

REAVIS, SERENA B., M.A. "Myself Yet Not Quite Myself": *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and a Third Space of Enunciation. (2005)
Directed by Dr. Christian Moraru. 26pp.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys gives voice to the creole woman and provides a space for the other's enunciation by "creolizing" *Jane Eyre*. Rhys creates a place that is at once both *Jane Eyre* and not *Jane Eyre*, an ambivalence that captures the struggle of Bertha and Jane's identity. *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s relationship to *Jane Eyre* as a re-vision/rewriting is a third space that allows, I argue, for the enunciation of the other. While a postcolonial/racial foundation prompts the rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, the gender of both women relates to their status as subaltern. Rhys' re-vision is a complicated act of subaltern agency, in which the author locates a third space of ambivalence to reiterate the feminist struggle of Jane Eyre as well as revoke and then reinscribe critically the racial and feminist struggle of Bertha Rochester.

REAVIS, SERENA B., M.A. "Being Herself Invisible, Unseen, Unknown": *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours*, and the Re-inscribed Lesbian Woman. (2005)
Directed by Dr. Christian Moraru. 24 pp.

This paper will begin to unravel the intricate relationship between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, focusing primarily on the treatment of homosexual relationships in both novels. Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, we encounter complex gender identities and sexual orientations. At times, characters are queer but not queer, are straight but not straight. The novel itself steps into a liminal space, allowing the representation of homoerotic desire even though this desire is never fully lived. *Mrs. Dalloway* represents an articulation of otherness, and *The Hours* furthers this act by granting the other a fuller voice and a more lucid representation. Both novels query their relative contemporary cultures and defy the dominant discourse by granting the other voice. The presence of the homosexual, neither deviant nor adored, challenges lingering Victorian standards and emerging postethnic values, and attempts to break through to the postgay.

“MYSELF YET NOT QUITE MYSELF”: *JANE EYRE*, *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*,
AND A THIRD SPACE OF ENUNCIATION

AND

“BEING HERSELF INVISIBLE, UNSEEN, UNKNOWN”: *MRS. DALLOWAY*,
THE HOURS, AND THE RE-INSCRIBED LESBIAN WOMAN

by

Serena B. Reavis

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2005

Approved by

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the
Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
“MYSELF YET NOT QUITE MYSELF”: <i>JANE EYRE</i> , <i>WIDE SARGASSO SEA</i> , AND A THIRD SPACE OF ENUNCIATION.....	1
WORKS CITED	25
“BEING HERSELF INVISIBLE, UNSEEN, UNKNOWN”: <i>MRS. DALLOWAY</i> , <i>THE HOURS</i> , AND THE RE-INSCRIBED LESBIAN.....	27
WORKS CITED	49

**“MYSELF YET NOT QUITE MYSELF”: *JANE EYRE*, *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*,
AND A THIRD SPACE OF ENUNCIATION**

So between you I often wonder who I am and where
is my country and where do I belong and why
was I ever born at all.—*Wide Sargasso Sea*

As a revisionist movement, postmodern rewriting attempts to directly address minority issues by recovering their untold stories, and more to the point by “retelling [their] history from a previously buried or provocatively transformed viewpoint” (Geyh, Leebron, and Levy 291). Adrienne Rich describes this phenomenon as re-vision, “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (35). Writing thus becomes a mode of inscribing formerly silenced or unheard voices, of filling gaps left by the dominant discourse. Jean Rhys takes on the task of such revisionary inscription in her final novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which the madwoman in Edward Rochester’s attic narrates part of her own story. Bertha Rochester, in fact, Antoinette Cosway, tells of her childhood growing up in the West Indies, where her neighbors “stood about in groups to jeer at her [mother]” and eventually burnt down her family home, Coulibri Estate (18). In this novel we hear for the first time of Bertha’s experiences before being locked in the attic at Thornfield Hall. She becomes more than a hindrance to Jane and Rochester’s marriage or the psychological double of Jane that critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss; she speaks for herself.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys gives voice to the creole woman and provides a space for the other's enunciation by "creolizing" *Jane Eyre*, by telling Jane's story in a different racial context. In translating the Victorian woman's feminist struggle to a West Indian context, Rhys creates a place that is at once both *Jane Eyre* and not *Jane Eyre*, an ambivalence that captures the struggle of Bertha and Jane's identity. This paper will first discuss *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s relationship to *Jane Eyre* as a re-vision/rewriting, a third space that allows, I argue, for the enunciation of the other. I will then examine the postcolonial/racial foundation, which prompts the rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, and the gender of both women as it relates to their status as subaltern. After establishing the connection between ambivalence of identity, I will analyze Jane and Bertha's feelings of displacement seen through the metaphor of the looking-glass and then connect the metaphorical reflection of character and identity to the act of rewriting. Rhys' re-vision is a complicated act of subaltern agency, in which the author locates a third space of ambivalence to reiterate the feminist struggle of Jane Eyre as well as revoke and then reinscribe critically the racial and feminist struggle of Bertha Rochester.

I

Describing her own reaction to the undercurrent of racial difference and struggle, Rhys comments,

When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should [Brontë] 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 have really been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life. (Vreeland 235)

Thus, Rhys as a reader and a writer changes or rather imagines the life of the ghost in the attic. Rhys sets out to re-envision Antoinette's story, extending her and her readers' understanding of this closeted woman. In granting the other a life outside the attic, Rhys provides a background and a more complete understanding of Antoinette's portrayal. More importantly, Antoinette gains agency in Rhys' text; she has a voice and a history. Her story, told by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, interprets *Jane Eyre* through the lens of otherness. The narrative of Bertha's childhood experiences and the presentation of her marriage to Rochester provide a re-vision of her final act of rebellion in *Jane Eyre*.

In Rhys' postmodern vision of a Victorian past, Bertha experiences life in much the same way as Jane Eyre—they both struggle to create a space for themselves in a world of restrictions. Jane's life is a constant negotiation of place, and her struggle ends in an opposite space to Bertha's—with the world, home, and family open to her in new ways. Bertha's movement through life leaves her, in the end, with nothing but a small place in the secret, ulterior passages of Thornfield Hall and ends with a sacrificial act that enables Jane's acquisition. In the disparate endings of similar lives, the mirrored reflection reveals the inequality of these woman's lives. Through inscription of semblance, *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals problematic elements in the story of *Jane Eyre*, highlighting, specifically, the privilege of racial difference.

Hidden behind the walls of Thornfield Hall and the lies of Edward Rochester, but more strikingly beneath the story of the struggle of the white working-class woman, Bertha's presence undermines the covert feminist strain in *Jane Eyre* by reminding the reader that the equality established at the end of the novel in the marriage of Jane and

Rochester is a victory of one woman at the expense of another woman. In *Jane Eyre* the feminist struggle is almost negated by the presence of an imprisoned woman. We see a mirror image of Jane in Bertha and notice the difference of race. By engaging the absence of the West Indian woman, *Wide Sargasso Sea* points to the paradoxical nature of the progressive movement in *Jane Eyre* and works towards the act of a progressive racial movement and mindset.

Rhys' re-vision is also what Christian Moraru terms rewriting because the novel includes "elaborate narrative parallelisms" (19). Though *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not restructure Jane's story or adopt a completely similar structure to *Jane Eyre*, it deliberately borrows images and themes from Brontë's text to enhance our understanding of both women. The fire that kills Antoinette's brother recalls the nursery fire of Jane's early years at the Reeds, and Antoinette's loss of her childhood friend Tia alludes to Jane's loss of Helen Burns. The novel completes *Jane Eyre* by providing a place for Antoinette to tell her story but also always mimics the previous novel by presenting the domination of a male discourse. Though Jane narrates her own story throughout the novel, the reader is constantly reminded of her position of inferiority as a woman.

Rhys' complicated reworking of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* at once grants Antoinette space to speak and violently splits itself with the interjection of Rochester's words. Not far into the novel Edward Rochester's voice silences Antoinette's narration. Antoinette's husband actually narrates more of the novel, taking control of the story in the second section once they are married. The first time Rochester is present as a character, he speaks, leaving us to consider the power structure of relationships and their

base in race and gender. The white male robs Antoinette of agency. This usurpation of voice appears to contradict the act of subaltern speech set forth in the re-vision but instead only further emphasizes colonial and patriarchal domination, opening an ambivalent space of negotiation.

Though Rochester narrates a large portion of the novel, his discourse is split, which both acknowledges its power and reveals its lack of power. Veronica Gregg argues, “[Rochester’s] narrative appears to be dominant, yet it is his nothingness that the novel insists upon” (100). Rochester cannot affect the situation in the West Indies; it is its magic that controls him, but he takes Antoinette to Britain. The empowered powerless is representative of the ambivalence in authoritative discourse. As Homi Bhabha explains, “Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. . . the *presence* of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert” (107-12, original emphasis). In establishing his authority, Rochester reveals his lack of control—that his authority is split. His in-between state also admits the hybridity of Antoinette—that she, though marked powerless, has the ability to act. In recognizing this space, the third space, Antoinette will enact her ultimate power—the destruction of Thornfield Hall. *Wide Sargasso Sea* opens this third space by capturing the ambivalence of rewriting.

The parallel plot structure of the stories creates a complicated space in which *Jane Eyre* is always already an active force in the reading experience, posing the constant awareness of Jane’s life, and thus, producing a new reading of *Jane Eyre* in the reading of

Wide Sargasso Sea. The text bears out Romita Choudbury's suggestion that postcolonial intertextuality is ambivalent; it is both "completing and problematizing the canonical text," because the novel fills the void of Bertha's history but refuses to deny Jane's feminist movement (318). Rhys is not simply negating *Jane Eyre*; she is overtly directing our attention to the preceding text in almost every image, every scene. The displacement Antoinette experiences throughout her life mirrors the crisis of identity Jane undergoes. Both texts critique the hegemony of their relative cultures and build a bond that unifies the experiences of Antoinette and Jane. Elizabeth Baer argues, "[Antoinette] and Jane are not polar opposites, nor a handy dichotomy, but sisters, doubles, orphans in the patriarchy" (147). Rhys has clearly constructed the text to follow Antoinette through her struggles in patriarchy, but because racial depiction inspires the novel's rewriting, we cannot ignore the outcome of the women's lives. In fact, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is always split and doubled as it affirms the prior text, an action Laura Donaldson calls the Miranda Complex, a refusal to rank oppressions and the recognition of one another's struggles (71). Though *Wide Sargasso Sea* points to racial oppression, it never negates Jane's experience with oppression; it simply legitimizes the differences of the racial and feminist battles.

Antoinette's experiences reflect those of Jane to the extent that both texts become mirrors of each other, and the metaphor of the looking-glass provides an understanding of Rhys' re-vision. The displacement for both women centers on each of their moments in front of a mirror—making the metaphoric dichotomy represented in the character's duality a literal moment, a time spent in front of a reflective glass in which each character

sees herself. In the looking-glass, the symbolic splitting and doubling of the self reflects an ambivalent space of identity, which is a product of their subaltern status in their relative cultures. Each woman is always “[her]self yet not quite [her]self” through reflection as each novel is independent but yet dependent upon the other (108).

Essentially, the rewriting establishes a multi-layered mirror metaphor by isolating Jane’s ambivalence of identity as seen in the mirror, expanding the image by inscribing the looking-glass literally as a presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and then mimicking the reflection of characters with one another and their own selves in the act of rewriting. *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes the mirrored reflection of *Jane Eyre*, both splitting and doubling its predecessor, and breaks open an ambivalent third space that allows the other to speak, act, and enunciate her own identity and place within the text.

II

Rhys’ rewriting uncovers Bertha’s story, specifically in order to explore the life of the West Indian creole—the mysterious other hidden away under the orders of the hegemonic, in this case, the white male. Bertha’s madness, central to *Jane Eyre*, serves to draw attention to the almost supernatural form, the ghost, that is never quite knowable. Her race disturbs our reading further, frustrating our ability to simply read Antoinette as Jane’s psychological double. This enigmatic figure is a precursor to Jane and constantly hides and reveals the truth to Rochester’s life. Bertha’s dwelling—the attic—becomes a haunted space marked by the presence of the mad creole woman and extends through the house, affecting Jane’s mind. Bertha’s influence cannot be contained and, in fact, must

be present in order to legitimize Rochester's actions throughout the novel. The subjugated woman is reminiscent of the colonial context and is always at once present and absent, reflecting what Bhabha calls the ambivalence of colonial discourse.

Discussing the presence of imperialism in nineteenth century British texts, Patrick Brantlinger suggests, "while the India of *Jane Eyre* might be dismissed as incidental background, pertinent only to St. John Rivers, Mr. Rochester's West Indian ties, including his marriage to Bertha Mason, suggest the *centrality* of the imperial context" (12, my emphasis). While *Jane Eyre* sets out to negate the authoritative discourse of patriarchy, instances of allusion to the colonial situation outside England problematize our reading of Jane's resistance or rather the resistance of the novel—the challenge to hegemony. Brontë's act of writing, inscribing the woman's journey, is itself an attempt to dispute the male claim to dominance. Because patriarchy and colonialism are products of the same mindset—the privileging of certain persons at the expense of others based on arbitrary physical traits—Jane's movement is always haunted by Bertha's imprisonment. In fact, Jane's enunciation of identity is, at times, described in colonial terms, as we will see later. The constant presence of the absent colonial authority and subject prompts the need for re-vision.

Bertha's race is of particular importance in both novels, because the contrast of the British landscape and British characters with a hidden West Indian woman recalls British imperialism, the racist mindset, and practices that stem from colonialism. Though the West Indies are not the only postcolonial reference in the text, Bertha's non-native status demands attention because her race is stereotypically associated with delinquency

and uncivilized behavior. Representation is key in understanding the rewriting. As Said asserts, “the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it” (22). Thus, the representation of the Orient, or in this case, the West Indies, through the West’s interpretation in political, social, and literary texts directly affects the culture taking part in the digestion of those texts. The mad creole comes to stand in for all West Indian women, and this representation is similar to colonial discourse at large in its association of race with inadequacy. *Jane Eyre* becomes part of the dominant discourse through inscription of the West Indian creole and mimics the colonial discourse of England, which employs stereotypes of the other to justify colonial rule.

The similarity between the images of delinquency, madness, and infancy ascribed to colonial subjects and those used to represent Bertha engage the same discourse—a rhetoric of subjugation. Bhabha argues that this discourse “is crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization,” that the hegemonic power structures discourse by inscribing symbolic associations that come to rule the real object and create the dichotomy of superiority/inferiority (67). The discourse changes black skin into a symbol of incompetence and fills the colonizer with fear and pity. As Sander Gilman explains, “The anxiety present in the self concerning its control over the world directly engenders a need for a clear and hard line of difference between the self and the Other” (27). In this case, “the hard line” is skin color, but “stereotypes, like commonplaces, carry entire realms of associations with them, associations that form a subtext within the

world of fiction” (Gilman 27). Dark skin stands in for a recognizable standard of difference, by which the hegemony defines and qualifies the dark person, a symbol that comes to represent the various associations of personality and psychology used to subjugate the dark person. Darkness becomes the signifier of stereotype.

The stereotype is the mode of inscribing and reinscribing incompetence or madness onto the colonial subjects’ skin in order to align the two until they become one—constantly highlighting the difference between the colonizer and the subject. Bhabha argues that this association is essential in understanding colonialism: “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (70). The construction of the other as degenerate involves repetition of stereotype that establishes hierarchical systems. Patriarchy uses gender as a physical difference signifying power relationships to create semblance of order, which merely subjugates half of the population. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is both woman and creole—race sets her apart from the other characters, and her madness is the stereotypical association of degeneracy with blackness. Bertha’s madness is the Rochester’s excuse for locking her in the attic, for ignoring her presence, and for courting another woman while he is married. The association of delinquency with race and the justification for Rochester’s actions are products of the discourse of colonialism.

A large part of the need to justify the presence of the exterior colonial context, something existing on the borders of the novel and England, resides in Bertha’s own role in the narrative. Jane hears Bertha’s voice the first day she arrives at Thornfield Hall,

While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased only for an instant; it began again louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to *wake an echo in every lonely chamber*; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed at the door whence the *accents* issued. (114, my emphasis)

This moment outlines Bertha's effect on Jane's life. Just as Bertha's laugh and her madness disrupts Jane's solitary moment in the hall, it enters into every room, every part of her life. In the back of her mind, as well as the reader's conscience, Bertha's fragmented uttering foreshadows a "coming out," of sorts, a revelation of the truth. Jane's perception of the noise as accented, though harmless in reference to distinctness, indicates a noticeable difference in the voice, something foreign to Jane's ear. Mrs. Fairfax may blame Grace Poole for the interruption, but Jane suspects another source: "I really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard" (114). As the ghost in the attic, Bertha is at once present and absent; she enters into a liminal space of identity that both informs and reflects Jane's experiences in Thornfield Hall. Her "preternatural" laugh suggests that she is out of reach; she speaks yet Jane cannot understand her words. Jane is aware of a presence, of some hidden knowledge but never quite understands it until much later when Rochester speaks to her about his past. Bertha's liminality creates a space for enunciation because it paves the way for her articulation.

Bertha is in-between—she is Rochester's wife yet not his wife. This liminality posits a question of legitimacy that both Rochester and Jane must acknowledge. Bhabha

suggests that this in-between space is essential for the other's act of rebellion and is a constant in colonial discourse. Bhabha asserts,

Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality, *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then the intervening space becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (7, original emphasis)

Rhys breaks open this space in her rewriting, by expanding the knowledge of Antoinette's relationship with Rochester through an utterance that rejects and accepts *Jane Eyre*, one that acknowledges the feminist struggle but represents the racial discrepancy in the novel. Thus, Bertha may never speak but her presence—her voice—is always a factor at Thornfield Hall, and when Rochester confesses his secrets in section three, her race overrides her madness. She is no longer the pale ghost that haunts the mansion but the other.

Antoinette's origin is of issue in England and in the West Indies, but in Jamaica she is not subaltern, nor is she unable to speak; instead, she is an outsider. As Gayatri Spivak explains, she "is caught between the English imperialist and the black native" (269). She exists in a liminal space, somewhere between native and non-native, assimilated neither into her West Indian neighbors nor into her English husband's world. As a "white cockroach," she belongs neither to the colonizer nor the colonized and obtains freedom from the binary established in the colonial situation. Each group defines

her as other, leaving her no space to claim in either collective. Her half-black, half-white selves negate each other, separating her from the ability to adopt group identity.

Although this is sometimes distressing, as in her relationship with her childhood friend Tia, it allows her to escape the colonial dichotomy. Nonetheless, she remains gendered: being woman places her in another system of domination—patriarchy. Whereas Jane seeks independence and a relationship of equality, Antoinette loses her freedom when her stepfather “sells” her to Rochester. Though her race is the issue in Brontë’s text, Antoinette’s gender is the important factor in Rhys’ novel. Antoinette’s struggle in patriarchy and feelings of displacement mirror Jane’s feelings of belonging.

Though Reginald Watson attempts to make Brontë personally responsible for the novel’s “images of blackness,” Rhys more subtly comments, “Charlotte Brontë must have had strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books, like *Villette*” (Vreeland 265). One expects the rewriting, especially because it is based on the inadequacy of racial depiction, to saturate the story in the colonial context. In fact, to a large extent, gender relations dominate the theme of racial difference in the text, much like its predecessor. Discussing the role of gender in the novel, Rachel DuPlessis argues that “a woman from a colony is a trope for the woman as colony,” implying that the colonial context in the novel is parallel to nineteenth-century arranged marriage (46). The re-vision sets out to correct racial depiction but adopts parallels to such an extent that it always points to sexual difference. Though a charge of her stepfather, Antoinette is able to act for herself on some level before her stepfather arranges her marriage to Rochester. Once her husband has possession of her estate,

Antoinette is in a position of subalterity. Though separate systems, colonialism is a metaphor for patriarchy in both these novels. In Rhys' novel, the history of the West Indies provides a background to Antoinette's life, but her position in patriarchy robs her of freedom.

III

Frantz Fanon suggests that in the colonial context the black man is constantly met by the gaze of others, judging his condition and personhood. When encountering the black man on the street, the young white boy remarks, "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (109). The boy's declaration of racial inferiority, both distinguishing physical difference and applying the stereotype related to his skin color, changes the way the man views himself. This "being through others" challenges the "real dialectic between [the black man's] body and the world" (111). Whereas the self exists before in its own imagined schema, it is now entering a historio-racial schema founded in the inventions of the white man to represent the black man (114). Bhabha explains that envisioned stereotypes used to label the other are ambivalent, representing both the recognition and negation of difference (75). The gaze of others reveals a neurotic splitting and doubling of both the observer and the observed. In the case of Bertha Rochester and Jane Eyre, the observed must question her existence when others define her in a way which conflicts with her previous understanding of self. Even though Jane's identity is often characterized through gendered and economic difference rather than racial difference, her "being through others" plays out throughout *Jane Eyre* as she seeks a place to belong. In

fact, both Antoinette and Jane internalize this gaze and begin to interrogate their own identity.

Jane finds herself utterly alone when she leaves Thornfield Hall and comes to Whitcross: "I am alone. . . . Whitcross is no town, nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet: white-washed, I suppose to be more obvious at a distance and in darkness" (317). Whitcross, though, is not the first place where Jane experiences a moment of identity crisis. As the four arms of the road sign indicate, Jane has already left the Reeds, the Lowood dormitory, Mr. Rochester, and St. John of Marsh End, each representing collectives in which she must negotiate her selfhood. As an orphan, Jane lacks family background, which establishes a foundation for identity and a place in the collective. Throughout the novel, Jane is always struggling to find this missing part of her life.

Her displacement begins when she is an outcast of the Reed family. Mrs. Reed banishes her from the drawing room, and John violently confronts her, sending her fleeing to the red-room, where we see her stand before a mirror for the first time:

Returning I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travelers. (26-7)

Driven by the gaze of others to a position outside the family, Jane sees herself through a new filter that splits her identity, a situation that Bhabha terms the “otherness of self” (44). The literal looking-glass in the text can be read as the figurative mirror of Lacan and Bhabha, a location, “which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational” (77). Here, Jane is at once herself and the mirrored image of herself. She sees herself as Mrs. Reed views her, as a dependent, selfish orphan, adopting the words that Mrs. Reed uses to define her; she becomes unable to recognize the self she has known before. The projection of a degenerative person usurps her understanding of her privileges as an individual and forces her to re-conceive of her place in the Reed home. The repetition of Mrs. Reed and John’s verbal and physical violence, the constant re-defining of Jane, pushes her further and further outside of the family.

Once contented reading in the window seat, in the depths of her own identity, Jane must reexamine herself after Mrs. Reed and John’s rejection and labeling. Her own image actually gazes out of the mirror onto her body in reality, forming a “real spirit,” a hybrid of self and other. Throughout the passage above, perspective oscillates between the “visionary hollow” and “reality,” between her own view to that of others. The image in the looking-glass leads to a doubling of Jane—she is both her real self and her imaginary self—and ends in a splitting—she is the “half fairy” of Bessie’s stories and the “half imp” of Mrs. Reed’s inventions. This ambivalence transforms her attitude from that of a satisfied “Turk” (20) to “the mood of the revolted slave” (27).

The use of colonial references to describe Jane acknowledges the colonial context within the text and reveals that the interrogation of identity exists in systems of

oppression. In fact, this discourse through association with Jane reveals the attitude of the colonizer—viewing the subjects of colonialism as children, as dependent beings. Fanon explains that colonizers inscribe an inferiority complex on the colonized to justify colonial rule—“Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates. . . . a myth of the Negro” (117). O. Mannoni, describing his observations of the colonial situation, says, “The fact that when an adult Malagasy is isolated in a different environment he can become susceptible to a classical type of inferiority complex proves almost beyond doubt that the germ of the complex was latent in him from childhood” (Fanon 84). Colonial discourse situates the colonized as ignorant or dependent before the presence of the colonizer and justifies the colonizer’s role as educator or administrator. This discourse translates into Jane and Bertha’s lives as they are assumed incapable of caring for themselves. Just as Jane is the charge of the Reeds, Bertha becomes the charge of Rochester—a disturbing act of both colonialism and patriarchy.

Both women, in different contexts, are defined through their position of suppression. Excluded from the Reed family, Jane does not even find a lasting connection with the family’s employees, such as Bessie, who declares, “you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep” (24). The class binary established in the Reed home, master and servant, excludes the orphan. Like Antoinette, she is an “outsider.” Though she gains no collective identity, the gaze of others forces her to redefine her schema and provides a space of negotiation, where she can negate the images Mrs. Reed, John, and Bessie create to represent her. Describing this process of identification, Bhabha declares, “The emergence of the human subject as socially and

psychically authenticated depends on the *negation* of an original narrative of fulfillment, or of an imaginary coincidence between individual interest or instinct and the General Will” (51, original emphasis). Jane’s conception of self must be reexamined when she faces the images that Mrs. Reed and Bessie create to represent her and justify discrimination. The ambivalent space of “being through others” allows Jane to interrogate her position in the Reed home and articulate that presence throughout the rest of the novel, to the extent of demanding a “marriage of equality” with Mr. Rochester.

At this stage, Jane’s displacement sets her outside the borders of both collectives; she is, at once, a child and a stranger in the Reed family, both a master and a charge of the servants. Thus, the class binary, which categorizes family interaction, excludes Jane and forces her into an ambivalent space. Through the stereotypes employed by the two opposing groups, she becomes a hybrid of the authoritative discourse and finds the beyond for which Bhabha calls. She is in a third space but not that which includes cultural difference. This prompts the question of whether forced exclusion from the collective, a pseudo-independence, allows Jane to continue to find a favorable outcome and overcome the position of the “outsider” in general. Through its final resolution of marriage, *Jane Eyre* suggests a “happy ending,” in which Jane rises to a position equal to that of the Reeds, a conclusion made possible through the sacrifice of Bertha. Though economically dependent as a female, Jane is able to move forward, claiming her rights as an individual once her rejection releases her from the association of the General Will.

IV

When we encounter Bertha locked up at Thornfield Hall, filling the house with neurotic laughter, she appears as the subaltern, an oppressed racial other imprisoned in her master's house. Describing Thornfield Hall, Bertha says,

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us—hard, cold, and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (180)

Bertha's selfhood is largely connected to her ability to see her own reflection; thus the literal looking-glass becomes the symbol of self-identification. The mirror is the place where she and her mother look for confirmation of their identity and where they find freedom from the collective. In Thornfield Hall, not only has Rochester taken her freedom, he has taken her mirror, a physical possession that is the extension of herself. Essentially, her existence has been taken from her by her husband.

Rochester is often depicted as the white colonizer in critical studies, such as Spivak's "Three Woman's Text," and also in conflicting colonial terms. Elsie Michie argues that colonial references in the novel suggest that, at times, Rochester represents both the Irish native and Oriental despot. Nonetheless, Rochester's position of authority and ownership, his ability to grant possession and take it away, clearly raise him to the status of colonizer who wields control over the subaltern. In changing Antoinette's name to Bertha, he employs the authoritative discourse to separate her from her past, her home,

and her identity; he attempts to re-define who she is. Rhys solidifies this position in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Rochester gains control of Antoinette and her inheritance and narrates most of the novel. On the other hand, Antoinette's position of subaltern is more complicated in Rhys' text; her creole heritage places her outside both the ranks of subalterity and the position of authority.

Rhys borrows the crisis Jane undergoes and translates it to a West Indian context. As an orphan and an individual with two racial identities, Antoinette struggles to find her place in a collective. Much like Jane, she is outside the binary established to maintain order. "Being through others" and the mirror image outline Antoinette's displacement. The looking-glass is an ambivalent place of hope and fright for Antoinette and her mother. The gaze of others causes fear, and the mirror offers a consolation of continuity. Annette uses the mirror to see herself complete and solidified; the mirror is a stable, knowable reflection of herself—a confirmation of her identity. When each collective rejects Antoinette and her mother, they look to themselves to reconfirm their existence. Describing her mother, Antoinette says, "I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped—perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking-glass" (18). Antoinette's mother yearns for companionship, and the mirror reminds her of the presence of others. The looking-glass is a constant part of Antoinette's life. Even when she has no mirror at the dormitory and later at Thornfield Hall, she remarks on the absence. The figure in the looking-glass becomes a companion in their displacement. Their split creole selves are doubled through reflection.

Antoinette's childhood friend Tia becomes a reflective image that serves to symbolically outline the effects of the creole self. Because Antoinette's father was a wealthy slave owner, the natives of Jamaica ostracize her and her family. After the "black" people burn down the family estate, her companion Tia denies their friendship by maintaining rather than bridging the space between them:

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. . . . When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.
(45)

Though Antoinette exists as an "outsider," it is not until after the fire and the rejection of Tia that this becomes clear in her mind. The creole child and the black child have played together as companions, and, now, with identification with their parents and their history, the younger generation enters into the colonial existence, separated by a gulf. Gregg asserts, "Instead of being an erasure of history, the relationship between Tia and Antoinette is a direct engagement with the roles that have been historically and discursively assigned to black and white people in the West Indies. The relationship exposes the previous, unstable, yet powerfully destructive mechanisms of the colonial structure" (91). The General Will takes hold of Tia, and she follows the example of her

elders, acting out in violence. Tia resembles the young white boy's crisis depicted in Fanon. The children, whether oppressed or oppressor, assimilate into the collective.

Nonetheless, Antoinette, at the end of this passage, still identifies with Tia, as she describes her experience through the looking-glass. Gregg points out, "There she is 'part of [Antoinette's] life,' her mirror image, her other. She needs Tia as the mirror to reflect her self-identity back to her in whole, in tact" (95). As previously discussed, the mirror represents the doubling and spitting of the self. Even after the racial war pushes Antoinette and Tia apart, they continue to recognize one another as friends. Their history is in opposition to their mothers' past. They are doubled—both members of conflicting groups—and split—half of a pair. At this point, the collective does not negate but only complicates their friendship. The mirror is the ambivalent space of two opposing histories—the past of their ancestors and their personal past.

Antoinette projects an image of her double identity even when no mirrors are present at Thornfield Hall. In the moments before the final fire, Bertha says, "It was then that I saw her—the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (188-9). Antoinette has heard the stories of the ghost in Thornfield Hall but does not know that she is this phantom. When she steps out into the hall, she, for the first time in England, comes face to face with the stereotype created to hide her from existence. The invention is ambivalent because it both acknowledges her existence and denies it, asserting that the noise in the attic is real but the person making the noise is merely a spirit. During the time surrounding this recognition, Bertha's consciousness oscillates between her projections of the past—Aunt Cora and Christophine—and the

immediate experiences of escape and inferno. Bertha projects her past experience of identification through the mirror into the present moment, condensing her temporal existence. The ghost in the frame is a memory of her childhood obsession with the mirror, always needing to identify herself. The past displacement is split with the present displacement, and she fully recognizes that she will always be an “outsider” and realizes “why [she] was brought here and what [she had] to do” (190). Her connection with her history leads to her act of rebellion. In the symbolic splitting and doubling of past/present, Antoinette locates a third space that allows her to embrace the power she has over her own life—she resists her captivity. Embracing her identity, she takes on agency and rejects Rochester’s control, burning down her prison and blinding her captor.

V

Like Antoinette and Jane’s looking-glasses, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a mirror to *Jane Eyre*. Rhys’ novel opens a third space of articulation, by representing the life of the unknown, by entering the “unhomely” and signifying the beyond. Bhabha calls this act presencing, which “captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of the extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (9). For Bertha, the attic is the space where unhomeliness solidifies for her, the dwelling where she becomes Rochester’s ghost and remains Antoinette of Jamaica. Thornfield Hall is her home and her prison. Bertha is Edward’s wife, a title that justifies his care and possession of her, and she is the mad native, which is an excuse for her imprisonment. This ambivalence—wife/charge—is the necessity of

colonial discourse and also its flaw. In acknowledging this third space, the subaltern is able to find agency. As Bertha embraces and rejects her dual identities, she moves into the in-between. She is both—wife/charge—and neither, and in this space, “something begins its presencing” (Bhabha 9). Bertha breaks the silence through an act of denunciation—freeing herself from her imprisonment and destroying the power it has over her life. Bertha’s being and non-being creates a space for her to act, to avenge herself and her mother. She burns down Thornfield Hall and kills herself.

Through the act of enunciation, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also an assertion of denunciation—an insistence upon revision of a historical void. The novel acknowledges the necessity of seeing literature and culture with fresh eyes by forming a parasitic relationship with *Jane Eyre* and capturing the in-between within the pages of its own text. The text reflects what Geyh, Leebron, and Levy suggest about the postmodern understanding of the past, “The postmodern fascination with history lies in the belief that the past—or some version of it—remains an active and transforming force in the present” (293). Rhys denounces the dichotomous understanding of Victorian culture, by borrowing the female struggle of Jane and by inscribing the racial battle of Antoinette into the same pages. The novel is at once the mirror and the mirrored reflection and acts in line with the postmodern revisionist movement—acknowledging the boundaries of hegemony and crossing over the borders of historical universalizing identities. The hybridity of the novel and of the characters breaks open the binary structure of us/other and brings forth the self-asserting creole woman.

WORKS CITED

- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. London: Cornell UP, 1988.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Beth Newman. New York: St. Martin's P, 1996.
- Choudhury, Romita. "'Is There a Ghost, a Zombie There?': Postcolonial Intertextuality And Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 315-27.
- Donaldson, Laura E. "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading." *Diacritics* 18.3 (1988): 65-77.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "Breaking the Sentence; Breaking the Sequence." *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. 31-46.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove P, 1967.
- Geyh, Paula, Fred G. Leebron, and Andrew Levy. "Revisiting History." *Postmodern American Fiction*. New York: Norton, 1998. 291-3.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress." *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. 336-71.
- Gilman, Sander L. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Gregg, Veronica Marie. "The 1840's to 1900's: The Creole and the Postslavery West Indies." *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995. 82-143.
- Michie, Elsie. "White Chimpanzees and Oriental Despots: Racial Stereotyping and Edward Rochester." *Jane Eyre: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*. Ed. Beth Newman. New York: St. Martin's P, 1996. 584-98.
- Moraru, Christian. *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and the Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*. New York: State U of New York P, 2001.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*. New York: Norton, 1979. 33-50.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985. 262-80.

Vreeland, Elizabeth. "Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction [Interview] LXIV." *Paris Review* 21.76 (1979): 218-37.

Watson, Reginald. "Images of Blackness in the Works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë." *College Language Association Journal* 44.4 (2001): 451-70.

**“BEING HERSELF INVISIBLE, UNKNOWN, UNSEEN”: *MRS. DALLOWAY*,
THE HOURS, AND THE RE-INSCRIBED LESBIAN WOMAN**

She would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.
—*Mrs. Dalloway*

Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours* was published to critical acclaim. Critics were impressed with its intertextuality, describing the novel as “three novellas inspired by a classic work of modernism, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*” (Coffey 53) and observing that “decades later [Cunningham] created another *Mrs. Dalloway* in his own novel” (Johnston 24), but even the praise directed at the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel mirrors the complexity of the novel’s relationship with its predecessor. The disparate ideas employed to describe the connection, inspiration, and creation, imply both that *Mrs. Dalloway* prompted Cunningham to write his text and assert a clear relationship between the two novels. In fact, *The Hours* is what Christian Moraru terms rewriting because it “is marked by the author as an ‘intentional’ presence rather than as an elusive, faint ‘echo’” (19). In this paper, I will argue that Cunningham engages Woolf and her inscription of the lesbian woman intentionally to query contemporary culture. The novel’s connection with *Mrs. Dalloway* complicates the depiction of otherness within *The Hours*, positing postmodern concerns of identity as a primary factor in the rewriting and pushing the boundaries of the postmodern revisionist movement.

More to the point, this paper will begin to unravel the intricate relationship between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, focusing primarily on the treatment of homosexual relationships in both novels. I will begin my discussion with an exploration of rewriting as it relates to the two novels and consider how the relationship between the novels creates an epicenter—homosexuality. Building on this foundation, I will analyze Woolf's representation of the lesbian woman in *Mrs. Dalloway* and then look at same-sex relationships in *The Hours*, in order to demonstrate the liminal in Cunningham's rewriting. As the reader will notice, Cunningham inscribes his work in what Homi Bhabha terms the beyond—a condensed temporality, in which the past and present come together to transform contemporary understanding. As Bhabha asserts,

Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revolutionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond,' becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (7)

The Hours does more than represent the current homosexual; the novel also challenges 20th century mores as they relate to homosexuality.

The presence of the homosexual, neither deviant nor adored, challenges lingering Victorian standards and emerging postethnic values, and attempts to break through to the postgay. As David Hollinger explains, "A postethnic perspective recognizes that most individuals live in many circles simultaneously and that the actual living of any

individual life entails a shifting divisions of labor between the several ‘we’s’ of which the individual is a part” (106). The postgay is the queer equivalent of this rethinking of multiculturalism—a mindset that recognizes first that biological considerations should not determine a person’s movement through life and, more importantly, that queerness is only part of any person’s identity. Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, we encounter complex gender identities and sexual orientations. At times, characters are queer but not queer, are straight but not straight. The novel itself steps into a liminal space, allowing the representation of homoerotic desire even though this desire is never fully lived. *Mrs. Dalloway* represents an articulation of otherness, and *The Hours* furthers this act by granting the other a fuller voice and a more lucid representation. Both novels query their relative contemporary cultures and defy the dominant discourse by granting the other voice.

I

Though *The Hours* maintains a separate identity in its apparent parasitic relationship it forms with Woolf’s novel, the novel is invested in *Mrs. Dalloway* in such a way that it is dependent on the earlier text for some of its meaning and employs intertextuality to the extent of almost negating its own existence. In fact, Cunningham acknowledges that his novel “was initially just a modern-day version of *Mrs. Dalloway*, but it expanded during writing into these three linked stories. . . . It seemed right that the book should include a character, a reader, and a writer” (Peregrin 1). Why, then, revisit

Woolf's work, a novel brilliant in its invention, one that does not need validation from another author? Why, as David Cowart would say, become a parasite of *Mrs. Dalloway*?

In *Literary Symbiosis*, Cowart suggests that postmodern texts create biological systems in the form of parasitism, mutualism, and commensalism and that each of these symbiotic relationships depends directly on the prior narrative for meaning (4). Arguing against Todd Gitlin's idea of comparing these texts via pastiche, he states, "The point is that what has yet to be written was always already written, both literally and grammatologically. All writing is 'imprisoned within previous writing' and these insights are part of symbiotic meaning" (18). Texts are not simply related to one another but are also a form of exchange.

From the model Cowart presents, we can begin to understand the intertextuality of *The Hours*. While the novel derives complexity from this relationship, it does not criticize Woolf's text, yet seeks instead to extend its themes into new spaces and times. In fact, Cunningham includes a note on sources at the end of the novel but interestingly only lists the texts used in constructing the fictional sequence of Woolf's day in 1923. As he says, "While Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Nelly Boxall, and other people who actually lived appeared in this book as fictional characters, I have tried to render as accurately as possible the outward particulars of their lives as they would have been on a day I've invented for them . . ." (229). Although he points to textual borrowing, he seems to justify only his treatment of Woolf as character and omits mentioning her novel.

Cunningham recognizes Woolf's importance and respects her creative genius. He borrows from other Woolfian texts as well, incorporating *A Room of One's Own* into his Laura Brown sequence. Asked why he focused his narrative on a previous text, Cunningham replied: "Because [Woolf] was a genius and a visionary, because she was a rock star, because she was the first writer to split the atom, because I'm in love with her, because she knew that everyone, every single person, is the hero of his or her own epic story" (Peregrin 30). Cunningham's explanation summarizes the action of the novel. Though the text honors and values Woolf's work, the novel does more than simply praise the writer; the novel forms its own story. In the fashion of Rhys, who rewrites the story of Bertha Mason in her novel *Wild Sargasso Sea*, Cunningham tells the story of lost identity in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Thus, *The Hours* draws attention to Woolf's themes, appropriating their relevance, extending their meaning, and interpreting them through the lens of contemporary culture.

One crucial theme that reappears in Cunningham's novel, echoing *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf herself, is undeniably the rewriting's epicenter—homosexuality. In *The Hours*, we witness a postmodern conversation with modern temporality, cosmopolitanism, and language, but each of these themes is only a sidebar to the uncovering of gay and lesbian relationships. Cunningham forces his reader to acknowledge the relationships; he even reminds the informed reader of Clarissa Dalloway's latent homosexuality in the character of Laura Brown.

Andrea Wild's essay "The Suicide of the Author and His Reincarnation in the Reader" dismisses same-sex relationships. Focusing on the intertextuality of *The Hours*,

which alludes to more works than *Mrs. Dalloway*, Wild claims that, “While Cunningham’s characterisation originates in Woolf’s characters with their concealed homosexual feelings and updates them for the end of the millennium when everybody has come out of the closet, he basically retains the plot” (4-5). The homosexual relationships in *The Hours*, she suggests, are present merely because of the contemporary setting, a time and a place in which the gay and lesbian movement has arrived and lesbian women and gay men refuse to be ignored. Wild is right to point to temporality, because Woolf is interrogating Victorian standards and those of a new modern era, but as this paper will demonstrate, Cunningham reiterates Woolf’s concerns and pushes the boundaries of contemporary culture by re-inscribing the lesbian woman. Cunningham employs Woolf’s questions as a foundation to ask different questions of the contemporary era and its treatment of homosexuality.

Woolf and Cunningham do not stand alone in this endeavor; Oscar Wilde, Djuna Barnes, Dorothy Allison, and other authors, break with traditional standards to represent queerness. Considered together, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* highlight a historical spectrum. By engaging a modernist author born in the Victorian era and a Postmodernist living in the 21st century, my discussion spans more than a century of argument, challenge, and change. We move from the time of romantic friendship, to the new discoveries of Sigmund Freud and other sexologists to the contemporary fight for gay marriage. Thus, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* present an opportunity to revisit and reconsider the representation of the homosexual in literature and culture. At work in

Woolf's text is a modern interrogation of Victorian principles, and Cunningham provides the result of this questioning—a culture more aware of identity.

In Woolf, in Cunningham, in the act of Cunningham's rewriting of Woolf, the other—the homosexual—finds presence and acquires voice. At times, the verbal or nonverbal presence of the lesbian woman appears either negligent or overwhelming, but both Woolf and Cunningham in their own ways and based on their own temporal existences employ the history and the present situation of the lesbian woman to develop a mode of resistance. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the resistance takes the form of a subtle undercurrent. Nonetheless, the presence is almost absent, lingering in the memory of one distant day in Bourton and saturated in the overwhelming heterosexuality surrounding it. In *The Hours* homosexuality comes out in full force, with more queer characters than heterosexual ones.

In both novels the other's articulation and rearticulation demand a contemporary reconsideration. Cunningham acknowledges Woolf's articulation and extends her representation of otherness into postmodernity, acknowledging at times a greater acceptance and insisting that contemporary culture reconsider its standards and beliefs. The historical negotiation of lesbian identity represented in Woolf and Cunningham initiates cultural change by presenting hybrid identities that challenge the cultural hegemony of the 20th century.

II

In 1929, four years after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf published “A Room of One’s Own,” which directly challenges 20th century notions of gender identity, arguing that an understanding of women and fiction cannot be captured until women have the means, via space and property, to have time to write. Women’s writing depends on the freedom of women, and Woolf does not hesitate to expound on the grievances of Western culture’s imprisonment of the female body and mind: “The spectacle is certainly a strange one, I thought. The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself” (55). This opposition points to both sexism and the male role in the promotion of sexism. Considered a feminist argument, this political and social essay does not go so far as to argue for equality of the sexes but simply expresses a desire for all women to have “money and a room of one’s own” (4). Woolf echoes this feminist sentiment in *Mrs. Dalloway* but challenges her reader in other ways as well. Behind the backdrop of a day in the life of the female socialite, Woolf inscribes a narrative of homosexual love and desire.

The queer strain in *Mrs. Dalloway* is much more covert than the feminist argument in “A Room of One’s Own.” Nonetheless, Clarissa Dalloway’s kiss with Sally Seton is quite significant:

Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had

been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (225)

Clarissa remembers the kiss as “the most exquisite moment of her whole life.” This instance is of particular importance because Clarissa returns to it often throughout the day. It is more than a passing memory, as Emily Jensen states: “No simple girlhood crush, Clarissa’s love for Sally Seton is a profound reality that permeated her adult life” (162). In fact, Clarissa, when thinking of Richard’s affection for Lady Bruton, contemplates Sally Seton: “But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?” (222). Clarissa uses her relationship with Sally as a comparison to other romantic relationships. Though Clarissa also believes “[her love for Sally] was completely disinterested” (223), her thoughts in this passage start with Richard’s possible love for another woman and lead to the memory of the kiss, indicating an argument in her own mind about the exact nature of her and Sally’s friendship—something not clear to even Clarissa.

Years earlier, Clarissa’s relationship with Sally would have been dismissed as a romantic friendship. Evidence suggests that in the 18th and 19th centuries in England, women were encouraged to form strong attachments to one another that were often more important than any marriage. Describing romantic friendship, Lillian Faderman states,

Romantic friends courted each other, flirted, were anxious about the beloved's responses and about reciprocity. They believed their relationship to be eternal, and in fact the faithfulness of one often extended beyond the death of the other. The fondest dream of most romantic friends, which was not often realized, was to establish a home with the beloved. (125)

Essentially, previous to the 20th century, women were considered devoid of sexual desire and encouraged to thwart any sexual advances; thus, love between women was permitted because a girlhood crush between two females served to contain any expression of love in a nonsexual relationship. Scientifically, lesbianism was not thought possible.

At the time Virginia Woolf wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*, sexologists such as Freud, Krafft-Ebing, and Ellis, had already published theories of women's sexuality, which changed the way culture viewed close relationships between women. In *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman*, Freud asserts, "Homosexuality in women, which is certainly not less common than in men, although much less glaring, has not only been ignored by the law, but has also been neglected by psychoanalytic research" (164). At the turn of the century, suddenly, the third sex and inversion seemed to become problems. As Faderman explains, "Love between women was metamorphosed into a freakishness, and it was claimed that only those who had such an abnormality would want to change their subordinate status in any way" (240). As lesbianism entered the Western consciousness as a deviant behavior, close relationships between women became suspect.

The oscillation between love and disinterest in Clarissa's mind suggests that she perceived her relationship with Sally in terms of romantic friendship, or she, at least,

dismissed it as such. An anxiety surrounds her inability or unwillingness to define the kiss and her constant return to its memory. She still contemplates the memory as a way to understand her current life experiences but does not commit to a clear understanding of the relationship as it existed that day in Bourton. The worry, present for Clarissa in the moment following the kiss, has persisted in her mind in the re-consideration of its place in the present. For instance, when the moment of the kiss was interrupted, Clarissa expresses “shock” and “horror. . . . It was like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness!” (225). Clearly, the kiss between Clarissa and Sally had to stop, because physical intimacy between two women was not accepted in polite society; at that time and even now such a kiss can hardly be discussed. Though Clarissa returns to the kiss, to Sally, and to Peter, in her memory throughout the day in London, the kiss has never entered conversation after the initial experience at Bourton. The kiss occupies an in-between space for Clarissa, having a real existence in the past but always an undefined reality in her mind.

This memory enters a liminal space for Clarissa—it is love but not love; it is disinterest but not disinterest, and thus, the relationship also occupies a liminal space for the reader of *Mrs. Dalloway*. As Toni McNaron in “A Lesbian Reading Virginia Woolf,” says,

Reading *Mrs. Dalloway* for the first time thrilled me beyond measure, though I must confess I completely glossed over the key lesbian scene that now seems central to the entire book. . . . Perhaps I read the moment . . . through tightly fitted heterosexist blinders. . . . The fact of my own passionate relationships with women did not offset that indoctrination into compulsory heterosexuality as a literary scholar. (11-12)

Reading Woolf in the 60's, McNaron outlines the effect of the novel's queerness in her life as a reader but also as a lesbian herself and, in her essay, inscribes her own reader-response to the novel, postulating a theory of "compulsory heterosexuality" in the academy. Essentially, the kiss, undefined, thwarts the novel's readers on some occasions but also allows for Woolf's subtle undercurrent to serve its purpose. The homosexuality enters a third space, the beyond—being neither specific nor absent.

Presenting a relationship that mimics romantic friendship after the sexologists' publications challenges culture because it deliberately posits a same-sex relationship during a time when such was not culturally acceptable. The kiss remains the "most exquisite" moment in Clarissa's life and, I argue, the most important moment in the novel in regard to understanding the novel's work concerning otherness. Not only is the kiss the most significant connection between women, it is also the one physical expression of passion in the novel. None of the other characters connects in a concretely emotional way. Covertly inscribing the lesbian woman allows her articulation in the first place.

The lesbian woman is queer but not queer, entering what Bhabha terms the beyond, which "becomes a space of intervention in the here and now" (7). Because she is undefined and in some cases unrecognizable, culture allows her inscription. Readers can safely interpret the homosexual desire between Clarissa and Sally as romantic friendship or disinterest. Nonetheless, the lesbian takes form on the pages of the text and finds a voice—a space of enunciation. As Bhabha explains, "The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present" (7). Clarissa is this "newness" for the lesbian woman. She is not part of a

romantic friendship, in the sense of its fullness in the 18th and 19th centuries, but she is also not “out of the closet.” She is the protagonist of the novel, the narrator, the voice, the reader’s guide through London. In the close association between reader and narrator, the reader comes in direct contact with this “newness.” Woolf creates this contact by inscribing liminality and intervenes in cultural expectations and considerations. The hybrid character posits queerness in culture through a subtle undercurrent of articulation. Woolf inscribes homosexuality in order to resist and redefine liminality.

Woolf’s treatment of Clarissa’s pseudo-suicide also challenges cultural conceptions of the female socialite’s life. The choice of including homosexual relationships affects the representation of suicide within the novel. Because Woolf’s characters are unable to express identity, they paradoxically choose death as a mode of survival. As Karen DeMeester asserts, “Septimus’ death is the result of his inability to communicate his experiences to others and thereby give those experiences meaning and purpose” (649). Though DeMeester is primarily concerned with Smith’s postwar treatment, she addresses cultural perceptions as a dominant aspect of her essay. These perceptions affect not only the treatment of shell-shock but the understanding of homosexuality as well. In “Clarissa Dalloway’s Respectable Suicide,” Emily Jensen argues that Clarissa’s choice to marry Richard Dalloway was itself an act of killing herself because it denied her homosexuality. Her “suicide” is “this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (202). Clarissa feels a disconnection between the past, which is a constant in her mind as memory and narrative, and her present activities of party planning. The experiences of her youth

ended when she married Richard. She established the “gulf” between husband and wife and refused Peter because “with Peter everything had to be shared, everything gone into” (199). Clarissa denies her love for Sally and avoids the intimacy that a relationship with Peter would involve and thus chooses to occupy a liminal space.

Originally, Woolf expected that it would be her protagonist who committed suicide. Drawing from Woolf’s diary, Cunningham actually has Woolf contemplate her character’s suicide, “Clarissa Dalloway will die, of that she feels certain, though this early it’s impossible to say how or even precisely why” (69). Jensen states, “[Clarissa] identifies with Septimus Smith as one who committed suicide to preserve the treasure of his homosexual feelings . . .” (162). Clarissa chooses a pseudo-death, which reinvokes the in-between space of her queerness; Clarissa is alive but not alive, dead but not dead. Her choice of marrying Richard can be interpreted as conventional heterosexuality even though a close reading of Clarissa’s feelings towards life and marriage reveal her own disengagement from her marriage. As Jensen explains,

While Clarissa’s choice in itself . . . is not by definition self-destructive, the way it is presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests that it is destructive for Clarissa Dalloway. It is, in fact, on par with Septimus Smith’s more obvious suicide, as stated by Clarissa’s specific identification with him at the end of the novel: ‘she felt somehow very like him—the young man who killed himself’. (163)

Clarissa’s thoughts and actions parallel Septimus’s throughout the novel; Septimus’s madness and death are more defined and offer explanation for Clarissa’s choices. By means of contrast, Woolf reveals the devastating effects of cultural expectations and

personal isolation. Clarissa's "suicide" blurs the boundaries of her identity, clearing a space for the articulation of the lesbian woman without overtly inscribing a homoerotic relationship.

III

Some twenty years after the publication of "A Room of One's Own," the fictional character Laura Brown still hopes for the freedom of her own space. She uses her husband's money to rent a hotel room for the day. This place presents both relief and shame to her:

She laughs quietly to herself. Please God, she says silently, let heaven be something better than a room at the Normandy. Heaven would be better furnished, it would be brighter and grander, but it might in fact contain some measure of this hushed remove, this utter absence inside the continuing world. Having this room to herself seems both prim and whorish. She is safe here. She could do anything she wanted to, anything at all. (150)

The room becomes her third space. Though she escapes the oppressive place of home and family, in "stroking her belly" she remembers the child inside her and decides to stop contemplating the end of connection with her family for the time being (152). She obtains freedom in this liminal space and remains connected to motherhood. Unlike Clarissa Dalloway's choice, marriage does not work for Laura; it cannot be her pseudo-death. As a wife and mother, she is constantly reminded of her inability to choose her own way, her lack of time to just sit and read her novel. As Mary Joe Hughes observes,

“Although Laura visits the antechamber of death in the hotel room, nearly taking her life, reading *Mrs. Dalloway* helps her to overcome despair” (354). Laura escapes through literature that connects both to Woolf and Clarissa. Though she contemplates suicide, she will ultimately choose to escape her familial roles by moving to Canada, where she indeed finds a room of her own.

In *The Hours* Clarissa Vaughan and Sally, have an apartment of their own. Cunningham places Clarissa and Sally in a 21st century setting; instead of a kiss, they share a partnership. We witness the fulfillment of the contact between Woolf’s Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton in *The Hours*. As James Schiff observes, “changes in legal standing and public attitudes toward homosexuality enable Clarissa Vaughan to live a domestic and sexual life largely unavailable to Clarissa Dalloway in 1920’s London” (367-68). Presenting a complex association between the past and present, Cunningham provides a less harrowing escape by placing Clarissa Vaughan in a contemporary setting, when expression of identity is more accepted, a period of time that Hollinger terms the postethnic:

A postethnic perspective favors voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, and promotes solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. (3)

The Hours, however, is not enabled, I argue, by the postethnic or postgay culture. The queer equivalent to the postethnic is the postgay—a perspective that views gay identity as

only part of the many determinate factors of identity. Queerness is only part of a person's expression. Instead, the fulfilled kiss between Clarissa and Sally serves to do the work of the postgay, clearing a space for the lesbian woman, for Cunningham inscribes queerness outright, challenging notions of 21st century mores.

Homosexual desire appears in various relationships. Richard and Louis are both gay men who were at one time partners, and Julia and Mary are involved in a friendship that hinges on lesbian desire. Although homosexuality is a theme in *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is suppressed and only underlies other dominant issues, but Cunningham uncovers this element of Woolf's narrative, bringing it to the surface, and interprets it as one of the most important plot elements of the story. Thus, by moving Woolf's characters into a new space and time they are, in part, able to embrace their identity in regard to sexual preference and to live different lives.

Clarissa Vaughan, however, constantly negotiates her understanding of her identity and the identity of the women around her. She revisits definitions of queer identity as she considers her relationships with Sally and Richard. Though it is clear that "she wants no other" than Sally, "Richard was the person Clarissa loved at her most optimistic moment" (92, 97). Mary Krull's lesbianism is also a problem for Clarissa Vaughan,

. . . and then she walks on, regretting the lovely little black dress she can't buy for her daughter because Julia is in thrall to a queer theorist and insists on T-shirts and combat boots. . . . You know [Mary] mocks you, privately for your comforts and your quaint (she must think them quaint) notions about lesbian identity. (23)

Clarissa does not experience or express a clear-cut acceptance of her lesbianism or the lesbianism of others. As Hughes argues, Cunningham “indicates that even if she were to live an open gay existence, she would continue to experience doubts . . . that strict demarcations between queer and straight are problematic and that sexual orientation is complex and fluid” (368). Cunningham essentially constructs a new third space of queerness which is not always clearly queerness. This in-betweenness challenges understandings of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. Clearly, the characters are not reacting but are pushing forward to a postgay worldview. Thus, the fulfilled kiss comes under question and re-definition by the queer protagonist.

Cunningham examines the kiss in each of his narrative sequences as the kisses between women multiply. Along with the kiss of partners Clarissa and Sally, the fictional character Virginia Woolf kisses her sister, and Laura Brown embraces Kitty. Just as Clarissa returns to Bourton throughout the day in her memory, we encounter the kiss periodically in Cunningham’s novel. The fictional representation of homosociality through Woolf’s sister reveals the extent of association between women, masking Woolf’s lesbianism on one hand but making it blatant on the other. By including this sequence, Cunningham interprets fiction as a reflection of the life of the author, as does Eileen Barrett, who asserts, “In the passionate friendship of Sally and Clarissa, Woolf captures the intermingling of the intellectual and erotic, the personal and the political that she experienced in her own feminist friendships” (151). Cunningham brings this latent context to the forefront of the narrative.

The connection with Woolf's life brings to mind her own relationships, specifically that with Vita Sackville-West. As Carolyn Heilbrun suggests, "Her love affair with Vita Sackville-West awakened her to her love for women, and to the possibilities embodied in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In discovering this love, Woolf chanced upon the necessary release—as one might turn the dial on a safe, vaguely remembering the combination, hitting on it at last" (237). In the fictional character of Virginia Woolf, Cunningham provides an interpretation of Woolf's life. Like Barrett, Cunningham links Woolf's life with her writing, suggesting that her own lesbian desire finds a place of expression in her fiction. As readers we see a Woolf that is not Woolf creating her Clarissa and in essence masking her life experience in a fictional expression.

Laura Brown connects with Clarissa Dalloway, and the work of Woolf's inscription of hybridity performs fictionally. Cunningham presents this hybridity in the act of Laura's reading Woolf and Clarissa. Laura is the lesbian woman who is not a lesbian woman, the mother who is not a mother, and her presence haunts Richard in other sections of the novel. The kiss is especially relevant to the Laura Brown sequence, because of all the women in the narrative, Laura resembles the struggle of the original Clarissa more closely. In the moment of embrace between Laura and Kitty,

Laura is flooded with feeling. Here right here, in her arms, are Kitty's fear and courage, Kitty's illness. Here are her breasts. Here is the stout, practical heart that beats beneath; here are the watery lights of her being—deep pink lights, red-gold lights, glittering, unsteady; lights that disperse; here are the depths of Kitty, the heart beneath the heart. . . . Here it is, in daylight, in Laura's arms. (109)

The emotion of this moment mirrors the moment between Clarissa and Sally in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Laura bridges the emotionally gap between her and Dan symbolically through connection with Kitty. Laura is distant from her family and the rest of her surroundings, and in fact, the only other connection she makes is with the character in the book she reads, Clarissa Dalloway. Though Dan strives to love Laura and to provide her with a lifestyle of comfort, she lacks a fundamental connection to family and avoids an emotional relationship with her husband. Cunningham explores the negative effect of suppression in her character by clearly associating her with homosexuality. When Laura kisses Kitty, she relates to another human being for the first time in the novel. Laura initiates the kiss. Though she attempts to ignore her own desires, she, unlike Clarissa Dalloway, is unable to be a wife and mother and leaves her family. Thus, in one sequence the main character obtains homoerotic desire, and in the other the pleasure remains unreachable.

Cunningham does not negate the struggle of the lesbian woman and does not, by unmasking Clarissa and Sally's love, suggest that culture has come full circle. Rather *The Hours* multiplies the in-between spaces that Woolf develops in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa is the lesbian who questions the definition of lesbianism. Laura is the mother who is not a mother—the main presence in the “Mrs. Brown” sequence and the absence in the “Mrs. Dalloway” sequence. Woolf is fictionalized reality, the writer inscribing her Clarissa simultaneously as Cunningham presents his re-considered Clarissa. All this quite undefinable identity enters a liminal space that acknowledges Woolf's work on one

hand and on the other opens new boundaries in contemporary culture. As Bhabha says, “The ‘interactive time’ of the future as *a becoming ‘once again open’* makes available to marginalized or minority identities a mode of performative agency” (219). As the future of *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours* presents a performative agency in the multiplied hybrid characters.

IV

While examining *Life’s Adventure* by the fictional Mary Carmichael, the narrator of “A Room of One’s Own” encounters the passage “Chloe likes Olivia. . . .,” and Woolf as Mary Seton whispers, “Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women” (80-81). Chloe and Olivia may simply be partners who share a laboratory. Clarissa and Sally may be romantic friends. Laura and Kitty may be companions who express their love and grief to one another. But the point is that cultural expectations of gender roles are limited and flawed and that they restrict creative expression and life experience. And the power of performative agency, of seeing the inconsistency, the beyond, allows for an articulation by something or someone other than the hegemonic.

Postmodernity is a time of re-consideration and re-vision, a breaking apart of universal definitions and a birthing of more complex cultural understandings. Of this period, Bhabha observes,

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. (1)

In *The Hours* Cunningham creates a moment of articulation, not by positing some original act of difference, but by building upon what has come before. By seeing Woolf's inscription of lesbian identity and then reinscribing the lesbian woman, Cunningham acknowledges the beyond and through repetition makes the third space innovative for 21st century readers. Through an act of performative identity, *The Hours* "touches the future on the hither side" and does the work of moving forward to a postgay era (Bhabha 7). Judith Butler refers to "a specificity . . . to be established, not outside or beyond that reinscription or reiteration, but in the very modality and effects of that reinscription" (17). Inscription and reinscription are essential factors in cultural change and must be continued as acts of contest and negotiation. The "posts" in postmodernity, postcolonialism, postfeminism, and postgay do not mean that we are finished with the work of breaking down boundaries between the marginalized and hegemonic but rather that we are in a time in which that work is possible like never before—a time when the beyond is recognizable as the future.

WORKS CITED

- Barrett, Eileen. "Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of *Mrs. Dalloway*." *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*. Eds. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer. New York: New York UP, 1997. 146-64.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. "Decking Out: Performing Identities." *Inside/Out, Lesbian Theories Gay Theories*. Ed. Diane Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Coffey, Michael. "Michael Cunningham: New Family Outings." *Publishers Weekly* 2 November 1998: 53-5.
- Cowart, David. "Tradition, Talent, and 'Stolentelling.'" *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993. 1-26.
- Cunningham, Michael. *The Hours*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.
- DeMesster, Karen. "Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44.3 (1998): 649-73.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: Paperback, 1991.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman." *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. Ed. Lillian Faderman. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. "Virginia Woolf in Her Fifties." *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*. Ed. Jane Manus. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983. 236-53.
- Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.
- Hughes, Mary Joe. "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Postmodern Artistic Re-Presentation." *Critique* 45.4 (2004): 349-61.

- Jensen, Emily. "Clarissa Dalloway's Respectable Suicide." *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*. Ed. Jane Manus. Lincoln: U of Lincoln P, 1983. 162-79.
- Johnston, Sheila. "A Day in the Life." *Sight and Sound* February 2003: 24-7.
- McNaron, Toni A. H. "A Lesbian Reading Virginia Woolf." *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*. Eds. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer. New York: New York UP, 1997. 10-20.
- Moraru, Christian. *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and the Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*. New York: State U of New York P, 2001.
- Peregrin, Tony. "Michael Cunningham after *Hours*." *Gay and Lesbian Review* March-April 2003: 30-1.
- Schiff, James. "Rewriting Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*: Homage, Sexual Identity, and the Single-Day Novel by Cunningham, Lipponcott, and Lanchester." *Critique* 45.4 (2004): 363-82.
- Wild, Andrea. "The Suicide of the Author and His Reincarnation in the Reader: Intertextuality in *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham." *Xchanges* 1.2 (2002): 1-27. 4 Dec. 2003
<<http://www.americanstudies.wayne.edu/xchanges/1.2/wild.html>>
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt, 1981.
- - -. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt, 2005.