

Miroirs d'encre.⁹ Le terme d'autoportrait est imparfait, nous dit-il, et semble impliquer "une conception périmée de la mimesis et de la reproduction." Dans *Smile Please*, nous ne trouvons pas d'allégeance aux notions de ressemblance ou de fidélité au modèle. Le texte me paraît voué à l'impersonnel. En disloquant la chronologie, il ne se confine pas à la durée d'une mémoire individuelle particulière. La mémoire y prend la forme d'une réflexion sur l'écriture, qui sature la surface de la toile et en exclut le je identifié, authentifié de l'auteur. Ce qui reste quand le modèle a disparu, ce sont les tâtonnements de l'écriture, une poétique de l'aléatoire et l'émergence d'un je reconstruit selon les modalités de cette poétique. Il est difficile de dire quelle forme *Smile Please* aurait prise, une fois achevé. Peut-être s'acheminait-il vers la représentation d'un "beau désordre," expression de Boileau, où Karlheinz Stierle voit une définition possible de l'écriture lyrique.¹⁰

NOTES

¹Jean Rhys, "Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction," Interview with Elisabeth Vreeland, *Paris Review*, 26, 1979, 218-37.

²Jean Rhys, *Smile Please*, 1979, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981. Les références entre parenthèses renvoient aux pages de cette édition.

³Philippe Lejeune, *Moi aussi*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, 13.

⁴Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, 96.

⁵Jean Rhys, *Quartet*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, 96.

⁶Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, 151.

⁷Norman Rockwell, *Triple autoportrait*, 1960, Collection personnelle de Rockwell, reproduit dans *Norman Rockwell: Soixante ans de rétrospective*, Paris, Editions du Chêne, 1977, 111.

⁸Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire*, Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, Gallimard, Seuil, 1980, 30.

⁹Michel Beaujour, *Miroirs d'encre*, Paris, Seuil, 1980.

¹⁰Karlheinz Stierle, "Identité du discours et transgression lyrique," *Poétique* 22, 1977, 432.

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MIRROR AND MADNESS: A LACANIAN ANALYSIS OF THE FEMININE SUBJECT IN *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

Lori Lawson

Madness has become a dominant theme in feminist literary criticism. Gilbert and Gubar addressed the issue of madness in literature with their seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.¹ They explored the sociological and feminist implications of the figure of the "mad woman" in literature, drawing upon Charlotte Brontë's character, Bertha Rochester, as their prototype. Bertha Mason Rochester appears in Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, as a mysterious and bestial figure devoid of all but the vestiges of humanity. Jane

quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane" which covers her face, thus obscuring her identity as a woman. Although this description certainly implies a condition of madness, such is not, in fact, the whole truth. Jean Rhys recognizes in Bertha an unexplored depth of humanity and determines to "write her life."² Functioning on the premise that "there is always the other side," she decides to give voice to that other side by recounting the unwritten life of Antoinette Bertha Mason. She relates the story of Antoinette's life as a Creole heiress and traces the genesis of her supposed "madness" from her early childhood in Jamaica through her captivity at Thornfield Hall. What appears throughout her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is a madness of questionable proportion, and of sociological, rather than hereditary, origin. Antoinette's condition may in fact be understood in terms of Lacan's psychology of the "Mirror Stage" and its implications for feminine identity.

Lacan's approach may be characterized as a reinterpretation or revitalization of Freudian theory in light of the contemporary disciplines of semiotics, object-relations, structuralism, and linguistics. Lacan incorporates structuralist-linguistic principles in his discussion of psychoanalysis, a method he considers highly appropriate inasmuch as "the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language."³ Lacan believes that "a material [may be seen to] operate in [the unconscious] according to certain laws, which are the same laws as those discovered in the study of actual languages" (*Ecrits*, 234). The unconscious may therefore be regarded as being subject to the same linguistic methods of analysis as language. Lacan theorizes that the structural laws of the unconscious (*Verdichtung*, or "condensation," and *Verschiebung*, or "displacement") function like the structural laws of linguistics (metaphor and metonymy) (*Ecrits*, 160).

Lacan perceives language and the unconscious as being not only similar, but interwoven phenomena in which language may be seen to function as the dynamic force which "shapes perception and identity by symbolic effect."⁴ "Lacan's model gives both language and the unconscious a sort of autonomy which de-centers [them] with respect to externality of the referent" ("Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism" 563). Thus the unconscious may be read in much the same way as any other language act - as a text subject to linguistic and psychological analyses. Such is precisely Lacan's method:

Lacan looks at large units of language discourse in their dialectical form of question/response, in their direction of movement and intention, and in terms of those patterns and repetitions which move at the surface of apparent linguistic clarity ... [into which are] mixed conscious verbal expressions, unconscious associations and intentions. ("Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism" 563)

Lacan perceives both language and the unconscious as being metaphorical sign systems that center on the absence of the desire object. Thus, these systems are both necessitated by the absence of the actual object, and empowered by the desire for the object. Desire may be understood as arising from the human organism's "prematurity at birth" and resulting biological "insufficiency" (*Ecrits*, 4). This insufficiency exhibits itself in the infant's lack of ability to control its own movements or environment. A fundamental condition of lack or insufficiency gives rise to Desire as "the driving force of the human subject,"⁵ and serves to direct the individual toward the "other," who is presumed to have that which the subject lacks. Thus, for Lacan, Desire is always an irreducibly desire of the other, and it is ultimately this desire which may be seen to motivate human behavior and facilitate human development.

Lacan formulates his conceptions of development around the central notion of subjectivity. For Lacan the essential ontological task of the individual is the creation of a self or "subject." Lacan does not conceive of the subject as "intrinsically unified," but instead perceives "the human subject [as being] split into conscious and unconscious parts."⁶ The unconscious part of the subject is further divided, however

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains: "The Lacanian conscious 'subject' is composed of two seemingly unified and 'intelligent,' but different, modes of formation and function: the 'moi' and the 'je'" (*Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, 3). The "moi," or ego, is the narcissistic element of the subject, constituted through the process of identification with external or "alien" images. The "moi" is the subject of identification, while the "je" is the "speaking subject" that directs its discourse to others.

Lacan conceptualized human development in terms of three phases, which he labelled: "the mirror stage," "the imaginary," and "the symbolic." Each of these phases may best be understood as a register which functions to endow the developing subject with a higher order of symbolization, and of subjectivity. Lacan explains the function of the mirror stage as essentially "an identification," or "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (*Ecrits*, 2). This assumption of an image ushers the subject into the realm of the imaginary, the function of which is to give form to the subject through the process of identification with a series of external objects or images. The symbolic heralds the initiation of the subject into the realm of social and signifying practices expressed in language. Lacan in fact equates the symbolic order with language, which he defines as "the world of public discourses."⁷ The task of the individual throughout these phases of development is to construct himself as a speaking subject, or "je," capable of functioning within the symbolic order of his society. This developmental process is inaugurated with the mirror stage.

Terry Eagleton explains "the transformation that takes place in the subject" during the mirror stage:

If we can imagine a small child contemplating itself in a mirror, ... we can see how, from within this "imaginary" state of being, the child's first development of an ego, of an integrated self-image, begins to happen... The child finds reflected back to itself in the mirror a gratifying unified image of itself, and although its relation to this image is still of an imaginary kind - the image in the mirror both is and is not itself, a blurring of subject and object - it has begun the process of constructing a centre of self.⁸

This self identification is initially a narcissistic one that draws the subject repeatedly back to its mirror reflection for definition. It rapidly extends its reflections to the social realm however, "arriving at a sense of 'I' by finding that 'I' reflected back to it" not only by the mirror but by other people in the world (Eagleton, 164). Thus, far from remaining narcissistic, the formative self is strongly influenced by the "other," which may be defined as the society, person, or object which identified it as a subject and "reflects" its identity back to the individual. In this way the perception of self as the object of reflection simultaneously functions to construct a self through the formation of subjectivity.

Lacan's perception of subjectivity as a formative process is revealed in his description of the mirror stage:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic; - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (*Ecrits*, 4)

Jean Rhys's novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, addresses the same issues as does Lacan's theory, namely the creation of a self or the "construction of a subject" (Belsey, 46). Throughout the novel Antoinette struggles to construct herself as a speaking subject within an oppressive patriarchal environment. The novel may be read as a drama of developmental process - the process whereby Antoinette constructs an identity for herself in isolation. This developmental process, like that of the mirror stage, is motivated by lack, or "Desire," and moves from "insufficiency to anticipation." In the novel, a "succession of phantasies" may be seen to result from this "fragmented [self-] image," and to ultimately culminate in the "assumption of an alienating identity."

As the novel opens, Antoinette exists in a state of general isolation - social, racial, economic, and geographic. Her isolation is intensified, however, by the lack of a familial other. Lacan postulates that "the human subject first becomes aware of itself by identification with a person [or "other"], usually the mother (*Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, 16). Antoinette, however, is ostracized by her mother, and therefore unable to formulate this primary identification. She further lacks a father figure to instruct her in the symbolic order, or to initiate her into the Oedipal conflict. This is a serious deficiency, since in Lacanian terms the Oedipal complex constitutes the primary experience of the symbolic order which requires the child to move out of a dyadic relationship with the mother, and into a triangular relationship which accommodates the place of the father. The Oedipal complex articulates the social prohibition of incest on a personal, or subjective level. It is "the primordial Law" which... "superimposes the kingdom of culture" upon the individual, thus "subjectifying" him in the process. (*Ecrits*, '66). The father in this sense must be regarded as being "more than [just] the third member of the Oedipal triangle - he is the symbol and representative of the social order" (Muller and Richardson, 18). He is the speaker of the Law, and the upholder of the symbolic order to which the individual must subject himself. Antoinette's subjectivity is thus severely threatened by her lack of both a source of primary identification (a mother), and source of initiation into the symbolic order (a father).

It is within this state of acute social and familial isolation that the mirror makes its first appearance in the novel. Described not as a mirror, but as a "looking glass," the emphasis upon the agency of the mirror is entirely appropriate to the emergence of the subject. In the absence of any reflective other, Antoinette is drawn to the looking glass by her Desire for identification. In the mirror she perceives herself not as a subject, but as a desirable object or commodity with a future prospect of purchase within a patriarchal, mercantile economy. She exists at this stage as an object which lacks identity, and has yet to achieve the primary identification of the mirror stage requisite to identity formation.

It is this fundamental lack of identity that leaves Antoinette so vulnerable to Tia, since it is in Tia that Antoinette encounters her first "other." Tia's words serve to provide Antoinette's first sense of identity, and it is for this reason that Tia's epithet "white cockroach" strikes Antoinette so harshly that it continues to challenge her sense of self throughout her lifetime. Through her relationship with Tia, Antoinette begins to identify herself as a young girl like Tia in age and gender, but unlike her in race and station, as Tia points out: "Old time white people nothing like white nigger now, black nigger better than white nigger."⁹ In her attempt to gain Tia's approval and thereby identify more completely with her, Antoinette consents to performing an "under-somersault." While she is so employed, Tia takes her dress and money and leaves, stripping Antoinette of even the identifying marks of the "white cockroach." Devoid of all identity she looks into the pond but fails to distinguish her reflection and leaves in confusion and disbelief. She is forced to wear Tia's discarded clothing home. It is her mother who provides Antoinette with the appropriate means of disposal for derogatory social trappings. She tells Christophine to "burn" the dress (*Wide Sargasso Sea*,

Antoinette does not quickly recover from her experience with Tia. Lacking any reflective other, she remains at the threshold of the mirror state, possessing only a confused and fragmented sense of self. Lacan describes the fragmented self, which characterizes this early state as a "fragmented body," and states that such fragmentation "usually results in dreams" (*Ecrits*, 4). Such is indeed the case in the novel. Antoinette's experience with Tia precipitates her first dream, which is vague, but clearly threatening in nature. This sense of threat quickly realizes itself in the attack of the black people on Coulibri. Antoinette appears to remain in a dream-like state even when instructed by her mother to dress and leave the house. It is in this preconscious state that she leaves her home and sees Tia in the crowd. Having identified with her more completely than with any other in her life, she fails to distinguish the essential separation between Tia and herself. She runs toward Tia, seeming to perceive her as a mirror reflection of herself. Tia, in response, hurls a rock at Antoinette and injures her head. Still unable to perceive the difference essential to identification, she stares at Tia as if at a reflection, stating: "It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 45).

Lacan was familiar with this phenomenon of undifferentiated identification which he defined as "transitivism," or the "captation by the image of the other" (*Ecrits*, 18). This condition is indicative of the child in the pre-mirror, or early mirror stage. Lacan explains: "This first level [of identification] shows us that experience of one's self in the earliest stage of childhood develops, in so far as it refers to one's counterpart, from a situation experienced as undifferentiated" (*Ecrits*, 18). John Muller observes that:

Given the fact that the subject first discovers himself in an external image [or other], it is easy to understand how he confuses this external image of himself [reflected by the other] with the images of other subjects. ... This confusion leads to a misidentification of himself with the other and has far-reaching effects, not only on relationships with others but on knowledge of external things." (Muller and Richardson, 31-32)

Antoinette obviously exists in a state of transitivism at this point in the novel. So entrenched is she in this state of transitivism that even the trauma of her experience with Tia is insufficient to catapult her completely into the mirror stage. She fails to recognize the alienation inherent in the possession of an image, the necessity of being both subject and object simultaneously. She perceives only the subjective identification of the image without the accompanying recognition that it is after all, an object outside herself. For her the subject/object split does not yet exist, and the two remain blurred. She does not yet possess the wisdom of the parrot who knows both the objective question: "Who is there?" as well as the subjective answer - "myself," "Ché Coco!" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 41).

With Tia's attack, Antoinette's preconscious condition quickly becomes an unconscious condition in which she remains for six weeks. Shortly after her recovery she is sent to the convent, where there are "others" with whom to identify, specifically the de Plana sisters and the nuns, but no looking-glass with which to define a sense of self. The need for such a means of self-identification is illustrated by the young nun who "looks at herself in a cask of water ... to see if her dimples are still there" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 54). Such lack of self-identification exacerbates Antoinette's vulnerability to social definition as a "crazy girl" who is "crazy like her mother" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 49).

Antoinette's fragmented sense of self exhibits itself once again in the dream she has shortly after Mason's visit. The second dream is more vivid than the first. In it

the sense of threat is still present, but this time more specifically defined in the person of a man. Recalling the dream she comments, "I make no effort to save myself" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 59), perhaps because she recognizes that she does not yet have a "self" to save. It is in this dream, however, that we begin to perceive a developing sense of purposiveness in Antoinette, who feels compelled to continue climbing the stairs despite her presentiment of imminent doom: "It will be when I go up these steps. At the top" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 60). This purposiveness is accompanied by Antoinette's first expression of volition: "If anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 59). It is in her dreams that Antoinette begins to work her way through the mirror stage. She awakens from her dream with a question: "Such terrible things happen. Why?" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 61). Thus she begins articulating the subject/object split central to the mirror stage, expressing it in the "dialectical form of question/response" which represents for Lacan the very essence of this stage ("Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism," 563).

With the opening of section II of the novel, Rochester preempts Antoinette's voice with his own. Already himself a bastion of the symbolic order, he assumes his culturally endorsed position as speaking subject and speaks for her. In so doing he effectively silences her by depriving her of the right to function as a speaking subject, or "je," herself. Early in the chapter we see evidence of Rochester's own psychological state. He postures before the looking-glass in the bedroom of Grand Bois and grimaces upon perceiving his image. Thus, far from embracing or accepting his image as an object or reflection, he turns and abandons it without truly "looking" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 73). This seemingly isolated response becomes indicative of Rochester's own psychological state when added to his perception of the unconscious as not only unnecessary, but hostile. He remarks of his journey into the woods: "I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 104). Rochester accepts the conscious, objective half of identity, but fails to recognize either the existence of the unconscious, or the possibility of subjectivity.

For this reason, Rochester's psychological development is clearly behind that of Antoinette. She has begun to identify the essential subject/object split inherent in the imaginary stage and is involved, unconsciously at least, in constructing a self. Rochester has not begun to so much as recognize the existence of the subjective. This aspect of his psychology also evidences itself in his failure to perceive Antoinette as anything more than an object, and in his escalating attempts to make her an amendable object, a "Marionette" named Bertha, a "dead girl," and finally a "mad wife," that most defenseless of females subject to patriarchal possession.

Rochester's systematic attempts to completely reduce Antoinette to the status of object are detailed by Christophine. She confronts Rochester on marrying Antoinette for her money and then deliberately attempting to "break her up" by alternately abusing and abandoning her, insisting upon renaming her, and sleeping with her maid in a deliberate attempt to demean her. The internal speech of Rochester's "je" confirms the calculated nature of his treatment of Antoinette, and his internal monologue articulates the degree of his malice toward her. He denies a previous intent to break her, but declares spitefully: "Now I'll do it" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 165). He vows to deprive her of love, her home, the sun, and her looking-glass. He determines to make her mad through systematic deprivation in order that he may possess her more completely, muttering to himself "She's mad but mine, mine," (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 166).

Rochester's thinking and behavior appear to be considerably more disturbed and unwarranted than Antoinette's. Why then is it Antoinette who is labeled as "mad" and locked away? The answer lies in the Lacanian notion of language as a dynamic subjectifying force with sociological implications. Just as language enables the individual to perceive himself as a subject, so too it functions to create individuals as

subjects who of necessity support the dominant societal ideology. Louis Althusser explains that: "The destination of all ideology is the subject (the individual in society) and it is the role of ideology to construct people as subjects."¹⁰ "In reality, it is only by adopting the position of subject within language that the individual is able to produce meaning," and in so doing become an acknowledged or "speaking subject." "He may achieve this status only by conforming his speech to the [existing] system of linguistic [and social] prescriptions" (Belsey, 47). In Western civilization the English language has endorsed a patriarchal system, and the "speaking subjects" have been men. It is therefore the nineteenth century patriarchal ideology which recognizes Rochester's right to utilize language's power to identify his wife as "mad" and to prescribe incarceration for her in order to maintain his own social position. As Christophine puts it: "It is in your mind to pretend she's mad." It is also within his power to impose his will: "The doctors say what you tell them to say. That man Richard he say what you want him to say ..." (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 160).

Rochester has the powers of the symbolic order on his side. Thus he represents a formidable force which virtually no unpropertied woman in the nineteenth century could withstand. Rochester systematically influences Antoinette to become mad just as Mason drives her mother to it. Christophine relates: "When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband he go off, he leave her" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 157). But does this method succeed with Antoinette as it did with her mother? Is Antoinette in fact "mad" in Rhys' novel as she is in Brontë's?

Catherine Belsey observes that:

If it is to participate in the society into which it is born, to be able to act deliberately within the social formation, the [individual] must enter the symbolic order, the set of signifying systems of culture of which language is the supreme example (Belsey, 48).

This signifying system of culture called language provides a sticky dilemma for a woman in a patriarchal culture, a catch-22 which requires that she either subject herself to an identity as mere object, or be deprived the tool of perception and identity entirely and be relegated to the hospital, the asylum, or the attic. What are, in fact, her options? How can she become a full subject without being subjugated?

Such is precisely the dilemma faced by Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Locked in the attic at Thornfield Hall and deprived of any reflective other, she is also figuratively locked in the mirror stage, unable to perceive and subsequently construct a self. She states that "there is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now." But rather than conceding her formative selfhood, she draws upon images in her memory for identification. She remembers herself as a girl watching herself in the mirror, and observes that "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" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 180). These reminiscences lead her to a recognition of her present situation. She asks in the interrogative of the mirror state, "What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 180).

Thus, far from capitulating to her circumstances or to her captors, Antoinette continues her attempts to construct herself as a subject. Grace observes that she "hasn't lost her spirit" and is therefore more free than the other women in the house (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 178). This observation substantiates Lacan's "picture of being [in which] madness is not a thing apart, a genetic deficiency or environmental blight, but rather a human potential which reveals the structural limits of human freedom" ("Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism," 564). It is her refusal to accept subjugation which

differentiates Antoinette from her female counterparts and earns her the distinction of "madness." Unlike the woman in Mary Coleridge's poem "who is the prisoner of the mirror," and "has no voice to speak her dread" (Gilbert & Gubar, 16), Antoinette determines to create a voice for herself by writing her story in her mind, being deprived of the basic language tools of pen and paper. Antoinette uses her imagination to "write her name in fire red" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 53), and tell the story of her life which Rochester would not hear. In the attic, as in childhood, there is "no one to tell, no one to listen" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 91), so she writes the story for herself, and in so doing constructs herself as a subject through language, albeit unwritten and unspoken.

Antoinette has her third and final dream, this time from the attic. This dream however, reflects not a fragmented self, but one in the process of subjectifying. She dreams of herself as a whole, autonomous person who walks through Thornfield Hall and up the attic steps. This dream clearly marks the development of subjectivity, and the culmination of the mirror stage. Unlike Antoinette's previous dream of a "fragmented body," this dream signals "the formation of the I" as subject. Lacan explains that this "formation of the I is symbolized in dreams by a fortress ... where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle" (*Ecrits*, 5). Far from "floundering" at this point, Antoinette moves irrevocably up the stairs toward the attic, "the lofty, remote inner castle" that has been her prison for so long. As she climbs, she passes a mirror, and recognizes herself in the gilt frame for the first time as both subject and object. With this recognition she is finally freed from the mirror stage, and is able to consciously, independently determine the course of her action. She awakes from her dream, as a fully subjectified self who refuses to live in subjugation. She has come full circle through the Lacanian drama of development. Initially motivated by a sense of "insufficiency," she ends the novel in a state of anticipation stating: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 190). Antoinette has dreamt herself "through a succession of phantasies" onto the threshold of the conscious, symbolic order. She stops short, however, of assuming "the armour of an alienating identity" created for her by the culture (*Ecrits*, 4). Newly issued from the mirror state, she stands at the threshold of the symbolic order.

At this juncture of the imaginary and symbolic orders, Antoinette pauses to consider the symbolic order, and to determine her course of action. She has two apparent options available to her: she can remain locked in an imaginary state and be considered mad, or she can subject herself to a symbolic order which will ultimately subjugate her, through definition as an object. There exists in Lacanian theory, however, a third option located at this "juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic"¹¹ - it is the absolute rejection of the existing symbolic order enacted in self-destruction. This resolution of the conflict has been labelled by some as "the masochistic outcome" (*Seminars*, 172). It is better understood, however, as the practical outworking of the death instinct, "which is constitutive of the fundamental position of the human subject" (*Seminars*, 172). The human subject in Lacanian theory is always an alien subject, but in the case of Antoinette, a radically alienating subject which would fundamentally deprive her of subjectivity, and relegate her to a state of essential subjugation.

This alienating identity derives from the "existential negativity" that defines the feminine condition in Western society. Having been characteristically defined through signifying systems of the culture as deficient, Julia Kristeva believes that woman's "task must be to assume a "negative function" or revolutionary posture which "explodes social codes" and rejects "conventional culture and language" ("*Inscribing Femininity*," 88). Kristeva, "the feminine demand will never find a proper symbolic, [and] will at best be enacted as a moment inherent in rejection ... in violation of communal conventions." It is precisely such a moment of rejection that Antoinette enacts at the end of the novel. She chooses the realization of the death instinct and walks down the dark passages of Thornfield Hall, intent upon burning both the literal and figurative patriarchal

structures which have imprisoned her for so long.

NOTES

- ¹Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.
- ²Michael Thorpe, "The Other Side: *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 8, 1977, 99-110, 99.
- ³Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, translator, New York, W.W. Norton, 1977, 234.
- ⁴Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism," *The Literary Review*, 24, 1981, 562-577; 562.
- ⁵John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, New York, International Universities Press, Inc., 1982, 14.
- ⁶Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986, 2.
- ⁷Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine," *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, editors, London, Methuen, 1985, 80-112; 89.
- ⁸Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 162.
- ⁹Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1982, 24.
- ¹⁰Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, New York, Methuen, 1985, 45-64; 47.
- ¹¹Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, John Forrester, translator, New York, Norton, 1988, 172.
- ¹²Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Féminine," *Feminine Criticism and Social Change*, New York, Methuen, 1985, 86-101; 86.

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Editorial Board

We are pleased to welcome Bianca Tarozzi to the Editorial Board of the *Jean Rhys Review*. She is Associate Professor of English at the University of Verona, and the author of books on Robert Lowell (*Il nudo artificio*, Vicenza 1981) and Jean Rhys (*La forma vincente*, Venezia, 1984), as well as *Nessuno vince il leone* (Venezia, 1986) a volume of...