidents of this story would, according to Rich, contain a young governess, a little French ward of ambiguous parentage, and a brusque and brooding master. The governess and master fall in love and intend to marry, but the wedding is interrupted by the announcement of his earlier marriage to a foreign woman who now lives in captivity in the attic of the master's house. The governess flees to a different part of the country, and when she returns after having serendipitously acquired a fortune, the house is burnt down, the wife is dead and the master is, though blinded and maimed in the conflagration, free to marry the governess (475). When condensing the text to such an extent, the result seems rather clichéd and stereotypical. I would like, however, to draw attention to the fairy tale-esque quality this evokes and explore some of the more prominent elements of or allusions to fairy-tales the novel contains. In relation to the way in which Jane seemingly dismisses entirely her expansive yearning for a greater existence at the arrival of Rochester, it could well be noted that through the means of fairy tales, Jane has also been inculcated with the importance of the fulfilment of the romantic ideal upheld by such stories as 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Beauty and the Beast', etc. Karen E. Rowe contends that 'Jane Eyre is a heroine whose life is molded by romantic ideals drawn from childhood readings of fairy tales ... Jane's choices, according to fairy tale and Victorian mores, are limited to spinsterhood ... or marriage' (70). It could thus be argued that despite their disparity of station, and the inappropriateness of any possible attraction, Jane is, perhaps on an unconscious level, discerning a possibility, however minute, of fulfilling the romantic ideal endorsed by these female-centred fairy tales. However, Jane's interest in fairy tales also comprises stories such as Jonathan Swift's fantastical story *Gulliver's Travels*. One might thus say that the influence of fiction on Jane is dual in that it prescribes different ideals for men and women, but which Jane appropriates indiscriminately. Rowe describes Jane's eclecticism towards romantic ideals of achieving maturity and the duality that this engenders in the following manner:

Acquiescent in her servitudes, [Jane] can nurture feminine domestic skills and virtues, while dreamily awaiting the romantic prince and marriage as her promised reward; or according to masculine archetypes, she can defy larger-than-life authorities and journey into foreign environments, seeking rugged independence, but sacrificing hearth and family comforts. (75)

These influences of Jane's early childhood might be recognised throughout the novel in her tendency of vacillating between her desire for the (male) privileges of freedom and individuality and her (female) yearning for the safety and stability of domesticity.

Thus, it is also interesting to observe that the entire plot of *Jane Eyre* conforms quite closely to a classical fairy tale formula. The fairy tale of *Jane Eyre* contains a heroine who goes on a quest (for freedom, maturity, independence), during which she resides in different places (Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, Ferndean), and is assisted by different benevolent donors (Bessie, Mr Lloyd, Miss Temple, Helen Burns, Diana and Mary Rivers, her uncle Mr Eyre), and after having defeated numerous obstacles (desperate rage, hopelessness, starvation, temptation to yield to sin with Rochester and self-annihilation with St. John Rivers), she finds a happy ending (acquiring a fortune and marrying as Mr Rochester's equal). This summarisation of the traditional quest-based fairy tale also corresponds conspicuously well to the pattern of the conventional *Bildungsroman* described in the beginning of this chapter. I would argue that this formulaic structure is important for the novel's canonical status and its continued popularity, taking into consideration Rowe's assertion that 'it is a well-accepted premise that fairy tales fulfil basic psychic needs for both the individual and society' (69). The gothic elements that permeate the story tie in with this fairy tale theme and the popularity of the gothic genre throughout the nineteenth century, and later still, could also be argued to contribute to the novel's enduring popularity.

The plot structure of *Jane Eyre* might also be seen to have a repeating and circular pattern, in which Jane ventures out, overcomes obstacles, and triumphantly returns. Paula Sullivan argues that this plot pattern is repeated twice in the course of the story (69). The first quest is completed when Jane returns to Gateshead to visit her dying aunt. Although she as a child promised never again to acknowledge Mrs Reed as her aunt, Jane magnanimously forgives her. The triumph of her return may be assigned to her own success, however modest, in contrast to the failures of the Reeds. The dysfunctional relationships of the Reed family has led to John Reed's excessive gambling, financial

ruin and ensuing suicide, and the estrangement of the two sisters Georgiana and Eliza. Jane, on the other hand, has in the time following her expulsion from Gateshead acquired a good education and a respectable position. However, as Sullivan points out, Jane's seemingly gracious and magnanimous forgiveness is belied by her exaggerated insistence that she is not vindictive, to the extent that her forgiveness becomes something forcefully and spitefully imposed on her aunt Reed rather than something humbly offered. I would argue that this ties in with the good/bad dichotomy of the fairy tale genre, where everyone gets their 'just deserts' – good things happen to the good people; bad things happen to the bad. I would therefore argue that Jane's return to the ruined tormentors of her childhood resonates strongly with her (possibly unforgiving) sense of justice.

The second quest cycle of *Jane Eyre* constitutes Jane's stay at Thornfield, her self-imposed expulsion and succeeding rambling journey, her stay at Marsh End, and then her return to Thornfield, which is in ruins, and finally, the impediments removed, her marriage to Rochester. The triumph of this final return can be attributed to several issues. For instance, Jane has, before coming to this point, defeated the bleak temptation offered by St. John Rivers. The initial impediment to her marriage has been eliminated, through no fault of her own. Furthermore, by the acquisition of her heritage, Jane is now a wealthy woman, in contrast to the economic loss Rochester has suffered through the loss of his estate. This is one of the two ways in which the power relations between Jane and Rochester have changed at the conclusion of the novel. The second, and perhaps most important shift of their power relations is represented by the incongruity of their physical capabilities. The fire has rendered Rochester nearly blind and physically impaired, so he is now dependent on Jane's assistance. Not only is Jane now financially independent, she is also the dominant part in terms of physical ability. It is evident from the text that Rochester is painfully aware of this juxtaposition, and the superiority of age and experience that he up until now has used to his own advantage in relation to Jane is now presented as a disadvantage and a discouragement to Jane's marrying him. He describes his own situation thus when incredulously ascertaining the truth of Jane's acceptance of his proposal: 'A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead by the hand? ... A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?' (379).

In the story there are also several explicit and implicit references to other fairy tales or to fairy tales in general. For instance, the first meeting between Rochester and Jane is in itself quite dramatic and contains elements of gothic fairy tales, when

Rochester's horse slips on a patch of ice in the road and throws its rider off, upon which Jane is required to help him. Leading up to the appearance of the unknown rider, Jane lets her imagination run wild with picturing mythological creatures native to her North-of-England environments, called the Gytrash. When Jane catches sight of Rochester's dog, Pilot, she identifies it as this mythical creature: 'I heard a rush under the hedge, and close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. It was exactly one mask of Bessie's Gytrash,—a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head' (95). When later speaking of their encounter in the lane, Rochester also associates this encounter with fairy tales: 'When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse' (104). I would argue that these incidents tie in with the overall fairy tale-like structure of the novel.

The first reference to specific folktales and fairy tales, however, is found in the beginning of the novel, when Jane is interviewed by Mr Brocklehurst before being enrolled at Lowood. As Sullivan points out (63), Jane's assessments of Mr Brocklehurst's face when brought close before her evokes associations to 'Little Red Riding Hood': 'What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! What a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!' (26). This echoes almost exactly the observations of Little Red Riding Hood when she sees the wolf disguised as her grandmother. Moreover, many scholars, Gilbert and Gubar among them (342), have also drawn a parallel between *Jane Eyre* and the story of Cinderella, and there are indeed many striking similarities – the orphaned girl growing up with a wicked step-mother and cruel siblings, suffering unjust punishments before breaking with her family, meeting the prince, and, after a measure of complications, marrying and living happily ever after. This analogy provides a rather straightforward and unproblematic presentation of the events narrated in *Jane Eyre*. In the text, however, Charlotte Brontë also affords an explicit and much more disturbing reference to a fairy tale, namely the story of Bluebeard. This allusion is found when Jane has recently arrived at Thornfield, and is being guided around the house by the housekeeper, Mrs Fairfax: 'I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle (91). 'Bluebeard' is a folktale made famous by the French writer Charles Perrault (1628 – 1703), and it tells

the story of a rich nobleman whose blue beard makes him ugly and undesirable to women. Because of his considerable wealth, however, he has several times been married to young and beautiful women, but they have all disappeared mysteriously. When he again marries a young woman, Bluebeard declares that he is going away on a trip and leaves his new wife in charge of the keys to unlock all of the rooms in his house. However, he forbids her to enter one specific room, and driven by unquenchable curiosity, the woman unlocks the forbidden chamber and finds the bloody bodies of all of his previous wives. Immediately after making this comparison, Jane hears the sound of laughter coming from one of the doors, first faintly, and then increasing in volume and intensity, until it becomes 'a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber' (91), as if to uncannily confirm Jane's unconsciously accurate association. On a side note, seen in connection with Jane's gravitation towards the upper regions of Thornfield when her mind longs for liberty and a taste of what lies beyond her immediate surroundings, the interruption of Bertha's maniacal laughter might be seen to function as a kind of warning that presages the fate that might await Jane should she continue to display such unfeminine desires that break with the conventions of appropriate female conduct. Furthermore, Jane has by her allusion to the horrific story of Bluebeard unknowingly come closer to the truth than she could ever have imagined. Like Bluebeard, Rochester is not conventionally handsome, as Jane unperturbedly tells him when asked, echoing, as Rowe points out, the same conversation in 'Beauty and the Beast'. Furthermore, as will be revealed after his attempted wedding to Jane, Rochester is already married. Having grown tired of his first wife's mental instability and alleged promiscuity, he has locked her up in a remote and closed-off part of his house, effectively denying her existence both to himself and to others, as well as to Bertha herself, and making her to all intents and purposes dead to him. Although he never expressly forbids Jane from entering these quarters, the similarity is sufficiently striking. Similarly remarkable is the fact that these details of Rochester's past are only revealed after he has failed to make Jane his wife, something which suggests that he never intended Jane to be privy to these facts at all. In Gilbert and Gubar's essay, the Bluebeard reference is seen in relation to Rochester's 'male sexual guilt' (354), and indeed, after the thwarted wedding, Rochester divulges, if not all, then an adequate amount of what one could consider to be encompassed in this category. In conversation with Jane after the debacle of the wedding, Rochester tells her of the romantic and sexual liaisons he

pursued while residing on the Continent in order to escape his life, forget his wife and overcome the failure of his first marriage (266). Even though Jane seems to have a penchant for ignoring or at least very easily forgiving Rochester of his moral vices, it must here be noted that she does indeed perceive an incompatibility of their notions of respectability and dignity. Before giving this account of his past, Rochester suggests that, despite his already married state, he and Jane are to settle in ‘a white-washed villa on the shores of the Mediterranean’ where they will live as if they were married: ‘You shall be Mrs. Rochester—both virtually and nominally’ (259). This arrangement would in effect make Jane his illegitimate mistress. However, towards the conclusion of his explanation, Rochester admits that a mistress is ‘always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading’ (266). Jane, like Bluebeard’s latest young wife, upon the discovery of her intended husband’s past conquests, feels herself in danger of joining their ranks:

I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled in me as—under any pretext—with any justification—through any temptation—to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. (266)

Jane has now exposed Rochester’s big, dark secret, which, as Gilbert and Gubar correctly remark, is closely connected to the notion of male sexual guilt, and senses a threat to her own dignity and unyielding self-respect, as can be seen from the passage quoted above. What saves her from the threat of repeating the fates of his past conquests, however, does not come in the form of a brave brother, as in ‘Bluebeard’, for kinless as she is, Jane can rely on no one but herself. Rather, it is her strong character and firm resolution not to compromise her self-respect that guide her away from an existence of relative security, but in which she cannot respect herself or her beloved one, and towards an uncertain future without means or connections. It is also worthwhile to observe Jane’s pervading scepticism and suspicion towards Rochester’s love during their courtship. See for instance the following: ‘It can never be, sir; it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy tale—a day-dream’ (220). This might be seen as a kind of acknowledgement of the fairy tale qualities the novel

contains, both in plot and structure, but it might also be interpreted as a foreshadowing of events to come, and a confirmation that the prospect of such ‘complete happiness’ is indeed too good to be true. Also significant in this matter is the way Jane is very reluctant to accept the gifts and fineries Rochester tries to purchase for her leading up to their wedding day. Having all her life been meticulously ordinary, even ‘Quakerish’ (220) in dress and appearance, Jane is uncomfortable with assuming excessive adornments. I would also argue that one might see this initial reluctance in connection to Jane’s apprehension of becoming yet another number in the tally of Rochester’s conquests. Although this is not revealed to Jane until after the wedding has been interrupted, it seems significant to note how Rochester used to relish in showering his romantic interests with presents and fineries, before ultimately growing tired of them and discreetly discarding them. I would therefore argue that Jane’s hesitancy towards accepting such ornamentation reveals her resistance towards being objectified by Rochester – and thus becoming merely a ‘decorative wife’. This is in coherence with the tentative feminist ideas that Jane and the novel uphold.

In the period leading up to the climax of the forestalled wedding, during which Jane and Rochester become increasingly familiar and affectionate with each other, Jane is on several different occasions revisited in her sleep by a number of variations of the same dream. The first time this dream comes to Jane, in chapter XXI, it returns on the next seven consecutive nights – notice here the fairy tale associations related to the number seven – and it contains an infant ‘which I sometimes hushed in my arms, sometimes dandled on my knee, sometimes watched playing with daisies on a lawn; or again, dabbling its hands in running water. It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next: now it nestled close to me, and now it ran from me’ (188). Having as a child heard from Bessie that dreaming of children portends misfortune, Jane is not surprised when she hears of the misfortunes and ill health of her Reeds relatives. However, when inspecting the next iterations of this dream, as related in chapter XXV, the atmosphere becomes progressively darker and more frightening, this time presaging the misfortunes that await Jane in the obstructed wedding and her escape from Thornfield. This is suggested by the way Jane, while dreaming once again of an unnamed child, experiences ‘a strange, regretful consciousness of some barrier dividing [them]’ (240). Instead of idyllic scenes of a child playing with the flowers in a meadow, the child is now ‘a very small creature: too young and feeble to walk’ (240), shivering and

wailing. In the dream, Jane sees Rochester in the distance, but is unable to call for him or overtake him. In the next dream, Jane sees the prospect of Thornfield Hall in ruins, clearly foreshadowing the conflagration that is to destroy it. Still burdened with the charge of the infant, whom she cannot lay down anywhere ‘however tired were [her] arms—however much its weight impeded [her] progress’ (241). Trying to climb a crumbling wall in order to ascertain the identity of an approaching rider, the child clings to Jane’s neck in terror, and almost strangles her. Reaching the top of the wall, Jane recounts, it crumbles and ‘the child rolled from my knee, I lost my balance, fell, and woke’ (241). According to Gilbert and Gubar, this repeated dream pattern ‘corresponds to “the poor orphan child” of Bessie’s song at Gateshead, and therefore to the child Jane herself’ (358). They argue that the child represents Jane’s solitude and orphanhood, which, as I have previously argued, are issues that have come to constitute important components of Jane’s identity. Gilbert and Gubar thus argue that ‘though consciously Jane wishes to be rid of the heavy problem her orphan self presents,’ she cannot lay it down, and further that the perception of a dividing barrier represents the ‘disguised intuition of a problem she herself will pose (358). William R. Siebenschuh, whose analysis precedes Gilbert and Gubar’s, argues that the child in the dreams can be interpreted in several different ways. The child can be seen to represent Jane’s newfound love of Rochester, which is on several occasions in the text described in terms of children, like ‘newborn’ (208), and particularly sick children, ‘like a suffering child in a cold cradle; sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester’s arms—it could not derive warmth from his breast’ (252). Both Siebenschuh and Gilbert and Gubar agree, however, that the haunting child-dream is representative of the way in which Jane’s own childhood haunts her, particularly the much-discussed red-room scene. I would argue, therefore, that it seems significant that Jane revisits this scene in a dream before fleeing Thornfield. She relates that ‘I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears’, strongly reminiscent of her traumatic experience in this room, however, the gliding light that ‘long ago had struck me into syncope’ transforms in this dream into a kind of maternal spirit represented by the moon who entreats Jane, ‘My daughter, flee temptation!’, to which Jane replies, ‘Mother, I will’ (272). The descriptions of the emergence of this oneiric mother spirit echoes strongly Jane’s drawing of the Evening Star which she shows to Rochester in chapter XIII, and which he remarks Jane ‘must have seen in a dream’ (108).

Jane does indeed admit to the reader that the subjects of her paintings had ‘risen vividly’ on her mind, and that in painting them she has tried to embody what she saw ‘with the spiritual eye’ (107). After leaving Thornfield, Jane is no longer haunted by this dream. In relation to Gilbert and Gubar’s and Siebenschuh’s analyses of the significance of the child, I would like to contribute an aspect of this that they have not mentioned. These critics seem to agree that Jane’s inability to lay down the child and part with the it – her orphan self – is what generates the sensation of a separating barrier between Jane and Rochester. However, in moving to Marsh End and being inadvertently united with her only living relatives, I would argue that Jane is able to ‘lay down’ (358) her orphan self in accepting the love of her family, thus eliminating the obstacle she herself represented to her union with Rochester. All of this serves to suggest that Jane is a person highly susceptible to spiritual impressions, either conscious or unconscious, and that the dreams function as recurrent reminders and cautions to Jane to remain true to herself and her integrity. The union at the novel’s conclusion is only possible when Jane can recognise and receive love from more than one person, i.e. from both her family and her lover, a prerequisite that prevents her from making herself wholly and solely dependent on one single person.

Because of this, I contend that Jane’s decision to leave Rochester and Thornfield represents a considerable development of Jane’s identity. During a conversation between Jane and Rochester after the unsuccessful wedding, Rochester urgently implores Jane not to go, but to live with him, albeit in sin. Bordering on manipulation, Rochester, as Rich puts it, ‘plays on every chord of her love, her pity and sympathy, her vulnerability’ (479). During this crisis of emotion, Jane, as Lorna Ellis puts it, ‘is forced to weigh her desire to control her own destiny against her desire to be loved’ (143). However, although she is touched by his implorations, Jane remains faithful to herself and her principles. Her emotional struggle is presented as an internal debate between conscience, reason and feeling, whereof the latter almost mockingly refers to her solitude and kinlessness, as well as her insignificance, in order to persuade her to abandon her plan to leave: ‘Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?’ (270). However, Jane is indomitable in her resolve, and in the reply she gives one may recognise the advice provided by Helen Burns eight years before, which permanently establishes Jane’s uncompromising sense of self-respect: ‘*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself’ (270). The

importance of Jane's decision to forsake happiness and love for the preservation of her dignity is significant. It also serves to illustrate the development towards independence that Jane has heretofore undergone. Although she loves Rochester deeply, she is unwilling to let her emotional connection to and dependence on him compromise the self-respect that has become such an essential part of her identity. In leaving Thornfield, I would like to argue that Jane displays great strength of character, even though the manner of leaving would seem reckless and hasty. One might thus argue that her leaving Thornfield unnoticed at dawn is representative of the only emotional irrationality Jane falls victim to in connection to this episode, and, furthermore, her resolution not to let herself be swayed by persuasions and implorations is what constitutes the paramount token of her identity and character. I would argue that this episode is essentially the realisation of the assertion Jane made during her punishment of confinement in the red-room at Gateshead: 'Resolve ... instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die' (12). Though the circumstances are different and the prospect of oppression takes a different nature, I would argue that the cost is essentially the same: Jane is unwilling to compromise her self-respect in exchange for undignified security, be it under constant persecution at Gateshead, or under illicit and immoral conditions at Thornfield. The fervent promise ten-year-old Jane makes to herself will come to be realised virtually verbatim when Jane decides to leave Thornfield and sets out across the vast moors, without food or drink, and after several days without nourishment and rest, becoming increasingly gripped with desperation, she makes the following contemplation: 'Hopeless of the future, I wished but this—that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept; and that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness' (277). While the ten-year-old Jane is afterwards ashamed of having entertained such ideas – 'All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so: what thought had I been but just conceiving of starving myself to death? That was certainly a crime' (13) – the adult Jane does not, in her desperation, perceive of any such sin. Jane now wanders aimlessly about between road, moor and village. Because she has no money at hand, she is forced to resort to begging for food. The villagers, however, are suspicious of her apparently decent clothes and appearance and most of them shun her and turn her away. In pursuit of one last hope, however, Jane

catches sight of a light shining in the distance and decides to go and find its source. When arriving at the house from which the light shines, Jane knocks and asks for a night's shelter from the weather, but the housekeeper turns her away and refuses to fetch any of the other residents, a couple of young ladies whom Jane has observed through a window. Having been turned back into the rain, Jane is now reaches the furthest point of desperation: 'This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet door-step: I groaned—I wrung my hands—I wept in upper anguish' (286). It is in this position that a man, another resident of the house, finds Jane and welcomes her into his home and introduces her to the next chapter of her life as guest of the Rivers family in the house known as Marsh End, or Moor House.

### **3.3.4 Marsh End, or, Moor House**

At the house known variably as Marsh End and Moor House, Jane spends the first few days convalescing from her traumatic ordeal of wandering hungry and exhausted as an outcast across the inhospitable moors. Upon waking, Jane significantly conceals her true identity by telling her hosts Mary, Diana and St. John Rivers that her name is Jane Elliott. This might be seen as an attempt at creating an illusion of emotional distance to the distressing experiences Jane *Eyre* has recently undergone, and it also functions in a merely practical manner to preclude any attempt of recovering her on the part of Rochester. I would argue that this is significant because it emphasises the great value Jane puts on having control over her own life, and effecting agency in the way events turn out. Reviewing all of the previous relocations Jane has seen, they can all be put down to Jane's own volition. The first move, and perhaps the most unlikely to be available to Jane's influence, is actually the result of Jane's having refused to let the apothecary Mr Lloyd investigate whether the allegedly poor relatives on her father's side of the family might be willing to take Jane on. Jane rationalises this refusal by reflecting on the indignity she would have to suffer by living in poverty and thereby reveals the prejudices that the Reeds have inculcated in Jane against herself and against her own family:

I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of

the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste. (20)

Turning the focus back to Jane's present situation, the naïve fears of her childhood seem to have been fulfilled, although not in the way she expected. The entire episode of leaving Thornfield and the subsequent sufferings and indignities Jane experiences on the moors might be seen to represent the heroic act of purchasing liberty at the price of caste that the ten-year-old Jane was unwilling to undertake. Ironically, the relatives that would have constituted the alternative to Lowood, had Jane only allowed Mr Lloyd to organise the union, are the ones that will now be responsible for Jane's recovery and welfare. However, the familial relationship between Jane and the Rivers family is not discovered immediately, and their relation develops first from polite hospitality to friendship, especially between the sisters and Jane. In terms of the cyclical pattern that seems to be a constantly recurring element in the novel, we find also in this location a representation of an authoritative male figure in the character St. John Rivers. Although he is not as actively oppressive as some of the other male oppressors of Jane's previous acquaintance, his strictly controlled mien and apparent emotional detachment give him an air of austere aloofness. Furthermore, his profession as a clergyman and his solemn devoutness evoke in Jane a deep sense of respect and admiration. It could be argued that St. John's severe Christianity, as well as his stony demeanour, are some of the main reasons why Jane finds herself seeking his approval – because it is so rarely and never frivolously given – and eventually considering seriously his proposition of becoming his missionary's wife, the outcome of which would almost certainly be her premature death. Moreover, as Wood argues, St. John might also be seen simultaneously as 'the antithesis of Rochester' and a 'masculine mutation of Jane herself who takes self-control to an almost perverse level' (106). In this regard, one might draw attention to the recurring issue of fire and the contrast between fire and ice. While St. John is persistently described in terms of ice and cold; 'no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue a speaking instrument—nothing more' (350), and 'cold as an iceberg' (378), Rochester is in contrast depicted in terms of fire and heat, in phrases like his 'flaming and flashing eyes' (245), as Gilbert and Gubar also point out (339). Jane herself also identifies with the element of fire, especially in times of passionate anger, as

can be seen from the way in which she likens her anger after delivering her tirade to Mrs Reed to ‘a ridge of lighted heath, alive glancing, devouring’ (31), and when she throws into the fire the humiliating sign her stoic friend Helen has to bear as punishment at Lowood: ‘the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, the tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheeks’ (63). Upon considering St. John’s proposal, Jane senses a threat to her very nature in the incompatibility of her own fire and St. John’s ice: ‘forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—*this* would be unendurable’ (347). Looking again to the homophonous qualities of Jane’s surname, Eyre, in relation to the element of fire that is emblematic to her character, I would argue that it seems appropriate to comment not only on the fact that these comprise two of the classical elements – earth, water, *air* (*Eyre*) and *fire*, but also that the element of fire so closely connected to her identity is dependent on the other element of her identity, namely air (read: *Eyre*) to exist. This might be seen in relation to the way in which Jane is so closely attached to her surname and is reluctant towards assuming a different one upon her marriage, and the way in which its mention is elegantly passed over when she does marry Rochester at the conclusion of the novel. The dangers she envisions in the prospect of a marriage to St. John are not only based on her fear of living in a foreign environment with a man she does not love, but it is also grounded in her fear of losing her name and her identity – the fire of her spirit would be quenched should she be denied air/*Eyre*. In addition to the two most prominent instances of actual fire in the novel, namely the fire in Rochester’s bedroom and the final devastating conflagration of Thornfield, both at the hands of Bertha, one could argue that Jane is the novel’s most noticeable representative of figurative fire. Fire is symbolic of passion, anger, blood and love, all of which elements Jane personifies in the course of her story. Furthermore, fire is ‘an image of energy which may be found at the level of animal passion as well as on the plane of spiritual strength (Cirlot 106). Fire thus becomes a ‘meet emblem’, to quote Jane herself, of a character whose greatest defining elements are precisely animal passion and spiritual strength. Being from childhood driven by her passion and anger, Jane learns to control, but not alter, her fiery nature as she grows older, and is able to endure great hardships through persevering spiritual strength. The novel’s happy conclusion is contingent on her being united with her relatives, that is, with her blood, which in turn enables her to pursue and accept love.

The incompatible natures of Jane and St. John paired with their strangely similar personalities give rise to a conflict of feelings in Jane. This might also help explain Jane's gravitation towards him. An example of the way in which Jane exerts herself in order to please St. John and her disappointment at his neutral acknowledgement is found in the following passage, in which Jane, after having discovered and acquired her inheritance, arranges a refurbishment of Moor House: 'A spare parlour and bedroom I refurnished entirely with old mahogany and crimson upholstery: I laid canvas on the passage and carpets on the stairs. When all was finished, I thought Moor House as complete a model of bright modest snugness as it was, at this season, a specimen of wintry waste and desert dreariness without' (333-4). Expecting to receive commendation for her efforts from St. John, Jane is gravely disappointed when St. John is more concerned that her efforts have been overambitious and in vain, never uttering 'a syllable ... indicating pleasure in the improved aspect of his abode' (334). Jane articulates her disenchantment thus: 'Now, I did not like this, reader. St. John was a good man; but I began to feel he had spoken the truth of himself when he said he was hard and cold' (334). Interesting about this passage is not only the way in which Jane actively seeks approval for her endeavours from the only male member of her newly discovered family, the lack of which is felt all the more keenly, but also the nature of the redecorations in and of itself. The imposing atmosphere created by 'old mahogany and crimson upholstery' is eerily reminiscent of the dreaded red-room at Gateshead, in which Jane suffered a great emotional trauma. It is particularly significant, as Madeline Wood calls attention to, that in 'redecorating the house, Jane subconsciously re-creates the scene of her childhood trauma' (106). In an attempt to create the epitome of comfortable domesticity, Jane thus recreates the seat of the most traumatic experience of her life. Wood goes on to underline how 'Jane's reason for this act, even her understanding of it, is completely elided by the narrative voice' (107), an issue that I would argue serves to emphasise the tendency of cyclical patterns and repetitions that recur in the novel. This subconscious recreation of a traumatic environment seen in relation to Jane's intensely forthright articulation of her sentiments towards the rights of women in general and her own personal liberty in particular, gives rise to a significant conflict of conscious intention, and acts precipitated by subconscious influence. In her essay 'Enclosing Fantasies', Madeleine Wood establishes her argument on the basis of Gilbert and Gubar's claim that the episode in the red-room at Gateshead functions 'in itself as a

paradigm of a larger drama that occupies the entire book' (Gilbert and Gubar 341). They justify this claim by drawing attention to the way in which Jane recalls this episode in moments of great significance, and which precede important decisions. Wood furthers Gilbert and Gubar's argument by placing an even greater focus on the red-room as a symbol of the recurring issue of what Gilbert and Gubar see as the a central motif in the novel, namely Jane's constant oscillation between enclosure and escape. Jane's desire for freedom is persistently precluded by her tendency to turn from one entrapping environment to another one, when she believes herself to be searching for freedom and autonomy.

The move from Gateshead to Lowood does not constitute much change in terms of Jane's personal freedom, conversely, the privations she has to endure during her tenure there lead to even further marginalisation and limitation to her autonomy. The next relocation Jane sees, from Lowood to Thornfield, is indubitably the one that represents the greatest change in Jane's life thus far. However, in relation to Jane's yearning for independence, the amount of ground won is not as great as one might expect. Jane is once again, like she was at Gateshead, living in a great house at the mercy of its owner, previously Mrs Reed on behalf of her son John, and now Mr Rochester. The liminality of her position as a governess echoes the way in which Jane as a child living with her adoptive family was employed by the servant Bessie as 'a sort of under-nurserymaid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs, &c' (24) because her aunt and cousins excluded her from their company. Furthermore, the next move is occasioned by the intense emotional trauma that Jane experiences when the existence of Rochester's wife is revealed. What she seeks to escape by leaving Thornfield is the illusion of happy domesticity that Rochester proposes they achieve by moving to his house in France. In her next place of residence, however, her redecoration of Moor House, her disappointment at St. John's lack of enthusiasm as well as her ambiguous relationship towards him, might be seen to reflect the illusion of domesticity she originally sought to avoid.

Concerning the recurring issue of liminal positions in Jane's life, it is necessary to give due attention to the relationships built between Jane and her newly discovered cousins and the potentially problematic subject of St. John's proposal of marriage. During her residence at Moor House, the first role Jane occupies is that of stranger, and, once again, dependant. However, as she recovers her health and is able to take up work

as a teacher in the village school, she also grows closer her housemates, especially the female ones, Diana and Mary. The relationships within their domestic group now resemble those of a family. Significantly, this is the first time in all her life that Jane lives in a familial unit where everyone is equal and where mutual love and respect prevail. Upon the discovery of her kinship with the Rivers siblings, Jane is ecstatic at having finally found a family, a reaction that stands in stark contrast to the puzzled solemnity with which she receives the news of her inheritance, indeed even sadness, because it is contingent on the death of her only known relative. Being made aware of their common ancestry, Jane now begins to regard her cousins as her own brother and sisters: ‘It seemed I had found a brother: one I could be proud of,—one I could love; and two sisters whose qualities were such that, when I knew them but as mere strangers, they had inspired me with genuine affection and admiration’ (328). It is also significant that almost immediately after discovering that she is heiress to a large fortune, Jane quits her job as village teacher, without much sentiment towards the pupils she abandons, and steps into the role of *leisurely*, rather than *unemployed*, heiress, refurnishing and decorating in costly and lush fabrics and colours. This discovery of her fortune entails for Jane another new social role, namely that of a sister. However, as St. John reveals his plan for Jane to become his wife and missionary companion, this newly discovered fraternal and sisterly love is threatened, and the prospect of being at the same time wife, sister and cousin to St. John implies incestuous tendencies. Admittedly, cousin marriages were not socially unacceptable by the mid-nineteenth century, but towards the end of the century, they began to become increasingly discouraged as new knowledge was gained in fields of genetics and thereby the dangers of consanguineous reproduction (Anderson 296-7). For Jane, St. John’s proposal makes their sister/brother relationship tenuous, and without ever really resolving this conflict of roles, relationships and intentions, Jane is spared from making a final decision by the interruption of Rochester’s desperate telepathic cry (357).

While this is the first time Jane experiences this kind of seemingly supernatural divination in a wakeful state, she has up to this point had a number of foreboding dreams, presaging for instance the illness and eventual death of her aunt Reed. On these previous occasions, Jane has been keenly aware of the potential import of these dreams, as illustrated by the statement she gives before recounting one of these auguring dreams:

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs: and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long absent, wholly estranged relatives; asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be the sympathies of Nature with man. (187)

Upon hearing the voice of Mr Rochester crying her name, Jane reiterates her notion of Nature communicating with man, or intermediately conveying such communication between two ‘far-distant, long absent, wholly estranged’ lovers by the means of presentiments, sympathies and signs. She dismisses the possibility of any superstitious evil, and assigns this telepathic message to nature: ‘ “Down superstition!” I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate. “This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She roused, and did—no miracle—but her best” ’ (358). The love between Jane and Rochester is thus presented as something pure and natural, unstoppable and unquenchable, almost like a force of nature itself, thereby dispelling any notion of gothic superstition this seemingly supernatural incident might evoke. This revelation comes to Jane at the most opportune of moments, just as she is beginning to contemplate seriously the persuasions of St. John. The stark contrast between the prospects of the two marriages – one stilted and artificial, the other pure and natural – emerges before Jane, and she heeds Rochester’s call, keeping to her previous declaration of recognising and acknowledging signs and presentiments.

### **3.3.5 Ferndean Manor**

Having heeded the call of love, Jane is now once and for all reunited with Rochester, who has sustained serious injuries from trying in vain to rescue his mad wife from the fire of her own making. Although he is crippled and nearly blind, Rochester is now free to remarry whomever he chooses. However, despite the apparent sense of freedom, the sense of claustrophobic entrapment is prevalent also in Jane’s final home. The physical surroundings of Ferndean Manor is described as being ‘buried deep in a wood’ so dense that ‘even when within a very short distance of the manor-house you could see nothing of it; so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it’ (366). Furthermore, in

addition to the confining natural surroundings of the house, the sense of its patriarchal significance is heightened by the account of its history the narrator gives on the introduction to these final chapter of the novel: '[Mr Rochester's] father had purchased the estate for the sake of game covers. He would have let the house; but could find no tenant, in consequence of its ineligible and insalubrious site' (366). Jane and Rochester's current location at Ferndean Manor is thus contingent on two different figures of paternal and patriarchal authority – the late Mr Rochester for the acquisition of the estate, and Jane's uncle, the late John Eyre, for the inheritance that has enabled Jane to return to her former fiancé as his equal. I would argue that the apparently happy ending for Jane and Rochester is actually severely circumscribed by the patriarchal structures that permeate their society. Considering Jane's numerous relocations to new places and communities, the journey that the novel relates can thus be seen as 'a series of disturbing returns and repetitions that establish the motif of feminine enclosure' (Wood 96). Jane's final place of residence and her apparent happiness here are thus deeply lodged within paternal structures of the patriarchy.

Jane's journey from lonely, outcast orphan at the beginning of the novel to married bourgeoisie heiress at its conclusion represents a considerable leap in terms of social status and position. The passage often referred to as Jane's/Charlotte Brontë's 'feminist manifesto' might also be seen to advocate not only for the rights of (middle-class) women, but also for the rights of workers of both sexes. It is therefore interesting to observe how, towards the end of her story, Jane seems to be conspicuously content in her new position of affluence, almost to the degree of condescension. Through Jane's history and upbringing, reverence towards the boundaries of class has been continually ingrained in her, and now that she has made such a considerable advance on the ladder of the social hierarchy, this respect seems to remain. This is significant in relation to the many instances of circularity and cyclical patterns that the novel contains. In the concluding chapter, Jane relates how they were married and how, after an interval, Rochester regained his sight partially, as well as what became of some of the people closest to Jane's heart, namely her Rivers cousins. She also tells about the rest of Adèle's education after Jane vacated her post as her governess. This is where the contour of a pattern of circularity begins to appear. Adèle, like Jane, is sent to away to a school where she is 'not happy' and looks 'pale and thin' (383). Jane's investigations find that like the Lowood of her childhood, 'the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of

study too severe' (383), upon which discoveries she takes Adèle home. However, having intended to once again tend to Adèle's education herself, Jane 'soon found this impracticable' (383) because her husband requires all of her time and attention. Adèle is thus again sent away to school, albeit a different one that is 'conducted on a more indulgent system' (383). Drawing on the appearance of a repeating pattern, Susan Fraiman argues that '[i]nsofar as Adèle stands for Jane's oppositional child-self, it is ominous that she is banished from Ferndean, returned to a punitive Lowood, and at last reduced to grateful docility' (118). Also remarkable in this respect, I would argue, is the display of chauvinist English superiority and contempt for what is foreign, or rather *other*, Jane gives in the following description of her stepdaughter: 'As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her *French defects*; and when she left school, I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled. By her grateful attention to me and mine, she has long since well *repaid any little kindness* I ever had in my power to offer her' (383, emphasis added). From this brief passage one might see not only Jane's prejudices of class, but also of nationality, and not least of parentage. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that Jane's assessment of Adèle's 'French defects' stems as much from the inherited sins of her mother as from Adèle's general Frenchness and her actual nationality. This trespass against English propriety places Adèle in a position of social inferiority towards Jane, a fact that could help explain why Jane, as socially superior to Adèle, sees her own acts of kindness as something that would engender a debt to be repaid. Moreover, the success of Adèle's education is demonstrated by her being pleasing, obliging and docile, qualities which Jane in her previous vehement repudiation of social conventions for women, deemed to be unnatural and promoting stagnation and restraint for the autonomy of women. While this would seem to suggest a defamation of Jane Eyre as a symbol of early feminism, I would like to argue that by having Jane revert to the prevalent conventions of class and gender, as well as Jane's oscillating ambivalence throughout the novel, Charlotte Brontë emphasises the rigidity with which these social constructs are sustained and thus perpetuated. It also serves to illustrate the limitations that a patriarchal society sets for the potential for women's development and self-realisation. Although Jane's inherited fortune probably exceeds Rochester's assets after the loss of Thornfield, Jane lets herself be subsumed under Rochester's name, authority and autonomy, as can be seen from the following passage, in which Jane speaks to Rochester's servant John: '

“Thank you, John. Mr. Rochester told me to give you and Mary this.” I put into his hand a five-pound note’ (382). Unwilling to act on her own behalf, Jane avails herself of (or rather a-veils herself in) her husband’s name in order to dispense what is most likely her own money, thus undermining the sense of autonomy that she has determinedly sought already from childhood. Furthermore, as Fraiman also points out (119), the fact that Jane hands to John the money also intended for his wife Mary, implies a conforming to the notion that the husband subsumes and supersedes the authority and autonomy of the wife, especially in financial matters, as she herself implicitly admits when she claims to act on behalf of her husband.

### 3.4 Chapter Conclusion

*Jane Eyre* has for more than a century and a half stood firmly not only in the canon of English literature, but more significantly in the canon of feminist literature. However, as I have shown in this chapter, there are several elements in the novel that seem to be conflicting with the feminist ideology the novel aspires to sustain. Among these problematic issues we find the way in which the novel ultimately adheres to the patriarchally approved trajectory of the female protagonist by having Jane and Rochester marry and so to speak ‘live happily ever after’. Therefore, I have tried to illustrate through analysis of the novel’s genre and plot structure, how Brontë through the means of appropriating a conventionally male genre and plot structure can be seen to be subverting these traditionally gendered patterns. At the same time, I have analysed the significance of names and titles in the novel, emphasising the important relationship that exists between names and the issue of identity. Identity has also been my main point of focus in my analysis of the geographical locations between which Jane moves in the course of the novel. The physical mobility that Jane gradually achieves is a majorly subversive element in a time when a woman’s appropriate place was confined to the home. Consequently, the conventional conclusion by marriage becomes all the more anticlimactic. However, the sum of Jane’s proto-feminist endeavours, emblematised by the famous monologue advocating for the rights of women’s freedom of movement and intellectual expression, supersedes the potentially problematic issues of patriarchal compliance and enables *Jane Eyre* to maintain its position as a precursory feminist work in the literary canon.

## 4 Comparison and Conclusion

When engaging in a parallel study of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, it becomes increasingly evident that these works have a great deal more in common than just the handful of characters that the first borrows from the latter. In addition to the similarities of Jane and Antoinette's marginalised social situations, there is also a conspicuous correspondence of the plots. In the following I would like to demonstrate some of the many elements that coincide in the plots of the two stories, using to support my arguments the keen investigations by one of few critics who have made the similarities between Jane and Antoinette a main point of study, namely Elizabeth R. Baer in her essay 'The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway'.

As my study of the two novels have shown, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* share some of their most significant instances of symbolism in the way that the issues of fire, dreams and mirrors are given great import in the progression of the plots. Furthermore, as Baer points out (135), both of the protagonists reside in five different locations in the course of each plot; Antoinette at Coulibri, Mt Calvary, Granbois, an unnamed house in Jamaica, before finally at Thornfield; Jane at Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, and finally Ferndean. The similarities between the two protagonists begin already from their childhoods. Baer comments that while Jane is an orphan from the beginning, Antoinette becomes one at an early stage in the novel. She further underlines how both girls are at least partially raised by their aunts, and that they both live in family groups in which a male child is preferred; Pierre at Coulibri and John Reed at Gateshead. One of the most striking similarities that Baer points out is found in the fact that both Jane and Antoinette suffer an injury by a blow to the head inflicted by another child, John Reed and Tia, respectively, upon which injury both respond with rage and ensuing illness. Baer remarks that both Jane and Antoinette attend schools that isolate them from society and where religion is strictly heeded, and upon leaving their schools ready to embark on young adulthood, both of them encounter the same man almost immediately, namely Edward Fairfax Rochester (Baer 135). Although we at this point in the narratives encounter a discrepancy in the period of time that passes between the first encounter and the ensuing marriage, the plots do converge in the fact that both women do (eventually) marry Rochester. I would like to expand on Baer's observation of

Jane and Antoinette's first encounters with Rochester by arguing that these respective encounters constitute the paramount turning points in the lives of both women. However, while Jane's acquaintance with Rochester ultimately has a happy outcome, the case is diametrically opposite for Antoinette. Upon Jane's acquaintance with Rochester and their eventual marriage, Jane gradually comes to know not only Rochester, but more importantly she also gets to know herself. I would thus argue that it is through her meeting with Rochester that Jane is for the first time prompted to become aware of her own identity – who she is and who she wants to be. This is most importantly due to the fact that with Rochester she feels for the first time that she can interact with someone as an equal – at least intellectually, given that their initially unequal social stations prevent true equality. Antoinette, on the other hand, enters into a union with Rochester practically involuntarily. Their marriage is arranged by their families in order to trade Antoinette's fortune in exchange for Rochester's good, English name. I would argue that this transaction is permeated with the rules and conventions of the patriarchal ideology that dictates their society. First, due to the tradition of primogeniture, Rochester is excluded from inheriting the family estate and fortune from his father and is thus required to obtain these through the means of a good marriage. Second, Antoinette's family, and especially her stepfather, wish to ally themselves more closely with England and the notion of Englishness in order to create a further distance between themselves and the ubiquitous ambiguities that characterise the West Indies in terms of race and ancestry, but also in relation to the possibly dubious origin of fortunes in a country whose slave population has recently been emancipated. Not having had the interval of deliberation and self-discovery that Jane is forced to take between the failed marriage and the successful one, Antoinette enters the marriage without having had the chance to discover her own identity as she steps into adulthood from the isolating confines of her convent school.

Yet another similarity between the protagonists of the two novels, as Baer remarks, is found in the fact that they both have prophetic dreams and visions (135), and even more significant, I would argue, is the way in which Rochester figures in both Jane's and Antoinette's dreams, named in the former and unnamed in the latter. Furthermore, Antoinette's third and final dream is 'unmistakeably the same' as the third of Jane's five recounted dreams (Baer 144). In these dreams both women envision the destruction of Thornfield, and both imagine in their dreams that they are climbing the battlements of this manor house. Significantly, both dreams culminate in them jumping

or falling from the parapet. Compare 'I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee, I lost my balance, fell, and woke' (*JE* 241) with 'I called "Tia!" and jumped and woke' (*WSS* 124).

Moreover, adding to Baer's analysis, I find it important to observe how the issue of age is presented in the two versions of Rochester and Antoinette/Bertha's relationship. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is at the age of twenty-one sent away to Jamaica to 'espouse a bride already courted' for him (260). He marries Bertha, who later turns out to be five years older than him – 'her family and her father had lied to me even in the particular of her age' (262). This fact is revealed in Rochester's account of his first marriage in connection with Bertha's emerging insanity, as if suggesting that the two are somehow connected. In any case, it is clear that Rochester considers Bertha's higher age an anomaly in their marriage. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette marries at eighteen, having just left convent school. Rochester's age is not explicitly stated in this version, but he is on several occasions described as a 'young man', presumably somewhere in his twenties. Rhys has thus made a conscious choice of making Antoinette younger than Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, the most remarkable instance in relation to the issue of age in a relationship is represented by the twenty-year difference that exists between Jane and Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. This disparity in age and experience is presented as a problem on several occasions, for instance by Mrs Fairfax and particularly by Rochester himself. Jane seems to be the only one who does not consider their difference in age to be a problem, an attitude that seems to appease the concerns of her lover. It is significant then, that the difference of five years that exists between himself and Bertha is posed as a problem and as a contributing factor to the deterioration of both her sanity and their relationship, while the considerably greater gap of twenty years is easily accepted and passed over.

A further analogous detail, although internal to *Jane Eyre* only, is found in the way that both Jane and Antoinette/Bertha rebel after intervals of ten years. Susan Meyer points out this feature (55), and remarks that Bertha has been held in captivity in Thornfield's third storey for ten years when she sets it ablaze, as Rochester reveals: 'Glad was I when I at last got her to Thornfield, and saw her safely lodged in that third-storey room, of whose secret inner cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast's den—a goblin's cell' (264). Jane is ten years old when she delivers the rebellious speech to her aunt that will bring about her enrolment at Lowood School, where she resides for

another nearly ten years before she feels the urge to break free from the constraints of its monotony. A final interval of ten years that Meyer does not mention, is found in the concluding chapters of *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane tells the reader of the current circumstances of some of the main characters and also mentions that she has now been married to Rochester for ten years (383). When considering these consistencies, the idea of a relationship of duality existing between Jane and Antoinette/Bertha, which I would argue Rhys anticipated Gilbert and Gubar in openly suggesting, seems to be unequivocally confirmed in the following quotation by the dying Mrs Reed to the adult Jane: “You have a very bad disposition,” said she, “and one to this day I feel it impossible to understand: how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend” (204). Considered in the purpose of comparing the characters Jane and Antoinette/Bertha, I find it especially significant how this statement could just as well have been directed at Bertha and her literally flaming rebellion as at Jane and her figuratively fiery insurgence. Adding to Baer and Meyer’s observations, I would like to contribute one further detail which serves to further establish the parallel link between Jane and Antoinette. Before their greatest rebellions – Jane’s furious tirade to her aunt and Antoinette’s setting fire to Thornfield – both seek comfort in imagining distant, exotic places. Jane achieves this by reading, among others, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Antoinette imagines in the dream she has just before she realises what it is she has to do, her true home and birthplace – with the places she used to visit and the people she used to know.

Antoinette/Bertha’s burning of Thornfield and her subsequent suicide might be claimed to be subversive acts and a final demonstration of whatever little power she has left. As my analysis has heretofore shown, Antoinette has a special relationship with the element of fire and from childhood to her last conscious moments, she identifies with this element. This identification with fire does not only come from inside Antoinette, but from her natural surroundings as well. In contrast to the warm and vibrant nature of her native Jamaica, the England she encounters in Part III of the novel is described as unendurably cold and drab, to the extent that she disbelieves that her dreary surroundings can really be England. Her act of arson and self-immolation might thus be seen to represent not only destruction, but also an attempt at recreating the heat and passion of her native West Indies, an act that will enable this representation of the West Indies and

Antoinette's fiery identity to entirely obliterate the cold and hostile environment which has supplanted them. Baer accurately comments on this that 'Antoinette's final torching of Thornfield Hall is an act of assertion, of defiance, of symbolic identification with her West Indian heritage' (134). Yet, I would argue that this act that not only destroys the patriarchal structure, that is, the actual physical building in which she is trapped, which, in perpetuation of the patriarchal institution of primogeniture, did not come into Rochester's possession until the death of his older brother. Her suicide is also an act of anti-patriarchal sabotage because it destroys the identity that Rochester, as a representative of the patriarchy, forcibly assigned to her. In her final moments of recognition, Antoinette realises that what she 'ha[s] to do' in order to escape but also sabotage the structures that confine her, is to let them be consumed by the fire emblematic of her Creole spirit. The two final lines of the novel poignantly present this: 'There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage' (123).

It is in these final passages of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that the plots of the two novels engaged in this instance of literary symbiosis conflate. Precisely like Antoinette feels herself trapped in a 'cardboard house' (118), Rhys' narrative is also at this point trapped, literally circumscribed by the pre-existing narrative of *Jane Eyre*. It is therefore significant that Antoinette in these passages not only behaves in a manner that clearly suggests that she is losing her grip on reality and is in a state of mental instability, thus adhering to the plot of *Jane Eyre*, but also that she at this point becomes increasingly obsessed, both awake and while dreaming, with the many associations with the West Indies she can glean from her ostensibly bleak surroundings. She is fixated on finding her red dress, which she perceives to be still redolent of 'vetivert and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering', and which she describes to have 'the colour of fire and sunset' and flamboyant flowers (120). As my previous analysis of Antoinette's character and identity has shown, she identifies strongly with her native Jamaica with all of its sensory impressions – its vibrant colours, lush vegetation and warm climate. I would argue that the references to the West Indies and Antoinette's Creole childhood in Part III seem conspicuously numerous and the fact that their intensity increases proportionally with the madness that culminates in her resolution to do 'what she has to do', presumably to burn down Thornfield, seem to suggest a

correlation between her Creole background and her insanity. This corresponds to the exoticising colonial discourse that Said contends permeates relations between Western society and any non-Western culture. In these final passages, then, Antoinette is reduced to a stereotype of the Creole woman – irrational, excessively sensual, and childishly naïve, all at once. Despite her potentially subversive act of literary mimicry in writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* in response to *Jane Eyre*, Rhys thus makes herself complicit in the orientalist framing of Antoinette/Bertha as the ‘madwoman in the attic’ (to use the term coined by the ubiquitous Gilbert and Gubar) whose lunacy is to a great extent ascribed to her West Indian background. Because Rhys chooses to conflate her story with *Jane Eyre* at this point, and for the first time establishes conclusively her novel’s relationship with its host and source of inspiration by making explicit reference to a character that is indubitably borrowed from *Jane Eyre*, i.e. Grace Poole, one might argue that she is merely adhering to what is already prescribed in the pre-existing text, without being able to alter the course of events.

This brings us to the cyclical patterns of repetition and circularity that recur in both of these novels. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the circularity is represented by the devastating fires that bookend the narrative, first in the torching of Coulibri by the angry mob of former slaves, lastly in Antoinette’s anticipated arson that lies just beyond the concluding sentences. Additionally, as I have pointed out in my analysis, Antoinette repeats her mother Annette’s life almost down to the detail, a fact that is emphasised by the similarity of their names. Precisely like her mother Annette marries the English Mr Mason, Antoinette marries the older Englishman Mr Rochester. After an interval of some years of marriage, they both go insane. Moreover, in an intertextual perspective, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a text that is intrinsically circular in that it inevitably leads up to the preordained plot of *Jane Eyre*. This circularity is emphasised by the way in which Rhys in her narrative gives subtle signals, through dreams and presentiments, to indicate that Antoinette is aware of her inevitable awaiting fate. In *Jane Eyre* the cyclical patterns are represented first and foremost by the novel’s *Bildungsroman* structure, and the major quest cycles that Jane commences and concludes in the course of the novel analogously with her development and discovery of her sense of self and identity. Furthermore, the many allusions to fairy tales both in the novel’s form and content suggest that the novel is constructed around a fixed narrative formula in which there is always a happy ending for the hero or heroine. This adherence to a prescribed pattern echoes the way in which

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is also contingent on an external text, and thus they both move towards a previously decided conclusion; Jane towards the 'happily ever after' that the fairy tale formula prescribes, and Antoinette towards the final fatal leap that *Jane Eyre* requires.

This tendency of predetermined outcomes and adherence to fixed patterns evokes a strong notion of inescapable limitation. However, as I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, both of these novels reveal that the reasoning behind systematic oppression is always tenuous, and the structures that uphold it could thus be seen to be no stronger than a cardboard house. I would thus argue that both Jane and Antoinette are trapped within cardboard houses – Jane within the tenuously legitimised cardboard house of patriarchal Victorian Britain, Antoinette within the intertextual boundaries *Jane Eyre* sets for her, *and* within the equally tenuous justifications of imperial superiority. The development of both Jane and Antoinette's identities is greatly influenced by their oppressive environments, but where Jane finds room to resist conventions and establish her own identity, Antoinette is only ever able to reclaim her lost identity through a vastly destructive act of self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, through the means of subversive and ambiguous narrative technique – appropriation of the traditionally male *Bildungsroman* genre in *Jane Eyre* and a pervasive destabilising ambiguity in the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea* – Brontë and Rhys both successfully manage to represent and put into question the unjustified arbitrariness of social oppression.

Considering the many similarities that exist between Jane and Antoinette, it is even possible to imagine the existence of a kind of alliance between the two characters. Thus, in order to allow Jane to have her happy ending, Antoinette needs not only to burn down Thornfield and sacrifice herself, but also to cause severe economical, but more importantly physical injury to her husband. Consequently, when Jane completes her circuit of development in returning to her former lover, she is able to entirely reverse their former power relations. Jane is now rich; Rochester has lost his grand estate and now has to live in a house he deemed unsuitable and unhealthy even for his mad wife (256). Jane has lived a happy and healthy existence in the company of her newfound family, while Rochester is incapacitated by his injured sight and hand, living in solitude but for the company of two servants upon whose help he is entirely dependent. The reversal of their power relations now gives Jane the upper hand that Rochester previously always held; she is physically, and in all likelihood mentally, stronger, she is richer and

she is no longer kinless, friendless and lonely. This ties nicely in with the subtly subversive principles that Jane and the novel have upheld from the beginning, and might also help ameliorate the fact that the novel ultimately adheres to conventions about a novel with a female protagonist by ending in a happy marriage. Jane's eventual success is in any case at least partially contingent on the incapacitation of her partner, a feat which is achieved through Antoinette/Bertha's ultimate sacrifice.

Rhys' choice of concluding her novel at the exact point she does, namely before the devastating, and for Antoinette (or for the purpose of emphasising the amalgamation of the storylines, *Bertha*) fatal, conflagration actually takes place, is subtle, yet remarkably effective. Significantly, despite having borrowed substantially and unabashedly from its host text *Jane Eyre*, it is not until after the conclusion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that it relies fully and wholly on the reader's pre-existing knowledge of the plot of the host text. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel that might perfectly well be read as an individual work of literature, regardless of the reader's previous knowledge of *Jane Eyre*. Its interpretation, however, will vary greatly between a reader familiar with the text to which it implicitly refers and one who is not. The ending of the novel thus allows for two different interpretations, depending on the reader's previous knowledge of *Jane Eyre*. A reader who reads *Wide Sargasso Sea* as an independent novel will be open for a wider range of outcomes to what appears to be an open ending of the novel. Without being aware of the previous plot with which the story now conflates and the inevitable outcome this prescribes, the reader is free to imagine what it is Antoinette 'has to do' and how she might regain her freedom and her identity. A reader familiar with *Jane Eyre*, however, has already from the beginning of the novel condemned Antoinette to suffer the same fate as her mirrored self Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, and is compelled to assume that what Antoinette 'has to do' is to set fire to Thornfield and sacrifice her life for the sake of ultimate defiance and a final act of resistance. Rhys' choice of stopping her plot short of the fire that would provide for Antoinette an unequivocal conclusion emphasises the autonomy of even a symbiotic text.

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