

**CAN SILENCE SPEAK? READING THE MARGINALIZED WOMAN IN THREE
NOVELS OF FEMALE DEVELOPMENT**

by

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This work investigates the representation of domestic servants within mid-twentieth century novels of female development, which are written by middle class women. The comparison is between the following authors: Rosario Castellanos from Mexico, Jean Rhys from the West Indies, and Clarice Lispector from Brazil. Postcolonial women writers have needed to tackle hegemonic structures within their own fiction, as they confront the privilege of the modern writing subject who frames herself in opposition to the silence of colonized female characters. Working to rewrite history, and to develop texts that speak from the margins, there is a conscious effort to incorporate subaltern voices into their narratives. Nevertheless, anxiety arises within those texts of middle-class writers who are preoccupied with the management of differences, stemming from a realization that in fact there is no place within the privileged writing subject's text from which the subaltern can actually *speak*. Therefore the authors struggle to write within a masculine-centered literary tradition that privileges certain voices over others, while at the same time recognizing their complicity with that system that works through exclusions. While the servant is silenced, the writing also shields her from being appropriated and defined by the mistress who needs her as a caregiver while she pursues a personal growth and awakening. That is, silences are used to form a protective space in which the marginalized woman cannot be

merely the embodiment of alterity for the narrator's quest for subjectivity. An element of shame is therefore revealed by means of an implied author, which reminds them that they are expressing an ideal that they themselves have not lived up to. The marginal character becomes a negative element that points to the inability of the narrative to adequately represent her. It questions the model of solidarity through shared oppression that readings of women's and postcolonial writings often take, suggesting that new forms of community need to be imagined that take into account inequalities and injustices between women.

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PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues, friends, and advisors, who helped me to develop this project, each shaping my thinking in meaningful ways. I have had the support of an excellent dissertation committee; the members of which have been instrumental in my academic formation, and in the development of this dissertation. I thank my dissertation director, Jerome Branche, whose work concerning issues of coloniality and critical race theory has been inspirational for me. I am also grateful to Susan Andrade, Bobby Chamberlain, and Erin Graff Zivin, for dedicating their time and invaluable insight towards this dissertation. The faculty and students at the University of Pittsburgh that I have had the pleasure of working with over the past few years have been tremendous in their support, offering dialogue and critiques that have added to the value of my research. Finally, I am also indebted to the kindness of Valeria Amaral and the faculty and students at FOCCA (*Faculdade de Olinda, Brasil*), for great discussions that gave me a glimpse into a *Recifense* understanding of the writings of Clarice Lispector.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In a striking point in Clarice Lispector's novel *A paixão segundo G.H.*, the affluent protagonist, named only with the initials G.H., anxiously remembers the absolute silence of her live-in maid: "revi o rosto preto e quieto, revi a pele inteiramente opaca que mais parecia um de seus modos de se calar, as sobrancelhas extremamente bem desenhadas, revi os traços finos e delicados que mal eram divisados no negro apagado da pele" (41).¹ From her account, silence is related to the opaque blackness of her maid's skin and her ways of disappearing – she accentuates these traits in her defense for why she had never noticed "that woman" before, even though she was living in her home. Realizing this tendency towards omission, it then becomes the work of the reader to deduce what the first-person narrator had left out of her account, what she had invisibilized, and what she had excluded in order to narrate for herself a concept of a whole, individualized life.

Silence, as it has been formulated within a colonially inherited discourse, implies a state of depoliticization, an inability to speak in the master's tongue, passivity and acceptance. Embodied by the preferred peaceful Indian that Columbus contrasted with the *Carib/Cannibal* image (see Fernández Retamar, 14), silence becomes misinterpreted as natural benevolence and

¹ "I saw again her quiet, black face, I saw again her entirely opaque skin that appeared more like one of her ways of keeping quiet, extremely well defined eyebrows, I saw again the fine, delicate features that were barely discernible on the faded blackness of her skin" (my translation).

obedience; thus political representation could only be achieved through the charity of the Subject, who is able to speak for the “other.”

Conversely in this moment of revelation described by Lispector, it is the silence of the other woman that threatens to dismantle the world of the narrator who has allowed her into her home; and in that same way she who had been constituted as the embodiment of *otherness* refuses to be spoken for, pointing to the restrictions of the text that have “allowed” her to enter. Her silence imposes a protective barrier, disallowing the discourse that works to represent her and creating a shock to the already constituted textual structure that works to delineate the boundary between self and other. Not merely quiet, the domestic servant in each novel chooses all verbal and non-verbal communications very carefully and will choose not to speak, finding a way through silence to reach through the borders that the mistress has constructed around herself in order to protect her fragile self-constitution. The shockwave occurs when the maid gets *too close*, and thus the narrator is terrified upon finding that there is no Absolute Other against which she can constitute herself.

There is a recurrence of the theme of silence running through each of the novels in this study, of which I am most concerned with silences *among* women that indicate differential oppressions: writers such as Lispector incorporate silences in their works in a way that allows the reader to question the very meaning of agency and the nature of subjectivity, challenging the understanding of silence that maintains the dichotomies of and vertical relationships between constructions of male/female, self/other, subject/object, agent/victim, and friend/stranger. As a literary device it creates a gap in the narration through which shame emerges, as we find that the narration is unable to live up to its purported ideals – to create a space of solidarity in resistance to patriarchal oppression. The heavy emphasis on the individualized “I” that was characteristic

of mid-twentieth century modernist writing is challenged, since it is inclined towards a formation of subjectivity through exclusions; a process with implications for the development of the feminine subject that has been a long-standing theme in criticism of women's writing. The movement from being represented to being the subject that makes meaning is viewed as a central component of the advancement of the female artist; however the tools of their compositions may continue to reinvest in the power of hierarchies, as many women writers were well aware, exhibited in writings that were anxious in their representations of others.²

Referring to Castellanos' poem "Silencio cerca de una piedra Antigua" ("Silence Near an Ancient Stone") and thinking through the ethical space carved out by the author in the entirety of her works, Eleonora Cróquer Pedrón highlights the lyrical "I" that confesses a knowledge of her own incapacity to act for the other through writing:

lo que el saberse apelado opera sobre este *yo* es un progresivo estado de autoconciencia y de implicación: no solo reconoce la presencia del otro que espera, sino que se asume (a pesar de su propia impotencia) responsable frente a la demanda que esa espera formula silenciosamente (15).³

"Not speaking," or "not writing," becomes a way of signaling accountability for that which is outside of the narrative ego. The other waits for the "I" who considers an appropriate response; the narrator is powerless to change the dynamics of their encounters. Responsibility, moreover, is implicated in the "I"'s knowledge of the proximity of the other; the silence indicates

² Audre Lorde's 1984 paper "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," written over twenty years after the novels in question, puts neatly into perspective the anxieties that plagued these female artists who questioned their means of representation: "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change*" (Lorde 112).

³ "what the knowledge appealed to produces over this *I* is a progressive state of self-consciousness and of insinuation: not only does it recognize the presence of the other that waits, but also it assumes to be (despite of its own impotence) responsible to the demand that this waiting is silently formulating" (my translation).

a meditation concerning what the response to that proximity should be. The position of the “I” in that situation is one of fragility according to Pedrón; and one in which the other may be construed as an individual despite not being “represented” by the writing/speaking subject.

It must also be taken into account, however, as Debra Castillo notes, that silence as a political strategy has limited value – “eventually it must be broken” (*Talking Back* 255). The works in question announce a possibility for a more productive dialogue between women that experience differential oppressions, more than they engage in breaking silence themselves. It will be most significant to note that silence is that which points to the privilege of the writing subject by remaining outside of that subject without being employed as its object, effectively standing in for what might otherwise be limited to a self-reflexive, confessional narrative directed solely towards interiority. Therefore one may refer to the distinctiveness of the marginalized subject without looking for evidence of her existence only through the lens of the first-person narration.

The hierarchy of the Speaker and the spoken has been a dominant construction within feminist literary criticism, even as writers have with good intentions attempted to overcome what Marilyn Frye called the “arrogant eye” (72); that way of approaching another that is based upon ignorance rather than understanding. It is also fitting to keep in mind the “hostile eye” that Roberto Fernández Retamar refers to, which always perceives Caliban as deformed (63). While feminist as well as postcolonial critics actively confront the hegemonic eye that distorts and assimilates the uncivilized other while proclaiming its own coherence and rationality, they remain tangled up in issues of representation. This is seen as works by women writers continue to be judged according to their capacity to speak *for*, without appropriating the other. For Seyla Benhabib, for example, something that differentiates people within a system based upon gender

and sex is the way in which they confront the other. For men the other is a generalized entity whose existence should submit to the impartial exercise of the law; for women the other tends to be a concrete subject, who demands exchanges based upon solidarity and responsibility (see *Situating the Self*). According to this formula women are more able to identify with an “other” because they themselves are marked by exclusion.⁴ This notion however does not offer an argument concerning the ways in which women could display a productive solidarity by recognizing differences among each other and responsibilities to one another. Solidarity of this type could be achieved by looking at literary operations that open up a space for analyzing that which stands between characters of different social status, thereby illustrating that which cannot be represented by the writing itself.

Deborah Archer performs a reading of *Lispector* based upon French post-structuralism, which is concerned with the establishment of a feminine relationship with the other that maintains proper distance. She states: “It has to do with what Cixous and Irigaray call ‘libidinal economy’ – that is, with one’s relationship to the ‘gift’ and to ‘giving,’ with the difference between the masculine ‘gift-that-takes’ and the feminine ‘desire-that-gives’” (256). Studies that are preoccupied with identifying these “feminine” nurturing traits that are distinguished from “masculine” ones of subjugation and coercion, tend to focus on the need of the writer to “receive” the other, allowing the other to “enter” her in order for there to be a relationship based upon respect; although they diminish any meaningful reading of the exteriority of the marginal character. Seldom is that unequal relationship between privileged author and less-privileged subject meaningfully troubled, and assumptions that the feminine necessarily occupies the role of

⁴ See Eleonora Cróquer Pedrón’s work *El gesto de antígona o la escritura como responsabilidad* for an account of the ways in which feminist theorists in dialogue with ethical philosophy have approached the question of the Other.

the oppressed is rarely challenged.⁵ These constraints of criticism that marginalize women's writing as only concerned with the self-expression of the author herself overlook the extent to which agency and theory are articulated from silent and silenced spaces.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her analysis of Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*, points to Kristeva's inability to find a solution to the separation that privilege enacts. Kristeva in her description of women in Huxian Square states that they belonged "to a community with which we will never have anything to do. ... Who is speaking, then, before the stare of the peasants at Huxian?" (qtd. in Spivak, "French Feminism" 158). Spivak responds that her question, "in the face of those silent women, is about her *own* identity rather than theirs" (158). In the novels that I address the narrators describe their position through the perspective of who they are not. Solidarity is not only a far-reaching ideal, but in relation to Kristeva's question, they hold various assumptions (rightly or wrongly) regarding their privilege that would make community-building between women impossible. They presume the following: that the other is unknowable, to try to know the other is a condescending act, the marginalized holds knowledge about the world inaccessible to the narrating "self," and self and other are immutable categories that are only surpassed in acts of domination or submission. Thus not only is the marginalized woman in a protective space outside of the central narration that is struggling to know her, she also signals narrative anxiety, as well as possibilities for alternative alliances that are left unrealized. The other woman is more than the representative of an ideal that the more privileged

⁵ One notable exception is Rita Felski, who points to the pitfalls of developing a feminist aesthetics that privileges a relationship between a female gender and a literary form (19). To assume that works written by women provide a means of studying the nature of the feminine subject presumes that "woman" is a fixed identity to be located in the woman writer. I am interested as well in looking beyond assumed structures for "women's writing." I employ feminist theory to read these texts not because they are women writers, or because they identified themselves as feminists (none of them did); but because their works employ discursive techniques that undermine dominating symbolic forms and content; additionally they show a particular concern with women's condition, and with collapsing gender-based binaries.

narrator cannot access; through irony the reader witnesses a subtext that criticizes the narrator's inability to describe other points of connection.⁶

Therefore what is unique in the novels that I am exploring is that there is a strategic use of the implied author⁷ which works not only to draw attention to absences and invisibilities, but also to expose through the interconnections between a privileged and less-privileged woman a possible shift in the way that the relationship would normally be perceived – as either nurturing or confrontational. Most importantly, what would be understood as a confrontation with the silence of the Other within a narrative of female development will be read as a political and ethical space that actually goes beyond the narrator's ability to speak that potential. That is to say, the space in-between works discursively to point out the asymmetrical relationships that form the backdrop of the bildungsroman⁸ form that is constructed through the ontological pairing of self and Other, and politically to imagine relationships among women that are not built upon essentialist notions of identity. Moreover, I will demonstrate that each writer allows herself to be vulnerable to attack, and that the inconsolability of the narrator's anxiety announces that responses to shame are infinite.

The specific novels in this study portray a relationship between a middle-class female protagonist and a less-privileged woman – the nanny or domestic servant. It is this relationship,

⁶ Lionnet speaks of the importance for feminist critics to continue speaking of “community,” “to attempt to find a common theoretical and ethical ground from which to argue for political solidarity without objectifying the ‘other’ woman, or subsuming collective goals under the banner of sameness” (*Political Representations* 3). Despite the impossibility of grouping women into a solid category, the continuation of gender-based oppression and the strength found with communities to counter hegemony makes it still an essential political goal that should not be abandoned despite the difficulties involved.

⁷ I use Wayne Booth's term “implied author” from *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) as a tool to understand the possible inferences that the reader may make concerning the values being purported in the texts by recognizing the unreliability of the narrator.

⁸ Throughout this paper I do not capitalize bildungsroman, unless quoting from a source that does, in order to stress the contemporary notion of the genre that has gone through several transformations and that can now refer to various types of growth and development of a character.

in which one woman is revealed to be the vehicle for which the other may reach towards the power of the male domain, which provides a clear way of destabilizing notions of female solidarity based upon shared gender oppression. Feminist literary criticism too often has tended to view the inclusion of the “native” female in the text of the more-privileged woman as an insistence of the commonalities between women by virtue of oppression under a patriarchal system, generating a paternalistic view of unity that ignores oppressions *between* women. Moreover, this view creates an idealized space, in which female characters are employed to harmonize an interaction between two cultures, resulting in the servant being put to work as transmitter of her culture for the more privileged character and reader. Is it, for example, that the categories of oppressed and oppressor were created only so that one could necessarily be silenced, and thus the narrator may be in the position to achieve selfhood through an act of charity? In this study I struggle to read the texts from the “other side” – a location that is fearfully acknowledged by each of the protagonists as that place that they have marginalized, but also from which the other judges their actions, witnessing their silences and silencings. I argue that the character of the servant goes beyond being a mere helper to the protagonist that relies upon her for physical and psychological survival, becoming an agent who troubles the concept of unity in its one-sided emphasis on the subjectivity of the central character. The servant points to the limits of hegemony assuring that the mistress can never be in complete control of her own house: as Benhabib asserts, “a household is composed of other beings whose needs, desires, and concrete identities always make claims on one and remind one of the inevitable perspectivity and limits of one’s own point of view” (“Sexual Difference” 349). I exercise the type of reading that investigates the gaps and silences inevitably created by the author, who (paraphrasing Eagleton) is forced to “reveal the limits of the ideology within which [she] writes” (35).

Furthermore, I question what it means when that critical silence is embodied by a marginalized character, making her influential even while the narrative “I” works to frame her as inconsequential.

The texts approach the possibility of solidarity between women through creative and sensitive negotiations of class, race, and gender; this negotiation of difference is significant in this context as it is not often taken into consideration within the analytical lenses that dominate discussion of the writers. I am interested for example in Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos’ novel *Balún Canán* (1957), in which a young girl’s Indigenous nanny complicates her desire to ascend within the patriarchal structure of her land-holding family as the girl learns that what would make her life comfortable is actually the cause of her “other mother’s” subjugation. The dynamic is very similar in Jean Rhys’ West Indian novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), with the strong presence of the black nanny troubling her Creole mistress’ notions of race and humanity. Finally I will turn to Brazil, and Clarice Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), in which the journey of self-discovery of the protagonist is mocked by cryptic messages left by her absent maid. While each of these novels is considered to be a narration of self-development of the female subject, I argue that they are also preoccupied with the history of violence that a valorization of the unified subject in Western history has entailed. The deep psychological character of each work demonstrates the nightmare that results from a coerced homogenization, which radically marginalizes otherness and erases differences. Furthermore, the deconstruction of the unified theory of self occurs not only so that the text itself can speak, but also to engage notions of responsibility and accountability for exclusions that occur within the writing process itself.

Ultimately I am concerned with the way in which the unreliable narrator speaks the “language of feminist individualism” (Spivak, “TWT” 157) while the silenced, marginal character who appears only in glimpses questions the feasibility of the model of women’s liberation that conveniently obscures the social realities within which self-realization takes place. The silence of the marginalized is therefore not merely a passive reaction to oppression; rather it becomes a critique, marking the very limits of the text to be able to *represent* the less-privileged woman. In that way it is revealed that it is not only the center that acts upon the margin which is inscribed by victimization; rather the margin influences and even defines the center. Spivak makes this point when asserting the significance of the nanny Christophine in Rhys’ novel: “She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native” (“TWT” 156). Spivak’s analysis which has come to lead subsequent criticism of the novel announces the necessary rethinking of the form itself, which enables the colonized woman to be used as the embodiment of primitive knowledge, as a native informant to lend authenticity to a work.

Much of the criticism of the novels in question has asserted that the colonized female character is submerged in a plot about the narrator’s individual identity. I have asked as the author struggles to recognize her own privilege to what extent does she actually “recenter” her own experience in a reconfirmation of the narrative “I,” instead of meaningfully recognizing the margins of her narrative. What I have found is that the writing is conscious of the way that the less-privileged female is used in order to gain access to a higher moral ground – thus the maid points to an outside, an alternative logic to her mistress’ version of humanity, while remaining on that outside – the “other side”– in order not to be appropriated and indoctrinated into the systems of reasoning of the dominant classes. It is fundamental to point out that for the writers in this

study the presence of the colonized woman is not merely bracketed off as an alibi for the story of individual development; rather in each text she haunts, and in fact determines, the entire narrative process.

Although each novel is separated linguistically and geographically, through a close reading of the texts various points of intersection are revealed. First, each writer experiences the familiar anxieties when producing within a literary tradition that tends to marginalize women's writing, leading to feelings of suffocation; a process described most notably in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Even when being critiqued in a positive light, women's writing tends to be linked implicitly with "lower" forms of literature – the subjective, the material, the emotional, the *feminine*. Lispector expressed her ambivalence towards being considered a "woman writer" in an interview cited by Cristina Santos: "Tudo que eu digo, ou não, é uma bobagem...Ou então é considerada como ou uma coisa linda, ou uma coisa boba. Tudo na base de ser escritora. É por isso que eu não ligo muito para essa coisa de ser escritora e dar entrevista e tudo. É porque não sou isso" (8).⁹ Importantly reactions of fear towards being marginalized and scrutinized on the basis of generalized categories are met with attempts at not undertaking subjugation themselves.

This anxiety moreover affects the way in which we read those texts – through the perception of the oppressed talking back to the oppressor, only to find that "his" is the only language that she has with which to express herself. The primary question then becomes, how does she address the singular literary tradition that marginalizes her? Each writer dialogues with multiple literary and theoretical traditions at multiple registers: Castellanos' novels are

⁹ "Everything that I say, or not, is nonsense. Or then it is considered as either a pretty or a silly thing. Everything on the basis of being a woman writer. It is therefore that I do not get tied up with this thing of being a woman writer and giving interviews and all of that. Because I am not that" (my translation).

mentioned most often in connection with Indigenismo, Lispector's with existentialism and French feminism, Rhys with Caribbean modernism and English feminism, all with a generalized global literary feminism that pits them against a homogenous notion of patriarchy. For that reason while each is celebrated within the literary canon, they tend to be critiqued either on the basis of how well they compare with male writers in those specific traditions or how well they follow a feminist format that is based upon a Western female literary tradition in which *Jane Eyre* is most often exemplified as the female novel *par excellence*. Spivak points to the emergence of a "(proto-) feminist Western subject" ("TWT" 145) in the feminine literary text, exemplified through the character of Jane Eyre. As this becomes a comprehensive model in the literary world, the historical role of non-Western notions of empowerment has been left out. Rosario Castellanos' works, for example, tend to be linked with a liberal feminist tradition which presupposes the inherent good in developing female subjectivity. Therefore the common perception that the ending of *Balún Canán* is a fulfillment of a linear process of subject constitution based upon a classic Bildungsroman-style is often taken for granted; the implication of which is that the failure of the girl-narrator to distinguish her nana's face from that of other indigenous people is interpreted as a failure of the novel itself to adequately *represent* the indigenous character. Although if the critic recognizes that Castellanos may be writing in tension with Western feminism that is defined by female access to individualism, the "ending" opens up to various interpretations.¹⁰

The second point of intersection is the general time period in which each novel was composed, each being exposed to regional artistic currents framed by modernism as well as to

¹⁰ Liliana Ramírez makes this point, that it is a misreading to assume that *Balún Canán* depicts a linear process of mestizaje; on the contrary, she asserts that there are only moments when certain cultural elements, expressed by either the Indigenous nana or the Ladino family, are closer or farther away (72).

European feminisms and the emerging Second Wave feminism in the U.S. Although based in the specifics of U.S. race and class dynamics, the Second Wave was reaching out transnationally in order to challenge masculinist systems of oppression by calling upon “woman-centered” notions of coalition-building and alliance-formation. While it is important to identify the cultural and historical specificities of each text, it is also notable that each writer dialogues with, either by chance or deliberately (and posthumously as international critics discover them as representative of woman’s voice), both a local writing tradition as well as global women’s writing. Moreover, speaking of the “universalism” of a work is of course prickly terrain: women’s writing that presumably does not speak adequately to the local situation will at the same time be called “universal” in its ability to speak to the situation of women on a global level. A universal “woman’s” text is more easily designated as *something other* than regional literature, dismissed as inadequate to address social or political situations. Feminist critiques also tend to be ignored by literary scholars in Latin America and the Caribbean, since feminism is perceived to be inextricably fixed to a white, middle-class U.S. movement with ties to imperialism.¹¹

With these factors in mind, it is not out of the question to suggest that women writers negotiate an international literary climate differently than male writers do, as they do not exactly fit into leading discussions concerning race and politics – this also means that the texts may

¹¹ Within the most celebrated women activist voices of the mid-to-late-twentieth century in Latin America, there was justifiable suspicion towards the internationalism of women’s rights. For example in an often-quoted statement by Domitila Barrios de Chungara to the chair of the Mexican delegation at the International Women’s Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975, she affirms their acute differences, pointing out to the chair that she arrives each morning with a new outfit, elegantly dressed. The wives of *mineros*, Chungara states, have only a small borrowed home that they will need to abandon when their husband dies. “Ahora señora, dígame: ¿tiene usted algo semejante a mi situación? ... Nosotras, no podemos, en este momento, ser iguales, aun como mujeres” (Viezzler 225). [Now señora tell me, do you have something in common with my situation. We cannot be, in this moment, equals, even as women” (my translation)]. Chungara states that they cannot in that moment be considered equals, not ruling out the possibilities for discussion that would take account their differing situations. Her statement of dissatisfaction may also however be co-opted by those who would only exclude feminist thought as a Western ideological position with no place in the “Third World.”

speak to international feminisms, even if they are not connected to them directly. For example, while the colonized female character provides a way of analyzing regional inequalities, feminist theorists from various standpoints may infer from the oppressions she indicates the need for any type of women's movement to deal seriously with the racism and classism that has occurred within its ranks. The cross-cultural examination that is undertaken in this project works to present various options for relooking at feminist positions in order to confront realistically their hegemonic position over women's experience, as well as to rethink notions of transcultural alliances and female solidarity.

The most evident point of relation that is seen in each novel, which I am using as a structuring device for this investigation, is their portrayal of the domestic servant, who acts not as strictly the nurturing and faithful mother (mammy, nana, nodriza) to the "master's children;" rather she points out alternative ways of knowing to that of the protagonist's "real" parents, problematizing the quest for selfhood that each narration undertakes. She becomes the vehicle for which the protagonist begins to unlearn privilege, but not through unquestioning loyalty; rather the conception of the "faithful servant" is very much complicated and put into perspective through the narrator's unwillingness to represent the other.

The domestic servant poses a real problem for the protagonist who wishes to be seen by the other woman as a member of her community, but who also fears being connected to the intense marginality that she represents. More than the "wise obeah woman," or the devoted surrogate mother, each woman has her own story to tell, which also names the privilege of their mistresses. The way in which the mistress responds to the realization of her role in oppression becomes vital to the direction of her formation. The little girl in *Balún Canán* comes to understand her role in the cruelty towards her nana: "Ella, como siempre desde que nací, me

arrima a su regazo. Es caliente y amoroso. Pero tendrá una llaga. Una llaga que nosotros le habremos enconado” (17).¹² The interconnections, then, between the female characters is not only based upon caring, but also upon a capacity to face up to a wound that will never heal, given the perpetual nature of responsibility. The other continuously waits for a response concerning the wound, but there is no one answer that would be a symbol of a sufficient resolution.

What distinguishes these authors from others that have undertaken this subject is that they portray a relationship that is neither romanticized nor idealized; rather through an emphasis on silences the presence of the colonized woman both resists marginalization and uncovers the unconscious racism of the protagonist who must learn to recognize the “heelprints” that she has left in her process of self liberation.¹³ By making central the relationship that is portrayed in each case, the following assertions will be made: a) there is in the texts a consciousness of the possibility for new understandings of unity and emancipation which can only be realized through an unlearning of privilege b) to judge each novel based upon how well the author represents the subaltern voice would be to ignore the multiple negotiations that take place between the women, as well as the ways in which silence presents a logic outside of the ordering processes of the text c) through an encounter weighted by both fear and desire, determined by the silence of the marginalized, is a deconstruction of Western notions of subjectivity with implications for feminist understandings of cross-cultural solidarity – even if that solidarity is not entirely realized in the work itself.

¹² “She draws me to her lap, as she has always done ever since I was born. It is warm and tender. But she has a wound. A wound that we have reopened” (my translation).

¹³ In her 1981 keynote address to the National Women’s Studies Association, Audre Lorde asks, “What woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman’s face? What woman’s terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny?” (132).

Within close readings each of these points will be taken into account, revolving around the central question – what can solidarity *between* women look like? The resuscitation of the discussion of these authors will be a way of redirecting analysis away from finding ways for a speaking subject to identify with others, and towards the way in which they work to de-center privileged women’s experiences thereby opening up spaces for new initiatives of coalition-building. The remainder of this introduction is divided into three sections, which offer further background in order that these questions may be explored. In **Part I** the role of genre will be dissected, given that each novel has a push/pull relationship with a dominating form that carries with it a history of subject-formation based upon individualist principles. It must be taken into consideration that bildungsroman narratives, as well as narratives of female self-discovery,¹⁴ are the forms against which each novel tends to be measured. **Part II** examines more closely the perceptions of the mistress towards the servant, and the role of the domestic servant as a literary figure. **Part III** will work to frame my thinking with respect to the relationship between the central character and the marginalized woman as an *encounter* between the privileged and the silenced. Through that encounter I will consider how interconnectedness may be read.

¹⁴ The narrative of female self-discovery is described by Rita Felski, as indicative of contemporary feminist writing in which “access to self-knowledge is seen to require an explicit refusal of the heterosexual romance plot, the framework which has traditionally defined the meaning and direction of women’s lives” (122). More credence is thereby given to the power of community-formation between women as a source of intersubjective development. The narrative exemplifies the reworking of the bildungsroman, the plot of which no longer needs to limit itself to the growth from childhood to adulthood; any description of the process of self-development or awakening is seen to be an outgrowth of the bildungsroman form.

1.1 THE FORM OF FEMINIST INDIVIDUALISM

Of concern in each text is the standard of women's writing, which in the mid-twentieth century remains the individualist, bildungsroman-style journey of female liberation through which a protagonist arrives at an understanding of her own subjectivity, which is not necessarily bound to socioeconomic positionings. This standard is notable as it presents its own way of domination through a form that only allows for a unidirectional movement of the individual on her quest, and which does not question the formation of the subject through exclusion of the "other" [Who I am is *not* the Other > the Other is an indiscriminate collective of "not-me's"]. That is not to say that women writers have inserted themselves unproblematically into that tradition; critical texts of the novels in question often consider the way in which they transform the conventional bildungsroman pointing out that subjectivity cannot be formed in isolation; rather it is a continuous process of "becoming" through relationships with others. According to *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, protagonists of new narratives of female development are more embedded in relationships; women are more likely to perceive their commonalities thereby receiving a source of support different from the male form that is concentrated solely on the individual. For Erica Frouman-Smith the bildungsroman form is important specifically for Latin American women authors because of the genre's ability to reach across linguistic and racial borders, creating an international community of women (102). While the transformations that they stress are significant, problematic in these formulations is that in the development text the marginalized are seen to be consistently directed towards the individual's journey, even if they are not completely subsumed within it. Also, since the narrative continues to be seen as a projection of the self towards the other, the "reaching-out" towards a collective is based more upon charity than solidarity. The relationship with the other

becomes a necessary step towards self-development leading to a narration that looks to convert all otherness into a sense of the self.

Also notable is María Inés Lagos' work on the bildungsroman in Hispanic literature. Referring to Elaine Showalter's notion of the *double-voicedness* of women's literature, Lagos states that the female Hispanic bildungsroman is not a subgenre, but an unconventional version of the form: "las escritoras cuentan dos historias, una historia que sigue los parámetros convencionales y otra que los subvierte" (22).¹⁵ Differently the objective of the traditional bildungsroman narrative is the construction of the central character's individual, rational self, which is liberated from emotional bonds and social conventions. Various critics, including Ian Wojcik-Andrews, give the female bildungsroman credit for pointing out the failures of the masculine tradition:

If the success of the male Bildungsroman is defined by the degree of separation the hero achieves from the family and the community, the *failure* of the male Bildungsroman is defined by the degree of interconnectedness achieved by heroines in the female Bildungsroman, narratives of community (68).

Although it is clear that postcolonial novels written by women are often in tension with the model for selfhood based upon rationality and individualism, criticism in this vein fails to recognize the work of the implied author and its disruption of the protagonist's subjectivity; moreover it takes for granted the linear movement of the bildungsroman and its posturing of the rational self reaching towards the irrationality of the other. This assumption leads critics to call the texts either triumphs of feminist individualism or failures of their use of *mestizaje* or

¹⁵ "these writers tell two stories, one that follows conventional parameters and another that subverts them" (my translation).

creolization to propose a cross-cultural opposition to the momentum of colonial historiography,¹⁶ since there is a presumed consumption of the subaltern through the linear progression of the text's narration.

Furthermore, of the novels in question in this study each protagonist plays with the seeming "bourgeois pettiness" that comprises the bildungsroman with a male hero (Redfield 39), although it is an imaginary concept of individuality in which they have no place.¹⁷ Each woman flirts with either the ideals of marriage or liberalized education that would resemble a happy ending for an individualized character, yet the rug is seemingly pulled out from under them as they look to the colonized woman to provide stability for her so that she may maintain the semblance of a coherent identity, even knowing that it is an inauthentic process that could only fail. What is at stake is the alterity that is sacrificed in the process of self-determination. My reading of these novels is most heavily informed by Gregory Castle's formulation of the modernist bildungsroman, in which the desire for autonomous formation rescues the "classical ideal of Bildung," but at the same time subjects that ideal to an "immanent critique" which allows for a new "questioning of ideological subtexts concerning the nature of the subject and self-cultivation" (3). It is this ironic element based upon the self-reflexive quality of what Castle calls the "transcultural Bildungsroman" and the simultaneous process of recuperation and critique, which I borrow for my study that looks at the negative element which is necessary to oppose the dominating tendencies of the narration. Each novel presents an ideological element that the protagonists strive for, one that would connect them with humanity and rescue them from their own *otherness* – the negative moment emerges to displace that very order and to

¹⁶ This conception of creolization within the postcolonial modernist text is taken from Simon Gikandi, who states that it is appropriated as a figure of modernism "because it opposes the synchronic vision of colonial historiography with the diachronic narrative of a cross-cultural imagination" (17).

¹⁷ See Teresa de Lauretis for perspectives of identity that go beyond the fragmentary or "imaginary" (9).

disrupt essentialisms, leaving the protagonists with feelings of terror, anxiety, and shame. The bildungsroman-style journey that they were undertaking is no longer adequate to find a sense of self, and what is left is a failure to complete their formation as well as an aperture towards new models of growth based upon intersubjectivity.

Studies of the female bildungsroman allow us to see the ways in which the modernist form critiques structures of domination that limit the freedom of one to seek out their own identity; still they do not account for the alternative logic that enunciates itself through silence, which exists outside of the protagonist's construction of selfhood. Castle does insist rightly that domination must be dealt with; that it is "not the structure of the Bildungsroman but what it excludes that is the issue; only a logic of disintegration can attempt to include what has not yet been integrated into a structure that exists by virtue of its absence" (27). Keeping this point in mind, it would be prudent to reexamine at what has been often referred to in the case of Lispector an aesthetics of failure, in which encounters with the Other always present the author/narrator with her own limitations, and inabilities to construct her own subjecthood, which eventually leads to a dismantling of the structures that had formed her identity. I will argue in subsequent chapters that Lispector's novel indeed moves the furthest towards dismantling structures of power, even though the protagonist never seems to become completely aware of her space within that ordering system.

Taking this argument a step further, the absence must not only be dealt with through the protagonist's eyes, but through the work of the implied author – that gulf that is created between the author and the narrative ego. As the configuration of the ego enters into crisis, a space emerges from which the reader may question the motives of her narration. It is not only the protagonist's marginalization that limits her freedom, but her own complicity with those systems

of oppression that the texts beg us to observe; and in that sense she indirectly references the author's recognition of her privilege as a writing subject. The title of Lispector's novel introduces us to the "passion" *according to* the protagonist, G.H.; thus we might assume that the entire text is filtered through G.H.'s point of view. Although upon reading it becomes evident that there is much more going on that is outside of her perception. Therefore rather than examining these texts through the eyes of the central character and her search for identity, which may in fact occur through the transformation of the conventional bildungsroman, I argue that it is important to look at the placement of the marginalized, subaltern character as a significant critique of the very process of the protagonist's self exploration. Mieke Bal highlights a type of reading that presumes the work is a coherent and well-structured whole, which encourages "the projection of 'masterplots' that colonize or erase the marginal" (507). Differently, the type of reading that I propose resists the lure of the "I" of the narrative and her will to produce coherence, in order to avoid reaffirming her naturalizations within criticism and to get at those experiences that undercut the structures of domination.¹⁸

1.2 THE SERVANT

*I een de house
tie up wid apron
between bedroom
where white mammy
practicing piano
an kyan quite*

¹⁸ Furthermore, this suggests that critics be wary of not repeating the structures of domination within their criticism by anticipating an overriding literary structure, thereby misreading irony. Carol Boyce Davies states unequivocally her view of critical responsibility: "In redefining the critical and creative landscape, it is necessary to foreground whether one's work is for reconnection, invasion or exploitation" (23).

*reach de blues
an de kitchen
where black mammy
reign supreme
where mi soul
steam out
smell like fresh clothes
wash wid roses soap
(Breeze, "Red Rebel Song" 3)*

The servant in texts by relatively more-privileged women is a theme that reemerges in literary criticism sometimes as a point of fascination regarding the unwritten space that the "other" woman occupies, for instance Gabrielle Daniels' effort to discover the "woman left behind," Anais Nin's housemaid. Daniels expresses: "Here were two women, one black and one white, both educated and silenced in their own ways, yet could not help each other because of race differences" (80). In Alison Light's much more recent study *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, she calls attention to Virginia Woolf's dependence upon servants that "plays havoc with any easy celebration of either her or her sister, ... as bohemian, free, women" (xvii). Without the servants of course the writing would not exist.

What I find most compelling about Light's work is that she emphasizes that service has always been an emotional as well as an economic category (3). The "peculiar intimacy"¹⁹ that dub poet 'Binta' Breeze conveys above illustrates the tangled and conflictive encounter that repeatedly occurs in each text. Discerned in the poem is a space separating the black and white "mammies," between the piano representing self-cultivation and the workplace of the kitchen, which the "I" works to negotiate. It is not about the blending of self and other nor is it the assimilation of one into the other's space, but about the space in-between through which

¹⁹ This wording is borrowed from Barbara Ehrenreich, who describes the "peculiar intimacy" (93) that occurs in homes with live-in maids.

“rebellion” is to be found. Breeze alludes to the fire set by Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as she speaks of the rebel woman: “jus a raw fire madness / a clinging to de green / a sargasso sea” (2). This woman refuses to support the status quo, and finally opens up her mouth to sing her song, releasing herself from others’ expectations, with no apologies and accepting her madness. Moreover, the poem’s narrator at last articulates her sense of self and claims her own voice: “I jus a come / I I I own rainbow / I I I own song” (6). From the ambiguities that inform her life she sparks a rebellious fire.

By calling attention to the characterization of the live-in domestic servant, nanny, and *nodriza* (wet nurse), I am in many ways building off of Castillo’s desire to reconsider Gilbert and Gubar’s notion of “the mad woman in the attic” from new perspectives that would take into account the intersection of the Attic (of the *criolla*) and the “attic of the Attic” which is given over to the maid. Castillo states:

In Latin American women’s writing, one way these two rooms intersect is in the vexed and exploitative relationships between mistress and servants, in the sexually charged contacts between master and servant. In other words, the woman’s Attic surface is a subterfuge for the attic where the secret self takes refuge (*Talking Back* 8).

Castillo brings to light the relationship that I wish to explore; which, with its reoccurring instances of confrontations and rejections, exposures and retreats, threatens the unified sense of self for which the protagonists are presumed to be searching.²⁰ If we analyze the relationship by way of a Hegelian notion of self-consciousness, the mistress recognizes herself only as a discrete individual, even while being dependent on the maid as the body which makes her whole (see Russon, 68). Therefore, the mistress must ignore the inequalities between them and look away

²⁰ While I am not exploring sexuality in this study, there is certainly room for further development of the sexualized encounters between masters and servants and mistresses and maids.

when the servant resists, since that would mean the destruction of her sense of self. Within this relationship of mutual dependence and fear, we may view the spaces in which both domination and resistance are present in silent and intimate forms. I begin by exploring who the servant is from the protagonists' point of view, and then return as I begin the next section to the contestations of those conceptions; a rebellion towards representation.

In *Balún Canán* the nanny explains to the girl: “[D]ice la ley que ningún rico puede entrar al cielo si un pobre no lo lleva de la mano” (30).²¹ This rule learned from her nana leads the girl-narrator in Castellanos' novel to believe that her redemption *requires* an intimate connection with someone of a lower social status. What does this form of interdependence mean? In the narrative context, who is the servant if she is not there to further the protagonist's ego? Are silences perpetuated by the narrator only so that she may find a voice for herself? Lagos, who otherwise does a fantastic job fleshing out the workings of the novel of formation in Latin American women's literature, surprisingly claims that the servant character is actually *more liberated* from societal restrictions, and thus provides that access for the protagonist to gain an outside to the phallogocentric world:

Las sirvientas tienen mayor libertad para ir y venir, para tener relaciones sexuales fuera del matrimonio, pues su vida no está reglamentada por las convenciones y restricciones que atan a las señoras. Las relaciones con las niñas son íntimas y espontáneas y, al no mediar la distancia que se crea en las relaciones con la madre, se tratan de igual a igual (88).²²

²¹ “The law states that no rich man can enter heaven if a poor man is not leading him by the hand” (my translation).

²² “The servants have more freedom to come and go, to have sexual relations outside of marriage, so their lives are not regulated by the conventions and restrictions that bind the mistresses. The relationships with the girls are intimate and spontaneous, and when not mediating the distance that is created in the relations with the mother, they are treated as equals” (my translation).

She goes on to assert that the nanny (in *Balún Canán*) does *not* represent a threat to the girl like the mother does (89). Lagos' assertion that household servants have more freedom within the domestic space, not restricted by the same moral codes as mistresses, ignores the confinement within which they maneuver. While it may be clear that within fiction nannies/servants tend to provide the resistance to hegemonic values that the mothers do not (thereby creating a safe space of nurturing), this interpretation ignores the threat to stability that evokes fear in the protagonist – it is not just desire that drives the narration, but panic. In fact, the domestic space (specifically the kitchen is often evoked as a setting of intimacy) is also a (work)place that threatens to intrude into the rest of the home. In reference to the colonial period in Mexico, Jean Franco states: “Blacks mulattas, and indigenous women (and men) were perceived to be the dangerous guardians of the erotic arts, all the more perilous since, as servants and slaves, they penetrated the heart of the home” (*Plotting Women* xiv). The fear of invasion of personal space of course extends to the terror of ruination of the landholding class – as Kenneth Ramchand suggests we might use Fanon's phrase “terrified consciousness” to indicate the “shock and disorientation” of the white minority when the Black population became aware of their power (224-25). This connection is unmistakable in the writings of Rhys and Castellanos; but even in Lispector's novel there is a concern with property – a middle-class that preserves their status through another's domestic service is exemplified through G.H., who fears the decay of what she has come to know as her culture. She maintains through cultural standards of cleanliness a firm boundary between the maid's quarters and the ideal of her living space based upon strict standards of beauty and femininity.

Moreover, the protagonist resists forming a relationship based upon an equal recognition of difference when she fears an otherness that she would not be able to control. That is, she

worries that the other could possibly know as much as her, and perhaps has observed more than she should from her space of exclusion, thereby dismantling any sense of superiority that she may have. In response to this danger the mistresses take opportunities to distinguish the inferiority of the colonized woman: for example, Antoinette says about Christophine, “how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?” (112). Each protagonist points to the ignorance of the other woman, doubting that her knowledge can help to relieve her “modern” problems. The narrative voice is one that both resists and claims its own centrality – allowing the “I” to be questioned, but also claiming its authority for fear of disintegration of self. The implied author confuses the narrator’s realm of meaning and experience, the result being a panic-driven move towards solidarity (expressed also as a desire to be considered intelligible to the other woman), which fails because of that very fear of being “multiple.” What occurs, then, is a working out of shame on the part of the narrator who is confronting these various fears and desires, thereby opening the text up in a way that allows an imaginative possibility for future dialogues and alliances. The fear of contamination is conflated with feelings of guilt, a process that is revealed most clearly upon the sudden disappearances of the colonized woman in each text: in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Christophine disappears from the story without justification from the narrative; the nana in *Balún Canán* is given the opening lines of the novel, but by the end is erased from the little girl’s memory; the domestic servant in Lispector’s novel is always out of view, leaving her employer to contemplate the shocking absence left in the maid’s quarters.

It should be reiterated that silence works not in the passive way desired by the narrator, rather to defend against employment as the cross-cultural bridge – the “Red Rebel Woman” in Breeze’s poem that makes reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the “red ribba / foot shape outa

country clay / Madder / of white children red children an black / who!" (5). She is made to act as the bridge across continents, underneath "troubled water lay" (5); although she fears losing part of "I" if she goes to either side, she refuses to take abuse from either direction. It is this image of rebellion that I wish to hold onto as I examine the ways in which the domestic servant resists the authority of her mistress' narrative account. While her labor for the home and for the text is invisibilized, by way of careful slippages between object and representation there is a retrievable voice within absence that tells the story of discrimination and privilege that the narrator has left out. Uniquely in each text the servant makes a choice that releases her from being employed as merely the vehicle for her mistress' self-discovery, thus demanding a type of necessary intercultural dialogue that the text does not yet provide.

1.3 ENCOUNTERS

No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self.
(Spivak, "TWT" 156)

The above citation draws attention to the resistance to domestication that the Other performs – any criticism that bases itself upon the journey of the self towards the Other must keep in mind this imperialist project of *othering* in which marginalized subjects are produced in order to reconstitute the center. Contemporary feminist criticism has focused on a notion of self that is in a constant process of becoming, since it must always be in dialogue with other voices that produce a change in self-awareness. As Mary O'Connor states:

Although consciousness may seem to be the ultimate goal – one single definition of self by which to live – this self must be one in constant transition because it is always in dialogue with other personalities who represent other social forces. The self produced for the moment must necessarily redo itself in its next encounter (202).

It is also crucial to define who those “other personalities” are. Are they ontologized as well within a dialogic production of self? I intend to underline this idea of “encounters,” but instead of determining selfhood through the body of the other woman, by emphasizing the two-way exchange and the history that makes the encounter possible. Sara Ahmed astutely emphasizes that it is not just the face-to-face encounter that is important, but “the spatial and temporal dislocations that made that moment possible” (145). This means for example that the girl who encounters her indigenous nana, and who sees her differently each time, is not merely a blank slate to be filled with cultural information; rather she carries with her a history of inequalities that frame those moments. Thus the production of subjectivity becomes less important as the formation of a response to the interactions between already constituted selves and others. This process will become clear through a close reading of each of the novels.

Ahmed refers to “strange encounters” through which differences are determined and the infinite responsibility to the other is revealed. She describes an encounter as a meeting of surprise and conflict – identity is then established through a shifting of what we *think* we know. The protagonists are surprised by their lack of knowledge that would allow them to control the encounter, and by that frightening possibility that they may not actually be able to read the body of the other woman. Differences, according to Ahmed, are determined at the level of the encounter, *not in the body of the other* (145), thereby countering ideas that would mark that embodiment as *the* sign of difference. While recognizing the significance of the response of

each protagonist upon realizing the oppression of the “other” woman, it is also important to not consolidate the entire moment onto the reaction of she who is looking to preserve her “self.” Again I would reinforce the potential of the space in-between, which may be apprehended by the reader who does not settle for reading from only one side, thus revealing historical inequalities as well as future possibilities.

The reading that I am offering deals with unconscious racism, and uncovering those places where privilege hides. What is being put to the test is the positing of the privileged individual versus the faceless collective (the “not” Subject). Critics that focus on the female self-expression in the novels in question maintain the self/Other dichotomy and work to reverse the paradigm that DeBeauvoir posits: “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (xix). If this formulation is merely reversed, who then occupies the position of Other? In her work on *Lispector*, Cristina Santos contends:

There is an instinctive need to overcome the silent female role imposed by way of social and cultural prejudgments and values for one of authentic self-expression. For this reason the self-reflexivity of the female quest for an authentic self cannot be undertaken without recognizing that meaning is constructed through a dialogue not only with one’s ‘self’ but also with one’s Other (7).

This paradigm asserts that feminine identity can only be introduced through alterity; through the self becoming aware of another’s consciousness. According to critics such as Santos and Mercedes Kahn, the purpose of *Lispector*’s inclusion of alterity is to give evidence to an excluded Other, while showing her own ambivalence towards being tied to that exclusion. The Other only serves as a reflection of oneself – the mirror – when the Other is visible the reaction is to incorporate it into the interiority of the protagonist. First-person narration attempts to do

this, yet the “other woman” that occupies that space of alterity remains unintelligible, outside the bounds of the narrator’s perspective.

The treatment of difference in each novel is much more nuanced than the previously mentioned works concerning subjectivity would suggest. Instead of emphasizing the self > Other dialogue that occurs in the “female quest,” my intent is to read each text as an extension of an encounter through which is revealed the multiple connections as well as dislocations and asymmetries between the actors. Important to this reading is thinking through the approximations toward ethics and literature, relying most prominently upon the works within feminist and post-colonial studies of Ahmed, Françoise Lionnet, Castillo, Spivak, and Benita Parry. Within ethical philosophy I make marked reference to Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy. My reading is influenced by Nancy’s conception of the “first-person plural,” which challenges conventional ideas concerning collectivities. According to Nancy:

Everything, then, passes *between us*. This ‘between,’ as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. ... There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up (5).

The voice enacted through silence, in this way, does not indicate a complete absence, but a space in-between, of both proximity and separation, “contiguity but not continuity” (Nancy 5). The possibilities for and impossibilities of interconnectedness will continue to be explored through each novel, keeping in mind the potential for a feminist literary theory that recognizes the multiple stages of inequality that it is framed against.

2.0 WE HAVE BEEN BOTH TWINS AND ENEMIES: SHAME AND ANXIETY IN ROSARIO CASTELLANOS' *BALÚN CANÁN*

Niña, olvidé su lengua, no aprendí sus costumbres / y nunca usé su ropa. / No digas que es mi raza. / No tengo más familia / que esta casa (Castellanos *Salomé y Judith* 128-129).²³

Modeling what would be viewed by subsequent generations as the “new” Mexican woman, Rosario Castellanos opened the door for women writers and feminists who would have a newly formed place from which to speak. She has been a striking and enduring influence on Mexican and Latin American women writers, many of whom consider her a “foremother” (see Finnegan 181).²⁴ Her legacy provided an example of a committed life – described by José Saramago as the ambassador of Chiapas (Rollason 1), she used her intellectual platform to dedicate her life to speaking for the disenfranchised and marginalized populations in Mexico. Writing, as Myralyn F. Allgood emphasizes, would be the form in which her ethics of social justice would take, striving to represent not only herself but the lives of others who lived in misery. As a creative writer and essayist, teacher, activist, intellectual, and ambassador to Israel, she drew upon her experiences to call out and defy the machismo that dominated Mexican

²³ “Daughter, I forgot their language, I never learned their customs / and I never used their clothing. / Don’t say that it is my race. / I have no other family / than in this house” (my translation).

²⁴ Nuala Finnegan highlights the intertextuality between contemporary Mexican writers Guadalupe Loaeza, Rosmaría Roffiel, and Castellanos, in their intent to reveal patriarchal patterns and to utilize writing for social change. Finnegan also emphasizes that they share a concern for the middle-class woman, and are indebted to second wave discourse (183).

cultural and political life, and to speak in opposition to the bigotry directed towards indigenous peoples.

Perhaps ironically, she grew up in a landholding family whose land was expropriated in 1939 by reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas, whose presidency she would later extol as the turning point for indigenous and women's rights. A child of ladino parents in the region of Comitán in the state of Chiapas, and raised by indigenous nannies, Castellanos witnessed first-hand the oppression of indigenous peoples and the sexism that dominated the region, which are outlined throughout her writings. Having maneuvered between the two cultures she has been able to radically criticize the Ladinos from the inside, while recognizing that sexism has no ethnic boundaries. This positioning is reflected in her drama *Salomé*, in which the young ladino girl is crushed to discover that while she looked for freedom by allying with an indigenous man as opposed to her landholding father. She discovers however that both men equally exhibit misogynist behavior through violence and cruelty, thus identifying a singular oppressor: "Madre," she cries, "mujeres todas que antes de mí y conmigo soportasteis un yugo de humillación, bebisteis un vaso inicuo, ¡estáis en mí vengadas!" (38).²⁵ Significantly it is the nodriza who is there to comfort her at the end of the work, posing the question that if Salomé and her mother are bound under the yoke of humiliation, suffering from the cruelty of both white and indigenous men, where does the sacrifice of the indigenous woman for her mistress(es) fit into that oppressor/oppressed paradigm?

Castellanos writes her essay "El hombre del destino" ("Man of Destiny") to credit Cárdenas with the amount of freedom that she has been able to enjoy, and describes what would have become of her if she had not had the privilege of an education. After passing through the

²⁵ "Mother, all women before me and with me supported a yoke of humiliation, drank from a glass of injustice, they are in me avenged! (my translation).

stage of señorita and then eventually marrying, she would become a respectable señora: “Una señora respetable tenía un hijo cada año y confiaba su crianza a nanas indias, así como confiaba los quehaceres domésticos a un enjambre de criadas que se afanaban en la cocina, en los patios, en las recámaras y salones” (*Uso de la palabra* 207).²⁶ This is the life that is related in her first novel *Balún Canán*, in which she tackles the discrimination of women and indigenous people while recounting the story of a year of her childhood when Cardenas’ reforms were arriving belatedly to the Chiapas region.²⁷

By way of the girl-narrator the reader is offered a narrow vision of the cardenista period and the relations between the landowners and the *campesinos*.²⁸ The autobiographical element combined with the child-narrator’s perspective brings about a tone which is at time autocratic, which attempts to organize the political upheaval and racial inequalities through her limited point of view. With the girl offering the world only as she can see it and rarely asserting her own judgment, the reader is uniquely aware of the limitations of her vision, physically and mentally. Her descriptions of her space of enunciation hint at that which is outside of the writer’s purview: “cuando me yergo puedo mirar la frente las rodillas de mi padre. Más arriba no. ... Miro lo que está a mi nivel. Ciertos arbustos con las hojas carcomidas por los insectos; los pupitres manchados de tinta; mi hermano. Y a mi hermano lo miro de arriba abajo” (9).²⁹ She struggles

²⁶ “A respectable woman had a child every year to whom she trusted an Indian nanny to raise, and trusted the domestic chores to a cluster of domestics that toiled in the kitchen, the patios, the firing chambers and halls” (my translation).

²⁷ Castellanos tended to focus her feminist writings on the life of the *señora*, leaving the indigenous woman out of that framework. This could be owing to a fear of representing a group that she was separated from through privilege. Thus in this novel I highlight the treatment of the nana towards whom Castellanos expressed ambivalence with respect to their relationship.

²⁸ See Teresa Hurley’s work *Mothers and Daughters in Post-Revolutionary Mexican Literature* for a detailed analysis of the function of the child-narrator.

²⁹ “when I stand up straight I can see my father’s knees just in front of me. But not higher. ... I see what’s as high as myself. Some bushes, their leaves nibbled by the insects, the desks stained with ink, my brother. My brother I can see from head to foot” (Trans. Nicholson 13).

to define her place in a family that only values *el hijo varón*, the boy-child; since her brother Mario is younger he is the only one that she can “see” fully, and to whom she could explain things that she already knew; for example that Columbus had discovered America. Although she claims certain influence over him, she cannot fully ignore that he is the center of the family who will have the power to use any knowledge that he receives to shape his own future. The juxtaposition of the two children is central to the discussion of gender inequality asserted by the text.

While the narrator struggles to assert control there is also an interior criticism that counters that impulse, as well as a hint of an outside of her perception most deliberately expressed through the nana’s character. Being that the nana functions as a surrogate mother, the girl both shows admiration for her and resistance to her influence while attempting to locate an identity within a family that favors the younger brother. By way of this text the author identifies her own prejudices as a product of that environment, in a way that makes the work more compelling as a confessional tale that signals both the value and limitations of self-exploration. Significantly her exploration is not passive; rather she subjects herself to the scrutiny of the reader, who no doubt finds her eventual retreat into ladino solipsism insupportable. Readings of the novel tend to arrive at one of two conclusions concerning the girl/nana relationship: that they are twins in oppression and their friendship is liberating, or that there can be no meaningful reading of the nana given that she is subsumed into the girl’s development tale, which is told in Spanish. I contend that rather than being a bond that is defined by either liberation or exploitation, there are moments when each point is true, leading the reader to read beyond the girl’s ultimate failures at cross-cultural solidarity to find a space in which the possibilities for community are possible.

The novel is divided into three sections, the first and third narrated by the seven-year-old girl, who is the daughter of ladino landholders César and Zoraida Argüello and the sister of Mario, the future of the family as the only boy child. As a semi-autobiographical representation of the author, the protagonist grows up in Comitán where her life is changed as land and education reforms are introduced in the region. Largely ignored by her parents, the girl forms a close bond with her nana, who is the only connection to the indigenous side of her culture. While Mario attends school and is encouraged to be competitive, the girl spends time with her nana and other indigenous women who relate to her Mayan stories and who display their distinct points of cultural reference. These experiences are taken from the author's life; in interviews Castellanos has recounted that she had an Indian nanny named Rufina, and a Chamula girl (María Escandón) was hired by her mother to be the children's "playmate and toy" (O'Connell 15). She did not question the inequalities embedded in these relationships at the time, and it was not until much later into her adult life that the author began to think critically about the position of the domestic servant in Mexican culture. Apparently influenced by U.S. feminism in the '60's and '70's and in censure of Mexican women's denial that feminism could speak to them, in 1970 she forcefully states: "Cuando desaparezca la última criada, el colchoncito en que ahora reposa nuestra conformidad, aparecería la primera rebelde furibunda" (qtd. in O'Connell 222).³⁰ Although as Joanna O'Connell makes clear, while she worked to denounce racism and sexism at all levels, to address directly her own privilege would be a long process. During her diplomatic career she addresses what her own dependence on nannies and maids has meant, and speaking of the situation of her son's nanny Herlinda in "El frente doméstico" she declares: "Ay, Herlinda y yo estamos en plena guerra de clases, cada una en su respectiva trinchera. Y yo sé que la razón

³⁰ "When the last maid disappears, the cushion upon which we rest our conformities, the first furious rebel would appear" (my translation).

histórica es suya” (qtd. in O’Connell 222).³¹ Despite having addressed her own privilege, O’Connell concludes that Castellanos was “still unable to imagine the maid as the potential feminist” (222).

While Castellanos expressed sympathy for the plight of the domestic servant, she did not appear to have an adequate response to the inequality that defined her status, given that she could not imagine for her the same type of agency that the girl achieves through education. It may be surmised, however, that Castellanos was wary of speaking for a group of people against which she had participated in discriminating. The result in the novel therefore is not complete cooperation between two silenced characters; rather the nana is a specter that continuously questions the author/girl’s sincerity. The failure that is announced from the beginning, that the Spanish text cannot actually produce a meaningful dialogue with the indigenous characters within it, hints at the confessional style of the story, showing the difficulties of finding points of connection. At times when the nana is speaking the girl is not listening, or she complains that she doesn’t feel like hearing her stories. It is perhaps revealing that Castellanos in her own life felt uneasy about her relationship with her *cargadora* María Escandón, who actually stayed with her until she married at age 33. Poniatowska quotes her as saying that she regretted that it never occurred to her to teach her *cargadora* to read and write: “Mientras yo andaba de redentora ... de Quetzalcóatl por montes y collados, junto a mí alguien se consumía de ignorancia” (qtd. in Steele 82).³² This incredible farsightedness that allows even champions of women’s liberation to ignore what occurs in their own home is difficult to account for; but it is the principal failure that this study seeks to address. But it must also be asserted that the reality that the author displaced

³¹ “Ay, Herlinda and I are in a full-fledged class war, each one of us in our respective trench. And I know that historical reason belongs with her” (my translation).

³² “While I was going along as the redeemer ... of Quetzalcóatl through mountains and hills, next to me someone was being consumed by ignorance” (my translation).

domestic work onto another woman also makes clear the relationship of dependence that develops between the two women, as occurs with the girl and the nana. Furthermore, autobiographical elements, while they should not be used to explain the novel, help to illustrate the point that as close as they were there was no natural empathy between the girl and the nana based upon any type of gender realism or shared consciousness of oppression; instead she would have to develop an awareness that recognized in retrospect the violence and cruelty of her surroundings.

The middle section of the novel gives way to an omniscient narration, which offers a wider perspective of the reforms being enacted on the hacienda and the tensions as the Argüellos resist challenges to their rule. The “I” is displaced presumably by a more objective, impartial voice, which begins: “*Esto es lo que se recuerda de aquellos días*” (75).³³ The change in form of this section may suggest a privileging of an “active” voice when telling broader political and social issues. According to Hurley, “[t]hat the second part makes scant reference to the little girl and contains most of the ‘action’ of the novel, reinforces the notion of the ‘active’ (omniscient) male narrator and the passive first-person female who only writes memoirs” (76).³⁴ It may be inferred that with the change in form that she felt that a more realist approach and a temporary abandonment of the autobiography would give the text the objectivity it needed to approach the political questions being confronted in that section. While it has been noted by critics such as Castillo that it subverts the autobiographical form, there also seems to be an abrupt distinction made between the active and passive voice, revealing insecurity with a narrative form that is

³³ “*This is what is remembered of those days*” (Nicholson 73).

³⁴ The implications for this change in form, while outside the parameters of this investigation, would be an important subject for deeper study. Interestingly Castellanos later expressed about the novel that she felt that it was flawed in part because there was an overwhelming subjectivity, and thus she sought to correct her errors through her next novel, *Oficio de tinieblas*, which explored the psychological profile of a variety of characters (Steele 82).

“female,” and thus presumably less political. While in the first-person narration the political had obvious implications for the personal, it appears that it was difficult for Castellanos to imagine that the other way around. Yet certainly the relationship between the nana and the girl gives way to thinking about discrimination and responsibility that has implications for a political discussion. Moreover this has influenced subsequent writers such as Elena Poniatowska, whose *Hasta no verte, Jesus mío* (*Here's to you, Jesusa!*) uses the personal form of testimonio to displace privilege and address discrimination.

In the second section the nana is absent and the girl practically disappears as several other important characters are introduced, most notably: Ernesto, César's illegitimate nephew appointed to be the schoolteacher on the hacienda although he does not speak or understand the local language; Felipe, who leads the *campesinos* to demand their rights promised to them under *Cardenismo*; Juana, Felipe's wife who is infertile, and whose interior monologue fights to resist her husband's abuse; and the “spinster” aunts Matilde and Francisca, both who end up demented, although in different ways. Each character represents an aspect of Castellanos' vision of social hierarchies. The women occupy limited spaces (virgin, whore, spinster, *señora*) while the men are responsible for directing political action. Although I focus this study on only the first and third sections in which the encounters between the nana and the girl are enacted, feminist readings may certainly be aware that there are various representations of women's experiences within the entire text, all of which depict women as secondary creatures to the decision-making of men. Castellanos expresses in an often sardonic tone a pervasive image of motherhood as that which perpetuates a vicious cycle of victimhood. Ernesto for example asks Matilde, *la soltera*, why she would think she is better than his mother who sacrificed herself for him. This fundamental question that lays bare the roles that women are given in society: “¿Porque

preferiste secarte en tu soltería que sacrificarte por un hijo?” (124).³⁵ For the purposes of this study I isolate the encounters between the girl and the nana, although I propose that their relationship is not merely an abstraction; rather it indicates an ethics of which the other elements of the novel are a sign. That is, their expressions towards each other produce an alternative cross-cultural community that demonstrates the instability of fixed cultural categories that entrap each character.

The third section then returns to the first-person narration as the family returns to Comitán and the girl is reunited with the nana. As the tension between the workers and the landholders has begun to erupt into violence, the nana approaches Zoraida with a prediction concerning Mario’s fate, stating that the *brujos* of Chactajal will eat him up as condemnation to the *patrones* for their treatment of the Indians: “—Los brujos no quieren dinero. Ellos quieren al hijo varón, a Mario. Se lo comerán, se lo están empezando a comer” (231).³⁶ Zoraida is incensed that the nana would even have the nerve to speak to her about *her* family, much less make such a horrible proclamation based upon “sorcery.” I will return to the ways which the nana in this scene crosses the fuzzy line here between family and servant. For the nana this encounter with Zoraida highlights her loyalties to the family and how she is punished for them. It was her obligation to tell the *patrona* about the danger facing Mario, given her love for the children and her dedication to the family. Zoraida nevertheless throws her out of the house and the girl sees the last of her nana left undone on the floor – “abandonada como una cosa sin valor” (232), abandoned like a thing of no worth. Although Zoraida had discounted the story as only

³⁵ “Because you’d rather dry up in your spinsterhood than sacrifice yourself for your son’s sake?” (my translation).

³⁶ “The sorcerers want no money. They want the male-child, Mario. They’ll eat him, they’ve begun to eat him already” (Nicholson 217).

true among Indians – “Somos de otra raza, no caemos bajo su poder” (239)³⁷ – when doctors cannot help him she begins to consult priests and healers to protect Mario from their spell. The boy eventually succumbs to an unknown illness³⁸ for which ironically the girl feels responsible, believing that it was she that brought judgment upon Mario since she hid the key to the altar box so that he could never take first communion. In a scene that establishes the attainment of individuality as a separation from her surrogate mother and reintegration into society, while visiting the cemetery, the girl thinks that she sees her nana:

¡Es mi nana! ¡Es mi nana! Pero la india me mira correr, impassible, y no hace un ademán de bienvenida. Camino lentamente, más lentamente hasta detenerme. Dejo caer los brazos, desalentada. Nunca, aunque yo la encuentre, podré reconocer a mi nana. Hace tanto tiempo que nos separaron. Además, todos los indios tienen la misma cara (291).³⁹

In one fell swoop this alternative mother figure is lost; not only are memories of her erased, but her uniqueness becomes something that the girl would not again be able to *recognize*.⁴⁰ The use of *reconocer* should be dissected, since being *recognized* by the other is different from being *known* by her. It evokes ideas concerning memory as well as choice – does the girl willingly dismiss the possibility of the nana’s uniqueness once she was no longer part of her everyday life, making it easy for her to be forgotten? Or, does the girl’s entrance into ladino society inevitably

³⁷ “We’re of another race. We don’t fall under their power” (my translation).

³⁸ There are mentions of possible appendicitis by the doctor that examines him. This is significant as Castellanos’ own little brother, Benjamín, died from appendicitis when he was eight years old, and it has been insinuated that Castellanos could have felt guilt for his death because that meant that she then became the center of the family. María Luisa Gil Iriarte quotes her speaking of her brother: “Tuve un hermano, un año menor que yo. Nació dueño de un privilegio que nadie le disputaría: ser varón” (156) [I had a brother, one year younger than I. He was born the inheritor of a privilege that no one would dispute: that of being male” (my translation)].

³⁹ “It’s my Nana! But the Indian watches me quite impassively, making no welcoming sign. I slow up – slower and slower till I stop. I let me arms drop, altogether discouraged. Even if I see her, I’ll never recognize her now. It’s so long since we’ve been parted. Besides, all Indians look alike” (Nicholson 271).

⁴⁰ I thank Rubén Sánchez-Godoy for elaborating for me the possible multiple significations of this word and its implications for reading the ending.

mean that the nana's face would be indistinguishable from that of other Indians? To recognize could also mean to either note someone's presence according to one's own perceptions of that other person, or to recognize the difference of the other as something that is unknowable, yet recognizable.

I read her statement as recognition that she had always to some extent seen her nana in the faces of other Indians, and in her absence the nana becomes completely engulfed; consequently the girl could no longer claim a personal connection to their world. Her nana was no exception to the distance that she perceived between herself and the indigenous community. What is new for her in that moment is that she can, or will no longer, distinguish her nana within that collectivity. This final dissolving of the nana's identity combined with a confession is for me the most captivating and perplexing point of the novel. Again, she refers to something that was done to her nana – "they separated us" – and then confesses to that same attitude within herself. If the little girl ever recognized the humanity of her nana, she then disappears again into the collective fabric of all faceless Indians. The girl has seemingly fully incorporated the society's values into her world view, achieving a successful formation of the bildungsroman. That is, she transforms from being a subject in a community to an individual, while the nana's character moves in the reverse direction.

After the girl's first visit to the cemetery to see her brother she takes out a pencil and writes Mario's name on the walls and in the pages of her notebooks. The last words of the novel are interpreted by many to mean the girl's inscription into the writing world but only through an allegiance to the rights of the masculine to name and control. According to Franco Moretti's conception of the classical Bildungsroman, the hero's happiness is determined by an "end of becoming;" he describes happiness as the opposite of freedom, and it entails the end of the

tension between the individual and the world (23). Happiness may be desired, since there is comfort in its uniformity; but it is in exchange for freedom. Ostensibly this is the type of ending that the girl arrives at after her brother's death: one in which she is no longer wrestling with cultural ambiguities, and no longer fighting to be the center of the family. Nevertheless, it is not a success since she has resigned to the system that had assailed her. Moreover, her ability to move towards public life is coupled with both the guilt of the loss of her brother and of the nana. What seems to be suggested is that the establishment of a unified self that is promoted in a bildungsroman narrative is incompatible with the cultural mediation that living on the border between cultures implies. That is to say, the only way of finding her place as an individual within society would be to separate herself from the collective memory that her nana embodies, which threatens the happiness (or the comfort and stability) that the girl seeks.

Central to my analysis of the novel is the relationship between the girl and her nana and how their interactions problematize the centrality of subjectivity in the author's own feminist thought. The nana in Castellanos' drama *Salomé*, as cited in the beginning of this chapter, communicates her in-betweenness and isolation to the girl (*niña*), who also experiences cultural indeterminacy as she straddles the worlds of her nana and her family that she is connected to through blood. The girl's assumption regarding her nana's location indicates the temptation to position her fully in that "other" world, in order that she be easily employed as the bridge between cultures that the girl may access without disrupting the comfort of what it is to self-identify by distinguishing a self/other polarization. But the nana here challenges this simplified claim, pointing out that her culture cannot so easily be defined and appropriated. She too has an individuality that separates her from a collectivity. Even as it appears that she has been fully colonized, absorbed into the master's home, language and culture, the nana continues to signal

resistance to the narratives that name her through an implicit critique, given that the word “family” in her dialogue indicates multiple ironies. “Family” in this sense is not only a place of love and kinship, but is also a space in which she is a possession. Her exclamation – “*No tengo más familia que esta casa*” – draws attention to the fuzziness of boundaries between home and work, family and strangers, host and guest, that occurs in a “live-in” situation. The *cama adentro* reinforces the cultural and economic hegemony of the “masters”, while at the same time drawing attention to an uncomfortable closeness and a reality that there are aspects even within their own home that are not under their control. The servant is ideally for the “masters” an absent presence: like a child she must be seen and not heard, subject to monitoring and discipline, residing in the furthest corners of the home. In this case, even more than a “live-in” nanny the nana is a surrogate mother, lending her desires, ambitions, love, and milk, always towards the interests of the family that posses her. Although silenced, as the eyes and ears of the family she holds a certain power. But if she breaks her silence, as she carries out in the ending of the novel, she is expelled from the residence, and from the lives of the children that she has cared for.

I have found that this presence of a marginalized space and body within the borders of the master’s house echoes the framework of the text, which also constructs limits that are questioned by its exclusions. The type of reading that I propose echoes what Spivak suggests when she states: “The effect is to demonstrate how all narratives – fictional, political, economic – construct themselves (like empire itself) by suppressing, or marginalizing, competing possibilities, viewpoints or material” (“TWT” 146). By examining the silencing in the text it may be seen that the author recognizes her complicity (intentional or not) with the political and economic empire whose workings she fights to uncover. It is notable that she cannot merely speak for herself and

other marginalized subjects in a formation of solidarity; rather she displays the acute inequality between subjects within the various communities that she occupies. In this way the novel may be considered a failure since it suppresses viewpoints that are other than that of the narrator, while the author proposes the need for liberation based upon inclusive notions of identity.

Signaling the failure of that project in the novel however does not denounce the text as a moral failure; rather it illustrates what possibilities for community are opened up by the text's admission that it falls short. Failure is not an end of discussion; rather following John A. Ochoa's readings of failures in Mexican literature, they "can indeed threaten, alarm, and be used to assign blame; but they can also be deeply useful" (5). Failure means to reform; to imagine solidarities that are not built upon polarized notions of identity that exclude rather than include. Most importantly, what would be understood as a confrontation with the silence of the other within a narrative of female development will be read as a political and ethical space that actually goes beyond the narrator's ability to speak that potential. That is to say, the failure works discursively to point out the asymmetrical relationships that form the backdrop of the bildungsroman-form that is constructed through the ontological pairing of self and other, and politically to imagine relationships among women that are not built upon essentialist notions of identity.

This theme of failure will continue to reappear as it indicates both personal/confessional and political aspects of the novel that are seldom connected. For now, it is a useful reminder that for the indigenous woman in both *Salomé* and *Balún Canán* the peculiarity of her position is even more pronounced, as her uncomfortable closeness to the at once master/daughter/friend/stranger has alienated her from the family and community into which she was born, to the point in which she is considered a traitor by those of her culture and therefore in

danger of violence committed against her. Even as she nurses, protects, and disciplines the children she is ultimately reminded of the racial and cultural markers that construe her as unequal. In *Mujer que sabe latín* (*A Woman who Knows Latin*), Castellanos names motherhood as another aspect of women's experiences that is meant to keep them inept (15). Although, in her essays she seldom analyzes the nana's position, who occupies the role of sacrificial mother without ever being afforded the esteem that a mother in Mexican culture would typically receive (respect of mothers in this sense describes the process of mythification, which only values women's experience that keeps her domesticated and shielded from the public sphere). As the children grow up, the nana can only anticipate that at some point they will understand their societal dominance over her, and she will return to being a faceless Indian, who nonetheless is no longer accepted by that community given her closeness to the masters. Therefore the separation of the children from their mother in the individualization process has implications that go beyond the perpetual yearning for one's home – the nana's body is used and then discarded, a cultural and biological resource for the children who will grow up to abandon her.

In her analysis of Latin American intellectuals Franco asserts that in literary and cultural discourse the mother in her immobility has been employed as a symbol to offer stability in a changing world, for example in the attitudes of Gabriel García Márquez and the poetry of César Vallejo ("Beyond" 364). What, then, of this "other" mother, whose body is offered up for the comfort of the family without having formal kinship ties? As the family is afflicted by rapid social change she offers stability on the domestic front, yet she is easily discarded, and her protection is not valued as the white woman's is. Moreover, how could she negotiate the dual loyalties to the indigenous population that is gaining power and the landholders who are a source of oppression? More than merely replicating the figure of the Latin American mother who is

also isolated and confined to the home; the nana as a character is both punished for her loyalties and employed as a figure in the text to bear the brunt of cultural shifts.

In the novel the nana character is not given a direct voice as she has in the aforementioned drama; rather she is heard only through the narration of the seven-year-old girl. Better stated, the nana forms part of a relationship through which the girl-narrator is molded, and which she uses to develop a concept of self. Although her voice is muted, the nana continuously influences the will, conscience, and dreams of the girl-narrator, and for that reason it is necessary to examine the feminism of the narration through the relationship between the two characters. By using the nana/girl relationship as a structuring device for this chapter, I examine to what extent the nana puts that formation of subjectivity as a liberating process into crisis by highlighting what is suppressed in an articulation of selfhood. When the girl proudly asserts for example that Columbus discovered America (10) – she exposes alliances to a telling of history that contains the nana’s storytelling within a framework of the inarticulate colonized. In this sweeping declaration she negates the indigenous voice in the narration. The nana’s voice however refutes her censorship; the first words of the novel belong to her: “–...Y entonces, coléricos, nos desposeyeron, nos arrebataron lo que habíamos atesorado: la palabra, que es el arca de la memoria” (9).⁴¹ The girl tells her nana to stop telling that story, that she doesn’t care to hear it; but her words are nevertheless spoken, inscribed into the girl’s consciousness, and thus framing the reader’s understanding of silence throughout the text. The negotiation between self and other that is a component of female development narratives is troubled in this text, since a unidirectional movement from the narrating “self” towards the experiences of the narrated “other” is confronted by the nana as she hints at other readings and other tellings of personal and

⁴¹ “And then in anger they dispossessed us, they confiscated what we had treasured: the word, which is memory’s strong-box” (Nicholson 13).

communal history. Moreover, it will be seen that as the nana's voice is inserted into the girl's narrative she speaks in her own time. Her silence is cautiously examined by the girl, and never interrupted.

Whether or not she is ready to meaningfully engage in self-exploration, the girl's connection with privilege is presented to her during that crucial age when she is forming her identity. She becomes unmistakably conscious of the inequalities that form her world when an Indian is killed by his community for being close with her father – an event that she undoubtedly begins to connect with the situation of her nana. Overcome by fear she runs to her nana who she finds washing *their* clothes: “Yo huyo, despavorida, y encuentro a mi nana lavando nuestra ropa a la orilla de un río rojo y turbulento. De rodillas golpea los lienzos contra las piedras y el estruendo apaga el eco de mi voz. Y yo estoy llorando en el aire sordo mientras la corriente crece y me moja los pies” (33).⁴² The reality that the nana is always tied to work is perhaps most poignantly felt in this scene, as for the first time the nature of the system is defamiliarized and showing its frays. The girl's inability to be heard as if it were a nightmare forces her violently into herself, at the same time as she echoes the pain of losing language that the nana announces in the first words of the text. For the girl the air is deaf to her cries, and the nana's speech also falls upon deaf ears (only the girl is there to listen). The cultural genocide that occurs through colonization suppresses language, and thus those affected are not even able to speak that pain. This is the initial loss that the girl comes into contact with as she feels the fear that her nana experiences living between two worlds and threatened by both. Each encounter between them

⁴² “I run away terrified, and I find Nana washing our clothes on the banks of a swirling red river. She is on her knees, beating the linen against the stones, and the noise of it muffles the echo of my voice. And I'm weeping in the silent air while the river rises and my feet get wet” (Nicholson 34).

In the translation of this section I believe it is important to emphasize that the air was *sordo*, meaning deaf or indifferent; not silent. Her cries are muffled by something bigger than herself, in this case nature, the representation of her nana's world.

reenacts the silence that distances them, actions that I will continue to develop an understanding of through a closer reading of the novel.

The accusation from the *nodriza* (wet-nurse) in *Salomé* that is also present in the novel – that the girl cannot easily identify the other woman and thus cannot speak for her – is heard only through the girl’s failures. The challenge that the indigenous woman presents on a personal level within the story is that she demonstrates for the girl her family’s role as oppressors. Because of her closeness to the nana, it would be impossible for her to merely ignore that inheritance. Therefore the nana’s role as source of indigenous thought is not something that can be passively accessed, since the girl is made aware that she is complicit in the exclusion and romanticization of that knowledge and history. Hence their relationship is based upon a shared sense of silence and silencing, that works at times to unite and at other times to divide them. The girl continues to learn of her role in hegemony as her nana explains to her why she had been punished by the *brujos* of Comitán, leaving a scar on her leg: “[e]s malo querer a los que mandan, a los que poseen. Así dice la ley” (16).⁴³ Although the nana never explicitly associates the girl with her *patrones*, a presence of a law that governs the way that they experience each other is felt, even if the complexities of the system are unknown to her. What she does know is that when she needs comfort or protection, it is her nana that is there: “Ella, como siempre desde nací, me arrima a su regazo. Es caliente y amoroso. Pero tendrá una llaga. Una llaga que le habremos enconado” (17).⁴⁴ This permanent sore represents responsibility towards her that cannot be resolved; any assertions of inter-ethnic harmony must be mediated by that point.

⁴³ “It’s wicked to love those that give orders and have possessions. That’s what the law says” (Nicholson 19).

⁴⁴ “She draws me to her lap, as she has always done ever since I was born. It is warm and tender, but it has a wound. A wound, and it’s we who’ve opened it” (Nicholson 20).

It cannot be denied that the negotiations between self and other that are necessary for the development of subjectivity are the inheritance of the girl who, as a semi-autobiographical figure of the author, will enter into the intellectual world – the nana, without access to the formation of that privileged sense of self resists being possessed by the narration and points to the failures of the girl’s quest. I undertake an examination of the nana as a marginal force destabilizing the controlling center of the text as a negotiation between what is spoken and what is either held back, silenced, or not heard as a result of indifference. Moreover, I argue that through these spaces one may sense both shame, and a proposal for an ethics of community not readily accessed by the author at the time.

2.1 INDIGENISMO, FEMINISM, AND THE EFFECTS OF CATEGORIZATION ON READINGS OF MARGINALIZATION

I previously mentioned that in her essay “El hombre del destino” Castellanos credits Cárdenas for her personal success, since his reforms made it possible for her to receive an education. She states that her first memories of hearing his name were from her elders who pronounced it with fear and rage because he threatened their economic interests (*El uso de la palabra* 119). The setting suggests an effort to retell and recapture a national history when there was a potential for a revolutionary socialism that had since receded; although it certainly intertwined with a retelling of the author’s own childhood, and we may guess an effort to address

her own complicities with the oppression of Indians that as an activist in her adulthood she seeks to abolish.⁴⁵

Questions regarding the usefulness of the first-person narration reflect the frequent debate of whether or not a concentration on the development of subjectivity is in conflict with political concerns. According to Perla Schwartz, Rosario Castellanos' first novel opens a cycle in her writing which she dedicates to the "indio" (89), suggesting a new direction in her political consciousness. Yet a sticking point for many critics is that within her fiction she relies upon an autobiographical format – any telling of the plight of the "Indio" is filtered through her own story of development. I contend that this filtering is incomplete, given that the novel challenges the autobiographical form by including voices that do not cooperate with the self-directed central narration, and which are not there to merely differentiate the protagonist from the community landscape; instead those voices place her within a web of social relationships. Moreover, with respect to identifying the importance of this novel for feminist readings, it is important to state that subjectivity does not necessarily erase political potential. The tendency of the voice of the first-person to turn inward does not make exteriority disappear; rather the reader is conscious of that which stands outside of her version of coherent subjectivity.

Because the novel itself is inclined to distinguish the national from the personal, in order to establish context I begin by addressing the political and work my way back into the personal that is affected by it. The historical setting also hints at the tone of the novel, which somewhat nostalgically recovers a *cardenista* sensibility. As Cynthia Steele points out, the important

⁴⁵ Elena Poniatowska contends that Castellanos used literature as therapy, and quotes her as saying: "Recurrimos a la escritura para explicarnos el mundo, comprender lo que nos sucede" (*Ay Vida* 57); "[w]e turn to writing to explain the world to us, to understand what happens to us" (my translation). Castellanos has spoken a great deal of her intentions when writing; my concern is that studies that rely too much on the author's voice are limited by not complementing them with close readings of the novel.

intellectual component of the period of Cardenismo was Indigenismo, which looked to create a homogenous nation that would include the Indian, who would undergo a radical acculturation (65) through socialist education. She states that Mexican intellectuals and proponents of Indigenismo “dieron por un hecho la teoría evolucionista de que su propia sociedad representaba una etapa de desarrollo cultural posterior al de la sociedad autóctona Americana, y por tanto superior, buscaron crear una nación homogénea incorporando al indio mexicano a la sociedad dominante” (65).⁴⁶ Liliana Ramírez also observes that with the elevation of the Indian the Mexican Mestizo intellectual was actually elevating himself; it was *his* voice that became central in the development of the nation, permitting him to assert his independence from Europe. Ultimately the discourse of the nation worked to assimilate the Indian in the name of strengthening the state.

In the 1950’s, the time in which Castellanos began working for the Centro de Coordinación Regional in the Tzeltal-Tzotzil area of Chiapas and writing about indigenous issues, the attitude among intellectuals towards the indigenous people returned to stressing their backward nature; they again were aligned with savagery, the obstacle to progress. In opposition to this negative view Castellanos’ writing arguably at times reflected the paternalism of Indigenismo that sought to prove that the Indian could be “civilized.” Nevertheless it also must be noted that she created indigenous characters that stressed heterogeneity. Situating her writing within Neindigenismo that separated itself from the Indigenismo of the 1930’s,⁴⁷ Luz Elena Zamudio and Margarita Tapia point out that Castellanos demystified the Indian, and that she

⁴⁶ “took for granted the evolutionist theory wherein their own society represented a stage in cultural development subsequent to that of the autochthonous American society, and therefore being superior, they looked to create a homogenous nation incorporating the Mexican Indio into the dominant society” (my translation).

⁴⁷ See Tomás Escajadillo’s *La narrativa indigenista: dos estudios*, for a detailed description of the phases of Indigenismo.

notably declaring at one point: “Los indios son seres humanos absolutamente iguales a los blancos, sólo que colocados en una circunstancia especial y desfavorable. Los indios no me parecen misteriosos ni poéticos. Lo que ocurre es que viven en una miseria atroz” (qtd. in Schwartz 86).⁴⁸ In her writing she was thus careful to not exoticize her indigenous characters, although this may have resulted in them being underdeveloped in *Balún Canán*. What is more, it should be stressed that her writing accentuates the gulf between Indians and Ladinos that she herself could not cross completely. In her poetry her voice emphasizes her position as witness to the plight of indigenous peoples, writing in “El Pobre”: “Me ve como desde un siglo remoto, / como desde un estrato geológico distinto” (*Poesía...* 182).⁴⁹ This perspective, debilitating in that she cannot possibly reach the other given her privileged position as the speaking subject, is also evident in the novel, as the narrator witnesses indigenous women only from a distance – she speaks of their curious languages and how they are always walking under the weight of their load.

As the family is leaving Comitán on their way to the hacienda, the girl describes an unwelcoming settlement of *strangers*: “Son indios. Mujeres de frente sumisa que dan el pecho a la boca ávida de los recién nacidos; criaturas barrigonas y descalzas; ancianos de tez amarillenta, desdentados” (65).⁵⁰ The girl describes them as unattractive, even distasteful. Most notably, she highlights them as existing separately from the way in which she conceives of her own culture,

⁴⁸ “The Indians are human beings absolutely equal to the Whites, only that they are placed in a particular and unfavorable circumstance. The Indians do not seem mysterious or poetic to me. What has occurred is that they live within atrocious misery” (my translation).

Zamudio and Tapia also emphasize that Castellanos’ writing formed part of the *Ciclo de Chiapas*, which refers to those narratives written between 1948 and 1962 that deal with Indian/Ladino relations by writers that have knowledge of the region.

⁴⁹ “The Poor”: “He sees me as if I were from a remote century, or from a different geological stratum” (my translation).

⁵⁰ “They are Indians. Meek-looking women who proffer their breasts to the grasping mouths of newborn babies; pot-bellied, barefoot urchins; toothless old men with yellow complexions” (Nicholson 64).

and as a community which speaks with one single anonymous voice (see *BC*, 72). Although stylistically her description may include elements of *costumbrismo*, through which the Indian becomes part of the landscape, it is also an honest portrayal of the girl's perception of her community as she internalized the racist attitudes of her surroundings. Moreover, the risk within postcolonial studies that by naming the colonizer and colonized as if they were polar opposites further entrenches conceptions of bad vs. good, weak vs. strong, powerful vs. powerless, etc.; this binarism is mitigated in the novel through the de-heroization of that character whose final success would otherwise be extolled for her achievement of independence.

The revolutionary tone in the second section as the overdue reforms come to the region is tempered by a feeling of stagnation; Ernesto exclaims in a drunken rant to his students: “No va a cambiar nuestra situación. Indio naciste, indio te quedás. Igual yo” (160).⁵¹ Equality here is evoked as a leveling of the situation of the oppressed, not as an expression of solidarity towards his Indian students. Felipe, having been educated abroad and thus able to make demands for land and education rights, is also a macho type who requires submission from his wife and punishes her for not being able to have children. And most notably by the end of the novel the girl adopts the attitude of the oppressors despite her closeness to her nana. Steele writes that this cynicism reflects a theoretical viewpoint of Castellanos that is influenced by the thinking of Simone Weil, for whom “la opresión es un producto inevitable de la naturaleza humana en la sociedad tecnológica. La opresión crea la lucha por el poder, que nunca es absoluto y que siempre necesita reafirmarse” (Steele 83).⁵² Avoiding Manichean depictions of white versus Indian as well, every character has the potential to be either the oppressed or the oppressor; and

⁵¹ “It’s not going to change where we stand. Indian you’re born, Indian you stay. Me too” (Nicholson 153).

⁵² “oppression is an inevitable product of human nature in the technological society. Oppression creates the fight for power, which is never absolute and always needs to reaffirm itself” (my translation).

both at the same time. Therefore there is not a generalized leitmotif that posits female and Indian against White Catholic supremacy; locating power is found to be a trickier undertaking, as it is even situated within the most intimate relationships. This indicates that unlike Castellanos' male contemporaries such as Arguedas and Asturias,⁵³ indigenous subjects do not become idealized as models for the "good" which provides a retreat from capitalism (see Franco, "Beyond" 366). A character such as Felipe for example, an Indian educated in the metropolis, exhibits simultaneously courage to speak for the oppressed and cruelty towards his wife. Moreover, the tension between white and Indian, or male and female, cannot be resolved by simply affording the subaltern power through education; there would need to be a more revolutionary dismantling of the power structure. That is to say, while Castellanos herself was able to use her education for personal advancement and to become an advocate for the disenfranchised, it is also necessary to ask to what extent literacy is actually tied to individual empowerment and who is left out of that paradigm. The idea that it is human nature to go after power when afforded the opportunity thus implies that the oppressed always have the potential to become oppressors; this may provide another way to understand the ambivalence of the ending, when the absence of the brother offers the girl some semblance of power by adopting language.

Given that Castellanos' feminist writings overwhelmingly tie women's liberation to education, readers of Castellanos when venturing into the novel may hold various presuppositions; for example, they may assume that it will have a central purpose of validating both the intellectual capacities of both women and indigenous people, in order that they may

⁵³ Often included in courses as an example of a transcultural text, Castellanos' novel stands as an interesting counterpoint to those of writers such as José María Arguedas and Miguel Asturias, whose male heroes hold both urban and rural educations and thus carry and negotiate within themselves a collective cultural history. Castellanos points instead to the girl-child who is in the shadow of the male narrative tradition, yet is able to grasp a piece of her own story even though her own education is not valued. Thus the girl's story runs parallel to that of the Indians for whom education stands as that all-important means to economic advancement, to citizenship, and to claiming rights, even when that means a certain acceptance of the status quo.

participate in society as full citizens. Hence the ideal of equality within liberal institutions is in the air as that which will dominate the direction of the text. Because it is so often assumed that Castellanos' intent is to give the Indigenous a voice through her writing, the novel has been perceived as a failure of Indigenismo, given that by the end the nana's identity is ostensibly subsumed into the story of the little girl's bildungsroman-style developmental journey. Certainly there is an emphasis on progress through education, as the novel describes the education of the indigenous people during the reform period of Cardenas' presidency and the entry of a little girl-narrator into the writing world. The movement from "savagery" into civilization was strived for. Speaking of her didactic theater pieces while working at the Centro de Coordinación Regional from 1956-1957 (the same period in which she began work on *Oficio de tinieblas*), Castellanos describes the trajectory of her protagonists thusly: "un triunfo de la inteligencia sobre las supersticiones, del progreso sobre la tradición, de la civilización sobre la barbarie" (qtd. in Dybvig 22).⁵⁴ Her dedication to progress within liberal institutions during this period is noted, but it is not the only lens through which to read the novel. By analyzing what is left out and swept up in that progress we find in significant moments of interaction between the girl and the nana that the narrative's unidirectional movement is interrupted. Much like the author's personal confession that she had not considered the education of her domestic servant, educational reform as represented in the novel did not mean equality for the nana. The novel reflects a long-standing preoccupation by feminists, that if the goal is to "get ahead" in society, ahead of whom? Who is sacrificed for the sake of that progressive model? In the familiar words of bell hooks, if

⁵⁴ "a triumph of intelligence over superstitions, of progress over tradition, and of civilization over barbarity" (my translation).

Castellanos' commitment to give back to the indigenous community in compensation for the way in which her family had exploited them is noted. Rhoda Dybvig makes note that for this job as theatre director she would not accept a salary (22).

the goal of feminism is to be equal to men, “which men do women want to be equal to?” (19). Even as a marginal, underdeveloped character, the nana’s presence upsets the girl’s desire to be equal to her brother, since the nana remains in her shadow, challenging what could otherwise be a flattening of women’s experiences within a middle-class framework.

Much has been postulated about the function of a child’s narration (see Nuala Finnegan and Teresa Hurley, for example); what needs closer review is the function of the nana both in relation to the girl as well as in those hints of an outside to which the girl has no access. Thus to get at the position of the nana in the text and the implications for her being erased at the end, I continue by building off of Catherine Grant’s important study of the indigenous *nodriza* in Castellanos’ work, since it is a key text in encouraging a more in-depth study of the nana. Grant also highlights tensions between differing readings of the novel that I wish to address, since strict categorizations have implications for how retrievable the nana’s voice is – if it is an autobiography, purportedly the Indian voice may be neatly tucked away given that it is really the girl’s story. If however it is written in the neoindigenista tradition then it can only be read as a failure, if we read the indigenous voice as disappearing into the girl’s story line.

A strong argument of Grant’s reading is directed towards the way that feminist criticism has tended to frame texts as realist when they are looking for evidence of feminist concerns. She challenges popular criticism of the novel by pointing out the logical fallacies of merely associating the author’s life with what the message of the text should be. Concerned with contesting the complexity of the nana character, she argues that although the novel may be considered autobiographical in some ways, “the claim that the *nana* is entirely a realistic character is faintly ridiculous, if based on an understanding of the conventions of literary

realism” (89).⁵⁵ The nana from her point of view only stands as a character of indigenista fiction, the representative of some lost reality, “the anonymous voice of an ancient people” (90), as well as a warning to the modern world. Furthermore, she strongly affirms that because the text relies on the elements of a European family chronicle, it is no more than a “typical confessional tale where the female protagonist’s quest for self-identity through writing both mirrors and prefigures similar narratives by other twentieth-century feminist authors” (93).

This is similar to my reading, which looks for a feminist critique that is more than a simplified portrayal of cross-cultural solidarity for the achievement of one woman’s subjectivity. Grant, however, asserts that regardless of these feminist aims, it is illogical to consider the nana as a complex character, since she is not given a voice in the text: “The little girl loves her as a human being who responds to her needs, and only comes to view her as just another Indian – under the constant bombardment of racial hostility – after the *nana* has been dismissed by her family and removed from her immediate sphere of concern” (88-89).

What goes unnoticed in Grant’s study is the work’s tendency to be self-conscious of its inability to represent the nana’s complexity. The girl’s turning inward is as much a sign of defeat as it is the natural direction of the type of confessional tale to which Grant refers. It is also not clear to me that Castellanos intends to portray the little girl as an innocent victim of racial hatred, who conceived of herself as the same as the nana before she was taught differently. Evident in the nana’s stern warning that she will become an Indian – “Te vas a volver india” (10), the girl certainly knew that the nana was marked as “other,” making her final disappearance perhaps less surprising. The nana’s way of dressing and speaking was different than how the girl saw herself and her family. In the way that Franco describes the figure of *La Malinche* in

⁵⁵ Her study limits the genre of autobiography to the domain of literary realism. A more expansive view of the genre is perhaps more apt in relation to this novel.

Mexican culture through Bhabha's concept of mimicry, the nana's precarious position between cultural loyalties make her "the same but not quite" (*Critical Passions* 74); she is distinguished from the colonizers by dress and customs, but enters into their world through attitudes and loyalties. Learning her sense of femininity from her mother, the girl would watch Zoraida as she dressed and put on makeup likely imagining herself doing the same one day; the nana's *tzec* however was more of a curiosity, and not something that she looked to emulate. A fear of contamination of the colonized other is always present; vigilance over race, class and gender boundaries taught to her both by her mother and by her nana. From birth, the girl was situated in a different social plane from the nana, making her surrogate motherhood more confusing, never something that construed them as equal.

According to Liliana Ramírez, Grant assumes that the novel is clearly situated in liberal feminism because the subjectivity of the main character is always taken as a given (see Ramírez 64). If when she sees herself as a subject it is only after the nana's expulsion from the story, then at the same time as it presents a successful female bildungsroman in which the girl achieves selfhood, it is indeed a political failure for falling short of "giving voice" to the oppressed indigenous population. In that case, it would also be presumed, as Grant does, that Castellanos takes for granted liberal feminism from a European tradition, and any indigenous elements of the novel are subsumed beneath that structure.

I undertake a similar critique, as I agree that looking for only the positive qualities in the characters and positing a resolution at the end of the text ignores the complex cultural paradigm offered by Castellanos. By ignoring the space between the writer and the narrator, the plot is leveled to only consider the easily assumed social commentary that Castellanos would be making about indigenous or women's rights. In that way the conclusion that the girl arrives at – "todos

los indios tienen la misma cara” – seems an anomaly to the rest of the novel, especially given that by the end of the text the girl has “ascended,” no longer overshadowed by her brother and hinting at her future as a writing subject. It is from this point that I would like to dialogue with Grant’s text, and affirm my own reading of the novel as not *merely* a confessional tale based upon European notions of salvation and human development, even if that plot is indeed present, but as one in which the narrator’s confession results in a critique of this very genre, from which a space emerges to imagine collectivities that stand as an alternative to the reification of individual growth through concentrated self-reflexivity. If we read the narrator as complicit with the realities that maintain the invisibility of the nana, then the nana does not actually disappear, but remains essential to the understanding of the possibilities of such a narrative to reveal the fragmented community. Her character is positioned in a way that allows the reader to critique the girl and her social world.

Moreover, the narrator’s honesty in the end of the text results in a critique of the very narcissism that her character displays (Castillo, “Ashes” 266), from which surface new points of reference between the two women, even if Castellanos herself, if we read the novel as an autobiography, could not imagine them at the time. Narcissism in this context may be viewed in the light of Luce Irigaray’s conception of it, referring to a broader tendency to fantasize a lost unity, idealizing the “One” (see Peebles, 234). The girl is inclined to try to recreate that unity, and when it becomes impossible she instead chooses the path of forgetting. This also has implications for the capacity of saying “we”: unlike other women writers Castellanos’ narration resists *we-saying*, instead acknowledging that she first would need to recognize and take responsibility for her own point of enunciation in order to not disempower others in the idealized

collectivity that she would be creating.⁵⁶ The narration gives power to the nana's voice, yet makes it known that it is limited in its reach, since it is only the ladina girl who hears it, and then has the power of transmission. It is of concern that as much as Castellanos in her essays worked to draw connections between the experiences of all Mexican women through the common point of reference of their confinement within the domestic realm, when she came to write that commonality in fiction she was not able to imagine (or perhaps she resisted representing) a fully shared space, with the expression of common experiences between the two characters having to come to an end. Thus I sense that she *felt* what Spivak described as the danger of speaking for the disempowered while simultaneously silencing their experience, and by retelling her family history she is recognizing complicity with the oppression that she is fighting against through her own historical location.

Returning to the central aim of this chapter, judgments concerning the authenticity of the author's project such as how "good a feminist" or how successful an indigenista writer Castellanos was (see Castillo "Ashes," 247), which were dependent on how well she succeeded in identifying with the subaltern, have clouded to some extent other insights that studies of her work may offer. Grant suggests this tendency to pigeon-hole her writing, questioning how her work should be considered: as that of a neglected woman writer with subversive potential, or indigenista and therefore superseded by the boom (86). That is to say, of course she is concerned with the voicelessness of the subaltern evident from the very first lines of the novel; but it is not obvious that she would assert that the function of her work was to provide them with that voice. Various critics implicitly or explicitly refer to what women's writing is expected to *do*. If, as

⁵⁶ Lorraine Code articulates this dilemma within intersubjective relations well: "Naming ourselves as 'we' empowers us, but it always risks disempowering others. The 'we-saying,' then, of assumed or negotiated solidarity must always be submitted to critical analysis" (35).

Poniatowska asserts, women's writing is necessarily the writing of the oppressed, then to what extent is the value of their work dependent upon the ability to rescue other oppressed groups?⁵⁷

Marjorie Agosín reflects the assumption concerning women's narrative of an obligation to speak for and with others when she writes:

Toda escritura de mujer, a partir de los años setenta en Latinoamérica tiene y presenta, como telón de fondo o retrato, el diálogo con la otredad, rito iniciado con los escritos de Rosario Castellanos, conocida por ese presente ritual que permite entablar el decir del que habla con el que no puede decir o no dice por el temor al decir (171).⁵⁸

There is a marked desire for dialogue within the novel as Agosín suggests, although it is also apparent that it challenges the status quo on a deeper level, in a deconstructive way, looking critically at the project of writing as a unifying process that subsumes the plurality of languages and experiences of the subjects in the text within the gaze of a ladina writer's Spanish text. Castellanos effectively questions the different ways that people enter into citizenship by pointing out what is lost as well as what is gained in the progressive model. Through the nana and her apartness, and her losses, this polemic is approached. She experiences facelessness and the loss of word; the girl is complicit in these losses not only through her blood connection to the oppressors, but also in the choices that she makes by the end of the novel.

⁵⁷ See Poniatowska's "La literatura de las mujeres es parte de la literatura de los oprimidos," in which she maintains the following: "La actual literatura de las mujeres ha de venir como parte del gran flujo de la literatura de los oprimidos: la de los sin tierra, la de los pobres, los que aún no tienen voz, los que no saben leer ni escribir" (27). ["Present-day women's literature has emerged as part of the great tide of literature of the oppressed: that of those without land, of the poor, of those that still have no voice, of those that don't know how to read or write" (my translation).] The challenge, according to Poniatowska, for women writers in Latin America is to counter that great internalized silence that women carry within them with denouncement of oppression through writing.

⁵⁸ "All women's writing, beginning in the seventies in Latin America, possesses and displays, like a backdrop or portrait, a dialogue with otherness, a rite initiated with the writings of Rosario Castellanos, known for this present ritual that permits us to begin talking about that which one speaks, together with what one cannot say or does not say for fear of speaking" (my translation).

Therefore the nana's function to disorganize and complicate the process of identity-building suggests that Castellanos was aware of the pitfalls of representation and of exoticizing her indigenous characters; or, it was at least an implicit critique for the reader to construct. Nana's presence creates a possibility for conversation, perhaps more in the way of what Agosin proposes – not just to speak *for*, but to dialogue *with*. The girl's utterances are subject to questioning and judgment, hence using Mikhail Bakhtin's language the novel's discourse enters into a "tension-filled" environment": "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value. ... It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (276). In that way the novel itself is not a closed monologue, but a text that is left open for judgments and differing viewpoints. More to the point, the work is not solely oppositional to patriarchy; rather as Castillo states the writer is located within a tradition that she aims to subvert:

The tradition she wishes to subvert is triply her own: hers by right of class, race, and access to education. All three terms are problematized in this poetic novel, as it is precisely in respect to this privileged position that Castellanos grounds her critique, confusing the distinction between autobiography and fiction intentionally so as to call attention away from the failed ideal of a meaningful, complete, and self-directed life, toward the (for her) more essential questions of the contribution of an ideological critique of a society that actively prevents self-direction in a significant majority of its citizens ("Ashes" 246).

Therefore the "success" of the bildungsroman is mediated by an imminent critique concerning the nature of the subject's development. Castillo discusses the novel as an autobiography, although it is not a traditional autobiography that asserts an "I" that maintains control throughout

the narrative; rather there is a “we” that is pronounced, and it is seen that there are competing storytelling styles indicating a “love/hate relationship of mutual dependence and shifting lines of power between the white child and her Indian nurse” (“Ashes” 249). Thus understood, a battle for control over the text is carried out, and consequently the “we” is not an uncomplicated union of cooperative voices; rather it is in place specifically to challenge the girl’s subjective authority.

I devote this larger space to Castillo’s analysis given that it approaches the thrust of my investigation – the self-conscious critique of the writer’s privileged position as an intellectual. The plural narration is not a superficial form of solidarity that conforms to the liberal ascension towards emancipation, but one that includes a dialogic battle for voice. Hence what is important for studies of this novel is that voice is not lent to other characters by a charitable narration, it is *taken* by characters who are disobedient to the central structure. This is carried out through strategic silences and utterances. By way of the manipulation of textual space a heterogeneity of voices is produced, and the nana displays resistance to being overtaken by the narrative “I”. Yet, she remains an ally to the girl as well while preserving a protective barrier between them through silence.

What this type of narration indicates is that it is not a story dedicated to either the Indian or the female subject; rather the coming-to-consciousness of the newly educated landless workers parallels the “coming-of-age” story of the narrator, so that the novel attempts the multi-voiced narration that characterizes the female bildungsroman, which stresses that subjectivity cannot be formed in isolation. In that way I assert that whether or not it remains within the bounds of any particular theory or cultural discourse becomes less important than its ethical implications for speaking about accountability and responsibility within those discourses.

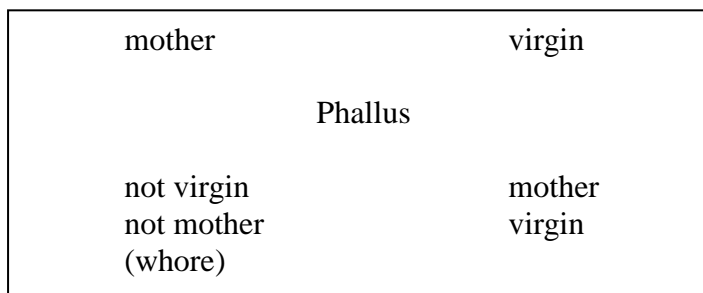
It is also important to point out that by emphasizing her representative role as a “woman writer,” readers are more inclined to pick out the feminist elements without looking deep enough into the multiple layers of exploitation that are represented. As Castillo asserts, the most common critical reaction to the novel is an “underreading” (“Ashes” 247). It may be that the inclusion of a feminist discourse confounds some critics as to the purpose of the text. For example, when Ramírez questions “¿qué prima y cuándo? ¿la clase social, la raza, el género?” (50),⁵⁹ she insists that we must be able to identify which oppression she is censuring, that on women or on indigenous people; as if the two positions were mutually exclusive. Moreover, Ramírez assumes that a feminist agenda immediately supposes an alliance with liberal aims that push her outside of the “social” writing that her male contemporaries were undertaking. What is more, if such a sharp distinction is made between feminist readings of the novel and indigenista readings of the novel, what is to say that the nana’s struggle cannot also be read from a feminist understanding? It is not that only the girl articulates the feminist aspects of the novel as a female character that asserts herself as an intellectual while the nana represents “something else” – it is rather their interactions to the resistances to assimilation and homogenization that say something about the role of solidarity and community in emancipation. We must be cautious of paring down feminist discourse as if it only applies to certain privileged groups of people. Thus as I too read from a feminist perspective, it is imperative to note and be wary of the fact that like many women writers Castellanos’ work is too often subjected to superficial readings. Another case in point is the reading of Lidia Parada de Brown, who in an instructional text on *Balún Canán* wonders whether Castellanos’ “lyricism” might actually surpass her social work on behalf of indigenous people (19), demonstrating the presumption that as a woman writer known mostly for

⁵⁹ “What takes priority and when? Social class, race, gender?” (my translation).

her poetry she would be more prone to concentrate on melodious verse than to undertake the more “serious” socially-conscious writing of the indigenista tradition. Not to mention, there is a superficial distinction made between form and content, and as a woman writer she is more likely to be taken to task for putting too much focus on the “appearance” of her writing.

For the purposes of this study it is important to address these shortcomings in the reading of the novel, as they suggest that the writer is always most concerned with the emancipation of the female protagonist following a liberal feminist position without any examination of the premises of equality. While I acknowledge the presence of liberal notions of social advancement as well as the desire for a singular selfhood exhibited by the protagonist; these ideas are always in tension with a communal formation of identity and the reality that within that advancement others may be silenced.

The following diagram is offered by Franco, which demonstrates the interactions of the Latin American woman within society that is useful as a visual representation of the limited roles that the female characters of Castellanos’ novels occupy.



Franco explains: “It is along this axis that social meanings accrue so that the *madre patria* in nationalist discourse is productive or sterile, prostituted or sacred” (“Beyond” 364). The female characters in Castellanos’ writing are extensively caught up within this discourse, subject to the ordering processes symbolically represented by the phallus, rarely escaping their role as

emblematic figures for someone else's societal plan; they are either spinsters, mothers, whores or virgins.

In any case, what is missing from the diagram, as Castillo also reminds us, is the nana/nodrizas who is not necessarily served by a liberal feminist scheme. Castillo presented an opportunity for Latin American feminist theorists to remember that when we talk about the limited roles for women in Latin American society that we remember this "other" woman - "Indian mother-who-is-not-a-mother" (*Talking Back* 12), a figure that has yet to be investigated fully within the development of Latin American feminist theory. It may also be seen that the type of feminism that Castellanos offers which hinges upon liberal notions of female empowerment and emancipation is questioned as a model for female development by introducing the indigenous woman into the framework. Surely with the evocative presence of the nana, Castellanos suggests that female liberation is not only the release from domestic duties and the sacrificial mother role, since it is the nana, and not Zoraida, who performs this function in the novel. Solidarity between women if it is to be truly revolutionary must be based upon something more than a break into the public sphere. Zoraida is by nature of her class liberated from domestic duties, yet she represents a woman who is both oppressed by a patriarchal system that limits roles for women, and who oppresses those that she considers beneath her. Thus the progress of the girl from marginalized object to writing subject by the end of the novel, which may be viewed as a triumph of feminist individualism, is shadowed by these concerns of the relational nature of oppression.

Keeping these precautions in mind, and in an effort to expand the scope of what Castellanos' work can offer feminist criticism, I call attention to the narrative anxiety displayed while presenting the relationship between the girl and her nana, since by way of demonstrating

the pitfalls of a liberal feminist position that fails to acknowledge difference it presents an inquiry regarding the direction in which feminist criticism might take. What is interesting is that there is not a simple presentation of cross-cultural solidarity that would perhaps satisfy the desire for harmony; rather by revealing the not-always-so-empathetic intentions of the little girl, it troubles for whom that alliance is formed. The maintenance of the silence of the indigenous woman by the end of the novel proves unsatisfactory for readers who tend towards idealism. To think further upon this irresolvable tension, I am concerned with the ethical response to inequality that is demanded. To produce this critique, I continue to examine the bildungsroman form, and then continue through an analysis of the ways in which the use of narrative silences might break and reconstruct solidarity, suggesting a continuous need to address past injustices within present encounters.

2.2 SUBJECTIVITY AND OTHERNESS

*Lo supe de repente:
hay otro.
Y desde entonces duermo solo a medias
Y ya casi no como.*

*No es posible vivir
con este rostro que es el mío verdadero
y que aún no conozco.⁶⁰*
(Castellanos, "Revelación," *Poesía no eres tú* 179)

Reflecting upon the space of the "other" and its relationship to the "self" has been an essential feature of Castellanos' poetry: the other who is always next to her, sharing both

⁶⁰ "Suddenly I knew: / there is another. / And from then on I barely sleep / And I hardly eat. / It is not possible to live / with this face that is my true face / and that I still do not know" (my translation).

darkness and happiness, begging for companionship and dialogue. The other is at times a doubling of herself that she does not recognize, or it is another person through which she may see something of herself. The realization of others in fact is the reason that the interviewee in her poem “Entrevista de prensa” gives for her beginning to write; in order to compensate for her feelings of nothingness: “Escribo porque yo, un día, adolescente, / me incliné ante un espejo y no había nadie. / ¿Se da cuenta? El vacío. Y junto a mí los otros / chorreaban importancia” (*Poesía...* 293).⁶¹ As Allgood states writing became one of the ways in which Castellanos sought to connect with the human community, and she was continuously reaching out to other people (xxxix). Taking into account this desire to reach out to others, how may the often vexed relationship between the girl and the nana be interpreted? The writing looks for a way to demonstrate the connection between the two characters as nameless women, neither permitted to participate in public society. Yet as they reach out to each other, the distances and disconnections between them are not overcome but emphasized, in a way that questions their bond.

As a way of entering into the relationships that will be explored in this novel and in each of the following chapters I introduce a comparison with Castellanos’ poem “Nocturno,” which presents an alliance between those who are both twins and enemies:

Atados mano contra mano y vueltos / --forceando por irnos-- / uno hacia el sur,
hacia el fragante verde, / y el otro a la hosquedad de los desiertos; / desgarrados;
sangrando yo con la herida tuya / y tú quizá doliéndote / de no tener siquiera una

⁶¹ “Press Interview”: “I write because I, one day, an adolescent, / leaned towards a mirror and no one was there. / Can you imagine? Emptiness. And next to me were others / dripping with importance” (my translation).

pequeña brizna / de dolor que no sea también mío, / hemos sido gemelos y enemigos (*Poesía...* 193).⁶²

While the poem reflects the pain of separation, it also demonstrates a commitment to the other that is as much suffocating as it is liberating. Each protagonist in the novels of this study will suggest a longing to see herself in another woman thus finding her own silence; the sense of shared oppression operates to bring about a consciousness-raising. But the act of finding that shared pain is not merely consoling; Castellanos' writing instead wonders if perhaps the other laments that she is not able to even have her *own* pain, independent of the one who seeks to *know* her. Questions arise such as: is it part of the project of the narrator to protect herself from the influence of the other by working to consume all exteriority? Or, must the writer "accommodate" competing stories as part of the subject's formation? And a question that is most significant for this study – is the other woman obliged to surrender her ways of knowing, including her pain, for the protagonist's understanding? After all, when the nana does speak it is not from the space of the indigenous community; it is rather within the master's home and for the girl's education, so that she may know the indigenous side of history.

These questions will emerge in the following chapters as well. Clarice Lispector refers to the *inimiga indiferente* (indifferent enemy) living in her home; and Jean Rhys longed to be recognized by the Black population that she also considered her enemies, as their politicization threatened her way of life. The need for recognition as a human trait is complicated in these situations saturated with power. If indeed these cross-cultural relationships display a "bridging" of differences in order to more clearly define the identity of the protagonist of whose

⁶² Tied hand to hand and returned / --forcing each other to go-- / one towards the south, towards the fragrant green, / and the other towards the harshness of the deserts; / torn apart; I bleeding with your wound / and you perhaps hurting / from not even having a small strand / of pain that isn't also mine, / we have been twins and enemies" (my translation).

development we speak, to what extent does it indicate a failure of women's liberation since it is still searching for ways to account for the multiple layers of inequalities that exist between them? How does the use of silence as a literary device signify this failure? Moreover, if political agency can be read in the silence of the marginalized, is the polarity between writing subject and written object in any sense overcome?

Finally, it is necessary to foreshadow my conclusion with respect to the role of the colonized woman in the text by evoking at this point Levinas' conception of the possibility of encountering the "face": "The face resists possession, resists my powers" (197). What it means, then, for the nana's *face* to be literally erased from the girl's memory at the end of the novel will be explored in that sense. But again, it should be stressed that it is the girl's privilege to occupy the role of the "I" who determines in what way her encounters with the other will benefit her development; it is a challenge to read from the side of the nana, who also influences and manipulates those meetings. Castillo endeavors to imagine the voice of the nana suggesting that it is retrievable: "I am watching you listen/refuse to listen to me as I tell myself (but implicitly you) this story, and you are angry because you want me to hear you" ("Ashes" 250). The girl will run to her nana anxious to tell her about something that she experiences; the nana in turn makes the girl wait until she is ready to listen. The protagonist learns respect from these encounters, although as Castillo asserts she ultimately rejects the ear for the written word (251). The implications of reading both sides is to observe in what ways the meetings between the two characters creates an open space for dialogue; even if the narrator in the end seems to choose the privacy of writing over a view of the world based upon intersubjectivity.

These distinctions between who is able to speak and who is not, as well as who is the subject and who is the other, are nuanced and not always clear; thus reading from a fixed

viewpoint of the first-person narration is ineffective: the girl is simultaneously the subject of the narration and othered by her family who only values her brother's education. The nana as well is marginalized by the girl who is looking for a place to establish her own authority, while exercising the power of a subject to assert a worldview and to decentralize the dominant narration. As a reading subject who also learns colonial history by sneaking into her father's library to read manuscripts that record the indigenous history of Comitán, the girl may find the "we" of those manuscripts of indigenous history to be simultaneously liberating and tormenting; as she reads she develops a connection with the indigenous inhabitants of what was once known as Balún Canán, while realizing that the history was produced instrumentally for the service of the oppressor class, from which she cannot separate herself. She is thus implicated in the production and cooptation of these texts, which mirror the novel's use of Spanish to describe the lives of indigenous peoples. Yet before the girl is really able to perform any meaningful engagement as a reading subject, a shadow falls over her; it is her mother: "[p]recipitadamente quiero esconder los papeles. Pero ella los ha cogido y los contempla con aire absorto. –No juegues con estas cosas –dice al fin--. Son la herencia de Mario. Del varón" (60).⁶³ The power of interpretation is given to Mario; but what she is allowed to share is the history as told to her by her nana. That is, although she may be part of the "we" that is found in the documents, a possibility is present to discover an alliance within their marginalization that circumvents the conventional polarities of oppressor and oppressed.

The desire of the text clearly is to represent a negotiation between self and other that creates an intersubjective relationship based upon mutual understanding and love; which is articulated, yet not fully achieved. María Esther Quintana contends however that the girl does

⁶³ "‘You mustn't play with these things,' she says at last. 'They are Mario's inheritance. The male child's'" (Nicholson 59).

achieve at times moments of a utopian narrative of inter-ethnic harmony towards which Castellanos aspired (307-8). As Quintana comments regarding the relationship between Ladinos and the indigenous people of Mexico: “las que se desarrollan entre las nanas indias y las niñas ladinos son las que establecen una mayor intimidad y afecto y las que logran el mayor grado de comprensión entre las dos culturas” (305).⁶⁴ The intimate moments that the two characters share are no doubt moving, indicating a counter-family that displaces the ordering that falls from the father’s authority. Nevertheless those instances are fleeting, since it is supposed that as she grows up her dependence on her nana will grow from that of mother/daughter to that of servant/señora. Most importantly harmony is not an adequate word for the inter-ethnic encounters that are experienced, especially given the girl’s eventual forgetting of her nana. That the privileged/colonized relationship is constructed around the domestic realm to which Quintana refers is also a reminder that the colonized is confined there – only the girl has the potential, however limited, to reach towards the “male,” public domain. It is nevertheless evident that while Zoraida would discount anything the nana says as superstition, the girl separates herself enough from her mother to be sensitive to her complicity in the cruelty against her nana. How then can she negotiate the love that she gives with the violence that made it possible? Even though she and her nana share a mother/daughter bond that counters that between herself and Zoraida, the girl must – at times – include herself in that “we” of the oppressors. The two evidently experience solidarity, but it is the working out of the privilege and inequalities that frame their interactions which must be carefully examined. Moreover, any notion of community can only be spoken through the wound that the nana continues to carry, imagined bodily through the scar that remains on her leg.

⁶⁴ “those that develop between indian nanas and ladino girls are those which establish a better intimacy and affection and those which achieve the most understanding between the two cultures” (my translation).

2.3 FORM AND MESSAGE: READING THE NEGATIVE OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN

Castellanos' text presents itself as a bildungsroman for the advancement of a female character's subjectivity: the story is seen through the eyes of a little girl, whose experiences and contacts shape her as she grows and develops into a reader/writer who eventually learns to critique and fashion her world through the use of language. To be able to present a detailed analysis of the way in which the text both follows and challenges the format of the bildungsroman it is worth returning to an analysis of the ending, as it is that moment that provokes reflection on the entirety of the text. As Grant suggests the end affirms a victory for patriarchal ladino society; although adding to this surrender is the taking over of the confessional aspect that turns inward towards the personal anguish of the author, which admits the failure of being able to express solidarity in her chosen narrative form.

What does the final forgetting mean to the girl, and what is the purpose of her retelling it? More than a lapse in memory, the girl assigns to the nana the same face as any other Indian, defying the heterogeneity that was insisted upon by the author. Any success of the girl's development is predicated therefore upon that failure. If the success of the conventional male bildungsroman is achieving that "cumulative, gradual, total" organic growth (Abel, et. al. 5), overcoming various obstacles including relationships with other people, eventually achieving knowledge of his own identity and being reabsorbed into society; differently the successful contemporary female bildungsroman has entailed building self-awareness through relationships. While this process of seeking out others to identify with is undertaken by the girl, its seeming abandonment in this case demonstrates that there is an eventual failure of intersubjectivity that cannot be resolved.

In the introduction I approached the ways in which women and “Third World” writers have sought to transform the bildungsroman form, inserting alternative world views into what was once a male-dominated genre of social development unavailable to those whose options in society were limited. As the genre was reworked by nineteenth century women writers in the liberal tradition, their expression was pushed intensely inward, and found their only options to be death or madness (Hirsch 26). Castellanos addresses these limitations in her influential poem “Meditación en el umbral” (“Meditation on the Threshold”), when she contends that there must be another way than that which her predecessors took, another way of being “free and human” (Trans. Bogin 95). Battling to forge their place within a machista environment, Latin American women writers in bildungsroman narratives demonstrate the “growing down” or *crecimiento diminutivo*, versus the “growing up” of male heroes (Lagos 35), since heroines tend to retreat to inner life when the exterior world becomes unworkable. As Annis Pratt explains,

women’s fiction ... is a literary strategy expressing the ironic inversion of humanistic norms by rigid gender codes. ... It follows quite naturally, then, that so many of the images and leitmotifs of the *bildungsroman* deal with the same suffocation, breathlessness, of being stuffed down and dwarfed, that characterizes inmates of mental institutions (34-35).

The response to this is found in some twentieth century reworkings of the bildungsroman by “Third World” writers, which have replaced linear development with circular logic and the valorization of the individual self with notions of intersubjectivity. West Indian writers such as Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid, for example, stress that subjectivity is a cultural construction, allowing for more nuanced understandings of subject-formation and interpersonal

relations.⁶⁵ The girl in this case confronts obstacles strategically; she sneaks into her father's library, for example, and exercises curiosity regardless of being discouraged to do so. She never confronts her father directly, although she finds her space within the silencings of colonial history as described in the manuscripts.

Even if she cannot insert herself unproblematically into male-dominated society the way that a male hero would, neither does she follow the nineteenth century model of madness or death. The novel follows a modernist bildungsroman form with a hero that experiences both growth and failure, but who continues to learn from setbacks and eventually attains subjectivity. However when it would become time to declare the success of the bildungsroman at the end, she is still haunted by the failure of achieving intersubjectivity, leading the reader to question what indeed success means in this case. By forgetting the nana's face she achieves a semblance of individuality, replacing her brother as the one who would have access to an education thus advancing her intellectual capacity. In doing so, she carves out a space for herself within patriarchy, but not without questioning the abandonment that her success entails. In his analysis of the nineteenth-century novel Moretti reveals a typical protagonist who will betray his friends in order to succeed (84). He explains that "perhaps the novel of success became more consonant with reality, but it lost that painful ambiguity which had made it important" (84). In a similar plot sequence the girl betrays her nana; thus illustrating an incompatibility between personal and moral success. While the girl abandons ambiguity, however, I argue that the novel remains important, since her opportunism is left open to critique by the reader.

As a tale of female development, it follows the description given by Lagos of the Latin American female bildungsroman as one that tracks the development of a protagonist searching

⁶⁵ See Louis F. Caton for a study of Kincaid's novel *Annie John* as a bildungsroman, and Fiona R. Barnes' analysis of Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*.

for a sense of self, but with an emphasis on irony within the narrative voice (34). Unlike the classical form, autonomy and socialization are no longer part of a single course (see Moretti, 80). Resolution between interiority and social reality is only an illusory ideal – by erasing the nana’s face she may convince herself that she can move “forward,” but as the reader is aware the face is not erased, but only not recognized. The importance of employing a study of the bildungsroman within this context is, following Castle’s definition of the modernist form, that it is not only what it includes that is significant, but what it excludes as well. This way of reading negatively, keeping in mind the irony that Lagos highlights, presents us with not only a heroine within a male tradition, but with a text that encounters its own impossibility of being independent from that system. Consequently with respect to silences, they are gaps in the overarching written text that place the reader outside of the girl’s effort to define her world. Thus the formation of the protagonist’s subjectivity is read in the way in which she needs others to develop, but also in her exclusion of others to form her sense of self. In this novel that which the girl suppresses is more important than what is at the forefront. Specifically, it is the nana’s presence that tackles the organizing will of the bildungsroman narrative; if the largely first-person narration creates a text that is directed towards the self, the nana, by presenting an indigenous viewpoint, signals a direction away from the girl’s interiority. This tension between “inner” and “outer” experiences is highlighted as the girl indicates that she is not always listening and does not want to listen to the nana’s stories. The girl for instance asks her nana to not tell her that story of colonization and forced silence: “–Acaso hablaba contigo?”– the nana responds – “¿Acaso se habla con los granos de anís?” (9).⁶⁶ It is the girl’s choice whether or not she wants to listen and engage with this information, but the nana voices it regardless of the response. This other direction presents

⁶⁶ “So you think I was talking to you! Do you suppose one speaks to the seed of the anise?” (Nicholson 13).

the possibility of a reciprocal encounter in which one must leave oneself open to the other and wait – the narration’s impulse to translate and homogenize therefore is undercut.

Lagos observes that the bildungsroman has been transformed in the hands of women writers, no longer valorizing the achievement of singularity by the individual: “El hecho de que las protagonistas niñas no se vean a sí mismas como individuos independientes sino como piezas en una red de relaciones en las que tienden a borrarse los límites entre el yo y el otro puede explicar la preferencia de las escritoras por estas estrategias narrativas” (60).⁶⁷ If we look at the example of this novel, however, I stress that the trepidation towards this experience of dissolving borders should be stressed; the girl-protagonists do not necessarily *want* to connect with that alterity. The desire to form a singular identity is still felt, whatever the action, generating ambivalence towards those fuzzy boundaries. Otherness is alarming, threatening to dismantle any integrity of the self that the protagonist may be experiencing. As I have been contending, the “I” of the narrative is continuously put into crisis, which contests the bildungsroman form. Moreover, readings of the novel as a semi-autobiography are complicated given the instability of the first-person narration. Identity, then, becomes a strategy; for the girl her separation from her nana is necessary to protect herself from an internalized stereotype – “[t]e vas a volver india” – while she allies herself with privileged knowledge, indicated when she states proudly that Columbus discovered America. I use the word strategy not as much in the sense of Teresa de Lauretis, who calls attention to an identity that one “decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations, and that one insists on as a strategy” (9). In this case those multiple assimilations cause stress to the protagonist who works to suppress those associations that further entrench her

⁶⁷ “The fact that girl protagonists do not see themselves as independent individuals but as pieces in a web of relations in which they tend to erase the boundaries between self and other, can explain the preference that women writers have for these narrative strategies” (my translation).

within marginalization, and thus she strategizes an illusory identity that would be constructed against that otherness.

The evident need for a meaningful connection with her nana combined with the ambivalence that I draw attention to here makes this narration instructive; it shows a very personal reaction to what it means to live between cultures, which can be a productive space. As Priscilla Meléndez concretely states, Castellanos' narrator lives in the middle of two cultures, "la ladina a la cual pertenece por herencia, y la indígena con la cual se asocia cotidianamente a través de la servidumbre y la mano de obra indígena" (341).⁶⁸ It is in this everyday relationship that the ethics of the novel enter and are questioned. As a narrator who demonstrates lack of control of her own text allowing other voices to seep through and take over, she displays naïveté regarding her own point of enunciation, reflecting at once the landholders' alarm towards the growing strength of the indigenous rebellions, the will to escape gender oppression, and the fear of being associated with the "Indian" side of herself that is superexploitable. The anxiety that she experiences of having her growth stunted by society is compounded with the information that the comfort that her family is afforded is set to end. Tío David (not actually their uncle but a friend of the family) reiterates the "terrified consciousness" of the landowners, the fear of the upper classes that the lower classes will come into consciousness, evident in the song that he sings: "*Ya se acabó el baldillito / de los rancheros acá*" (26).⁶⁹ He warns the children that now all of them will be in the same lot as the poor people (25). The children's responses reflect their defined gender roles: Mario answers that he will then be a hunter like his uncle, while the girls states that she would wish to be the "dueña de la casa ajena y convidar a los que lleguen a la hora

⁶⁸ "the ladino which she belongs to through inheritance, and the indigenous with which she associates daily through the service of indigenous labor" (my translation).

⁶⁹ "*The tithe-days are over / For rancher and drover*" (Nicholson 29).

de comer” (25).⁷⁰ Her offer of hospitality at once shows that she sticks to the limits of her gender choosing a role that would not require education, but also that she is attracted by playing the part of hostess offering comfort and food to visitors. The text parallels the girl’s intentions, as it is structured as a home for the girl through which other characters may visit and be invited to share in her comfort. The nana however is indeed competing as a character with the development story of the little girl. Although she is a secondary character, given that her words only appear through the vehicle of the little girl’s text it also must be recognized that she propels the story, serving as memory for the little girl, as well as prognosticator of the death of the girl’s brother in the end. In that sense she marks the limits of the bildungsroman, which cannot restrain the alternative logic that she exhibits.

Much has been inferred regarding the duality of cultural influences that the girl reacts to and performs. That is not to conclude that her sense of self developed through the bildungsroman is a synthesis of what she learns from the competing world views; rather she reiterates both indigenous and ladino telling of history without fully accepting either. Nor at that age does she make a moral judgment based upon what she witnesses; all of that is left to the reader. She learns through observation, and often mimics the adults as a “cultural receptacle of the racist and sexist ideologies of her environment” (Finnegan 21): using the language of her parents she reflects the attitudes of the Ladinos towards the indigenous people, at the same time exhibiting her nana’s authority.

This often confused point of view is illustrated as the girl describes her nana: “No sabe nada. Es india, está descalza y no usa ninguna ropa debajo de la tela azul de tzec. No le da

⁷⁰ “the mistress of the other man’s house and invite the ones that come at mealtimes” (Nicholson 28).

vergüenza. Dice que la tierra no tiene ojos” (10).⁷¹ The beginning of her statements reflects the racist attitude of her mother, Zoraida, while she concludes with what may be detected to be a defense in the words of her nana. This type of double narration that includes the attitudes of the oppressed and the oppressors continues throughout the novel, and is most often a reflection of the presence of two opposing mother figures. The way in which she negotiates her development is dependent upon the way that she sees her nana, as at once a strong, maternal figure and an incompatible presence; which may be described through the notion of heterogeneous conflictivity,⁷² since the two characters stand in dynamic and competing tension. According to Kemy Oyarzún, Antonio Cornejo-Polar’s concept of heterogeneity is a tool for “apprehending the double articulation of ethnicity and class in transitional societies, where more than one mode of production can be seen to function” (6). Heterogeneity in this sense relates to transition – whether it is the struggle between semi-feudalism and pre-capitalist society, or the more personal struggle – between who you think you are and how others perceive you. The theme of transition is thus used to view the girl’s individual growth, along with that of her society – growth is not only positive; rather there is resistance to alterity and motivation toward self-integrity by establishing the facelessness of the other. As the girl moves through this period she comes to the realization that she is not actually the nana’s “daughter,” and thus finds a way to separate from her by emphasizing her inevitable *strangeness*. Although it is the nana who teaches her how to live and to be a woman, the mother’s voice remains to challenge that authority with the attitude that Indians are childlike and ignorant. In response to Cardenas’ insistence that Indians

⁷¹ “She doesn’t know anything. She’s Indian, she doesn’t wear shoes, and has no other garment under the blue cloth of her *tzec*. She isn’t ashamed. She says the ground hasn’t any eyes” (Nicholson 14).

⁷² Cornejo-Polar posits that transculturation is no more sufficient to describe cultural encounters than hybridity, given that it eventually implies the reduction of the conflict to an unproblematic totality that ignores the conflictive nature of cultural dynamics. Thus I think that his formulation of heterogeneity is the best tool for understanding the “doubleness” of the postcolonial intellectual, because it emphasizes the conflictiveness and the ongoing nature of the cultural encounter, moving us more safely away from the positivist impulses that come from notions of hybridity.

be granted rights Zoraida is incensed: “¿Cuando pisotea nuestros derechos, cuando nos arrebatan nuestras propiedades? Y para dárselas ¿a quiénes?, a los indios. Es que no los conoce; es que nunca se ha acercado a ellos ni ha sentido cómo apestan a suciedad y a trago. ... Y yo hubiera preferido mil veces no nacer nunca antes que haber nacido entre esta raza de víboras” (46).⁷³

The girl protects her nana from this talk, quickly shutting the door so she cannot hear, indicating that she comprehends the hurtful impact of her mother’s remarks. That she will come to reiterate her mother’s attitude, then, would not be out of ignorance, but out of the same terror that Zoraida experiences; that of being connected to the inferiority that she projects onto the Indians.

It is important to highlight that her imitative behavior does not dissolve the political relevance of the text. There are instances when the girl doubts that her nana is ignorant as her mother says, and she tries to witness the other logic that her nana uses, although she is always left with doubt. For example, when she describes her nana’s fear of traveling in cars, she states: “Quién sabe si la nana tenga razón. El automóvil es un monstruo que bufa y echa humo” (22).⁷⁴ Not committing to any certainties about whose reasoning is correct, the door is left open for more than one system of logic to influence the text. Furthermore, it is seen that the nana does not only exist *for* the girl; rather she has her own essence that cannot be captured by the text. That is to say, through the narrator’s doubt there is suggested an outside to the girl’s knowledge; the nana’s experiences that she does not share, or that the girl cannot understand completely, often out of fear. I also insist that the incomprehensibility of the nana from the point of view of the little girl hints at a complexity that the novel itself may be unable to represent. I do not see

⁷³ “When he tramples on our rights, when he seizes our properties? And to give them – to whom? The Indians. He doesn’t know them; he’s never been near them and found out how they stink of filth and drink. ... and I’d a thousand times rather never have been born, than be born among such a race of vipers!” (Nicholson 46-47).

⁷⁴ “Perhaps nana’s right. The automobile is a monster that puffs and blows smoke” (Nicholson 25).

this as a failure of understanding, but as a representation of the possibility of mutual recognition through difference.

Key to interpreting the tension between self and Other with the framework of the bildungsroman is the attempt to assimilate that which is incomprehensible. I refer to Irigaray, who demands a respectful distance between self and Other achieved by using non-phallogocentric language in order to not consume the other. Levinas uses the example of food as that which is able to be assimilated, because upon consumption it is stripped of its independence for the pleasure/use of another being. If readers are faithful to the apparent bildungsroman journey, the girl moves through adolescence consuming the experiences of her nana along with her own for her own sense of being. Access to the nana's sense of history will allow the girl contact with citizenship that values memory, myth, and storytelling, yet within a structure of progress and social development. Even with the best intentions, this reading relies too much on a faithful one-sided narration. According to Perla Schwartz: "La nana desempeña un papel importante, es quien compenetra a la niña con el mundo circundante, quien le permite que trascienda la *soledad* de su individualidad" (89, emphasis added).⁷⁵ This statement is striking in its attesting to the loneliness of individualism. The privileging of the collective "nature" of the Indian, with access to a more meaningful existence outside of the pressures of living as an individual in modern society does not recognize any talking back to that system that is taking place. Her protection from "privileged individuality" is interpreted as "the good" that the girl must hold onto in order to shield her from the blows of modernization. The way in which this role isolates the nana should also be considered, evident in the cynicism of her words when she reiterates that the only place she belongs is what she has been forced to abandon: "Yo no pertenezco a los Argüellos.

⁷⁵ "The nana carries out an important role, as the one who identifies the girl with her surrounding world, who allows her to transcend the *solitude* of her individuality" (my translation).

Yo soy de Chactajal” (231).⁷⁶ The writing carefully distinguishes the nana from the possessors’ version of her, leaving her assimilation incomplete.

Returning to the ending of the novel, although it is recognized that the bildungsroman forms the central movement of the text, this does not mean that the ending, which appears to be the success of the bildungsroman, is in fact the resolution. Ramírez insists that the subjectivities represented in the novel go through changes, but progress has nothing to do with it; rather each character demonstrates an anti-Cartesian conception of the subject as constructed, historical, and not essentialized (75). While other critics focus on the ending as the consumption of the girl by a phallo-centric order that insists on her forgetting of the nana, Ramírez argues that if the novel is not conceived of as a progression, “este momento de conversión sería solo uno de los momentos en los que en la subjetividad de la niña primaría el orden patriarcal” (78).⁷⁷ In the same vein I contend that time should be viewed as a series of moments in which a greater history of colonialism is evoked through each encounter. Through thinking of the text as a string of encounters rather than a complete picture of one year in the life of a girl, the possibilities for reading the counternarrative become clearer. One need only remember that in the forgetting⁷⁸ the girl also mentions that she has a dream in which she and the nana are together again – “Cuando cierro los ojos en la noche se me representa el lugar donde mi nana y yo estaremos juntas” (244)⁷⁹ – thus it is possible to read the ending as open to other possibilities, and not one that as expunged all exteriority.

⁷⁶ “I do not belong to the Argüellos. I’m from Chactajal” (my translation).

⁷⁷ “this moment of conversion would be only one of those moments in which the girl’s subjectivity would be privileged over the patriarchal order” (my translation).

⁷⁸ Thinking the politics of memory has again recently been a popular topic in feminist theory – the importance of memory for questioning monolithic assertions of history is evident. In the girl’s forgetting of a reality that the reader is aware of allows for a reconstruction of that history; a task that the reader would be invited to undertake.

⁷⁹ “When I close my eyes I get a picture of the place where Nana and I will be together” (Nicholson 229).

2.4 THE NANA/NIÑA RELATIONSHIP: READING BOTH SIDES OF THE “DYAD”

I place dyad in the title of this section in quotation marks, since although it is tempting to isolate the two characters in a way in which they would complete each other in a harmonious way, forming a “whole” of two parts, this does not take into account the “separateness” of the nana, who would be a complex character outside of the girl’s limited point of view. Given that they are the only two characters without names, the reader can assume that they are meant to share in the absence of that fundamental establishing linguistic element of their identity – this lack may denote both the way in which they are invisibilized, and a freedom within that invisibility to eventually name themselves. They also have in common being marginalized or rejected by their communities: the girl is emotionally abandoned by her parents because all of their attention is directed towards her brother, and the nana is rejected by the indigenous workers in the field because of her close connection to the family. She is frightened of the “brujos” that had harmed her in the past, exhibiting a type of alienation that goes beyond that which the girl can understand. When she explains to the girl that it is wrong to love those that possess you (16) the nana refers to an implicit social code of which she bears the brunt of responsibility for breaking.

There is a complicated mirroring that occurs which is stated explicitly at the end of the text when the girl exclaims: “El espejo... ¡No, no quiero que me vea!” (280).⁸⁰ It is a mirror that might reveal, as Castillo suggests, “that not only do all Indians have the same face, but the single face of the Indian is one she too shares; that all oppressed people, not only Indians, share the same mirror-face” (“Ashes” 265). I believe however that this scene also reflects an intense

⁸⁰ “The looking-glass. ... No, I don’t want it to catch sight of me!” (Nicholson 261).

shame, which also has something to do with judgment; in the context of the guilt she feels for Mario's sickness the mirror reminds us that the girl only wants to see but not necessarily to be seen. To be seen in a mirror is to acknowledge the way in which others see her, and determine her identity from the outside. Thus jealousy, fear, a sense of abandonment, and occasional cultural border crossings link the two characters, although they are not unified in a complete knowing of each other.

Not only considered a traitor by her Toltec community for working in the master's house, the nana is also employed as mediator for the girl to soften the blows she receives as she looks to ascend within a society in which she is insignificant. That the girl would want to latch onto her stability and to employ her as mediator is evidenced in parallel images of nature such as the *ceiba* described by the omniscient narrator: "Y en medio de todo, sembrada con honda raíz, la ceiba, la *nodriza* de los pueblos" (193, emphasis added).⁸¹ Other women servants are also depicted as performing a necessary balancing act although they always are placed last in the social hierarchy: "Y hasta al último, las criadas, que sostienen un equilibrio sobre su cabeza los pumpos y los cestos de los comestibles" (287).⁸² With their bodies they sustain communities and balance discordant elements – what does this overwhelming connection with harmony and sustenance imply? How is she employed by the author in the service of her text? Indeed various references are made to the Indians' backs that carry the loads of the "civilized;" for example the girl describes ascending the mountains on the journey to Chactajal on the back of an Indian. This image of the Indian carrying the colonist on his back carries over into the spiritual realm. Ernesto listens to one of the *señores* remark: "¿Te fijaste que la imagen de Nuestra Señora de la

⁸¹ And in the midst of everything, deep-rooted, was the silk-cotton tree, keeping guard over the villagers" (Nicholson 181).

⁸² "And last of all the servants, balancing on their heads the pumpkins and food baskets" (Nicholson 268).

Salud es de bulto? Le trajeron de Guatemala, a lomo de indio. Es muy milagrosa” (77).⁸³ It is recognized even among those that consider Indians to be less than human that power is given to savagery, as that which is necessary to *carry in* civilization. Like the domestic servant that maintains the order of the house and keeps the babies fed, but is herself considered unclean, their work forms the backdrop of the experiences of the ladino children; but the inequalities between them are never meaningfully addressed.

In a telling scene, the girl asks her nana why her mother would visit a poor woman; for the response she must again wait patiently and adjust to her nana’s time: “Todavía no es suficiente lo que ha dicho, todavía no alcanzo a comprenderlo. Pero ya aprendí a no impacientarme y me acurruco junto a la nana y aguardo. A su tiempo son pronunciadas las palabras” (28).⁸⁴ The distance established through the nana’s delayed response is noted, as it dictates the conditions of their encounter. This encounter may also be analyzed within the context of Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation, in which the person who is “hailed” becomes a subject when she recognizes that it is she that has been identified and called; an experience that thereby binds her to the norms of that interaction.⁸⁵ The nana’s response however indicates her subjecthood that exists before the girl’s vocative call; her capacity to manipulate that encounter illustrates that she brings colonial baggage into their meeting that is not necessarily defined by the girl. The nana soon answers using a story recuperated from the

⁸³ “Did you notice that the Statue of Our Lady of Health is of carved wood? An Indian brought it on his back from Guatemala. It’s very miraculous” (Nicholson 77).

⁸⁴ “What she tells me still isn’t enough to satisfy me. I still can’t understand. But I’ve learned not to be impatient, and I cuddle close to Nana and wait. Her words will come in good time” (Nicholson 30).

⁸⁵ Althusser summarizes interpellation as an operation which “can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday ... hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’ ... The hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was really he who was hailed (and not someone else)’” (174).

Mayan story of creation to explain the system of inequality and interdependence between classes that she herself knows intimately:

Los señores despertaron al escuchar su nombre entre las alabanzas. Y miraron lo que había sucedido en la tierra durante el sueño. Y lo aprobaron. Y desde entonces llaman rico al hombre de oro y pobres a los hombres de carne. Y dispusieron que el rico cuidara y amparara al pobre por cuanto que de él había recibido beneficios. Y ordenaron que el pobre respondería por el rico ante la cara de la verdad. Por eso dice nuestra ley que ningún rico puede entrar al cielo si un pobre no lo lleva de la mano (30).⁸⁶

Foremost, what is illustrated in the story is that there is no redemption without the help of those less-fortunate; therefore it helps to establish the girl's role in society as one who through charity would request the help of the poor. Strikingly, economic inequalities are explained through myth, creating a space that cannot be circumvented by political means. The story does not serve to challenge the status quo, rather to explain each of their roles in the system. Within this counter-narration of resistance by telling history from below, there is also unsettling support and normalization of inequality.

After this revelation, the nana again “guarda silencio” (30-31), keeps silent, assuring that she controls the amount of information that the girl receives. The girl asks who her “pobre” is, and she responds, “Todavía no lo sabes. Pero si miras con atención, cuando tengas más edad y mayor entendimiento, lo reconocerás” (30-31).⁸⁷ The prophecy-like tone of the passage captures

⁸⁶ “The lords woke up to hear their names pronounced among the psalms of praise. And they looked to see what had happened on earth while they were sleeping. And they approved what they saw. And from that moment they called the man of gold rich and the men of flesh poor. And they ordered things in such a way that the rich man should care for the poor and shelter him, since it was the rich man who benefited by the poor man's acts. And the lord so ordered it that the poor should always answer for the rich before the face of Truth. That is why our law says that no rich man can enter heaven if a poor man does not lead him by the hand” (Nicholson 32).

⁸⁷ “You don't know yet. But if you watch carefully, when more years and understanding are upon you, you will recognize the poor one that is yours” (Nicholson 33).

the reader's attention; the girl will at some point also undertake acts of charity as her mother does, in order that she is also permitted some type of transcendence. But as we know, Castellanos would go on to help the poor by challenging power, not by maintaining the system of inequalities as her mother did. Comparing the novel with Castellanos' poetry in which she discusses "otherness," I find that the question of whether or not charity is only self-serving looms as an inevitable gulf that she must have confronted in her social efforts. In her poem "El Pobre" for example, she writes: "Hay distancia. Hay la misma extrañeza interrogante / que ante lo mineral" (*Poesía...* 182).⁸⁸ While hopes for solidarity appear dismal, the writing continues to assert an infinite responsibility towards the other as she regrettably uses the master's tools within her composition. Not only does she recognize distance, but as the face of the nana continues to fade she takes responsibility for what this implies for the past, present, and future.

Therefore the question remains for this study, if the nana serves to guide the girl-narrator through her story, to what degree does the narrator then appropriate the nana's voice for the service of the narration of female development? Does the nana not only aid in the discovery of the narrator's self, but also by being included in her story lessen the girl's guilt for what her family had done? Or does the novel open up new possibilities to think through the relationship between two underprivileged characters, for whom inequalities divide as well as unite them?

There is a self-conscious bearing-witness to the narration's narcissism by maintaining distance. Part of what keeps the nana and the girl apart is a secret – that being the sense of history that the nana guards, revealing only a portion to the little girl. This strength that I attribute to the nana despite the confines of the text might differentiate between what the narrator would like the nana to do *for* her, with respect to the establishing of her identity, and what she

⁸⁸ "There is distance. There is the same questioning strangeness / that there is before that which is mineral" (my translation).

actually does. That is, the nana's presence cannot be smoothly accessed by the recollections of the narration without the interference of feelings of shame and remorse. The hopeful expectation to which I refer, which possibly would be perceived as a success, is that the nana by replacing the mother would form an alliance with the girl who gains consciousness about the nana's reality, thereby creating their own kinship based upon an alternative set of commonalities. That desire is fulfilled to some extent; although the nana is prematurely erased from the plot line through the violence of forgetting before that connection would be complete. We may note that while the forgetting at the end parallels the colonial silencing in the beginning, that the girl's act does not necessarily erase memory, she only displaces it in favor of her own growth.

A way of approaching these questions is to look more carefully at the encounters between the female characters, which I contend are based upon a push-pull relationship between departures and approaches. One of the most significant images is that of the wind, which evokes a theme of social movement while providing an object through which the relationship between the two hinges. The wind is an entity that the girl is just beginning to know with the help of her nana; it is a source of excitement as it is that which connects her to her community. Their shared association with this element also establishes their intimacy, as a closeness that challenges the authority of the male voice. In the first encounter with wind the girl undermines Mario's importance as the male child by not paying attention to his winning the kite flying contest. In this instance she follows her nana's direction even in her absence, instead of that of her mother:

¡Qué alrededor tan inmenso! Una llanura sin rebaños donde el único animal que trisca es el viento. ... Y me quedo aquí, con los ojos bajos porque (la nana me lo ha dicho) es así como el respeto mira a lo que es grande.

–Pero qué tonta eres. Te distraes en el momento en que gana el papalote de tu hermano (22-23).⁸⁹

The mother's distinction between the children based upon gender is clear; still the girl disregards Mario's success and rushes home to tell her nana that she had "met" the wind - "¿Sabes? Hoy he conocido el viento" (23). By sharing this knowledge an alliance is formed through a connection with something of which only the two understand the significance, thereby displacing the mother's authority. Nevertheless, the nana does not interrupt her work to answer; the girl again must wait for her response before she finally states: "Eso es bueno, niña. Porque el viento es uno de los nueve guardianes de tu pueblo" (23).⁹⁰

The nana's response highlights a few important points. First, since she invokes the novel's title at this moment there is the hint of something fundamental that is not explained fully. In fact the first chapter ends with those words. Her answer is succinct, leaving open a range of further questions to be asked and hopefully answered. Also it is notable that the nana uses "tu" instead of "nuestro," thereby fixing the girl as a recipient of both Indigenous and European knowledge that will contribute to her growth as a citizen. The nana however remains outside of that continuum of positive growth within a society, and in an indeterminate space according to the girl's narrative. Thus one may again observe that the nana indeed contributes to the direction of the girl's narrative while maintaining her position outside of it - which may be described as both a self-imposed act of protection and a separation forced upon her. The time that the girl must wait for her nana to answer is also of interest. The nana exercises authority as well as her own concept of time by not adapting to that of the girl; but without breaking communication

⁸⁹ "What a vast moor it is, a plain without flocks where the only animal that plays is the wind. ... [A]nd I stand here with lowered eyes because (Nana's said so) that's the way humility looks at bigness. 'How stupid you are. You pay no heed just when your brother's kite's winning'" (Nicholson 25-26).

⁹⁰ "That's good child. Because your people possess Nine Guardians, and the wind is one" (Nicholson 26).

altogether. The girl in turn waits respectfully allowing for the certain distance between them to be noticeable. This may be compared to the structure of the novel - the narrative seeks to leave itself open to other voices by opening up spaces in which the presence of another voice could be imagined, leaving room for dialogue without demanding that the other conform to the rigidity of the text itself.

The will towards dialogue may be contrasted with the communications of the father with the Indians that work for him. In one of the most significant points of the novel the girl observes their rituals that reinforce her father's domination; they remain silent as he talks, in *his* own time and space:

Mi padre recibe a los indios, recostado en la hamaca del corredor. Ellos se aproximan, uno por uno, y le ofrecen la frente para que la toque con los tres dedos mayores de la mano derecha. Después vuelven a la distancia que se les ha marcado. Mi padre conversa con ellos de los asuntos de la finca. Sabe su lengua y sus modos. Ellos contestan con monosílabos respetuosos y ríen brevemente cuando es necesario (15).⁹¹

The relations between the oppressed and the oppressors are established through a performance, which ensures that only César has the power to maneuver between the two cultures (the integrity of which is also produced through their interactions). Conversely in the dialogue between the nana and the girl there is no master (there is control, but it is interchangeable); only locutor and recipient. The question remains whether or not this respectful distance that she undertakes establishes an alibi for which the girl may continue telling her story of development. Although

⁹¹ "Lounging in the hammock on the veranda, my father receives the Indians. They approach one by one and offer their foreheads for him to touch with the three middle fingers of his right hand. Then they return to the respectful distance where they belong. My father talks to them about the business of the farm. He knows their language and their customs. They answer respectfully in words of one syllable, laughing briefly when they're supposed to" (Nicholson 18-19).

there is a will towards dialogue, the relationship between the two principal female characters is really not based upon reciprocity. More likely, the only gift that the girl offers the nana, a voice within her text, is an act uncomfortably sidled by patronizing notions that maintain the hierarchy between the two, while the nana offers access to the indigenous worldview for the girl's full citizenship. Again, this does not present a revolutionary challenge to hegemony that one who takes a feminist position would hope for. As much as what the girl and nana share builds an alliance, there is a barrier between them, and as their dialogues battle within the text the reality that they are also enemies is discovered.

2.5 CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK? SHOULD SHE SPEAK?

Me asustaste. Esa manía que tiene tu raza de caminar sin hacer ruido, de acechar, de aparecerse donde menos se espera. ¿Por qué viniste? No te llamé (Zoraida speaking to the nana, 229).⁹²

It is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 17).

El sentido de la palabra es su destinatario: el otro que escucha, que entiende y que, cuando responde, convierte a su interlocutor en el que escucha y el que entiende, estableciendo así la relación del diálogo que sólo es posible entre quienes se consideran y se tratan como iguales y que sólo es fructífero entre quienes se quieren libres (Castellanos, *MSL* 140).⁹³

Language stands out as the primary means through which those with access to power distinguish themselves from the subaltern – the entering into the political system, as Felipe has,

⁹² “You scared me. This mania your people have of walking about so noiselessly, lurking in ambush, jumping out when one least expects. Why did you come? I didn’t call” (Nicholson 215).

⁹³ “The sense of the word is in its addressee: the other who listens, who understands and who, when he or she responds, becomes the interlocutor in which he or she listens and understands, establishing therefore the dialogic relationship that is only possible between those who consider one another to be, and treat one another as, equals, and that is only fruitful between those who want each other to be free” (my translation).

is afforded only through access to the Spanish language. Threatened by the emerging consciousness of the Indians of their place within the landholding system, César and Zoraida work to maintain their power most strongly by insisting that they be the only ones that speak Spanish – therefore the Indians effectively had no voice within the system dominated by the Spanish language. Castellanos’ concern with the dominating tendencies is clear; as expressed in her previously-cited essay “Notas al margen: el lenguaje como instrumento de dominio” (“Language as an Instrument of Domination,” *MSL*), language may be exercised against others, as an expression of privilege, property, and exclusion. Finding an alternative language means creating dialogue in which the speaker waits for a response from the listener. Determined to make dialogue impossible, César even employs a schoolteacher who has no understanding of the local language, therefore there would be no possibility of mutual comprehension (*BC* 145). This reality makes the novel all the more awkward, although I argue self-consciously so, as it is a Spanish-language text within which indigenous characters are contained. Female characters are limited to interiorized dialogue, while indigenous characters are enveloped in a silence that makes speaking impossible. In her poetry Castellanos also evokes the Indian that is silenced through violence: “El borbotón de sangre que sale por su boca deja su cuerpo quieto” (“La oración del Indio” (*Poesía...* 67)).⁹⁴ The contemplation of the quieted body evokes the biopolitical implications for the silenced community. In one sense a community is broken through violence, while silences are also recuperated as a means of refusing the dominating language and culture. Although Mayan languages are incorporated into the text (of course the title itself is Mayan, referring to the “nine guardians” that watch over their pueblo) and she attempts to capture some sense of orality at times within the omniscient voice, it is difficult to

⁹⁴ “The gush of blood that exits from his mouth leaves his body still” (my translation).

imagine anything outside of a paternalistic relationship between narrator/narrated, writer/written, since everything is filtered through the Spanish-dominated text. As Castillo states drawing from Carlos Fuentes' wording "la palabra enemiga":

Castellanos never forgets that, by writing her story and the story of the Tzeltal-speaking Indians in Spanish, she is making herself complicit in one of the most tortuous ambiguities of the 'palabra enemiga' – giving voice to herself and to them in the language of the oppressors, in a form and style inaccessible to the people she represents ("Ashes" 245).

However, if it is read as an open-ended text with multiple interpretive possibilities, there is a potential for imagining outside of the central narration and thus finding possibilities for alliances exterior to the hegemonic structure of language. While the girl views the Indians as silenced, they also exercise power when refusing to speak, and are represented as possessing a language outside of the dominant linguistic system.

For my purposes here it is important to stress that one of the ways in which the narrative is challenged is by presenting the silence and silencing of the indigenous other, creating a sense of disorder that counters a progressive bildungsroman format desired by the girl. The novel begins with the imposed silence of colonization, and then throughout the nana performs willed silences that form a barrier between herself and the person with whom she is closest. An exteriority to the girl's world is opened up, and to her dissatisfaction she is unable to assimilate all of it. For that reason the inability to "recognize" her nana's face I propose is part of her way of rationalizing her failure to establish dialogue with the Other. In "Approaching the Other as Other," Irigaray speaks of the will to appropriate:

Our manner of reasoning, even our manner of loving, corresponds to an appropriation. Our culture, our school education, our cultural formation want it this way: to learn, to know, is to make one's own through instruments of knowledge capable, we believe, of seizing, of taking, of dominating all of reality, all that exists, all that we perceive, and beyond (23).⁹⁵

No one could expect the girl, who desires her own education that was lost when the government removed her teacher for teaching Catholicism, to not take part in that type of domination that has to do with “knowing” *her* world. She in fact begins this process out of boredom, sneaking into her father's library where she attempts to see and absorb all of the knowledge she can, even if she is not able to understand it all. When this determination to know is confronted with the opposing will of the nana to establish boundaries thus protecting herself from appropriation, she encounters resistance. This type of resistance is as Levinas explains the relation with the face, or the other that cannot be contained: “[t]he ‘resistance’ of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical” (197). The space in-between the two signals an asymmetrical relationship that forms the backdrop of the bildungsroman narrative, at the same time working to imagine a relationship that is not built upon the exclusion or assimilation of the Other. Irigaray also proposes: “It is in the first moments of drawing near to one another that the other moves us the most, touching us in a global, unknowable, uncontrollable manner. Then, too often, we make the other our own” (123). Analyzing their encounter by way of this thinking, the girl works to make the nana's experiences her own: presented with unsolvable problems, that is perhaps why in the end the girl willingly takes the

⁹⁵ The “our” that Irigaray uses is of a generalized West. Her rather strict polarization of self and Other, East and West, may be critiqued; for the purposes of this paper it is only necessary to point out that the manner of reasoning that she speaks of is the type of logic that the girl recuperates and that the nana challenges.

name of her brother in her writing, suggesting to some extent an acceptance of the masculine order.⁹⁶

The attitude of the writing subject towards the “not I” can be explored from a variety of standpoints; there is always the danger of treating the “other” as a “natural resource”⁹⁷ to lend interest to the piece, or as an alibi to excuse pandering to liberal notions of emancipation that fail to recognize the real project of dismantling the system of oppression altogether. Using the metaphor that Franco offers when speaking of the mediation that the Mexican intellectual undertakes in the mid-twentieth century between native and metropolis, the native plays the role of the guest who can bring a bit of flavor to the party organized by the host – but the host makes the rules, implies a dress code, and sets the language that will be spoken. “We should not forget” Franco asserts, “that at this banquet, the autochthonous culture is only a condiment that makes food more easily digested” (*Critical Passions* 452). Like Levinas, Franco uses food to illustrate the way in which the autochthonous culture is stripped of its independence, there for another’s use. On the other side of this paradigm, the guest in the narrative does not make anything easy on her host, nor on the reader; she complicates any efforts toward talking about emancipation, liberation, equality, etc., thus provoking a rethinking of what it means to write a socially-conscious text. The nana is able to assert criticism by addressing the girl’s privilege when she would prefer not to hear it.

As I have maintained, whether or not the nana is actually able to speak within the narrative has been the central concern of various critics such as Grant, who are preoccupied by

⁹⁶ Although if we follow the author’s biography, we learn that after her brother Benjamín died the family responded with silence, and thus she felt compelled to write in his name to preserve his memory (Bonifaz 17). Thus what many writers have assumed to be an acquiescence to the masculine’s power of naming, may actually be part of gaining her own voice through a reclaiming of what had been silenced in her family.

⁹⁷ I borrow this wording from Franco, who quotes Alfonso Reyes: “The autochthonous culture [is] an enormous reserve of raw material, of objects, shapes, colors and sounds, which need to be incorporated and dissolved in the fluidity of the broader culture, to which it lends its condiment of mixed, tasty spices” (*Critical Passions* 452).

whether or not the liberal feminist elements of the text actually engulf any meaningful portrayal of the indigenous reality. The issue of representation is always on the table, as Castellanos' works, while they are hopeful, seem to reiterate the notion that indeed the subaltern woman *cannot* speak within a text that takes her as its object of interest, sympathy, or investigation. As tight as the connection is between the girl and the nana, her initial announcement of dispossession made possible by the hierarchy of the speaker and the spoken cannot be ignored. The repercussion of being silent is de-politicization, although those that speak run the risk of having their voices co-opted. This leaves an impossible space to be in; just as the nana works her voice into the narration, she also resists being the embodiment of "traditional" knowledge for the girl. Although, through a more careful reading of the novel a purpose is revealed that while looking to connect with an indigenous world view and to include an indigenous perspective within her feminist text, the author also works to critique those very efforts towards solidarity in a way that is not unproductively guilty, but perhaps better categorized as remorseful. That is, referring to the definition of shame that I presented in the introduction, the text displays a failure of living up to an ideal that the author has extolled in her work. While the two female characters share their experience of invisibility, the girl nonetheless is reminded of her privilege as a member of a landholding family. There is a sense of shame, then, as the narration is conscious of the fact that as much as it works to speak against oppression, that it does not and cannot completely escape its own reproduction of inequalities.

At this point a more careful examination of the discursive employment of silences in the text will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which inequalities are confronted. The text's movement is constituted by navigations between instances of profound silence and something that breaks it. Often that which breaks it is a distraction, which provides a

way out of the confrontation. For example, after a fight with Ernesto, Matilde laughs in order to break the useless silence: “No podía quedar así, sentada en el suelo, ridícula, con todo el odio que aquel silencio sin reproche transformaba en nada. Rió entonces escandalosamente” (159).⁹⁸ In her otherwise interiorized, unproductive speech, she demonstrates an ability to break the silence that entraps her in codes of acceptability that do not allow her to live the life that she would want.

The silences may also mark limits of expression, illustrated when Tío David tells the girl and Mario the story of the “nine guardians,” advising the girl to keep quiet, and for Mario to keep his distance: “nosotros, la gente menuda más vale que nos callemos. Y tú, Mario, cuando vayas de cacería, no hagas lo que yo. Pregunta, indágate. Porque hay árboles, hay orquídeas, hay pájaros que deben respetarse. ... No los toques porque te traería desgracia” (26).⁹⁹ At that point then they find it impossible to speak, until the girl breaks the silence by suddenly playing a chord on the guitar, and then asks him to sing again. Two silences are employed: the girl is asked to silence herself, to not be curious about things that are not supposed to pertain to *la gente menuda* – those who are small, meek. After his warning there is silence that is pregnant with meaning that they cannot access, and the girl enacts a disruption as if the silence were too difficult for her to bear. Her act also denies the colonial silence that she is not prepared to confront.

While silence may be a mark of impossibility, it is often simultaneously a space of action. Defiance, resistance, and refusal to cooperate are also communicated through silences. This is

⁹⁸ “She couldn’t stay like that sitting stupidly on the ground, with all the hate that crumbled away in the unrepenting silence. She laughed indecently” (Nicholson 151-52).

⁹⁹ “we, little people, it’s better we keep quiet. And you, Mario, when you go hunting, don’t do as I did. Ask, find out things, because there are trees and orchids and birds that one ought to respect. ... Don’t touch them or they’ll bring you bad luck” (Nicholson 28).

witnessed in another scene, in which the Argüellos, caught in the rain and hungry on their way to the hacienda, ask a man who appeared to be the *dueño* of an Indian village for shelter, and are confronted only with silence: “No hace más que negar y negar con su triste rostro ausente, inexpresivo” (66).¹⁰⁰ His absent face suggests a refusal to be present for the family in this case, using invisibility or the ability to go unrecognized as strength. Thinking of his absent face juxtaposed with the nana’s that is eventually made to disappear, the notion that she becomes “just another Indian” may also be a reminder of this resistance that is enacted through denials (*negar*). While demonstrating realistically the way in which the author had failed to recognize the domestic service that had made her life more comfortable, facelessness also allows the nana refuge from the coming-of-age story that would have captured her alterity for its own end.

The apolitical notion of silence that may be troublesome to readers with an eye towards the empowerment of the characters is thus mitigated by these denials. An apolitical silence that brings death is exemplified metaphorically when the children witness Ernesto shoot a deer and the girl states: “No sabíamos que fuera tan fácil morir y quedarse quieto. Uno de los indios, que está detrás de nosotros, se arrodilla y con la punta de una varita levanta el párpado del ciervo. Y aparece un ojo extinguido, opaco, igual a un charco de agua estancada donde fermenta ya la descomposición” (68).¹⁰¹ The girl notes the unsettling looks in the other Indians that observe the deer’s eye, and her father explains only that they are *supersticiones*, and that the deer will have to rot there. “Desde entonces,” the girl states, “los indios llaman a aquel lugar ‘Donde se pudre nuestra sombra’” (69).¹⁰² The hunted deer as the Indians’ “shadow” indicates a startling

¹⁰⁰ “[H]e goes on flatly refusing with his sad, absent, expressionless face” (Nicholson 64).

¹⁰¹ “We did not know it was as easy as that to die and to lie quiet. One of the Indians just behind us kneels, and with the tip of a stick pries open the fawn’s eyelid. There is the iris, all snuffed out and opaque like a puddle of stagnant water where things have already begun to rot” (Nicholson 66-67).

¹⁰² “From that time the Indians have called the place ‘Where our Shadow Rots’” (Nicholson 67).

connection between silence and death. Ernesto claims that the deer had come to look for death, suggesting responsibility on the part of the deer for his own demise given his failure to resist when confronted with the superlative power of Ernesto's pistol. It seems as though it is a silent acceptance of one's fate in a world in which one cannot live with unequal weapons. Also revealed is a theoretical stance that the weak are always inescapably devoured by those with authority, suggesting the certainty of the continuation of the cycle of victimhood and power.

There may also be dignity in silence, and maintaining unintelligibility may be a way of protecting the sovereignty of cultural traditions. Although it is necessary to warn against mythifying silence, as Castillo cautions this may designate the acceptance of a "marginal, magical role" (*Talking Back* 39) for women. The author's writing of the nana takes up this difficult contradiction. When the family travels to the hacienda and the girl must separate from the nana, her absence in this section does become mythified; she is given the power to transcend time and space in order to be there for the girl:

--Es hora de separarnos, niña.

Pero yo sigo en el suelo, cojida de su tzec, llorando porque no quiero irme. Ella me aparta delicadamente y me alza hasta su rostro. Besa mis mejillas y hace una cruz sobre mi boca.

--Mira que con lo que he rezado es como si hubiera yo vuelto, otra vez, a amamantarte (64).¹⁰³

The material reality of why the nana cannot go – because she is in danger of being harmed by *los brujos* – is obscured in favor of a transcendent love between the two, made possible by the

¹⁰³ "'It's time for us to say good-bye, my child.' But I stay on the ground and cling to her tzec, weeping for I don't want to go. She loosens my hold gently and raises me up to her face. She kisses me on the cheeks and makes the sign of the cross on my mouth. 'You see, what with all that praying it's as if I'd gone back to the times I gave you suck'" (Nicholson 62-63).

nana's bodily offering of breast milk. It is difficult indeed to conceive of the nana as not occupying that space for the girl – that is, that she somehow from a distance provides comfort to her surrogate daughter whose class is assailed by dramatic changes. In the end however that absence is demystified by the violent act of separation enacted by Zoraida and the subsequent imposition of facelessness that brings attention to the realities that leave her vulnerable to domination. In this encounter the nana's silence is at once defiant and a mark of the boundaries of her rebellion. She at first asserts her independence, telling Zoraida to not touch her, that she has no rights to her since she did not buy her with her dowry (231). Then refusing to deny what she said about Mario's fate, the nana's silence enrages Zoraida, but it does nothing to help the nana herself; as the girl recounts: "Ella no se defendía, no se quejaba. Yo las miré, temblando de miedo, desde mi lugar" (232).¹⁰⁴

It is necessary to acknowledge Castillo's in-depth analysis of the strategic uses of silence by those who have been silenced: "Silence," she affirms, "once freed from the oppressive masculinist-defined context of aestheticized distance and truth and confinement and lack, can be reinscribed as a subversive feminine realm" (*Talking Back* 40). In her analysis of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's use of negativity, she explains that there is a

no decir that is quite different from *callar*, in which the traversal of speech by the negative allows for a trace of its passage, maintaining her essential self at a safe spatiotemporal distance that both permits her free play of thought and subtly establishes her own agency as the concealed subjectivity alone capable of bridging the gap of silence (42).

¹⁰⁴ "Nana neither defends herself nor protests. From my corner I watch them, trembling with fear" (Nicholson 218).

I would relate her *no decir* which the act of the nana who “keeps silent”: *guarda silencio* codes other realities/experiences/stories that she could say, but will not. Zoraida’s accusation quoted at the beginning of this section, that the nana and those of her race have a way of walking without making a sound, and popping up where they are least expected, challenges an apolitical reading of the nana’s silence, since it is her agency of which Zoraida is most frightened. Moreover, the notion that she shares the same space but always threatens getting too close indicates that she has power that needs to be contained.

Furthermore, this scene finds that the nana initiates an encounter; it does not follow the implicit rules that she and Zoraida normally follow, that she maintain her distance. As the girl states: “Durante los años de su convivencia mi madre ha procurado hablar con ella lo menos posible; pasa a su lado como pasaría junto a un charco, remangándose la falda” (229).¹⁰⁵ Silence is not proposed as an answer, rather it is a sign of a “not yet” situation. The historical silence of the rural indigenous people of Chiapas remains unbroken; not to mythify it, but to bring attention to the larger colonial narrative of which all of the characters are a part. Instead of writing a utopian ending she leaves the nana in her absence from which she may critique and sway the girl’s quest. Moreover, although the girl often resists the nana’s voice, her willingness to listen indicated when she recognizes that she must wait for her nana’s responses, demonstrates a type of silence that has to do with listening to the other that Irigaray proposes when she states:

I am listening to you ... as the revelation of a truth that has yet to manifest itself – yours and that of the world revealed through and by you. I give you a silence in which your future – and perhaps my own, but *with* you and not *as* you and *without* you – may emerge and lay its foundation. ... It is a silence made possible by the fact that neither *I* nor *you*

¹⁰⁵ “During all the years they’ve lived in the same house, Mother’s tried to have as little to do with her as possible. She edges past her as she would circumvent a puddle, with petticoats drawn up” (Nicholson 216).

are everything, that each of us is limited, marked by the negative, non-hierarchically different. A silence that is the primary gesture of *I love to you*. Without it, the “to,” such as I understand it, is impossible (*I love* 117).

Irigaray’s understanding of this relationship as something that looks towards the future illustrates my argument that the silences enacted are neither wholly positive nor wholly negative; rather they indicate a situation of being with the other in which at times they are further away and other times closer to each other. Coming from the girl it is a small gesture that forges the possibility of understanding. The nana however also identifies the violence of “silencing,” using it to shield herself from appropriation but also falling into an apolitical silence when she has no opportunities for resistance.

2.6 ENCOUNTERS THROUGH INEQUALITIES

To think a freedom exterior to my own is the first thought. It marks my very presence in the world (Levinas 17).

Finally, I would like to further tackle the way that the nana escapes being the embodiment of oppression for the girl’s understanding. As the “*charco*” (puddle) with which Zoraida seeks to evade contact, the nana is dismissed by the mistress as less than human; but at the same time by not being seen she is able to maintain a space for herself exterior to the family. Through encounters by subjects that experience differential treatment past injustices and future inequalities emerge. The silence that is broken in the meeting between Zoraida and the nana is different from what was examined earlier; this time the nana keeps quiet, refusing to deny the truth of what she revealed about Mario’s fate regardless of Zoraida’s insistence that she recant;

infuriated, Zoraida strikes her, breaking the silence with a violent act. For the second time an Argüello woman resists a silence that may challenge her authority. Before this point any connection between the two women is unknown; there is only one passing mention by Zoraida of the nana's presence, claiming her ignorance of Spanish as proof that Indians are lesser beings: "La primera vez que vine a Chactajal quise enseñarle a hablar a la cargadora de la niña. Y ni atrás ni adelante. Nunca pudo pronunciar la *f*. Y todavía hay quienes digan que son iguales a nosotros" (96).¹⁰⁶ Her reaction to the nana's startling presence evokes again racist rhetoric that would posit the Indian as inferior, only worthy of receiving either reproach or charity from the "civilized." *How could she dare to approach the mistress, without first being invited to speak?* The nana's responses in this encounter are complex: in one sense she betrays the Indians of Chactajal by revealing their secrets, calling to mind the historical imaginings of La Malinche as collaborator and traitor. She also demonstrates resistance by insisting on telling the truth; yet in not acting in self-interest she exhibits loyalty to the family that possesses her. Nevertheless, like the girl's story of formation she negotiates a space between the self and socialization, refusing the normality that is expected of her. Therefore she does not fit easily into categorization, neither the emblematic passive Indian nor the figure of La Malinche.

It has been shown through silences that mark differences and that are reminders of inequalities that the relationship between self and other is presented not as static, but based upon a series of encounters through which each party is transformed each time. Even Zoraida transforms as a result of her encounter with the nana, as for the first time she must acknowledge a connection with indigenous thought. Ramírez points out that it is necessary to rethink the

¹⁰⁶ "The first time I came to Chactajal I wanted to teach the woman who looked after my baby. Not a word could she get into her head. She couldn't even pronounce the *f*. And yet there are people who say they're the same as us" (Nicholson 94).

position of self and other, a positioning that is not static, but rather one in which among others we are constantly displaced (64). Also, as stressed by Ahmed, there is a need for opening up encounters that are affected by race and class, to stress the multiple histories and futures potential in each moment (145). Offsetting the closed and one-sided communications of César and Zoraida is the impossibility of closure that the reader perceives. In *Intercultural Mediations*, Ana María Manzanás and Jesús Benito evoke the figure of Eshu to carry out this disruption: “Eshu disrupts their sense of friendship and community by revealing the emptiness of the surface harmony – buried in the past and in repetition – and thus ignites a healing process oriented towards a dynamic rethinking of their position towards each other” (2). Thinking in this light, given the encounters through inequalities there cannot be a successful bildungsroman in the conventional sense in which “the countless nuances of the social context blend together in a harmonious ‘personality’” (Moretti 21). The girl’s act of silencing is not the completion of anything, rather it is a process that has been repeated and will continue to be repeated in future encounters.

By way of conclusion, I argue that the relationship put forth at times approaches something like what Spivak refers to as “ethical singularity;” recognition of the full particularity of the other person in confrontation, in which responses flow from both sides (“Introduction” xxv).

We all know that when we engage profoundly with one person, the responses come from both sides: this is responsibility and accountability. We also know that in such engagements we want to reveal and reveal, conceal nothing. Yet on both sides there is always a sense that something has not got across. This we call the ‘secret,’ not something that one wants to conceal, but something that one wants to reveal (xxv).

This notion differs from Levinas' idea that responses are to the other's expressions and revelations (Levinas 197). In the context of this novel the girl is required to respond to what goes unsaid. It is the nana that maintains a secret between them, not to exclude the girl, but to assure that she uphold her individuality within their encounters. This type of relationship Spivak recognizes as impossible, yet an ideal to be strived for. She adds that this is why "ethics is the experience of the impossible" (xxv). In addition to this movement towards ethical singularity that valorizes two-way communication it should be recognized that the relationship cannot only be perceived as a whole which is either positive or negative; rather it ought to be viewed as a continuous reaction to scarring left from past encounters and the possibilities for future wounds. Spivak asserts that responsibility in the context of resistance consists of "responding and being responded to" (xxvi). By holding back information and requiring that the girl wait before she responds, the nana models the dialogue that demands that both sides listen, keeping in mind that one is always waiting for an adequate response. Castellanos works out an ethical response to what she has perceived in her life as her own privilege, combined with the discrimination that she experienced within a machista environment. Although it is clear that the pessimism at the end of the novel prevents either character from acting in resistance, Castellanos does open up a possibility for responding to the particularity of the subaltern in her novel. Aurora M. Ocampo states the following: "Rosario Castellanos supo escuchar las voces de los desposeídos porque ella también fue una desposeída, las voces de los oprimidos porque ella también fue una oprimida y las de los verdugos porque también tuvo ocasión de serlo" (qtd. in Castillo "Ashes" 245).¹⁰⁷ As a champion of the rights of the dispossessed Castellanos would need to recognize the

¹⁰⁷ "Rosario Castellanos knew to listen to the voices of the dispossessed because she also was disposed, the voices of the oppressed because she was also oppressed, and those of the tyrant because she also had the occasion to be one" (my translation).

complexities of her own space of enunciation in order to not continue the mistakes that were made in the past. Although I would stress again that responses must come from “both sides;” a possibility that is often not recognized in her work. That is to say, the girl’s striking erasure of the memory of her nana’s face leads the reader to forget the nana’s responses within their relationship.

What is more, thinking upon the stakes of forgetting, a key question is perhaps what it would have meant if she *were* to have remembered her nana, despite her removal from the house. She did not immediately forget her, in fact she went to the nana’s room and gathered her belongings, and imagined a place where they could be together. By the time however that Mario dies the girl has indeed grown “up”; no longer merely a “receptacle” of racist attitudes, she makes an individual choice to enunciate those attitudes that she has internalized. Honesty undoubtedly plays a part in her final admission, although the ending is also a refusal of simplistic inter-ethnic harmony.

In her poem “Destino” Castellanos troubles the idea of love as full acceptance of the other’s presence: “El aire no es bastante / para los dos. Y no basta la tierra / para los cuerpos juntos / y la ración de la esperanza es poca / y el dolor no se puede compartir” (*Poesía...* 171).¹⁰⁸ There is an uncomfortable destiny of inevitably devouring who you love – there is violence in the act of making someone equal. The question remains whether the two may exist simultaneously without being devoured. Left with the impression of an impossible relationship between equals, ethics mixes with social politics. The place of the nana is only to be there *for* the other. Her hours are not fixed, there is no family to go home to, yet she remains a stranger within the house that she resides. One would think that only power and hate could exist in this

¹⁰⁸ “There is not air enough / for both of us. And the earth will not hold / both our bodies / and our ration of hope is small / and pain cannot be shared” (Trans. Bogin 27).

situation, yet there is still love. Ironically she is allowed to live because of her invisibility (only noticed when the work is not done), because she is not looked at, not devoured in the eyes of the other. The love that exists between the two female characters is one that always runs the risk of appropriation; it demands affection and consumes the other's presence with longing. What allows the recognition of singularity is separation: as Levinas contends, "[t]he relation with the Other does not nullify separation" (251). It would be impossible for the "self" to abolish exteriority; there are always traces left after an encounter, like the ashes that are left without a face.

The faceless nana at the end is something different than the violence of conceiving of someone as the absolute Other: her invisibility reveals complacency on the part of the narrator, which figures something like recognition of complicity. In her analysis of the troubling end of the novel, I think Castillo gets it right; to point out that the failure of the little girl to recognize the face of her nana actually parallels the narcissism of the genre of female (semi-) autobiography itself, thereby forming a critique that insists upon a reality at the same time as it questions it. If Castellanos rejects this fantasy, she proposes instead a community that takes into account loss and the inability to have complete knowledge of the other. In Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of "being singular plural" he offers an idea concerning the modern community, suggesting that "[p]erhaps everything happens between loss and appropriation: neither one nor the other, nor one and the other, nor one in the other, but much more strangely than that, much more simply" (13). The girl and the nana do share commonalities, but the failure to develop this into "unity" is not the way in which their capacity for building alliances should be judged. Castillo states that the final words of the narration "offer an implicit commentary on the communal/self-portrait she is in the process of drawing/erasing" ("Ashes" 266). I pose this

statement to my original thesis – criticism that uses individuation as an anchor to classify the novel of female development is inadequate to describe the degree of criticism that *Balún Canán* brings onto itself. Castillo points out perceptively that the work uncomfortably “opens with a tale of silencing and closes with a strictly parallel act of silencing: the negation turned against itself” (258). I have insisted that what must be added to this formulation are the willful silences of the nana in-between those two acts that confront the domination of the Spanish text. As I have stated, the girl does imagine another possibility before the loss of face happens. She imagines other possibilities, but to actually represent that possibility outside of a dream would be utopian. What is more, in that space she dreams that Mario would also be successful, maintaining a sense of permanence in a space “above” them. Harkening back to the kite scene, the place where the two would be together is

[l]a gran llanura de Nicalococ y su cielo constelado de papalotes. Habrá algunos que vuelen a ras del suelo por falta de cordel. Otros que desde arriba se precipitarán con las varas quebradas y el papel hecho trizas. Pero el de Mario permanecerá, en medio de los más altos, de los más ligeros, de los más hermosos, como una estrella fija y resplandeciente (244-45).¹⁰⁹

As a girl her imagination is limited by what she knows to be possible, and the place for her nana that she hopes for is one in which she is there for comfort, to be there in that alternative space wherein she is not allowed to join in the kite contest, but she nevertheless uses that time to discover the wind. I contend that it is not the novel that is a failure because it fails to live up to the genre, but rather the novel highlights a double failure: the writer illustrates that one cannot

¹⁰⁹ “The great plain of Nicolocac and the kites like constellations in the heavens. Some are flying close to the ground, because their strings are short. Others drop out of the sky with broken props and paper in shreds. But Mario’s kite stays there among the highest and the lightest and most beautiful, like a fixed star brightly burning” (Nicholson 229-30).

speaking *for* the subaltern, and neither can the subaltern speak within the confines of her text. But the fragments that remain reveal that in the end the girl knows that there is no complete absolution; that her connection with her nana does not alleviate her responsibility.

3.0 JEAN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*: RETRIEVING THE COLONIZED VOICE IN ANTOINETTE'S ANXIOUS NARRATION

Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now (Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea 66).

Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough. They can be recognized. White faces, dazed eyes, aimless gestures, high-pitched laughter. They way they walk and talk and scream or try to kill (themselves or you) if you laugh back at them. Yes, they've got to be watched (WSS 172).

Wide Sargasso Sea, West Indian-born writer Jean Rhys' final and most acclaimed novel, placed her work decisively within the realm of postcolonial literature. Presenting a woman's voice within anti-colonial discourse, as well as the perspective of an exile from the planter class in the West Indies, the novel is continuously summoned in debates concerning race, feminism, and *place* in the West Indian novel. Even though it was written from her space of England, it has been referred to as West Indian given its reflection of exile and a desire to reconnect with the author's Caribbean homeland (this of course has been a subject of extensive debate). She began writing the novel in 1945, although this also marked a considerable time when Rhys published nothing at all, during which she witnessed the nationalist movements of former colonies and the collapse of the British Empire, presumably leading her to then write within a postcolonial framework and to deal more forcefully with issues of race and class. According to Judith Raiskin this content made *Wide Sargasso Sea* a "radical departure" from her previous novels, which were more concerned with "rejected womanhood" (103) – alluding to the criticism often

leveled at her work that it is fatalistic, with heroines who wallow in their victimhood. Also, this is the only one of her novels set in the Caribbean, demonstrating a clear change in perspective for Rhys.

Faced with criticism that seeks to separate her feminist from her more “serious” writings that would deal with social issues, *WSS* tends to be judged according to how well the author is actually able to depart from those concerns of female subject formation. But the matters of race and cultural identity had in fact been prominent in her other writings, intertwined with that of feminine subjectivity. While she was concerned with the self-constitution of the feminine subject, heroines that looked to escape into interiority were put under pressure by the demands and desires of the social landscape. Her short story “The Day They Burned the Books,” for example, prefigures the themes of *WSS*. Her characters’ fixation with color is revealed, obeh is introduced as an alternative logic, and the stability of Englishness as an identity is questioned by the protagonist:

It was Eddie with the pale blue eyes and straw-coloured hair – the living image of his father, though often as silent as his mother – who first infected me with doubts about ‘home’, meaning England. He would be so quiet when others who had never seen it – none of us had ever seen it – were talking about its delights (*CSS* 152-153).

Throughout *WSS* essentialist claims to cultural and gender identities are also broken down and demystified through characters that do not quite fit into social norms. Heavily preoccupied with color, insurmountable fears concerning “mixed blood” lead to madness, abandonment of love, betrayal, and death. Specifically in this case, white feminine purity is a sign against which the female characters are situated, creating a traumatic narrative in which Creole women find themselves haunted by their connection to the brutalities of the plantation system yet abandoned

themselves by Whites after emancipation. Despite Antoinette's recognition of difference, her desire for the protection that Englishness would offer demonstrates her specifically Creole position which, in the words of Raiskin, is "both resistant to and complicit with colonial definitions of status and place" (120).

These themes prove to offer extensive fodder for postcolonial critics; of particular note are Spivak's analysis in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" and Parry's later critique of Spivak's work.¹¹⁰ Ensuing criticism since 1985 has been preoccupied with the way in which we read the "colonized woman," suggesting a feminist ethics having to do with the challenge that the text presents to imperialist ideologies, which the reader would negotiate with the modernist aesthetics of the narrative. As I have cited in the earlier chapter, although Antoinette's nanny is tangential to the narrative, for Spivak she also "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" ("TWT" 156).¹¹¹ Her reading shows that the non-elite woman marks the limits of the text's own discourse, while Parry attempts to expand even further the character's role, pointing to the ways in which she "disrupts" the text and "defies" discriminatory discourses that would define her (Parry 40). My reading owes much to Parry's language, in that I indicate the ways in which the nanny has an independent voice that speaks against imperialism and patriarchal thought. Importantly, the force of her posturing is unfeasible for the heroine. The women relate to each other as powerful and powerless; although,

¹¹⁰ Focusing on her analysis of *WSS*, Parry asserts that Spivak has a "deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard" (40). By focusing on the protagonist's position within the discourse of the European female individualist, Parry posits that Spivak does not recognize the specific "settler discourse" that is "distinct from the texts of imperialism" (39).

¹¹¹ As Nun Halloran and others have demonstrated, the use of "native" by Spivak shows her simplification of race and nationality in the novel to assume a white/black binary. Nun Halloran points out: "Rhys's text imagines a complex spectrum of black Creole identities – Jamaican and Martinican – as well as occasional performances of black Englishmen, but no one describes himself or herself as or is ever called a 'native'" (102).

the nanny defies classification, complicating the heroine's attempts to identify herself through narcissistic imaginings of who the other should be. Through a comparison with the other writers in this study, I intend to reveal the heavy preoccupation of women writers with the possibility for creating community. The ability to connect with other women is seen as a central concern, leading to ambivalent narrations that portray the shame and disappointment of not being able to reach those ideals.

As part of the English canon of literature, *WSS* is well-known as the postcolonial revision of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 *Jane Eyre*, the female Bildungsroman *par excellence*. The novel aims to write the prequel to *Jane Eyre*; this one meant to tell the story from the side of the "madwoman in the attic," Bertha Mason, whose grunts and animal-like behavior seemed to Rhys to be misunderstood within the English text. Rhys discusses her reasons for writing the novel in a 1979 interview: "When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been" (Vreeland 235). Therefore she chose to give voice to the "madwoman" who had been brought from the West Indies to England, and to rewrite her not as uncivilized, but as a victim of forced exile, and gender and race oppression. Rhys connected with her character as a Creole woman also born in the West Indies, and valorized her unintelligibility as a sign of resistance to her husband's patriarchal rule. She stated that Bertha "seemed such a poor ghost," that she thought she would like to "write her a life" (qtd. in Baer 132). Bertha in Rhys' vision would not be her actual name, but one given to her by her husband Edward Rochester as an act of colonization (this act is turned back upon Rochester by the author by never giving his full name). Rhys imagines her actual name to have been Antoinette – "Bertha is not my name," Antoinette tells

her husband. “You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeah too” (147). Her protest reveals a concern with the imperialist act of making others the same – Spivak explains: “Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism” (“TWT” 153). Obeah according to Antoinette’s understanding means the ability to influence and control other people, significantly happening through the power of naming, a speech act in which the addresser’s language and performance are one. As a foreshadowing of my assertions regarding the interactions between speech and silence, I reiterate obeah’s relationship to action as opposed to silence.

The plot follows Antoinette Cosway from childhood living on a disintegrating Jamaican planter estate with her mother Annette, to the burning down of the estate by black rioters, her subsequent comfortable life in a convent school, and then arranged marriage to an Englishman (*Jane Eyre’s* Mr. Rochester) and eventual descent into madness after being renamed and taken to England. Her nurse (*da*) Christophine is a compelling presence, staying with the family after the fire, and returning after Antoinette leaves the convent to take care of the newly-married couple. It is Rochester’s voice that I cite in the beginning, who describes his wife as one of those zombie-like beings with “white faces” and “dazed eyes.” He separates himself firmly from “they” – Creoles with mixed blood, dangerous, and “aimless” in a world in which they belong nowhere. Therefore the madness that he isolates within Thornfield Manor to be “watched,” is not only located within Bertha; rather it is that of all Creoles who have no history and who can never achieve English virtues of purity and individuality.

The text opens with a concise framing of race relations according to the narrator’s understanding: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we

were not in their ranks” (17). The difference between “we” and “they” is established, and immediately Rhys’ preoccupations with “ethnic identification and the management of difference” (Lonsdale 55) are revealed. If solid categories of “white” and “black” offer comfort and safety to Antoinette, she had now been cast out into an indeterminacy of meaning and identity. While *Balún Canán* begins with the colonial act of silencing as a means of conquest, here there is an initial act of exclusion forming the marginality from which the protagonist will speak. Silence emerges in this text as an inability of the narrator to speak to her own oppression, as well as in her occlusion of realities that threaten the identity that she is constructing for herself through the story. By way of telling her own story she seemingly defies Brontë’s characterization of Bertha as animal-like; but Rochester’s competing narration and the presence of the marginalized voice make developing a coherent subjectivity impossible. From Rhys’ account Antoinette’s ultimate submissiveness is what will imprison her at Thornfield Hall; her only expressions of agency realized through madness and suicide (it is through those forms that she resists the efforts to formulate her identity from without). Excluded from whiteness and unable to embrace her Caribbeanness, Antoinette narrates her victimization within a social system dictated by an unnamed “they.” As the female other to her husband’s and stepfather’s influences, she finds herself doubly victimized by gender and race, and a victim of discrimination from Blacks as well as Whites. As Vivian Nun Halloran describes, the novel suggests that “social demarcations between English and Creole cultural identities are artificial because they ultimately depend on chance – on the geographical accident of a given person’s or character’s place of birth” (88). While she is positioned between a deteriorating landholding class and the black servants who continued to maintain her survival, she works to separate herself from both in order to become a model wife (based upon English values), thus attempting

to be included within the ranks of the colonizers. Most importantly, while being captured as the Other against which Jane would formulate her identity, Antoinette/Bertha in this novel displays the same narcissistic tendencies as her identity is cultivated, and the unwillingness to allow the lower classes to define her identity from without; which will be exhibited in her relationships with servant women. It will not be until she experiences alienation from her husband and eventual exile in England, that she begins to question the naturalness of race discrimination and colonial relations.

Rhys sets her text loosely between Jamaica and Dominica in the transition period after the Emancipation Act passed in 1833, when the plantocracy was experiencing the ruin of its power base and the meanings of what it meant to be white and black were shifting. Interestingly she adjusts the chronology of *Jane Eyre* to fit her own family's time and space – Peter Hulme explains that there are several features that suggest that the descriptions of the setting are more characteristic of Dominica (where Rhys grew up) than Jamaica (which Rhys never saw), and the time period is sometime after 1840 when Rhys would have known more about her own family's history, and thus would have most likely drawn upon personal stories.¹¹² In Brontë's novel Bertha would have lived in Jamaica probably before 1820 (Hulme 78), and consequently readings focusing on the comparison of the two novels would need to take these discrepancies into account. The reworking of the framework in order to insert her personal and family history into the plot is telling, as it indicates that although it is not an autobiography, there may be a

¹¹² Rhys was born in Dominica in 1890, her father was an immigrant from Wales and her mother, Minna Lockheart, was of the fourth generation of plantation owners. The first Lockhart to have land in Dominica was Scot James Potter Lockhart, who bought 1,000 sugar-growing acres in 1824, with 200 or more slaves (Sternlicht, 1). Sternlicht also states that ten years after emancipation former slaves burned down the Lockheart's manor house, although Hulme disputes that fact, pointing out that in records there is no evidence of the estate actually burning (81).

confessional element to this text that emerges out of that conflicted history.¹¹³ Characters need not be employed as direct representatives in an autobiographical manner to exhibit signs of the author's attitudes. As Bakhtin contends, a novel is never actually an author's direct confession, but nevertheless "since form always stands in dialogic relations to her experience, it assumes confessional qualities" (qtd. in Smith 40). This is significant in what the novel can tell us about the psychological effects of colonialism and the possibilities of moving beyond a state of victimization in order to form valuable alliances that would counter discrimination.

The possibilities for a reconstruction of family memory that would reclaim Antoinette's subjectivity in a revision of Brontë's novel is mediated by Antoinette's (and possibly Rhys') desire to distance herself from colonial guilt. Antoinette remains a "poor ghost" in the sense that she is incapable of achieving the intersubjectivity that a successful female bildungsroman would require.¹¹⁴ It may be telling that Rhys chooses to address her protagonist's background in a way that is reflective of her own, frequently emphasizing the Creoles' victimization rather than the reality of her family's social status as plantation owners, which would have affected the life of her surrogate mother. Her guilt generates this type of unwillingness to unleash colonial skeletons in a direct manner, producing a text that conceals more than it exposes.

In parts the novel becomes less a story of Rochester's domination, and more about Antoinette's inability to connect with a Caribbean reality most readily represented by her childhood nurse Christophine, and her black friend Tia, mirroring Rhys' preoccupation with being able to connect with her West Indian heritage. The anti-colonial work of the novel lies

¹¹³ In fact Rhys was sure to insist that Antoinette was not an autobiographical character: "This is nothing to do with me. It is imagination, and the time is 1840 or so, when really I wasn't alive" (*Letters* 162). In any case this family history certainly makes its way into the novel. I agree with Hulme who declares that *WSS* is writing "out of that family history" (76).

¹¹⁴ Vron Ware speaks of the European women's liberation movement of the sixties, affirming that in Britain there could be few middle-class families that did not have colonial connections, a reality that was too often met with silence by those feminists (228).

mostly in the psychological domain, working through those relationships, leaving material and economic change unimaginable for the young protagonist. For those reasons I will complement my reading of the novel with elements of Rhys' life as told in her autobiography and in letters, in which she expresses many of the same concerns that are revealed through her characterization of Antoinette.

The form is similar to that of *Balún Canán* in that it is divided into three parts, the first and third being narrated by Antoinette, and the second almost exclusively by Rochester, with one direct change to Antoinette's perspective and other occasional interventions that are seemingly his wife's refracted voice. This novel is distinctly more modernist in style, with a constant allusion to truths that wait to be uncovered through surrealist techniques and an overwrought subjectivity that tends to obscure the history of the island. The third section brings Antoinette to Thornfield Hall and her descent into madness, where she will "dream the end of [her] dream" (WSS 111). This final segment begins with an overheard conversation between Grace Poole, a character from *Jane Eyre*, and Leah, which is further evidence according to Keith A. Russell that Antoinette has been deeply embedded into colonial ideology since she is no longer capable of entering into dialogue with the exterior world, and the narrative ego is not able to process their conversation through its own point of view. The disappearance of Antoinette's voice represents another shift in the narration, in which Antoinette's identity is left "fragmented and incomplete" (Russell 101). Hence this text does not perform in a way that would be considered positive for a novel of female development – although the first-person narration dominates it is challenged throughout, and eventually disintegrated.

While the girl in Castellanos' novel searched for an often uncomfortable and unbearable history told in manuscripts and by the indigenous people she was in contact with, Antoinette

suppresses curiosity and works to bury anything that would reveal her as anything but a victim of oppression. When the family's estate is burned the narration begs for sympathy from the reader – after all, as women Antoinette and her mother were victims themselves, independent of the decision-making of the white men that enslaved the Blacks. Moreover, Antoinette is sure to assert that she herself has no memory of the prosperity of the place, thus distinguishing herself from that history. Providing some of the historical work necessary for this text's analysis, Hulme writes of Rhys' replacement of historical facts with false memories. Most revealing in his study is the way in which Rhys described her grandfather, the "old" Lockheart. The burning of the estate house is an event based upon one in Rhys' family history, about which she states: "It was during my grandfather's life, sometime in the 1830's, that the first estate house was burnt down by the freed negroes after the Emancipation Act was passed. He was, apparently, a mild man who didn't like the situation at all" (qtd. in Hulme 81). What interests Hulme is that this has been assumed as fact, when there was actually no fire at Geneva. Also, Rhys' grandfather whom she describes as "mild" was actually the subject of investigation for "acts of cruelty" having to do with people whose census details he was supposed to be collecting (Hulme 82). By mentioning this is not to provide a hidden meaning to the novel, rather it is to illustrate the complexities of the writer's planter background and how this influences the way in which she writes her revisionist text. Her sympathies were with all of the marginalized, but like Antoinette her loyalties remained with her family and their honorable reputation, and she would tend to distort facts that were upsetting or threatening to her concept of self.

Furthermore, instead of the second section moving towards realism in a shift towards objectivity, the narration here is told from the perspective of Rochester, undermining the "I narrative" with another controlling subjectivity. Even while his section seems like an invasion,

another act of appropriation directed towards Antoinette, it is also the case that neither narration can be trusted; and his offers an interesting alternative perspective to Antoinette's attitudes and behaviors. He witnesses for example the ways that she is silent, the times when she evades history, and the love between her and Christophine which he perceives as an allegiance with the cultural "other" that further removes her from any sense of Englishness. The destabilization of the first-person narration helps us to gain insight into Antoinette's ambivalence towards place, and her responsibility in the face of the remnants of slavery that surround her.

The dominant readings of the novel that lean towards a portrayal of Rochester as the oppressor and Antoinette as the consummate victim are encouraged by Antoinette's seduction of the reader, to win us over to the naturalness of the colonial ideology that maintains gender and racial hierarchies. She endeavors to narrate herself into a white woman's history, separating herself from "coloured" people and attempting to close ranks with Whites. Rochester complicates these efforts when he describes her eyes, highlighting her difference from Europeans: "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (67). To resist the narration is to uncover what Mieke Bal calls its "hidden agenda" (qtd. in Van Neck-Yoder 194), which is to convince us that she is the victim of circumstances, and also not of mixed blood. In addition it may be emphasized that this agenda is mostly motivated by a will for survival, which is based upon being intelligible to others, and therefore worthy of protection. Liminality is dangerous; "passing" for her is advantageous, given that to be a white woman means to be afforded political and economic protections. To be "not quite," leaves her vulnerable to further marginalization and exile.

Accordingly an analysis of the implied author is particularly salient in this text, as through each narration there is a distinct process of retelling history, an act of control that the

reader perceives, thus forming his or her own judgment of what is missing from each version. Realities are located between characters, within conversations and silences, not within any one voice. As previously mentioned, Antoinette will go even further to deny certain realities of colonialism by claiming an ignorance of motives and context – although she claims to Rochester that she is not a forgetting person, of the burning of the estate house she only relates that it was a “sacred place,” and leaves out all of the circumstances behind the devastation. Rochester contemplates how much of what she says is “true”: “Certainly many of the old estate houses were burned. You saw ruins all over the place” (133). Different voices compete within the text and various attitudes are interjected; none is given ultimate authority.

Rochester is in fact cautioned by Antoinette’s statement, “[t]here is always the other side, always” (128). Displacing any accounts that may disguise themselves as the “truth,” the narrative voice is continuously complemented with subtext, often in the form of dreams that undermine the central female development plot. Negotiations of truth are undertaken through dialogue between central and minor characters, and Antoinette, as the daughter of slaveholders, holds onto the hope that if certain things are left unsaid there is the chance that they won’t actually be true. But as Hilda Van Neck-Yoder perceptively points out, the listener to her story, the reader, distinguishes that which she leaves unsaid, and therefore “her version of the experience--her censored narrative--fails to construct ‘real’ events” (189). Silence with respect to certain experiences in this case fails to provoke change; it is only a debilitating silence that further reinstates her victimhood. In one sense, in the absence of a history of colonization told “from below” there could be no truth; but also truth is idealized as an alternative to the chaos of “native culture” – this presents a view of colonial culture that at once laments the loss of “sense” that was provided by Eurocentric ideals in the plantations system, while making room for

alternative logics by displacing assertions of any essential truth. Accordingly there is a simultaneous deconstruction of Eurocentric viewpoints that the protagonist finds suffocating and a demonstration of her allegiance to them when it is necessary for her survival.

Seeing as specificities concerning slavery are obscured as part of the protagonist's silencing of shameful events from her family's history, it may be said that her character embodies the forgetting of black slavery, and it becomes the work of the reader to uncover in the traces left behind and in the subtext of her dialogue the obscured historical realities. Antoinette draws the reader's focus upon the way in which others have mistreated her, at the same time distancing herself from her family's slave-holding past. In one telling instance she explains to her husband the term "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" (102). While the reader sympathizes with her suffering as a result of injurious speech, it is also noted that she slyly places her "people" as rightly belonging to the Caribbean since they were there before slavery, and names slave traders as part of a crime that happened in Africa by Africans, a history of which she only feels the effects. Adopting this enduring dismissal of responsibility for suffering, she places herself within a discourse that would name Africans savages, whose crime is the unwillingness to be civilized. The mis- and un-remembering that she undertakes tells us more about the planter class during post-emancipation and their feelings towards slavery than we would have known if she had provided a mere historical account. Another sharp example of this is when Antoinette is asked by Rochester why a village would be named Massacre, and she insists that it no longer holds any meaning. She attempts to erase the clearly violent past evoked in the name, which would be plain even to those that do not know the history. In any case, Hulme affirms that Antoinette, like Rhys, certainly would have known to which history that

name referred; the 1674 killing of Indian Warner, the half-Carib son of a prominent English colonist, Sir Thomas Warner (Hulme 80). “She sounded shocked,” Rochester relates. ““Not slaves. Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now”” (65-66).¹¹⁵

Her willingness to comply with the erasure of rebellion disturbingly reminds the reader of her father and grandfather’s slaveholding past, something that is only revealed through the questionable source of Daniel Cosway – Antoinette’s illegitimate brother, who she is consistent in dismissing as a liar. In his letter to Rochester he writes: “I am your wife’s brother by another lady, half-way house we say. Her father and mine was a shameless man and of all his illegitimates I am the most unfortunate and poverty stricken” (96). Daniel tells Rochester that he was not the first man that his wife had been with, that she had been involved with Sandi, whose father was the half brother of Daniel and whose mother was very fair, and therefore Daniel states that he was “like a white man, but more handsome ... and received by many white people they say” (125). Responding to Rochester’s accusation that Daniel is her brother, Antoinette is sure to include herself within the ranks of the white colonizers, stating the following: “He hates all white people, but he hates me the most. He tells lies about us and he is sure that you will believe him and not listen to the other side” (128). The concealment of the affair with Sandi and her biological ties to Daniel, suggest Antoinette’s deep-seated fear of being associated with a tainted race.

What are most striking in these constant shifts of perception as Antoinette’s history is revealed through others, are the wavering interactions between self and other. The cover art of the Norton paperback copy of the novel (done by Tim Gaydos) pictures a green lush landscape

¹¹⁵ Thomas describes the history at Massacre as “the betrayal of a half-sibling, racial tension exacerbated by the shame of miscegenation and illegitimacy, vengeance, and doubt over the paternity of the mixed-race illegitimate child” (173) – all themes that surface in the novel.

with red flowers popping out; no doubt representative of the wildness of the country that Antoinette refers to as that which replaced their Christian-like garden after slavery had been abolished: “Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. ... All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery – why should *anybody* work?” (19). The italicized any- “body” draws attention to the notion that the Other in this case is that mass of strangers that has allowed everything to go wild. Work as connected with blackness is not directly articulated, ironically left unquestioned; the blame for the believed degeneration of society is inferred to be directed towards black “bodies” that challenge civilization. The beauty and peace of Eden was disrupted, turning everything to “bush.” Standing out alone in the picture, slightly off-center, is a girl’s white face, expressionless, with lifeless, perhaps zombie-like eyes. To her immediate left is the outline of a black face, lacking all features so that it actually only depicts the absence of a face that blends into the green and red background. Her one gold hoop earring and scarf tell us that she is a woman; we may assume that she is the nurse Christophine, also distinguished from the wildness through her loyalty to the girl’s family.

The cover art illustrates my thesis regarding the novel: that it is no doubt the story of the development of the Creole girl, the rescued madwoman in the attic, whose longing for selfhood is proven impossible within an oppressive social context; but in that narrative Christophine, the “other mother,” is also always present, distinguished at times but also forming part of the “landscape” for Antoinette. While a marginal character, her importance to the narrator’s concept of self cannot be denied. We see that there is interplay between what is hidden and what is apparent; the hidden stands to attention as the narrator tries desperately not to disappear into that lushness, where the outline of her *self* is scarcely apparent. She will prefer to construct her “I”

within Rochester's ideology rather than be taken in by the "overgrowth," narrating for herself a life in which others are responsible for any obstacles to her development. She is well aware that her choices as a Creole woman are limited, yet fails to recognize her complicity with the system that keeps her oppressed.

Rescuing Bertha and valorizing her West Indian experience did not mean that Rhys changed the outcome of Brontë's tale; Antoinette remains a colonized woman whose victimization is partly her own fault, given that she fails to assert a voice that is independent of that of the colonizers. She remains a "poor ghost," who nonetheless had a life independent of being Jane's Other, to which Brontë presumably would not have been able to do justice in her English text. But in writing the Caribbean from her space in England, Rhys would come across the same challenges, entangled by the distance with her birthplace, and her own ambivalence towards the black Caribbean population. It is not a merely oppositional text; it instead connects with an English novelistic tradition that it simultaneously seeks to subvert. One may note in the text an intertwining of the narrative tradition represented by *Jane Eyre* with a pattern of rupture and exile that searches for a West Indian reality. To some extent Rhys works within the same liberal feminist form of *Jane Eyre* to create a space for the Caribbean woman, although we may guess that while creating a space in which Antoinette could speak, there was another *sub*-subaltern that came into visibility, whose presence becomes the opposite on which Antoinette's identity is constructed. While Rhys was compelled to rescue Bertha from Brontë's text that did not comprehend Bertha's West Indian reality, in the same way it may be inferred that Christophine's reality is incomprehensible to Rhys; the way in which she emerges in the text is equally beyond what Rhys would have expected. Just as Bertha consisted of Jane's opposite (her

other side), so does Antoinette have an uncivilized “other” who haunts her process of individuation.

In writing a story for Antoinette that parallels in many ways Jane’s female bildungsroman, she would have to recognize the gaze of the other that also assesses her means of individuation, and that signals what she leaves out of the story. Rhys’ ambivalence towards writing characters that were far from her own experience is in part related to her experience of exile and her fears of being excluded from a cultural imagination based upon race. Part of the imaginary that surfaces in West Indian literature that stands out in this novel is that of separation, and of being the outsider. Her text becomes more than a revision of a classic feminist text in order to include the West Indian woman; she is also in a process of discovering her own West Indianness.

Rhys expressed in letter written in 1936 during her only trip back to Dominica, where she lived until the age of sixteen, that she felt “distrust” of British writers working on the Caribbean since she could not imagine being able to write about a place without loving it, having lived there, or having been there (qtd. in Raiskin 123).¹¹⁶ Even though she spent most of her life outside of her birthplace, the way in which she relates her experience of exile may be compared to Edward Said’s well-known account, in which he states that it is not something sad or deprived; on the contrary “belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide enables you to understand them more easily” (xxvii). The idea of belonging for Rhys was equally complicated, given that Dominica was someplace from which she felt alienated, but at the same time she loved it like part of herself, or a lost family member. Therefore in rewriting *Bertha*, it

¹¹⁶ I mention as an aside that she does not take into account the tradition of Caribbean writers in exile in Britain, which began largely after World War II when large numbers of emigrants went to Britain for employment (see Marsh-Lockett and West, ii). This disconnect is noteworthy given that although her writing was marked by exile, she did not seem to be connected professionally within a community of other Caribbean writers in exile.

may also be inferred that Rhys aimed to build a connection with her homeland in the West Indies. Moreover, by including women of color with whom she had trouble connecting, she demonstrates that side of West Indianness that she is connected to through the history of colonial violence, but that she cannot claim as a part of herself without recognizing her own complicities.

While Edward K. Brathwaite has notably questioned her inclusion in the canon of West Indian literature, citing that her separation from the local realities as a white Creole she could only necessarily speak with an “outsider’s voice;”¹¹⁷ she has influenced later writers such as Michelle Cliff who praises Rhys for being able to portray Bertha from the inside, “using the lens of the colonized female questioning colonization” (42). As a woman writer her perspective and intervention into the canon are fundamental; Raikin states that until Rhys’ work “the theoretical debate [of colonialism] couches itself in terms that are strikingly male” (108). Rhys indeed paves the way for other West Indian women writers, and shows a concern with her exclusion from the patriarchal writing system, which is represented in the text through the trope of the lost mother. But like Castellanos she is also able to give us the perspective of the colonizers, who were terrified of the changes on the island after emancipation. Important for this study is that criticism of her work that questions her capacity to speak for a Caribbean reality, also highlights a discomfort with the way in which privilege should be handled, and uneasiness with disentangling who can speak for whom. Moreover the apprehension towards subjectivity that

¹¹⁷ Wally Look Lai was the first West Indian critic to claim the novel as a West Indian novel in 1968, while Edward Brathwaite later argued that white writers could only represent an “outsider’s voice” and thus had nothing of relevance to say to a West Indian literary tradition (qtd. in O’Callaghan 19). He strongly contended that the Creoles cannot meaningfully identify with the spiritual world of the West Indies, asserting that the majority of white West Indian writers are not prepared to let their art “erode the boundaries set up around their minds by the physical/metaphysical plantation, and so do not yet recognize that their world has become marginal to the majority sense of local reality” (79). The inclusion of white West Indian writers in the canon was argued for by Ramchand, who points out that these writers have the distinct ability of portraying the terrified consciousness of the elites. By only exploring the voices of the “colonized” postcolonial theory runs the risk of staticizing the realities of the oppressed and ignoring the “other side,” meaning that structures of domination are not significantly destabilized.

would frame the bildungsroman as insignificant to social criticism is noteworthy for feminist readings of the novel. The victimhood that Antoinette experiences has to do with not being able to identify with a group without being stigmatized as either not European or not Caribbean enough. Much criticism of the text is directed towards the conception of Antoinette as the victim to forces beyond her control, making her inadequate as a feminist heroine; but it seems that the narration is more sophisticated than a simple story of victimization, especially since we do know that it was Rhys' intention to rescue Bertha from being considered the mere silent victim of Jane's text. Carmen Wickramagamage makes clear that Rhys' "particular version of otherness cannot stand for the marginalization of all others who share the same geo-political space with her" (39).¹¹⁸ I argue that it does not seem that Rhys intended to write an allegorical novel of a Caribbean reality; instead there are multiple and nuanced expressions of realities, intertwined in a way that indicates differential oppressions. That is, with the inclusion of the voices of other women who offer judgment and criticism of the protagonist, Rhys makes it known that she is writing the Caribbean from a perspective that is outside of many of the experiences of her characters. It is not therefore a text that tries to speak for a West Indian reality through the leading narration's brand of subjectivity; rather it highlights the standpoint of one West Indian Creole woman, emphasizing the ways in which she has been oppressed, and the ways that she has been blind to other realities that surround her.

¹¹⁸ There has also been much discourse with respect to where Antoinette's allegiance lies; a demand for racial constancy that falls onto the author. The same questions of authenticity that form the basis of criticism of Castellanos' works arise with respect to Rhys: who is she speaking for and when? Which oppression is she speaking to? That which is based on race *or* gender? Wickramagamage for example notes "schizophrenic loyalties" (30), yet sees that the narration is more willing to occlude the oppressions caused by her father's class, and to hold Blacks up as the cause of her suffering: "she never holds her father, or the socio-economic ethos he represented, responsible for their difficulties in the present. However, she is more than willing to blame the blacks for their present predicament which she considers 'undeserved'" (Wickramagamage 35). Her argument assumes too much about the writer's intentions, ignoring the workings of the implied author that hold the protagonist responsible for her positionality. Antoinette may be portrayed through a lens of victimization, but her exclusions would be evident to the discerning reader.

Critical reception of the novel thus tends to be directed towards whether or not it is too burdened by Antoinette's "victimhood" to be considered a novel of female liberation. With respect to what she observes to be ubiquitous victimhood, Nicola Nixon asserts that unlike *Jane Eyre*, Rhys' novel is actually an "anti-feminist" text given that there are no feminist prototypes to assert independence (qtd. in Wickramagamage 28). Antoinette does play the victim, but this posturing is not offered in the novel as an answer, nor is subjugation presented as the only path that a woman could take. Furthermore it is clear that Christophine makes assertions of independence, thus perhaps Nixon had overlooked the possibilities for her feminism.

More accurately than the nonexistence of a feminist voice, Antoinette exhibits a "vicarious victimhood,"¹¹⁹ shifting focus from the plight of the blacks to the struggles of her own family. By hanging onto oppression she assures that she takes the side of the oppressed while distancing herself from the victimizers; but in this act she denies any authentic confrontation with her existence that would be a necessary step towards developing a coherent subjectivity. This is relevant in a study of the marginalized women in the text: it will be seen that Tia judges Antoinette for her short-sightedness, and Christophine criticizes the disingenuousness of Antoinette's silence. Thus the placement of the other's gaze does more than provide Antoinette with an indispensable experience of double-consciousness; it also offers an outside to Antoinette's perceptions in order to question her efforts at solidarity and present alternative possibilities that would not have been possible for this character.

What is more, it may be that Rhys fails to connect meaningfully with the Afro-Caribbean context of her novel (of course taking into consideration Brathwaite's criticism anything *but*

¹¹⁹ This is Dominick LaCobra's term cited by Raiskin (18), referring to when an oppressor takes over the position of oppressed by shifting focus of empathetic identification back onto themselves. Burrows also finds offensive what she calls Rhys' appropriation of the Afro-Caribbean concepts of maroonage and zombification, as they then become symbols for the status of the white Creole subject.

failure would be inauthentic); but I also agree with critics such as Ramchand, Victoria Burrows, and Evelyn O'Callaghan that we need a deconstruction of whiteness in order to view more meaningfully the structures of power that are in operation. Very much resembling Castillo's thesis regarding Castellanos' resistance of writing a utopian narrative which I described in the first chapter, George Handley defends Rhys in the following way:

Rhys tries to represent Antoinette's need and desire for blackness as escape, but ultimately Antoinette is aware of the ironic limits of such a project. ... Therefore, Rhys's representations of blackness are not constructive of whiteness but serve to deconstructively expose white colonial dependency on Afro-Caribbean culture (159).

Handley affirms that Rhys does not actually try to *represent* Afro-Caribbean culture – I also concur that the insecurity of the narrative demonstrates Rhys' own ambivalence towards the representation of her characters. There is no fulfillment of the cooptation of “primitiveness” in order to provide an alibi for constructing her West Indian narrative; rather the less-privileged woman remains clearly on the outside of the protagonist's rhetoric. Although, it will be seen that Antoinette does in fact attempt to project a primitive identity onto Christophine, and then exploit it for her own yearning to remain desired by her husband. What will be important to recognize is the failure of this process, demonstrating the infeasibility of expecting recognition and acceptance through the one-sided project of immersing oneself in otherness. The reflection upon this failure is what makes the work exceptionally useful for studying it within a postcolonial context.

3.1 CHRISTOPHINE – HOME, STRENGTH, AND THE POSITION OF THE OTHER MOTHER

Keeping in mind Rhys' apprehensions and possible intentions for developing a connection with West Indianness, this investigation continues to explore the relationship between Antoinette and Christophine, and the ways in which Rhys struggles to write that relationship from her relatively more-privileged status as intellectual.¹²⁰ This analysis requires two additional points of entry; that of the ways in which other women fit into the heroine's bildungsroman, and that of Christophine's challenges to her narrative agenda by asserting an opposing discourse. Again in this novel the protagonist's *da* is the "other mother," who provides guidance when the actual mother is emotionally or physically absent. Although different from the other novels in this study is that the protagonist here not only looks for validation from the other woman, but also asks her directly for help; even if she resists her advice [Antoinette contemplates in a line of thought very similarly to that of the girl in *Balún Canán*, "how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?" (112)]. The "other" female in this case is not only excluded, but made to be the Other upon which the protagonist establishes her subject constitution; a process that hints at an ideological subtext that favors rational individualism over the collective identities that Christophine models with other black women that live in proximity. Spivak finds that a reading of Christophine is important in this canonized novel, in order to "wrench oneself away from the mesmerizing focus of the 'subject constitution' of the female individualist" ("TWT" 147). Individualism is motivating for the protagonist and captivating for the reader,

¹²⁰ See Russell's article for a concise outline of the approaches to Christophine as a character by critics that tend to use Spivak's analysis as a point of entry.

given its association with freedom as a continual movement between becoming and socialization. For the female protagonist this is particularly attractive, because it is a process that is typically afforded to a male hero. I also draw upon this deconstructive tendency towards which Spivak aspires in order to question the process of individualism, and to come to an understanding of what possibilities for community between women are opened up for writers of subsequent generations.

3.1.1 Negotiating the margins of the Bildungsroman: The *other side of Jane Eyre*

Elizabeth Baer analyzes *WSS* specifically as a female novel of development, writing persuasively of a *sisterhood* between Jane and Bertha. The reader, she states, through a reexamination of how Jane actually survived, is compelled to “conclude that it is Antoinette’s warning that makes Jane’s marriage to Rochester possible, that the real meaning of sisterhood is the courage of one generation to empower the next” (133). The way in which Bertha aids Jane as her shadow self also ensures Jane’s survival. Moreover, Baer asserts that in the “woman’s” novel there is an intense concern with the act of writing, which must always be questioned; thus dreams are present to reveal the “difficulty and subtext” of writing a female novel of development (148).

I agree that of particular importance is the act of writing, but her use of the word *sisterhood* is curious, given that in this context cooperation depends upon the sacrifice of one woman’s growth for the independence of the other. Thus it is not necessarily courage, but a burden to carry *for* the future generation who suffer the afflictions of “the present.” *Sisterhood* would then be based upon the sacrifice of one for the other, and hopes for mutual recognition and dialogue between women are forgotten. This type of development of Jane made possible by

Bertha is mirrored in Antoinette's actions and responses toward the women around her. If sisterhood is indeed constituted by the courage of one generation to *support* the next, suggesting an act of friendship, Christophine sustains her in that way. But the sacrifice of one woman for the other is not present – Christophine refuses to live in the newlywed's home for example, given that she did not support Antoinette's readiness to suppress her own desires in compliance with her husband's will.

Despite her placement in the background of the narrative Christophine is neither muted nor completely absorbed within the central development narrative. She forms the exception of the text, and therefore she can be read from a process of negation. I believe it is useful to look at the bildungsroman in this case keeping in mind the work of Moretti, who proposes that the history of the novel "has accustomed us to looking at normality *from within* rather than from the stance of its exceptions" (11). This novel as a modernist, often surrealist, multiple-voiced narration, demands that the reader question the unreliable narrator on the basis of what is created in the zones of exclusion. This has implications for understanding the possible sisterhood that has been proposed by various critics. Ian Wojcik-Andrews states that what is identifiable about a female bildungsroman is the blurring of boundaries between self and community:

If the success of the male Bildungsroman is defined by the degree of separation the hero achieves from the family and the community, the *failure* of the male *Bildungsroman* is defined by the degree of interconnectedness achieved by heroines in the female *Bildungsroman*, narratives of community (68).

The assumption in this definition that women writers would achieve interconnectedness is not yet found in Rhys' work, for which solidarity was an unaccomplished dream. The community of women that the protagonist glimpses when she is in the company of Christophine, which would

be one of growth through nurturing, cannot be achieved, given the prevailing racial tensions as well as differing constructions of womanhood based upon race. Antoinette perceives interconnectedness as being accepted by the other, and the ability to see herself in the other; she does not however adequately conceive of what it would mean to transform according to what she learns for others, nor for that matter to give of herself to the other. What is more, she becomes largely under the influence of Rochester, who fears this interconnection as a source of power. Again, he identifies the bond between Antoinette and Christophine as a threat. As Sue Thomas relates, Rochester works to erase these relationships in order to produce her as an “isolated individual” (165). The ideal of the isolated, private subject then, in this case is not as much that of the protagonist, as it is of the dominating male figure.¹²¹ This is the case that he is intent on separating her from all personal connections, and also that Antoinette cooperates with this isolation as an odd form of individuation. Antoinette may seek to form relationships with Tia and Christophine, yet she is not willing to give up the ideal of being a wife, which would entail purity which is not possible if there is any close association with blackness.

Thus within the bildungsroman form there is no uncomplicated reaching across borders of race and class for the sake of the protagonist’s development; in fact Antoinette fears the disintegration of self that could develop from letting the exterior world intrude into her narrative. Also, Wojcik-Andrews presumes a self reaching out towards others, whereas what we find in Rhys’ work is that those upon whom Antoinette depends for her growth do not silently obey her narrative. Tia will throw a rock in her face, demonstrating the resistance of the other to be incorporated easily into her developmental tale. There is always that “other side” that may make

¹²¹ In writing this Thomas states that Rhys had probably drawn upon several historical instances such as the Obeah Act of 1904, and the case of “Wyllis vs. Steber” in which a husband is threatened by the intimacy of a female relationship of his wife (160).

her feel at the very least wary of the stability of her position – although any stability is actually only in the world of appearances. She longs for safety, retreating at times into a dream world, and enters society realizing the limited options available to her [the *crecimiento disminuido* referred to by Lagos (35)]. She eventually puts her faith into romantic love, accepting that as the ideal way in which she might enter into humanity. Nevertheless, Christophine challenges the myth of the unified colonial subject, as one who is embedded in an imperialist project.

While the novel plays with the idea of romantic love as a possible salvation, Antoinette eventually finds that she sacrifices her identity for the security that it offers, and that existence is impossible in the parameters of her surroundings. Like her mother her only option becomes madness and suicide. Although the ending may be read as a failure for women's liberation given that she could not actually exist in the world, there are also hints at other possibilities that hinge upon finding support from other women.

Later Caribbean writers such as Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff will confront the bildungsroman in a much more defiant way; revisions that Antonia MacDonald-Smythe refers to as “backchat” (65), and what O’Callaghan cleverly calls “dub versions,” which play with and talk over the master tape (11). While the agency that Rhys offers may seem pale in comparison to the works of contemporary West Indian writers, like Castellanos and Lispector she seems to announce the need for a feminist sensibility based on solidarity that later writers come closer to reaching. Interconnections between women which may be described through the term “sisterhood” are sources of strength for contemporary writers; differently for Rhys they were elusive and remote. If sisterhood is as Baer suggests a task of one generation to prepare the next, this is achieved through the intertextuality of West Indian women writers, even if it is not fulfilled in Rhys’ novel.

3.1.2 Christophine's discourse

I concur with Spivak that Christophine's challenge to the central narration of female individuality does provide a valuable standpoint from which colonial relations may be examined, and that the possibilities for her character should remain open. However, while Spivak seems to easily designate the colonizer and colonized in the story, this determination is not quite so easy to make. Both women are commodified (one through servitude and the other through marriage) – colonized and excluded from a master narrative of humanity – although in different respects. Rather than expound upon the place in the hierarchy that each of them occupies, it is necessary to analyze the interactions between them that either maintain or break conventional binaries of oppression. Moreover, before delving into a discussion of Christophine's characterization, it is important to mention that the encounters between Antoinette and her friend Tia will also be especially interesting to mention in connection with the context of racial tension that situates the characters. The two girls have a friendship that seemingly transcends their racial divide until they have an argument in which Antoinette intones a racial slur, and Tia counters by projecting that insult back onto the addressee; an incident that I will return to address in greater detail.

Christophine's presence, like the nana's in *Balún Canán*, points to the narrator's dependence on the "other woman" coupled with a fear of contamination;¹²² too much contact with otherness would mean for Antoinette the decay of a culture, namely that of the planter class

¹²² The fear of contamination is shown to be particularly strong, as is the terror of ruination of their class. Contamination in the novel may also be seen in the construction of femininity based upon a white plantocratic ideal constructed around maintaining cultural standards of cleanliness. Thomas explains that "it is part of a bounded gender system modeled on the body, which expresses a social and economic relation to property and the labor of servants (apprentices and freed slaves), and policed by vigilance over racial and class boundaries" (181-82). This distinct fear that moves from the psychosocial to the material is witnessed when Antoinette is wearing Tia's dress, and her mother has it burned, even though she has no money to buy a new one. Although having Blacks in proximity was normal, the contact with the lowest classes that the dress represents is too unsettling for Annette in her precarious position.

of the West Indies, and is part of the terror that comes through in the narration. Tia uses this fear against her when she tells her that there are now “real” white people in Jamaica with gold money, and that “old” white people are even worse off than Blacks (24). The transitional period after emancipation is undoubtedly reflected within the girl’s conflict.¹²³ Thomas quotes Gramsci in order to describe that interim period after emancipation, in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (156). Those caught most poignantly in that situation are Creole women, who in the novel are in fact “aimless” as described by Rochester, abandoned beings, zombie-like, who no longer appear to belong anywhere. Antoinette is a heroine lacking agency who fails to comprehend the realities of her situation; it is therefore useful to bear in mind the psychological impact of the ruin of the planter class on Creole women in the period immediately after emancipation. Rhys’ friend and confidante Francis Wyndham describes in the novel’s introduction the figure of the “mad Creole heiress” of the early nineteenth century, which forms the characterization of Antoinette and her mother: “products of an inbred, decadent, expatriate society, resented by the recently freed slaves whose superstitions they shared, they languished uneasily in the oppressive beauty of their tropical surroundings, ripe for exploitation” (12). Much like the sentiment of the landholders in Mexico during Cardenas’ reform period, stagnation lingers, as the Creole women feel they are on the brink of changes of which they feel that they can only be the victims. Weakness and victimhood are qualities that were once prized as virtuous and wholesome, and that now offer the Creole women no defense from the outside world; neither afforded protection nor having the psychological tools to undertake rebellion, they are consequently left to disintegrate unless rescued through marriage.

¹²³ Jennifer P. Nesbitt in fact points out that the period of social upheaval after emancipation parallels those of decolonization in the time in which the novel was published (310); thus the author’s attitudes towards social change may draw upon a more contemporary thinking regarding politics.

After emancipation Annette lives five years alone with her two children in the crumbling estate at Coulibri until she marries an Englishman, Mr. Mason. Although they enjoyed being “English” for that time, Antoinette notes that she missed Christophine’s cooking; an aside that takes on special significance as she realizes as an adult that being with Christophine feels like home. The division between what the English understood and the reality of the life of the Creoles is also clearly felt in her reminiscences of her stepfather. “None of you understand about us,” Antoinette thinks to herself in regards to Mr. Mason (30). Antoinette treats Christophine as a mother, but if being awarded a place in society amongst the colonizers means forsaking that relationship, she finds that her only option is to do so.

What is similar between the relationship between Antoinette and Christophine and the girl and her nana in *Balún Canán*, is that it is based upon an ever-changing conflation of mother/daughter love, ambivalence, fear, dependence, and often aversion. It is important again to remember Castillo’s advice in this context, that we remember this “mother-who-is-not-a-mother” (*Talking Back* 12) when theorizing the mother-daughter relationship¹²⁴ in the text, and the discourses of confinement and immobility that her presence evokes. Antoinette states that she spent most of her time as a girl in the kitchen, and that Christophine slept in a little room next to it. Christophine’s marginality as is evident in the room that she occupies is not explored by the narrator, since for her it would be ordinary; although the reader surmises the implications of having a shared domestic space within which the nanny is confined. The quarters adjoining the kitchen are historically reserved for the maid or nanny, who will be at the heart of the home

¹²⁴ For an in-depth study of the role of the mother in the novel, see Deborah Kelly Kloepfer’s *The Unspeakable Mother*, in which she states that an important trope in this novel is the “interplay between the banished mother and the male text” (14); the banished mother being Annette, the protagonist’s biological mother. Kloepfer states that Rhys was concerned with her own exclusion from the patriarchal writing system, and that exclusion is spoken through the absent, “dead mother” (15).

but also kept at a respectable distance, not being allowed at the dinner table or to interact within the “living” area. I offer the idea that in the novels in question the resistances that each *surrogate* mother undertakes are reflected upon after her disappearance – the sense of loss that the heroines experience evokes sensations of guilt, owing to the betrayal to the very ideas of equality and liberation that are being purported through the heroines’ desires for individual success. In this novel the nanny affirms the value of her knowledge and then takes herself out of the narrative: “‘Read and write I don’t know. Other things I know.’ She walked away without looking back” (161). By making the choice to leave she affirms an agency that the heroine lacks.

Furthermore, feminist scholarship generally has failed to recognize differences in race while theorizing about the mother-daughter relationship, the result being that white women’s experience is taken as normative. By assuming the normativity of the mother/daughter bond varying conceptions of female subjectivity are excluded from criticism. That is to say, it may be theorized that the absence of the father, in this case Mr. Cosway who is never mentioned by the female characters, allows for the protagonist to release herself from a formation through the Law of the Father, creating an exceptional female text that is not bound by the same structuring principles as the conventional bildungsroman form. Yet, the patriarchal system is still present, evident as Antoinette’s stepfather receives a dowry from Rochester for her hand in marriage. What is more, the mere existence of a female relationship does not preclude a development through an absence of hierarchical relationships, as is made clear in these novels. Antoinette’s formation is different from that of a male hero, although the trope of individualism still stands as a yearned for, albeit impossible, objective.

Interestingly, Burrows emphasizes that it should be remembered that within the mother/daughter relationship we are not only talking about nurturing and love, but also

aggression, ambivalence, and even hate. When employing this model as we think through these cases between girls and nannies, we find that their competition does not necessarily lessen the mother/daughter bond that they share; rather it is another sign of it. The girls' tendency to rebel against the views of her nanny and to assert her independence demonstrates the tightness of their bond. The use of the term "ambivalent" is also appropriate to examine the connection between children and their nannies, since there is a strong push-pull movement occurring between them. Antoinette pulls Christophine closer when she needs her for support and acknowledgement, but pushes her away when she stands to contest the way of life to which the young woman has chosen to cling. In fact, Antoinette most likely learns the most about herself in those moments when she painfully realizes her apartness from her surrogate mother.

Therefore it is clear that while Rhys wrote the story of the madwoman by way of drawing upon her own childhood in the West Indies, she also ended up writing a character that was marginalized yet essential to her story, much like the role that Bertha plays in Brontë's text. Theirs does not however exactly mirror the connection between Jane and Bertha: unlike Bertha, Christophine asserts her freedom by expressly declaring herself a free woman, and does not allow her sensibilities (her otherness from Antoinette's perspective) to be co-opted for the sake of her mistress's desire for the ideal English marriage. In many ways Antoinette, like other white Creoles in those moments of transition, remains bound to the past, while her nanny moves forward by vocalizing her independence. Christophine, like Bertha, forms part of the motif of the "other side" to every story; embodying that which for Rochester is the "mystery" of the island that is *not* on his side.

In the same process of invisibilization that is seen in *Balún Canán*, Rhys' text works through an interplay of occlusion and revelation of not only the identity of the subaltern woman,

but also of the entire black history of Jamaica. Christophine is of course a part of that history, but also being from Martinique she is somewhat different, allowing Antoinette to escape identifying her surrogate mother with her family's troubling past. Burrows makes reference to the historical context in the following way:

while Rhys's focus on the tortured relationship between a white Creole mother-daughter provides a poignant analysis of the ambivalent complexities of white-on-white racism, her mobilization of a trauma narrative to explain the construction of Bertha's madness conceals the far greater traumatic historical conditions of enslaved African-Caribbeans (9).

The abandoned Creole woman is constructed as the victim, who has been forsaken by white West Indians and rejected by the Blacks on the island, no longer belonging anywhere. Distressing events however that would have been suffered by the Blacks with whom she is in contact on a personal level are brushed off by the narrator that describes them as either strong and thus able to withstand suffering (thus readings of Christophine as powerful should be examined in that light), or as cruel, having become oppressors themselves.

There is no question that social constructions of race and gender that are part of the national imagination are largely accepted by the protagonist who is looking for protection; but I maintain that the inconsistencies of these imaginings are given away by the minor characters,¹²⁵ while Antoinette works to reinforce them, relying upon certain stereotypes that for her offer the promise of belonging to a group. Rochester also offers an interesting outsider's perspective to Antoinette's thought processes. For example, Antoinette has memories of things that never

¹²⁵ In his analysis of minor characters, Alex Woloch states that highlighting a stable thematic center through a hero obscures competition between characters, which may provide an alternative center (244). Instead of easily delegated margin and center within the novel, the discussions between characters become more relevant in the ways in which they direct the text.

actually happened, which are questioned when Rochester takes over the narrative. Her distorted relationship to history is related in what she states to Rochester in his narrative:

We would have died, my mother always said if she [Christophine] had not stayed with us. Many died in those days, both white and black, especially the older people, but no one speaks of those days now. They are forgotten, except the lies.

Lies are never forgotten, they go on and they grow (131).

A couple of things are revealed in this passage that will be of concern in the following sections. First, she makes clear the dependency that she and her mother had on Christophine, who was stronger both mentally and spiritually. Why she would remain loyal, however, when she had the choice to leave, is a question that remains unanswered. Also Antoinette's allusion to lies is much like her reference to the wildness that had taken over destroying the paradise that her family had once enjoyed; truth for her is only what would reconstruct the status quo. Thus for her the only counter to lies is forgetting.

The implication of the ways in which "truth" and "lies" are manipulated for Rhys' writing of the "other" woman in this text, is that while the colonized woman is present in different forms through the way in which others talk *about* her, she courts the notion that there is an outside to their references that cannot be apprehended; exhibited, as I will demonstrate, through a type of communication that works to isolate even Antoinette when she attempts to appropriate the other's voice. Rochester works to construct a narrative of this woman through others' accounts that depict her as a practitioner of "black arts," and consequently also a convicted criminal. Antoinette also courts this portrayal; returning to the family's estate at Coulibri after her mother's marriage she notices a difference in the new servants: "It was their talk about Christophine that changed Coulibri, not the repairs or the new furniture or the strange

faces. Their talk about Christophine and obeah changed it” (30-31). She makes no assertions regarding Christophine, only alluding to the menace that the servants’ “talk” presents. What is most interesting is the way in which the colonized woman’s position changes according to the terms of the encounter: she is at times a friend or mother and at other times a stranger and thus dangerous. She is a servant who is at times far away and other times uncomfortably close; yet she also emerges as an individual who would challenge Antoinette’s notions of what a woman should be.

What is more, like the girl-narrator in *Balún Canán* Antoinette feared what she perceived to be on that “other side,” which would be much like the way in which Castillo imagines the “other” woman’s voice: “in seeing me you see the unwanted, unspoken, rejected side of yourself and refuse that story, that mirror” (“Ashes” 250). The girl’s memory of the nana discarded as if she were worth nothing haunts her as does her own fear of recognizing that part of herself that marginalizes, and that is marginalized. Antoinette also looks to escape that silent part of herself that reminds her that while she is a victim of gender and race oppression, she is also complicit in domination as the daughter of a slave owner. As much as she works to include other less-privileged women in her narration, they tend to remind her that she cannot merely claim to see herself in their oppression without also reaffirming her connection with the history of slavery that she works to displace.

England only exists for Antoinette in the pages of a geography book; a fantastical place that holds no real connection for her, yet she remembers being there, and knows that it is her destiny to return:

I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me.

... After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White feathers falling? Torn

pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. I must know more than I know already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my dream (111).

Perhaps Antoinette accepts this as her destiny because, like Jane, she could not tolerate being in an ambiguous situation.¹²⁶ Tellingly, asserting her difference in attitude towards the colonial culture that has captured her mistress's imagination, Christophine doubts that there is even such a place: "I don't say I don't *believe*, I say I don't *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it. ... Why you want to go to this cold thief place? If there is this place at all, I never see it, that is one thing sure" (112). She suspects that Antoinette is foolish, surrendering herself in pursuit of the ideal English marriage that her husband would want, even though it is so far separated from their reality. This accusation pushes Antoinette further away, who insists that her history has already been written for her, and that her only future is in becoming this different woman in this unknown place.

The distinction between the two women, the fact the Christophine is able to successfully deny knowledge that poses itself as the authority while Antoinette is captured by it, is reflected through fretfulness in Antoinette's narration. I read Antoinette's in-betweenness (maneuvering between Christophine's and Rochester's worlds) as reflective of an anxiety of not belonging anywhere, and a feeling that she needs to take sides for survival. There is never a feeling that the opposing sides either of race or gender can be reconciled. As O'Callaghan makes clear, within

¹²⁶ Moretti questions why Jane abandons Rochester after learning that he is already married to Bertha, who is alive and locked up in the attic at Thornfield. He states that the answer is simple: "To stay would mean becoming an *adulteress*, and a world intoxicated with ethical dichotomies cannot tolerate the thought of an *ambiguous* situation, suspended between two value-systems, two persons, two lives" (188). This may also serve as a reason why Antoinette does not simply leave Rochester – caught between his value system and that of Christophine she would choose the former, since she could not bear to be a woman who abandons her husband.

the novel there is a motif of failed dialogue. The relationship between Antoinette and Christophine may have been privileged as a possible cross-racial counter-family between surrogate black mother and Creole daughter, but their dialogue as well will ultimately fail, only being possible through dreams.

As was previously mentioned, a significant aspect of the cultural imaginary that surfaces in West Indian literature written by white Creoles is that of separation, and of being the outsider. According to Lionnet, Jean Rhys like other West Indian writers living away from their homeland portrays in her writing a sense of alienation, given that she never really came “home” to the Caribbean (*Postcolonial Representations* 28). Born in 1890 and leaving Dominica for England at age sixteen, Rhys would not return to the island until 1936. The result is a sense of ambivalence towards writing the West Indies, as well as a constant interplay between distance and proximity. The separation from the homeland is most keenly felt in the writing of cultural separation of those who live in close proximity to one another – namely the interactions between servants and mistresses. That is to say, while she includes black and “coloured” Caribbean characters in the novel, she does not attempt to write a Jamaican reality; rather the Caribbean for her is always shadowed by a looming ideology of Englishness. Writing home is what Rhys attempts to do, as personal and national history converge in her text, only to find a permanent sense of being orphaned.

Consequently the role that Christophine plays is one that creates a sense of home for the heroine – home not in the sense of permanence, but in something that is eternally lost, that can never be regained. Antoinette will mention later when she is at Christophine’s house that she felt at home in that place where she has memories of women working together doing wash in the river, with a “gay busy noise” (108). She states that Christophine had their “warm and

comforting” smell, but that “he” did not like it. She felt that there was where she belonged and where she wished to stay, but she denies her desires since England is her destiny, the only option that she envisions to be feasible. Antoinette’s imagination is colonized by the ideal of English civilization, and she plots her marriage story according to the achievement of that end.

Furthermore, with respect to the “vicarious victimhood” to which I earlier referred, the obsession with English culture which is fetishized by Antoinette cannot be adequately studied without also considering in comparison the various tropes that are at play in the novel that borrow from Afro-Caribbean stories and themes; specifically those of zombies and maroons. Annette describes their abandonment through maroonage, and both Annette and Antoinette are described as zombies when they become mad. Raiskin’s analysis is captivating, as she states that the appropriations of African tropes of maroonage and zombification in the novel amount to an instillation of black voices that would then empathize with Antoinette’s Creole point of view (31). She states that the zombie as a mark of alienation is what offers her a Caribbean understanding, bringing her closer to Tia and Christophine. In fact, this is the project that the narrator is undertaking, and that disquieting element is noted as well in her autobiography. This same type of appropriation is evident for critics who read Antoinette’s dream in the end as fulfilling a traditional slave wish for wings to fly home. The use by the author of Afro-Caribbean reality reflects her desire to see herself within that reality, instead of fractured from it; making her simultaneous wish to be in England perplexing. Not only does it potentially create sympathy, but suggests a psychological need for belonging that is realized through the narrative. But when that belonging means also being further stigmatized as “other,” it can be no more than a daydream. The Caribbean as embodied by Christophine offers temporary shelter from civilization and an access to life that Rhys finds to be more characteristic of the black population,

but Antoinette can only imagine in moving in the direction of the ideal of England, as it has become something of an *idée fixe*.

Different from Raikin's criticism and that of Burrows who fully objected to Rhys' appropriation of African history in the name of the Creole subject, Angela Reyes asserts that maroonage is actually the empowering center of the novel (105), the source of which is Christophine. Reyes sees Antoinette as creating an extended kinship with those who are marooned on the island by choice, which is strengthened the more powerless that she becomes. Sisterhood would then be realized through the protagonist's giving up on the English ideal, and moving towards a central unity that she would find through communion with "rebellious" women. I agree that Rhys taps into a source of strength that has something to do with maroonage, voiced by Christophine, although this type of assertion tends to ignore the local realities that are obscured by the text. Most notably, Christophine, while being strong, was also a commodified woman, who remained loyal to the Creole family. In addition, there are two types of maroonage that are alluded to within the novel, that of rebellion and that of abandonment. Annette declares, "[n]ow we are marooned" (18), when someone poisons her horse. It was at that point that she realized they were completely helpless, running out of what they had and no means to improve their position on their own. If Rhys is making a connection based upon a shared maroon identity, she would have to either erase the resistance from the maroon, or recognize an alliance between powerful and powerless – the maroon embodied in Christophine resists oppression by never allowing herself to be subjected to the rules of law that define her position. The powerless is Antoinette, whose only option for survival is marriage, or to align herself with Christophine's power. The Creole women *are marooned* by forces outside of their control, while Christophine relocates herself in a way that she escapes confinement – these are

two very different concepts. It is not clear however that Antoinette forms any alliance with the maroon identity; rather, the distance is always accentuated.

The possible solidarity then that I imagine in *WSS* built upon the relationship of Antoinette and Christophine depends both on the recognition that the heroine attempts to marginalize Christophine within the “greater” story, and the way that she challenges that story prompting hints of admissions of complicity from the narrator in the marginalization process. Despite the central emphasis of the development of Antoinette’s subjectivity, like the nana in *Balún Canán* Christophine is introduced in the first lines of the novel (although unlike the nana Christophine is a named and speaking subject): Antoinette says in the second line, “[t]he Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, ‘because she pretty like pretty self’ Christophine said” (17). Established immediately is Christophine’s specific use of what is most likely a form of Caribbean Creole, as well as her tendency towards active discourse juxtaposed with Antoinette’s passivity. Moreover, the protagonist searches out Christophine when she wants to know something, making her the source of knowledge concerning her family and community.

As Spivak’s analysis illustrates, Christophine is the only character who is allowed to offer real criticism without falling into victimization (“TWT” 155). Furthermore, while Antoinette may leave out Christophine from her idea of a progressive life, she demonstrates an apolitical silence, whereas Christophine uses her voice to enact change. Although it is justifiably noted, as Raiskin does, that Christophine’s critique of imperialism is not from her “own people” (38). Van Neck-Yoder as well makes clear that there is a censored narrative which “consists of experiences that undercut the premises of colonialism, the very premises Antoinette is driven to affirm as natural and immutable” (195). Antoinette has an agenda to be included within the ranks of the

colonizers; this process is evident through her exclusions and the misrepresenting of her own family's history. This indicates for Raiskin a cultural ambivalence of being trapped between two "disdainful cultures" (28). Certainly the process of creolization that is represented in the novel resembles the tradition as explained by Brathwaite, that it is told in the way in which Whites are affected by Blacks (202); this is the dominant tendency in Rhys, although it is also evident that there are sparks of criticism of this point of view. In all glimpses of victimization and narrative manipulation the dependence upon her nurse for relieving her anguish and for being a source of strength is evident. The dynamics of their relationship and the interplay between categories of silencer/silenced, victim/victimizer, and weakness/strength, I undertake in the following sections.

3.2 THE NARCISSISTIC IMPULSE: ADDRESSING RACE AND THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR

One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable (Butler, Excitable Speech 4).

*I am safe. I am safe from strangers.
(WSS 27)*

When considering Antoinette's approaches to other women and the workings of the marginalized in this bildungsroman, evidently two threads become particularly significant: that of the posturing of the self towards otherness, and the construction of the figure of the stranger. *Wide Sargasso Sea* has a strong psychoanalytic element that merges with postcolonial readings, making applicable interpretations that are supported by notions of the psychological impact of colonialism. In this vein I am concerned with what has often been read as the narrator's

narcissism, her incapacity to recognize what is other than herself; a tendency that attempts to direct the reader's perceptions of the discrimination and race relations that form the narrator's experiences. The perhaps unavoidable narcissism of the narrator will be read as she attempts to make "others" into what she conceives of as her "self" (not what others make of her) in a recuperation of oneness. Besides the implications for self-constitution, the resistances of the other towards being "selved" in this process become important keys to understanding the possibilities for community that will be revealed. These resistances signal the failures of narcissistic identification when the protagonist attempts to erase differences in favor of an idealistic unity.

Spivak explains the othering that occurs in the novel through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Narcissus' recognition of the Other as himself discloses his madness ("TWT" 153). For her the Ovidian pool represented in this novel does more than disclose Antoinette's madness; revealed is an imperialist system that constructs the hierarchies through which the characters are elucidated. Rochester can only understand Bertha as mad, since she defies his English understanding (and Christophine can only be a dangerous criminal who needs to be isolated from "society"). Moreover, the way in which Antoinette seeks to see her reflection in Tia illustrates the hierarchy between the two characters.

In Freud's explication of narcissism, it is the process of the self investing energy in oneself, and narcissistic rewards are those that offer the experience of oneness with one's lost mother. The hero of the conventional bildungsroman seeks an identity based upon this type of wholeness and unity. The loss, accordingly, of Antoinette's mother to madness and death lends quite straightforwardly to Freudian readings of the novel. Antoinette would seek to reconnect with the lost mother, and when it is impossible she becomes the madwoman in the attic. What is

more, narcissism as an overpowering desire to make the “other” into the “same” sheds light on the protagonist’s approaches to other women in her life. The first-person narration fails to recognize the full reality of others, only apparent through nuanced readings that interpret what is not said, and what is hidden. The narcissistic libido, as Marshall W. Alcorn explains,

seems to disguise an object because it encourages us to pay only selective attention to it.

Narcissistic libido can be considered a sort of light that, when shone on an object, can partly hide it by revealing it according to a particular and limited effect of shade and shadow; some facets are accentuated, other facets are hidden (8).

Thus people or objects that are related through a narcissistic need cannot be seen completely. The implications of characterization through a first-person narrator are that no character can realistically be fully developed, and their complexities are principally revealed through other interventions such as an implied author. This is important as the discerning reader analyzes Antoinette’s narration of other women, with whom the reader begins to identify as influences outside of Antoinette’s version of events, who are perhaps misrepresented when considering her motives. The apparent magnitude of Christophine’s influence within her life leads to interpretations regarding the ways in which she stands aside from Antoinette’s narcissistic gaze, yet remaining key to the story. As Antoinette’s identity becomes more fragmented and subjected to Rochester’s colonizing influence, the mystery surrounding Christophine and her use of obeah is amplified. The nanny is then constructed as a stranger who represents a danger to civilization, and thus must be kept at a distance.

The opening lines of the text [“They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (17)] present a triangular view of society constructed along races lines, and it is important to think in which category each of the

characters fit: white people (they), Creoles (we, who find their division from whites arbitrary), and the third point which consists of unnamed strangers, whose growing power caused this sectioning-off to occur. It is this *third* whose strangeness precedes any individual existence and from whom Antoinette initially looks for protection in Christophine. Of course in actuality characters do not fit so neatly along these lines, but Antoinette prefers the comfort of these neat categories of black and white. Through her loyalty Christophine remains within the category of “we” with Antoinette, except in those points when she exhibits signs of otherness to the sensibilities of the English ideal. It will be seen that the strangeness of others is categorized through impersonal hate, while Antoinette continues to cling to Christophine, using her strangeness to serve her own ends.

In the context of this novel Fanon’s notion of “terrified consciousness” is particularly salient, and has resonance within the first-person narration. The settlers are conscious of the “envy” of the native, always waiting to take their “place.” “It is true,” Fanon states, “for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place” (*WE* 39). Fear is a motivating factor in the narration; not only an evident fear of violence and loss of privilege, but one that creates deep collective anxiety, allowing facts to be manipulated in the service of continued existence. In reference to a riot that she remembered as a girl, Rhys states the following: “I could not forget the howling sound and there’s no doubt that a certain wariness did creep in when I thought about the black people who surrounded me” (*SP* 48). According to Michele Cliff the planter class reacts by positing civilization against “ruination.” Ruination signifies “the reclamation of land, the disruption of cultivation, civilization, by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest ... As individuals in the landscape, we, the colonized, are also subject to ruination, to the self reverting to the wildness of the forest” (Cliff 40). Antoinette was terrified

by the idea that she, like other Creoles after emancipation, would now be considered to be a “white cockroach;” barred from taking part in any privileges of citizenship or progress, cast aside by Europeans and rejected by the Blacks they once dominated. The only choice would be to embrace civilization at all costs, even if she would be excluded to the margins of that process.

The image of the cockroach will return in my reading of Lispector’s novel; in the case of WSS it signifies contamination, and those intercultural existences that must be stamped out. Terrified of being identified as such and the violence that comes along with it, Antoinette demonstrates a paranoiac fear of strangers: “I never looked at any strange negro,” she states, “[t]hey hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a little girl followed me singing, ‘Go away white cockroach, go away, go away.’ I walked fast, but she walked faster. ‘White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away’” (23). Feeling unwanted and an outcast, Antoinette portrays herself as a victim with no intention of defending herself who will look to Christophine to take pity on her and to be her voice. By stating “let sleeping dogs lie” she displays her unwillingness to dig up colonial dirt. Her establishment of victimization is complicated by various realities: the position of the servants on the estate, the racist notions reinforced through the attitudes of Antoinette and her mother, the hostility of the narration towards the formally enslaved peoples who refuse to work, and the very claim of victimhood suggesting Antoinette’s will to be included within the ranks of white women – rhetoric that posits the white woman’s body as that which is always at risk of violation, and thus must be protected by taming and controlling black men. The descriptions of Christophine stand counter to this reading of victimhood: she garners respect because she stays loyal to the family and she is thus distinguished from other black women; but there are aspects of her life that Antoinette does not know, cannot control, and that terrify her.

By labeling Antoinette a cockroach, the stranger also reinforces the binaries of light and dark, upheld through complicity. She is thusly forced into experiencing double consciousness, seeing herself through the lens in which others see her. The image of the stranger is especially forceful in her dreams in which she senses someone with her but who was out of sight and who hated her; she assures herself that she is safe from strangers, but wakes the next morning knowing that nothing would ever be the same: “It would change and go on changing” (27). The use of the word “strange” and “stranger” implies ignorance on the part of the speaker as to who those “others” are, and why they would want to harm her. The erasure of her nana’s face deliberately enacted by the girl in *Balún Canán* in order to protect herself from the pain of loss, here is perhaps undertaken from the beginning as a result of her trepidations regarding the future and fear of being exposed and open to attack. Hate is mostly impersonal until it comes from Tia, and then it resonates, continuing to affect Antoinette’s sense of worth. Nevertheless Antoinette finds that her nightmares indicate a real terror that what she once recognized as her own was threatened and that people who she believes would want to harm her are getting too close.

Ahmed dissects the idea of the encounter between strangers as discussed within ethical philosophy, in an effort to displace what she calls stranger fetishism, which conceals the embedded social relations in encounters between others. From her account strangers are who one knows in “not-knowing” (55). The word stranger is loaded with possible significations, marking even those others with whom we have yet to have contact. While we may assume that someone is a stranger when we do not recognize them upon the first meeting, politically there are various reasons for constituting certain others as strange that do not depend upon their unrecognizability, and that maintain their strangeness even after meeting them. Raced and gendered others are sealed in an embodiment that marks them as different, and they therefore

threaten to contaminate when they go beyond those limits. From Antoinette's account she must distinguish herself from that strangeness, assuring that she can be known and defined in some way that protects her from indeterminacy.

The first day that Antoinette goes to the convent and had to separate from her Aunt Cora, she encounters two strange children; her description of them is rampant with the view of miscegenation as repulsive and abject:

The boy was about fourteen and tall and big for his age, he had white skin, a dull ugly white covered with freckles, his mouth was a negro's mouth and he had small eyes, like bits of green glass. He had the eyes of a dead fish. Worst, most horrible of all, his hair was crinkled, a negro's hair, but bright red, and his eyebrows and eyelashes were red.

The girl was very black and wore no head handkerchief. Her hair had been plaited and I could smell the sickening oil she had daubed on it (48-49).

She immediately sees them as alien and threatening because of their physical characteristics, before they begin to taunt her. Establishing the scene in which she will be the innocent victim and somehow distinct from their strangeness, she describes their features as grotesquely mismatched; not only with dull white skin, but also having a "negro's" mouth. Emerging as the victim in this account since she is unable to even *speak* after this encounter, she also establishes her appearance as being something different than what they are – with the disgust that she narrates the physical characteristics of the children, we might assume that she did not hold the same attributes of being between races. What is important is that they were strange to her, and threatening for no apparent reason.

The fear of strangers I read from this light; the stranger is not someone she does not know, but someone who had already been constituted as a stranger before their encounter, who

lingers in a space of foreboding and is now getting too close. In the emancipation period borders are ostensibly broken down, yet made visible in the violence they cause in the everyday realm. The social inequalities that are embedded within Antoinette's encounters are no doubt too difficult for her to grasp as a young girl. In this reading it will be seen that even those black female characters that she is close with will also reveal themselves as strangers when their realities cannot be interpreted by the narration; or, when they begin to judge her from without. In the most significant reversal Tia throws a rock in Antoinette's face when Antoinette looks to her for recognition. Christophine also changes from mother to stranger, when at times Antoinette looks at her and is not sure about what secrets she might be hiding that connect her with "black magic."

Strangers are threats when they are watching, or when, like the servants, they know more than they should. After her father's death and during their five years of isolation on the estate, Antoinette witnesses her mother being jeered at by "black people" as her clothes become shabby – in parentheses Antoinette's narration mentions – "(they notice clothes, they know about money)" (*my emphasis* 18). As much as she works to narrate herself as a victim of apparently indiscriminate racial discrimination, she also displays her willingness to homogenize the former slaves into one mysterious, potentially dangerous, and nameless group – all are strangers, none are to be trusted. They have only two sides – innocent or vengeful.

Mr. Mason communicates what he perceives as the ignorance of Creoles and their unnatural connection with Blacks: "You imagine enmity which doesn't exist," he says to Annette. "Always one extreme or the other. Didn't you fly at me like a little wild cat when I said nigger. Not nigger, nor even negro. Black people I must say" (32). Annette returns that he simply cannot see the good, or the evil, in them, and in fact does not see them at all. "[Y]ou

won't believe in the other side" (32), she states; again hinting at the duplicity that frames the narration's description of the social dynamics. Mr. Mason had maintained the position that Blacks were like children, incapable of even hurting a fly. Two joint racist dialogues are at play: one that constructs the black population as only dangerous and secretly capable of great cruelty, and the other that diminishes their capabilities of resistance. The idea of the "other side" shows the racism of Annette who views black people as either dangerous or exotic, and her knowledge of them is based upon a relationship of exploitation (see Fanon, *WE* 36); yet she also calls attention to her new husband's ignorance of racial conflict, and deeply entrenched belief that his superiority as an Englishman is a natural state that will be upheld by those whom he just considers to be background to the real story of civilization.

This debate is reflective of the author's attitude, who had always expressed ambivalence towards black people who she perceived as hostile to her when she lived in Dominica; it was only when she lived in Europe that she began to identify with them as "marginalized people" (see Sternlicht, 2). As Helga Druxes states, Rhys was taught as a child in Dominica to separate herself from blacks, while "experiencing them as close in everyday interaction" (66); thus the boundaries when considering the close quarters between the property owners and the domestics that maintained the estate are especially blurred. In the novel color is presented as a social construction, clearly offered through the macabre certainty by both sides of the conflict that black and white must surely "burn the same" (44).

By maintaining boundaries the protagonist more easily focuses upon her own subjecthood. Van Neck-Yoder states pointedly that Antoinette is "driven to narrate" in order to be "included in the ranks of the colonizers" (196). The way in which she tells her story she displays herself as a victim of racial hatred, in a way that perhaps aligns her sympathetically with

the troubles of the Blacks on the island, while keeping herself separated by asserting their strangeness.

The obsession with color and the tremendous fear of exclusion that emerge as she tells her story are also reflective of Rhys' own discomfort with whiteness, envy of blackness, and fear of black people that she did not know, revealed in her unfinished autobiography, published posthumously with the title *Smile Please*. Rhys writes:

Side by side with my growing wariness of black people there was envy. I decided that they had a better time than we did, they laughed a lot though they seldom smiled. They were stronger than we were, they could walk a long way without getting tired, carry heavy weights with ease. ... They were more alive, more a part of the place than we were (SP 50).

Rhys' childhood experiences that find parallels in the novel demonstrate that it is more than an oppositional text to *Jane Eyre* – there is more at stake in the narration than locating a voice for the poor madwoman in the attic. There is a complex confrontation with subjecthood that finds that intersubjective relations are tricky to establish. In a chapter entitled “Black/White,” Rhys relates occurrences of being othered as a result of her race, and unjustly being made to feel out of place. Later when she goes to a convent in which white girls were the minority, the young Rhys¹²⁷ attempts to talk to her “beautiful neighbor”: “she turned and looked at me. I knew irritation, bad temper, the ‘Oh, go away’ look; this was different. This was hatred – impersonal, implacable hatred. ... I never tried to be friendly with any of the coloured girls again. ... They hate us. We are hated” (49). She conveys an “impersonal” and “unreasoned” hate, not by someone who knew her, but by those who had already determined her from without. The fear of

¹²⁷ Rhys was actually her pen name; at that time her name was Gwen Williams (Savory 1).

not being recognized which is evident here is echoed in Bertha's violent attack of Richard Mason at the end of the novel. Grace Poole tells her that she flew at him when he said the word "legally" (a criticism of the conflation of money and love typical in Rhys' work); but Bertha only remembers that he did not recognize her: "I saw him look at me and his eyes went first to one corner and then to another, not finding what they expected. He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that?" (184). She had become the stranger that she feared, and the only recourse left for her is violence.

The way in which Rhys relates this telling childhood experience reiterates the uncomfortable distance between "we" and "they." The experience of being hated continues to reemerge, and that it is "impersonal" hate is of particular significance. Thinking again upon the scene with the two children that taunt Antoinette on her way to school, it is noteworthy that Antoinette reacts to the girl's laughing with a *hate* that came over her, and as she relates "a courage with the hate so that I was able to walk past without looking at them" (49). Hate in this setting is the strength *not* to look at them; hence she evokes the character of the beautiful girl, refusing to recognize the children so that they do not exist (what she most feared would happen to her). Again, not only is there the fear of being harmed physically, but that of not being seen – being constituted as "other" in a way in which she is never even recognized as a full human being. She insinuates that even though the girls did not know her, that they still hated her, thus demonstrating her feelings of being left out because of an historical situation that was beyond her control. She demonstrates a Hegelian concept of desire that is one of recognition from others in order to be constituted as "socially viable beings" (see Butler, *ES* 2). Although it is also the case with this protagonist that when she *is* recognized, by Christophine for example, she refuses the painful story that is being shown to her.

There is a striking similarity between Rhys' story and Fanon's earlier-written account of color prejudice undertaken by "light-skinned races," a comparison that I am compelled to mention given that he also refers to an "unreasoned" hate upon which she seemingly draws: "I had read it rightly. It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother's side, but by an entire race. I was up against something unreasoned" (*Black Skin...* 118). This parallel is useful in order to think the "other side" of Rhys' account; the way in which Rhys tells her story is comparable to the racism that Fanon encountered, although in her case it is to highlight the unreasoned nature of Blacks. Her story's aim is to demonstrate the way in which she was a victim of a social situation that was not her own. Her desires to befriend black women, which would mean being acknowledged as existing by those around her, are rejected, leaving her in a helpless position; but instead of meaningfully addressing their distance and the historical circumstances that have affected those relations, Rhys is sure to emphasize her status as minority. Unlike Fanon's example, the historical context of her personal encounter with her classmate is masked in order to highlight what she perceived as an unreasoned personal attack. She does not consider the histories that emerge which have predetermined her personal relations, and that will continue to insert themselves into these encounters. The gaze of the other that Antoinette experiences gives her a sense of double consciousness, having to confront how she is perceived by the other; but for the reader the gaze of judgment also indicates realities that she is unwilling to face.

Antoinette describes the onlookers of the burning estate: "There must have been many of the bay people but I recognized no one. They all looked the same, it was the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming, mouth half open to shout" (42). Her representation establishes the black population as the enemies, impossible to be perceived as individuals. Also their grievances

are irrational, ostensibly misplaced upon the Creole women who are victims themselves. Referring back to *Balún Canán* and the failure of the girl to “recognize” (*reconocer*) her nana’s face, Antoinette also blurs the distinction between Blacks in order to establish them as strangers/enemies. This keeps them at a distance, thus freeing her from having to face her inability to find connection with that community.

Furthermore, keeping in mind the narcissistic tendencies that form a general movement of the text, while Antoinette has intense desires to be recognized by the other she also obscures the identities of those who she anticipates in turn would not recognize her in order to protect her existence from being erased. There are, however, individual characters that stand out in this scene, whose actions are depicted as bravery against the hatred of the overwhelming crowd that purportedly attacked without merit. Christophine of course leaves with the family and takes care of Annette; but also their servant Mannie called a group of them “brute beasts” (43), differentiating the house servant from the strangers that now threatened them. Thus Antoinette is sure to call attention to the loyalty of the few who would take her side. There were also expressions of sympathy coming from women in the crowd: “One woman said she only come to see what happen. Another woman began to cry. The man with the cutlass said, ‘You cry for her – when she ever cry for you?’” (44). Thus it is not as homogenous as Antoinette suspects, and they suggest a hint of a history of cruelty or indifference on the part of Annette that goes unsaid by the narrator.

The last thing that Antoinette does is run to Tia, who was part of the crowd – “I will live with Tia and I will be like her” (45). At this point she wants to be part of Tia’s community, which will be the ones who are able to stay; she will not acknowledge the differences between them established by the social order in order that Tia may rescue her from expulsion. But Tia

picks up a rock and throws it at her face (although Antoinette does not see her throw it) in a telling scene establishing the complex mirroring between self and other that reoccurs throughout the text – “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). For Antoinette, she achieves being “like her” through the pain that the both experience, victims in a system of cruelty that both are too young to fully understand. But did she see something of herself in Tia, or did she merely project herself onto Tia, failing to actually recognize her as an individual?

Spivak frames Tia in this encounter as the Other who “could not be selfed, because the fracture of imperialism rather than the Ovidian pool intervened” (“TWT” 153). It is a significant task to question what constitutes that self that Antoinette seeks to create in her friend, which is other than who Tia actually is. That is to say, not being comfortable with her own Creoleness, Antoinette constructs an ideal image of Tia that she wishes to be, which no doubt has something to do with her discomfort with whiteness, given the interesting connections witnessed in Rhys’ personal history in which she relates that she had often wished to be black. Often cited is her memory as a child when she receives two dolls from England, one light and one dark. Infuriated when her sister took the dark doll that she wanted, she smashed the face of the light doll with a stone: “There was a great fuss about this. Why? Why had I done such a naughty, a really wicked thing?” (Rhys, *SP* 40). This story indicates that in a psychological reading there is more to Antoinette’s motivations than wanting to access power; passing is also about finding comfort in affinity with others, and being able to control one’s own surroundings. Whether or not the scene is intentionally drawn from this incident, it sheds light on Tia’s actions. The smashing of the doll’s face that resembled her and the preference for the black doll indicate a self-loathing with which Rhys had yet to come to terms. In one sense the two girls share being embroiled in a

system of oppression that they did not create; the throwing of the rock demonstrates a separation between them that seems arbitrary and cruel. As Hulme points out the incident demonstrates compensations at work; the displacement of colonial violence with the story of “an innocent childhood dream of friendship shattered by the realities of a racially-divided society” (83-84). Yet the scene also establishes a violent reaction to difference – Antoinette’s difference from her friend exhibited in her fair skin color.

While mirroring is important as a continuing trope throughout the novel – the absence or presence of a looking glass often reveals the loss of or search for identity – it is also imperative to remember the context of this defining episode. Antoinette had earlier called Tia a “cheating nigger” (24) after a quarrel over a bet for pennies. When Antoinette asserts that pennies didn’t buy much anyways and she could get more if she wanted to, Tia retaliates by pointing out her lie, and turning the word “nigger” against her: “That’s not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. ... Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn’t look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger” (24). This part however is not in quotations, nor is the rest of the dialogue in that exchange, compelling the reader to wonder whether or not Antoinette’s narration of these events can be trusted. That is, it is important to question to what extent Antoinette *heard* her friend at all, feeling herself to be the consummate victim of the encounter. Incapable of recognizing that which is other than herself, Antoinette disguises portions of the story in order that when she is in desperate need of solidarity Tia may be portrayed as an equal victim in marginalization. Moreover, as Nun Halloran also suggests the term “white nigger” is not a firm designation by color; rather it is an objection to a group’s

behavior (89). What it calls into question is Antoinette's preservation of the hegemonic ideal of whiteness after being cast from their shadow.

Thinking also upon the original insult that Antoinette uses – “cheating nigger” – as injurious speech, she uses it to hurt Tia, but also to name her in a way that limits her to a paradigm in which Antoinette is the rightful winner in a just society. In Judith Butler's formulation of hate speech, she contends that the “injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response. If to be addressed is to be interpellated, then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call” (*ES* 2). As Antoinette attempts to fix Tia in a position below her, she counters that call using the very language that Antoinette has employed, and the addressee is injured in the process, unexpectedly putting her out of control.

Tia then runs off with Antoinette's dress, forcing her to wear hers, and making her confront the reality that she had no other clean dress to wear. As Antoinette works to employ Tia to be her mirror in that one encounter, Tia challenges her appropriation by reminding her of the history of inequality between them. Nun Halloran explains that what Tia makes Antoinette experience is a moment of what Du Bois calls “double consciousness,” “by being simultaneously aware of how (racial) Others view her negatively only because of the color of her skin, while also maintaining her own sense of herself” (91). However it is not the color of her skin that Tia is necessarily responding to, but her behavior, her performance of whiteness. Thus the sting of Tia's words result from an encounter with her own inadequacies. Antoinette uses the word to signal “blackness” and Tia's “moral inferiority” (Nun Halloran 91); while for Tia the word is used to explode the moral binary that Antoinette calls upon to win the argument. If Antoinette

wished to call on Tia to be her “twin” in oppression, by throwing the rock Tia reasserts the discourse of moral difference that Antoinette had previously employed.

Drawing then upon Butler’s discussion of injurious speech, it may be seen that Tia’s reaction to Antoinette’s attempt to fix her in a category and thus refusing to answer “correctly” in Antoinette’s interpellation, illustrates Tia’s ability to slip out of the social system according to the narrator’s rules. As Butler states, “the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response” (*ES* 2). Tia proves that one can counter the offensive call, and Antoinette emerges as the most injured in the process. Antoinette uses hateful speech towards both Tia and Christophine, but notably neither woman accepts the terms. Thus their capacity to exceed the limits that are dictated for them demonstrates attempts at narcissistic identification that can never in fact be completed.

Using these encounters to think through the possibilities for community, I am led to reflect on the following assertion by Bernice Johnson Reagon: “You don’t really want Black folks, you are just looking for yourself with a little color to it” (244). Reagon was referring to the stage in coalition politics before allowing the other to enter, when a group is not looking for a real challenge to the racial composition, but to be seen to be making the effort. Antoinette’s seeming displacement of herself towards the other woman shows that she is determined to break down borders; although, she also wants to be the one to control that action. She holds a strong will to see herself within others whose *otherness* is actually terrifying to her. Therefore it is not the mirroring that offers an answer, a bridge to connect their two worlds; rather it displays Antoinette’s failure to see within herself what Tia is seeing. If Tia indeed acted out of hate in this case, it was not an indifferent hate, but one that knew what it meant to hit her in the face. It meant taking control of the encounter away from Antoinette, thereby denying the hegemonic

discourse into which Antoinette had early attempted to inscribe her. *Not* blameless victims of a system they don't understand, Tia identified Antoinette as the enemy out of the language of hate that she upheld. Moreover, Antoinette's tale of fear of racial victimization is mediated by the fact that hers is not the only experience of colonial violence that exists, evident in Tia's action.

Perhaps owing to her experiences of rejection as a girl in Dominica, despite her tendency to gravitate towards black Caribbean culture Antoinette also would assume that in a white/black framework that her "place" inevitably would be with England. Not entirely unlike writings of other Mestizo and Creole intellectuals that have sought to forge a place within the writing system of the metropolis, her project is at times to vindicate the reputation of her family in order to be included within the ranks of the colonizers, while simultaneously showing sympathy for the plight of the Afro-Caribbeans. There is no genuine identification with what may be described as a black reality of the island (calling to mind Brathwaite's criticism); there are only narcissistic impulses that seek to carve a place for her within a community. It therefore becomes at times a narrative of passing – she succeeds in "deceiving" Rochester for some time until her features betray her, and he begins to question the "purity" of her blood, wondering to whom in fact she could be related. This revelation means for him that she has bad blood, and therefore would no longer make a suitable wife. His attempts however to change her become absurd, only further highlighting her otherness.

Antoinette thus narrates her sections from an ambivalent space of both fear and longing: fear of being harmed by strangers and of being considered one herself, and longing to be accepted by a community, moving between those that her family had once colonized, and those who had abandoned her people. Part of being on the outside of the stable white/black categories is the feeling of envy, stemming from not being able to "close ranks" with anyone in order to

protect oneself not only from physical danger, but also from the fragmentation of self that comes from not being able to identify with a group. Hence her reaction is to reclaim identity in any way that she knows how, looking to find herself in others, becoming the English wife that she had first resisted, but also centering family life around Christophine. Unlike Van Neck-Yoder who concentrates on Antoinette's moves towards whiteness, Thomas states that Christophine's presence in the text is a proposal of "a cross-racial counter-family" (162). Yet another reading is that kinship becomes a *tactic*; there must be allegiance to one group in order for survival, which is strongly connected to a desire for intelligibility within a community. This will be seen most saliently through Antoinette's use of obeah the ways in which she manipulates Christophine's "otherness" to serve her own need to win the love of her husband.

Certainly Antoinette partly suffers from an "intimidation of color", explained by Mary Helen Washington as a theme in the literature of black women writers as those feelings of inadequacy when confronted by the dominant cultural constructions of beauty (210). For Antoinette this is reflected in a self-hatred stemming from her capacity to pass as white, but also her inability to pass for the black women who surrounded her. There are few instances when she begins to reveal her Caribbeanness to her husband, suggesting that she may be more like Christophine after all, which is a part of herself that she had learned to suppress. Whether or not she feels self-conscious about her ability to pass for white in her husband's foreign eyes is difficult to say; however it is clear within the subtext that she makes more of an effort to be like the black people in her life, and seems to feel more pride when doing so even while trying to ascend the social ladder. Her anxiety is not only concerning not being able to close ranks with the colonizers, but in not being included at all, within *anybody's* rank. While she certainly has a race-based notion of superiority, her desire for racial purity is not limited to whiteness. Passing

for her would mean to fit in, a yearning also demonstrated by Rhys who confesses to always feeling inferior to her sister who had darker skin.

In a heated exchange with Rochester regarding her buried past, she, according to his narration, imitates a "negro's voice," "singing and insolent," when she says "[y]ou frightened?" (129) – a teasing phrase that would also be used by Tia and Christophine in other circumstances. His sense that she had used a mocking tone was something that he had perceived from all black people, highlighting that there is a joke at his expense of which he is not a part. This use of mimicry is interesting, since she makes use of Tia's speech in order to stress her difference from her husband, but without necessarily connecting herself to it. It calls attention to the incapacity of narcissistic identification in these circumstances. Yet it significantly displays her willingness to be part of the "other side" of her own narration when it is for her own defense, or to point to her distinction from the way in which Rochester would like her to be.

As Rhonda Cobham affirms, writers of postcolonial fiction tend to be invested in dualities that risk "repeating the anthropocentrism of the hierarchy it assails, and ultimately the humanity of the new subject may be asserted at the expense of some other group deemed lower on the rungs of the ladder that constitute the (new) great chain of being" (45). The challenge for the writer is to not "conform" to a system that privileges her "self" over others, even though the preservation of the self as subject is perhaps the priority for these writers. In this case, given that the reader is aware of her attempts to erase a past of slavery and oppression that is not her own, she sustains her society's prevailing anthropocentrism while creating a nuanced narration that is at the same time critical of the narcissism being perpetuated. The "outside" to the narration that Tia and Christophine assert should not however be overstated, since it is not idealized in a nostalgic narration. Instead Antoinette's narration remains unsure of the presence of those

characters within her text, just as Rhys seemed at times to resent Blacks for the fall of the planter class. What stands out most pointedly by the end of the text is the realization that the self/other polarity that Antoinette had narrated was in fact not productive, only leading to her captivity within Rochester's story.

Essential then to remember is that Antoinette simultaneously looks to find her identity in others while struggling to distinguish herself from those others that within her thought system are more heavily oppressed. The extent to which she feels that her development is dependent upon a community of women is questioned, as there is an evident failure to see or hear the other side. I return to the figure of the stranger, which emblemizes the other side well: the stranger that the protagonist is wary of is the construction of various fears of otherness – the other that may be uncontrollable, that may cause her harm, or that may judge her from without. What is more, the duality of interiority and the external world is confounded by realities of racial and gender oppression; interiority is strived for as protection, while the exterior world threatens intrusion.¹²⁸ This desire for safety is expressed when Antoinette wants to stay in the convent, because it sheltered her from the danger of the outside world. "They are safe," she states regarding the nuns. "How can they know what it can be like *outside*?" (59).

Whether it is Tia who reflects Antoinette's racism, Christophine who chides her desire to be a "good wife," or Rochester that questions her family history that she has ignored; ultimately Antoinette succumbs to socialization through the path of the good English wife over that of identification the group that is closest to her in proximity. Being English after all remains a dream, an ideal to be strived for without ever really knowing of which that identity consists.

¹²⁸ Decidedly relying upon psychoanalysis rather than realism in her reading, Elizabeth Abel likens this reaction to schizophrenia: like schizophrenics, Abel states that "Rhys's heroines experience the world as a hostile environment and lead lives of isolation, detached from family and friends, unable to establish real contact with others" ("Women and Schizophrenia" 156).

Moreover, Christophine may demonstrate for her *another way to be*; but Antoinette chooses to turn away from the threatening world, to be suffocated within a completely interiorized development. She thus rejects as strange any otherness that would not be tamed by her sense of English sensibilities, but then loses the exteriority needed for her existence. By failing to recognize the independence of the other, she in effect loses herself.

3.3 THE QUESTION OF POWER AND THE OTHER MOTHER

The black people have or had a good word for it – ‘she magic with him’ or ‘he magic with her.’ Because you see, that is what it is – magic, intoxication. Not ‘Love’ at all. There is too the magic of the place, which is not all lovely beaches or smiling people – it can be a very disturbing kind of beauty (Letters of Jean Rhys 262).

In this section I explore Antoinette’s desire to be close to Christophine’s “power,” before finally delving into an analysis of silence and language. While Antoinette is described by Rochester as something “different” than English, she in turn describes Christophine in a manner that separates her from other black women:

Her songs were not like Jamaican songs, and she was not like other women. She was much blacker – blue-black with a thin face and straight features. She wore a black dress, heavy gold earrings and a yellow handkerchief – carefully tied with the two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion (20-21).¹²⁹

¹²⁹ This is similar to Rhys’ physical description of her nurse Meta in her focus on blackness: “Now it is time to talk about Meta, my nurse and the terror of my life. ... a short, stocky woman, very black and always, I thought, in a bad temper” (SP 29).

Christophine cannot be so easily ethnically or racially identified in the narration – she is separate from the homogenous group of blacks that Antoinette fears, giving her a cloak of safety, and also exoticism. The material realities that she endured are masked by emphasizing her psychological strength and mystical nature. Being from Martinique she was separated linguistically from Antoinette, who did not always understand her patois songs.¹³⁰ This separation makes her signification in the text more slippery, which grants her some sense of autonomy as she defies neat racial categorizations. But also she was perhaps made more acceptable by Antoinette, who felt the need to separate her from the masses. Antoinette points out:

while she could speak good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois, she took care to talk as they talked. But they would have nothing to do with her and she never saw her son who worked in Spanish Town. She had only one friend – a woman called Maillotte, and Maillotte was not a Jamaican (21).

In fact other women were terrified of her given her apparent use of obeah. Although the representation of this practice is in part owing to the imaginings of the girl-narrator and therefore conjured through apprehension, Christophine also asserts a real threat when she warns the servant Amélie, “I give you bellyache like you never see bellyache. Perhaps you lie a long time with the bellyache I give you” (102). With the narration focusing upon her independence and even dominant traits, comparing Christophine’s position with that of the nana in Castellanos’ narrative again it follows that the woman who works in the master’s house has endured a separation with her biological family and has been shunned by the surrounding community.

¹³⁰ Russell suggests that when the narration states that patois is being used, that it is perhaps a Martinican or even Dominican Creole dialect that only Christophine masters, and that the other characters do not understand. The connections with Martinique also illustrate Rhys’ writing of what she knows, Dominica, into the Jamaican setting, where she had never been. Hulme points out that Dominican references pervade the early part of the novel, with no effort made to strictly anchor the setting to Jamaica (78).

Concerned with why Christophine would stay with them when so many others had left, Antoinette inquires about her background to her mother, who responds that she had been a present from her father, but then reproaches her for asking about “these things that happened long ago” (21). She asserts that the other servants, Sass and Godfrey, stayed to take advantage of having food and shelter: “Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure” (21). She then directs the dialogue towards her own fate, leaving Christophine’s motives a mystery, but surely gives the impression that she in any case acted of her own will. Is it fidelity to the mistress, or does Christophine go where she pleases? Unlike the other servants she is presumed to not be bound to the dominion of the Creole family. Antoinette wonders if Christophine would leave if her mother told her to, but does not dare ask the question, allowing her to escape too much familiarity with the extent of her mother’s authority.

There is never any explicit mention that Christophine’s loyalty to their family could be the reason for her separation from her son. Her distinction from other black women is depicted as a result of *their* fears, rather than the more likely story of the distances and tensions between house servants and slaves working in the field (once more their labor is obscured). Moreover, the emphasis upon her loyalty denies the reality of her commodification – she was of course a “present” for the mistress, and did not arrive on her own accord. Different from the nana in Castellanos’ novel however Christophine uses obeah to exert her own power and thus protect herself from anyone who may have done her harm, affording her a sense of agency that a silently “oppressed” character would not have. Thinking again upon the feelings of being out of place and not quite belonging that Antoinette experiences, we can only imagine the precarious position between worlds that Christophine is in, although according to the narration she is able to handle

this positioning with ease; in fact these negotiations apparently lend her strength. While Antoinette is constantly preoccupied with belonging, Christophine is able to forge a place for herself outside of the rules and laws that her mistress follows and by which she is defined – this is particularly clear when she asserts in response to Rochester’s threats, “[t]his is a free country and I am a free woman” (160), despite also declaring the falseness of emancipation: “No more slavery! She had to laugh! ‘These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people’s feet. New ones worse than old ones - more cunning that’s all’” (26). Parry makes sure to emphasize the potency of this defiance as being outside of the interests of the dominant discourse of the protagonist: she underscores that it is “not enacted in a small and circumscribed space appropriated within the lines of dominant code, but is a stance from which she delivers a frontal assault against antagonists, and as such constitutes a counter-discourse” (40). I wish to stress the effectiveness of this rebellion; not muted within the narration but undercutting the patriarchal codes prevalent within Antoinette’s speech.

Like the girl’s assertion that Columbus discovered America in *Balún Canán*, Antoinette’s erasure of certain histories that would challenge her story of victimization is placed against Christophine’s drawing attention to the limits of emancipation and the ineffectiveness of the law. The narrator allies herself with history that nonetheless keeps her in the position as victim; in the progress of history she can only be marginalized. In this case it is not Christophine who is silent; rather she uses language effectively to form for herself separate spaces which the narration cannot capture, a process that I will outline in the section “The Multiple Languages of Christophine.” Antoinette’s silence couches her within the protective discourse of the disenfranchised. Being unable to act to some degree frees her from responsibility.

The potential for resistance to Antoinette's cooperation with racial mores is evident, but also that the narrator identifies Christophine as both powerful and dangerous shows that she is willing to exoticize the other woman in order to simultaneously draw from that power that she invests her with and keep herself at a distance so that she may pursue the English ideal. This lends another dimension to the now familiar trope of helpless mistress / strong servant. Not only does Antoinette rely upon Christophine's strength, she uses it in order to maintain a clear dichotomy between them. Although, Antoinette's manipulation of Christophine's practice of obeah also displays a turning point in their relationship, from which Antoinette will not recover. The status quo is ultimately not to her benefit. It is at that point when Antoinette most pointedly asserts herself as the mistress, who requests that her servant perform a task for her which she opposes; any motherly advice that Christophine offers goes unheeded. Like the protagonist of *Balún Canán*, she turns on her surrogate mother in order to follow her own story, doubting her knowledge that up to that point she had trusted. For instance she yells at her: "You shut up devil, damned black devil from Hell" (134)¹³¹ after Christophine tells her the truth about her mother, that she had become completely mad. Antoinette doubts Christophine's reason and draws upon racist remarks for support when she is presented with something that is difficult to hear. She most clearly has adopted the Victorian model that would have separated she and Christophine into different "moral" categories; fixed in a binary explained by Paula Giddings, in which the white wife was "hoisted on a pedestal so high that she was beyond the sensual reach of her own husband," while black women were "mistresses, whores, or breeders" (43). After abolition this

¹³¹ Interestingly Rhys reported calling her childhood nurse, Meta, a "Black Devil" (*SP* 31-32). The force of this insult undoubtedly made an impression on the author, and thus it is significant that it would reappear in the novel for the reader to be shocked at Antoinette's words.

dominant trope remained in place to continue to distinguish between different types of human beings, and Antoinette relies upon this in order to preserve her own humanity.

As previously stated, Rochester continued to doubt more about his wife's past and considered how much of her may have been black after all, he no longer saw her as a proper wife and eventually not even an object of desire, leaving her to dangle precariously over that lower moral category.¹³² Desperate to regain his love, Antoinette seeks out Christophine to use "magic" to bring him to her bed one last time. The hope to use obeah to rebuild her marriage exemplifies a colonialist attitude of allying oneself with power that lies in savagery for the civilizing project.

The mentions of obeah throughout the narration that create an atmosphere of foreboding exoticize Christophine, but they also tell us something important about Antoinette's fear of otherness. The chance that Christophine could break out of that mythification, thereby challenging the hierarchies that support the semblance that is left of Antoinette's world, remains a menace. Even though she claims to know Christophine and feels close to her, crossing forbidden boundaries and laughing at her husband who was afraid to touch her, Antoinette notes that much of her life is a mystery to her. She begins to be afraid of Christophine's room even though she says that she knew it so well: "I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly...No one had ever spoken to me about Obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look" (31). A child's imagination of what is behind the closed doors could have been informed by what she had overheard, which would be predicated on suspicions.

¹³² One possible reading of the implications of Antoinette's sexuality is articulated by Lisa Starks, who states that Rochester is only able to view Antoinette as either Madonna or whore, given his cultural heritage: "when he conceptualizes Antoinette as a sweet, silent woman, he 'thirsts' for her. Ironically, however, by quenching that thirst or consummating his desire for her, he makes her unpure and therefore unfit as a love object" (111).

A fixed representation of Christophine becomes increasingly difficult as she escapes the grasp of what Antoinette could possibly know.

When Antoinette first approaches Christophine with the request to use obeah on her husband, she advises her to instead leave him, and labels her a fool for staying in a loveless marriage and allowing him to control her money. In my reading of the marginalized woman in this text Christophine stands out as that character who challenges the English sensibilities with which the protagonist works to align herself. Christophine's critique of Victorian family life demonstrates that she comprehends oppression in a way that Antoinette does not, an understanding that seems to be in concert with the attitudes of lower-class women of the time when Rhys was growing up. Cobham in her study of women in Jamaican literature in the first half of the twentieth century, points out that dominant culture in Jamaica tried to impose its values on the lower-class – valorizing marriage, the man's right to property, etc. – which was then satirized by male writers of the period whose objective became to rescue lower-class women (198). Christophine is surprised by Antoinette's submission to her husband and scolds her for having surrendered her money to Rochester: “All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my god. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man” (109-10). If before it was clear that she was a commodified woman, having been bought by the master to serve Antoinette's mother, now in these discussions it appears that Antoinette has replaced her as an “owned woman” while Christophine has found a way to emerge as free despite what society would tell her. She laughs at European laws, keeping her own definition of freedom that has nothing to do with an artificial emancipation. What is more, she actually exhibits a self-reliance resembling values of Western modernity that Antoinette could never achieve. More accurately,

the juxtaposition of the two female characters may be viewed as exemplary of two opposing handlings of modernity, in the way that is described by Partha Chatterjee: “whereas Kant, speaking at the founding moment of Western modernity, looks at the present at the site of one’s escape from the past, for us [the colonized] it is precisely the present from which we feel we must escape” (20). The radical difference between these two modes of thought is exemplified by Antoinette’s unwavering intent to move beyond her past in order to be incorporated into English society, and Christophine’s insistence that the present is something with which they must contend in order to have a future. In conceiving of the possibility for intersubjectivity, these differing modes of thought must be considered in the way in which they are not able to be reconciled.

As stated earlier, Christophine claims free speech, although not in a way that claims the exercise of reason and pursuit of knowledge for the public domain, but in her private arena she has asserted her independence in a way that accentuates her cleverness and skill in revealing the hypocrisy of laws. She flouts the structures of authority that would define about which subjects she is permitted to speak, eluding those powers that would seek to define her in a vocal disruption of which Antoinette is incapable. By declaring that she does not know if a place such as England exists, we are left not with an impression of ignorance, but with a refusal to believe the way in which the “realities” of the world are presented by colonial authorities. Withholding assertions and maintaining a “what if” stance, their realities are opened-up to dialogue.

Christophine warns her: “So you believe in that tim-tim story about obeah, you hear when you so high? All that foolishness and folly. Too besides, that is not for *béké*. Bad, bad

trouble come when *béké* meddle with that” (112).¹³³ Antoinette nevertheless refuses her advice that she must leave Rochester, and insists that her only option is to go to England. “Why you ask me, if when I answer you say no?” Christophine questions. “Why you come up here if when I tell you the truth, you say no?” (109). If she could not leave him, Christophine states that then she must have “spunks” and “do battle” for herself (116), tell him everything calmly and make him understand; only then would she do what Antoinette asks. It is also significant that Christophine is the “voice of reason” in this scene: she advises Antoinette to keep her dignity and leave the man, and to stay away from things that are not for her. She recognizes that Rochester is only interested in money, and it keeps him unable to love anything else. She is the only one that sees that by staying with Rochester that Antoinette is complicit in her own victimization.

Their discussions of obeah remain cloudy; Christophine keeps Antoinette in the dark, first saying something that she could not make out, and then switches between patois and English. Her tone with her surrogate daughter becomes facetious, teasing her that she must already be frightened after catching her noticing the chicken feathers in the corner. Although the inequalities between them in this scene are evident as Christophine continues to refer to her as the mistress, she also assuredly establishes that she is not a commodified woman when Antoinette attempts to pay her: “You don’t have to give me money. I do this foolishness because you beg me – not for money” (117). After Antoinette wonders if it is indeed “foolishness,” Christophine states: “If *béké* say it foolishness, then it foolishness. *Béké* clever like the devil. More clever than God. Ain’t so?” (117). She reverses the conventional white/black binary of godliness and devilry to demonstrate the devilish power that Antoinette is attempting to implement; it is she who seeks to manipulate others, not the obeah woman. Laughter is also a

¹³³ Tim tim is defined in Richard Allsopp’s *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* as a “Cry by a story-teller announcing to the audience that he/she is about to tell a folktale” (qtd. in Russell 92).

recurring theme; both Antoinette and Rochester fear the laughter of the servants as a threat to authority, and Antoinette's inexplicable laughter for Rochester indicates that she knows secrets that she is not telling. Here again Christophine laughs – something that earlier Antoinette states that she rarely did – demonstrating the increasingly deepening gulf between them, as she knew something about which Antoinette would never access.

It is clear that underlined in this scene is the barrier between them that the protagonist calls attention to when obliging her nurse to use obeah for her. Russell questions to what extent Christophine's is the refracted voice of the author; but in these instances Rhys surely knew that Christophine would have been aware of Antoinette's ignorance of obeah, and it is more likely that she is again speaking in Antoinette's language for her. But this time she mocks her outsidership, reminding her of her allegiance to white purity and illegitimacy within black Caribbean reality. Antoinette relates: "She was talking to Jo-jo [her son] and he seemed curious and amused. Nearby a cock crew and I thought, 'That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor?'" (118). What is perhaps distinct in Antoinette's actions is that she recognizes her failure and feels guilt for it. At the end of the scene Christophine gives her something that feels cool in her hand, materially evoking what had turned cold and impersonal between them. Their relationship is forever changed, and Antoinette will only be able to revisit the feeling of belonging through dreams.

Hence to reiterate, Christophine's unwillingness to allow Antoinette to participate in obeah, and its ultimate failure, highlight the cultural distance between them, as well as the understanding that if Antoinette were to participate, it would not lead to greater acceptance between them but an appropriation of Christophine's knowledge for the service of her surrogate daughter's yearning to be accepted by civilization, ultimately meaning that she would be worthy

of receiving love from a white man. Burrows agrees that Christophine does critique imperialism, although not from the space of her own people (38). This is an important point that must be kept in mind – Christophine’s role in the novel is ultimately to aid Antoinette, and she does eventually agree to help her. But I would agree with Parry that Christophine’s voice is locatable outside of that of the narrator, while Antoinette contests her ability to speak (*what could she know?*). The reader perceives that by not respecting Christophine’s knowledge, she in fact erases any activist potential of the cross-cultural relationship, and in turn solidifies her position as the oppressed. Additionally, the critique of imperialism becomes deeper than that of valorizing Bertha’s story in Jane’s text, since we are able to glimpse through omissions Antoinette’s complicity in the civilizing project that creates the subaltern class, thereby making the critique that much more influential.

Moments when Christophine’s criticism of other characters is overt demonstrate that Creole subjectivity is not only constructed in relation to the colonized woman, but that in this case the colonized woman actually is enlisted to speak *for* the victimized Creole narrator. Antoinette’s victimhood makes her an unappealing character in many ways, while Christophine stands out in the way in which she speaks of freedom, and how she is the only one in fact who is able to recognize the hypocrisies of emancipation. As Angelita Reyes astutely states, Christophine is both “silent and silenced,” “powerful and powerless” (89). Or as Russell asserts, she “transcends boundaries and dichotomies,” being “servant and master, native and non-native, voiceless and voiced” (101). [Tia also embodied strength that Antoinette lacked; Antoinette mentions in an aside: “(fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry)” (23)]. It was inconceivable for Antoinette to have the spunks that Christophine encouraged her to have, and Nesbitt states that she used “racism to avoid acknowledging that her

supposed privilege rests on economic disempowerment” (316). She instead calls Christophine an “ignorant, obstinate old negro woman” (112) and invests in Christophine’s “primitive” power of obeah to get her husband back. In that way not only does she represent what cannot be contained by the text, but she is enlisted to be a source of strength for the protagonist. It would actually be implausible to give Bertha strength beyond what the “madwoman in the attic” of *Eyre*’s story would have, so any critique of servitude coming from a text that is meant to give voice to the Creole woman would have to be framed as outsider criticism. Nevertheless the force that Rhys gives to her black female characters is not entirely positive; rather it seems to be based upon racist rhetoric that connects blackness with strength and whiteness with purity and weakness, making Blacks more suitable for the hard work upon which Whites depend.

Thinking consequently about weakness as a reoccurring theme, I have argued that what is looming in the rewriting of Bertha that reflects upon Rhys’ family history is the pressure to embrace victimization in order to excuse her family’s role in racial oppression – as Antoinette longs to be considered white, weakness is part of the narrative that she constructs. This follows the thinking of slavery discourse which also reveals a hierarchy based upon color that connected Blacks with suffering. In a discussion of liberal fantasies of assimilation, Kathryn Stockton referred to the *intrusion* of the child “queered by color” into the liberal household. Her talk made reference to William Blake’s poem “The Little Black Boy” as an example of a practice within abolitionist literature of associating whiteness with weakness.¹³⁴ The poem begins: “My mother bore me in the southern wild, / And I am black, but O! my soul is white; / White as an angel is the English child: / But I am black as if bereav’d of light” (Blake n. pag.). Stockton contends that what is really bereaved of is the weakness of whiteness; the privilege of innocence

¹³⁴ Kathryn Stockton, “Oedipus Raced, or the Child Queered by Color: ‘Gay’ Child and ‘Black’ Child in Liberal Race Films,” Women’s Studies Lecture Series, University of Pittsburgh, 6 Apr. 2007.

that can never belong to the black child, who is too strong to be white. Part of the privilege of whiteness is the capacity to have a childhood free from physical labor, and the weakness that comes from a lack of suffering. Thus attempts at liberation are complicated by the reconstruction of difference based upon fantasies of the other that hinge upon privilege and weakness. While we may sympathize with Antoinette for not having the tools to fight for her own liberation, no doubt this also keeps her in the relatively privileged position of the cloistered woman. This may have seemed a safe alternative to the girl traumatized by colonial violence; but its failure to provide a real means of survival will in fact become evident to her. The nanny is there for her to preserve her cloistered state; Antoinette would maintain the hierarchy between them, even as Christophine offers her a more challenging sense of friendship that would be built upon dialogue and a heterogeneous sense of knowing and morality.

In a familiar move for the girl-narrator who is growing up between cultures, Antoinette exhibits the patriarchal attitudes of her surroundings: through claiming weakness as part of her nature, and by using obeah without really believing in it or connecting herself to it meaningfully, she illustrates a colonialist tendency to ally oneself with “savagery” and the knowledge that comes with it, whilst maintaining one’s allegiance to “civilization.” In her reading of rum in the novel Nesbitt affirms that obeah, like rum, “is a product of imperialism.” She states:

Antoinette’s decision to use *obeah* on her husband appears, first, as race betrayal and, second, as treasonous native resistance to British authority. However, as Carine Mardorossian’s ‘Shutting up the Subaltern’ and Sue Thomas’s *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* demonstrate, this interpretation of *obeah* reflects the power of colonizers to read black Creole culture as corrupt and illegitimate; it is not a disinterested representation of African-based spirituality (318).

In her poem “Obeah Nights”, Rhys writes: “‘It’s too strong for Béke’ / The black woman said / Love, hate or jealousy / Which had she seen? / She knew well – the *Devil!* / - What it could mean” (*Letters* 265). The ‘hellish’ power of obeah is too strong for “Béke,” meaning white people. Rhys’ terror that she expresses when confronted with the unknown is shown; if there is an ambiguous axis of rational and irrational set up in the novel, Antoinette allies herself with the irrational out of necessity, but protects herself through a veil of ignorance of that which is thought to be of the “devil.”

Therefore Antoinette and Christophine’s relationship reinforces and challenges the duality of colonizer/colonized. With respect to the relationship between colonizer and the colonized subjects, familiar post-colonial theories of ambivalence surface, and one may refer to Bhabha’s conception of a relationship of simultaneous complicity and resistance (*The Location of Culture* 85-92). Although, I see in this relationship in question a different action occurring by each subject: the protagonist demonstrates the push-pull concept that is based upon fear on one side and a human desire for recognition and protection on the other, while the colonized woman undertakes a simultaneous revealing and concealment – sharing personal and historical information at times, but also concealing a bit of herself so that she maintains a semblance of independence. Another useful tool for understanding their relationship is thinking of it as a knot that binds one another to each other’s history, a notion offered by Raiskin. Raiskin explains that the “unraveling process provides a means of analyzing historical, socio-cultural and maternal genealogies that shape female subjectivity, a positionality always multiply mediated through the axes of race and class as well as gender” (2). This metaphor accounts for the multiple alliances between women that bring them closer at the same time as they remain separated. The distances noted in their encounters maintain the unintelligibility of Christophine’s character. Antoinette

points only to obey as that which stands between them, not recognizing discrimination or the history that would have connected their families. It may even be recognized that the push-pull concept is adequate for the more privileged narrator who may form her identity based upon when she accepts and rejects of others, but that the subaltern woman must be on her toes, ready to respond to and guard herself from the protagonist's desires to absorb the other into her sense of self. Concealment is about protection and survival as much as it is about marking difference; thus we may notice that survival means different things to each subject – protection or recognition. This type of marking of the different systems of knowledge that the writer and reader may access I believe prefigures the solidarity built upon the respect of a secret. Without this action, the narrator is never obliged to enter into meaningful dialogue with the other woman that would allow for a potentially political solidarity.

When emphasizing that Christophine is not consumed by the first-person narration, that is not necessarily to say that the writer achieves allowing the other to speak by establishing a respectful distance; rather the history of exploitation that forms the basis of the relationship between the two women emerges in each encounter as that which must be worked through if there were to develop an intersubjective rather than individualist memoir of Antoinette's experiences. The silences between them indicate the struggle of the writer to write that "obeah woman", as well as a presentation of a *not yet* situation in which through an owning up to privilege by the narrator, or that "little perpetrator" within her,¹³⁵ the heterogeneity of experiences within a community are recognized.

¹³⁵ The term "little perpetrator" is borrowed from Mark Sanders, who explores the role of the intellectual in matters of justice and responsibility, and comments that it is not only complicity in deeds that the intellectual must realize, "but the generalization of complicity in human-being that gives moral significance to those deeds" (6). This concern with the "universalization" of responsibility leaves co-responsibility not only to those who are aware of their specific role in oppression, but also to those who understand their consistent potential to do injustice as a human

3.4 THE MULTIPLE LANGUAGES OF CHRISTOPHINE

*Nan was the one she knew best, who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked, had one good arm and half of another. And who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back. But the message – that was and had been there all along (Morrison, *Beloved* 62).*

The words that Nan used in the preceding excerpt from *Beloved* lay bare the intimate connection that two characters can form through the language that they share. The loss, then, of that language indicates the tenuous connection with memories, and with ideas of home. When Rhys wrote the novel she had largely forgotten the French Creole of her birthplace, yet it emerges in the most intimate exchanges between the girl and her nurse; for example Christophine uses with her the following affectionate address: “*Doudou, ché cocotte*” (72). The “separate” language of *ma'am* is also indicative of her separate space within the home; she at once signifies unity and detachment. Importantly, like Christophine her use of a different language does not signify lack of education or inarticulateness; rather it is an alternative dialogue that evokes feelings of intimacy and community instead of control and domination. Different from Antoinette’s silence when confronted with her own oppression, it will be seen that Christophine “does” language in order to affect consequences (like obeah may be described as a

being in relationship with other human beings. This is significant since the characters in the novel are placed within a social context of racism and oppression, and even if they are unwilling participants there is an expectation by the reader that they reach some sort of awareness of how they could begin to act against discrimination even in the most impossible of circumstances.

practice of affecting one's surroundings).¹³⁶ That does not mean that she is always in control of the consequences, but that she employs language in order to cause an effect.

The linguistic registers are much more nuanced in this novel, with the suggestions of Patois, English, French and French Creole, establishing who is inside and who is outside of the dialogic performance at play. Before observing Christophine's physical disappearance from the narrator's purview and Antoinette's final silence, it is crucial to examine the multiple ways in which Christophine chooses to say or not to say, and the resulting strain on Antoinette's faith in reason and individual development. The idea of Christophine's selective and clever use of language is discussed by Spivak who makes reference to her use of *patois* in the opening line ["she pretty like pretty self" (17)]; Spivak then examines Retamar's Caliban whose predicament of being between worlds is read as a trope for Bertha's animal/human state.¹³⁷ She signals the importance of language to Christophine's character, the necessity of figuring out what her use of "so-called incorrect English" ("TWT" 156) might mean, but then only considers Bertha's likeness to the deformed Caliban without significantly making note of the ways in which Christophine uses the master's language in a way that breaks down hierarchies. When considering Spivak's analysis of how Christophine may actually exceed the narrative, a sharp analysis of her linguistic maneuverings is key.

¹³⁶ See Butler's discussion of "doing" language: "We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both 'what' we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences" (*ES* 8).

¹³⁷ According to Fernández Retamar, *The Tempest's* Caliban is a more apt symbol for Latin America than Ariel: "Asumir nuestra condición de Caliban implica repensar nuestra historia desde el otro lado, desde el *otro* protagonista. ... No hay verdadera polaridad Ariel-Caliban: ambos son siervos en manos de Próspero, el hechicero extranjero. Sólo que Caliban es el rudo e inconquistable dueño de la isla, mientras Ariel, criatura aérea, aunque hijo también de la isla, es en ella, como vieron Ponce y Césaire, el intelectual" (30). There are some obvious parallels to draw between this polarity and that of Antoinette and Christophine, although I will only expand upon Spivak's analysis insofar as to highlight the difference between each one's use of language.

Russell introduces a thorough reading of the multiple registers that Christophine speaks from, and announces the need for more investigation on this topic. After all, it is possible to identify at least four languages that she speaks – English, French, Caribbean Creole, and some sort of patois – making her incredibly articulate, sophisticated in fact, and leaving other characters to wonder at times what it is that she is saying. Her first line for example (“she pretty like pretty self”) is opened-up by Russell who points out that it foreshadows her continuous “unconventional” speech throughout the novel. Her use of repetition is consistent with Caribbean Creole expressions, but also indicates a creativity of expression that lends to the novel’s stylistic rhetoric.¹³⁸ Russell notes that she uses what may be considered “childlike” Creole expressions when it is between intimates, such as *do do l’enfant do*, which as previously mentioned further illustrates the closeness between she and Antoinette. However, while various critics have dismissed the creative possibilities of Creole, he notes that there is a complexity that may be read which demonstrates that Christophine is actually the most adroit character of the novel. Criticism that has claimed that the novel lacks a character that speaks her own independence fails to credit Christophine for articulating her own space of enunciation, and the syncretic nature of that location.

If Christophine is perceived as a multifaceted character that challenges Antoinette’s ways of knowing, and who demonstrates a complexity of thought that exceeds that of other characters, then she indeed as Spivak purports tests the narrative structure itself, and also assures that attempts by the author to “construct the ‘Third World Woman’ as a signifier” (Spivak, “TWT” 157) would fail. Taking into consideration her role in Antoinette’s development as more than the Other to consolidate the self provides a way of reading against the grain of imperialism – to not

¹³⁸ Contrary to those who claim Creole to be lacking in creativity, Russell charges that Christophine’s grammatical structures are in fact “often striking in poetic ways” (91).

merely take for granted neither the exceeding importance of individualized subject constitution nor the protagonist's oppression by societal forces that would seal her fate. Christophine exhibits cunning with which Antoinette had the choice to ally, but she instead chooses to emphasize the savagery of the other woman. The blatancy of this act of colonization sheds light upon bland efforts of confessing privilege for the sake of solidarity. It may certainly have been unrealistic for a woman in her position to make any other choice, nonetheless alternative options are presented in perhaps a truer notion of sisterhood for future generations.

Though it also stands for us to consider why Rhys would have chosen to develop her subaltern character in this way. Christophine's narrative power is something that stands outside of Rhys' presumed mindset, and she marks resistance to the dehumanization that Antoinette would enact in order to attain that fetish of white female purity. With respect to authorial intentions, it is interesting to note that in her letters in which she describes the writing process, Rhys herself seems to demonstrate her disconnection from this character (and mentions her own ignorance of obeah). It appears as though Christophine emerged in the writing despite the author's unawareness of her substance, in a similar way to how the protagonist tends to dismiss her nurse's influence. If one reads the novel before knowing anything of Rhys herself, it is perhaps surprising that she writes to Diana Athill in 1966:

The most seriously wrong thing with Part II is that I've made the obeah woman, the nurse, too articulate. I thought of cutting it a bit, I will if you like, but after all no one will notice. Besides there's no reason why one particular negro woman shouldn't be articulate enough, especially as she's spent most of her life in a white household (*Letters* 297).

The way in which Rhys appears to disregard her significance is telling, in that it is evident that the purpose for Christophine is to be the agent in developing the turning point of the story, and to then disappear. If she is in fact as Annette describes her *not* domesticated, always loyal to the family with a choice to leave, then she is also another that refuses to cooperate with Antoinette's process of individualization through "civilization," which also provides an alternative explanation for her sudden exit from the story. She had chosen to leave the honeymoon house, and it is Antoinette who goes to her to beg for her help; she then walks away from Rochester of her own volition. Furthermore by calling her the "obeah woman," Rhys implies that her "magic" is the biggest contribution that her character makes to the story, and that she was probably not meant to be more developed. Is she then an anonymous voice of a confessional tale, there merely to add credibility to the author's "outsider" voice?

We will not know Rhys' intentions, although what she may have meant by "articulate" is interesting to consider; is it that if she would have been true to her characterization that she would have been unintelligible to an English reader? Is Rhys' fear that she may appear educated, when a more accurate representation would have her speaking a simplistic form of patois? I assert that Christophine's articulateness is an ability to maneuver between various languages and cultures, and to thus be able to speak and be heard in a manner that is resistant to domination. This separates her from Antoinette who by the end of her story is only capable of interior resistances, and who (while she may express herself in an unruly way through wildness) is in effect mute to everyone else. This difference between the two female characters by the second section of the novel is striking. Christophine uses double talk with Rochester, calling him sir and occupying the place of the traditional servant, but then purposely making him uneasy using "foul" language: "Taste my bull's blood, master. ... Not horse piss like the English

madams drink ... Drink drink their yellow horse piss, talk, talk their lying talk” (85). Rochester works to suppress any part of his wife that is becoming like Christophine, and notes that her language has become filthy – a trait that he would associate with Christophine, although Christophine attributes it to old Mr. Cosway. “She don’t understand what she says” (156), claims Christophine. She displaces the filth onto the colonizer, refusing the story that Rochester would tell about her. Christophine does not admit to any control of language or agency on Antoinette’s part, everything is repetition and imitation. Therefore it is seen that the *da* steps in as her mistress’ defender, who compensates for her weakness. Not because she is obliged, but out of friendship.

My sketch of Antoinette’s narration as one that is much like the girl’s in Castellanos’ novel: a double narration, at times in the tongue of the planter class and other times in that of the colonized. Although she shows sympathy for the plight of the black Jamaicans, she begins to also see them as her oppressors, and exhibits envy towards those who she feels actually *belong* somewhere. For example, she tells Rochester that she is like Christophine after all, stating “I’m very lazy you know. Like Christophine” (86); but then will also call her an ignorant woman (given Rhys’ surprise that she could be articulate, it would have also been a shock to the girl that an uneducated woman could have something to teach her). Again, this protagonist is very much a “cultural receptacle” of her environment (Finnegan 21), repeating what she hears and interpreting little of it independently. There is also a battle of control over her in the argument between Christophine and Rochester; the *da* asserts that she is like neither of them: “She is not *béké* like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us either” (155).

Being located between cultures for Antoinette is not a source of strength; it in fact pushes her further into herself, as she does not know how to control the fragmentation as a result of not

being able to form a unified identity, always being faced with the ideal of purity. Contrary to this, Christophine's ability to speak multiple languages and her choice of which language to use with whom demonstrates her negotiations of who should be included and excluded from conversations based upon the threat that the other may present. For example, by speaking to her son in English when Antoinette established earlier that he speaks patois, Christophine assures that Antoinette is included, that there are no secrets between them at that time. The stress on which language is used with whom and in what circumstances is apparent. According to Russell's study she had more likely spoken to Antoinette in a Caribbean Creole that Antoinette could understand (93), highlighting the deep familiarity between the two women. I am reminded of Lionnet's description of women's writing in postcolonial contexts, in which the subject is able to speak "several different languages (male and female, colonial and indigenous, global and local, among others)" (5). This is a fundamental point; although Christophine is not the speaking subject as such of the text, she does demonstrate this capacity to speak to and from different locations, pointing to the skill of speaking in the language of the recipient (or not) in order to manipulate one's subject position. That she would demonstrate this proficiency in a postcolonial text and not the Creole protagonist is significant, given that while Antoinette may be confined to her participation within *Jane's* story, there is a character that is able to manipulate her subject position in a way that allows us to imagine more of an outside to the Creole protagonist's story.

Rochester is particularly sensitive to this process, frustrated when he feels that something is being hidden from him. In his first impressions of Christophine, her danger as an uncontrollable figure that represents a challenge to his authority is revealed:

'Doudou, ché cocotte,' the elderly woman said to Antoinette. I looked at her sharply but she seemed insignificant. She was blacker than most and her clothes, even the

handkerchief round her head, were subdued in colour. She looked at me steadily, not with approval, I thought. We stared at each other for quite a minute. I looked away first and she smiled to herself, gave Antoinette a little push forward and disappeared into the shadows at the back of the house. The other servants had gone (72).

Christophine flashes the control that she has of her surroundings in this encounter, as well as an ability to create distance through language and gesture. Her distrust of Rochester dictates the language she would use, and her gestures indicate with whom she is allied. Also, while Antoinette never refers to her as a servant (although Christophine politely calls her mistress), Rochester makes note that she is of a higher social order than the other servants remaining after many had gone. The menace that she represents for him is not just obeah, but that she had crossed the borders into family life.

He is frustrated when he hears Christophine and Antoinette speak together and he is not part of the dialogue: “*Adieu foulard, adieu madras, or Ma belle ka di maman li. My beautiful girl said to her mother (No it is not like that. Now listen. It is this way). She’d be silent, or angry for no reason, and chatter to Christophine in patois*” (91). He thus heard Antoinette use both French and Creole with her “mother,” perceiving again that she is more than just a servant. What he does not understand is devalued from speech to “chattering,” hence beginning the dehumanization process that will take from her language the power to evoke change or to name, and her capacity to be civilized. If we are linguistic beings and thus constituted by language, a structuralist argument that I contend Rhys would support given her emphasis on the connections between names and identity, then the force that it has upon us is defining, and to be excluded from dialogue is to deny one’s existence. Antoinette’s inner language that forms the basis of her life story may offer a sense of individual self for her benefit; but does not in fact allow her

existence in the world. Although she manages to shut her husband out with silence, it is not enough to rescue her from her fate.

Returning to the concept of interpellation, interestingly, Butler points out that although it requires a relationship of control in which she or he who is being called must acknowledge the way in which she or he is being addressed, one can also be “interpellated, put in place, given a place, through silence, through not being addressed, and this becomes painfully clear when we find ourselves preferring the occasion of being derogated to the one of not being addressed at all” (*ES* 27). The insistence of the body to be interpellated in either positive or negative ways stands out in this novel; to be raced (by calling one “nigger” or “white nigger”) affords power to the one doing the naming. But the addressee, if feeling fragmented from a community, may allow herself to be interpellated as an act of survival. Tia unmistakably refuses the interpellation by answering with a violent act. Christophine however answers, “[I]ook me trouble, look me cross!” (135), when called a black devil. She opposes the hateful speech, yet accepts the terms of their encounter by answering. Antoinette is not able to do either, confronting control with silence, or with violence that has no solution (she physically attacks both Amélie and Mr. Mason). When Rochester calls her Bertha she tells him that it is not her name, and being called white cockroach drives her to rage; yet to be ignored completely is that which is most unbearable, and for that reason she employs obeah even after Christophine warns her that he would only hate her. It is her silence that causes her ultimate downfall.

When considering then the grunts of the madwoman alongside the linguistic registers of this novel, they become more than an indication of madness or deformed speech, and instead highlight what cannot be understood within a text that is limited by the axioms of imperialism. It was the idea of deformed speech that prompted Rhys to write the madwoman’s story, believing

that just because Bertha was not understood did not mean that she could not speak. But, it is also significant that while Antoinette loses her voice Christophine is able to adjust her language depending upon who she is speaking to, or around – she may speak the recipient’s language, or she may choose one that he or she does not understand.

Thus although I would be tempted to highlight the moves towards silencing the domestic servant that would connect her with the protagonist, it is more exact to state that she does not come close to the type of silence that Antoinette embodies, as she employs an apolitical silence that fails to protect her. Rochester in fact states that she was “silence itself” (168), remembering that she had initially tried to escape their marriage, but nevertheless gave in: “coldly, unwillingly, trying to protect herself with silence and a blank face. Poor weapons, and they had not served her well or lasted long” (91). Although Christophine is a minor character, she shows Antoinette that her silence cannot speak; that it will be her demise. Meanwhile Christophine is able to verbalize her space in order to stay at the margins, but also to complicate the story in a way that provides an alternative subtext to that of woman’s subjugation under man’s laws, and black woman’s silence. The text does however indicate that she is quiet, but when she does speak her words have strength.¹³⁹ Quietness is differentiated from silence, which draws Antoinette completely into herself. Although her silence does have the effect of creating a barrier between herself and her husband, it also allows him to control her like a marionette.

Christophine lets Rochester know that she knows what he means when he uses the word “marionette”: “That word mean doll, eh? Because she don’t speak. You want to force her to cry and speak” (154). Christophine’s articulateness reveals that she not only can “do” language, but that she can locate the structures of domination in others’ language as well. His is different from

¹³⁹ By characterizing her as quiet, Christophine is distinguished from the stereotype of the “black mammy,” often portrayed as loud and boisterous.

Christophine's manipulation of language; her ways of hiding that hint at the various logics presented simultaneously in the text. She seemingly takes advantage of Rochester's ignorance of patois, using it to exclude him when she speaks with Antoinette: "she kissed Antoinette on the cheek," states Rochester. "Then she looked at me, shook her head, and muttered in patois before she went out" (102). She not only excludes him, but isolates him from language in order that he experiences loss of control. Her weapon is language, while Antoinette's is the less effective one of silence.

In Rochester and Christophine's long dialogue towards the end of his chapter, an unidentified voice interferes in parentheses: "Oh Christophine. O Pheena, Pheena, help me" (154). While it is unclear whose voice this is, or whether or not it is Antoinette interfering in Rochester's narration, given that her name is changed and anglicized it follows that it is Rochester who offers the plea. Although Antoinette does apparently refer to her as Pheena in one instance (145), thus it is not out of the question that its shortening is a term of endearment. Regardless, in Rochester's voice the name becomes condescending. Unlike changing Antoinette to Bertha, calling her Pheena has no interpellative power since Christophine is not present to answer (she does not turn around reflexively in the Althusserian sense). By using Pheena, as he did with Bertha, he works to create a new reality despite protests from the ones being addressed wrongly. He experiments with naming her: "So much for you, Josephine, or Christophine, I thought. So much for you, Pheena" (143). Even so Christophine denies the power of his speech. As Russell states, he brands her a devil and refuses to use her name, although by "refusing to identify Christophine" he loses control over her (99). He fails to rename her as he does Antoinette, and can only subtly mock Christophine's identity and his wife's dependency on her. Christophine meanwhile continues to talk in circles, never admitting to drugging him. "She

began to mutter to herself. Not in patois. I knew the sound of patois now” (161), Rochester muses. Mutterings, whispers, and indistinct dialects – there is close attention paid to language and its function for establishing meaningful dialogue. The key question for *Balún Canán* may have been – are you listening? Here we are more keenly aware of who is meant to hear according to the language chosen. Christophine walks on the sidelines of the text not within an apolitical silence, but subtly manipulating the dialogue in order to challenge patriarchy from the margins in a way that Antoinette cannot control.

3.5 QUESTIONS OF SOLIDARITY – THE *NOT YET* SITUATION

“With” is the sharing of time-space ... “With” does not indicate the sharing of a common situation any more than the juxtaposition of pure exteriorities does (Nancy 35).

I have been building up to an assertion regarding the possibilities for solidarity between women, presented through Christophine and Antoinette’s relationship, which I analyze by way of conclusion. Solidarity implies a relationship with political possibilities that go beyond the individual. Thus the mother/daughter bond between the two women would not just be productive for the young woman’s growth, but would allow us to read for feminist potential that challenges hierarchies and constructions of racial and gender mores. Community implies mutual understanding; a stepping-stone to solidarity. The type of community that resists the assimilation of others into a dominating conception of unity must acknowledge the idea of being *with*, as opposed to being *of* or *for*; and also must reach an understanding through recognitions of responsibility to the other. To glimpse this possibility within an inherently unequal relationship demonstrates a will by the author to address past injustices, and an inclusion of characters that

challenge more than support the central narration. Antoinette glimpses the possibilities for a community between women when she describes the somewhat idyllic scene of the women working together at the river. When she mentions Christophine's smell it is not just her presence that brings her comforting memories, but that she smells like "them." Perhaps then Antoinette breaks into Rochester's narrative at this point in order to demonstrate that Christophine's character is not limited to that dangerous obeah woman. Rochester depicts her as a criminal with anti-social tendencies; in response Antoinette places her within a community. But it would not be enough to embrace this community, immersing herself in otherness, without also coming to terms with the acute inequalities that stand between them, and to accept that she must feel ideologically threatened in order to move forward without closing the possibilities that differences offer. Antoinette sees the women gaily washing clothes, but she does not stop to consider whose clothes they are washing; it would require uncovering some of those "secrets" and recognizing complicity in order to actually form any type of community. Moreover, although there is familiarity in that recollection, it is not what Antoinette had come there for; she goes to Christophine for what she deems as her *strangeness* (not to engage in a dialogue in which she must hear the other's point of view).

Spivak describes Christophine as being driven out of the story "with neither narrative nor characterological explanation or justice" ("TWT" 157). She seems to have served her purpose as native informant – secret-holder, myth-maker – and is then pushed aside so that the text can continue its forward momentum as the promulgation of the development of "white" female subjectivity. First, it should also be remembered that she walks out of the story of her own accord, without "looking back." Much differently Antoinette finds herself in Rochester's home, feeling that she had never actually arrived in England, that they had gotten lost somewhere along

the way. Eventually she repeats Christophine's words that she will never "believe" that she is in England. While Antoinette becomes trapped in a limbo state of dreams without hopes for the future, Christophine walks ahead, leaving the disarray for others to clean up. She is not bound to mend their marriage, nor does she share Antoinette's need to be valorized within the ideological system that privileges whiteness since she has her own sense of independence.

Also, although she is physically absent Christophine does not disappear completely, remaining in the thoughts of both Rochester and Antoinette. She is present in influence but disembodied, thus escaping being recuperated for any bildungsroman-like resolution. Antoinette may endeavor to recover a sense of unity through the image of her old nurse, but it is an ideal that cannot be achieved. After torching the estate, which would finally be an end to her dream, Antoinette recalls the following: "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). Fire is associated with the Caribbean in contrast with the cold of England. It is also connected to strength: fires, according to Antoinette, always lit for Tia; and here, Christophine is behind a wall of fire that helps Antoinette although it burns her. How is she helped? – certainly not in the way that she would have expected; that is not in complete cooperation but with painful distance. Thus the novel ends not with Jane, but with the images of two women that Antoinette longed to be like, and from whom she needed help. Tia remains laughing like the girls that Rhys went to school with; only Christophine remains a loving figure, even behind an impenetrable wall of fire.

The torching of Thornfield Hall, while anticipated from the beginning, through Rhys' perspective also symbolizes the destruction of an English ideal, this time in the hands of

Antoinette.¹⁴⁰ In the 1993 film based upon the novel, Antoinette is portrayed as defiant until the end, dancing to the music of African drums with the flames of the estate raging behind her. In this interpretation Antoinette is feistier in response to Rochester, and much more defiant to Englishness. She is always part of the Sargasso Sea, which is filled with seaweed that ensnares Rochester.¹⁴¹ In the novel, however, Antoinette is much more drawn to English ideals, and thus the final act demonstrates a realization that it had all been a false promise. Drawing a parallel to when the Cosway estate was burned, at that time Antoinette expressly lamented the destruction of the painting of The Miller's Daughter, a symbol of order, never to be seen again. She struggles to keep that image of England alive until the ending, when she realizes that it does not exist and that she would never arrive *anywhere*. When Bertha flies at Richard Mason and attacks him she not only reveals her animal-like status (as in *Jane Eyre*), but performs the brave feat of attacking the rule of law, displaying agency that was missing before that point. The final chapter therefore connects Antoinette to Christophine's logic, and also to a Caribbeanness that she had previously been denying. As Van-Neck Yoder explains, at this point she "asserts herself as Caribbean and explodes the Manichean antithesis her narrative was driven to confirm" (185). She also admits her relationship with Sandi, which would have meant for her a shameful breaching of the color lines. Nevertheless she now only encounters the Caribbean through exile, and her only recourse is to turn back to Christophine through dreams; although it is too late for her, the possibilities through which she could have come by a different history may be inferred.

¹⁴⁰ Kathleen Renk does a thorough reading of the presence of the "English ideal" in *Caribbean and Victorian Ghosts*.

¹⁴¹ The film is heavy with symbolic imagery; in particular the dense and hallucinatory seaweed is a distinct motif. The sequence in which Rochester arrives at the island opens with a drowned Englishman being pulled from the weeds by black men, and later Rochester dreams that he is trapped in the weeds while Antoinette swims free within them. This draws attention to the colonists' incapacity to understand the West Indies, which is like a dream, as well as their tendency to frame the other culture within a lens of mystery.

Nun Halloran asserts that the novel is actually postmodern in its insistence on the individual as being more important than the community, and also on the impossibility of the development of a unified subject (88). Although the text aspires towards the individuality of the female subject, the final scene acknowledges that to purport fluid relationships that dissolve boundaries between selves and others is problematic at best; but that the ideal of a community of women would not be so easily dismissed in the modernist text. Are we simply looking at two refracted female identities, the impossibility for the colonized woman to develop a cohesive self, and not at solidarity? What must be recognized in any criticism of the novel are the failures that are being narrated – the failure of Antoinette’s cross-racial friendship, that of being unable to break the silence that imprisons her, the fall into madness of Antoinette and her mother, and ultimately the inability of the text to maintain a meaningful dialogue with Christophine. These failures reveal possibilities for reform; particularly a feminist text emerges that does not take for granted the presence of the other for the formation of subjectivity. The emergence of the power of the other, even perhaps despite the author’s intentions, give way to a purported need for dialogue which prefigures the writings of later women such as Cliff who honors the rebelliousness of Nanny, who would represent a true maroon identity.¹⁴²

Therefore community is seen as a possibility only within the counternarrative which is presented most dramatically through dreams and daydreams: Antoinette imagines a situation in which either Christophine or Tia is able to save her. They form the direction in which she runs, where she seeks to know herself, while her path with Rochester takes her towards an imaginary

¹⁴² According to Cliff the powerful aspect of the grandmother in her novels “is apotheosized in Nanny, the African warrior and Maroon leader and ‘Science-woman’ (as the Maroons called her), precolonial woman par excellence, whose boiling cauldron so mesmerized the Red Coats that they tumbled in and disappeared; ... The extent to which you can believe in the powers of Nanny, that they are literal examples of her Africanness and strength, represents the extent to which you have decolonized your mind” (47).

England that consolidates her identity into a colonized/colonizer duality. The first-person narration would assume that liberation would be achieved through greater access to individuality and the connections with Englishness that her husband offers – that frozen image that she held from a school book – while subconsciously there is an awareness of the possibilities for forming a communal identity. While Jane was able to move from a counter-family to a family-in-law (see Spivak, “TWT” 149), Antoinette finds that the law offers her no security or love, finally coming to the awareness that the type of counter-family that Christophine offered would have afforded her a greater sense of freedom.

Finally, I address Grace Poole’s statement at the beginning of the final sections: “Servants will talk and you can’t stop them” (177). The common fear by the ruling class that as the eyes and ears of the home servants know too much (the most dangerous ones are laughing), is a constant theme, and it is significant that it is reiterated again in the final section. The servants both confirm and threaten boundaries. The idea that their talk cannot be stopped not only indicates their unbridled nature according to the English women; their fear is that they call attention to the limits of hegemony through their whispers, and are intruders in those very spaces in which they are confined. Christophine speaks; she uses the terms master and mistress, but also criticizes their audacity to claim reason and dispense justice. When she comes to the mistress with the truth of what is happening in her family she is shunned and rebuked with racist comments. This is not because her knowledge is powerless; it is powerful. To ally with this power Antoinette would have to accept the most unpleasant truths about history, and her complicity with the promotion of a view of humanity that she could access through “passing.” Her hypocrisy is laid bare, as a wound kept open by the fire that separates them.

This ending may leave promising a sense of mutual recognition that Butler examines in light of Jessica Benjamin's work: according to Benjamin recognition is "a process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of the one into the Other ... or a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other" (*UG* 131-32). This type of mutual recognition is achieved through communication in which there is always posed the "psychic risk of destruction" (*UG* 132), as Butler stresses. In communication, in order to avoid destruction, one must avoid projecting aggression onto the other, or closing oneself off to the other. For Butler this means that although there may be breakdowns, recognition "can triumph" (*UG* 134). Pursuing this line of thought in my analysis, recognition need not fall into an absolute narcissism; nor does the text need to resolve itself with either the triumph or collapse of the individual in the face of the other. A more productive space has emerged with the image of the fire and Christophine behind it, "helping" Antoinette. She stays out of her grasp, reminding Antoinette of what is unassimilable in her life.¹⁴³ Butler's question, "how might we encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers?" (*UG* 35) may be approached in a reading of the relationship between the female characters. Antoinette's safe world of definitions is no longer an option; she is unintelligible to others, and therefore her life becomes unlivable. The image of fire assures that she will continue to experience the necessary scorching, which may also be imagined as Christophine's tongue and her multiple languages, achieving no resolution yet glimpsing hopes for the future.

¹⁴³ I borrow this wording from Ahmed who refers to the "stranger neighbour," who is both distant and close, a reminder of that which is "unassimilable" in one's life (138).

4.0 CLARICE LISPECTOR'S *A PAIXÃO SEGUNDO G.H.* - THE ACCUSATION OF THE OTHER

*Esse ela, G.H. no couro das valises, era eu; sou eu – ainda? Não. Desde já calculo que aquilo que de mais duro minha vaidade terá de enfrentar será o julgamento de mim mesma: terei toda a aparência de quem falhou, e só eu saberei se foi a falha necessária (Lispector, *A paixão segundo G.H.* 32).¹⁴⁴*

This study has been touching upon the ways in which the minor characters in fiction may not only support the main character and be indicative of the implied author, but also more forcefully stand to judge the central narration from without; hence the protagonist's capacity to tell a story of development within a feminist text is consistently destabilized from the margins. Resulting from this process is that within these texts in which the individuality of the female protagonist is put under pressure by a changing exteriority, there is a greater possibility for reading a possible solidarity that is built upon the unremitting insistence of the recognition of complicities. A concern with not appropriating the other within the discourse of the "I" reveals at once that escaping narcissism completely is impossible, and that despite that failure the mistakes of the narration reveal a subtext that critiques the patriarchal ideologies within which the writing is bound up.

¹⁴⁴ "That her, G.H. in the luggage leather, was me; is it ...still? No! Hence I calculate that the hardest thing my vanity will have to face will be my own judgment: I shall have all the appearance of one who has experienced failure, and only I shall know if it was requisite failure" (Sousa 24). All translations of *A paixão segundo G.H.* will be taken from Sousa's translation unless explicitly stated otherwise.

What distinguishes the comparison between the novels of Rhys and Castellanos is their focus on the developing subjectivity of a young girl who wrestles being located between cultures. Her guilt concerning privilege is a result of being intimately attached to the colonized woman through a mother/daughter relationship. Despite their unequal relationship, the girl and her nana share in oppression within the domestic space. In contrast, Clarice Lispector's novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* is set in an urban, mid-twentieth century Brazilian setting, through which an adult woman will be confronted with the reality of her domestic servant. Unlike the previous novels there is no concern for strangers that surround them who may do them harm; the maid and mistress are isolated within the high-rise apartment, living a private life specific to urbanization. The protagonist can more easily ignore her maid even given their closer proximity, just as the city-dweller is trained to walk with blinders, ignoring suffering. In this novel there is also no face-to-face intimacy between the mistress and the maid; the mistress cannot even remember her maid's face. In that sense the protagonist is much like Zoraida in *Balún Canán*, who expects that the servant will remain in her socially designated place and to stay silent; she is not invited into the "living" space, and should avoid unnecessary interactions with her possessors. In the case of *A paixão...*, the protagonist is not struggling with identity, and does not feel that her subjectivity should be dependent upon interactions with her domestic. Although they share a living space, the domestic is confined to the servant's quarters, and to cross those lines would mean to break with the protagonist's concept of what is natural. Furthermore, there is no representation of family life. The protagonist is a single woman without children, and successful in the contemporary sense of not being bound to social conventions. She would expect that any development of subjectivity would occur in social isolation, within the alienation of the urban setting. That she will be obliged to see the nature of her being through the gaze of another is a

shock to her system, as she realizes that she does not have the freedom to make her own meaning of her life.

The apartment setting becomes a microcosm of humanity; the protagonist's indifference towards economic exploitation is allegorical of contemporary city life. The writer's inability to capture reality is intensified as she develops her story within a complete abstraction. Furthermore, this is not a female development story in which growth happens gradually over time; rather it is an awakening in an instant, restructuring the bildungsroman into a confined space in which the past, present, and future exist simultaneously. It demonstrates that the bildungsroman, as fundamentally a story of growth, does not necessarily have to begin in childhood. Thus I will speak of the text as a novel of awakening, a subgenre of the bildungsroman. A common theme between this and the other novels in this study is that of growth which is based upon a confrontation with privilege.

4.1 LISPECTOR'S AESTHETICS OF FAILURE

Lispector's writings reflect on the tendency of exploitation through representation that occurs with the very tools of her compositions, and thus they compose a compelling subject for the study of responsibility within literature. The author fears not being able to express herself in her chosen form, as much as she also hesitates to represent others through a delineating process that comes with language use. Within her works words are revealed as part of the tyranny of modern life, in which it is impossible to find spaces which have not already been codified. The result of her resistance to hegemonic language is ironically an authoritative narrative voice in works in which it is difficult to distinguish the "I" and the "other" which are both projections of

the self. Hence all approaches towards exteriority are defined through a narcissistic position. Otherness emerges as a fragmented projection of the “I”, which eventually returns to be incorporated into the same (see Mercedes Kahn, 19). The problematizing of representation is nevertheless asserted given that the writing is conscious of this process, and hinting at otherness that remains outside of the narrator’s perception, leading to her shock and distress.

Much like Antoinette’s anxiety-ridden narration in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.*, the narrative “I” seduces the reader from the beginning, only to later contradict herself in a way that appears deceiving. That is, she suggests in the beginning what she would expect to find at the end of her largely introspective experience (salvation, redemption), and then evades those expectations, leaving the reader perplexed. Eleonora Cróquer Pedrón describes this movement between expectation and disappointment as an “artificial seduction,” or a “delicate manipulation” (my translations, 70) of the other’s desires, a characteristic aspect of Lispector’s place of enunciation. Also significant is that the narrator tends to seduce the reader away from recognizing the exteriority of her experience, in a reflexive way that could only displace her narrative authority and demonstrate the existence of otherness that is outside of the first-person’s gaze.

While drawing upon a modernist prose style that is open, playful, and which emphasizes the mystery of language; Lispector also reformulates modernism by staying intensely within the world and the reality of things. The disillusioned narrator finds that she cannot transcend the everyday. Instead, as the everyday reveals itself to her she uses it as her place of enunciation, even though she may simultaneously recoil in horror. As Luciano Rodrigues Lima describes her style, it is a prose that does not attempt to escape from the real through language, rather she leads us unendingly back into life, and the materiality of things (19). The effect is a writing style that

is incredibly dense yet concise, that tends to trip over itself in its limitations of expression, restructuring the language in a way that is not unreadable, but that displays a different perspective of the object in question. Many will note that her texts present the world in reverse, or upside down – it is still the world (not transcendence), but presented from a different angle in order that what it actually *is*, underneath the artifice of description, is revealed.

Furthermore, the field of the everyday is one that is loaded with meaning; having been obscured, the reemergence of the everyday within the protagonist's conscience produces a sense of shock and then bewilderment. Her reaction to "illegibility" is important for this reading, as is the question of whether or not the protagonist is able to comprehend her responsibility for what has been buried underneath her construction of a modern artist's life, in which everything must make sense.

My concern with her writing practice in the specific novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* is with the ways in which we may read the social in what on the surface appears to be a strictly interior and narcissistic narrative. I will further problematize the idea of narcissism through this novel, questioning the negative connotations that limit the term. For now it is sufficient to question whether or not the mere presence of narcissism, particularly notable when discussing women writers, means an essential moral failure. This particular novel while dealing with the same type of existential and mystical explorations that we find in the themes of her previous work, also arguably marks a point in which a significant interest in class difference and privilege is uncovered. It becomes more noticeable that Lispector is deeply aware of the location from which she speaks; not just interior spaces, but exterior as well. That is to say, a social consciousness exists with implications that surpass the individual, contrary to critics that have characterized her writing as purely interior and distanced from the local Brazilian reality. It is

often assumed that there is no outside to the interiority of the experiences in her texts, and in fact various studies have harshly criticized the lack of political commitment in her writing, labeling it as immature, essentialist, and bound to colonial and patriarchal ways of thinking;¹⁴⁵ but I argue that in this novel there is an approach towards intersubjectivity and a concern with social problems, hinted at by the presence of the colonized woman who dwells within the more privileged woman's apartment. Thus not only is there a failure of expression, but also of being able to speak of the other not from ourselves. Seeing the other as he or she is, as Hélène Cixous declares in praise of Lispector, is where the "real work begins" (144). As G.H. incorporates exteriority into her own experience, the reader becomes more pointedly aware of the crisis of assimilation with which the marginalized subject is faced. That is, although the colonized woman is presented as a non-subject by the narrator that does not mean that she is; in this case she will assert a subjectivity and voice to the shock of the narrator. The reader is called to interpret the side of the invisibilized beneath the narrative of self-awakening constructed by the protagonist, as enigmatic as her positioning may be.

The novel approaches the world of two characters: the protagonist G.H. (which may very well stand for *Gênero Humano* (*humankind*), and her maid, Janair. The existential journey that G.H. undertakes is allegorical of the plight of humankind. However, that G.H. would represent humanity leads us to question then under which category her maid falls. G.H. is a sculptor whose maid had recently left (it is never revealed why), and within the completely empty and whitewashed servant's area she finds only a cockroach (which she will find herself having to eat)

¹⁴⁵ See Cróquer Pedrón for a concise outline of the arguments of Lispector's various critics. Most striking are those that have criticized her lack of political discourse, which for Cróquer Pedrón hint at misogynist undertones, given that as a woman writer she was more prone to attacks based upon a perceived lack of agency and inability to get beyond the personal. Alvaro Lins for example had already accused her in the 1940's of narcissism, and within feminist criticism Dafne Patai censured her lack of engagement with the problematic of gender, evidence of a colonized perspective (see Cróquer Pedrón, 62).

and a message left for her in the form of charcoal drawings on the walls; these surprising traces of life in the room trigger a defamiliarization of her space and G.H. begins a journey of self-discovery through losing what she had thought to be her identity. The self is thus constructed through a fracturing of outward identity, and the text's movement between breakage and reconciliation is explained by Anna Beatriz Paula in the following way: "Essa identidade bipartida ... movimenta-se num ritmo de retração e expansão, fusão e separação" (2).¹⁴⁶ She will be unable to reconstruct for herself a sense of wholeness, rather her journey entails the type of awareness of marginality that is attentive to evidence of fragmentation of the subject as well as to the tension between interiority and exteriority.

The entirety of the text takes place in what we can imagine would be a tiny space (the average domestic's room would be not much bigger than a closet); just as the novel itself is small but incredibly dense. G.H. finds herself trapped within the marginality that Janair had occupied, which is presented to her as the object. With horror G.H. discovers that she would have to begin a process of renaming things in order to get back to her life. According to Rodrigues Lima the subject of her novels "tem horror à estagnação da linguagem, à solidão dentro da linguagem, à incomunicabilidade. E esse sujeito investe na renovação da escritura" (17).¹⁴⁷ Thus the subject is intimately related to the writing itself, through which another way of seeing life is exposed. She discovers however that the "name" is an accretion that inhibits contact with the thing: "O nome da coisa é um intervalo para a coisa" (140).¹⁴⁸ Therefore, she suggests an inherent inauthenticity to any exploration of the self that would take place through an abstraction from the real. As frightening as materiality may be, she is resolute to stay within it.

¹⁴⁶ "That split identity ... moves in a rhythm of retraction and expansion, fusion and separation" (my translation).

¹⁴⁷ The subject "is terrified by the stagnation of language, the loneliness within language, the incommunicable. And that subject invests in the renovation of writing" (my translation).

¹⁴⁸ "The name of the things is an interval for the thing" (133).

In Ronald W. Sousa's English translation of the novel, he states in the introduction that it is difficult to see where philosophy ends and literature begins; which is a question of classification that other critics have taken up as well.¹⁴⁹ Like the writer herself Sousa hints at an ideal reader who will not be anxiety-ridden over plot lines and character development. Indeed the language used is stumbling and she experiments with punctuation and grammar, which is unfortunately cleaned up to some extent in the translation.¹⁵⁰ Revealed within a practice of putting pressure on the signifying capacity of language are multiple workings of silence; what it both conceals and reveals. Within the realm of absence and silence is where intersubjectivity is to be found; as in the other novels in this study commonality is found in shared silences. Intersubjectivity is a term that I have yet to find in studies of the novel, but it is certainly the case that G.H. develops an awareness of self that is through the coming-to-consciousness of the individuality of the other woman who shared her space. There is also, similar to the works of Castellanos and Rhys, a practice of "not saying," which is distinct from complete silence since it is still in dialogue with language. In this case although the marginalized woman does not speak, and in fact she is never physically present. Nevertheless, she comes into the text through a

¹⁴⁹ Lispector puzzled over the debates over classification of her texts, and asserted that G.H. was certainly intended to be a fictional character within a novel (Manzo 81).

¹⁵⁰ Sousa writes in his preface that in making an effort to maintain the intellectual positions in the book, and keeping in mind that often phrases and terms are not available in English, the translation "has lost something of the ambiguity and idiosyncrasy that is part and parcel of the original from which it arises and has become more expository in tone than that original." He invites the reader "to imagine a Portuguese text that transmits a much greater sense of potential language chaos than does the translation" (ix). Although I rely upon his translation, I also find that at times it is necessary to write in tension with Sousa's work, given that other meanings are suggested in the English version. Tace Hedrick, in her work "'Mãe é para isso': Gender, Writing and English-Language Translation in Clarice Lispector," points to the necessity of questioning translations of her work, since for Lispector even the smallest word choice may be profoundly significant. Hedrick asserts that one of Lispector's most important concerns is "the connection between language and being-female" (50), thus English translations that ignore certain word choices for the sake of narrative fluidity have sacrificed much of the meaning of the original text, especially with respect to the implications of the author's form for gender studies.

grapholect.¹⁵¹ Consequently there is a revelation of exteriority that works against the protagonist's narcissistic impulse to incorporate all alterity within her sense of the "same," presenting possibilities for intersubjectivity even if it is never achieved or recognized by the protagonist as such.

Critiques of Lispector's work predominantly draw from psychoanalysis, existentialism, French feminism, and (post)structuralism (the latter is intriguing given that her writing prefigured poststructuralism as a theory) to explain the particular type of philosophy that she offers. Suzanne Ruta's *New York Times* review of the 1988 English translation ponders whether the "discovery" of this Brazilian author could be the "missing link" between existentialism and structuralism. Lispector's texts certainly more than lend themselves to readings in this vein, but I would argue that they have been overdetermined as such since criticisms become grounded in a way that ignores the political undercurrents that may provide insight for other research trends, such as postcolonial and subaltern studies, as well as "Third World" feminist thought. My intent is to engage interpretations from various standpoints and to also posit new directions for feminist readings.

Readings of the novel are inclined to focus on the notion that the text deals with an ontological exploration that is closely tied to a rediscovery of creation and redemption that is related to a Kabalistic conception of the world,¹⁵² but as Lúcia Villares also argues, this has

¹⁵¹ I use grapholect in the way in which Walter J. Ong describes it, as a "transdialectical language formed by deep commitment to writing" (8). I emphasize that the commitment to space that Janair's writing undertakes demands distance between she and the reader (G.H.), as oral communication was impossible.

¹⁵² Also important to mention by way of introduction to her form are the various and evident theological elements of the novel, well-researched by critics such as Dany Al-Behy Kanaan and Eduardo Gross. From the *passion*, to the consumption of the cockroach that suggests to many the Eucharist, to the structure itself that Kanaan points out is much like Saint Luke's gospel; these borrowings hint at a mystical angle to Lispector's notion of "awakening." Yet the employment of religious structures and imagery are not faithful to their original use; rather they are reworked in order to correspond to G.H.'s individual experience.

implications that go beyond “a philosophical enquiry into the substance of self” (140).¹⁵³ There is also an intricate intertwining treatment of issues of class, race, and gender, which Lispector perhaps felt inadequate to deal with given her privileged position. Reading the text through Jewish mysticism one finds that it cooperates with the anti-authoritarian gesture of her writing that restructures linear time and questions modernity’s notion of progress. Her conception of time imparts a new historical discourse, which like Jewish mysticism always has in mind both creation and redemption.¹⁵⁴ The mysticism of the discourse of creation is not separated from the social, however, evident as G.H. becomes conscious of the historical context of her surroundings, and particularly the unrecognized workers that must have built her building where her penthouse is located.¹⁵⁵ We see that she does have an interest in the salvation of the collective, but in which the individual is of utmost importance; as G.H. sees herself in the debris of an entire civilization that had as its foundation “o salvar-se” (“self-salvation” 55). She does nonetheless witness the destruction of the human world that is built on individualism, suggesting that to counteract that destruction that redemption must be brought into the public realm. In his

¹⁵³ These readings are significant since it is clear that she borrows from a Judeo-Christian mythology, but she also does not limit herself by it – that is to say that although we may infer that her Jewish identity informs to some extent her writing, we cannot make an essentialist claim about a Jewish identity that she is creating discursively, falling into tendencies of constructing for her a unified identity that she does not necessarily claim. This is a quandary for feminist critiques as well – whereas we may certainly use feminist criticism to analyze the novel, Lispector never identified herself as a “feminist,” and as I cited in the introductory chapter she hesitated to define herself as a “woman writer” given the limitations that are often projected onto the female voice. Moore mentions that although she is often claimed as an exemplary writer by feminists, that she was also “someone who also at times wrote beauty advice columns and had a closet full of designer dresses” (n. pag.). Thus while we may point to the various borrowings within the narrative, there is not one that will serve to provide an answer for the complexities of her language use, nor will an assertion of even a female identity be found. Therefore, in thinking through a reading of otherness that keeps in mind the “other woman” who remains obscured by the narration, a feminism emerges through the problematizing of the essence of womanhood and the negation of linguistic structures which G.H. attempts to hold onto.

¹⁵⁴ Gershom Scholem asserts that the Kabbalah looks to span the abyss between God and man by “retracing one’s steps” to the beginnings of creation (245). Within its teaching religious conceptions such as creation, revelation and redemption are given different meanings that reflect the direct contact between man and God (Scholem 9).

¹⁵⁵ Villares also signals the double meaning of Lispector’s use of the word “cobertura” for her penthouse, which also means “cover-up” (Villares 129-30). Significantly abstract concepts are found within spatial locations.

theological study of the novel, Eduardo Gross mentions as well the connection with the social when G.H. first becomes conscious of the working world, looking into the service room:

vê a escuridão que ali se apresenta na forma de sujeira e mofo e lembra dos operários que construíram o prédio. A fachada branca, a parte visível, contrasta com esta parte escondida. ... A partir daí é que ela percebe a importância do suor daqueles que edificaram a construção – embora isso lhe causa certa repugnância (n. pag.).¹⁵⁶

The apartment building is imagined as a body, within which is that which is repugnant that she does not wish to see, but that nonetheless makes her life possible. The image of mold that Gross creates is also fitting, as something alive that grows out of decay, yet evidence of a transformation of something in the past and surely bound to the material.

The protagonist stops believing in the inevitability of the future, which for her lost its properties of the promise of salvation, questioning the ideologies of progress which have up to that point dictated her life – “quero encontrar a redenção no hoje, no já, na realidade que está sendo, e não na promessa, quero encontrar a alegria neste instante” (83).¹⁵⁷ Important to remember is that not only did her idea of progress fail to deliver to her an authentic life, it also would have only been possible through the labor of another woman who remained in the present, left in the wake of G.H.’s previous aesthetic pursuits.

Studies of Lispector’s work would be enriched by looking further into the concrete results of the very abstract choices that her protagonists are presented with. What accounts for

¹⁵⁶ “She sees the darkness that presents itself there in the form of dirt and mould and remembrance of the workers that constructed the building. The white façade, the visible part, contrasts with that hidden part. ... Beginning from there she perceives the importance of the sweat of those that realized the construction – although this causes her certain repugnance” (my translation).

¹⁵⁷ “I want to find redemption in today, in right now, in the reality that is happening, and not in promise, I want to find joy in this instant” (75).

the lack of social criticism of her texts?¹⁵⁸ Internationally Lispector's work has been celebrated by feminist theorists in the way that she problematizes women's experiences and cuts through hegemonic conceptions of self, identity, and woman's role in society in general. She does this by highlighting female characters that negotiate traditional female roles, and by destabilizing those societal patterns through literary operations that make use of epiphanies and the uncanny. The female protagonists are then caused to meditate upon their subject positions.

Feminist readings typically draw upon the heavy influence of French feminist topics within Brazil's intellectual circles, most likely owing to the fact that French is much more widely taught in primary and secondary schools than English. According to Darlene Sadlier, this accounts for the deeper engagement with poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and *écriture féminine* among Brazilian feminist writers, and the seeming disconnect with issues rising out of postcolonialism or discussions of race and class (166). Consequently with respect to studies of Lispector, there is an absence of intense exploration of the social concerns that are present within the context in which she was writing. What is more, there are scant comparative readings of her work that place it within a Brazilian framework. Her "exceptionalism" has tended to dictate public perceptions of her writing, as something essentially foreign and eccentric.

Her eccentric personality in fact has been highlighted and exoticized for a foreign audience, which may place her outside of the "natural" Brazilian collective. In her review of Benjamín Moser's new biography *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector*, Lorrie Moore writes that Lispector, "despite the South American sun, lived in the clouds and in cloudiness. She was to the public a charismatic obscurity, a witch, a recluse, a mystery: the

¹⁵⁸ See Nádia Batella Gotlib's article "Readers of Clarice, Who are You?" for an outline of both local and public reception of Lispector's works.

"Brazilian Sphinx." Cróquer Pedrón indicates this preoccupation with her strangeness as well, listing the various biographical peculiarities that have captivated readers:

su nacionalidad confusa, los rasgos eslavos y penetrantes de su rostro, su mirada a la vez aguda y extraviada, su excesivo maquillaje, el defecto de dicción que le hacía arrastar las 'r' y producía en la suya la sensación de un habla extranjera, la mano quemada por el accidente que tuvo mientras fumaba en la cama (63).¹⁵⁹

This tendency to cloak her writing within a discourse that portrays her as almost otherworldly diminishes the social impact that Lispector's writing may offer, and like Rhys her "in-betweenness" and complex engagements with the self and alterity bring pressure to bear on understandings of the makeup of postcolonial subjectivities along with the gender component.

The connection with French feminism also owes to the fact that it was primarily Hélène Cixous' reading of and dedication to her work that brought Lispector into the international arena – in her work *Vivre l'orange (To Live the Orange)*, Cixous relates her discovery of Lispector: "a woman's voice came to me from far away, like a voice from a birth-town, it brought me insights I once had, intimate insights, naïve and knowing, ancient and fresh like the yellow and violet color of freshias [sic.] rediscovered" (qtd. in Carrera 88).¹⁶⁰ She has promoted Lispector's writing as being able to reveal new understandings of language and the world, which are not limited by cultural borders. The attention that her criticism has brought to Lispector cannot be overlooked, although it has had the effect of imposing limits given that subsequent feminist analyses are inclined to be filtered through Cixous' language of the body. Moreover, what has

¹⁵⁹ "her confusing nationality, the Slavic and penetrating traits of her face, her gaze at once sharp and lost, her excessive makeup, the speech defect in which she would drag her "r's" and produced the sensation of a foreign accent, her burned hand from an accident that she had smoking in bed" (my translation).

¹⁶⁰ Carrera in her study of the reception of Lispector's work in the international arena through the writing of Cixous, questions whether it is possible to read the "other as other," as Cixous has done, in a non-appropriating way.

often been an imperious link with French feminism furthers the claim that Lispector is separate from a Brazilian reality; such criticism links her more closely with her Ukrainian than her Brazilian heritage, even though her family settled in Brazil when she was only two months old.

Indeed Lispector herself was careful to make clear that as much as critics wished to link her to certain theorists she was influenced by no one, only her own life. Replying to the work of Benedito Nunes, one of her most important critics, she states: “O Benedito disse que *A paixão segundo G.H.* tinha a náusea sartriana, especialmente devido à cena da barata. Não é bem isso. É náusea que a gente sente diante de uma coisa viva demais” (qtd. in Kanaan 143).¹⁶¹ She was in fact consistently resistant to attaching herself to any particular philosophy, and even hesitated to reveal authors that she had read (“Entrevista com Clarice Lispector”). Given that she urged a defiance of categorizations, accordingly critics of her work should be motivated to open up their readings to dialogue with perhaps unconventional and unanticipated theories.

Filled with epiphanies and moments of awakening, the feminine subjects in Lispector’s works struggle to know themselves outside of a patriarchal system. The type of bildungsroman-esque journey that the narrative subject in this novel undertakes is through writing, which allows her to see an alternative to the life into which she had apparently easily fallen. In keeping with the theme of individual growth of this study, I contend that this text may be likened to the novel of awakening as described by Susan J. Rosowski, who finds a pattern in works by and about women in which growth begins in adulthood, after discovering that childhood did not prepare them for life. The novel of awakening is akin to the bildungsroman in that it focuses on a protagonist’s discovery of the world, but for those in which a woman as subject, according to Rosowski,

¹⁶¹ “Benedito says that *A paixão segundo G.H.* has a Sartrean nausea, especially given the dinner of the cockroach. But it is not that. It is nausea that one feels when before something that is too much alive” (my translation).

attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage. The direction of awakening follows what is becoming a pattern in literature by and about women: movement is inward, toward greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world. ... it is an awakening to limitations (49).

The result is a doubling in the narrative between dream and reality, since the female protagonists cannot realize their desires within the constraints of their social situation. Rosowski names Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as a prototype of this type of novel. The main character in Chopin's work, Edna Pontellier, explores her inner self, but in doing so finds her life incompatible with the outside world. Thus the conflict also occurs within themselves, between an inner imaginative self and an outer "conventional self" (Rosowski 50). The strength of interiority is to provide a place of refuge and also a staging ground for desire and self-awareness. Rosowski also mentions Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which demonstrates that there is an inward movement "toward greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world" (49). The tension in this type of novel then results from the awareness that the protagonist cannot actually escape these structures in the real world, and thus her fantasies have no power other than that of temporary flights inward (Rosowski 51). It is not the same "coming of age" process experienced by the young protagonists in the other novels of this study which hinge upon a specific chronology, but like those narratives the subject struggles to represent herself within a system already constructed for her through patriarchal ways of knowing.

The development in the case of this novel occurs within the time of the *now*, which is nonetheless expanded with possibilities that take into account the past and the future in that moment. The time and space of the *now* suggests more of an awakening to a passage to another way of seeing the world than a process of development (imagined nicely by Cláudia Nina as *Alice in Wonderland* finding a door that immediately opens to a new reality). Even so, G.H. does not invest *all* of her hope in one moment; rather she recognizes that the occurrence has been repeating itself and will continue to do so, transforming her life each time. This repetition is indicative of the remnants of everyday life that tend to go unnoticed, unless one perceives them either when boredom becomes manifest (Blanchot 242), or in the shock produced by an outside party who challenges one's system of knowing.

With more of a sense of personal freedom than Antoinette or the girl in *Balún Canán*, G.H. senses that she has broken out of that system that would demand of her motherhood and domesticity, and she has been able to do this because of her social class. She was born into the comforts made available to her, accepting them as her natural lot. This hints at a fundamental difference between her and Janair who replaces her in the domestic domain. Different from Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier, G.H. has no need to escape through fantasy, since she has not experienced the “shackles” of marriage. She does, however feel that she is being judged from without, being a single woman living alone who we discover also chooses to terminate a pregnancy at some point.¹⁶² The type of movement into self-knowing that may be described as an awakening occurs through an intense scrutiny of her life. What is more, important for

¹⁶² This is another instance of the theme of (in)fertility and motherhood that runs through Lispector's works. Most notably in her short story “O ovo e a galinha” (“The Egg and the Hen”) the narrator alludes to her “abortive experience” after meditating upon an egg. In the case of this story that which grows inside of her is a threat to her self-constitution. The narrator in *A paixão...* also deals with guilt stemming from a cultural opposition between individual ambition and motherhood.

understanding this novel is that it is not only a tale of the process of becoming for an individual, but specifically one of becoming a woman. The text itself, as Nina argues, is uterine, filled with feminine images of fertility that are connected with the cockroach. G.H. defines her position as being between a man and a woman; a situation that leaves her, as she states, much freer actually to *be* a woman, given that she never had to worry herself with *formally* being one. Her femininity, as she contends, is something she had discovered naturally, that was not constructed for her – “E quanto a homens e mulheres, que era eu? Sempre tive uma admiração extremamente afetuosa por hábitos e jeitos masculinos, e sem urgência tinha o prazer de ser feminina, ser feminina também me foi um dom” (29).¹⁶³ Nevertheless she will find that although she has resisted social norms that she has also followed some everyday logic that has allowed her to leave certain inequalities that she has perpetuated go unquestioned, suggesting therefore something inauthentic about the way in which she speaks of her own freedom that the reader may in turn put up for debate. This protagonist will not be read through the lens of victimization, although she may remind us of Antoinette’s narration since she does exhibit an anxious narcissistic tendency owing to the fear of being *non-existent*.

After entering the maid’s room G.H. tries to remember what she was like before that moment of seeing for the first time this marginal part of her apartment, and states that never having married or borne children she had been continuously free, never having to wear or break any shackles: “Ser continuamente livre também era ajudado pela minha natureza que é fácil: como e bebo e durmo fácil. E também, é claro, minha liberdade vinha de eu ser financeiramente

¹⁶³ “And among women and men, what was I? I have always had an extremely tender admiration for male habits and ways of doing things and take an unurgent pleasure in being female, being female was also a natural gift for me” (21).

independente” (29).¹⁶⁴ The reality that her freedom was partly possible through the labor of another woman was not known to her, and in fact she hadn’t even noticed the existence of this other woman until the moment of the narrative when she encounters her reality through her very disappearance. It is this shortsightedness of the protagonist that her awakening will be framed against, complicating any hopeful expectations concerning her journey and the ways in which it presents an alternative to patriarchal logic.

The social critique that I am attempting to draw out of the novel is indeed no more than a glimpse – whereas the nana in *Balún Canán* is *faceless* and Christophine’s identity is manipulated by Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in this novel the maid in the protagonist’s urban apartment is in fact invisible. However, that which pushes a comparison of Janair with the nana and Christophine is that Janair nevertheless is *there*; hidden as a constant critique of G.H.’s quest for subjecthood. Moreover I have found that in rereading this novel I have encountered new ways of thinking otherness and the concept of “being with” that lend to a deeper understanding of other women’s narratives. As in the other works that I have chosen, there is not an idealized or romanticized version of the relationship between G.H. and her maid; rather the presence of the marginalized woman within the more privileged woman’s text resists containment and signals that which is being covered over in the process of individual development.

¹⁶⁴ “Being continuously free has been helped along by my facile nature: I eat and drink and sleep facile. And of course my freedom has also come from my financial independence” (21).

4.2 DISTINGUISHING OTHERNESS – WHITE AND BLACK BODIES

Entendi então que, de qualquer modo, viver é uma grande bondade para com os outros. ... quem vive totalmente está vivendo para os outros, quem vive a própria largueza está fazendo uma dádiva, mesmo que sua vida se passe dentro da incomunicabilidade de uma cela (A paixão... 168).¹⁶⁵

As I have stressed, G.H.'s narration works to filter everything that she encounters through her own perception. The "passion" of the title lends to a variety of interpretations; it may be biblical as in Christ's passion, sexual, or a way of living. One of her most noted biographers, Nádía Batella Gotlib, speaks of passion with regard to Lispector's writing in general, which draws upon opposite experiences, most notably intense love and hate ("Entrevista com Nádía Botella"). We may think of this as a play upon the simultaneous desire and terror of knowing that which is outside of oneself. Consequently, this leads to responses by way of both love and destruction. The phrase "according to" in the title suggests a feminist recuperation of symbolism and writing in the form of a retelling of the gospels *according to* Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but also hints at a domination of the text and the insistence of the narrator to tell *her* story, without intrusion of other voices. Accordingly the reader senses G.H.'s efforts to control the narrative as well as any alterity that she will come upon.

The novel is the telling of an experience of an encounter with the other, which begins with G.H. trying to relate to the reader an experience that she just had: "- - - - - estou procurando, estou procurando. Tentando dar a alguém o que vivi e não sei a quem, mas não

¹⁶⁵ "I then understood that, no matter the situation, living is a great good in relation to others. ... He who lives totally is living for others, he who lives his own vastness is giving a gift, even if his life takes place in the cloister of a cell" (162).

quero ficar com o que vivi” (11).¹⁶⁶ G.H. constructs a sympathetic “you” who will go along with her on her journey. The reader is immediately enlisted to listen to her tale, and to possibly even relieve her of some of the weight of her experience. G.H. is an affluent, single woman living in the Ipanema district of Rio de Janeiro on the top floor of an apartment building, floating above the everyday of the city. Having before felt comfortably free from the limits that identities can bring in a way that mimics the “colorblind” notion of Brazil’s racial democracy, she is now trying to make sense of an indescribable something that she has just experienced that has forced her to reevaluate her position in the world. She pledges to take us through it, since she cannot possibly put into words that which is *unsayable*. She begins her narration fearful given that she cannot understand what happened to her, but what occurred was an unexpected rippling of the lines, which she describes as “uma anomalia na continuidade ininterrupta de [sua] civilização” (15),¹⁶⁷ in which she for an instant experienced, a life-giving death. In a moment there is sudden recognition of the ambiguities of her world; the visual construct of her surroundings changes, revealing what is behind the mask in order that she become aware of an outside of linear time and the wholeness of space, and understands that to really understand what it is to be living she must deconstruct what she has considered humanity, and return to the essence in things. Therefore this mystical death requires a stop in the procession of history, an experience that requires something that I would compare to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the dialectical image. That is, in a very Benjaminian sense the most insignificant of objects in the novel contain potential historical and even mystical significance, which may be recognized in a “moment of

¹⁶⁶ “I keep looking, looking. Trying to understand. Trying to give what I have gone through to someone else, and I don’t know who, but I don’t want to be alone with that experience” (3). It should be noted that Sousa adds phrases that are not in the Portuguese [“Trying to understand”], and also that he omits the dashes from the beginning of the text. From my understanding the dashes indicate that the story/experience has no beginning or end, and they are an essential tool for understanding the time and space of the narration. At the end of the text he replaces dashes for ellipses; thus the circular, continuously self-reflexive movement of the text is lost in the translation.

¹⁶⁷ “an anomaly in the uninterrupted continuity of [her] culture” (7).

danger” (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 257). Based in this thought, I assert that G.H. is endowed with a weak Messianic power. According to Benjamin this power belongs to every generation, which is to rescue the dialectical image from oblivion: “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (*Illuminations* 257). It is this critical moment of danger which G.H. finally grasps on to, although she had let it pass by so many times previously. G.H.’s experience could only occur through an explosion of day-to-day life. The path to redeemed life does not occur in a smooth transition in Benjamin’s view, rather as Richard Wolen eloquently states, it is “transcendence breaking in upon history, an intrusion in which history itself perishes, transformed in its ruin because it is struck by a beam of light shining into it from an outside source” (84). In the case of the novel, I contend that Janair acts as the outside source that shines light on G.H.’s civilization, not in a benign way, in order to show her a different perspective which she would have never perceived on her own.

This time not allowing the moment of danger to escape, G.H. begins a task of taking apart everything that she had once considered to be her life, down to the seemingly insignificant trimmings and accoutrements, and realizes that it is all merely an artistic creation made to resemble a life – she wants to disassemble all of the human construction to get at what really *is* underneath the copy of the life that she had made for herself. No longer knowing who she really was, she realizes that she had become her name, those initials on her suitcase that identify her. What she saw looking back at her in pictures of herself was a silence: “havia um silêncio que só vi em lagos, e como só ouvi no silêncio mesmo” (25).¹⁶⁸ Silence in this context indicates who she is underneath the artifices of language and identity – what makes up what the narrator refers

¹⁶⁸ “there was a silence such as I have seen only in lakes and heard only in silence itself” (17).

to as *the human mask* (*A paixão...* 93). All within a trembling “now” moment, the text then undertakes an unfolding of these constructions in order to disclose glimpses of that silence. This the narrator thinks could be love: “Amor é quando não se dá nome à identidade das coisas?” (87).¹⁶⁹ Here she comes into contact with an idea of colonization undertaken through the act of naming, and suggests that love may be the absence of that operation. In that sense love is not something done to another, but a letting go of power. I will revisit this concept which G.H. never is sure that she understands, since it appears that there is a perception of love that would work against the level of narcissism that she enacts. For now she only hints at these ethical ideas, continuing to lead us through a retelling of her experience in which she states she comes into contact with the horrible neutrality of life, a life no longer organized by hope, but by the inexpressible, the tasteless like mother’s milk, what comes before we put order to things. She experiences a death of what she had thought of her “self” through what is within her apartment, and in that way becomes reinvigorated with life.

It is important to note again her desire to involve (or perhaps implicate) the reader in her experience, and indeed to give it to someone else: throughout the text she urges us not to give up and to hold her hand as she stumbles her way through the narration/experience, assuring that it will not be a self-involved pursuit of the writer/narrator, rather one that connects the reader closely with the text. Gross likens her narration to that of Saint Luke, who wants to share the “good news,” that is his experience with the divine, in a way that engages the reader and therefore convinces him or her of the truth of his claims (n. pag.). G.H. also enacts this process of recruitment, but finds that the sacred is within what already is, not in a promise of transcendence.

¹⁶⁹ “Is love when you don’t give a name to things’ identity?” (79).

Thinking in respect to the space of the intellectual, by directly addressing the reader she calls attention to the privacy of writing and the isolation of the writer who can never really reach the space of her object without an act of appropriation. Significantly, Nina states that the reader is the first “other” that is encountered in the text, whose collaboration is depended upon in order to make the narrative possible. Most importantly G.H. wants the “other” to *hear* her, evident as she uses the words *ouve* and *escuta* (*hear* and *listen*); but this connection carries with it the menace of absorption, making it difficult for the reader to imagine that there is anything at all outside of that narrative ego – thus the reading that I am suggesting is again one that resists the controlling “I” of the narrative, to see that which she is either forgetting or fearfully leaving out. This is where the often trivialized marginalized woman comes into play, whose critical function in G.H.’s experience should not be ignored. Expelled from the text she points to this failure in the traces that she leaves as messages on the walls of her home/artifice.

Hence for the purposes of this study I am interested in what the operative was for G.H.’s experience, which as I stated was the influence of Janair to present to her the other side of her life. Similar to Lispector’s other works the protagonist experiences an epiphany caused by an everyday event, but this everyday is loaded with meaning that G.H. hadn’t before recognized, and which perhaps she still resists comprehending completely. The “everyday” in this story, moreover, takes on a greater significance, since it is within that space that hegemony is enacted in silent ways. Because it is never revealed why Janair left, the reader is left guessing about what other challenges to G.H.’s authority were present but either ignored or unrecognized. Until that point she had only perceived the “human mask,” and was unwilling to see the complicated universe that lie behind it. Also, similar to my reading of *Balún Canán*, here again we find that critical emphasis tends to lie in the “end” of the novel, as if it were a conclusion, thereby

forgetting the striking absences that lead up to the event itself, which in this case I will argue pre-judge the (non-)transformative occurrence that is to follow.

G.H. describes her journey as beginning upon entering the room of the maid who recently quit. Her intention is to clean it – a seemingly normal event which she relegates to the margin of her narrative, but that in fact provides the reader with a greater knowledge of her life than she freely admits. G.H. assumes about the maid that she is untidy, and does not give much thought to the reasons why she would have left, only that she needs to be replaced, calling attention to her point of view that the help is as disposable as the cleaning supplies. She describes advancing down the corridor to find two “indistinct” doors, one leading to the service entrance and the other to the maid’s quarters to what she called the *bas-fond* of her house (37). That she is seemingly unfamiliar with this area is telling, as is her description of its darkness and lack of clarity. In Barbara Ehrenreich’s sociological study of domestic service in the U.S., she emphasizes that housework defines a relationship between human beings (87); while one is connected to filth, another is able to transcend that space. That transcendence means for the mistress a life, while the maid is associated with the material – dead things which will now have relevance in the present. What is more, as much as G.H. may wish to ignore the domination going on in her own home, often silent resistances to the mistress’ authority occur, revealing the workings of hegemony in those instances. G.H. could not cite her world completely, and would have to recognize she who could exercise a controlling gaze from the margins of her space. The “peculiar intimacy” (Ehrenreich 93) of the encounters between maids and mistresses relies upon notions of intrusion and possession of space – these processes are disclosed to G.H. as she moves through her experience of awakening.

G.H. speaks enthusiastically of her desire to put order to things, and looks forward to reclaiming what was once the maid's to put it back into her terms. She was looking forward to the mundane work she anticipated doing there, because she enjoyed the task of arranging things, and imagined in fact that she would have been a domestic worker if she hadn't belonged to the class that she did because of her money and culture. For domestic worker Lispector uses the wording "empregada-arrumadeira" (33), suggesting someone who not only cleans, but who puts things in order. *Empregada* is the familiar term for domestic worker in Brazil, and *arrumadeira* refers to someone who straightens things up. The reality of that position for Janair is obscured by G.H.'s idealizing of order, and also minimizing of the inequalities between them since there is a natural place for everyone. G.H. explains the following:

Sempre gostei de arrumar. Suponho que esta seja a minha única vocação verdadeira. ... Mas tendo aos poucos, por meio de dinheiro razoavelmente bem investido, enriquecido o suficiente, isso impediu-me de usar essa minha vocação: não pertencesse eu por dinheiro e por cultura à classe a que pertenço, e teria normalmente tido o emprego de arrumadeira numa grande casa de ricos, onde há muito o que arrumar (33).¹⁷⁰

References to her class position are not awarded great meaning by the narrator, they seemingly are asides to the dominant narrative of experience and redemption; nonetheless it is notable that as she speaks of her own would-be domesticity using language that dulcifies the reasons why she had come upon a different life, she never once connects this to the reality of her maid's life. What is real for G.H. remains very much what is definable by her own perception, and it is clear

¹⁷⁰ "I've always liked putting things in their places. I think it's my only true calling. ... But since, through reasonably well-placed investments, I have gradually become pretty well-off, I've been kept from putting that calling into practice: if I hadn't belonged to the class that I do by reason of both money and culture, I would normally have had a domestic's job in some rich people's great house, where there is a great deal to put in order" (25).

that she struggles to comprehend the reality of the room that is opening up for her. Sidestepping the life that was in her home, she relates the invisible work that continues to be done only to her own desire. Having a vocation is something foreign to her; she admits that she had only paid attention to those things that were natural gifts (29). Work, therefore, is conceived as an outlet of desire, not something that is done out of necessity, or survival. This outlines a fundamental lack of respect for the work that is done for her.

Also important to this examination is that by the epiphanic moment beginning with and being explained through this relationship to domestic service, the field of the everyday is reexamined in order that the subaltern emerges in what is the “illegible stain” (Johnson 22) in the construction of her culture. The charcoal outlines seem to ooze out of the walls thus being part of the structure itself, not merely painted on and thus easily removed. G.H. describes them emerging “como se tivessem sido um porejamento gradual do interior da parede, vindas lentamente do fundo até terem sudorado a superfície da cal áspera” (39).¹⁷¹ According to Maurice Blanchot’s impression, the everyday is bound up with the structures of modernity, and is demonstrated through the lived consent of those structures (see Johnson, 23) – in this case exploitation is enacted by G.H. as a replication of the racial codification of labor, and Janair resists this notion of the everyday by creating the unexpected rippling of the lines, the challenge to G.H.’s civilization. G.H. tends to overlook the everyday quality of her experience, instead searching for the great and transcendent experience that will liberate her from those constructs; consequently the failure is not only that she has no way to represent the other, but that she has displaced responsibility expecting that the very *otherness* of Janair will provide her a way out (really, the only direction that she can go from that point is *in*).

¹⁷¹ “as though they had gradually oozed forth from the inside of the wall, had slowly come from the core, finally reaching the harsh lime surface” (31).

Hence G.H. enters the room expecting to find clutter, but is surprised and mortified to find that the woman had right under her nose made the room her own, in a way that had nothing to do with the rest of the house – thus the space itself stands as a direct challenge to her identity. She states: “Não contara é que aquela empregada, sem me dizer nada, tivesse arrumado o quarto à sua maneira, e numa ousadia de proprietária o tivesse espoliado de sua função de depósito” (37).¹⁷² It is clear that the maid had opened up a dry, empty space, in her otherwise “fresh” and “humid” room.¹⁷³ G.H. had not realized that there was a portion of the house that was not entirely hers, that in fact rejected the cozy aesthetics of the rest of her apartment. She had lived according to liberal ideals, believing that her life, and mankind, could be perfected, which is represented in the way that she keeps her apartment in a state of controlled beauty – full of *moist life*; full of things that she had invested with meaning, but in doing so she actually created only a replica of existence. What she comes to realize is that her home was merely an artistic creation, a mimetic effort of what she thought life should be. In a superficial way she rejected any sign of decay as part of her life experience; presuming herself to be fully alive, not moving towards death. Interestingly she blames Janair for this infraction, although what existed in that space was resulting from her life, what had exceeded the limitations that she had created for herself. While Janair occupied an exteriority to G.H.’s world, it was also intimately connected to her tendency towards exclusion and ignorance.

Along with the existential philosophy that may be used to interpret the text and the tendency towards allegorical readings, it is also evident that G.H. demonstrates the practical

¹⁷² “What I hadn’t expected was that the maid, without saying anything to me, had fixed the room up the way she wanted it, and, acting as though she owned it herself, had done away with its function as a storage area” (30).

¹⁷³ For a thorough reading of the use of what is “wet” and “dry” in Lispector’s works and their relation to life, death, and fecundity, see Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira’s “The Dry and the Wet: Cultural Configurations in Clarice Lispector’s Novels.”

situation of a liberal woman who is able to be successful in the public sphere, and who has been able to liberate herself from the domestic sphere by hiring a domestic servant; this relationship of dependence, as noted by Castillo in *Talking Back*, keeps the mistress from remembering the way that she has displaced housekeeping tasks onto the maid ensuring the preservation of the class-gender system. In reference to the mistress who would claim to be doing the maid a favor by creating work for her to do, Castillo states that “the use of the rhetoric of liberation sounds like bad faith coming from a woman who only uses it to her own advantage and who averts her eyes from the exploitation going on in her own home” (13). The “aversion” that occurs in this novel may be read in various ways; it may be interpreted as a reaction to the abject in a Kristevian reading,¹⁷⁴ or what distinguishes self from other for the formation of a coherent subjectivity. I accept those readings, but in keeping with Castillo’s response to liberal privilege, I add that G.H.’s aversion is also an unconscious coping mechanism which is employed in order to not disrupt the comfortableness of everyday life, which until her epiphany had assured her the preservation of her way of life. The mistress may make various excuses for her need for a maid that may or may not be justified – that she is helping her by giving her work, that she could never do what she does without assistance – but what she fails to admit are the levels of inequality, evident in this case as the maid’s quarters doubles as a storage area, suggesting a life that is linked with trash and disposability; elements that went unnoticed by G.H.

I further contend that feminist readings of the novel risk undertaking this same aversion, concentrating only on the ontological exploration of G.H. and forgetting the work of the marginalized character that makes her journey possible. Trash is indicative of the messiness that

¹⁷⁴ The abject according to Kristeva lies “beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable ... but it cannot be assimilated” (1). This formulation of the abject is represented through the protagonist’s vomit, and also through the cockroach which she eats and then spits out.

in Lispector's work is necessary for approaching an understanding of existence itself. But its connection here to the life of Janair opens up to a reading that takes into account the economic exploitation that permits her time for contemplation. Although the maid remains a marginal part of the novel and G.H. never in fact arrives at admitting directly this act of exploitation on her part, the reader cannot forget this woman who provides the framework for this redemptive and potentially liberating experience.

Janair's character is rarely given serious attention by critics, even though through her domestic labor the process of individuation of the female development narrative is made possible. A notable exception is Lúcia Villares, who dedicates her article to reading the ways in which Janair presents to G.H. a consciousness of G.H.'s whiteness, thereby provoking the collapse in her identity structure. Villares recognizes that Janair possesses a distinct individuality, evident through a transformation from object to asserting her own voice and gaze, which "breaks an accepted 'social pact' that ensured that whiteness remained essentially invisible" (135). The ideology of whiteness is certainly part of what is being covered over within the trappings of bourgeois comfort in her home. Villares makes an important point that it is conventionally whiteness that is invisible, while blackness which is marked on Janair's body is the only signifier for racial discourse. By becoming invisible, then, Janair shines light on G.H.'s whiteness making her aware of a privilege that she had ignored. It is the case that while the maid's labor is veiled within the everyday, her intense visibility stands as a border between the more-privileged woman and the abject. She is at once intensely visible and invisible, seen as object yet ignored as subject. She belongs to G.H.'s everyday that passes by unnoticed, although she is assigned within that space to be in charge of the refuse. Thus for Janair to literally

disappear is a compelling announcement of G.H.'s employment of her in order to maintain a status quo.

Moreover, in her unrecognizability Janair is able to escape those very constructs that define her space. According to Blanchot, the everyday is “platitude (what lags and falls behind, the residual life with which we fill our trash cans and cemeteries: scrap and refuse)” (239). He continues however to state that this banality is “most important if it brings us back to existence in its very spontaneity and as it is lived – at the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence and all regularity” (239). He also insisted that the everyday is what escapes because “it is without a subject;” without an “I” able to “give rise to a *dialectical recognition*” (244): Janair is connected to the everyday as the doorwoman, but she also possesses a subjectivity that interrupts the everyday’s capacity to escape. She is part of that subalternity which, as Adriana Johnson posits, “forces us to think about what has remained outside that province we call modernity” (22). What needs to be emphasized is that the everyday is created by G.H. as that which goes beyond what she would constitute as her life; that Janair would also be constituted there demonstrates that according to G.H. she is not-quite human. Hence the protagonist’s search for a sense of “femininity” finds also that her womanhood is based upon the *non-womanhood* of another female character. The relationship between the abandoned and that which continuously escapes language’s processes of naming and defining is brought to light here through deliberate silence. True Janair is no more than a ghostly presence and cannot be given any serious characterological examination, but her absence is what nevertheless lends her agency. It is the imagination of her being that gives power to the reader to create other possibilities for transformation that G.H. had not considered.

Nina's work on the novel is compelling, given that she recognizes Janair as a character whose existence is completely ignored by G.H., but who we can envision also has "expectativas, desejos, sentimentos e criatividade" (124).¹⁷⁵ Conceiving of what the other woman may think of her appropriation for the protagonist's awakening to privilege has been a leading thrust in my analysis. In this case, the fact that the other woman is disembodied lends to an interesting critique of representation that also speaks to the protective silences employed by the women writers in this study. Keeping in mind Lispector's own wariness of her authorial power as we read about G.H.'s desires and creativity as an artist, there is the shadow of another human being who had been conveniently distinguished as a "worker," whose vocation superseded any possibilities for hopes or dreams that she may have had. While G.H. may have envied Janair's role in life as satisfying in its assumed simplicity, she had the choice and certainly did not elect it for herself. According to G.H., Janair may exist as representative of truths that she could not discover on her own – for the writer she becomes the token woman of color that may be there to answer her questions regarding racism and discrimination. However, by being absent she resists being marked as such, while still producing the critique of privilege necessary for G.H.'s awakening.

G.H.'s ignorance of social realities, especially within her own home, I contend has significant implications for feminist readings of Lispector's work, as primarily it brings about a questioning of the standard of feminist writing, described in my introduction as the individualist journey of female liberation through which she arrives at some sense of subjectivity, which is not necessarily bound to socioeconomic positionings. I read the work as a novel of awakening; however what distinguishes G.H. as a "liberal" heroine is that her self-awareness is thrust upon

¹⁷⁵ "hopes, desires, feelings and creativity" (my translation).

her through the toil of another woman. Lispector could have indeed written a very different text, in which G.H. is awakened by the tedium of her own existence through the dirt in her own home; but in this narrative G.H. never has to occupy herself with housework or have contact with untidiness. By introducing this named second character the nature of subjectivity is brought to bear on what would otherwise be a very individualistic existential journey. In a familiar sign of a specific intellectual privilege, “dirty work” is done by the maid in order that G.H. has time to consider her own becoming. Therefore I am driven to consider Janair as a woman in the attic; she is always there as a constant critique of G.H.’s quest for individual authority, and ready to burst forth at any moment and destroy G.H.’s sense of comfort. Nevertheless, more than just being put to work towards G.H.’s development, Janair has a retrievable individuality that escapes the narrator’s knowing.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, this novel is most often described as an existential text: it does convey an existential search for meaning through alterity, although I argue it must not be limited as such. That is to say there is certainly a delving into the murkiness of otherness that provides the fodder for the individual search, for the “I” of the narrative; but it should not be forgotten that the other is in this case given a name, and in that sense provided with the linguistic basis of identity that the protagonist herself cannot access. Being that only the minor character has a name and that G.H. even at the end of her struggle only has her initials, suggest that each woman has a different relationship to identity. The significance of this mirrors more closely Antoinette and Christophine’s relationship in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, rather than that of the doubly nameless nana and niña of Castellanos’ novel. We remember that in Rhys’ novel Antoinette had succumbed to being renamed Bertha, while her nurse Christophine kept her own name, successfully claiming her own identity and rejecting Rochester’s assertion of patriarchal control.

Here, Janair has that linguistic connection with individuality that G.H. does not; the latter only recognizes an abstraction of herself, her initials in the inscription on her suitcase. In fact Janair's name was the first thing that G.H. remembers about her, while for G.H. her name is something that she has had to fit into, something outside of herself that has framed her identity.

Critics of Lispector's novels note that the interior world that she offers is indeed productive, opening up a world of "possibilities and encounters" (Kanaan 34), which are however impossible to express. What is most significant is that the importance of this journey of awakening that lies in self-expression must be undertaken through a dialogue with the other. As Lima posits, the principal theme of Lispector's writing is developing human relationships, but that this schematization does not occur through those relationships in themselves, but through the way in which words construct and deconstruct those relationships (17). Yet in the case of *A paixão...* and her subsequent novel *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*), it is only when the characters undertake physical changes that any approach towards an intersubjective relationship is possible. This impact upon the body is what confuses writing subject and her/his object, although the privilege of that position is never let go. The narrator Rodrigo S.M. in *A hora da estrela*, for example, must impoverish himself in order to begin to understand his protagonist and object of study, Macabéia. Why, Rodrigo asks himself, would he choose to write about someone so impoverished, and answers that perhaps in the poor of spirit and body he reaches a sanctity, and that he would want to feel the *sopro do seu além* (*A hora...* 21), the wisp of what is beyond himself. G.H. also must undergo confinement and sickness to find the other life in her apartment, a process that she would assume would bring her connection with that which is sacred. The experience of dialogue with the other, which the author continues to suggest is necessary in order to have contact with existence, cannot be disentangled from the power

relations that would normally constitute the mistress/maid relationship. The only way for hierarchy to be displaced and for responsibility for marginalization to be a critical and eternal presence, is to have the marginalized character speak from within the silence imposed upon her. While the occurrence of dialogue with another person is missed, it must still be strived for through detachment. As Cristina Santos states:

There is an instinctive need to overcome the silent female role imposed by way of social and cultural prejudgments and values for one of authentic self-expression. For this reason the self-reflexivity of the female quest for an authentic self cannot be undertaken without recognizing that meaning is constructed through a dialogue not only with one's 'self' but also with one's Other (7).

Yet, one's "Other" more often than not implies an impersonal something, a seemingly arbitrary group of "not-me's" that serve only to redirect the protagonist of the quest back towards her own Being. In her previous works the other has taken various forms: a rooster, an apple, or an egg, for example. Thought of differently in this novel as one's other upon "whom" the protagonist depends for her redemption, that said dialogue must reveal an ethical possibility for both sides to undertake listening, and accept judgment and allegations from without. With that said, it would become important to recognize the foreboding presence of Janair's "being" for G.H.

Cixous likens Lispector's approach to the Other to that of Jean Genet, claiming that both *expose* themselves to the other instead of imposing themselves on the other, allowing themselves to be "impregnated, penetrated, invaded by the other (who is alien and repugnant)" (147). From that invasion a universal identity is then revealed. What Cixous does not take into account is the failure of this project that is illustrated through Lispector's characters, which questions the viability of the writer's stance towards the Other. It is clear that G.H. finds her own silence

through that of Janair, and their relationship is based upon that commonality. Rather than *allowing* the other to invade her, however, I argue that G.H. reacts to the invasion of the other woman by appropriating her in order to reconstitute her own identity. She does not willingly expose herself to the Other, given that she is horrified by the nakedness the charcoal drawings reflect; and she responds to that assault in a very instinctive way, by consuming the cockroach. It may be further noted that what is revealed through the ultimate encounter with the other –the consumption– is unexpected, and even unsatisfying. Thus readings that focus on finding that nurturing, maternal space, outside of the masculine ordering of language and identity are significant but in some ways off the mark, in that they do not go deep enough into the aesthetics of failure that Lispector offers. If one stops analyzing the content upon finding that “maternal space,” the works close in on themselves, missing the ways in which the subject of womanhood itself is critiqued.

I borrow the wording of “aesthetics of failure” from Daniela Mercedes Kahn, who notes that within Lispector’s works, encounters with the other always necessarily present their own limitations, and all creation and destruction are part of a ritual of continuous return to the same (19).¹⁷⁶ Dialogue is thus incomplete, since the protagonist works to digest the “other” into her sense of the “same.” What I believe distinguishes *A paixão...* from her previous texts is that strikingly the face of the other as an-other person is problematized as a troubling aspect of the protagonist’s construction of self. The limits of dialogue given the protagonist’s fear of the exteriority of the other woman are tackled. Furthermore, the use of the capitalized “Other” as Santos does in this case is no longer appropriate, since regardless of her strangeness according to G.H., here she is not a totalized exteriority, but an individual “other” woman who threatens to

¹⁷⁶ See Mercedes Kahn’s work for a detailed exploration of alterity and identity in Lispector’s work – she distinguishes social, figurative, cultural, and gender alterity/identity.

break the self/other polarity that would make G.H.'s quest more recognizable. This dialogue is intensely more social, displaying an asymmetrical relationship that is recognizable as resulting from an identifiable social and economic context that has produced it. It is indeed clear in this novel that the colonized woman has no access to the same privileged individuality that G.H. is able to move towards. The ramifications are realized through an ethical exploration of what it means to be a self with others, which also subtly takes into consideration race and class differences in a way that steps out of the parameters of a purely psychoanalytic reading based upon the individuation of the subject. As G.H. states, her essential question with regard to her identity was not "who am I," but "among whom am I" ["entre quais eu sou" (28)]. Therefore I reiterate an important questioning of the tendency to limit criticism of her work to interior spaces, as possibilities for understanding community that open up in the text are explored.

4.3 SILENCE, REPRESENTATION, AND DELVING WITHIN THE MAID'S QUARTERS

The everyday escapes. In this consists its strangeness – the familiar showing itself (but already dispersing) in the guise of the astonishing. It is the unperceived, first in the sense that we have always looked past it; nor can we introduce it into a whole or 'review' it, that is to say, enclose it within a panoramic vision; for, by another trait, the everyday is what we never see for a first time but can only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is constitutive of the everyday (Blanchot 240).

While the critical employment of language and the themes of alterity and identity can be compared within a wider context of Lispector's complete works, what I have insisted to be distinct in this novel is the cultural context of an upper-class liberal woman and her blindness to the woman who is working in her home. This protagonist makes an effort to always be able to

cite her world – “ Por honestidade com uma verdadeira autoria, eu cito o mundo” (31)¹⁷⁷ – and finds her identity lost when she encounters something around which she could not put quotation marks, challenging her level of control over her surroundings. This uncontrollable factor comes to her by way of another woman, who is her maid. It is noteworthy that class would enter into the novel in such a meaningful way, especially given Lispector’s own upper middle-class position and her reliance upon domestic service. Since the abolition of slavery, the female domestic worker in Brazil has served to maintain order within the bourgeois household. The way in which domestic service marked a transition for the middle and upper classes after emancipation is illustrated within the various manuals that surfaced towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century that were written for mistresses regarding the upkeep of their home and the handling of domestic service. These manuals reflected, according to Sonia Roncador, bourgeois values of privacy, comfort, and harmony (96). Moreover, the focus was upon keeping the servant obedient and servile, since her position of being an *outsider inside* would make her a constant threat to the stability of the home (while preserving it at the same time). This precarious line that the maid was to walk between civilization and barbarity is evident in the novel, as her disappearance draws attention to the normalizing quality of the everyday that obscured her individual existence. She challenges the mistress to no longer avert her eyes to the asymmetrical relationship between them which she had accepted as their natural lots.

In the Brazilian social context during which the novel was written, the legacy of slavery was kept alive silently in the private sphere through *empregadas*, whose employment was legally unrecognized; it would not be until the 1980’s when the profession of domestic service would

¹⁷⁷ “To be honest about true authorship, I cite the world” (23).

begin to be protected through labour regulations (Villares 128). For the protagonist having a domestic servant living in her home was normative; something would need to happen that would change her perception of the everyday in order to make her question it. G.H.'s awakening cannot, therefore, be described as a benevolent realization of her own privilege upon experiencing the marginalization of her maid, rather for G.H. in the moment of this discovery she is in the most danger, as everything that had been safely shrouded in silence miraculously had a voice.

It is important to stress that the “other woman” does not *embody* alterity; rather she presents to her mistress the misunderstandings and inequalities that stand between them. While criticism of the novel relies heavily upon an understanding of the “other” through which the female protagonist will come to know herself, I assert that the minor character actually resists being defined in those terms. She exists within the zone of invisibility, pushed out through the protagonist's constant mediation between the controlled and uncontrolled. I compare this action and the disclosure of the colonized woman's escape to Lefebvre's description of the everyday in which subjects both disappear within and are constituted through the threshold of the everyday (see Johnson, 22). It is her unintelligibility that is revealed as a limit to the narration's reach, forcing G.H. to undertake a development through the everyday, as opposed to one that transcends the material. Her undefinability moreover requires a new approach to language that would be extended towards her; one that is delicate in its approach, that does not represent itself in violence. The protagonist of course still reacts violently, but the demand coming from Janair is nevertheless perceived through her silence.

Whereas the marginalized female characters that I have analyzed thus far manipulate language (including silences) in a defensive turn that establishes distance between themselves

and the protagonists, in *A paixão...* it is seen that the maid works through complete absence, in order to point out to the protagonist other voices that she had silenced in her home, as well as the failure of her quest of awakening. The protagonist/narrator addresses directly various failures, but whether or not she is able to recognize the implications for those failures is a matter open to further questioning. That is to say that she is aware of her failure which was accepting her socialized identity and therefore reacts by dispensing with “beauty” and confronting the abject; but given her encounter with whom she had marginalized in her home, there are other failures that may not be explicitly stated but which contribute to a project of developing intersubjective relations.

Rather than speculating upon what the author may have felt regarding her own use of domestic service, we may suspect that the maid signifies for her another world to which she did not feel she had access. It has been suggested by Batella Gotlib, and mentioned briefly by Moore, that Lispector had been known for being stern with people, and particularly hard on her domestic servants. If we are to accept as true this reputation, there may indeed be a parallel between G.H.’s attitude towards Janair and the behavior of the author, who is described by Moore as having a “whiff of the diva” about her (n. pag.). However, whether this is classism or a case of general ill-temperament will not be known, and does not take away from the desire for the reader to experience the type of empathy necessary to imagine alternatives to the reality presented (even if the protagonist does not achieve it herself). The tension established between the reader and the narrator and her seduction permits a criticism of racist and classist attitudes present in the reality of domestic service.

Observed in both this novel and in *A hora da estrela* is a fascination with the poor of the world who the author feels express a reality entirely different from her own, which she laments

that she cannot possibly represent in writing. Silence is seemingly the only alternative to the totalitarian posture of the intellectual towards her subject. This inclination to separate oneself from the poverty that others may experience was articulated by the author: “Ever since I came to know myself,” she explains,

the social problem has been more important to me than any other issue: in Recife the black shanty towns were the first truth I ever encountered. ... I tend to be straightforward in my approach to any social problem: I wanted ‘to do’ something, as if writing were not doing anything. What I cannot do is exploit writing to this end, however much my incapacity pains and stresses me (qtd. in Castillo, *Talking Back* 188).

When she does come to touch upon that “truth” in her writing, it is only through absence or the failure of expression that it is approached, avoiding that exploitation that she is wary of committing. Macabéia, the poor girl from the *sertão* who is the subject of *A hora da estrela*, is meek, almost non-existent in her poverty of spirit. We may guess given her employment that Janair, like Macabéia, is not well-educated, but differently she exhibits enough strength to be able to assert an alternative voice to that of the narrator.

Also interesting is that Lispector frames her concern for social problems within the experience of knowing “herself.” Just as in her fiction the “I” of any experience is the primary standpoint, of which she resists fragmentation. Writing, therefore, is limited in its capacity to heal – any moving away from herself she seems to find inauthentic, following a modernist style that concentrates on the individual and her personal isolation. Yet, the anguish resulting from this incapacity to write another’s pain is also felt in her texts. She does not write herself an escape from her personal alienation, rather she forces her protagonist to stay within that realm of the everyday in which she had casually allowed another woman to toil for her convenience of a

bourgeois artist's life. G.H. recognizes that it is necessary to not turn away from the abject, conceding: "vou ter que ficar dentro do que é" (82).¹⁷⁸ Although Lispector may have lamented the limits of writing to enact change, she also would not allow herself to turn away from that otherness that she perceived when encountering poverty for the first time.

In further thinking the social problem, João Alfredo Montenegro states that suffering in her works takes on a mystical aura: "A ascensão ontológico do pobre, do despossuído, lhe confere uma liberdade, completamente inacessível aos que estão presos aos bens materiais, aos interesses mundanos" (152).¹⁷⁹ Montenegro suggests an understanding of the dispossessed as Absolute Other, with a poverty that is almost enviable since it entails a more authentic life, an attitude that can indeed be glimpsed in Lispector's reaction to seeing the *favelas* in Recife. The subject's confrontation with marginality is thus linked to her desire to escape from the materialism of her middle-class way of life. She is not able, however, to employ Janair as the bridge towards "liberty" within their encounter, since Janair has left. Her striking absence emphasizes the more elite woman's tendency to limit her to the material; she is able to escape complete objectification in the eyes of the narrating subject through the empty signifier of the cockroach. G.H. is able to glimpse a space outside of the appearances of her "culture," while Janair is physically absent. While experimenting with silences in order to reveal what is outside the symbolic order of language, Lispector is also conscious of the risk of appropriation and hence writes Janair in a way that allows her to resist being the object through which G.H. achieves subjectivity.

¹⁷⁸ "And I am going to have to stay within what there is" (74).

¹⁷⁹ "The ontological ascension of the poor, of the dispossessed, confers on her work a liberty, completely inaccessible to those who are tied to material goods, to mundane interests" (my translation).

Owing to her wariness of appropriating the other in her representation, the language that Lispector uses is extremely careful in the way that it treads towards otherness. Critics have considered *A paixão...* an exemplary text in its meticulous treatment of language structure, including Regina Helena de Oliveira Machado who commends her writing for reflecting upon what it means to give form – writing in a way that looks to redeem a loss of form, yet at the same time is “worked and crafted by it” (98). The dramatic loss of form that takes place is not as much liberating as it is a revelation of its superficiality and the gaps between what is constructed by language and Being. Through an empty and formless room the protagonist is obligated to confront a vision of “the other side of her own life” (Machado 99). Indeed everything begins to double, including the cockroach, whose eyes she perceives as splitting into two women, emphasizing for her the maternal that she had felt she had rejected. G.H. also sees something of herself that she had not known in the drawings.

Mercedes Kahn works most carefully with representations of otherness and identity in Lispector’s work, which she describes as enacting an ongoing ritual of confronting the other and then reacting violently against its threat of dissolving the border between them, through what is always a narcissistic perception of self. The *other*, Mercedes Kahn explains, “na verdade, corre o risco permanente de ser englobado pelo vasto universo do *mesmo*” (69).¹⁸⁰ In this reading there is no outside to the narrator’s universe – the title here then indeed is precise, the text is the passion *according to* G.H. Yet it is clear that the risk is addressed and the subaltern appears as a “misreading” within G.H.’s universe. As Johnson affirms, according to Lefebvre’s philosophy “the everyday constructs the coordinates of a legibility, the subaltern is always a “misreading,” an illegible stain in the archive” (22). Janair’s writing does not make sense according to G.H.’s

¹⁸⁰ “truthfully, runs the risk of being permanently undertaken by the vast universe of the *same*” (my translation).

understanding, and therefore I will question the way in which the event that is presented to her is interpreted – is Janair expressing something that G.H. never comes to comprehend?

In reference to Lispector's little-studied text, "A geléia viva," Kahn makes the following observation that I believe is quite useful to understanding *A paixão...* as well:

o encontro do *mesmo* como o *outro* é representado como uma experiência visceral de delimitação especial, que acontece em dois níveis: a reorientação do *eu* dentro do seu corpo e deste no seu ambiente. A alteridade se situa então no próprio limiar físico do *eu*. O *outro* não chega a se constituir como personagem independente, ele não passa de espelho de um corpo que se desfaz e se refaz (55).¹⁸¹

As seen in these two novels, relationships with the other are actually relationships with a double of the protagonist's self, and serve to deconstruct and then reconstitute her self-perception; thus identity and alterity are actually inseparable. Although, I also offer the idea that there is an otherness identifiable outside of that which is constructed by the narrator. Therefore even though there is an "other" who is the split of G.H.'s self, there is a third which signals the possible exterior of that self-reflexive process. This idea lends to readings that note her search for extralinguistic spaces. Additionally it is indicative of the social space from which the author felt alienation, which she would wish to write but cannot. The limits of her writing are marked by not being able to wrestle herself away from colonial baggage that leaves her inept in the face of the other who "resists her possession" (Levinas 107). The futility of the narrator's language is met with Janair's strength to be able to resist through silence.

¹⁸¹ "the encounter with the *same* as the *other* is represented as a visceral experience of special delimitation, that occurs on two levels: a reorientation of the *I* within one's body and of one's environment. Otherness is situated then in the same physical threshold of the *I*. The *other* does not arrive at constituting itself as an independent character, it does not pass from reflection to a body that undoes and redoes itself" (my translation).

I draw upon Mercedes Kahn's study with her meticulous description of narcissistic behavior, but in reading this particular novel wish to take the notion a step further. Thinking of narcissism it is useful to reflect upon the looking glass as well as the representation of "twins" used in *Balún Canán* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which I explained exhibit not only a psychoanalytic representation of self, but also fear of being judged by the "other side." When Tia threw the rock in Antoinette's face she fought against the protagonist's narcissistic conception of self that attempted to project her identity onto Tia, seeing her as her "twin." The nana in *Balún Canán* undertook a similar yet much more subtle separation, by using silences to create boundaries between herself and her surrogate daughter. The maid in *A paixão...* demonstrates a similar resistance that points to the protagonist's failure to see difference, and to recognize whiteness. Again, it is another side that demands not a tranquil reflection of being, but a violent undertaking resulting in fragmentation, loss, and judgment, which will be characterized by this narrator as deheroization. What looks back at her, most representatively through the dark eyes of the cockroach, does not see G.H. as she would imagine herself to be seen. It is a seeing that instead of recognizing her individuality marginalizes her, leading her to experience what her maid may have felt. The failure over which the protagonist ponders in the quote in the epigraph to this chapter could be "the" necessary failure of a female development quest in which the constructions of her world are dismantled, thus allowing her to find her true self. But again in this text there is another failure that the protagonist does not immediately recognize, one that will leave her at the end of her journey wondering how she might be judged, and who is judging her.

4.4 SPEAKING THROUGH ABSENCE

Não tenho uma palavra a dizer. Por que não me calo, então? Mas se eu não forçar a palavra a mudez me engolfará para sempre em ondas. A palavra e a forma serão a tábua onde boiarei sobre vagalhões de mudez (A paixão... 20).¹⁸²

For language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable (Benjamin, Selected Writings 74).

What connects all of Lispector's work is a brilliant use of epiphanies, which are most often brought about by everyday experiences – a mundane object in her world prompts the protagonist to step outside of herself, and see her world in a different light. According to Castillo, the operative principle that sets epiphany into motion in Lispector's texts is the "negative": "the subject of discourse is marked off not by the contours of a critical topography but by a desire satisfied in the hard process of gradual deprivation, by the unfolding lie of identity" (*Talking Back* 191). Any notion of the self that the protagonist had conceived of at once reveals its frays and slowly begins to come apart to reveal the other side of identity; what is on that other side can only be hinted at through silences. The power of silence is seen to be the ability to *negate* language – Lispector uses silence to reveal the absences behind meaningfulness. Her discursive techniques are described by Cróquer Pedrón as "decir sin decir nada o el no-decir-diciendo, la frase hermética o incompleta, la proliferación de imágenes, el oxymoron, la paradoja" (68).¹⁸³ The implications of this do not stop in linguistics; rather, as Castillo suggests, the ways in which the construction of identity is laid bare, left in fragments to be examined not unlike the "divine sparks" with socialist potential that make up the dialectical image (Buck-

¹⁸² "I don't have a word to say. Why don't I just stay quiet, then? But if I don't force myself to talk, silence will forever engulf me in waves. Word and form will be the plank on top of which I shall float over billows of silence" (12).

¹⁸³ "to say without saying anything or to not-say-saying, the hermetic phrase is incomplete, the proliferation of images, the oxymoron, the paradox" (my translation).

Morss 240). The next step to her discursive techniques would be a new way of seeing, in order to seize upon the potential of the non-symbolic.

In the case of *A paixão...*, the familiar epiphany is tied to a revelation of the oppressed within her own home. Finding Janair's empty room prompts G.H. to re-envision her own life by way of seeing the maid's previously non-symbolic existence for the first time. It is important to state that she does not remain in the room of her own will; rather she is compelled to occupy the room by an unknown force, and as a result left to undergo intense marginalization: "olhando o baixo céu do teto caído, eu me sentia sufocada de confinamento e restrição. E já sentia falta de minha casa. Forcei-me a me lembrar que também aquele quarto era posse minha, e dentro de minha casa" (45).¹⁸⁴ The confinement that she experiences is nothing that she had recognized in her life before, since she had considered herself a "free" woman, not having to limit herself to any prescribed role. It is not clear if she was then able to empathize with Janair, thereby facing-up-to her own foreignness. Tension arises as a gap is perceived between the writer and the narration; the reader notes the parallels between what G.H. begins to experience and the reality of Janair's life, while G.H. takes her awakening in a different direction. For her, what comes to light is a threatening "something" that is outside of herself, and consequently dangerous to her self-constitution. Yet again, as was noted in the works by Rhys and Castellanos, the home is seen as a place of danger in which there is always the presence or threat of invasion; the response to which is the protagonist's propensity towards self-reflexivity. A battle then ensues for textual authority as G.H. attempts to make the illegible legible. The reader, however, has more of a capacity to be empathetic, seeing more directly the ties between G.H.'s treatment of Janair and

¹⁸⁴ "in looking at the low sky of the whitewashed ceiling, I felt I was suffocating with restriction and confinement. I needed my own home back. I forced myself to remember that I owned that room too, it was in my apartment [and within my house]" (37).

the task before her, and therefore begins to outline a characterization of Janair as the forgotten woman who forces G.H. to both see for the first time the life of Janair and relook at her own life.

What G.H. comes to identify is something that has always been present which she had encountered various times before. What becomes important is her reaction to that startling presence that negates the familiar, showing her world upside down. The defamiliarization that is experienced while providing a revitalization of her world also moves further and works to reveal G.H.'s participation in the invisibilization of the other woman. The technique of defamiliarization thus provides a social criticism, acting as an awakening that points to the sleeping state of the protagonist who did not comprehend her role as both silencer and silenced. Defamiliarization is connected on some level to self-critique, implying not that the protagonist withdraw into her own guilt, but that she find a way of speaking that would reveal the existence of the other, while also illustrating her incapacity to do so. I will continue to refer to the idea of *intrusion* – the subaltern provokes an experience that intrudes into the protagonist's daily life, thus making her reconstruct her life based upon the absence of what she had considered her "culture." Contrary to Cixous' reading, the other woman is not invited; there is no indication that G.H. would actually want any more connection with Janair; her own journey is completely self-gratifying, and does not claim in any way that she intends it to be necessarily relational or intersubjective. This is evident, since when she is present with the face of the other, they do not in fact "see" each other: "E, como o escuro de dentro me espiasse, ficamos um instante nos espiaando sem nos vermos. Eu nada via, só conseguia sentir o cheiro quente e seco como o de

uma galinha viva” (46).¹⁸⁵ Moreover, this intensity focused on the body reflects upon a shared material existence without cognitive recognition.

In order to refine my discussion of narcissism that has emerged in each text, I would like to evoke at this point Jacques Derrida’s notion of the topic. He contends that there is no such thing as “narcissism” which would be a complete absence of self; rather there is only a more “hospitable” narcissism: “one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other” (199). Therefore, to not eventually make one’s way from other to self would be impossible and not the ideal type of communication or relation to the other to strive for since it would be unidirectional – a reaching out of the self towards the other without reflection or transformation. Derrida proposes the following:

There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended. ... I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other – even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation – must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible (199).

Love depends upon “hospitable” narcissism. Narcissism in the first two novels of this study was coupled with mourning of a mother figure, and thus her disappearance was part of a coping mechanism that refused to idealize her presence. Here, if we think with respect to degrees of narcissism, it is less hospitable given G.H.’s resistance from the beginning to the other’s presence. G.H. pondered the possibilities for love as the absence of naming; but this does not mean that it is a void. She may reconsider through the image of herself the charcoal images

¹⁸⁵ “And, as though the darkness inside were spying on me, we remained for an instant spying on each other without seeing each other. I didn’t see anything, I only noticed the hot, dry smell, like the smell of a live chicken” (38).

presented to her by the other, without having the narrative close in on itself and stopping possibilities for understanding through something like love. There is, however, a rift between the two women that leaves G.H. largely incapable of overcoming her tendency to be apathetic towards the plight of the other woman. Thus although I would argue that narcissism is not entirely inhospitable, misunderstandings prohibit G.H. from reaching any type of intersubjective development. This conception reinforces my emphasis on the importance of the relationship for revealing possible solidarities based upon a two-way encounter.

Thinking as well of the importance for Rhys and Castellanos of reconstructing colonial memory, G.H.'s remembering of Janair is telling: she remembers her as inherently invisible, as if it were her fault that G.H. never saw her:

Os traços – descobri sem prazer – eram traços de rainha. E também a postura: o corpo erecto, delgado, duro, liso, quase sem carne, ausência de seios e de ancas. E sua roupa? Não era de surpreender que eu a tivesse usado como se ela não tivesse presença: sob o pequeno avental, vestia-se sempre de marrom escuro ou de preto, o que a tornava toda escura e invisível – arrepiei-me ao descobrir que até agora eu não havia percebido que aquela mulher era uma invisível. Janair tinha quase que apenas a forma exterior, os traços que ficavam dentro de sua forma eram tão apurados que mal existiam: ela era achatada como um baixo-relevo preso a uma tábua.

E fatalmente, assim como ela era, assim deveria ter me visto? (41).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ The features – I discovered with no pleasure – were a queen's features. And her posture as well: her body, erect, slim, hard, smooth, almost fleshless, with no breasts, or ass. And her clothes? It wasn't surprising that I had used her as though she had no presence: under her small apron she always wore dark brown or black, which made her all dark and invisible – I shivered to discover that till now I hadn't noticed that that woman was an invisible woman. Janair had what was almost only an external form, the features within that form were so refined that they barely existed: she was flattened out like a bas-relief frozen on a piece of wood. And was it inevitable that just as she saw herself was, so she saw me? (33)

Does she shiver out of fear of the abject, invisible form? Or because she had not realized that in her home she had made someone else invisible? Her description of her queen's features suggests that there is power in her stature, while somewhat paradoxically her body appears gaunt and lacking feminine features. I must also draw attention to the use of the indefinite article, given the writer's meticulous use of language. Although Sousa's translation makes sense to maintain the Portuguese gender by stating she was an "invisible woman," it could also be translated that Janair was "an invisible" – not merely hidden, but also of a different group or caste. Thinking then about her relationship with the apartment's dirt, this also establishes her as different from G.H.

G.H.'s experience depends upon the way in which she remembers Janair, which tells us more about G.H.'s desire to maintain control over herself and her home; yet there is also something to be said for what can be inferred about Janair through her resistances to being objectified as "other," to become the embodiment of G.H.'s experience. Just as Castillo imagined how the nana may have responded to the little girl's struggle to gain ascendancy in *Balún Canán*, it is possible for her to envision what Janair was saying to G.H. in the charcoal drawings. They present themselves as an opportunity for G.H. to become conscious of her own privilege. Additionally, Janair addresses G.H. through the drawings in a way that designates her according to Janair's perception, but is also absent so that G.H.'s response could not be heard. G.H. thus experiences double-consciousness by way of the absent stranger's gaze. Disturbingly and provocatively, the silence of the domestic servant is used as an agent for her mistress' self-discovery, but at the very beginning of the occurrence she is absent. What I find most striking is that the writing seems to be conscious of the way that the subaltern female is used in order to gain access to a higher moral ground – however the maid points to an outside, an alternative

logic to her mistress' version of humanity, while remaining on that outside in order to not be appropriated to become her alibi.

Her existence is only recovered in traces (of course G.H. would have hoped that she had completely disappeared), left in the form of enigmatic charcoal drawings on the walls through which she silently reshapes G.H.'s previous conceptions of herself. Thus, through her absence she introduces an alternative reality. The interplay between absence and presence is striking; Machado emphasizes that when Janair was physically present for G.H. she was invisible, but "now that she is absent, she returns with the strength of presence" (104). There is something to be said for the presence that occurs when she escapes G.H.'s citing of her. An encounter is staged in which the gaze of the other will distort self-perceptions. But one of the actors is not bodily present, thereby making it impossible for the text to resolve the tension between the two women and leaving the reader to contemplate the conditions through which the other had been constituted. Her absence has three important functions: it introduces the shock of invisibilization; takes away G.H.'s advantage of asking the other to explain oppression to her; and finally it ensures that Lispector does not employ writing to be an idealistic cross-cultural bridging.

The charcoal drawings left in the room for G.H. are outlines of a nude man, woman, and dog, which, as G.H. states, is more naked than dogs usually are. The figures appear to her like three mummies – therefore they are figures that are wrapped, covering death. In another instance she refers to them as zombies; thus they are the dead disguised as the living. The images taunt her for the way in which she conceived of her life, which covered up anything that was unpleasant. G.H. hesitates at the door: "Coagida com a presença que Janair deixara de si mesma num quarto de minha casa, eu percebia que as três figuras angulares de zumbis haviam de fato

retardado minha entrada como se o quarto ainda estivesse ocupado” (41).¹⁸⁷ And it is a hostile occupation. Janair in her absence points her finger at G.H., who recounts her terrified state: “eu fora imobilizada pela mensagem dura na parede: as figuras de mão espalmada haviam sido um dos sucessivos vigias à entrada do sarcófago” (33).¹⁸⁸ The figures had been keeping watch in the death chamber which they would now not permit her to leave by making her trip and fall as she attempted to flee. G.H. explains that they fastened her to that spot with the simple act of pointing a finger at her (33). The final analysis of her life is left to them, if she can only interpret the message correctly. For her they indicate that a stranger had been living in her home who was the representation of a silence, the *African queen*: “E que ali dentro de minha casa se alojara, a estrangeira, a inimiga indiferente” (43).¹⁸⁹

Expressed unmistakably here is the “finger-pointing” that the marginal characters in each novel undertake. If the focus has turned to the redemption of the protagonist, it is not of her own making nor from some time of intensive soul-searching; rather what she responds to is an accusation that came to her as a complete surprise. G.H. understands that the images were meant to be read – they were not decoration but writing. The writing is different from that of the narrator that she needs to decode; it is a hieroglyph, as well as a pre-linguistic expression that has a greater ability to represent experience. G.H. interprets the message, rightly or wrongly, to be that the maid had always hated her for leading a man’s life: “é que nunca antes me ocorrera que, na mudez de Janair, pudesse ter havido uma censura à minha vida, que devia ter sido chamado

¹⁸⁷ “Besieged by the presence of herself that Janair had left in a room in my home, I noticed that the three angular zombie figures had in fact kept me from going in, as though the room were still being occupied” (33).

¹⁸⁸ “I had been immobilized by the harsh message on the wall: the figures with the hands spread out had been one of the series of sentinels at the door to the sarcophagus” (41).

¹⁸⁹ “And she had taken up lodging here in my home, that stranger, that indifferent enemy” (35).

pelo seu silêncio de ‘uma vida de homens’? como me julgara ela?’ (40).¹⁹⁰ Her *mudez* suggests a not-saying, willful silence that is likened to *calar-se*, different from silence that is mere absence of sound. With this attitude G.H. perceives that she has been censuring her life, looking at her from her space of invisibility. While Sousa translates *julgara* to “thought,” I believe it is important to stress the force of the word “judge,” as it is more than an opinion of her life-style, it is a critique that comes from a gaze that has the power to determine the protagonist’s actions; it suggests an authority. Janair was not, as G.H. had thought, a passive observer to her life. She also had agency enough to affect her life through a judging gaze.

Her interpretation however is more likely a reflection of her own guilt for not following the norm of what a woman’s role should be, and still does not recognize her role in marginalization. Therefore G.H. does not actually connect with the author of the writing; rather she only reiterates what would be the conventional criticism of her life, and to perhaps avoid where the finger was actually pointing. Machado states that the writing provides “a text where she can read herself as the other someday would have read her”; by reading the accusation G.H. participates “in her own judgment allowing herself to read, to be read” (105). Although I submit that it is doubtful that the extent of the judgment is G.H.’s failed domesticity, and even if she feels herself being read, she does not necessarily allow it. What she describes as her enemy’s indifference reveals a more covert threat, that of not being recognized by the other. If Janair’s criticism was of G.H.’s failed femininity, she would not be a disinterested observer, but rather an emblem of what G.H. lacked. G.H. finds the judgment unbearable and attempts to flee the experience altogether, stating that she will have the new maid take care of cleaning the “empty casket” that Janair had left.

¹⁹⁰ “had it never occurred to me that in Janair’s silence there might have been a criticism of my life-style, which her silence must have labeled ‘a man’s life’? how had she thought of me?” (32).

How then does G.H.'s incident of being judged from without relate to what Janair may have experienced? Ahmed reminds us that a philosophy of difference for feminists does not necessarily mean a practice of displacement of a hegemonic center of discourse. Rather difference can involve universalism, and can be spoken from the place of the white subject for example, who "reincorporates difference as a sign of its own fractured and multiple coming-into-being" (42). I believe this is what we see from G.H. – difference is only accepted as a vehicle through which she is able to dismantle her own identity; that does not necessarily entail an ethical response to Janair's message to her. Furthermore, her confession functions as a reinforcement of her own success as a "modern" woman who has been able to break down gender barriers, thereby positioning Janair more firmly in the past, as a traditional woman who *must* be offended by her mistress' unconventionality.

More revealing is that what surprised G.H. most was the type of hate that she felt from Janair – "ódio isento, o pior ódio: o indiferente. Não um ódio que me individualizasse mas apenas a falta de misericórdia. Não, nem ao menos ódio" (41).¹⁹¹ She negates her original statement, "indifferent hate," and we are left with not even hate but just indifference. As I mentioned, to not be recognized by Janair disgusts her most, since it is her view of the world that begins to assert its importance; if she primarily wants someone who will listen to her, Janair has failed her in this regard. G.H. feels the type of invisibility that Janair must have experienced, but without ever really seeing that capacity in herself to invisibilize the other. G.H. admits then that Janair's was the first outside person whose gaze she had ever really considered – before, she states that she had only surrounded herself with *certain* people. The woman whose gaze she now recognizes was closest in proximity, yet perceived as completely outside her domain. The main

¹⁹¹ "free hate, the worst kind of hate: indifferent hate. Not a hate that individualized me but just the absence of all compassion. No, not even hate" (33).

thrust of her individual journey, then, is recognition of how the other has perceived her – not just any abstract Other, but *she* who was indifferent to G.H.’s life, and who in turn meant nothing to G.H.

The reader may interpret her anxiety as a sign of guilt for trying in her life to be equal with men, privileged men; thus the reader has an opportunity to trouble her conception of individual emancipation which is framed upon her capacity to live in a man’s world. In fact she sees the man in the mural as being an extension of herself: “Eu, o Homem” (40) [*I, the Man*]. While she sees herself as being between a man and a woman, but *essentially* feminine, she imagines that Janair must perceive her as the Man. The capitalization of man suggests a phallic construction of control of which she is the center according to G.H.’s perception of Janair’s critique. Thus, in this observation she detects the presence of inequality but takes no responsibility for it, only making the point that Janair must have thought her to be non-feminine and authoritarian. G.H. does not necessarily accept this characterization of herself, however; she only surmises that it could be the reason why she was hated. She also makes the comment that the mummies are looking straight forward, as if they didn’t know that anyone else was standing beside them: “cada figura olhava para a frente, como se nunca tivesse olhado para o lado, como se nunca tivesse visto a outra e não soubesse que ao lado existia alguém” (39).¹⁹² To answer G.H.’s previous question, if this is Janair’s accusation she does see G.H. as G.H. saw her; indifferent to the other’s existence.

G.H. looks deeper into the drawings and sees a critique of her way of life – they serve to allow her to dismantle her sense of self. This process of self-realization has been explored in a myriad of ways, and there is a tendency to conflate G.H. with the author. Lima for example

¹⁹² “each figure stared straight ahead, as though it had never looked sideways, as though it had never seen any of the others and had no idea that anyone existed beside it” (31-32).

asserts that Lispector's most recurrent character is herself, and muses: "Para que retratar os outros se existem tantas clarices dentro dela mesma?" (23).¹⁹³ Also, Lícia Manzo, while examining the *Eu* of the text, often substitutes G.H. with Clarice when discussing what she must feel; and in reaction to the following statement by Lispector – "eu não escrevo como catarse, para desabafar. ... Para isso servem os amigos" (qtd. in Manzo 82)¹⁹⁴ – continues to suggest ways in which Lispector used literature as a way of knowing herself, even if she was not prepared to admit it publicly. This conflation of author and protagonist is somewhat understandable, given that Lispector signs her address to the reader at the beginning of the text C.L., suggesting a connection with G.H. Nevertheless, to move too far in this direction misses the fictitiousness of the work, and certainly the space between the writer and the narration. However, in the interpretation of the coal drawings there is also a critique of G.H. through the implied author, through which emerges a critical analysis of the basis for her moment of awakening. In these moments of encounter with otherness it is less about losing herself in order to develop subjectivity, and more about interpreting this message left for her.

While I find arguments by previously mentioned critics powerful, they are limited to not take into account the racialized encounter that is being revealed. By pointing out the differences being outlined between the two women, I demonstrate the multiple ways that they reveal and conceal parts of themselves to each other, thus forming a basis for potential understanding, although it is never reached. To begin, what is revealed to G.H. is her silence, while Janair keeps quiet. Thus while it is noted that G.H. does achieve discovering the silence in herself through Janair's silence, a distinction remains between the differing ways that each enters into language. The potential to appropriate the other in order to give legitimacy to the central character's

¹⁹³ "Why depict others if there exist so many clarices in herself" (my translation).

¹⁹⁴ "I don't write as catharsis, to speak my mind. ... That's what friends are for" (my translation).

experience is always present, but Janair does not allow this to happen by keeping quiet. The most striking lines of the novel for me, and those which have largely influenced this study, occur as G.H. struggles to remember her maid's name, and even her face. She blames Janair for excluding her from her so completely from her own house, that it was as if she were the stranger left outside, who had the door closed upon her. She admits that it was her own ignorance that had not allowed her to know the woman's silent hatred of her, revealing to the reader that her only concern at this point is the attack on her identity that she interprets from Janair's drawings. There is a growing disdain for that stranger who is now making her feel as if she were an alien in her own home. Her surprising unawareness of the woman who shared a living space with her is revealed stunningly in the following passage:

Foi quando inesperadamente consegui rememorar seu rosto, mas é claro, como pudera esquecer? revi o rosto preto e quieto, revi a pele inteiramente opaca que mais parecia um de seus modos de se calar, as sobrancelhas extremamente bem desenhadas, revi os traços finos e delicados que mal eram divisados no negro apagado da pele (41).¹⁹⁵

Sousa translates "seus modos de se calar," to "ways of being silent" (33); but there is a subtle yet significant discrepancy here. Janair wasn't merely silent, but she willfully had ways of keeping quiet (see Castillo, *Talking Back* 42), suggesting a political agency which I argue would be taken as obstinacy by a character such as G.H. Thus projected onto Janair, a character that we hardly know, are hostility and disobedience; questioning what her absence then means for the text's cohesion is crucial as one dissects this experience.

¹⁹⁵ "That was when I unexpectedly succeeded in remembering her face, but, of course, how could I have forgotten it? I pictured again her quiet, black face, pictured her ways of being silent, extremely well defined eyebrows, I pictured again the fine, delicate features that were barely discernible on the faded blackness of her skin" (33).

The second important contrast to make between the women is that it is observed that G.H. is undressed by Janair by means of the charcoal drawings, while Janair is only clothed, or covered up, by G.H. The complete nakedness revealed in the drawings assumes that there is no longer a way for G.H. to keep out what she considers unruly or abject. Being more naked than normal is to reveal the permeability of skin, which can no longer act as a complete border. Charcoal outlines of empty characters serve to reveal invisible characters that no less exist as ghosts within the home, like the men that must have constructed the building to which G.H. makes reference. Although their bodies are separated from one another, they are not enclosed completely. G.H. is opened-up to an experience of becoming which cannot operate merely through exclusions. Their nudity is described: “Nos corpos não estavam desenhados o que a nudez revela, a nudez vinha apenas da ausência de tudo o que cobre: eram os contornos de uma nudez vazia” (39).¹⁹⁶ Thus it is seen that covering is not available to hide behind, but in the absence of that covering there is not disclosure, but emptiness.

What G.H. remembers of Janair is silence and the blackness of her skin; it was as if she barely existed. But even more than that, G.H. recalls that she always wore dark brown or black under her apron, and therefore G.H. was not able to make out any bodily features: she shivers upon discovering that she had not noticed that Janair was an “invisible woman.” It is this invisibility that G.H. finds reflected back onto herself through the nude figures, thus discovering her own silence. However, unlike the drawings a covering does exist, hinting at a protective layer that is made available to her that the figures as G.H.’s reflection lack. Also, it is important to restate here that Janair is disembodied; and it could be that this hiding of her materiality, while giving her a negative value according to the narrator, may be seen as a means of defense. As I

¹⁹⁶ “What the nudity disclosed was not drawn in on the bodies, the nudity came merely from the absence of all covering: they were the shapes of empty nudity” (31).

previously suggested, Janair does not allow the text to appropriate her materiality in order that the agency of G.H.'s self-discovery not be built upon the fetishization of the other's embodiment. That is, she is touched by Janair while Janair remains distant, not giving G.H. the opportunity to touch her. If the female body is connected with nature, that of the woman of color would be doubly exploited within a discourse of woman's material reality. Hendrick makes mention to Lispector's tendency to cover the "materiality of the female body" with language (63). Janair makes visible materiality that has been covered over by G.H.'s linguistic definitions of existence; however she also resists being defined as pure materiality, no longer being relegated to the margins of the protagonist's "civilization." Nina comments that G.H.'s assumption that Janair's space will be "dark" and disorganized could be because domestics are poor, and in Brazil the majority of them have dark skin (123-124). Indeed Janair is marked by G.H. according to the "blackness" and "opacity" of her skin, which, using the language of Fanon, seals her into that "crushing objecthood." In Fanon's reinterpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is a racialization of the ego established in relation to black bodies – the real Other for the white man is the black man; and conversely "[t]he Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as not-self – that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable" (qtd. in Ahmed 43). This attention to Fanon offers another way of examining Levinas' conception of the "face" that refuses assimilation. Keeping this connection between bodies and otherness in mind, Janair's incomprehensibility may be not only owing to her exteriority to G.H.'s world, but more pointedly to her racial difference.

4.5 CONSUMPTION OF THE OTHER? ENCOUNTER WITH THE COCKROACH AND POSSIBILITIES FOR NEW WAYS OF SEEING

The identity of a living being throughout its history contains nothing mysterious: the living being is essentially the Same, the Same determining every Other, without the Other ever determining the Same. If the Other did determine it – if exteriority collided with what lives – it would kill instinctive being. The living being lives beneath the sign of liberty or death (Levinas 14).

Áspero instante de escolha entre dois caminhos que, pensava eu, se dizem adeus, e certa de qualquer escolha seria a do sacrifício: eu ou minha alma. Escolhi. E hoje ostento secretamente no coração uma placa de virtude: ‘Esta casa foi dedetizada’ (Lispector, “A quinta história” 84).¹⁹⁷

In the previous chapters I approached questions of seeing and recognizability. The female characters studied struggle to be recognized without being overdetermined by the other woman’s perspective and judgment. The questions of the body and slippery representations become more complex in the (anti-)climatic consumption of the cockroach. The great nature of the cockroach was that it made her lose her false transcendence, what she calls her beautifulness. But it also calls attention to, as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a threat of contamination, and signals that which stands between the female characters. While many argue that the encounter with the roach in the novel is the culmination of the epiphany that G.H. has been preparing for, I will suggest that G.H. dislocates the point of her transformation. She believes that what she needs is transcendence through the consumption of the material of the other, but discovers after she completes the act that she had always already had a connection with the “real,” and that she continued to be herself after the described epiphany.

¹⁹⁷ “In a harsh instant of choosing between two paths which, I was thinking, claim to say farewell, and certain that whichever choice would be one of sacrifice: me or my soul. I chose. And today I show off secretly in my heart a plaque of virtue: ‘This house was decontaminated of insects’” (my translation).

After discovering she cannot leave the room, but that its inhabitants were in fact rejecting her, G.H. discovers a cockroach which horrifically fastens her even more firmly in that marginal space. Machado reads the text as a passage from G.H. to “woman,” which “can only be reached after the appearance of the other occupant of the room: the only other presence alive in the book, less ‘humanized’, less domestic than a dog, an animal which would never be represented beside a man and a woman: the cockroach” (107). As an aside it is pertinent to explore the connection with the use of the cockroach in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which its image as a phobic object that spreads disease was linked to Creole identity. The characters are not only afraid of being touched by her who is identified as a “white cockroach,” but they are ultimately wary of anything that she has been in contact with; thus what is of concern is the transmission of contaminants between subjects. By calling Antoinette a white cockroach, the threat of degeneration is linked to her identity. The image of a cockroach is projected onto Antoinette; differently for G.H. the absence of the other (Janair) is compensated for in the cockroach, and she replaces the experience that she never was able to have with Janair onto the cockroach. Also important in the examination of the space that the cockroach occupies is that they are known to be present in the walls of a house and tend to stay in the darkness; it is only their visibility that is eschewed by the inhabitants.

The similarities between Janair and the cockroach are clear, especially given that there is a surprising insertion of race in the description of the cockroach which I have yet to see analyzed in other readings: “A barata não tem nariz. Olhei-a, com aquela sua boca e seus olhos: parecia uma mulata à morte. Mas eram radiosos e negros. Olhos de noiva” (56).¹⁹⁸ This passage makes

¹⁹⁸ “Cockroaches don’t have noses. I looked at it, with that mouth of its, and its eyes: it looked like a dying mulatto woman. But its eyes were black and radiant. The eyes of a girl about to be married” (48). This translation is an

it difficult to conceive of both Janair and the roach as mere representations of otherness without taking into account the way in which their “darkness” differentiates G.H.’s white body. In a curious juxtaposition of birth and death, she marks the body of the roach with the despair of the dying *mulatta* and the hope of a young bride; but also with an impression of Janair’s skin, again returning to the image of the African queen. It is therefore difficult to not recognize that through concern with the uninvited guest is also a raced other whose strangeness would be an affront to how liberal G.H. considered herself to be.

What is more, like the charcoal drawings the roach did not look directly at her. G.H. distinguishes the roach’s presence as that which is *with* her, although not *seeing* her. “Ela me olhava,” she recounts. “E não era um rosto. Era uma máscara. Uma máscara de escafandrista” (77).¹⁹⁹ She presents to G.H. only a mask of herself, yet G.H. feels the other’s gaze. This facelessness that presents itself as a mask, distancing itself from the subject yet looking at her, is perhaps more in-keeping with the “face” of the other according to Levinas which resists possession yet asserts a call to responsibility of the other party who upon the encounter can no longer retreat into interiority:

The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no ‘interiority’ permits avoiding. It is that discourse that obliges the entering into discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for, a ‘force’ that convinces even ‘the people who do not wish to listen’ and thus founds the true universality of reason (201).

example of Sousa’s tendency to erase gender, which is evidently significant in the original. Lispector treats the cockroach as feminine – not “it,” but “she.”

¹⁹⁹ “And it wasn’t a face. It was a mask. A deep sea diver’s mask” (69).

Paradoxically the mask that hides something behind it demands disclosure for the sake of dialogue. G.H. is obliged to enter into a new way of relating to the other that is not dependent upon a face that would supposedly disclose emotions and sentiment, and is left only with material knowing. The eyes are able to manipulate and appropriate the object, while the other senses require proximity and a permeability of borders. This body that “sees” her is distinct from that which G.H. attempts to mark in its strangeness, opacity, and darkness.

G.H. knew that the only way then to escape her confinement with the repugnant creature was to face up to the irresolvability of the situation; she takes action at this point through killing, by jamming the roach in the closet door. While it remains alive yet immobilized in the crevice of the door oozing mucus from its broken body, G.H. is able to come face to face with the abject: “Eu nunca tinha visto a boca de uma barata. Eu na verdade – eu nunca tinha mesmo visto uma barata. Só tivera repugnância pela sua antiga e sempre presente existência” (55).²⁰⁰ She had defined its presence as abject before their encounter. By looking *through* the cockroach the world becomes primitively alive, and she again finds the silence in herself, this time through the “Hellishness” of living matter. She describes leaving her world of human archaeology, and entering *the* world, eventually seeing herself in the fecundity of the cockroach’s body. She begins to imagine two cockroaches as two women, one being the silence of the other; Janair’s presence seems to have been displaced onto the cockroach, which provides G.H. with a link to humanity. Therefore her epiphany begins upon finding the drawings in the room, and comes to completion by way of the cockroach, who displays to G.H. her own silence. Silent spaces are empowering in this context, given that they escape the ordering processes of language. Even though, we should not ignore G.H.’s political silence that has normalized inequality in her home.

²⁰⁰ “I had never seen a cockroach’s mouth. I, in fact...I had never really seen a cockroach. I had only felt repugnance at their ancient, ever-present existence (48).

G.H. does not passively contemplate the existence of the cockroach. Rather, in order to face her own disgust, G.H. finds no other way out than to eat the cockroach – this act of consumption as a primary and transformative moment can and has been read as a communal act in which the cockroach is the Eucharist. Her intention however is not to establish a spiritual union with God, nor with the other female presence in the room for that matter; rather it is expressed as a desire to eat the impure, which would expel her from paradise, all transcendence, and return her to primitive being. Thus, readings that look for a type of communion with Janair in G.H.’s act are mistaken in that regard. There is a lack of evidence to show that G.H. was reaching out to Janair in any way. G.H. mentions forming solidarity with the cockroach, but only out of necessity, since she could not bear being alone with her own aggression. Nina emphasizes the roach as a passage, and concurs with the feminist reading of Rosi Braidotti which highlights G.H.’s transgression of taboos. G.H. valorizes desire by giving into temptation when she eats the “root,” the impure: “A tentação do prazer. A tentação é comer direto na fonte. A tentação é comer direto na lei” (127).²⁰¹ She felt that ecstasy of an assassin. The culmination of her experience unfolds by way of a transgression of Jewish law that prohibits the eating of impure things. She describes her experience as sin, because she will come to know something that is forbidden – the punishment for which is to lose one’s individual life and to disorganize the human world (*A paixão...* 136). She thereby reenacts the Fall of Man that destroyed the unity of paradise, but instead of working to restore unity relishes in the hellishness of the fragmented living world. G.H. states that as long as she had that disgust of kissing a “leper,” that the world would continue to evade her. Yet her action takes form not in a kiss, but in killing and consumption. Therefore while she may become necessarily aware of the fragmentation of her

²⁰¹ “The temptation of pleasure. The temptation is to eat directly from the source. The temptation is to eat directly from the law” (my translation).

world, she does not come to respect the distance between she and Janair, rather she works to assimilate her otherness into the same. It seems that part of her response entails consuming the other in order to neutralize the other's attack on her self-integrity. The otherness of the other is constituted through her "self," as G.H. continues to be inhospitable to the other's presence in her home.

For thinkers such as Manzo the "communion" is a generous act, finally an acceptance and recuperation of what has been marginalized in her culture: "em Clarice, nada mais é que a aceitação de todo um mundo renegada por nossa cultura, mas do qual é feita também e irremediavelmente nossa vida: o feio, o sujo, o mortal, o irracional, o não compreensível" (Manzo 78).²⁰² For Cixous the act is characterized through love, since G.H. allows herself to be infiltrated by the other. But the notions of conquest and even murder must also be accounted for. The moment, I argue, was not precipitated, and was not called for by the figures in the room. It was in haste; a will towards survival when one's self-identity is threatened by the abject. A life and death struggle to supersede the other ensues resulting from a response based upon instinct. G.H. gains contact with her animal-like nature, indeed locating a place before language; but does she necessarily form a connection outside of herself through that experience? Or, is this experience then primarily an integration of the other so that she could get back to what she had called her life? It is presented as a Hegelian struggle in which the death of the other would mean the negation of consciousness (see Hegel, 31). If G.H. were to annihilate the other there would be no other to recognize her "self," in order to affirm her existence. Yet, different from the Hegelian model this struggle results in neither the death of the other nor in the bondage of the servant. The other remains fully alive and outside of G.H.'s selfhood.

²⁰² "In Clarice, it is nothing other than an acceptance of an entire world denied by our culture, but from which our life is made irremediable: the ugly, the dirty, the mortal, the irrational, the incomprehensible" (my translation).

G.H. has a choice between two roads just as the protagonist in “A quinta história” (“The Fifth Story”) did, who was quoted at the beginning of this section. Whichever choice implies a sacrifice, between herself and her soul. As Hendrick makes clear, this is more than a meditation on killing cockroaches, it “is also a meditation on the consequences of murder and on the dangers of coming alive to one’s own constraints” (79). By killing the cockroach she preserves herself and control of her surroundings, yet she must accept the consequence of her action, that murder is a threat to her soul. Thus she is confronted with a decision – *it’s either you or me, both of us cannot exist in this space*. The idea, moreover, of even being in that situation had until that moment eluded her. Failing to conceive of another option, she violently consumes the other.

What G.H. integrates into herself is what she has conceived of as primitiveness, and therefore she puts the encounter in the familiar terms of a battle between civilized self and primitive other. The anthropologist Lévy Bruhl has proposed that the difference between the primitive and the civilized mind is in terms of participation for the first and distance for the second. Using Bruhl’s formulation, [Manzo](#) makes the case that the other is always an object of desire or fear, knowledge or mystery, and in the Western novel the integration of the two poles is an arduous conquest (80). I submit that the consumption in this case is an act of conquest of an “uncivilized” presence that had threatened G.H., but she quickly discovers that the act was a failure. That is, she does not overcome privilege at any point; rather she continues to be confronted with her class position, given that she has the freedom to make choices that the civilized could make when faced with the conflation of desire and fear. While there is bravery in her transgression, she interprets wrongly what her necessary act should be. As she explains: “Só parei na minha fúria quando compreendi com surpresa que estava desfazendo tudo o que laboriosamente havia feito, quando compreendi que estava me renegando. E que, ai de mim, eu

não estava à altura senão de minha própria vida” (167).²⁰³ Keeping with her discovery, it is necessary that the reader not allow this event to be the primary moment of her experience; rather it is important to keep in mind the preceding encounter with the room and what the messages were meant to say.

The notion of the charcoal drawings as a stranger occupying a part of G.H.’s house provides a way of understanding the subsequent encounter with the cockroach. Ahmed’s notion of “strange encounters” works well with my reading: identity is produced within the meeting of “surprise and conflict” through which there is a shifting of what we think we know. That the maid had actually created a space for herself within her apartment creates a shock, since she never expected to find within her own home something that challenged her authority, and thus posed a threat to her self-constitution. G.H. is surprised that she cannot control the encounter with Janair, and does not willingly submit herself to being controlled, looking for any way out. She realizes that she can only escape through the cockroach, by going in to what is, but that escape also involves interiorizing that exteriority. G.H. attempts to restrict Janair’s access even after she had gone by depicting her as an unruly servant who had hidden her identity from her mistress. Yet G.H. is able to remain face-to-face with the abject by way of the cockroach, which exists between the way in which G.H. had viewed her life, and the way that it really is – a physical presence of Janair’s message, without Janair actually having to be there.

Ahmed builds her analysis of racialized encounters between others off of Audre Lorde’s relation of a story of her childhood. As it provides a stunning comparison to the sliding significations that occur in this part of the novel, I include the entire Lorde quote:

²⁰³ “I only stopped in my fury when I realized with surprise that I was undoing everything I had laboriously done, when I realized that I was betraying myself. And that, poor me, I couldn’t get beyond my own life” (160).

The AA subway train to Harlem. I clutch my mother's sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, Christmas-heavy. The wet smell of winter clothes, the train's lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes past my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train ("Eye to Eye," *Sister Outsider* 148).

The roach in the story is a displacement for the cause of the hate. It stands in between them, signaling their separation, until Lorde realizes that she *is* the roach: "the impossible and phobic object" (Ahmed 39) that attempts to crawl from one body to the other. There was nothing physically between them, only the horror of contamination. For Ahmed, the roach actually becomes the black body in an act of sliding signifiers. In Lispector's novel the black body is transposed onto that of the roach, allowing for the separation and differences between the two women to be noted even though Janair is not bodily present. Ahmed states that when an alien, or a stranger, becomes a fetish, "it becomes abstracted from the relations which allow it to appear in the present and hence *reappears* no matter where we look" (2). The significance of Janair for G.H. is her strangeness, which is abstracted and displaced onto other elements for the service of

her experience. While the eating of the cockroach is a repugnant act, it still may be a more comfortable one for G.H. since she need only recognize her own interiority, not necessarily having to confront the exploitation whose presence is revealed in the encounter. It also brings her back to herself; she no longer has to look at that body staring back at her. Therefore it is seen that in this consumption she does not confront difference in a meaningful way; even if she undeniably faces up to alterity.

Nonetheless, significant for this reading is Ahmed's observation that differences are determined at the level of the encounter, not in the body of the other (145). In this case the narrative resists claiming the black body as a site of difference for the protagonist to discover, even though Janair's space is within the abject with which G.H. needs to confront for her process of identity-searching. In a Kristevian reading it is noted that when the abject is expelled, the boundary line of the subject is formed, but the abject still remains an object of fascination (3). It is clear that the roach as the abject for G.H. must be confronted as a way of embracing the unintelligible. Although by consuming her, it seems that the narration carries out the resolution of the novel of awakening but in an inauthentic way, since G.H., being ultimately concerned with her own subjecthood would not tolerate anything standing outside of herself, gazing at her, judging her. According to Machado, the "ethical requirement" of her writing is that the putting into form of her experience must "respect the occurrence as such ... in its strangeness and its otherness, without appropriating it, integrating it, neutralizing it" (109). G.H., I contend, is unable to realize this requirement and hence her epiphanic moment reveals that failure.

Examining more profoundly this moment, G.H. is dealing with fear of the material and looks for a transcendent instant; thus she discovers that the eating of the cockroach was no more than an experience of false transcendence, and she spits it out of her mouth, realizing that the real

and the divine were her all along. She traces a path back to herself but releases the other before “she” is actually digested. She states that she spits out the taste of “nothing at all” and utters a phrase from the Revelation according to St. John 3:16: “---porque não és nem frio nem quente, porque és morno, eu te vomitarei da minha boca” (167).²⁰⁴ The phrase comes to her from the back of her memory, and she no longer remembers what the multiple meanings are. It is in reference to a nauseating, lukewarm Christianity of the Laodiceans who have accepted material over spiritual wealth. The roach is discovered to be the Hellishness of living matter, meaningless in the sense that it has survived since before humans gave meaning to things through language. She has come into contact with an *ur*-moment; but on the level of the personal it may also be presumed that she is speaking to the insignificance of what she had previously perceived to be a meaningful act.

By spitting out the cockroach, there is not complete consumption; she is on some level of Derrida’s continuum of narcissism, having to a certain extent have seen the other as other, not incorporable to the same. This also closely resembles the response to the abject as postulated by Kristeva through food loathing: “‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*’ (*Powers of Horror* 3). But also, if we use the language of Ahmed rather than of Kristeva, it is possible to also think of the act as a response to an invasion. It seems to be that the abject according to Lispector is not only an object of terror and desire, but something that looks back at her. Ahmed points out that expulsion always leaves its trace; not to necessarily form the boundary between self and other, but to provide an indication of the expulsion that must continue to be addressed. Machado’s

²⁰⁴ “Because you are neither hot nor cold, because you are tepid, I will vomit you out from my mouth” (160).

language is somewhat different, as she states that the “art of withdrawal” must be distant enough that the formless may “leave its own traces” (109). The distance between the two women may be rethought with consideration to this willingness of the other woman to leave traces upon her withdrawal that were not informed by G.H.’s sensibilities, prefiguring the spitting out of the cockroach with the charcoal drawings. I also prefer to use the word withdrawal, given that Janair had *chosen* to leave and in a way that would inform upon the inequalities in the household. The only expulsion is that of the cockroach from her mouth, but even that is done impulsively, reflecting G.H.’s inability to control the situation. The charcoal drawings that emerged from the walls are traces therefore of Janair’s removal of herself from G.H.’s authority, while G.H. interpreted them as signs of a previous and continuing invasion.

While G.H. comprehends what it is to maintain a respectful distance, she does not take responsibility for the invitation of Janair into her home, her invisibilization and subsequent withdrawal; she only recognizes that other side when it is directly opposing her self-constitution. Additionally, the encounter as Ahmed explains is not merely in the present, but relived metonymically between various encounters. As I have emphasized in previous chapters, it is not only the face-to-face encounters in one moment that are important, but in Ahmed’s words “the spatial and temporal dislocations that made that moment possible” (145). It will be what Lorde always recalls as “the hate” that she experienced, and it reflects a multitude of past and future encounters in which both parties participate. G.H. herself admits that her coming to that room had been a process happening many times before, but that she had forgotten, and only now would it come to its conclusion. “Mil vezes antes o movimento provavelmente começara e depois se perdera” (35).²⁰⁵ Her insinuation, however, that there will be a conclusion is never

²⁰⁵ “The process had probably begun a thousand times before and had then been led astray” (27).

realized; that was part of the seduction of the reader through hopes that never materialize. Therefore we must not interpret the consumption of the cockroach as a final act (comparable to the disappearance of the nana in *Balún Canán*), since within this movement she also loses her way, and will have to repeat it again.

Most important to reaffirm is that Janair's body is not one that is waiting to be ontologized by G.H.'s recognition, nor is it actually offered up as a sacrifice to be digested into G.H.'s culture – rather what becomes important is the moment between them, and how each of them reads the encounter. Therefore I would argue the importance of the notion that the consumption of the cockroach, as G.H. states, is a moment of false transcendence, a failure to recognize or to interpret correctly the “alien” writing that Janair had put before her.

4.6 OPEN ENDINGS

What is presented as the narration culminates is G.H.'s capability to approach depersonalization, which she believes will allow her to encounter within herself the woman of all women. Through the cockroach she encountered the maternal, and it is that sense of being woman to which she most likely refers. But unexpectedly her language returns us to the troubling way in which she speaks of her maid at the beginning of her journey, and the reader wonders, as G.H. herself contemplates in the beginning, if she indeed achieved more than releasing herself from her own aesthetics – “Terei enfim perdido todo um sistema de bom-gosto? Mas será este o meu ganho único?” (20).²⁰⁶ According to Kahn, the epiphany comes not from

²⁰⁶ “Have I in effect abandoned a whole system of good taste? But is that my only gain?” (12).

the encounter with the other, but in the *sacrifice* of the other who is completely at the mercy of the protagonist, compelling the reader to remember the force of the themes of murder and consumption. Indeed, G.H. reestablishes herself as the hero of the narrative by referring to her “deheroization”:

A deseroização é o grande fracasso de uma vida. Nem todos chegam a fracassar porque é tão trabalhoso, é preciso antes subir penosamente até enfim atingir a altura de poder cair – só posso alcançar a depersonalidade da mudez se eu antes tiver construído toda uma voz. Minhas civilizações eram necessárias para que eu subisse a ponto de ter de onde descer (175).²⁰⁷

By falling from her “civilizations” she realizes that language had been employed in covering over her own female body; G.H. however does not come to identify the other female body that her construction of harmony had been covering over. She illustrates that only through first having a voice can one find silence; Janair’s agency through silence is not acknowledged, although it was the impetus for her awakening. My feeling is that this is a deliberate delegitimization of the narrative voice by continuing to portray her failure to see the way in which she had silenced within her own home; she certainly is re-awakened to her own limitations, which is the ongoing incapacity to see the other.

The moment of eating the cockroach, which G.H. describes as the lowest of all acts, is so fraught with multiple meanings that the text is opened up for the reader to judge G.H.’s reaction to the moment, as well as her subsequent forgetting. We anticipate her forgetting from the beginning of the narrative in which she predicts her return to the harmony of her life as soon as

²⁰⁷ “Deheroization is the grand failure of a life. Not everyone can fail because it is such hard work, one must first climb painfully up to get to the height to fall from – I can only achieve the depersonality of silence if I have first built an entire voice. My cultures were necessary to me so that I could climb up to have a point to come down from” (169).

she allows herself again to organize her thoughts into language. This reorganization will surely again lead to disorganization in a moment that she will again forget. She ends by saying, “Pois como poderia eu dizer sem que a palavra mentisse por mim? Como poderei dizer senão timidamente assim: a vida se me é. A vida se me é, e eu não entendo o que digo. E então adoro. - - - - -” (179).²⁰⁸ In Nina’s analysis of the novel she distinguishes the text as nomadic writing (different from writings of silence), her pilgrimage taking place through language: “as palavras não são faladas, mas escritas” (136).²⁰⁹ Silence here refers to the absence of spoken words, and the incapacity of words to express all of life’s experiences. Through writing G.H. finds life within which she cannot understand.

“E então adoro” (179) – “and so I love” – is the last phrase of the novel. “Love” has no object following, only dashes, suggesting an ongoing process. Furthermore, the love that she questions whether or not she had found must be conceived of as a future possibility. Returning to Levinas, he declares that Love is a relation with the Other that goes beyond the beloved: “This is why through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond the face, from what is *not yet*, from a future never future enough, more remote than possible” (254-255). In keeping with my analyses in the previous chapters I highlight the “not yet” situation, which Irigaray also expresses when she states that silence (listening to the other) is the primary gesture of “I love to you,” but in which the “to” is impossible. Lispector eliminates the “you,” perhaps allowing the reader to recognize the absence of an object which has escaped being part of the narrative. You, the reader, is no longer acknowledged. All exteriority seems to have been incorporated into G.H.’s single vision. I believe that Lispector demonstrated that impossibility of getting beyond

²⁰⁸ “For how will I be able to speak without the word lying for me? how will I be able to speak except timidly, like this: life is itself for me. Life is itself for me, and I don’t understand what I am saying. And, therefore, I adore ...” (173).

²⁰⁹ “the words are not spoken, but written” (my translation).

herself; yet by highlighting the distances and silences between the two female characters in this case, the narrative reveals the liberty of the woman who is exterior to the narrative “I”, and thus the *possibility* of objectless love based upon that relationship.

It is important to say that Lispector goes beyond confessional narratives, in which the author looks at her own privileges that have been afforded to her by virtue of social location. There is certainly a confessional turn, but there is no hope for redemption or forgiveness in that turn. That would be bypassing the fact that the differential treatment between the two women is not going to end through her confession – we also suspect that this is actually not a final closed encounter, alternatively it will be forgotten and repeated again. Lispector maintains the conflict all the way through – her response to the encounter with Janair must be infinite, it cannot be fulfilled. To conclude with what is constructive in the narrative for feminist literary criticism, I consider the following quote from Laura Gillman:

it is instructive to bring to bear in feminist discussions on fear of the racialized ‘other’ as experienced by white women in the confessional cultural narratives of the fear of the racialized ‘other’ as experienced by women of color. Here, fear of whiteness is not represented as an emotion that is learned through a process of socialization and later deployed as a strategy to legitimize privilege... Rather, fear of whiteness emerges from the experience of feelings endangered by white racist dominance (hooks 1992, 169). White dominance invokes fear as it manifests itself not only directly in a variety of subjugating or punitive social practices, but also indirectly as it subsumes the gaze of the “other” (130).

Janair successfully returns that gaze in an act of resistance, calling upon us to imagine her experience as a woman of color. In comparison with Lorde’s experience, we might turn G.H.’s

moment with the cockroach around, and remember not only the protagonist's fear and fascination of the abject, but also the "abject's" fear of and resistance to being appropriated by her. This is not a far-reaching analysis given that, as was earlier asserted, Janair is present in the narrative all the way through, and the implied author has made known G.H.'s blindness to this fact. G.H. demonstrates a type of "white solipsism" in which she represents her experience as universal, and has difficulty accepting that she is shown otherwise. Lispector engages not only G.H.'s fear of the other in her home, but anticipates Janair's fears of white dominance, although given her concern with representing the less-privileged, she does not presume to be able to express these feelings in her writing.

What Janair's characterization illustrates most poignantly is that the colonized woman speaks from a place of utter invisibility. Yet, her presence is made known through traces of her existence in the apartment that elude G.H.'s dominant discourse. Within the revealing of the presence of the colonized woman it is suggested that she resists any efforts at being assimilated into a confessional narrative, or a story of redemption, as there is a creation of a space that allows for a critique of the text itself. Although Janair's story remains at the margin of the margins of the text, it is within that margin that G.H. begins to detect something that resembles herself, although she not only perceives her own silence, but subconsciously also the ways that she has silenced. When speaking of the ways that all of us have internalized oppressive imagery, Cherrie Moraga states that the oppressor fears similarity; "He fears he will discover in himself the same aches, the same longings as those of the people he has shitted on. He fears the immobilization threatened by his own incipient guilt. ... We women have a similar nightmare, for each of us in some way has been both oppressed and the oppressor" (451). To recognize this means to face the vengeance of those that have been hurt by indifference. Through looking at silences and

invisibilities Lispector opens up a space for reading a “possibility” for solidarity between women that takes into account that reality.

What distinguishes Lispector’s work is that she does not pretend that her introspective journey toward selfhood is free of those that she affects around her. Santos describes the “journey” of G.H. towards “self-realization” as one that “consists firstly of the object’s desire to be recognized by the Other, and culminates with the desire for representation of one’s own experience” (67). But this desire is based on ambivalence: ambivalence as a writer, as a narrator of other’s experiences, as an educated woman in a class and racially-coded society. For Santos, there seems to be no other goal to be reached in the text besides that of espousing an authentic self, which is only found in a state of depersonalization: “It is in this neutral state that becomes a form of unexplained ecstasy of freedom in the impersonal prefigurative. The voice that searches for identity is real and its language is one of liminal silence that is always an in-between state of mind” (82). Further questions that are raised are how we may speak of the willed silence of the marginalized within this process, and the way in which Janair’s presence marks the limits of the protagonist’s self-exploration and signals that need for depersonalization.

Finally, further thinking the way we may perceive a relationship between Janair and G.H., I return to Deborah Archer, who, influenced by Cixous and Irigaray, is concerned with the establishment of a feminine relationship with the other that maintains proper distance (256).²¹⁰ As I have stated, Cixous in her treatment of Lispector uses the language of the body to describe the experience of letting the other “invade” and “impregnate” her (147). The type of readings taken from her treatment tend to focus on the need of the writer to “receive” the Other, and

²¹⁰ Irigaray point out that the “gift-that-takes” is part of a masculine bourgeois mentality of giving the Other a voice so that she will speak his language. The feminine gift respects distance in an attempt to construct a non-phallogocentric discourse, and therefore does not consume the Other through language.

diminishes any meaningful reading of the marginal character, or for that matter any type of social reading. With respect to Lispector's work at least, I believe it is important to turn attention away from judging a work based upon how well an author gives voice to the margins, and think more about the complexity of the silences that Lispector is offering. Willed silence that stands in objection to the reader's desire to know, and to the narrator's individualist quest for redemption. Should we really categorize her writing as a gift to the subaltern? Moreover, what if the gift is not asked for, and/or refused? It occurs to me that with so much attention paid to whether or not Lispector or other women writers achieve *speaking for*, are we not missing the ways in which these writers are critiquing that very action? Lispector does not in fact give voice to the subaltern in her text; rather she reveals critical silences in her writing, which are simultaneously willed and imposed, as well as her own complicity with invisibilization of others. What is at stake when reading *A paixão...* goes beyond finding ways for a privileged feminist subject to identify with the other, and towards an examination of the ways in which silencing has been carried with us within feminist writings.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Era um riso como somente quem não fala ri. Esse riso, o explorador constrangido não conseguiu clasificar. E ella continuou fruindo o próprio riso macio, ela que não estava sendo devorada. Não ser devorado é o sentimento mais perfeito. Não ser devorado é o objetivo secreto de tôda uma vida. Enquanto ela não estava sendo comida, seu riso bestial era tão delicado como é delicada a alegria. O explorador estava atrapalhado (Lispector, "A menor mulher do mundo," *Laços de família* 70).²¹¹

The impetus for this project was to explore the apparent connections between various works by middle-class women writers of the mid-twentieth century which seemed to speak to each other, especially with regard to an authorial anxiety over the possibility that the act of writing could become exploitative and even authoritarian, brought about as a result of their own privilege. What happens, I ask, when the author's efforts to find a non-mimetic voice within the male writing world comes into contact with someone who she has silenced? I anticipated finding confessional tales that would attempt to overcome a protagonist's feelings of shame as she assumed a task self-exploration, compelled by her relationship with a less-privileged woman. What emerged within the narratives of Castellanos, Rhys, and Lispector, however, was something outside of the guilty first-person narrative – a retrievable voice of the marginalized woman that challenged the very ways in which the narrative worked to tell her pain.

²¹¹ It was a smile that only someone who does not speak can smile. A smile that the uncomfortable explorer did not succeed in classifying. And she went on enjoying her own gentle smile, she who was not being devoured. Not to be devoured is the most perfect sentiment. Not to be devoured is the secret objective of a whole existence. While she was not being devoured, her animal smile was as delicate as happiness. The explorer felt disconcerted. (Trans. Pontiero 94).

Works written by women that tell personal stories of development in a bildungsroman style tend to be dismissed by readers and critics as politically irrelevant when there is an overemphasis on the “I,” in particular when they are that of a character who has a certain amount of social privilege. Elena Poniatowska, when considering her 1988 autobiographical novel of development, *Flor de lis*, states that she had been reluctant to write her story given its inevitable focus on upper-class characters. “In part I did it to avoid who I am,” she admits. “Someday when I have achieved a certain serenity, I will be able to create novels that aren’t assigned tasks ... write another novel about my family” (qtd. in Jørgensen 105). Poniatowska alludes to a notion that self-exploration, when it is one of privilege, is only productive in a narcissistic sense. It is doubtful that she would ever reach that serenity, since recognizing one’s responsibility as a writer to tell the stories of the oppressed means also accepting that it is a process that can never be satisfied.

Yet there is something useful about analyzing privilege within a search for female subjectivity, as stepping into the discomfort of one’s complicities with discrimination and inequalities opens up new ways of thinking about community-building. That is, speaking about another’s misfortune without recognizing one’s own space of enunciation, which may be bound up with the system that produces inequalities, further marginalizes the other who is spoken. The option may be for the writer, as Poniatowska has wondered, to not write only of her own experiences given its inherent narcissism. However, there is value in self-reflection, even when, and perhaps especially when, that means confronting the ways in which the speaker has treated some and ignored others. Furthermore, the writers in this study are poised to challenge the form of the conventional bildungsroman, recognizing that subjects are not formed in isolation. Yet, while they work to reach across boundaries of race, class, and gender, the act is revealed to be

inauthentic, given that they have not found a way of approaching the other in a way that is built upon solidarity rather than charity. Their novels highlight that there is something missing in the relationships between the women which makes solidarity unattainable. A certain respect must be achieved that begins with the recognition of hegemony within intimate spaces, but that continues by allowing differences to inform interior development. What is lacking for these protagonists is a way to move beyond their fears of otherness.

Moreover, it is not the identity of the writer that determines whether a work will challenge the status quo. Critics such as Poniatowska as well as bell hooks warn that merely assuming that works written by women or minorities are critical fictions that will inevitably disrupt patriarchal ideologies cooperates with essentialist notions of otherness. It keeps oppressed groups in the position of the ones who must teach about discrimination, as if it only belonged to them. I extend this argument to point out that it should not be presumed that women's writing inherently speaks for all oppressed groups. Throughout this work I have indicated the criticism that falls into this pattern of always looking for the voice within women's writing that would be a gift to the subaltern; when that voice is seen to be lacking the text is recognized as a moral failure, but there is not an adequate response to that failure by readers. Hooks strikingly affirms that it is the reader's response which "will determine the power of the text to challenge and transform" (58). This is also the direction of my analysis: it takes a discerning reader to identify the discriminatory notions being laid bare by the writing; just because the writers speak from the space of the more-privileged, does not mean that there is not a critical confrontation with dominating ideologies. The failure to adequately confront the reality of the subaltern, and the protagonist's attempts at covering-up this inadequacy, are presented as the critical point of analysis for the reader.

Concerned with her background as the daughter of ladino landholders, Castellanos announces from the outset of her novel that the nana's ability to speak has been taken from her. There is no mistaking that the writer, by inscribing the pain of this loss with the means of that robbing of indigenous speech, implicates herself, and her entire novel, in the colonizing process. Rhys shrouds Christophine in the mystery of being an obeah woman with a "dark" history, unknowable to the Creole narrator. Antoinette's fear of being swept up by her "unreasoned" discourse and thus further away from closing ranks with Whites opens up criticism of the protagonist based upon her involvement with Enlightenment ideology. Lispector's novel opens with the stark absence of the life of the maid, creating shock in response to the blasé approach of the protagonist toward the humanity of others, as she uncomfortably makes us follow her through her ultimately self-involved journey into marginality. Thus considering this distinctive voice in each novel which simultaneously desires to speak for the colonized other and is critical of her appropriating location of enunciation, this work was narrowed to a triangular comparison between three writers who exhibit this unique narrative ambiguity.

Balún Canán, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *A paixão segundo G.H.* stand out in their overarching emphasis on the marginal female character within their writings, who happens to be either a maid or a nanny. That each of these writers had the experience of living with and employing domestic servants is significant, given that their writings hinge upon a certain uncontrollability of the "invited stranger" within the domestic space. The ability of the marginalized woman in each story to escape the gaze of the mistress is a comment upon form as well as content. The writing is conscious of the fact that it can no longer rely upon the formal conventions of the bildungsroman without ignoring or suppressing the other lives upon which the development narrative is made possible. While each text continues to be a bildungsroman with

its emphasis on individual development or awakening, the other woman is in place to point to the limits of such a project. It may also be noted in reference to the class position of each of the authors, that writing requires a special commitment of time that is hardly feasible without the relief from certain household responsibilities. Thus their very process of self-reflection was realized through reliance upon the service of others, a surprising demonstration of the roadblocks to solidarity. Poniatowska has confronted this system of inequality that the middle-class woman tends to hold onto forsaking the real possibility of solidarity between women:

Si la solidaridad entre mujeres existiera hace mucho que habría comedores y guarderías públicas. Las mujeres de clase acomodada llevarían hijos de unas y de otras a la escuela y a la clase de piano y de ballet y de karate y de lo que gustaban, no que ahora solo corren y se espantan cuando es SU hijo, si el SUYO y no el de la vecina el que se cae de la patineta (“La literatura de las mujeres” 26).²¹²

While inequalities that come between women can certainly be studied from a variety of standpoints, there is something peculiar about the relationship between mistresses and servants that draws our attention, providing a lens into the very personal workings of oppressions. It is the indifference towards the neighbor’s children that Poniatowska highlights as detrimental to the community-building necessary for any women’s movement; when some are fearful of having to give up personal comforts, real solidarity is traded for individualism and liberty based upon a generic notion of gender equality. Communities based upon “working together” for what needs to be done, witnessed but not experienced by Antoinette and the girl in *Balún Canán*, cannot be realized as long as there are relationships of dependency for the service of individualist goals.

²¹² “If solidarity between women had existed for years, we would have public cafeterias and daycare centers. Women of the comfortable class would take each other’s children to their piano, ballet, karate, and whatever other classes they like, not like now, they only go running and become alarmed when it is HER child, if it’s HERS and not the neighbor’s child who falls off of his or her skateboard” (my translation).

For the protagonists in these texts however they have moved beyond feelings of apathy and unresponsiveness toward the well-being of others, and into the territory of fear of the unknown that bonding with the colonized other presents.

I began writing this conclusion after watching a movie called *A Cooler Climate* (1999), in which Sally Field plays a live-in housekeeper to a mean-tempered rich woman in the Northeast United States. After the mistress' husband leaves her the two women form an unexpected friendship that is based upon the pity the housekeeper develops for her employer, displaying an empathy that looks beyond her cruelty and indifference. After Field's character breaks her leg the mistress willingly waits on her, eventually learning from her maid that she will need to learn to take care of herself. The happy ending depends upon the emotional strength of the maid to be able to forgive her mistress and offer her hand in friendship, allowing herself to sacrifice certain freedoms to become the family member that the mistress desired.

This familiar trope is also seen in the Uruguayan film *Cama adentro (Live-In Maid)* (2004), but differently the mistress who is suffering financially is eventually invited to move in with her domestic, since she never learned to care for herself. The maid never stops sacrificing for the needs of her mistress/dependant, even when she is no longer getting paid. Also seen in both of these films is that the maid forms a bond with the mistress' daughter, demonstrating a greater capacity to be maternal than the mistress whose money has removed her from caregiving responsibilities. Her focus on individual success makes her less of a woman in the ideological sense. While we are trained to cheer on the maid who will save the family, by doing so we allow her to become the domesticated woman who is needed by modern society to maintain our comfort and soothe our pain resulting from the disintegration of relationships in an increasingly privatized society. What is strikingly familiar in these cases is the juxtaposition of weakness and

strength that is normalized within a domestic setting. Strength is associated with the woman who works harder and who cares for the other; the upper-class woman is assumed to be either lazy or inept at taking care of domestic work. More than a basic economic trade in skills, mistakenly we judge their relationship based upon ideologies of femininity to which we assign moral value. The mistress has failed to be a woman in the way in which the servant is – self-sacrificing, maternal, one who prefers to listen rather than speak.

The protagonists in each work of this study exhibit a dependency upon the strength of the other woman for her individual development, employing her to be there to listen to her pain. What I have most forcefully intended to demonstrate, however, is that the minor character is put in place to resist that movement of appropriation, thus disrupting the comfort of their asymmetrical position. She does this through a manipulation of language and silence, establishing a necessary distance between the narrating “I” and the other. She emphasizes the cultural heterogeneity, making impossible a harmonious union that would dissolve differences – the familiar happy ending that is represented in *A Cooler Climate*. In order to witness these movements of both appropriation and resistance it has been important to analyze the encounters between the women, in which there is conflict that is based upon a history of inequality, and surprise when the mistress realizes that her maid is getting too close, thus threatening the comfort of their arrangement.

The extract from Lispector’s “The Smallest Woman in the World” in the epigraph demonstrates that she who seems to be most easily colonized and understood given her incredible smallness, instead completely and bewilderingly resists appropriation. Evoking a history of nineteenth and twentieth century ethnological expositions that were intended to display and exoticize “primitiveness” for a curious public, her ironic smile confounds the intellectual

whose task is to classify her. It is neither a welcoming nor a wanting smile; rather it is one that forms a barrier between herself and her observer.

Compare her smile to the grin of the “Negro” from the following account of “a white man, a mulatto, and a Negro” at St. Peter’s gate that Fanon relates:

One day St. Peter saw three men arrive at the gate of heaven: a white man, a mulatto, and a Negro. “What do you want most?” he asked the white man.

“Money.”

“And you?” he asked the mulatto.

“Fame.”

St. Peter turned to the Negro, who said with a wide smile: “I’m just carrying these gentleman’s bags” (*Black Skin...49*).

Fanon refers to the smile which is made to alleviate the anxieties of the white man as a gift “without end” (49). Inequalities are forgiven and each man as permitted to carry on without having to worry about being held accountable for injustices. Individual desires for fame and money are reasons for allowing the continuation of prejudice, approved of by the smile. Moreover, dependency is again evoked as we are reminded of the nana’s story that no rich man can get into heaven without a poor man leading him by the hand (*Balún Canán 30*).

In contrast, the smallest woman’s smile is one that disconcerts the white man, who is disappointed that he is unable to devour her completely. Not only can she not be understood by the explorer, she *won’t* be understood by him. She offers only a lack to the appropriating gaze of her public. This is the type of action that I have witnessed in the marginalized woman in each novel, who resists being absorbed completely into the individualist movement of the bildungsroman. The repression that comes with a totalizing use of language is not expunged, but

it is resisted by inserting barriers through silences, and by accentuating the “face” that “resists possession” (Levinas 197). Most poignantly in Lispector’s novel *Janair* is completely disembodied, yet makes her resistant gaze known through the abstraction of the charcoal drawings. It is a smile moreover which is disinterested, meant to conceal and not reveal, and opposing any notion that she would have a gift to give to the intellectual searching for answers.

I emphasize that resolution is not found within the novels themselves, yet within each there is an opening to another way of being that approaches the idea of community-building between women, insisted upon by the messages of the colonized woman. I have used various theories in order to explore alternative ways in which women could relate to each other, which are announced but not yet realized within each narration. Particularly important in my reading has been Spivak’s notion of ethical singularity, which illustrates a need for dialogue that imagines a tentative voice of the silenced other. The theory touches upon a need for recognizing both sides, as opposed to readings that only look for the ways in which the narrating self reaches out to the other in either appropriating or non-appropriating ways. Spivak highlights a secret within relationships based upon responsibility and accountability; the secret is something that we want to reveal, but that remains between us, perhaps as a reminder that there is always work yet to be done toward the development of solidarity. Moreover, dialogue only exists as long as there is something more to reveal.

Keeping in mind Spivak’s insistence that both sides be recognized, I note that the other has a capacity to speak, but the author does not employ her voice in order to reveal everything for the protagonist in what would be a hasty resolution of conflict. Tension is rather maintained in order to call attention to the never-ending responsibility to each other. Instead of creating an individualistic narrative in which social tensions are resolved by way of strengthening the “I”

through a process of shadowing differences and eliminating incongruities, the writing of these authors does not presume to be able to create female subjectivity without recognizing the presence of less-privileged women in their midst that challenge the ideologies that inform the progression of their development. They are not, however, able to attain intersubjectivity, although there may be moments that resemble it. There is a desire to not form the subject in isolation, but with whom does the protagonist ally? Human desire for advancement would lead her to resist seeing the other woman outside of her role as servant and caregiver, since that would mean there would be no one to buffer the ideologies of womanhood that she comes up against. Nevertheless, given the simultaneous desire for community, the protagonist's project of individual development will ultimately fail, and thus from that standpoint an immanent critique is formed.

Therefore, for readings of Castellanos, for example, it seems that it would do her work an injustice to not call attention to the ways in which she has had the occasion to be both on the side of the oppressors as well as the champion of the dispossessed, since her novel calls upon readers to recognize the domineering tendencies of the intellectual who attempts to speak another's pain. The nana, who can only speak of her experience through the space of those that possess her, obliges the girl to experience an intensification of her own marginalization by creating distance, instead of merely creating for her a safe, maternal space from which to develop. While the leading thread of the novel is the bildungsroman of a young girl, the year of her life that is portrayed is one in which the nana was the most significant influence in her growth. The girl learns to be a woman through bonding with her nana, but also must acknowledge the secret that remains between them, that which is concealed to represent that there is more work to be done in the way of forming solidarity.

Christophine has a more assertive position in Rhys' novel, from which she judges Antoinette's colonized mentality, and demonstrates an agency that Antoinette does not possess. Christophine resists falling completely into the symbolic position of the obedient "black mammy" who would cooperate with the European romance plot that the Creole woman is constructing. While Christophine was indeed bought by the master as a present for the mistress, she eventually moves out of this role and by the time Antoinette is an adult she refuses to accept any subordinate position, ultimately walking out of the narrative altogether. The mammy image, according to Patricia Hill Collins, is that of an "asexual woman," "a surrogate mother in blackface" (74). She never questions her inferiority given her enduring love for the family. While Christophine exhibits a degree of loyalty and certainly love for Antoinette and her mother, her attitude in this regard shifts in a way that insists upon a two-way dialogue of listening and being listened to; a demand for respect that Antoinette barely notices until their relationship is severed. Unlike Antoinette she asserts liberation, and criticizes her surrogate daughter's sense of hope that lies within the contractual agreement of marriage, as well as within the movement towards whiteness. Christophine's characterization is also nuanced; while she exhibits strength she is also often quiet and evading withholding of her laughter.

Antoinette denies the friendship that Christophine offers by not listening to the alternative world view that she is providing, in order to pursue the English dream. Her denial of that more symmetrical relationship provides a space for the reader to critique her individualist quest, and to question her final leap towards Tia and Christophine. While she finally acknowledges the Caribbean part of her identity, represented by the fire and the red dress, it is too late, and could only occur through a dream state. Antoinette remains, that is, largely unaware with respect to the lives of the women who were closest to her. The type of *not yet* relationship symbolized in the

final dream sequence in which Christophine stands behind a wall of fire as Antoinette calls for her help, may be compared to Nancy's concept of the first-person-plural, in which community is not based upon the dissolving of boundaries between one another, but between the mutual recognition of singularities. Again, reemphasized in this theory is that critical space in-between, which might be a productive space that calls attention to the normalization of inequalities that is often silenced in stories of community-development. It should be seen that what stands in-between, when critically addressed, may be a basis for solidarity.

Lispector's enigmatic depiction of her absent maid is, in comparison with the other novels of this study, the final disengagement with an overpowering central narration. As Janair forces her mistress to intensify her own experience of marginalization, G.H.'s resistance to the knowledge gained from that experience demonstrates the continual necessity of responding to privilege; since, there is not one action that will resolve the ways in which she had been indifferent to the other woman living in the service area of her home. G.H. finds beneath the artifice of her constructed universe, not only the life of the woman who makes her comfort possible, but also an entire humanity that had erected the city through their blood and sweat, obscured by the gleam of high-rises and shopping centers. That which is beneath the surface of things is revealed, which has been relegated to the abject, and G.H. reacts with horror. Surprisingly, despite her confinement within marginality which created an acute space within which G.H. might empathize with Janair, she never comes to acknowledge her dependence upon the domestic, in much the same way as the urban shopping center would keep out those who had actually built the structure. After the moment of defamiliarization the everyday would keep moving along its pace, since G.H. fights complete disintegration; yet we are assured that the moment will be repeated.

As something of a contemporary “mammy” Janair would be expected to be completely committed to her job, being a silent partner to the mistress in a masking of the continued “economic exploitation of social class” (Hill Collins 74). The more that G.H. attempts to naturalize that relationship of inequality, the more the oppressive nature of the economic system comes to light. G.H.’s degree of inhospitable narcissism turns away the reader who looks for her to experience an ethical awakening. But instead, what is highlighted from beginning to end is the blindness of the mistress who cannot see the discrimination that she has enacted in her own home. As a woman she awakens to her own limitations, and the realities of her existence; but she continues to view Janair as uncontrollable, the maid who traversed the boundaries of who speaks and who is spoken; and in order to survive G.H. begins a reconstruction of her life still silencing that threat to her comfort.

Silence is perceived as a place that one is condemned to occupy when marginalized, excluded from political dialogue, and without access to political solidarity. Nevertheless it is seen in each of these cases that it may also be utilized as a tool to counter domination, and to protect oneself from being employed as the alibi to absolve another’s guilt. Silence becomes an alternative political realm based upon resistances and denials of hegemonic discourse, in which the authoritative tendencies of ones who control language are laid bare. Eventually of course silence must be broken for progress to be made, but other unconventional tools must be found to do so. The limits of each text are revealed in their inability to reconstruct the broken community with the tools at hand. Most importantly, the shame that emerges from this incapacity is the point from which to build, not from the body of the raced other. Thus considering the ultimate question – can silence speak? – remarkably illustrated by way of the marginalized character is the way in which wordlessness can indeed speak louder than the written text, representing

everything that for the more-privileged protagonist is incomprehensible. It points to the mistress' vulnerability when words can no longer be used as a tool of control, providing a necessary exposure to the uncomfortable places of privilege before solidarity may be established.

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