Caribbean women authors, in an attempt to reclaim their voices lost to patriarchy and colonialism, are creating a new literary tradition by expanding the boundaries of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Many have challenged the conservative male *Bildungsroman*’s deeply entrenched gender bias where female transcendence was impossible due to cultural prescriptions that mandated women’s passivity and selflessness. As a revision of this narrow tradition, many Caribbean women authors have radically transformed the quest through female protagonists attempting to define themselves, not through isolation and autonomy as with their male counterparts, but through female-centered spaces in which they can (temporarily) escape the ramifications of colonial hegemony.

Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid in *Annie John* confront the complex relationships between gender, genre, and race, as they help to inform an emerging female *Bildungsroman* tradition. Through their use of biological mothers, other-mothers, female friends, and motherlands, Rhys and Kincaid investigate their protagonists’ shifting locational identities within the
racially torn, poverty-stricken islands. By revising the genre to include female protagonists and complex issues of race, Rhys and Kincaid, as well as many other Caribbean women authors, give voice to the marginalized female Other of the West Indies.
(In)Forming the Female Bildungsroman in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*

by
Rebecca L. Farrow

A THESIS
submitted to
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented March 19, 2002
Commencement June 2002
Acknowledgements

I would like first to thank my family—Mom, Pop, Rhonda, Joey, Matthew, and Thomas—for supporting me through the especially difficult first stages of this project, for respecting my decision to pursue women studies, and for never questioning my ability to succeed in it. And thanks to each of them for being a uniquely inspiring creature, impacting my life in amazing ways.

Thanks are also due to my thesis committee: Professor Susan Shaw, for gently pushing me to grow both academically and personally; Professor Anita Helle, whose many insights refined this work; and Professor Patti Sakurai and Arne Skaugset for enthusiastically committing to this project.

Gratitude goes to several phenomenal women whose feminist convictions, belief in women studies as an academic discipline, and constant encouragement made this work possible: Professor Janet Lee, Lisa Lawson, Trina Filan, Gina Jackson, and especially Tracy Clow, whose wisdom, empathy, and laughter never went unappreciated.

To Paige with many unspeakable thanks for being who she is and for gracefully guiding me in my becoming.

And especially to Stephen Street, for his patience, generosity, humor, and kindness. For all of this and more I am immeasurably grateful. Vous et nul autre.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One: Situating a Tradition</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: (Re)Writing the Mother(Text) in Jean Rhys's <em>Wide Sargasso Sea</em></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Searching (for) the Self in Jamaica Kincaid's <em>Annie John</em></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Returning to the Islands</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
i am accused of tending to the past
as if i made it,
as if i sculpted it
with my own hands. i did not.
this past was waiting for me
when i came,
a monstrous unnamed baby,
and i with my mother’s itch
took it to breast
and named it
History.
she is more human now,
learning language everyday,
remembering faces, names and dates.
when she is strong enough to travel
on her own, beware, she will.

Lucille Clifton, “i am accused of tending to the past”
(In)Forming the Female *Bildungsroman*
in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*

Chapter One: Situating a Tradition

A consistent body of contemporary Caribbean women's literature reveals their female characters, no longer peripheral objects perceived through the male gaze and ensnared within the "father" text, are essential to the plot and central to the works' themes. In an effort to rescue women from their status as Other and disrupt their positions as subalterns, many Caribbean women authors repeatedly focus on the development and individuation of the fictional girl-child, a narrative position allowing them to revise the European literary model of the *Bildungsroman*. Caribbean authors Jean Rhys and Jamaica Kincaid enter the rigid boundaries of this tradition by first referencing Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), a classic female *Bildungsroman* that details a woman's resistance to gender and class oppression. In their novels, Rhys and Kincaid employ various elements of the genre not in an effort to accept or valorize it, but instead they subvert its androcentric assumptions and expand the female *Bildungsroman* tradition. By investigating the complex connections between genre, gender, and race, they question whether they can recuperate a female West Indian subject within such an inherited tradition and
whether their female protagonists can create a subjectivity that withstands the devastating forces of patriarchy and colonialism.

Not surprisingly in a patriarchal society, at one time Caribbean women authors received scant attention in criticism, literary histories, anthologies, classic works like Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (1970), Michael Gilke's *The West Indian Novel* (1981), and other popular works by Bruce King and Edward Baugh. Regrettably, of the various well-regarded male authors who write from and about the West Indies, including Brathwaite, Walcott, Lamming, Naipaul, Carter, and Harris, most have failed to acknowledge gender dynamics found within a patriarchal culture, and others ignore women all together (O'Callaghan, *Woman Version 2*). In the 1970s, however, arguably beginning with the publication of Merle Hodge's *Crick, Crack Monkey* (1970), the same pivotal year Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou published first books, there was growing interest in women's texts which began to receive recognition for (re)creating the female past once distorted and destroyed by colonial erasure (O'Callaghan, *Woman Version 17*).

The over-simplified term "Caribbean women writers" describes an extremely diverse group of women from numerous racial and ethnic groups who reside in many nations and write in at least four European languages, as well as many Caribbean Creoles and whose works cross all literary genres (Chancy 12). Through their diversity, these female authors have collectively undertaken the task of articulating Caribbean women's experiences by embarking on the writing
process with a self-conscious project of revising the ideological assumptions created by Euro-centric domination of their culture (Newman 24). With immeasurable effort, they are retrieving their female protagonists from the abyss of the colonial (literary) periphery and are overcoming the negation of their identities as women in a world that proudly defines itself as male.

Rhys and Kincaid, as do many other Caribbean authors, acknowledge the complex issue of race, which defines social locations and informs the political and economic identities of their literary characters. These convoluted racial and ethnic categories, fueled by a long history of racism, can develop into a difficult subject for white readers to investigate, especially as it is closely linked with the issue of class. Feminist literary theory can be a useful tool for transforming the colonized status of women; yet, one must scrutinize the appropriation of white, middle-class theory to texts produced by Caribbean women. Without conscientious examination, white critics can be guilty of reinforcing racial stereotypes, a counter-intuitive offense that can go ignored or unchallenged in the literary tradition.

A compelling narrative strategy authors utilize to confront colonial forces is disrupting and subverting long established literary traditions, particularly the popular literary genre of the male quest, or Bildungsroman. This novel of formation originates in the Idealist tradition of Enlightenment with its belief in human perfectibility and historical progress, and it derives from an understanding of human growth that assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 5). Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Wilhelm
Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels (1795) is generally considered the first Bildungsroman novel, a text that established the essential elements of a hero who seeks his rightful place in the world. The literary genre, reiterated in the curriculum of an enforced colonial education, depicts a hero who abandons his childishness, stasis, and emotionality as he enters the adult world of autonomy and self-sufficiency. One of the greatest limitations of this literary tradition is its entrenched gender bias where even in the Bildungsroman's broadest definitions, it presupposes a wide range of social options available only to men (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 7). Unlike the hero of the genre, the heroine's narrative is unnecessary in the traditional Bildungsroman precisely because cultural expectations of femininity during adolescence, including passivity, vulnerability, and submissiveness, follow her to womanhood, baring her from the touchstone quest for transcendence.

In The Voyage In, a valuable text for understanding the Bildungsroman tradition, the editors insist the female Bildungsroman, which combines genre and gender, traces the heroines "voyage in," substituting the intense self-conscious or psychological development of its heroine for her more active male counterpart's engagement with society. The authors illustrate shared similarities between the traditional Bildungsroman and the forming female Bildungsroman tradition, including a belief in a coherent self, faith in the possibility of development, insistence on the time span in which development occurs, and an emphasis on social context (14). Yet, they indicate two distinct narrative strategies of the female
Bildungsroman: the first is an essentially chronological apprenticeship, mimicking the linear structure of the male Bildungsroman; the second emerging strategy is a woman's awakening, typically occurring later in the heroine's life and consisting of brief, epiphanic moments (11-12).

In conceptualizing the female Bildungsroman, Rhys and Kincaid use the Bildungsroman's focus on the central character's growth and formation to establish literary parallels between their experiences as colonized women and the experiences of the small West Indian colonies under British control (Paravisini-Gerbert 86). Susan Fraiman, when considering the context of establishing a specific female Bildungsroman, imagines "the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as endless negotiations" (x). The girl-child protagonists in Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) and Kincaid's Annie John (1985), as well as other female protagonists in Hodge's Crick, Crack Monkey, Erna Brodber's Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home (1981), Zee Edgell's Beka Lamb (1982), Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), and Michelle Cliff's Abeng (1984), confront countless crossroads in their motherland which is racially divided between Afro-Caribbeans, Caribbean Creoles, and white colonists. As anti-colonial narratives, these novels chronicle the protagonist's struggles to establish agency within a motherland that fights for independence from colonial hegemony.

In the quest to become self-determining individuals, Caribbean women's female protagonists must negotiate various social and political forces that challenge
the formation of a coherent self, including British imposition in the West Indies, colonial hegemony through issues of race and class, the legacy of slavery, the alienating effects of a colonial education, and issues of sexual maturation. Through their protagonists, these authors critically scrutinize unbalanced power relationships and resist gendered subordination, giving language and expression to women’s experiences of marginalization; they also seek to undercut thematically the pervasive discourses that support colonialism and patriarchy, including myths of ownership, divisions of power, racial hierarchies, imagery of subordination, and the destruction of women’s bodies (Alexander 21). Further, the recurring disruption of sexual maturity in the young women's lives reveals explicit and obscure fears of male-defined sexuality, identity-obliterating masculinity, inevitable marriage, and enforced motherhood.

Many novels of female development, not limited to Caribbean women authors' texts, include intimate descriptions of the tremendous longing for and tragic loss of the mother, whether a biological mother, an other-mother, or the motherland. Numerous female authors counter the traditional Bildungsroman by envisioning a girl’s progress of achieving selfhood as her building solidarity with other women, not as a self-imposed period of isolation that the traditional hero endures (Fraiman 10). Where the hero's maturational norms and linear plot direct him toward separation and independence, some critics agree women's more independent self, paradoxically, is located in the creation and maintenance of intimate relationships. Pia-chia Feng, analyzing ethnic women writers of the
female Bildungsroman, asserts their female protagonists are often engaged in a perpetual search for their mothers (20). The return to the mother for Caribbean women authors is a particularly significant trope in that the repressed mother figure not only comes to represent the protagonist’s quest for self but also the nightmare of racial oppression.

The pervasive association of the Caribbean mother with the beautiful, betrayed island itself, and the island's ability to embody history, makes maternal corruption a (more) central and consequential symbolic element in Caribbean imagery (Rody 121). In some Caribbean women's novels, the separation between mother and daughter is volatile and absolute; especially in more contemporary works, the break is caused by a biological mother's murder, abandonment, or abortion of her child, or the daughter casting her mother as cruel, weak, incapable, or murderous. These tumultuous or absent relationships represent the ways in which the conquest of, and domination over, the motherland and the women of the islands reflect the power imbalances inherent in patriarchy. Indeed, in an extension of this intense mother connection, female protagonists, isolated and abandoned from human mothers, unable to locate an identity outside oppressive forces of male domination, must ultimately become their own mothers.

Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea and Kincaid's Annie John are two intriguing texts that address issues of home and exile, center and margin, self and Other within and outside the boundaries of the Bildungsroman tradition. These authors and their texts are not meant to represent of the bulk of Caribbean women's literature, and
comparisons between the two are problematized by various factors, including race, ethnicity, class, and time period. The parallels between their novels, however, help to explain the obliteration of women's identities in androcentric literary models and present two Caribbean women authors' tremendous effort to (re)write them. These women define themselves, their identities, their literary female protagonists, and their motherlands, while perpetually exiled to the periphery, the very place that necessitates the reclaiming. In appropriating the language and myths of colonial intrusion, post-colonial female authors, including Rhys and Kincaid, regain some control over them and the woman/native construct (O'Callaghan, Woman Version 59). Rhys and Kincaid create new pathways for considering the Caribbean woman's peripheral position in literature and work to authenticate the dismembered and deformed female from Western fiction.

Jean Rhys was born Ella Rees Rose Williams, in 1890, to a Dominican Creole mother and a Welsh-born doctor in Roseau, on the Windward Islands of Dominica. As a white woman in a predominantly Afro-Caribbean community and as the great great-granddaughter of a slave-owner, Rhys internalized the power divisions between the various racial and ethnic groups, and this ambivalence influenced her personal and literary consciousness. In 1907, she left her island home for England and enrolled in the Perse School, Cambridge (1907-8) and then the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (1909). Because she exited the Caribbean at such an early age, returning only briefly once within her lifetime, and because she eagerly sought a British education, a handful of critics challenge her
identification as a Caribbean author. With the publication of twelve novels, including *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), however, Rhys consistently articulated the displacement of her female protagonists both in the motherland of the Caribbean and the mother country, England. The ambiguity of her social position allows her to investigate the anguish of the Creole's double alienation from both the Afro-Caribbean community and the British imperialists. Particularly in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the death of the girl-child indicates a failure to communicate across these gender, racial, class, and psychological divides, a complex literary project that has sustained Rhys's popularity long after her death in 1979.

Christened Elaine Potter Richardson upon her birth in 1949, the Antiguan-born Jamaica Kincaid also fled the islands at the age of seventeen, leaving her family behind and legally changing her name upon reaching New York. Kincaid is best known for her portrayal of the mother-daughter matrix, one through which she investigates Afro-Caribbean women's double exile. This is a recurring theme woven through her short-story collection, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), and her novels, *Annie John, Lucy* (1991), and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), and her nonfiction works, *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Brother* (1998). She shifts her literary focus from the “victories” of white imperialists who colonized the West Indies to an insightful articulation of the consequences the colonized suffered. Her oeuvre challenges the white Western canonical literary tradition in various ways, one of the most striking is her rejection of Creole forms, instead using prosodic and
rhythmic components of English sentences (Ippolito 3). This stylistic approach allows her to assume the language of the colonizer and transform it to chronicle the plight of the colonized. With her accessible writing style and her discussion of intensely personal themes, Kincaid has become highly anthologized across racial and ethnic literary categories.

Rejecting the seemingly universal androcentric literary models that allow the female only the peripheral and ineffectual role of the muse or victim, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that for women writers a literary tradition is still being created: "(T)he son of many fathers, today’s male writer feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today’s female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging." They contend the woman writer "fear(s) that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Madwoman 49). In recognizing that the woman writer’s struggle is battling against the ways in which males read and write her, Gilbert and Gubar insist she actively seeks a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against a traditional literary authority is possible and necessary.

Various post-colonial Caribbean literary critics suggest Rhys serves as a literary foremother to Kincaid because they both are intensely interested in the mother-daughter matrix. Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea includes the biological mother as one of the essential elements in the protagonist's individuation, and Kincaid's
Annie John takes the girl-child's relationship with her mother as the novel's central theme (Abruna 13). Ambivalence for their mother/lands is not simply indicative of their feelings for the physical environment but can be interpreted more clearly as their relationship to their maternal-island history, one of slavery and racial and ethnic prejudices under white, colonial conquest (Rody 113). The young protagonists of the works, Rhys's Antoinette and Kincaid's Annie John, having been abandoned by their biological mothers, ultimately seek out their island motherland; yet, the imposition of colonialists eventually impedes the girl-child's security within a female-centered space. So in the adolescent mind, connections are made between identifying with women and joining them in their oppression, a connection that threatens the possibility for either Antoinette or Annie John to sustain an authentic self within their Bildungsroman quest.
Chapter Two: (Re)Writing the Mother(Text) in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Rewriting a canonical text is a brilliant form of narrative revision many Caribbean women authors use to (re)examine the consequences of patriarchy and colonialism in fictional women's lives. Both Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Kincaid in *Annie John* explicitly indicate Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a novel written within the context of nineteenth century imperialism, as a simultaneously empowering and subordinating text for women. *Jane Eyre* functions in seemingly contradictory ways: first, it compels literary critics with its re-visioning of women's agency and articulates the split of the female self into the *Bildungsroman* heroine, Jane Eyre, and the savage and imprisoned madwoman, Bertha; yet, it often repulses the same readers with its insistence on colonial ideals and patriarchal visions of woman's proper place in the world.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is a *Bildungsroman* text in that it records the story of the mad, imprisoned Bertha who, for Brontë, impedes and nearly destroys the marriage between Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester. While paralleling and challenging the mother-text, Rhys's "post-dated prequel" pushes the boundaries of Brontë's "happy ending" by inverting traditional fairy tale elements (Baer 132-33). Antoinette's husband is not the rescuing prince, but a cruel, withdrawn colonizer sent to the West Indies to claim unearned wealth, a stranger who ultimately kidnaps and
imprisons her in his English mansion. Gilbert, in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress," writes Jane's:

story, providing a pattern for countless others, is [... ] a story of closure and escape, a distinctively female Bildungsroman in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome: oppression (at Gateshead), starvation (at Lowood), madness (at Thornfield), and coldness (at Marsh End). (338-39)

*Jane Eyre* charts the treacherous and liberating development of female consciousness and presents an authoritative, narrative "I" that exercises control over the life being told (Sharpe 30-31). Where Brontë expands the notion of women's development within the novel by attempting to free Jane Eyre from gender and class oppression, Rhys investigates intersections of class, gender, and race by giving voice to the marginalized Antoinette/Bertha.

One of the moments Rhys began to associate the West Indies with oppression came when she read *Jane Eyre* upon first arriving in England from the Caribbean at the age of sixteen (Friedman 120). She wrote in her letters that upon reaching England, "*Jane Eyre* was one of the books I read then [... ] of course, Charlotte Brontë makes her own world, of course she convinces you, and that makes the poor Creole lunatic all the more dreadful" (Letters 296-97). In correspondence written throughout her exorcising of Brontë’s colonial demons, Rhys reveals her desire to transform Brontë’s “paper tiger lunatic” Bertha by articulating the West Indian Creole woman’s subjective and locational identities as
she travels the treacherous path of the Bildungsroman. By directly responding to
Jane Eyre, a text that stands as the “mother-text” to Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys turns
away from England and embraces the islands as a place of origin.

Rhys begins her literary transformation in Wide Sargasso Sea by centering
her attention on the female characters, while the male characters illustrate
destructive androcentric ideologies and are the cause of women’s oppression. Her
psychological portrayal of Antoinette not only provides a unique perspective on a
Creole woman’s experiences, but it allows the typically silenced female protagonist
narrative authority. Sections in the novel where Antoinette’s voice is replaced by
that of a man is Rhys’s indication of the violence of male intrusion. Beyond this
narrative strategy, she is also well regarded for her use of the modernist narrative
devices of dreams and associative thinking, orality and metaphor, and interior
monologues, components not found in the traditional Bildungsroman (Abruna 13-14). All of these techniques combine in a powerful confrontation of the colonial,
patriarchal, and literary barriers Rhys attempts to transcend.

Where Jane Eyre begins with Jane facing "no possibility of taking a walk," so Wide Sargasso Sea commences with women's symbolically repressed agency.
Antoinette narrates the sudden withdrawal of her mother, Annette, who feels
“marooned” after the Emancipation Act of 1834, which promulgated the abolition
of slavery in the West Indies. Annette, as the maternal figure, mirrors for
Antoinette the paradox of reclaiming a history of disaster and disempowerment in
many of the same fundamental ways Annie John's mother will reproduce for her.
The dilapidated house on the Coulibri Estate and the despairing Annette are metonymically connected as each reflects the other's distressed and corrupted core. Even the "very bad" road leading to the estate, where "repairs were a thing of the past," mirrors the sorrow and seclusion of the women within it (17). Antoinette cannot remember when the Coulibri Estate was prosperous, and its devastation is reiterated in Annette's retreat when she ultimately "refused to leave the house," a signal of her forced submission, so the two collapse simultaneously (19). Rhys's revision of and challenge to the classic Victorian notions of the angel in the household illustrate the inherent flaws of women's confinement to the home (a "happy ending" found in Jane Eyre) where women attend solely to the desires and commands of their male owners and progeny. The first passage of the novel signals, at least, the fragmentation of this English ideal by removing the façade of virtue and revealing a woman's shattered self.

The presence of mirrors proves another critical metaphor throughout Annette and Antoinette's stories, representing the complexities of rescuing a self threatened by colonial forces that disrupt and devastate their lives. Although Antoinette grows accustomed to solitary life, her mother internalizes the loss of social status in the economic crisis following Emancipation and longs to escape her island prison of poverty and racial tensions. Antoinette remembers of her mother: "Perhaps she had to hope every time she passed the looking-glass" (18). Gilbert and Gubar, in a feminist critique of fairy tales, assert to be "caught and trapped in a mirror [...] is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a
viable self” (*Madwoman* 37). For Annette, the mirror becomes a symbol of her
dual existence, a physical, although elusive, representation of her divided self.
Because she searches the mirror for authenticity through the assumed lens of the
men she must interest, the clear vision of her self remains blurred until a man
constructs and validates it for her.

Eager for security, the impoverished young widow marries Mr. Mason, an
affable, but foolish Englishman who ventures to Jamaica to claim an undeserved
fortune from an unsuspecting Creole woman (Thomas 172). Rhys wanted to
acknowledge the “many unfortunate marriages” of the period in the Caribbean in
which West Indian merchants and planters were wealthy until sugar cane crashed;
in the face of economic devastation and an uncertain future, their daughters and
widows “were very good matches” for Englishmen (Wyndham 297). These
Englishmen were aware of the dowry potential in the West Indies and knew that
“native” women would not have the benefit of the law once married and recovered
to England; instead, their identities would be consumed in a world that devalued
and humiliated them. Mason, an imperialist seeking money and property, ensnares
Annette in a colonial system of ownership and violence, and much like the land and
slaves he has conquered, so he will subjugate her.

Annette, desperate to regain her planter class status, emphatically commits
to Mason and the conditions of his affections. Much like Mason’s portrait of a
“lovely English girl with brown hair and blue eyes and a dress slipping off of her
shoulders” that hangs over their dining room table, Annette is confined within the
framework of his British identity, one that reflects Victorian notions of submissiveness and fragility (36). The portrait, removed from England and internalized by the Creole woman, represents two separate worlds and, more specifically, symbolizes a sense of dual exile from both the black and white cultures of the island. The painting, serving as a looking-glass in Annette's search for British identity, is a vehicle through which Rhys investigates her fictional women's Otherness. Annette, then, during the tumultuous time of Emancipation, must navigate shifting locational identities between the black "natives" of the island and the empowered white colonists.

Coupled with being dominated by Mason, Annette is obsessed with Pierre, her young and mysteriously sickly son, whom she favors over her only daughter. Antoinette suffers the ramifications of her mother's fixation, and although she seeks her love, Annette rejects her, "not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her" (20). As a result of her mother's inability to construct an autonomous self outside of her husband's visions of a cultured British family, Antoinette is incapable of perceiving herself as a constituted whole in her mother's eyes. During horrific thoughts of abandonment that haunt Antoinette at night as she sleeps, she recalls her garden near the Coulibri Estate: "I am safe [. . .]There is the tree of life in the garden [. . .] I am safe. I am safe from strangers" (27). One of the striking thematic parallels between Rhys's text and Jane Eyre is that both tales provide an incredible terrain of motherlessness and an endless search for surrogate mothers, imitating the very
basis for representation itself: loss of the referent and the attempt to replace it (Kloepfer 28). After the emotional abandonment by her mother, Antoinette’s narrative focuses on the central, pervading theme of Antoinette's *Bildungsroman* quest for a viable self.

Antoinette turns from her displaced mother to Christophine Dubois, a black Martinique house-servant, in an effort to establish a unified self outside the limitations of her biological mother. As an Obeah woman, Christophine maintains an intimate connection with the island by using magic and sorcery to perform various spells, from curing illnesses to creating love potions and countering black magic. Such a religious vocation positions her automatically as an enemy to the white hegemony in which she lives (Savory 141). Christophine was brought to the family as a wedding present, a colonial commodity, to Annette from her first husband, so her original attachments to family, community, and country are severed. Her removal from Martinique to Jamaica signals her position as an outsider, just as Annette is an outsider from the white planter class; however, she is deeply rooted in the Afro-Caribbean culture of the islands, and therefore presents Antoinette with the potential to establish herself within the same culture.

The Coulibri Estate, as a former slave-owner's plantation, contains the suppressed rage and agony of the past; yet, even under the vengeful eyes of white imperialists, it is Christophine who challenges the power of both Annette's husband, and later, Antoinette's husband. Although Christophine, who stays with Annette after Emancipation, creates an identity as the other-mother to Antoinette,
that is the only identity the historical period allowed her to possess. Race and class
differences, however, will continually separate Antoinette and Christophine, for
one is among the Creole class and the other is a newly emancipated slave.
Antoinette remains trapped between and alienated from two mothers who have
themselves suffered from the contradictions and cruelties of a culture that breaks
them apart in rigid categories and unjust hierarchies.

Antoinette, attempting to understand Christophine’s reasons for staying at
Coulibri, pressures her mother for answers, who responds, “She had her very own
good reasons you may be sure. I dare say we would have died if she’d turned
against us” (21). Annette, distracted and detached, pacifies her daughter, insisting
in spite of Christophine’s kindness, death “would have been a better fate” (21).
Had Christophine left the family, Annette and Antoinette would have been trapped
in the justified rage of the emancipated slaves; however, all in the town are
"terrified" of Christophine and the Obeah power she possesses (21). As a result of
staying on at the Coulibri Estate, Christophine is savior to Annette, thereby
becoming her mother and positioning herself as mother to Antoinette after
Annette’s emotional decline.

Throughout her narration, Antoinette struggles to define and maintain a
woman-centered community where her authentic self could be developed.
Christophine nurtures and supports her as a mother would, and moments of
compassion between the two inevitably follow moments of Annette’s rejection of
her daughter. Antoinette attempts to soothe her mother’s pain only to be pushed
away as her motherly says simply, "Let me alone" (20). After Antoinette discovers she talks to herself out loud, she becomes frightened of her, remembering: "Once I would have gone quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa [...] once I made excuses to be near her [...] to hide me, keep me safe. But not any longer. Not any more" (22). When Annette's wandering frightens Antoinette, she runs to find Christophine in the kitchen, where she spends "most of her time" (20). Within this maternal space, Antoinette is able to embrace the indigenous culture of the islands by rejecting her Creole mother for the Afro-Caribbean other-mother.

In the absence of her mother's affection and outside of Christophine's care, Antoinette turns to the island landscape for comfort. Eden-like and mysterious, the garden embodies the beauty and threat of the mother Antoinette mourns:

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell [...] Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky-looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root [...] The scent was very strong and sweet. I never went near it. All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. (19)

Many critics, in an attempt to explicate the religious elements of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, view the threatening landscape, especially repeated serpent imagery within the garden, as a form of hidden corruption, mirroring Eden's implications of moral decay (Adjarian 207). The scene takes place in a damaged Eden, one that holds the promise of salvation, but from which she will ultimately be banished. Rhys presents a different, noncanonical version of the Garden of Eden, a revision
complete with overt sexuality and palpable hostility. Ellen G. Friedman notes that Rhys draws this other garden in opposition to the "sheltered" and "Eden-like" orchard at Thornfield Hall with its tree of life, the giant horse chestnut that lightening strikes and splits when Rochester proposes to commit bigamy (121). In presenting this alternative Eden, Rhys directly confronts the rigid categories of good and evil operative in Brontë's Eden and, by implication, in England.

The first version of Antoinette's dream, in a series of three that will serve as a lose thread guiding the narrative, comes when she still lives with her mother:

I dreamed I that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could only hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying. The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me. (26-7)

After admonishing Antoinette for calling out, Annette returns to her son, whose physical weakness mirrors the emotional incapability of Mason for whom she also sacrifices. Although Antoinette is alone and afraid, she must not speak, must never complain or inquire, in accordance with the cultural prescriptions that mandate women's silent submission (Kloepfer 28). Antoinette remembers: “I woke next morning knowing that nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing” (27). She tries imagining she is safe within the house, but her dream has set in motion the continuation of Brontë's text, one that inevitably leads to a nightmare from which she can never escape.

To assist Antoinette in establishing a fixed identity within the Caribbean culture, Christophine arranges for her to play with Tia, a young black girl and
daughter of Christophine’s good friend. One afternoon at the bathing pool Tia dares Antoinette to perform an underwater somersault, which she attempts, accepting a challenge that will be reiterated in the last scene of the novel. Tia decides the performance is insubstantial and unimpressive, announcing she has lost the bet. Antoinette calls Tia a “nigger,” and Tia responds by saying, “Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger” (24). While the interaction illustrates racial relationships in the West Indies just after Emancipation, it also is a traumatic event that causes Antoinette to return to fears regarding her mother and reveals her anxieties of being isolated from her female-centered community: “All that evening my mother didn’t speak to me or look at me and I thought, ‘She is ashamed of me, what Tia said is true’” (26). Although Antoinette's relationship with Tia might have fixed her identity within the native Caribbean culture, the fracture of their friendship again capitulates Antoinette into racial ambiguity.

Antoinette's narrative is shaped by the uncertainties of navigating the boundaries between British colonialism and the threatened West Indian culture. What Tia indicates regarding race she internalizes, and the fissure of her identity after Emancipation is made more distinct:

[. . .] 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 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. (102)
Antoinette is neither English nor "native," and she must negotiate the divide between subject and object, center and periphery, self and Other. The economic collapse of the Caribbean after the 1830s transformed the planter class into disenfranchised "white niggers" and "cockroaches," which forced them outside the ranks of the new community of non-slaveholding English colonials (Thomas 182). In fact, *Wide Sargasso Sea* begins, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks," a signal that Antoinette's narrative commences with the racial tightrope walk of the Creole (17).

Part of Annette's shame from her confrontation with Tia at the bathing pool stems from the exchange of dresses between the two girls: "I searched for a long time before I could believe that she had taken my dress [...]. She had left me hers and I put it on at last and walked home in the blazing sun, feeling sick, hating her" (25). Wearing Tia's dress, she returns filled with rage and unexpectedly meets English visitors dressed in their finery. The contrast between their "beautiful clothes" and her threadbare dress emphasizes class differences and the importance of a woman's appearance, reaffirming much of what her mother has taught her. After the English family leaves, Annette, aware that they had scoffed at Antoinette, admonishes her for behaving "very badly" and for wearing a dress that was "dirtier than usual" (22). When Annette learns it is Tia's dress, she demands Christophine burn it out of shame for her daughter's identification with the blacks of the island. Rhys's connecting the dress with the English visitors is essential because Antoinette's dress would have signaled the restoration of the Creole mother and
daughter to the planter class. Antoinette returns wearing Tia's dress, however, representing her vacillating identity between the impoverished blacks and the wealthy colonials.

Although Annette repeatedly warns Mason of the emancipated workers' growing hostility at the Coulibri Estate, he continues to pacify her, saying, “They’re too damn lazy to be dangerous [. . .] They are children, they would not hurt a fly” (32-35). During this period, Afro-Caribbean people were consistently dehumanized by white colonials who characterized "natives" as lazy, over-sexualized, and possessors of subhuman brutality (Mackie 254). Toni Cade, in "On the Issues of Roles," articulates colonial assumptions of blacks during this historical period as stereotypes of the hardy, physically superior, animal-like, lazy negro; she contends this stands in stark contrast to the white colonizers' belief of the intelligence, sensitivity, and intuition of whites (145). Despite his colonial “knowledge” of the workers, they set fire to the Coulibri Estate, destroying the symbolic representation of his imperial power.

Annette’s death does not occur at the burning of the Coulibri Estate, although that is how the story is told; in the chaos of the fire, Mason sees Annette struggling to go farther into the house, attempting to rescue her parrot from the flames, a parrot who dislikes everyone but Annette and whose wings Mason has clipped. It is not Annette who appears on the balcony, but it is Coco the parrot: “He made an effort to fly down, but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire” (43). Annette does not attempt to save any of her
objects of exchangeable value, but instead rushes to save the bird that, in a
declaration of his Otherness, asks the question “Qui est là? Qui est là?” and then
identifies himself, to himself “Ché Coco. Ché Coco,” a form of colonial mimicry
Antoinette will later emulate (42).

The scene of the burning of Coulibri and Annette's emotional demise
necessitates the mirroring of Antoinette and Tia, even though the reflection they
both witness causes a divide in their individual sense of self. In the moment of
Antoinette’s horror and disorientation from watching fire consume the house, Tia
becomes “part of her life,” her mirror image, her Other:

I saw Tia and her mother and I ran for 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 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. (45)

While the mirroring of Antoinette and Tia is apparent, this intensely charged scene
cannot tell us anything about Tia’s fears of racial tensions or her understanding of
her relationship to Antoinette (Raiskin 110). In Antoinette’s immediate attempt to
repair the mother-daughter fragmentation, one that prevents her identity formation,
she turns to her mirror, Tia, who returns the shattered sense of self. Interestingly,
the name Tia is the diminutive of Antoinette and Antoinetta, Brontë’s name for her
Creole madwoman (Gregg 184). In a confusion of pronouns, Antoinette
remembers, “I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her” (45, emphasis added).
Antoinette’s use of “her” signals a blurring of the mother-daughter figure, where the two are inextricably linked. She intensifies her relationship with Tia and Tia’s mother to recreate the façade of an authentic self and to establish a community of women to replace the lost one shared with Christophine and Annette. Without Coulibri, her motherland, and in the absence of her garden, Antoinette believes the answer to contentment and approval can be found in living with Tia and her mother.

The destruction of Antoinette’s previously untainted motherland signals the psychological death of her mother, a madness Antoinette’s life eventually will reproduce. The metonymic connection between the Coulibri Estate and Annette reveals itself again in the simultaneous destruction of the house and her psyche. When the emancipated slaves destroy the house, Mason's connection to the English hegemonic paradigm is simultaneously ruined. He removes Annette from the burning Coulibri, where he “half supported, half pulled her” from danger, but because the house at Coulibri and Annette are metonymically connected, his rule over her burns in the house’s flames. Antoinette concentrates on her motherland in this chaotic moment: “I knew that I would never see Coulibri again [. . .] When they had finished [burning the estate], nothing would be left but blackened walls” (44-45). The place of garden walls covered with “green moss soft as velvet” where Antoinette found solace becomes a ruin where nothing under imperial control, neither her mother nor the Eden-like garden, can survive (23). After the torching of the Coulibri Estate and the death of her beloved Pierre, Annette, spiraling quickly
and irrevocably into suicidal depression, can no longer be manipulated by Mason and is exiled.

The landscape has irreversibly changed, seemingly into a barren graveyard with a single "mounting stone" metaphorically marking her mother's burial site. Annette's grave, however, would not be a return to the womb of her motherland; instead, it would serve as an encasement in land owned and governed by tyrannical men. After her mental demise, she is moved into an institution while Mason escapes with her remaining money, dodging threats of harm and intense humiliation. When Antoinette is allowed to visit her mother in an asylum, she is convinced she will not truly find her: "She was a part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone, I was certain of that" (47). So the loss, physically and psychologically, of her biological mother is signaled by the destruction of her island mother, a tangible loss not only exemplified in Antoinette’s psychic landscape, but also in her physical landscape.

In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, a tragic event causes the hero to separate from his family; similarly, with Annette's affliction, Antoinette leaves the temporary care of Christophe and is placed in a convent by Mason, thereby exiting one maternal space and entering another. In this nearly all-female world, Antoinette is cared for by the nuns, in particular by Sister Marie Augustine, who (similar to Miss Temple for *Jane Eyre*) becomes her spiritual mother and cares for her in the same ways Christophe once did. This cloister embodies acceptance and empathy, emotions Annette refused to display toward her daughter, and it
presents a world where Antoinette is able to enter a safer mother-bond. Her entrance into it, however, is made possible only through the loss of her biological mother, the devastation of her motherland, the loss of her Other, Tia, and the absence of Christophine.

Most significant regarding Antoinette’s time spent at Mount Calvary Convent is her self-discovery as the female utopia offers her a space to create an independent identity, a place where there is "no looking-glass" (54). Without a physical mirror, the young women of the convent are able to construct an identity outside the patriarchal definitions of womanhood and are given the space to create definitions of their true selves. As Antoinette cross-stitches with the other young girls, her needle “swears” in and out of the canvas, a verb indicating their transgressions against gendered social norms of attracting men. Compelled by a sudden force of self-assertion, she stitches, “Antoinette Mason, née Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839” (53). This “fire red” threading with which she writes her name symbolizes her declaration of selfhood. Her display of autonomy is illustrated on a white canvas with roses colored blue, green, and purple, an image similar to the Eden-like garden of Coulibri where flowers bloomed in a “bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, [and] deep purples, wonderful to see” (19). In a mixture of Christian and fairytale metaphors, Rhys allows Antoinette briefly to return to her motherland without the intrusion of her biological mother and from the safety of the protective convent walls.
Antoinette finds peace in the mother-centered convent, where its strict rules and unyielding rituals form a way of life she quickly adopts. She remembers, “The convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death” (56). The contradiction between life and death in the convent is a reiteration of Antoinette’s memories of the garden where the “smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell” (19). The convent, like the garden at Coulibri, is both nature and nurture, and the narrow and shifting bridge between innocence and sin (Savory 134).

Paradoxically, it is also a place of death because it is the first physical space in which she is separated from Annette: “This is for my mother, I would think, wherever her soul is wandering, for it has left her body” (57).

It is striking that Antoinette’s narration moves immediately from blurring memories of her mother and the convent to the second installment of her nightmare. The dream, a foreshadowing of her tragic fate after marrying an Englishman, reveals her reservations about entering into the patriarchal realm that governs marriage and motherhood. In the dream, Antoinette moves toward an unfamiliar forest “following a man” who manipulates her movements as he holds the “end of her skirt,” symbolically a wedding dress where the veil will literally obscure her identity (59). The dream indicates her removal from the forest in Coulibri to England, in an enclosed garden “where the trees are different.” She approaches a tree and struggles to cling to it, but it sways as though it were trying to cast her off. This image recalls Anna Morgan in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* where Anna is on a ship "sailing very close to an island, which was home except
the trees were all wrong. There were English trees" (140). The "different trees" Antoinette does not recognize are also English trees; she subconsciously understands England is not the place she will find the peace for which she has longed. Although on some level she knows "the man" is leading her to a final confrontation, she cannot yet explicitly connect his image to England. In fact, when she wakes from the nightmare and finds Sister Marie Augustine by her bedside, she tells the nun, "I dreamed I was in Hell," not England (60).

This scene is a reiteration of Antoinette's first nightmare in which her biological mother admonishes her for crying out in her sleep. It is now Mother Superior who tends to Antoinette lovingly, although Antoinette recalls her mother as the nun brings her a cup of hot chocolate: “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 to drink hot chocolate” (61). For the first time in her narration, Antoinette articulates the physical loss of her mother. In essence, the last scene of her first narrative section closes with two deaths: the first image is of her mother’s early morning funeral, and the second is Antoinette’s early morning nightmare of marriage.

Immediately following Antoinette's dream is her new husband’s narration, an indication that her stepfather has removed her from the convent for marriage and that the nightmare (one she and her mother share) has come to past. Where Antoinette once searched the faces of Tia and her mother to locate a self-affirming mirror, she now turns her energies to assuaging her English husband. While his
story is literally trapped by her two narrative sections, the story of her childhood and the tale of her madness, her voice is mysteriously absent from this section until he has forcibly moved her to England at the novel's end. An aspect of language that reinforces the mother-daughter-motherland bond is Antoinette's ability to narrate only stories of her past that include her mother; therefore, within the structure of the novel itself, there is an inevitable return to the maternal bond, although that return, after the interruption of Rochester (England), is a necessarily tragic one. Christophine also loses narrative power in Rochester's section, a signal of women's suppressed agency under his tyranny (Harrison 178). This literary move indicates Antoinette's complete loss of individuation under his obsessive rule, and his narrative version of his marriage to Antoinette mirrors the chaotic relationship between Annette and Mason.

Where once Annette and Antoinette were financially dependent on Mason, who controlled Annette's wealth, Antoinette is now at the mercy of his arranged marriage to a man who was sent to the West Indies to claim a fortune. Initially she rejects the marriage to Rochester, astutely perceiving his love will not be given unconditionally, but rather it will be something she must work to acquire and preserve. She expresses her fear of marrying the Englishman because she is "afraid of what may happen," terrified he will devastate her in the same ways Mason ravaged her mother (78). Rochester's response to her concerns--"I'll trust you if you trust me"--is seemingly a committed response for a man who is preparing to wed a stranger; Antoinette believes his sufficiently persuading words and
acquiesces to his proposal. However, he follows his promise with "Is that a bargain?" an utterance which introduces the discourse of exchange, thereby revealing his actual incentive for entering the marriage: her beauty and fortune make her a prized possession, an effortless and effective way to acquire social status in the islands and to appease his greedy, judgmental father (79).

On their journey to the wedding house, one that once belonged to Annette, Rochester, removed from England and situated in the overgrown and overpowering islands, is plagued by its natural elements: “Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger” (70). The very colors that Antoinette uses to write out her name in the convent are the ones that overwhelm him. Colonials entering the West Indies for profit often called this physical reaction "seasoning," a period of initiation through which the human body and soul become inoculated to the excesses of the islands (Mackie 250). Rochester, in his mental exhaustion from their journey, confuses boundaries between the Creole Antoinette and the foreign landscape; Antoinette is not named in the passage, so the land becomes a tangible enemy, and his wife is a suspicious creature.

Rochester desperately struggles to maintain dominion over her, the Other he has married and wishes to oppress, by attempting to make sense of the surrounding landscape. He believes, “What I see is nothing--I want what it hides--that is not nothing" (87). By manipulating Antoinette, he dominates what she comes to
represent: the islands, their inhabitants, and the threat they pose to him as an all-powerful, but out-numbered, European (Adjarian 5). He refuses to accept that the women speak a language that does not function by his rules and that the landscape demands a relinquishing of control at its entry. Unable to overcome the perceived threat presented by the emancipated slaves and the untamed, uncultivated environment, he grows violently defensive and works to negate and delegitimize Antoinette and her Caribbean world: “I feel very much a stranger here,” he tells her, “I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side” (130). Though he tries to impose a kind of British rationality and order to environment--his narrative section beings, “So it was all over, the advance and retreat”-- it is clear this closure will prove elusive to him (65).

Upon first seeing the abandoned marriage house in Granbois, a house once inhabited by Annette and Mason, Rochester follows Antoinette inside “unwillingly for the rest of the place seemed neglected and deserted” (73). His description of the house is similar to Antoinette’s image of her mother: “It was more awkward than ugly, a little sad as if it knew it could not last” (73). Because this marriage is born of greed and desperation, a union devoid of genuine compassion, the marriage house predicts the fate of their time spent together in the West Indies. Annette falls into madness under the tyrannical rule of Mason in this house, and Rhys foreshadows the same fate for Antoinette who now takes the place of her mother and substitutes the English Rochester for the English Mason. He remains determined to resolve Antoinette's ambivalence toward him first into singular
modes of English womanhood, and second, once his failure to cast her as the chaste mother of English sons is clear, into the equally restrictive role of a savage Other (Ciolkowski 343). Complicating the layers of meaning, the marriage house also alludes to Antoinette’s potential to bear children, an act that would perpetuate the cycle of mother-child that consistently excludes Rochester. Further, they would either bear a girl-child whose identity would be lost to patriarchy and colonization or bear a boy-child who, as a white male, would benefit from those institutions.

Rochester ultimately loathes the motherland of his wife because it does not yield to his desire to capture it: “I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know,” and his insecurities are transferred to his wife: ”Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I had found it” (172). In his disorientation and resentment, Rochester betrays his wife with a young servant who has traveled with them to the marriage house. Desperately attempting to either kill or seduce her husband after learning of his affair, Antoinette retreats to the mountains in search of Christophine. On her journey, she suddenly recalls images of Christophine washing their clothes “knee deep in the river at Coulibri” with many other women who collectively produced a “gay busy noise” (108). Conflated with this image is her memory of the landscape: “The sky was dark blue through the dark green mango leaves, and I thought, ‘This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay’” (108). The parallel is unmistakable: Christophine is literally part of the landscape, one in
which Antoinette takes comfort. The river, the motherland, is filled with women “laughing and talking,” so the water is a woman-centered landscape into which she retreats to find serenity. When Antoinette seeks the aid of her other-mother, Christophine, she must inevitably return to soothing images of the landscape, a place untouched by Rochester or any other colonizing man. Interestingly, the scene occurs during Rochester’s narrative section, so although Antoinette retreats into a woman-centered space that has the potential to support authenticity (both in Christophine and the landscape), she must ultimately surface under his narrative (and literal) control.

Spurned by Antoinette, rebuked by Christophine, imagining that "even the telescope said don't touch me," Rochester experiences the terror of being lost in the landscape, "the green menace," and feels he must lash out to gain control. In a moment of rage, he renames Antoinette, first "Marionette," finally settling on "Bertha," as an act of resistance to Annette and her madness, one he fears his new wife will certainly inherit. For Rochester, her name reiterates the inescapable conflation of mother, child, and desire as “Marionette,” or puppet, mocks the madness of Annette and the tyranny of her English husband, Mason. He unconsciously understands the mother-daughter relationship is already encoded in their names because Antoinette is a combination of Annette and ‘toi,’ a hidden, implicit bond between mother and daughter (Chancy 103). Ultimately, Rochester's arbitrary label for her completely severs the mother-daughter history, pulling Antoinette from her mother and her past in Coulibri. She demands to know why he
calls her by that name, and he answers, “It is a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (135). It is not, however, that he wants to (re)create a relationship with her, but it is his attempt to dissolve her relationship with Annette and the island.

Not passive to his will, Antoinette struggles to reclaim her mother, her past, and herself as she realizes Rochester’s intentions: “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into something I am not” (148). Her new name reduces her to his own creation, effectively obliterating her agency and identity and all that remains of what her mother and Christophine have given her. In a novel where “names matter,” Rhys’s un-naming of Rochester (his identity is only known by inference through Jane Eyre) acts as a counter to his attempt to rename Antoinette. Antoinette’s various social locations shift with every change of her name and put her in-between the symbolic orders of English culture and black Caribbean culture, a split she feels and attempts to explain: “Names matter. Like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass” (Raiskin 109; Wide Sargasso 180). This moment demonstrates Antoinette’s disassociation from her body and a return to the mirror imagery, where the things she has lost are all necessary for a woman’s survival. In a patriarchal society, the act of a woman gazing into a mirror is inherently a social act, where scrutiny in the mirror becomes an attempt at self-formation. This surreal image of herself parallels the image of her mother fading in
the looking-glass of colonial expectations, one that denies their shared names, their language, and their matrilineage.

After learning of Rochester's affair, Antoinette becomes "a ghost" who has "nothing left but hopelessness," a arbitrarily assigned "mad girl" reaction he links to the madness of her mother, thereby recreating the mother figure in her (170). In response to his hatred, Antoinette asserts, "I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it" (147). He callously decides to remove Antoinette from the marriage house and supplant her in England, his mother country: "So we rode away and left it--the hidden place. Not for me and not for her. I'd look after that" (173). In his greatest sense of masculine entitlement, interestingly occurring at the end of his narrative section, he commits a conscious act of vengeance. Separating her from the wild and beautiful landscape, he effectively destroys her maternal heritage, preventing her from identifying with the power of the black culture she found represented in Christophine and Tia.

While Antoinette is confined to a cabin on their trip to England, she smashes dishes and glasses and attempts to seduce the man who cleans up after her and brings her food. She is drugged and, in feverish disorientation, believes "we lost our way to England" (181). In truth, she never truly arrives in England; instead, this image replays an earlier scene from her childhood when she secretly sees her mother for the second and final time after the burning of the Coulibri Estate. As she presses against the window of the asylum, Antoinette hears her
mother screaming and sees that a man is forcing her to drink rum. She hears her
mother's spoken hallucinations that recall the past, and despite her mother's early
rejection, Antoinette believes she "will kill anyone who is hurting my mother"
(134). Although Antoinette escapes the terrifying scene of her mother's
institutionalization, she ultimately flees into her own captivity where she smashes
things and a man who drugs her tells her to "sleep," just as the man from her
childhood memory told her mother to "forget" (48).

The mother's story becomes the daughter's story, a maternal inheritance
that will lead to Antoinette's madness and death. Antoinette cannot save her
mother for the same reasons she cannot save herself: she is trapped in an
androcentric world too powerful for her to overcome. In a striking literary move,
Rhys recreates several mother-texts simultaneously: Jane Eyre is mother-text to
Wide Sargasso Sea, and Annette's story is the mother-text to Antoinette's story, a
seemingly viscous cycle reiterating the destructive natures of patriarchy and
colonialism that work against women's lives and women's literature. Annette and
Antoinette's histories are two similar drafts toward the final pages of Brontë's
Bertha's madness. Annette realized she would not survive in Coulibri, and in a
cycle held together by the mother-daughter matrix, Antoinette soon discovers she
too will not survive.

Rochester, near the end of his narrative section, feels increasingly helpless
over the inextricably linked images of his mother-in-law and his wife, entertaining
notions that the madness of one assuredly leads to the madness of the other. Under
this haunting pressure, he believes Antoinette is inescapably susceptible to her matrilineal inheritance, and he demands to know if Annette Mason is alive. Antoinette answers, "No, she is dead, she died [. . .] Not long ago." When he forces her to explain why she told him early in their marriage that her mother had died during Antoinette's childhood, she answers, "Because they told me to say so and because it is true. She did die when I was a child. There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about" (128). The real death Antoinette refers to is the moment her mother turned away silently and coldly, forever rejecting her only daughter. Because Annette serves as a mirror to Antoinette, so Antoinette will suffer two deaths. Although her literal (inferred) death occurs at the end of the novel as Brontë intended, her first death is her marriage to Rochester.

In the final section, narrated by Antoinette and set in Rochester's mansion, Rhys defines madness in the Caribbean as both cultural and psychological, because there is no center for Antoinette/Bertha in England. This serves as a cautionary tale for many anglophone Caribbean authors who end their narratives on a note of expectancy that implies a better life for colonized subject in the metropolis (Clark 277). Once to England, Rochester forces Antoinette into an attic prison in Thornfield Hall where the maternal figures of Annette and Christophine are replaced by Grace Poole, Antoinette's caretaker who remarks, "I know one thing for sure, she hasn't lost her spirit" (178). The term is significant because it recalls the lives of the young saints from Antoinette's time spent in the convent. She
knows the young Saints she read about who were “all very beautiful and wealthy. All were loved by rich and handsome young men” (53). So Antoinette, like the female martyrs in the Bible lessons, has been removed from her cloistral life with her Mother (Superior) to her attic prison, causing her life to blur with their lives. By being locked away in a prison by her cruel husband (the man who literally owns her) she recalls Saint Barbara’s imprisonment by her father. The story of the skeleton girl, Innocenzia, the saint “not in the book” at the convent, is similar to Antoinette’s story which is not found in Jane Eyre (53).

Following a culturally prescribed pattern, Rochester deals with his inadequacy by denying the value of what he cannot master, by calling it "madness" and locking it away. In her living tomb of his attic, Antoinette struggles to construct a viable, surviving self, recognizing, “There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now” (180). In order to constitute herself, however, she must not only recall her physical appearance, but that recalling inevitably means returning to the past:

I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself and not quite myself. Long ago when I was a young 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? (180)

The girl she sees is herself and not quite herself precisely because her identity, from childhood watching her mother in the mirror, to adulthood and being watched in the mirror by her husband, has been formed by the image she constructed for
others, not herself. Rhys's use of mirrors is as the distorted reflection of two images, neither one of which is really Antoinette but which beckon and taunt her with their normality. Gayatri Spivak links the mirror imagery to the Narcissus myth; while Narcissus recognizes his Other as his self, Antoinette sees her self as her Other. Spivak suggests imperialism historically refracts the absolute Other into "domesticated Other" that strengthens "the imperialist self" (253). Similarly, the castigated Antoinette relies on mirrors and mirror images because they are central to the depiction of her dilemma of determining her own self worth.

It is significant that the looking-glass at Thornfield Hall appears only in Antoinette's dream. An imagined mirror replaces the concrete object that provided a medium for her to create an identity because her authentic identity is misted over by Rochester's prescribed Victorian roles. Antoinette's reliance on others to define the boundaries of her identity ultimately causes an irrevocable disassociation from her body that she reveals in a dream-narrative:

It was then that I saw her--the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of the tablecloth and I saw the flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it. (189)

The disorientation of her own movements reflects the uncertainty of her identity, and not recognizing the difference between a mirror and a gilt frame that reflects a ghost is to be the ultimate outsider (Sharpe 45). It is not surprising that in this chaotic moment she calls for Christophine, the other-mother figure for whom she
truly longs. Yet, even the boundaries between herself and Christophine are blurred, signaled textually in the merging of Christophine's direct speech with Antoinette's internal narrative, with no separate marks to indicate independent dialogues.

Rochester abandons Antoinette in his attic prison, and in so doing, he severs her connection with her biological mother, her girl-child Other, Tia, her other-mother, Christophine, and her island paradise. The final moments of Antoinette’s dream-narrative reveal the elusive and shifting identities of mother and mirror image as they dissolve under the weight of her enforced isolation in cold, cruel England.

While pacing in her attic prison, Antoinette clutches her red dress, one she wore when she felt Rochester most loved her and the two shared the possibility for happiness. In the final section, she allows it to slip from her hands and fall in front of the fireplace, an act that works on many levels by tying together her failed attempts to define herself outside of the male gaze: "I let the dress fall to the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and the dress to the fire [. . .] But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do" (186-87). The image of her red dress conflates with her "fiery red" embroidered name at the convent, the torching of the Coulibri Estate, the brilliant Granbois landscape, and the saints of fire, and all of this leads to an inevitable vision: the burning of Thornfield Hall.

In her final dream, Antoinette escapes Grace Poole and her attic prison, wanders into the main area of the estate, sets fire to the curtains, and runs to the rooftop; she jumps but wakes before she falls to her imagined death. She dreams
the sky "was red and all my life was in it" (189). In a "fraction of a second" scenes
from her life appear in her mind’s eye:

I saw the orchids and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I
saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs [...] and the soft
green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw the doll’s house
and the books and the picture of the Miller’s Daughter. 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. But when I
looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She
beckoned to me and when I hesitated she laughed [...] Someone
screamed and I thought, Why did I scream? I called ‘Tia!’ and
jumped and woke. (189-90)

Just as Antoinette’s first nightmare in her mother’s house predicted--“Someone
who hated me was with me, out of sight”--Rochester has taken hold of her waking
and sleeping self. Her movement from the forest to the garden to the house arrives
at the image of the bathing pool where she experienced the most intact reflection of
an identity. When Tia beckons (representing the black culture of the Caribbean),
and "the man" calls her "Bertha" (representing England), her escape is from the
man and toward Tia, thus indicating her long flight from double exile. It is clear
that Antoinette imagines a sisterhood with Tia during their time spent together, a
façade Tia shatters by disregarding Antoinette at the burning of the Coulibri Estate;
by jumping into the looking-glass in which she sees herself/Tia reflected earlier in
the novel, she longs to merge with both the colonial blackness and the lost mother-
bond Tia represents, attempting to achieve a wholeness that has consistently eluded
her. Even in her dream, however, her double is beyond her. The connections with
Christophine and Tia that Antoinette finally attains at the end of the novel is unquestioningly Antoinette's fantasy, the final desire of her final dream.

Having been forcibly moved to England, Antoinette's quest suddenly shifts as she is forever unable to claim a fixed identity within the Caribbean culture. Her question at the end of her dream sequence mimics the question Antoinette's mother's parrot asks, the question Annette asks, "Who is there?" which has been interrupted and answered for Antoinette by Rochester: you are your mother and the uncolonized landscape, so you will suffer the fate they endured. The voice of the man gives the answer to the question of her identity. The memory of the parrot's call gives Antoinette the notion that she has the ability to fly; this misconception is suicidal even though it occurs in the dream-text, for Annette's parrot, with its wings clipped by Mason, could not escape the burning Coulibri Estate. The conflation of her dream and her mother's true history signals Antoinette's inability to determine whether the story she tells is her mother's or her own, and it reveals her subconscious understanding that the two may be the same.

Although in Jane Eyre Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall near the middle of the text, Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea ends with Antoinette waking from her final dream and preparing to leave Rochester's attic prison forever. When Grace Poole finally begins to sleep, Antoinette steals her keys and unlocks the heavy attic door:

I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for my candle flickered and I though it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage. (189)
The moment of epiphany is forever deferred as the novel ends with only her dream of revenge and flight. Although *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s mother-text, *Jane Eyre*, details Antoinette/Bertha’s journey to the battlements of Thornfield Hall and her subsequent torching of the colonial mansion, Rhys rejects Antoinette’s victimization by allowing her narrative to end with the promise of reprisal against her oppressors. By complicating the novel with several narrative voices, dense dream-texts, and complex race issues, Rhys indicates the difficulty of creating a female novel of development within the narrow boundaries of the traditional white, upper-middle class, male *Bildungsroman* model. She allows Antoinette the space to detail her own (novel of) development, her own quest for identity, while navigating the intersections of gender and race, a crossroads so complex, a simple ending cannot exist.
In *Annie John*, the Antigua-born Jamaica Kincaid dramatizes a young Caribbean protagonist's obsessive love-hate relationship with her devouring mother. In this and other Kincaid works, including *Lucy* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the mother embodies the ambivalence of colonial female identity because, for her daughter, she is at once a figure of oppression and a potential vehicle for liberation. *Annie John* is a coming of age tale that follows Annie's growth into adulthood, beginning when she is young and ending as she prepares to leave her motherland for England at the age of seventeen. Kincaid's protagonist, as a young woman, forces the *Bildungsroman* to acknowledge its inherent gender bias and creates a narrative strategy through which Kincaid draws thematic parallels between Annie John and Antigua's struggles for independence. Although it was well received among critics, *Annie John* was often acknowledged as a simple text exclusively exploring the mother-daughter matrix. While Kincaid's interest in the mother-daughter dyad of dependence seems incompatible with the traditional *Bildungsroman* hero of isolation and self-sufficiency, the two narrative strategies combine to form a novelistic version of a contemporary female *Bildungsroman*, one where a young female storyteller can narrate her attempts at selfhood while trapped in an intersecting system of oppression.
The first chapter, set in Antigua in the 1950s, is the introduction to Annie John’s *Bildungsroman*, notably beginning with death. Living on the outskirts of town, Annie John, at ten years of age, develops an overwhelming fascination with the cemetery and the “sticklike figures” that loom in the distance (4). After her mother explains that the figures are people attending a funeral and implies this burial is for a child, Annie John becomes paralyzed by the notion of death. Immediately, the connection between Annie’s mother and death is explicit: “I had not known that children died [. . .] My mother knew of many people who had died in such a way” (4). Kincaid’s conflation of mother-daughter-death signifies not the beginning of the child’s story as much as the death of her connection with her mother and her motherland and lends insight into the end of Annie John’s narrative.

As with Antoinette, knowledge of death introduces Annie John to the body of religious and spiritual beliefs connected to the practice of Obeah, a belief system handed down through the female line, which was believed to be a direct communication with the spirits (Morris and Dunn 224). She knows:

We were afraid of the dead because we never could tell when they might show up again. Sometimes they showed up in a dream, but that wasn’t so bad, because they usually only brought a warning, and in any case you wake up from a dream. But sometimes they would show up standing under a tree just as you were passing by. Then they might follow you home, and even though they might not be able to come into your house, they might wait for you and follow you wherever you went; in that case, they would never give up until you joined them. (4)

The practice of Obeah by indigenous cultures stands in opposition to the imposed Western religion brought by the colonists, as is widened the gulf between slaves
and slave owners and enabled slaves to maintain some control under the oppressive system of white domination (Ferguson, *Jamaica Kincaid* 42).

Within the first pages of her narrative, Annie believes death is also something associated with deformed or neglected children. When the young and sickly Nalda dies in Annie’s mother’s arms, and when Nalda’s mother is incapacitated by grief, Annie’s mother must prepare the child for burial (6). Annie remembers: “I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath. I especially couldn’t bear the sight of her hands lying still in her lap” (6). Nalda’s death, followed shortly by the death of another girl Annie’s age, identifiable only by her “humpback” deformity, solidifies the connection between death and children and her mother’s intimate knowledge of both. She recalls the "humpback" girl’s hair crookedly parted into four plaits and decides “she must have combed her hair herself” (10).

Compounded by her mother’s involvement in all of the deaths, Annie believes death is not a random act of fate but is closely associated with betrayal and abandonment obscurely related to mother love. Unlike Antoinette who searches for her Self in the young Tia, Annie searches “the girl” for signs of differences between them. Her fantastical imagination creates a scene where associating with her results in her own death and comes with the chilling notion that her mother will have to ask Annie’s father, who is a carpenter, to build a coffin for her. With no name, a mysterious illness, an absent mother, and “a plain face,” Annie refuses to create an identity for the unnamed girl outside of her illness and death. By
distancing herself from the young girls as opposed to identifying with them, she effectively (although temporarily) assuages her fears of death. When the dying children refocus Annie’s mother’s attention, however, Annie can envision not only her own death and abandonment by her mother but also her mother’s death and rejection.

The closeness of Annie to her mother and the extent to which Annie constructs her identity through the maternal image is manifested in their mutual participation in daily events. On the morning of a school-holiday, Annie waits patiently for her father to leave so that she might spend an uninterrupted day with her mother; the two bathe, eat, shop, cook, and clean together, engaging in domestic duties for which a wife is deemed responsible. Annie’s entrance into the domestic world highlights her affection for her mother: “I spent the day following my mother around and observing the way she did everything” (15). She makes clear the significance in the relationship between them, content in the truth that her mother wants to “include me in everything” (17). Annie senior becomes a vehicle through which Annie learns about the world of domestic duties, so Annie senior becomes a mirror for Annie in much the same way Annette served as one for Antoinette. Complicating the struggles between Annie and her mother is that the two share the same name, Annie John, mentioned only twice in the text. For an author who so closely regards the power of language, the duplication of naming is significant, indicating the psychological and physical connections between the two.
Although Annie works to maintain the bond with her mother, a series of parental losses reinforces their ultimate separation. She learns her father was abandoned by his parents when they sailed for South America, leaving him in the care of his grandmother who loved and worked for him. At the age of eighteen, he woke and found his grandmother dead, and “even though he was overcome with grief, he built her coffin and made sure she had a nice funeral [...] shortly afterward he moved out of that house” (23). Annie’s father’s separation from his maternal figure exacerbates Annie’s fears of such a loss. When she begins to cry after hearing the story, her mother comforts her: “She said I needn’t worry about such a thing as sailing off or dying and leaving me alone in the world” (24). Yet, her mother also lost her family at an early age when, after quarreling with her father, she packed a trunk and left home.

During her mother’s trip from Dominica to Antigua, her boat encounters a hurricane and several people are thrown overboard. Significant in the mother’s safe landing is that her trunk has successfully followed her, one that contains all she is able to take from her parents’ home. Annie senior stores inside the trunk markers of Annie’s infancy through adolescence, including embroidered garments, photographs, baby blankets, certificates of merit from school and church, and other trinkets representing the whole of her life. Sifting through the treasures of the trunk is a source of tremendous pleasure for Annie who recalls as her mother “held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself [...] No small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn’t made note of it, and now she would tell me
over and over again" (21-22). Aside from maintaining important memories, the trunk and its contents serve a more important function later in the narrative as representations of Annie's need for self-expression (Paravisini-Gerbert 110). Annie's mother positions the items of Annie's life in the container, serving a function similar to Nalda's coffin, as a symbol of her enclosing, containing, trapping, and binding Annie into a fragmented identity, and encapsulating her life which seems to be buried in the trunk with all of the other objects her mother possesses.

Annie's paradise dissolves into a cruel trick with the onset of puberty, as the delight and security of her mother's love is quickly and abruptly withdrawn. The summer she turns twelve, she recognizes "spindledlike" hairs on her legs and notices her increasing height prevents her from weaning her favorite clothes, changes that make her feel she "had turned into some strange animal" (25). Annie senior becomes distant when Annie reaches puberty because, manipulated by British assumptions of womanhood, she believes her daughter must suddenly transform herself. A significant element in Caribbean women's history is the consistent and pervasive imposition of European beauty standards. Afro-Caribbean women's desirability was often measured by these standards, which resulted in the "struggle of black women to alter their appearance as far as possible in the direction of European requirements for beauty but of course still falling short of these requirements" (Hodge 118). Anxiety about gender roles is often complicated by the well-documented experiences of alienation and negative self-image in the
colonized person, who is told to strive toward goals and values imposed from without (O'Callaghan, "Internalized Schisms" 99). Therefore, British elements in Annie's mother's mannerisms and language, once insignificant, now take on negative implications as Annie begins to realize the Victorian beauty ideals her mother has internalized and forces upon her. Her mother's "long plaited hair [...] pinned up around the crown of her head" as if a queen, once a particular favorite among Annie's reason for believing her mother beautiful, becomes a reflection of British culture and a target for Annie's disgust.

Complying with the expectations for proper female behavior according to imposed British standards, Annie's mother abandons the childlike values represented by the trunk and the items in it by appropriating the values of the culture she wishes for them to belong. Her distance from Annie becomes increasingly clear as one afternoon Annie asks her to retell the stories of the items in the trunk. "A person I did not recognize said, 'Absolutely not! You and I don't have time for that anymore'" (27). Paradoxically, Annie's body is changing in ways that make her more closely resemble her mother's physical body; no longer would her child's imagination need to create an imagined resemblance, because with puberty the literal mirror would serve as a figurative mirror for them. Annie accedes, however, to the logic of the bodily metaphor and struggles for a way to remain different from her mother in a desperate attempt to stay connected with her, and thus, the same as her (MacDonald-Smythe 220).
As in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, mirrors play an imperative role in Annie’s attempt to discover and maintain an identity. The mirror invokes a powerful tool in predicting the Otherness on the gaze of the Other, a perception particularly significant in postcolonial literature where the definitions of self must rival against Victorian notions of beauty and patriarchal assumptions of women’s passivity. The mirror has power to transform the viewer’s perception of her independent self, and it provides a space in which judgments of self-worth and significance are defined, particularly for women. What makes the mirror so enchanting, and also destructive, is that it forces the viewer to see herself as both self and Other. In Rhys and Kincaid, as well as in other works, the viewer invokes the mirror as a gendered cultural object; the gaze of the Other, even if it comes in the form of self-reflection, enforces the marks of gender passed through the matrilineal line.

The parallel between Annie’s changing body and her mother’s growing dissatisfaction continues, distorting Annie’s perception of herself and complicating her attempt at claiming autonomy. Her mother insists she become a young lady, so Annie searches the mirror to understand the implications of her mother’s reprimands. She stands naked before the glass, staring through familiar eyes at an unfamiliar body with unruly hair on her head and small tufts of it growing under her arms. Even her nose has changed:

> It had suddenly spread across my face, almost blotting out my cheeks, taking up my whole face, so that I didn’t know I was me standing there I would have wondered about that strange girl—and to think that only so recently my nose had been a small thing, the size of a rosebud. (27)
Interestingly, Annie once adored her mother’s nose that is in the shape of a flower soon to bud, and as the two women begin to separate, she believes her nose is larger, more awkward and unbecoming. The fact that her nose has changed is the manifestation of the loss of the mother’s love, a physical symbol of Annie’s ensuing physical maturation, and therefore, the loss of her childhood intimacy.

After winning a Sunday school award, one that Annie believes will “reconquer” her mother, she rushes home to find her parents making love. Undetected, she focuses on her mother’s hand as it circles the small of her father’s back: “Her hand! It was white and bony, as if it had long been dead and had been left out in the elements. It seemed not to be her hand, yet could only be her hand, so well did I know it” (30). The mother’s hand becomes a signifier of awareness of loss, betrayal, alienation, and failure, all intensified by her mother’s remaining unaware Annie is standing in her bedroom doorway. Her disgust of her mother’s one hand is Annie’s conflict of perceiving her mother both as protector and destroyer, death and life. The hand Annie cannot see in the surreal scene is one that is connected in the child’s mind to a safe maternal space and domestic tranquility (MacDonald-Smythe 46). Also important in Annie’s description of her mother is the “whiteness” of her hand, a signal of the newly recognized issue of race. Seen in the light of betrayal, the mother’s hands are linked to the end of an exclusive community the two Annies share; as one hand urges the child into maturity and womanhood, the other hand maintains a connection with death.
The autobiographical essay Annie writes on the first day at her new school reveals her attempt to secure an identity outside her mother's manipulation. Other children share their autobiographical essays, filled with accounts of England, of studying medicine in Canada, and having tea with royalty, while Annie’s focuses on the intractable distance between herself and others, specifically her mother, and the injustice of colonial intrusion. In the tale, Annie cannot swim and instead wraps her body around her mother who is a superior swimmer. The two swim in the medicinal waters looking like “pictures of sea mammals” where the mysteries of the sea are so familiar to her mother they seem to emanate from her (42). Her mother can intuitively sense the presence of danger posed by a shark or jellyfish, feels no threat by the depth or breadth of the water, and navigates the waves “as if she had always lived there” (42). Annie writes: “I would place my ear against her neck, and it was as if I were listening to a giant shell, for all the sounds around me [... ] would seem as if they came from inside her” (43). Annie’s mother is clearly associated with and becomes the physical landscape, the mother(s)land, and through Annie’s close physical and psychological connection to her, so she is part of her Antigua.

The fictional mother-daughter-motherland triad is shattered by “three ships going by,” carrying a mass of passengers engaged in loud celebrations. Although Annie does not explicitly name the passengers’ destination, the image functions in two ways: first, the large cruise ships may carry tourists to the Caribbean (which Kincaid considers an extension of the slavery system), and, second, they could also
represent Columbus's three ships, an image repeatedly explored throughout the novel. Annie's narrative within a narrative details the imposing ships and the oblivious passengers who disregard the tranquility of the moment. In terror, Annie realizes she has lost sight of her mother, a loss caused by the imposition of the British travelers: "A huge space opened in front of me and I fell inside it. I couldn't see what was in front of me and I couldn't hear anything around me. I couldn't think of anything except that my mother was not with me" (43). Because in her child's mind Antigua (her motherland) and Annie (her biological mother) are so closely associated, the loss of one necessarily results in the absence of the other. Without her mother, the beauty of the landscape and the wonderful mystery of its animal inhabitants disappear into an abyss of colonial invasion, and the quest for her identity is lost in the frenzy of her absent maternal reference.

As she reads her essay to the class, Annie reveals subsequent dreams in which the nightmare of her mother's absence replays itself, one where her mother, now joined by Annie's father, never turns to see her signaling. The invasion of the three ships and the anguish they cause she replaces in her nightmare with the intrusion of her father: "When he joined her, they would both sit tracing patterns on the rock, and it must have been amusing, for they would always make each other laugh" (44). The image of her mother and father, their obliviousness to her presence, and their hands drawing imaginary circles together, is a subconsciously digested memory of Annie's interference on their love-making. The secrecy and fear surrounding sexuality impress upon Annie the knowledge of something
inherently shameful and destructive in a sexual relationship. The scene also suggests that with male sexuality there are few lasting consequences, but for women the consequences are permanent and severe (Timothy 162). Not only does the essay articulate her hatred for colonial hegemony and fear of abandonment as a result of their destructive forces, it also communicates her anxieties surrounding her maturing body. For Annie, separation from her (sexual) mother signals her responsibility for entering into the world of sexuality and stricter gender roles. The conclusion in her essay, with her mother’s embrace and promise to Annie that she would never be abandoned, serves as Annie’s autobiographical space in which to rewrite the fading love from her mother and allows her to reconstruct the idealized mother she has lost (Ippolito 58).

Although only a few Kincaid critics cursively address Gwen’s role in Annie’s life, fewer still discuss her in terms of Annie’s sexual maturation. Juxtaposed against Annie’s rejection of her parents’ sexuality and assumed abandonment is her intense love for Gwen, a young schoolgirl she meets when Gwen approaches to congratulate her on such a beautiful essay:

[... reaching into the pocket of her tunic, she brought out a small rock and presented it to me. She had found it, she said, at the foot of a sleeping volcano. The rock was black, and it felt rough in my hands, as if it had been through a lot [...]. It may have been in that moment that we fell in love. Later, we would never agree on when it was. (46)

The gift of the rock is a fascinating revision Annie’s mother who, in Annie’s autobiographical essay, sat on a rock, unreachable. In this scene, it is Gwen who presents the oasis, one in which both she and Annie will find emotional solace and
define a new space for intimacy as they enter puberty. The lesbianism of the protagonist in the female Bildungsroman can be viewed as a reasonable outcome of her refusal to accept limitations posed by the traditional Bildungsroman (Zimmerman 244-45). The relationship with Gwen allows Annie the space to reject the compulsory heterosexuality that her mother so strictly imposes, one whose only model has been her mother’s domestic servitude to her promiscuous father.

In explicating the narrative position of lesbians within the female Bildungsroman, Zimmerman writes, "The provinces in the lesbian novel of development can be interpreted as the territory of patriarchy, and the journey/quest undertaken by the lesbian protagonist is toward the new world of lesbianism" (245). As if implicitly Gwen is also beginning to reject society's narrow definitions of sexuality, the two young girls begin to create this new world. Annie’s heart beats widely at the thought of Gwen approaching every morning so that the two might walk to school together, and when Gwen rounds the corner, “the whole street became suddenly empty so that Gwen and everything about her were perfect” (46-7). When Annie reveals to Gwen that her face is always set in a serious way, Gwen replies it is because she is thinking of Annie, who suddenly feels as if her “whole skin had become covered with millions of tiny red boils and that shortly she would explode with happiness” (47). The two agree they will grow up and move into a large house, a gray one with many rooms, in a lane where the houses have “high, well-trimmed hedges” (51). While symbolizing the absolute break from the mother
figure—"when I was younger I had been afraid of my mother’s dying, but that since I met Gwen this didn’t matter so much"—the scene also demonstrates the fortress-like world Annie and Gwen must create to secure identities where they could “live in a house of our own” outside of heteronormative dictates (51, emphasis added). Hidden away together, Annie and Gwen would revise the British notions of marriage and motherhood, abandoning those strict and limiting roles for new, more liberating ones.

Diane Simmons, in "Jamaica Kincaid and the Canon," brilliantly details the ways in which Kincaid’s Annie John transforms and re-inscribes the biblical account of Eve. When the mother’s love is apparently withdrawn as a result of Annie’s physical maturation, Annie’s sin is similar to Eve’s: “The first, slight, near-unconscious step toward a mature sensibility is cause for violent expulsion by a power which will brook nothing but utter childlike innocence and ignorance" (Simmons 58). Like Lucifer, Annie refuses to submit to a lost paradise, instead choosing to scorn her mother and hold bitterness and hatred for “life in general” (70). Consistently bombarded with self-loathing messages from her mother and teachers, Annie, at the age of fifteen, assumes the pain and disillusionment accompanying adolescence is a form of divine punishment. This powerful misconception is reiterated by her mother’s attitude that Annie’s behavior and changing body are sinful transformations from the tender, naïve child she once was.

The “sin” is manifested when Annie peers in the mirror, as the transformation into womanhood is nearly complete: “My whole head was so big,
and my eyes, which were big too, sat in my big head wide open, as if I had just had a sudden fright. My skin was black in a way I had not noticed before” (94). Like Eve, Annie is the innocent child, mysteriously overcome by some inexplicable evil. Under the pressures of her mother’s assumptions about young womanhood, Annie fully recognizes the consequences of her skin color. Similar to the colonial England, which establishes itself as both victor and vanquished, so Annie’s mother projects both nurturing and devouring images. In a mirroring of the colonial "mother" and her powers present in Antigua, Annie’s biological mother takes possession of her daughter’s body, mind, and spirit, a daughter who seeks to define herself in her mother’s face.

Annie’s return to school after the onset of puberty reinforces the conflated images of maternal separation, sexuality, colonialism, and death. Being the first in her class to menstruate, she feels compelled to exhibit and demonstrate the implications of the process. During recess, the eager young girls follow her out to the cemetery where she demonstrates “everything without the least bit of flourish” (52). As she sits among the tombstones, she is metonymically connected to the dead, an association reinforced by the “tolling” of the school bell, and the students “return to class as if going to a funeral” (53). Among the cemetery headstones, which mark the graves of white planters, Annie and her schoolgirl friends discuss sexuality and physical maturation safely within the confines of their female community, within a literal space of patriarchal death and decomposition. The sexuality-death metaphor signals Annie's disgust for her mother's insistence on the
British standards of heterosexuality, while tragically, menstruation signals her expected movement from a domineering mother to a tyrannical husband.

Annie’s love for Gwen dissolves as quickly as it arose and is replaced by her paradoxical affection for the Red Girl, whose rebellion and presumed evil conflict with Annie’s mother’s expectations of young ladies. While many critics of Kincaid’s *Annie John* overlook Gwen's role in defining Annie's sexuality, most of them blatantly disregard the ways in which the Red Girl disrupts both the heteronormativity of their community and her mother’s imposed British identity for her. The two meet when the Red Girl climbs a tree to retrieve a ripe piece of fruit Annie is unable to reach for herself: "How my eyes did widen and form an 'o' at this. I had never seen a girl do this before [...] better than a boy" (56). Again, Kincaid re-envisions the biblical story of Eve, attacking both its explicit gender divisions and its implicit heterosexuality. Annie loves the Red Girl precisely because her clothing and personal appearance belie all her mother has taught her: “her dress was dirty [...] the red hair [...] was matted and tangled [...] her fingernails held at least ten anthills of dirt under them [...] She had such an unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life” (57). The Red Girl personifies all the characteristics and mannerisms deemed inappropriate by Annie’s mother, and Annie now finds perfection no longer in the paradise of her mother’s love and Gwen's adoration, but instead in the Red Girl’s refusal to embody their narrow definitions of proper womanhood.
The Red Girl leads Annie outside the boundaries of her mother’s strict code of British behavior by introducing her to the forbidden and inappropriate game of marbles. Interestingly, Annie’s mother had presented her with a pair of marbles long before the Red Girl's interruption; upon receiving them, she believed: “They looked to me like miniature globes, the white representing the seas, the colors representing land masses” (55). Although Annie longs to play with them, her mother refuses, insisting the game is inappropriate. This becomes Annie's senior symbolically introducing a world in which Annie can never take part, a world she will desire but her mother will not only refuse but also prevent. Because her mother so adamantly disapproves of the game, Annie accordingly fashions it as her new obsession, playing it as she “had never done anything” (61). With Gwen, outside activities and games are appropriate as they fall within the sanction of Annie’s mother; however, Annie keeps the Red Girl a secret from her mother and their relationship is one of the first forms Annie's rebellion takes.

When Annie’s mother learns of her inappropriate playing, she crawls into a hidden space Annie has created beneath the house (literally a place outside of the domestic sphere) in a furious search for the marbles: “If she and I had been taking a walk in the Amazon forest [. . .] and after a while she noticed that I was no longer at her side, her search for me then would have equaled her search for my marbles now” (66). The two are not lost in the jungle, however, and the greatest threat to the solidity of their relationship is not the environment; instead, Annie’s mother has abandoned her daughter to colonial and patriarchal expectations of young female
behavior and is unwilling to see Annie precisely because she, with her disobedience and recklessness, rejects those supposedly necessary roles. In searching under her house for Annie's marbles, Annie's mother is seeking out the new world Annie is building for herself, one that she will never sanction.

Unable to find the marbles Annie has hidden away, Annie's mother first becomes enraged, and then perceiving anger's futility, shifts strategies to entice a confession from her. She shares a story with Annie of her own childhood when she traveled down the mountainside with a basket of figs on her head. The basket, growing increasingly heavy as she traveled, was revealed to contain a long snake, a revelation causing her to collapse in horror. Annie, moved by her mother's story, thinks, "If only I had been there, I would not have hesitated for even a part of a second to take her place. How I would have loved my mother if I had known her then [...] What I wouldn't have done for her!" (70). The snake carried unwittingly on her mother's head among a mound of fruit is symbolic of both the colonial pressures she has internalized and determines to pass down to her daughter and the young lady business of domesticity and subservience into which she educates Annie (O'Callaghan, Woman Version 55-56). Just as Annie identifies with her mother's terror and is on the verge of surrendering the entire marble collection, her mother embodies the serpent in the garden and the Medusa figure, whispering in a voice that is "warm and soft and treacherous [...] 'Well, Little Miss, where are your marbles?'" Annie, in a rejection of colonial, patriarchal, and maternal expectations, replies in her "own warm, soft, and newly acquired
treacherous voice [. . .] ‘I don’t have any marbles. I have never played marbles you know’” (70).

Just following her act of defiance, Annie admits, “Soon after I started to menstruate, and I stopped playing marbles. I never saw the Red Girl again” (70). The sexual identity Annie begins to form is interrupted by social conventions that demand upon puberty she relinquish her affection for young girls and focus her attention on young men in the anticipation of securing a husband, home, and family. This insistence on heterosexuality forces Annie to abandon her relationships with both Gwen, the mirror of appropriate female behavior, and the Red Girl, the antithesis of cultural expectations. For Annie and the young girls she loves, their relationships with women are subordinated by masculine desire and the social burden to become a wife, which, as Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born explains, “[. . .] demands that the girl child transfer those first feelings of dependency and erotic mutuality from her first woman, to a man, if she is to become what is defined as a ‘normal’ woman—that is a woman whose most intense psychic and physical energies are directed towards men” (219).

The British system that controlled women’s bodies and sexuality is the same that erased and distorted indigenous history. Annie’s forced empathy with the colonizer permeates her life at home and at school, so that wherever she goes, she is subjected to the power and influence of colonial rule. She painfully experiences the loss of her Antigua-based identity in order to mimic the colonizers' social codes, and therefore, to attain a (false) sense of that power and agency. For the
children of the colonial school system, the misplaced respect and reverence causes a split of self, one divided between the devotion to their traditions and culture and the desire for the power the other possesses: “Sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belong--with the masters or the slave--for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now” (76).

In a scathing long essay, *A Small Place*, Kincaid describes the European version of colonial history as a distorted fairy tale of “how we met you, your right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are, and always will be” (42). As a child schooled in the British educational system, Kincaid was not immune to the intellectual violence of a colonial education. In her works, she often details the negative consequences of European language, “the language of the criminal,” illustrating how it implicitly and explicitly favors those who enslave and dominate: “For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal’s deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal’s point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me” (32). This language usurped the languages, experiences, and traditions of the islands and replaced it with classic canonical texts from Shakespeare to Milton and Charlotte Brontë.

Annie is able to see through the hypocrisy of adoration her teachers and classmates feel for Christopher Columbus, portrayed in the children’s history text, *The History of the West Indies*, as a kind of god hailed as the creator and discoverer
of the Caribbean. The account, written from a British perspective, includes a portrait of the miserable and dejected Columbus, who was brought back to Spain, chained and desperate, after his third voyage. The text informs the students in an empathetic tone that the man, as a result of sustained injuries, was forced to use a cane to walk. The portrait of the “helpless” man transfixes Annie: “What just desserts, I thought, for I did not like Columbus” (77). Annie connects the tyrannical father with the tyrannical imperialist, and mimicking a phrase she has recently heard her mother use about her grandfather, Annie writes beneath Columbus’s picture: “So the great man can no longer just get up and go” (78).

Annie’s grandfather’s attempts at controlling the body of his daughter are similar to the colonials’ success at colonizing women’s bodies. The patriarchal grandfather, confined within traditional ideologies that insist he conquer and subjugate his daughter’s life decisions, refuses to acknowledge the woman’s attempt to define an autonomous identity outside the rule of a man. Similarly, Columbus, on a grander and more devastating scale, subjugates and manipulates the lives of women, men, and children whose culture and traditions are stripped away for the cause of “progress” and “civilizing.”

Annie’s imposing her own written will under the image of colonial ruler counters its hegemonic power. The punishment for her “blasphemy” of Columbus's picture is to copy out Books I and II of Paradise Lost, a post-colonial disobedience addressed by the forced assimilation of large doses of a canonical work that, significantly, inscribes women as narcissistic, greedy, weak and
credulous, ambitious, and essentially inferior to men (O’Callaghan, Woman
Version 55). The crucial lesson in Annie’s personal anti-colonial education is to understand and acknowledge the consequences for women and Afro-Caribbeans who resist the inferior and debase\ning roles allotted to them under imperialist control. Kincaid’s explicit naming of canonical works reveals, in part, her desire to reconsider the Bildungsroman tradition, as many of the texts used to educate "native" children of the Caribbean always depicted a white, male hero. Classic models of English literature worked to erase Annie's and Kincaid's sense of true self, one that, as an Afro-Caribbean woman, was closely linked to the African culture of the island.

Annie, rejected by her mother and increasingly angered by her teachers, retreats into the world of literature to imagine the fantasy of escaping to Belgium, “a place I had picked when I read in one of my books that Charlotte Brontë, the author of my favorite novel, Jane Eyre, had spent a year or so there” (92). In this imaginary world, Annie escapes her mother, who is forced to communicate with her by sending letters to “Somewhere, Belgium.” As Kincaid has made explicit in many interviews, Jane Eyre and Paradise Lost offered her ways to think about power and powerlessness, justice and injustice, truth and misconception. In both Brontë and Rhys’s texts, Rochester’s wealth is in truth Bertha’s wealth, because the law protects his rights to her property. Unlike the unfortunate Bertha/Antoinette and the trapped Annie, Jane’s identity crisis is resolved with the money she receives from a long lost uncle, one whose business interests were also supported
by slavery. Jane, therefore, secures herself among the ranks of those who commit acts of injustice against subjugated people and seemingly abandons her convictions in the interest of marriage. When Annie John, a young, black lesbian, reads *Jane Eyre*, she is at once identifying with an oppressed, subjugated woman, but also, she inadvertently identifies with a white woman who ultimately benefits from patriarchal, colonial, and economic institutions.

Annie feels irrevocably abandoned by all those who once loved and admired her but now reject her for her unwillingness to conform to their demands, and her loneliness is depicted as she passes a store window and attempts to recognize her own reflection. Unable to visually construct a viable self where no psychological one exists, the image in the glass does not resemble a young woman, but rather a portrait burned into Annie’s memory of a picture of Lucifer at a young age, wearing a smile that tells everyone the person “is just putting up a good front” (94). She makes the irrefutable connection between herself and Satan, for both are secluded and vulnerable figures expelled from paradise, an image that reiterates her belief that with sexual maturity comes the inexplicable and unavoidable fall from grace, represented here in her lost mother and loss of her pre-pubescent body.

Her misery is reinforced when she suddenly becomes the object of mocking attention from several boys who greet her with malicious and sarcastic courtesy. When Annie returns home after encountering the sneering boys on Market Street, she lies to her mother that she stayed late at school working on extra duties in an effort to disguise her embarrassment and to avoid a prolonged discussion. Annie
senior confronts her with her version of the truth, that Annie was inside a store “making a spectacle” of herself and acting like a “slut” in front of the older, and therefore sexually mature, boys. Annie drowns in her mother’s insult and is burned by the word as it reverberates through her soul: “As if to save myself, I turned to her and said […] like mother like daughter” (102). Annie's mother believes that a women's body is the property of the respectable man who will marry her; therefore, she feels compelled to keep strict vigilance so that potential suitors do not assume Annie is sexually promiscuous, even if that protection comes at the price of Annie’s true selfhood.

After the argument, Annie retreats to her room, one where everything reminds her of the sacrifices her parents made for her benefit. She returns to her shifting ambivalence for her mother, wanting to run to her side with loving apology and longing to see her dead and in a coffin at her feet. Her father senses the tension between the two and promises to make furniture for Annie’s mother, items she has longed to have for many years. He then turns to Annie and asks what she would like to have; she immediately responds “a trunk,” one that would replace the trunk her mother once held dear but has now abandoned. Annie’s longing for a trunk of her own, one that is separate from her mother, signals her conscious decision to make the quarrel between the two stand, and it ignites her need to leave her mother, foreshadowing her ultimate exile from her motherland.

Annie understands the convention of marriage is necessary to the development of an acceptable identity under her mother’s rule; yet, when her
parents suggest that in due time she will write from England to announce her marriage, she replies, "How absurd!" and when she learns Gwen is to marry, she feigns congratulations (136). She realizes upon menstruation that the process of maturation is linked to allegiance to a particular social structure that does not facilitate the female relationships of her pre-menstrual community friendships. Remembering Gwen, she suddenly longs to be "sitting in some different atmosphere, with no future full of ridiculous demands, no need for any sustenance save our love for each other, with no hindrance to any of our desires, which would, of course, be simple desires--nothing, nothing, just sitting on our tombstones forever" (53). When forced to return to the world of her mother, Annie enters a space in which women are isolated from and must compete against each other. Considering the life of her mother, Annie swears: "I plan not only to never marry an old man but certainly to never marry at all" (132).

After Annie and her mother experience the final split in their relationship, Annie falls victim to a mysterious and debilitating illness and is bedridden for several months. Essential in the process of killing the mother to save the self, Annie, in the delirium of her illness, visualizes the death of her parents' words: "I could see the words leave their mouths. The words traveled through the air towards me, but just as they reached my ears they would fall to the floor, suddenly dead" (109). In Annie's attempt to construct a viable self, she objectifies and annihilates those in her family who desperately seek to deceive and confine her. Left unsupervised while ill, she abandons all attempts to please her parents, and, in a
feverish vision, turns to a group of family photos that “blow themselves up” until they touch the ceiling, growing with the rhythm of music she cannot hear. It is significant that the photos contain images of her family dressed in white—Annie in her white uniform and Communion dress, her Aunt Mary in her white wedding dress, her father in his white cricket uniform—signifying false scenes of purity and feigning their connection with the white world. She rises from her bed and begins to bathe the photos, cleaning crevices, and smoothing creases before dusting them with talcum powder and covering them with a blanket so that they might sleep. Interestingly, she works to erase her aunt’s veil and washes the dirt from her father’s trousers, and in another photo of her parents, she erases them from the waist down, all in an effort to refuse the strict codes of sexuality her mother and society enforce.

In a photo of Annie wearing her confirmation dress, she “cleanses” everything but the shoes. Obliterating the confirmation dress is a rejection of British religious traditions colonization has forced upon Antigua. Annie’s explicit purpose for leaving her shoes signals her longing for an independent identity and foreshadows her ensuing departure from parents who would disallow her a sense of autonomy. The shoes in the picture had previously sparked a fight with Annie’s mother who believed they were “not fit for a young lady and not fit for wearing on being received into church,” and Annie, in rebellion, wished her mother dead (119). By leaving the shoes untouched, Annie effectively silences her mother and her confining ideologies while also creating for herself a symbolic mode of escape.
In Caribbean women's literature, when the biological mother, nearly crazed with her desire to control, manipulate, and dominate, fails her daughter, the girl requires a magical other-mother who can help her create a new selfhood (Simmons 28). As soon as new medicines from an English physician fail to revive Annie from her prolonged illness, her mother sends for Ma Chess, a knowledgeable Obeah woman whose powers derive from her knowledge of the pre-colonial past, one where the influence of the colonizer was rejected and despised. While Annie's attempts at womanhood through the mimicking of her mother focus solely on heterosexuality and are mediated by the colonizing forces that have repressed Annie's mother's sense of her true self, Annie's relationship to her other-mother remains unaffected by issues of sexuality and imperial intrusions. With the knowledge and belief in African traditions, Ma Chess rejects the British traditions that have (in)formed Annie's mature identity: her school lessons, her mother's strict moral code of behavior, her isolation from certain girls, her style of dress, and her language.

Ma Chess feeds and bathes Annie, comforts her in warm and inviting silence, and sleeps with her during Annie's long periods of delirium. As a result of Ma Chess's care, Annie begins to depend on her as an unborn child might:

Soon I began to count on her smells and the sound her breath made as it went in and out of her body. Sometimes at night, when I would feel that I was all locked up in the warm falling soot and could not find my way out, Ma Chess would come into my bed with me and stay until I was myself—whatever that had come to be by then—again. I would lie on my side, curled up like a little comma, and Ma Chess
would lie next to me, curled up like a bigger comma, into which I fit. (125-6)

The fetus-like comma is indicative of Annie's fetal position with Ma Chess, who, as the bigger comma, becomes Annie's other-mother. On the verge of death, she is brought back from the land of the dead by her other-mother and leaves the influence of her mother, who can only lay the dead to rest (Alexander 71). As imperceptibly as Ma Chess arrives at Annie's bedside, she disappears at the signs of Annie's recovery of her Self.

It is clear, however, that Annie's recovery is not one that will stabilize her identity within the tainted Antiguan culture; rather, it helps her understand more clearly that gender divisions and colonial impositions will never allow her self-affirmation on the island. As she sits with her mother, she realizes:

I never wanted to feel her long, bony fingers against my cheek again, how much I never wanted to hear her voice in my ear again, how much I longed to be in a place where nobody knew a thing about me and liked me for just that reason, how much the whole world into which I was born had become an unbearable burden and I wished I could reduce it to some small thing that I could hold underwater until it died. (128)

The maternal conflict is exacerbated by the colonial influences on Annie's education, so that the hatred for and rebellion against patriarchy and colonialism combine to form the impetus for her leaving Antigua, her motherland, and her mother. Kincaid's shift in focus reiterates the connection between European dominance and mother-daughter separation because the relationship between the
mother and Annie reflects the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the subject and object, self and Other.

As with Antoinette who sews her name in fiery red thread, so Annie attempts to assert an independent self outside of colonial control at the beginning of the last chapter of her narrative. She states, “My name is Annie John,” as she stares ambivalently at her name marked across her newly made trunk, leaving behind her mother’s trunk that once held so much joy. She asserts: “I did not want to go to England, I did not want to become a nurse, but I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood” (130). Annie's sense of isolation is reminiscent of her autobiographical essay written in school where her mother promises to never leave her. As Annie boards the vessel, her mother promises, “It doesn’t matter what you do or where you go, I’ll always be your mother and this will always be your home” (147). However, Annie’s life story with her biological mother ends in much the same way her autobiographical essay concludes where “except for the end, it was all true” (41). Annie understands she can never return to her childhood, idyllic motherland because, with colonization, she no longer has one. From the deck of the ship her parents wave good-bye, and she retreats into her cabin where she "could hear the small waves lap-lapping around the ship. They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out” (148). Annie’s narrative returns to its original scene where death rested on the figures in the distance, and as Annie’s mother
buried children in the morning, so Annie leaves the world into which she was born for a new and frightening one. There is desolation in the final image of Annie’s narrative, one of death, as her vessel drains itself (as blood from the body) into the unknown and disorienting waters.

*Annie John* demonstrates the difficulty of constructing a viable female self under colonial and patriarchal pressures. By refusing to conform to those pressures, Annie refuses her position as Other and seeks to recover her female subjectivity. Jamaica Kincaid addressed the question of the "happy ending" in an interview with Donna Perry, stating, "The West Indian girls said it didn't have a happy ending, the other students--not West Indian--disagreed" (130). She leaves uncertain the fate of Annie John as a representation of the ambiguity of female and colonial Othering and as a rebellion against the traditional *Bildungsroman.*
Conclusion: Returning to the Islands

Many Caribbean women authors explore the girl-child's social locations through the overlapping lens of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys re-conceptualizes Antoinette/Bertha's life by giving voice to her untold story, transforming her from a snarling, unrestrained beast to a woman driven mad under the oppressive patriarchal forces *Jane Eyre* celebrates. The dispossessed and displaced Antoinette becomes the symbolic object of struggle between racial ambiguity, gender stratification, and class differences. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* centers on the mother-daughter matrix as a figurative representation of the colonized West Indian mother/land. The novel illustrates Annie's tumultuous journey to maturity, the roles British colonialism plays in her psychological development, and the various modes of resistance she employs in her search for agency. Kincaid articulates the violence British invasion evokes on the vulnerable relationship between an African-identified female protagonist and a mother steeped in the rhetoric of British notions of womanhood.

One of the most striking parallels between Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Kincaid's *Annie John*, and one of their most interesting deviations from Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, is that the protagonists' narratives remain decidedly open-ended. In a clear confrontation of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Rhys and Kincaid explore the possibilities for a more convoluted, resonant female *Bildungsroman*. Both authors
break from the Germanic tradition that engages strict narrative limitations: either the hero gloriously triumphs or he tragically falters. While Antoinette and Annie John struggle with issues of agency and self-reflection, neither ends her narrative with a reintegration into society, a fundamental ending in the traditional, conservative genre (Ellis 25). Rhys and Kincaid reject reductive, definitive endings to disrupt the notion that such endings could be so cleanly decided. Antoinette's journey to Thornfield Hall's rooftop and Annie John's boarding a ship bound for England are both departures that suggest these journeys are a continuation of their search for autonomy. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Annie John*, therefore, cannot close with an ending, but rather they present a new set of possible beginnings, both for their protagonists and for the rising female *Bildungsroman* tradition.

Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, write, "The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature. It is a crucial consideration because it is out of this voicelessness and consequent absence that an understanding of our creativity in written expression emerges" (1). This voicelessness is the historically muted female Caribbean subject, erased under patriarchy and colonialism. Yet, many Caribbean women authors continue to battle this marginalization, and through their revisions of the *Bildungsroman*, strive to end their enforced (literary) silence. By demonstrating particularly the complexities of women's positions as subalterns under colonial hegemony, they navigate to the margins of history where women's stories have been exiled and
move them to the center of literary discussions. Claiming their female characters' selves and recording their undocumented histories allows Caribbean women authors to illustrate the intricate connections between genre, gender, and race, and it creates new narrative possibilities for the emerging female Caribbean Bildungsroman protagonist.


Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Women in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.


