

Burning Daylight



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BURNING DAYLIGHT

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Burning Daylight is an annual scholarly journal, published through Sonoma State University's Department of English graduate program, dedicated to providing a place for up and coming voices in the field of literature. We publish original critical and theoretical essays from B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. students that represent the current work, trends, and thoughts in literary criticism, composition, and rhetoric.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I am very pleased to have served as Managing Editor for the second year of *Burning Daylight*, and in this second iteration I am proud to present four thoughtful and intriguing essays. This sample of current investigations in rhetorical and literary studies is challenging and fresh, bringing together zombies, Aristotle, Malcolm X and Presbyterians in one volume. I offer many thanks to the staff for their time and dedication, especially Matthew Martin and Michaela Spangenberg. I also thank Dr. Armiñana for his donation to this publication, without which we would have been unable to print this edition. *Burning Daylight* is deeply grateful for the support of the English Department, and the ongoing assistance of the wonderful Karen Brodsky – we endlessly appreciate your time and good will.

Let the light of our minds illuminate the world,

Kristen Nicolaisen

April 20, 2013

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The Attic as Grave: Reading Dead and Undead Imagery in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

AMANDA L. ALEXANDER

The ultimate binary exists between life and death. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by destabilizing the essential binary of life and death through the use of living-dead imagery, set the stage to destabilize other binaries whose essential nature are taken for granted: self/other, male/female, colonizer/colonized. A Gothic reading of the two novels also reveals how the use of traditional Gothic imagery and undead figures establishes two concurrent epistemologies in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Within both texts exists a representation of the "normal" fearful English view, with its need to rationalize away the supernatural. Conversely, in Rhys' text, there also exists the perceptions of white and black Creoles, whose views are used to make salient the place or value of the uncanny. What is established then is that the fundamental binary constructed between English and Other, in this case both white and black West Indians, rests upon the basic idea that the English body, or soul, is inherently living while, because of the consequences of colonialism, the "Other" body is not.

To begin, *Jane Eyre* tells the story of a plain young Englishwoman, educated at Lowood School, who obtains a

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position as governess at a manor called Thornfield. While living at Thornfield, Jane often hears strange laughter, thuds, and other mysterious noises coming from the third floor (a part of the house restricted to her). Though Jane contributes the events to the housekeeper Grace Poole, Thornfield's great secret—the true figure behind the noises and fires—is Edward Rochester's (the master of the house) Creole wife Bertha Mason. After Jane and Rochester's wedding is thwarted, Rochester reveals this secret—saying that Bertha went mad immediately after their wedding fifteen years before and that is why she is imprisoned in the attic. After Jane flees from Thornfield to establish a new life, she hears Rochester's voice calling to her across a moor and decides to return to Thornfield. There she discovers that the manor has burned to the ground. Bertha's last act was setting fire to her prison and Rochester was blinded in his unsuccessful attempt to save her life. Shortly after they reunite, Jane and Rochester marry.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an elegant retelling of Bertha Rochester's history before and during her imprisonment in Thornfield's attic, set in the lush landscape of 1830's Jamaica. Significantly, Rhys renames Bertha—calling her Antoinette Cosway—and tells of her relationship to a young Englishman (who will stay unnamed in Rhys' novel). Shortly after their marriage, this unnamed man is poisoned by the rumors about Antoinette and her family—rumors of madness and promiscuity. Trapped between the increasing demands of her new husband and her own

precarious sense of a white Creole identity, Antoinette is driven towards madness. The novel ends with Antoinette being renamed back to Bertha, transitioning the narrative to be picked up in *Jane Eyre*.

A Gothic reading of these two novels offers readers a chance to explore the consistent uncanny and undead imagery within the texts. Such a reading recognizes the subversive nature of the genre and each novel's own place within the tradition. Charlotte Brontë's novel represents a traditional side of the Gothic, set in an English manor with a brooding Byronic hero, with an air of rationality ending with a (happy) marriage. Jean Rhys responds to the English Gothic mode with her postcolonial take on the genre. Her manor house is a decrepit plantation home, symbolic of a social class fallen out of favor, and her heroine loses all control of her narrative. The figures of ghosts, vampires, and zombies populating these two texts act as both representations of marginalized Creole voices and as powerful subversive voices fighting against patriarchal (colonial) control. Rhys' modernist style, the shifts in narrator and point of view, allow her to deconstruct the traditional Victorian novel form of *Jane Eyre* and destabilize the essential binaries of imperial doctrine. From this deconstruction, a space opens for the voices of white and black Creoles (and the undead) to respond to mother texts and mother nations. The white Creole experience, as Rhys writes it, is a Gothic (undead) experience because it exists in the liminal space created by being neither fully English nor black Creole.

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In spite of their differences, both novels seek to relate a white Creole body to an undead body in such a way as to distinguish explicitly between the normative, white English, body as a living body. One condition of Englishness lies, in part, in the notion of a *living* body acting as a representative for empire. Arthur Mee, for instance, goes to great pains to depict the national body, the body politic, of England as a living body. He writes, “a nation is like a great living creature” and goes on to explain that, like living cells in a body, “the body [of the nation] could not exist without the division of labour” (Mee 64-65). Phillip Gibbs reaffirms the connection of the empire to a living spirit, in a living body, when he says that “the soul of England spoke again that night...” in reference to a speech made by George V (Gibbs 53). The soul of England, the essence of Englishness, is alive in the body of the King (or Queen), in men like Edward Rochester, and women like Jane Eyre. It follows then that those individuals that are set up, as foils of Englishness must be, on some inherent level, not as alive as the English.

With this idea of Englishness in mind, this essay focuses on the two primary female characters, Jane and Antoinette, and how the unique social positions of each woman shape her interpretations of the undead. Jane, as a governess, occupies a class position that places her in between the servant class and the middle/upper classes. Her depiction as an educated, independent woman allows her to act in a rationalizing role and reaffirms her position as a representative of the normative English point of view.

Antoinette, as a member of the declining plantocracy class of the West Indies, also finds herself marginalized between two spheres. However, her duality as a white Creole, pictured as in between white English and black West Indian identities, is distinct from Jane's and allows her to choose to connect with living-dead imagery and the supernatural in a way that Jane cannot. Thus, it is arguable that Antoinette's specific social position, not only her dehumanization by her husband, aids in her zombification as she is transformed into the madwoman in the attic.

Brontë's Creole Vampyre

While Jane's connection to the supernatural begins with her terrifying experience in the Red Room as a child, once she accepts the governess position at Thornfield she enters into a distinctly Gothic world where she will face a disconnect between the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*.¹ For Freud, *heimlich* refers to something familiar, of the home or domestic, and also something concealed or secret. Conversely, *unheimlich* refers to something unfamiliar, uncomfortable or un-domestic, and something made known—a revealed secret. Jane's curiosity toward the mysteries of the third floor, which reminds her of “a corridor in some Bluebeard's

1 Avril Horner, in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, defines Freud's idea of *heimlich* (canny/familiar or belonging to the home) and *unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny) in such a way as to explain that the *unheimlich* “is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and *not* familiar...[It] can also mean that which is [meant to be] concealed and kept out of sight...” (287).

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castle,” foreshadows the surreptitious presence hidden within the house that she will soon discover (*JE* 92). She will hear a disembodied “demonic laugh,” “gurg[e] and moan[s]” and thinks of Grace Poole as “possessed with a devil” or as a “goblin” in the lead up to the climatic revelation (*JE* 126-27). Shortly before she is indoctrinated into the secret knowledge of Thornfield’s attic, Jane is visited by a figure with a “discolored face” a “savage face” that has red eyes which she first likens to a ghost” then “the foul German spectre—the Vampyre”² (242). When she finally meets Bertha in her attic prison, the narrator-Jane describes her as a “maniac” with “shaggy locks” and a “purple...bloated” face (250). The consistent theme is that the racialized white Creole body, to a distinctly English perception, is like a dead body. More specifically, a Creole woman’s body in English eyes is an undead body with no discernable voice, will, or memory of its own.

In analyzing *Jane Eyre* as a mother text, Heta Pyrhönen’s recent work *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and its Progeny* reads the novels (*JE* and *WSS*) through their connection to the tale of “Bluebeard.”³ Pyrhönen argues that,

2 In *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, Erik Butler divides the characteristics of the vampire into four points. First is the metaphysical transgression: the vampire is neither “wholly dead nor entirely alive;” secondly, the vampire redistributes energy (blood, money, life) in both a mystical and material manner; thirdly, “when vampires draw life from their victims, they infuse them with death and make the living resemble them,” which is often represented as the false-friend or seducer; and lastly a vampire’s existence violates the “boundaries of space and time, and it seeks to spread terror actively” (11).

3 The Bluebeard tale tells of a young woman married to a rich man with a blue beard. He gives her the keys to his home with the condition that she does not open one secret chamber. She disobeys and discovers that, in the secret chamber, is the bodies of his previous wives. (For a more complete

in the Bluebeard archetype, the new wife “recognizes herself in the dead women and acknowledges the pain they have felt in Bluebeard’s hands” (65). What this implies for readings of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is that on some level, Bertha (Antoinette) must have a relationship with death in order for her presence in Jane’s life to make sense. However, the fact that, unlike a Bluebeard ex-wife, she is still alive further connects her to the undead or living-dead. Brontë’s use of undead imagery, according to Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, describes her reliance “upon Gothic terminology to shape inner space, turning the macabre or the spectral into...reflections of the private self” (127). He explains the reasoning behind this construction of the inner self as an attempt by Brontë to “[use] the spectral to examine and rewrite contemporary constructions of ideal femininity” (128). In this context, Bertha’s character represents the pitfalls of a woman’s identity under the male gaze. The male gaze, in this line of thought, is instrumental in killing the individual identities of female bodies.

While Charlotte Brontë’s novel does use Gothic elements to critique normative romance plots, Brontë’s Jane fails to fully subvert this device, in part because she rationalizes away the supernatural. Jane is a subversive figure in her desire to have independence, as seen when she leaves Thornfield after learning Rochester’s secret (Chapter XXVII). When confronted with the realities behind the supernatural events in Thornfield, Jane acts to reassert the

discussion see Pyrhönen 2010 and Hermansson 2009).

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rigid morality that defines her identity. Upon her return to Rochester at the end of novel, brought about by another Gothic-esque plot device (Jane hearing Rochester's voice across a foggy moor), Jane temporarily surrenders to irrationality and follows Rochester's disembodied voice (*JE* 357-58). However, as the novel concludes, Jane reverts to her logical (moral) and rational self and is free to marry the penitent Rochester. Read this way, Englishness is defined by its sensibility, and the act of rationalizing the supernatural affirms the hegemonic nature of the romance plot. Brontë's novel, written by an English woman living in England, exists in a position to offer itself as a model of English/European Gothic and as an example of the English method of understanding the supernatural.

The Zombie in the Attic: Jean Rhys' Undead

On the surface level of the text, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, like its mother text, succumbs to a Brontëan heteronormative romance plot, meaning that, one peak of the story arch is heterosexual marriage, represented by the unions of Annette/Mr. Mason and Antoinette and her unnamed husband (*Jane Eyre's* Edward Rochester). However, Rhys' use of the Gothic in her text and the figure of the zombie allow her to critique that plot device by undermining its hegemonic nature. Marriage in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, between a white Creole woman and an Englishman, initiates a process undertaken by the English husband to zombify his

Creole wife. Readers first see this in the deteriorating state of Annette in Part One after her marriage to Mason. After the burning of Coulibri, Annette is removed from Antoinette's life and, foreshadowing what will become of her daughter, locked away like a shameful secret. Rhys establishes early in the text that the people around Antoinette connect her fate with that of her mother's. On her way to live in a convent, a young black Creole girl teases Antoinette that her mother has "eyes like a zombie" and that she herself "have eyes like zombie too" (29-30). Again, Rhys is foreshadowing Antoinette's eventual fate after she too will marry an English man.

Rhys clearly picked up on Brontë's use of the Gothic in *Jane Eyre* when creating her version of Edward Rochester. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester's time in the West Indies leaves him in a semi-delirious⁴ state where he feels threatened by the environment and the people he cannot understand. Once he reads an English book on zombies, Rochester's fears of the island have a conduit to express themselves (WSS 64). The zombie, or zombification, symbolizes what Rochester feels is happening to him on the island—especially after he takes the Obeah tonic Antoinette gives him—and also the process he undertakes to "other" his wife (64, 83). At the very beginning of his narrative, Rochester remarks that he his wife has "sad, dark alien eyes" and goes on to say that

4 Ian Baucom writes in *Out of Place* that postcolonial readings "have identified a central deliriousness in the workings of imperial history" (3). He goes on to describe, using the work of Rushdie and Fanon, the locations of empire as "spaces of bewilderment and loss" implying that the imperial/colonial experience is inherently Gothic in nature (4).

she is “Creole of pure English descent” but that “they [white Creoles] are not English or European either” (39). As his relationship with Antoinette decays, he likens her to “a dead girl” with cold hands, uncombed hair, inflamed eyes, and a swollen face, a marionette/doll, and a ghost in an attempt to distance himself and other her (81, 83, 87, 90, 102). It is at this moment that his wife becomes “silence itself,” implying, as the dead traditionally do not speak, that she has become death itself (101).

Antoinette’s own relationship to death and Obeah also asserts Rhys’ response to Brontë’s Gothic. While living at the convent just before her marriage, Antoinette prays, “for a long time be dead” because she wants to feel the “transcendent beauty” of the afterlife (34). She does not fear the idea of being dead. Antoinette believes, keeping with Caribbean religious tradition, that there are two deaths. She tells her husband that “[t]here are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about,” which implies that there is a spiritual death and corporeal death (77). Rhys also recognizes that both Antoinette and Rochester have two differing cultural understandings of what having two deaths means. In Rochester’s narrative, he explains this difference to the reader when Antoinette says:

‘If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn’t have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don’t believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.’ [Rochester replies] ‘Die then! Die!’ I watched her die many times. In my way, not

in hers...Very soon she was as eager for what's called
 loving as I was—more lost and drowned afterwards.
 (55)

At this early stage in their relationship, both Rochester and Antoinette acknowledge that there are two deaths. Nevertheless, Antoinette's two deaths (spiritual/soul and body) and Rochester's two deaths (orgasm and body), while similar, distinctly speak of their different social positions. Antoinette's idea of two deaths speaks to her identity between white and black Creole, while Rochester's two deaths speak to his understanding of female sexual submission and physical death.

The psychological death of Antoinette is analyzed in Heta Pyrhönen's *Bluebeard Gothic*. Reading Rochester as a Bluebeard man, she argues that he “not only robs Antoinette of her considerable fortune but also sets out to dismember her or, rather, to disintegrate her psyche and soul by imprisoning her in his mansion” (83). Bertha, a woman married for her supposed beauty and her actual money, “demonstrate[s] that their [beautiful, rich women] erotic potential condemns them to male subjection” (Talairach-Vielmas 135). The white female Creole body, as a representative of an exotic (erotic) place, is again not a living thing but an artifact, or commodity. Whether she is dead, living-dead, or a living product of the male gaze, one thing is clear about the white Creole in both Brontë and Rhys—she is *not* English—instead she haunts English domestic spaces, perceived as threatening to destroy the happiness of “true” English men and women.

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In these two novels, two images of the dead and living dead are apparent. Firstly, Brontë uses Gothic tropes to add suspense only to later give a rational (though cruel) explanation of what resides behind the images. The rational explanation Brontë gives readers is that, while Jane hears the demonic laughter in the walls of Thornfield and sees a shadow of a ghostly savage face, the woman behind these descriptions is a real woman, though not a dead woman (à la Poe's "Ligeia"). The ghost of a past wife does not haunt Jane; it is the shell of a living Creole woman that haunts her romance with Rochester. Secondly, is Rhys' view as a white Creole, where she connects the power of the zombie image to a black female power embodied by an Obeah woman.

Rhys' use of Obeah and the zombie in her novel positions her within the postcolonial Gothic tradition, which has an intimate relationship with Caribbean literature. Lisbeth Paravisini-Gebert connects the rise of the Gothic with the rise of imperialism and "the fear of miscegenation with the attendant horror of interracial sexuality" (230). Gothic fiction, she goes on to explain, attempted to address the "violence of colonial conditions," by turning to Caribbean religions like Vodou and Obeah as the "symbol[s] of the islands' threatening realities" (234). Jean Rhys, in a letter to Francis Wyndham, explains her own knowledge of zombies as "a dead person raised up by the Obeah woman, it's usually a woman I think, and a zombie can take the appearance of anyone. Or anything" (WSS 140).

In postcolonial Gothic, zombification⁵ came to embody a synthesis of the genre's tropes into a single frightening undead body. Quoting Katherine Dunham and Alfred Métraux, Paravisini-Gebert defines the zombie as:

[e]ither a truly dead creature brought back to life by black magic, 'but by such a process that memory and will are gone and the resultant being is entirely subject to the will of the sorcerer who resuscitated [them], in the service of good or evil,' or as persons given a potion of herbs...zombies can be recognized 'by their vague look, their dull almost glazed eyes and above all by the nasality of their voice'...the zombi [thus] remains in that grey area separating life and death. (238)

She goes on to argue using René Depestre's words, that colonization is a process of zombification and the people that have been subjected to slavery and colonial dominion represent both the consequences of colonialism and the reverberating rebellion against imperial power (239-240). Edna Aizenberg also reads the zombie in Rhys' novel and she acknowledges that the image is used as a link between "the tale of a sexualized, hybridized zombie woman with a narrative of imperial domination" (Aizenberg 464). A "hybridized zombie wom[a]n," in Aizenberg's argument,

5 Further readings of the zombie include those by Wade Davis, Thomas Loe, and Romita Choushury. From Davis, Loe states that "the efficacy of the zombification process depends in part of the belief in the power of the ritual" and that a person's "*ti bon ange*—the essence of individuality of one's soul—could be taken, destroying a person's individual identity, personality, and willpower" (36).

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acts as a “multilayered symbolic space” to address colonial/postcolonial conflicts (463). The female body is, in Aizenberg and Laura Ciolkowski’s discussions, the vessel and symbolic representation of miscegenation fears.

Rhys’ text seeks to illuminate the failure of a white Creole identity to find sanctuary in any “real” identity binary.⁶ Her Antoinette exists as a woman ostracized on multiple levels by the society she lives in. This is because the white Creole is “not quite English and not quite ‘native’... straddl[ing] the embattled divide between human and savage, core and periphery, self and other” (Ciolkowski 340). This opens up the idea that, in Rhys’ work perhaps, a white Creole identity is in and of itself Gothic—the “almost but not quite” like Homi Bhabha’s *mimics*. As mimic will imbibe all the external markings of the original society except for the internal essence of its meaning, the very idea of purity in the home society can be contaminated and subverted by the act of imitation. However, the “Other” will have become a false “equal” because the “mother country” will always “be more equal than others.” Bhabha describes this sort of false equal, as “almost the same, but not quite” (86). He goes on to explain the colonized person as mimic is “*almost the same but not white*” and that “the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction... at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between

6 Rhys’ choice of title for the novel underscores this idea. Rachel Carson writes that the Sargasso sea is “a place forgotten” where the weeds trap sea life and things live under a “process of fragmentation” (WSS 117-20).

lines and as such both against the rules and with them” (88-89). Much like a zombie or vampire, which occupy the space between life and death, Rhys’ white Creole protagonist, as a member of the moribund plantocracy class, occupies a space that is both familiar yet foreign in English eyes.

In the novel, Christophine (Antoinette’s Obeah nurse) says ‘She is not *béké*⁷ like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us [Black Creoles] either” (WSS 93). Unlike the class-based liminal space occupied by her literary sister Jane, Antoinette’s race and class position places her further outside of English normative constructions. In essence, because Jane can blend into English society as both a white woman and an English citizen living in England, she is less outside the idealized image of Englishness than is Antoinette as a Creole woman in the West Indies. Brontë also supports Jane’s independence through the plot device of inheritance. From her uncle Eyre, Jane inherits a fortune that he amassed in the West Indies (*JE* 327-330). Like Rochester then, her English individualism and independence relies on money taken from the Caribbean. Antoinette has no such luxury because, as Christophine notes, Rochester “marry [sic] her for her money and you [Rochester] take it all” (WSS 92). Antoinette also tells Christophine ““He would never give me any money to go away and he would be furious if I asked him. There would a scandal if I left him and he hates scandal. Even if I got away (and how?) he would force me back” (68). Just as the plantocracy class lost power to the new English

⁷ On page 68 of the Norton Critical Edition of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the term *béké* is defined as a white person.

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entrepreneurs in the years following emancipation, so has Antoinette lost her independence to her English husband.

Antoinette's identity as a white Creole is further defined by the idea that "the West Indian plantation owner, and by association, all the members of his family were convenient symbols of evil and immorality" (Ciolkowski 342). This association of the plantocracy class with immorality and malevolence shapes how those around her perceive Antoinette's identity. Her unnamed husband, the man who will become Jane's Mr. Rochester, "labors to make English sense out of this colonial confusion;" his labors are the efforts he makes to zombify his wife and his confusion lies in the duality of Antoinette as a white woman, yet also as a West Indian (342). Laura Ciolkowski further argues that Rhys' Rochester's reinvention of Antoinette into Bertha "maps out the process by which English men and women are made" (343). This process, the mission to civilize (colonize) a "native" wife, mirrors the acts of zombification. The goal of both practices is to remove all traces of previous humanity in a person and to replace it with the dreams, desires, and will of another.

Rochester's reaction to his time on the island and the Creole identity of his wife reflects a fear that "exotic excess...[will] spill over into and infect the innocence of the English body" (Ciolkowski 345). As his time in the threatening tropical landscape blurs reality, Rochester's fears of contamination hinge upon the creation of an image of a "highly infectious female carrier of disease" (346).

In this respect, the white female Creole acts in parallel to images of vampirism and zombification. The male body, the supreme representative of the Empire's strength, has its "very integrity...contingent on the protection of the English body from the foreign matter that threatens it" (347). Rochester feels isolated by what he sees as a hostile environment when he tells Antoinette that he "feel[s] that this place is my enemy and on your side" (WSS 78). The climax of his fears comes when he ingests the Obeah tonic. He drinks the wine offered to him and he wakes from a dream of being buried alive and vomits (82-83). His response to this delusional state is to seek out Amélie, a black Creole double for Antoinette, and have sex with her (84-85). The reaction he has, as he shapes it in his narrative, speaks to the English notion that his body suffers from a supposed contamination by the secret forces of the island as the reason behind his subsequent fall into exotic sin. He frames himself as victim, and uses this as justification for his subsequent imprisonment of his wife.

Concluding Remarks

Whether she is a vampyre or a zombie, the Creole woman in Brontë and Rhys is marked as a uniquely undead other. She illuminates the fears of normative English society, highlights the practice and consequences of colonialism, and speaks back to the European Gothic tradition—asking to be heard. When we meet her as Antoinette Cosway, the mother narrative that inspired her always already defines

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her. She will forever be Bertha Mason- Rochester, the mad butterfly, a transformed specter locked in an attic waiting to burn her prison to the ground. However, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* answers Bertha's call in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*—Bertha's fight to be recognized—giving her the voice she demands. A Gothic reading of these two texts offers readers the opportunity to more deeply explore the transformation cycle of Bertha/Antoinette through both novels' use of living-dead imagery. In this reading, the figure of the white Creole woman transcends the very cornerstone binaries used to other her: the division between living and dead, male and female, colonizer and colonized. Through this transcendence, her character becomes more complex and she becomes more than just her archetype. The madwoman in the attic is a vampire, a zombie, and in her un-death she will outlive us all.

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Rhetorical Selves and the Pedagogy of Writing

D. SETH HORTON

I remember the first time I discovered something about my beliefs through the process of writing. I was reading John Hawkes's *Second Skin* against Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* for an essay I was working on several years ago about different types of postcolonial hybridity. Up until this point, John Hawkes had been a literary hero of mine, a writer I once even mimicked in the beginning of my own creative development. And yet, in the course of writing my essay, I found myself arguing that Hawkes's book represented an Anglo exoticization of the Other and should thus be understood as a de-historicized, hegemonic, myth. I was, as can be imagined, shocked. And while the particulars of this experience are solely personal, it is no doubt a common occurrence, at least amongst literary scholars and creative writers, that writing has the power to change the writer's mind. Now that several years have passed and I have had time to serenely reflect on how my rhetoric affected my self, I'm prepared to theorize a notion of self-rhetoric that will, I hope, have pedagogical consequences. I begin by offering a brief overview of various post-Aristotelian rhetorical developments so as to situate the undercurrents within and behind the major aspects of my argument. I then attempt to theorize a rhetorical situation wherein one time-slice of

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the rhetorical self effects another time-slice of the rhetorical self. Finally, I close the essay by tracing the pedagogical ramifications of my argument, which, for reasons discussed below, I hold as a *necessary* component for all compositional theory.

(I)

On Rhetoric exudes an epistemological confidence that strikes the modern rhetorician, trained in the post-foundationalist milieu of contemporary English studies, as problematic. Aristotle argues that there are two rhetorical methodologies, each of which corresponds to similar concepts in dialectics: an enthymeme is the rhetorical version of the syllogism, and the example is similar to the process of induction (40). While he goes on to treat such things as emotions and style, these are clearly of secondary importance, and thus his rhetoric is primarily situated between two or more persons wherein an epistemological dialectic yields knowledge and/or capital ‘T’ Truth.

Because the notion of rhetorical epistemology continues to influence the study of rhetoric, especially in the field’s claims of legitimacy against, primarily, literary studies and analytical epistemology, contemporary rhetoricians have focused much of their work on expanding, problematizing, and theorizing the various relationships between Aristotle’s *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Examples abound. Bitzer argues that all rhetoric is situational and thus develops the

Aristotelian model by defining a rhetorical situation as “a complex of person, events, and objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence” (304). Lunsford and Glenn argue that the univocality of the speaker, listener, and message has now developed into polyvocal templates that shift situationally (177). Berlin, challenging the Aristotelian notion that the relationship between truth and rhetoric is simply that the latter expresses the former, argues for a New Rhetoric epistemology that posits truth as constructed through dialectical language, which is to say that *logos* is affected by the interactions of *ethos* and *pathos* (776). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note the power structures embedded in *logos*, as for example when the state uses propaganda to influence its public (17-19).

Although the particularities of these positions are not without problems, their general thrust towards positioning rhetoric dynamically between the crossroads of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* is an exciting development. That said, one can't help but notice the institutional influences that have resulted in a rather large, though previously unnoticed, rhetorical gap as it relates to the rhetorical subject. Composition theorists tend to foreground *logos*, which is not surprising given that introductory writing courses, as Sharon Crowley reminds us, ideally teach students to write in such a way that enables

them to transfer their writing skills to courses throughout the curriculum (7).

When theorists do write about the rhetorical subject, they tend to do so in one of two ways. Looking at the rhetorical subject from the outside in, so to speak, William Perry writes about the cognitive growth of the writer, a method often based on statistics and exegesis of actual student writing. Within this approach the rhetorical subject loses a certain degree of agency, and thus subjectivity, placed as she is within an overall developmental framework that deemphasizes the idiosyncrasies of her own individuality. Or, one might analyze the rhetorical subject from the inside out, following the lead of Peter Elbow, who discusses how to get power through voice. However, because he seems to conceive of the self as standing outside culture, language, etc., power is merely the ability to affect the audience, not the ability to affect oneself. Of course, most theorists who address the rhetorical subject do so somewhere between the extremes of Perry and Elbow. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, for example, discuss the role of audience in composition theory and pedagogy, but nowhere do they consider the possibility of the self as audience member. E. D. Hirsch foregrounds the importance of readability in the practice of composition as, for example, in his notion of relative readability, a position that seemingly affected Linda Flower in her theory of Writer-Based and Reader-Based prose.

All of these approaches, however, suffer from a

similar tendency to simplify the unpredictable quirks, complexities, and insights experienced by the rhetorical subject as she engages herself within the rhetorical situation. I will return to this topic later, when I deal with pedagogy and suggest a technique that explores, rather than silences, the rhetorical self. The claim I am making at this juncture of the essay, then, is simply that the institutional linkage between rhetoric and composition has resulted in a silencing of the concept of self-rhetoric. It is my hope that this essay begins to address this theoretical void.

(II)

My notion of the rhetorical self derives from poststructuralist theory. One of the best summaries I've read on the subject is by Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr., who I quote at length:

Selves do not emerge as they choose to do things with rhetoric; rather, rhetoric continually does things to selves. Selves are not creative agents working within the core of the rhetorical process; instead, selves are the effects of rhetoric, a sort of epiphenomena constituted by an interplay of social, political, and linguistic forces. There is no inner entity, the self, that chooses its character. Instead, the self reflects the particular character of larger social forces that determine its nature and movement. Additionally, the self is not necessarily constant or consistent over time.

Different social situations trigger different self-structures; it is a mistake to assume an inner core of the self that somehow grounds the various roles the self assumes (5).

While a short essay such as this is no place to begin to tackle the complex issue of poststructuralist identity in any kind of detail, suffice it to say here that the self, in this view, is constructed through rhetorical language and discourse, which means that the self is both the subject and object of language. Language is not a mere conduit that relates the thoughts of the subject to an audience; rather, it has the power to construct, affect, and change the subject. Thus a person can, and often does, create a discourse that s/he doesn't yet assent to, but in time and with a sufficient amount of reflection, realizes that the composition is accurate.

Assuming a version of the poststructuralist theory/theories of self/selves as broadly described above is correct, several interesting aspects of composition are affected, including audience and the aesthetic desirability of a text's unification. In terms of audience, while I of course advocate that we must recognize that the writer is the first reader of her own text, thereby complicating reader response theory, the theory of multiple rhetorical selves does not necessarily lead to Walter Ong's infamous and radical position that the writer's audience is always a fiction. He argues that the writer constructs his audience, which means that the audience is a complete fiction. Broadly speaking, he is, of course, correct, but as Pfister and Petrick point out, writers "must construct

in the[ir] imagination an audience that is as nearly a replica as is possible of those many readers who actually exist in the world of reality and who are reading the writer's words" (214). This is simply to say that my theory of the rhetorical self does not necessarily dictate a singular response to the broader issues of audience, except in the insistence that the writer is also a reader of her own text. One result of this is that the writer is a legitimate evaluator of her own writing. Interestingly enough, Susan Miller has noticed that her students knew perfectly well if their writing had been successful or not. Regardless, while the instructor is the final arbiter of grades, this doesn't mean that the instructor is the final arbiter of the quality of writing. Indeed, this responsibility must be left solely up to the student.

Also, as Alcorn states later in his essay, we should no longer necessarily celebrate unification as an aesthetic ideal. If the writer's rhetorical selves are in conflict, then the more honest text would highlight, rather than hide, the inconsistencies. Anomalies in writing, rather than being judged negatively, might very well be understood as signs of a new aesthetic appreciation that no longer tries to control and limit individual selves, which would, as Joseph Gemin points out, create avenues of expression for those afflicted with "mental illness," especially those with multiple personality disorder. Relatedly, we ought not expect a writer to know what s/he is going to argue prior to the act of composition. Outlines, though perhaps still useful, are nevertheless problematic and should thus never

be a requirement. In general, any “tool” that intercedes in the writing process ought not be a required assignment. Rather, the actual processes of writing and revision should be foregrounded at all times.

(III)

Compositional theory is currently situated within a field of contestation that threatens the legitimacy of its research. In a recent volume of essays acting as a textual prolegomena to graduate work in English studies by outlining the reconfigurations that have drastically altered the state of literary studies post-New Criticism, Richard Marius bitterly complains that “I can think of no book or article devoted to research or theory that has made a particle of difference in the general teaching of composition for the past twenty or thirty years...” (466). He goes on to mention the oft-noted problem that the field of composition is bifurcated between specialists—those who hold Ph.D’s, run writing programs, and publish—and the teachers, adjunct faculty, and graduate students who teach introductory writing courses at universities, community colleges, and public schools. Sharon Crowley, amongst others, has written a detailed account of the institutionalization of composition studies, suggesting that if and when the field exists independently of English department, the “unprofessional employment practices” surrounding introductory writing courses be reconsidered (18). If this were to occur, presumably one result would be

that composition instructors would have more free time to study the literature of the field, thereby minimizing the gap between theory and praxis that currently exists. However one might react to the current situatedness of composition studies, it is my contention that theorists *must* offer specific articulations of how their research influences pedagogical practices in the classroom. Otherwise, both individual projects and the field at large will be vulnerable to objections concerning justification and irrelevancy. To avoid self-referential problems, the remainder of my essay briefly sketches the pedagogical implications of my view.

There are primarily two reasons why the rhetorical self is not emphasized in composition classes. First, composition theorists are concerned with pedagogical models designed to assist the teaching of academic writing and thus notions of subjectivity and/or self-exploration threaten the legitimacy of writing courses that promise, at least in theory, to improve student writing in such a way that their skills are transferable to other academic areas of writing. Second, the writing instructor simply doesn't have the necessary time to consider the minute complexities of each rhetorical self as s/he engages in various ongoing rhetorical situations throughout the classroom. To acknowledge pragmatic classroom concerns should not, however, always necessitate a simplification of the rhetorical subject. Simply because we instructors lack epistemic insight into the subjectivity of our students' rhetorical selves does not mean that we cannot spend class time allowing them to address the fluidity of their rhetorical selves.

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In order to accomplish this task, we must temporarily create a rhetorical situation that protects our students' rhetorical selves from too heavy an influence from either their own rhetorical compositions and/or audience feedback from teacher and students alike. One way of doing this would be to set aside ten or fifteen minutes every other week for students to journal about their reactions to their compositions. It must be clarified from the beginning that nobody else will read what they write, for otherwise their rhetorical selves will posture in order to influence the rhetorical situation in their favor. This exercise will assist the student in creating a dialogue between their self and their rhetorical self, which should, eventually, strengthen their rhetorical and compositional abilities. In-class discussions about their journals would also be fruitful, for when student hear that some of their fellow classmates have unexpectedly changed their minds because of something they wrote, they just might begin to reflect on the power of their own rhetorical selves. The possibility of, as Stanley puts it, "a self-confident individualism and a fluid and ever-changing conception of the self" (1), strikes me as a highly desirable and achievable goal for students to attain at the beginning of their university education. That such a view attempts to revise the notion of invention in such a way that might help to bridge the current theoretical gap between rhetorical and literary theory is an added benefit

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The Task of the Biographer: Walter Benjamin and the Art of the Modern Biography

JOHN B. KINCHELOE

In one of his crucial texts on the art of translation, “The Task of the Translator,” German philosopher Walter Benjamin quotes Stephane Mallarme to try to get at the core problem with language:

The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent; the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialize as truth (77).

This quotation succinctly sums up, for Benjamin as for us, the problems that we face in a world saturated with language, culture, and modern technology. We face a severe “plurality” in our means of communication, and our ways of sharing information. In fact, it is possible that through this “diversity of idioms” something of our greatest art, knowledge, and lives may be lost. It is this something that Benjamin calls “Aura.” The aura’s tendency is to be an inevitable offspring of what Mallarme calls “the supreme one,” or what Benjamin refers to as “the true language.” It is through this “tensionless and even silent depository of the

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ultimate truth which all thought strives for” (76) that we find the great truth in our discourse and thought.

This yearning for a greater truth is the motivation for Benjamin’s thesis: it is the task of the translator, the interpreter of artifacts for new audiences, to combat the sorrowful trends in modern culture to dilute the messages of art through not interacting with them. It seems that it has always been that translation is simply the dissemination of content to new audiences, further building upon a message that has already been reported. However, it is Benjamin’s thought that “no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original” (74). Indeed, simple accuracy is the tendency for any translator that—through laziness or otherwise—sends culture down this road of simplistic messages. Although we think “kinship of languages manifests itself in translations, this is not accomplished through a vague likeness between adaptation and original” (Benjamin, 75). Rather, it is the job of the translator to reach back to that ideal Benjamin discusses with his concept of aura. Translators should not see themselves as disseminators of information and work; they should notice themselves as critics, challengers, and combatants of good art. There needs to be an “element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject matter” (75).

But let’s step back a moment. Benjamin defines aura generally, in a manner that could ostensibly fit just about any artifact in cultural history. What other elements of culture could contain an aura worthy of translation? Of course

literature, paintings, poetry, rhetoric and other traditional forms of art would qualify, but what about fashion trends, cultural achievements or human lives even? In terms of human life, it would have to be different from the concept of soul: whereas souls are ethereal life forces that traverse life and death and maintain the connection to our earthly being beyond the grave, aura would encapsulate not only one's accomplishments and personal connections, but a sense of the effect that one has had on the world and their greater cultural and societal influence. If we are to agree that this is the case, then the translator in search of any one person's aura would be the biographer.

In 2011, there were three biographies published that gained significant notoriety in the culture of American non-fiction prose. So much so in fact, that they were all nominated for the prestigious National Book Award. Deborah Baker's *The Convert*, Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, and Lauren Redniss's *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout* were each significantly lauded for their unique approach to their subject, innovation in the genre of biography and memoir, and critical popularity. Each work uniquely employs three distinct tools in the construction of a biography: employment of historical documents, inclusion of the subject's voice, and poetic license of the author. These works are meant, at least according to the National Book Award selection committee, to stand as quintessential achievements in modern biography. Therefore, it stands to reason that they should

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be the investigative nucleus from which we approach the connection between the art of modern biography and how it approaches Walter Benjamin's thoughts on translation and the concept of capturing aura.

Further on in Walter Benjamin's discussion of the task of the translator, he uses a particularly poignant analogy to describe the actions a translator takes in pursuit of aura: "[T]ranslation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (76). In the three NBA1 biographies, their authors pursue a similar "echo" of their subjects; the process is quite the same as that of Benjamin's translator. They are never embedded with the subject, able to speak from the center of a life-force and philosophical origin, as in autobiography. Rather they stand at an etic distance from the subject, "calling in" with their own "language," or mode of intention toward the subject and their life. Through their unique process of investigation, they attempt to understand and portray the subject's "echo" through the filter of their own voice and process.

Malcolm X is a very contentious figure in American cultural history. Through decades of discussion, publication, and other forms of modern reproduction, this complex man and self-structured political figure has been transformed into a cultural icon. His face not only represents struggle and racial triumph, but a revolutionary ideal and powerful

militant voice that is shared by many, surprisingly diverse modern groups. He is a martyr, a myth, and a commercial icon. So when Manning Marable, Professor of History at Columbia University, decided to take on this massive character in American society, he wanted to find a new way of understanding the man behind the mission and message, someone who was greatly influenced by the historical context in which he was working, and someone whose vulnerability and humanity can only be echoed through the filter of observational resources and personal relation.

Marable is an historian by trade, so it is only right that he spent over a decade meticulously researching the historical documentation that would make up the bulk of his source material for *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. In fact, historical documents seem to be the only avenue with which Marable can truly achieve his purpose in writing this biography: “My primary purpose in this book is to go beyond the legend: to recount what actually occurred in Malcolm’s life” (12). While this is a feat up for debate when one reads the work, he does purport to getting at sources that were heretofore unheard in the chronicling of Malcolm X’s life: “I also present the facts that Malcolm himself could not know, such as the extent of illegal FBI and [NYPD] surveillance,... the truth about those among his supporters who betrayed him politically and personally, and the identification of those responsible for Malcolm’s assassination” (12). This body of research, coupled with Marable’s personal filter as an historian, set the stage for a narrative framed around

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the life of Malcolm X, one that reads more like an historical chronicle than a biographical narrative.

So it seems the “echo” that Marable is looking for in his deconstruction of the life of Malcolm X is one that is based not on the voice of the man himself, which was steeped in rhetoric and personal agenda, but on a more historically-grounded vision of his life, that was entirely separate from the mythology that was created by and around him: “The historical Malcolm, the man with all his strengths and flaws, was being strangled by the iconic legend that had been constructed around him” (490). But in this “calling in” dedicated to exposing a depth of historical context and levels of reinvention in his subject, Marable sidesteps his self-appointed role as observer and historian, inserting his own voice and poetic choice into the structure of the work, reshaping his biographical process to meet Benjamin’s concept of translation as a “relation between one language and another rather than an exact correspondence” (70).

In describing Malcolm’s early life as a street hustler, Marable comes to shocking possible conclusion about the nature of Malcolm’s sexuality: “Based on circumstantial but strong evidence, Malcolm was probably describing his own homosexual encounters with Paul Lennon” (66). This conclusion, based on what even Marable describes as “circumstantial” evidence, is at the core of his poetic license in *Reinvention*, and perhaps the most important aspect in his pursuit of the aura of Malcolm’s life. In a few choice sections of his chronicle, Marable skirts his responsibilities

as historian and observer in order to point out certain ideas and details in Malcolm's life. The fact that he points them out, as well as make judgments about them, as he does when he calls Malcolm's choice to meet with the KKK "despicable" (179), exposes his "language" through which he "calls in" to his subject. In other words, it helps us understand his unique perspective as the biographer that allows him to approach his subject's aura.

Manning Marable is an historian, but he is also a member of the African American community. This dual membership keeps him from being completely objective in his discussion of the life of Malcolm X, but also sheds light on what it means to be the translator of the aura of someone's life. In order to fully understand and continue the life of a work of art, or in this case life of an icon, the life must be translated because "[the] translation marks [its] stage of continued life" (Benjamin, 73). Marable found his voice, simultaneously separating himself from the life of Malcolm X, interacting with it, and judging it, in his "call" into the "forest." In so doing, he revealed and contributed to the continued aura of the life of Malcolm X.

Radioactive: A Tale of Love and Fallout is Lauren Redniss's graphic biography of two pioneers of modern science: Marie and Pierre Curie. These Polish and French (respectively) physicists were fundamental in the discovery of two naturally radioactive elements, radium and polonium, that sparked a revolution in the understanding of the atomic world, and led to scientific developments that both

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greatly aided humanity and created massive destruction. These figures, through their complicated personal lives and poisonous nature of their work, became complex icons in the history of western culture. Their aura has been diluted by their reputation in the scientific world. This has caused them to be seen as sentimental and tortured figures that simultaneously made breakthrough discoveries that defined their cultural relevance, but also were responsible for their own physical and emotional downfall. To reach this aura, without falling prey to a modern reproduction of their story, Redniss found that the best approach was to frame her “call” from the standpoint of a romantic, looking at the inter-connectivity not only with one another and the people in their lives, but of their discoveries with society and culture.²

The historical documentation Redniss employs in *Radioactive* serves only to provide it the intellectual and research authority to be called a biography. In pursuit of her subject’s aura, Redniss included historical events and details, including quotes and documents that acted as artifacts in the narrative, not only to provide credentials for her literary journey through the connectedness of Curie’s life to be called a biography, but also as evidence of said connectedness. For instance, at one point Redniss includes the FBI file for Irving Lowen, a scientist associated with the Manhattan Project, as well as an exchange between him and then-presidential couple Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt (77-79). She credits Lowen for helping to convince the United States government to ramp up their experimentation and weaponization of

radioactive materials, before being blacklisted and booted from the Manhattan Project. These documents, along with others, are what represent this attention to detail about the influence of Curie's discoveries on the lives and culture of the modern world, and what gives this work its backbone as a biography. These documents also serve—along with the voice of Curie and the various people in her intimate life—as another type of fundamental support system: one that frames and holds up Redniss's "call" for the aura of Marie Curie as a figure connected to the progression of Western culture.

At the beginning of *Radioactive*, before the main action of the work, author Lauren Redniss issues an apology to her subject: "With apologies to Marie Curie, who said, 'There is no connection between my scientific work and the facts of private life'" (2). This assertion of guilt serves as our first inclination of the "call" that Redniss issues to her subject: one that is meant to elicit Curie's aura in spite of the author's personal beliefs and feelings on the matter, and frame Redniss's meditation on the connections that society and culture share with their inhabitants.

Although, however she is characterized as to the connections that she felt existed between her work and personal life, Marie Curie, whose voice is frequent throughout the book, is given abundant credit as to her own feelings and interpretations of the events of her life. Her words frame every chapter with a quote from one of her many journals—which remain radioactive after all

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these years. Furthermore we are sometimes left with just her words to interpret a specific event in her life, like the first meeting with her true love: “Upon entering the room I perceived...the grave and gentle expression of his face, as well as a certain abandon in his attitude, suggesting the dreamer absorbed in his reflections” (27). Redniss picks her references to Curie’s voice carefully, like these that constitute the entire 27th page, allowing her words to create the romantic connections that are the core of the “echo” Redniss elicits from her subject. So while her words may be questioned and challenged by Redniss in order to get close to the aura of her greater influence on society, Curie is given the opportunity to express her feelings about the connections that mattered most to her. But these feelings are only part of a greater poetic structure that Redniss designs in this work. The bulk of the mode of intention is based on Redniss’s own poetic license, and her ability to create connections through art and design.

Radioactive is the only of the numerous works that became finalists for the National Book Award in 2011 that can be considered graphic (National). Every page, while for the most part being accompanied by text, is laden with artwork designed, arranged, and created by the author. This choice, to design her biography in the form of a work of visual and literary art, is where the true mode of intention for Redniss lies. Her poetic license in this work is organized and designed to elicit the aura of connectivity that she sought from her subject through creating this work. Redniss

includes maps, drawings, diagrams, photos, historical documents, and many other artifacts that visually bind the story of Marie Curie to the different aspects of her life. This connectivity extends down to the very typeface the text is printed on, as well as how most of the images in the work were constructed. Redniss's artistic voice of connectivity permeates every aspect of this biography, exposing the connections in Curie's life and work, as well as showing the inter-connectedness that we all share.

It is through this process that Redniss achieves the "relation" that Benjamin requires from good translation. Benjamin includes for his translators a criteria based on the idea that "the intention...of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational (76)." In *Radioactive*, Redniss finds the aura of Curie, and the "echo" she wishes to gain from the memory and legacy of this figure through her own unique artistic structure. It is a derivation of the results of Curie's work and the artifacts from her life and others, intercut and combined with her personal account of the relationships in her life, ultimately providing an ideated romantic vision of the translations and connections that take place in our society.

The ideas of derivation that were so prevalent in Redniss's work, along with an ideational element that elicits the author's closeness to the subject, are what make author Deborah Baker's "call" to the aura of contentious historical figure Maryam Jameelah a perfect example of a biographical connection to Walter Benjamin's translator. Baker's subject

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is Margaret Marcus, who later became known as Maryam Jameelah. Left alone to discover the world, by the age of 19 Margaret became enthralled with the world and culture of fundamental Islam. She eventually moved to Pakistan and lived under the tutelage of an extremely conservative Islamic figure. Her aura has been characterized in Western culture as a powerful force of anti-American, anti-feminist thought, mainly because of the rhetoric in her published works. This is where Baker attempted to approach Jameelah, but her “call” was not to understand someone so politically extreme, but to chronicle the life and decisions of an historical figure with the lens of curiosity at the forefront. So while Baker’s greater intention is noble, her mode of intention can sometimes be misleading and incomplete, but Benjamin’s theory of translation does not exclude the translators that are incomplete. Rather he applauds the translator who engages in a critique of their subject, actively challenging it with a relationship based on personal connection and intimacy; which is precisely the criteria in which we find *The Convert*.

Baker’s employment of historical records in *The Convert* is mainly based on 24 letters written by Maryam Jameelah. It is these letters that drive the narrative of the work, exposing the audience to the different events of Jameelah’s life, and her supposed reasoning behind her actions and impressions of the Western world. She intertwines the letters with commentary, context, and personal thought to give the audience a complete picture of this complex woman and her experiences. Unfortunately, the historical

accuracy of the letters is thrown into question at the close: “[U]nless her words are accompanied by quotation marks and a specific citation, the actual and imaginary letters of Maryam Jameelah do not appear as she wrote them...I have re-written and greatly condensed these letters” (225). This jarring and somewhat misleading admission is where we find that the source of Baker’s “call” derives from her own voice. It is not the actual words of Maryam Jameelah that become the most important source material for this book; rather the true “call” of *The Convert* lies in Baker’s interpretation of those words, as well as her encounter with Jameelah and understanding the historical context in which she lived.

Because Baker’s interpretation of, and internal struggle with, Maryam’s words are the driving force for Baker’s attempt at reaching Maryam’s aura, it is not surprising that, when given the opportunity to interview Maryam, Baker spends so much time pushing back and criticizing Maryam for her thoughts and opinions. Towards the end of the narrative, Baker travels to Pakistan to meet Maryam Jameelah face-to-face. She is at times confused and somewhat disappointed in comparison with her experience with her letters: “Her letters moved and perplexed me. Her books unsettled me, stirred me into another way of looking at the complacent assumptions of my world. In person, however, Maryam seemed less sure of herself than her books had led me to believe” (196). The book is so concerned with Maryam’s own words, yet the author is so unsure of their quality or sincerity.

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Perhaps the most important thing she does in these conversations, in order to get at the aura of Maryam, is to push back and critique Maryam for what she sees as inauthentic correspondence with her: “There was a rehearsed quality to the speeches. She never repeated herself and she spoke in perfect paragraphs...I found myself impatiently completing her sentences” (198). Baker begins questioning Maryam at every turn, and even writes her a letter pushing against her rehearsed speeches, and asking her to own up to her contradictory thought process and actions. She finds that Maryam has no more desire to answer her questions honestly than to be candid in their interviews. But the critique that Baker exercises in this is the true testament to her work as an act of good translation. Whether she is being genuine or not, through Baker’s process, she gives her audience a closeness and intimacy with her subject that at least strives authentically for Jameelah’s aura.

In *The Convert*, Baker’s poetic license and choices that create her “call” to Maryam’s aura may seem extreme, but it is an exercise in the creative act of finding a place of resonance in the original that will serve as the launching point for a new understanding of that subject (Benjamin, 79). Most importantly throughout her creative journey, Baker is set upon critiquing the life of Maryam, intimately interacting with Maryam’s intentions and words, becoming them and trying to understand them at the same time.

When all is said and done, Benjamin’s concept of aura and his task of the translator desire one thing: steps toward

reaching a greater ideal, an understanding that transcends the differences among us and unites all of us in a harmony of knowledge. Benjamin calls this “the true language.” However, it is unachievable, and Benjamin knows this. Like the logarithmic curve in mathematics, if all variables are perfect we will only approach this understanding forever.

But this is an addendum to the task of the translator. Benjamin’s translators are not asked to be perfect, to achieve this true language in any fashion, but it is their burden to find the aura of their subject through their own mode of intention. The results of which will reach toward that true language that is “concealed in concentrated fashion in translations” (Benjamin, 77). In the realm of biography, there are several means of achieving this reach with the complex, culturally-embedded lives that we choose to translate: whether that is the understanding of a cultural figure’s life through painstakingly detailed research and subtle critique, or a romantic interpretation of the connectivity that ripples out from a figure’s personal life and scientific discoveries, or an internal journey to challenge, understand, and critique the thoughts and actions of a complex life of faith. But regardless of the means of doing so, it is the task of the biographer, as it is with the translator, to capture their subject in such a way so as to bring out their aura through connection and critique, and push them into a new realm of understanding and cultural relevance. Because with the intersection of good translation, an “original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air” (75)

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Privilege vs. Passion: Class Identity in Sherwood Anderson's "The Strength of God"

N.T. McQUEEN

Sherwood Anderson's classic portrayal of rural, American life has been lauded for the novel's psychologically insightful portrayal of human experience. The primary consensus among critics is the work examines more intimate, personal repression of the characters' individual desires and dreams. However, on closer examination, a deeper social issue permeates from between the words. Throughout the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio*, there are hints of a deeper, more political commentary on class structure that is woven within the characters of the stories. A story that most exemplifies this commentary in Anderson's collection is "The Strength of God." In this story, we find all the hallmarks of a classic Anderson short story such as repressive desires, psychological turmoil, and unique characters. But, underneath the obvious, literal struggles, Anderson is using his characters as tools to address a more complex, social issue surfacing in his fictional town; the issue of hegemony. Anderson uses the characters of Rev. Curtis Hartman, Kate Swift, and George Willard to personify class structures. Each character is a representation of Antonio Gramsci's ideas regarding hegemony, primarily the intellectual and production classes and how members of the intellectual class are bound to the class they are born into.

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Through these characters, Anderson, whether conscious or not, is commenting on the role of subalterns in a hegemonic society. This is displayed by how the characters interact with each other and how the dominant class promotes Gramsci's hegemony. By examining Anderson's personal life, we will also discover how his own personal views on capitalism and class reinforce this hegemonic belief within his story "The Strength of God" and how these beliefs work upon the subconscious desire of Rev. Curtis Hartman.

It is important that we define hegemony as to avoid any confusion. Hegemony is an implied power. The dominant group, or hegemon, rules over its subordinates through the threat of power rather than the exercise of military force. With that stated, it is important to understand the theory of "cultural" hegemony, pioneered by Antonio Gramsci in 1930. Gramsci believed in a more invidious means of hegemonic control, one that uses social class structures in order to maintain control over the dominated class; in other words, the use of subalterns. Gramsci divided the dominated society into two classes: the production and the intellectuals. The production class is the lower strata and the intellectuals are subalterns. In Gramsci's words, "the intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (673). The intellectual class functions as subalterns who reinforce ideologies through speech, media, and other influential mediums. Occupations included in the intellectual class are positions such as ministers and journalists. In the words of

David Sallach, “the dominant class uses its privileged access to ideological institutions (religion, education, culture, media) to propagate values which reinforce its structural position” (41). This information is important to note when applied to Anderson’s “The Strength of God” because two primary characters, Rev. Hartman and George Willard, function within Winesburg as subalterns.

Despite the fact that Anderson wrote “The Strength of God” a decade before Gramsci published his ideas of cultural hegemony, it is not difficult to find evidence within Anderson’s personal life that leads toward a more socialist belief system. The evidence from biographers like Kim Townsend suggest Anderson’s personal, political beliefs were prophetic of Gramsci’s ideology. Though Anderson’s personal beliefs can be considered separate from his literary work, the similarities between his experience and text draw some interesting parallels. In the character of Rev. Curtis Hartman, it is evident there is an element of Anderson’s personal experience that resonates from the pages. Rev. Hartman’s wife “was the daughter of a manufacturer of underwear at Cleveland, Ohio” (257) while Anderson’s first wife, Cornelia, was also the daughter of a successful business man who owned R.H. Lane & Company (Townsend, 51). During Rev. Hartman’s repressive passion for Kate Swift, he “thought of his wife and for the moment almost hated her” (262). Likewise, Anderson harbored these same antagonistic thoughts toward Cornelia. He “hated being married to her” and, in Anderson’s own words, stated, “I pictured her as my

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jailer and terrible hate woke in me. At night I even dreamed of killing her” (Townsend, 71). Similarly, Rev. Hartman had little “experience with women” (258) as did Anderson. These examples show a distinct parallel to Rev. Hartman’s life as a semblance of Anderson’s own struggles of repressed desire toward a more passionate existence.

Since the above example illustrates a semi-autobiographical correlation, within the text of “The Strength of God,” it is possible to extricate resemblances to Anderson’s political views. V.F. Calverton cites Sherwood Anderson as an author, among others of the time, “who have become either active Marxians or who have at least admitted their passive allegiance to the Marxian outlook” (131). In a letter written in 1929, Anderson wrote, “I have felt a going back toward my own people, working people” (Townsend, 255). Though written a decade after “The Strength of God”, Anderson’s quote hearkens toward the notion that he belongs to the “working” or, in Gramsci’s terms, the “production” class. It is in this class that Anderson was born to and identified himself with. Though he strove to ascend the social ladder, his birthright placed him within the lower, working class. Anderson may not have been aware of his political or social sense at the time he first penned his collection, but this comment hints to a strong sense of social grounding embedded in Anderson’s subconscious.

We see earlier that Anderson believed that he felt a part of the production class, or the class he was bound to by birth. This autobiographical parallel compliments the idea

that Rev. Hartman's desire toward Kate Swift is a desire to descend class structures and become a member of his birth bound social class, rather than the literal, sexual infatuation displayed in the text. The reason Rev. Hartman feels that he is more suited to descend the social ladder stems from Gramsci's notion that the intellectual class is essentially "class-bound." According to Kurzmen and Owens, the intellectuals can either be their own class, class-bound by birth, or classless. Gramsci believed that the intellectual class was divided into two groups: traditional and organic. In Kurzmen and Owens's words, "the bourgeoisie produced its own intellectuals and the proletariat produced their own" (65). Thus the "organic" intellectuals were produced by the production class while "traditional" intellectuals, such as priests and journalists, established themselves in their own minds as a different class entirely, regardless of the class they were bound to by birth. In "The Strength of God", Rev. Hartman is an "organic" intellectual in a role as a subaltern, allowed by the Presbyterian Church (the dominant group or hegemon) to function as a "traditional" intellectual to maintain ideology and enforce hegemonic principles. However, his status as a class-bound intellectual affects him through sub-conscious manipulation, hence his desire for Kate Swift is one of political passion and his role as a "traditional" intellectual, primarily a religious leader, is of the utmost importance.

Rev. Hartman's position as a religious leader is another important factor in understanding his role in the

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hegemony of Winesburg. Gramsci had his own beliefs and opinions toward religion. However, they were not entirely antagonistic. For Gramsci, “religion is always a political force” (Fulton, 198) and, whether Rev. Hartman is aware or unaware of his role, his position as pastor reinforces the hegemon’s hegemonic power by its congruous assertion that religion is, as Gramsci believes, a political force. Rev. Hartman’s desire to return to his bound class is, ultimately, a desire for an “intellectual and moral reformation” (Fulton, 197). Gramsci believed that a production class revolution by means of violence is futile and the only way for a socialist revolution to be successful is through “a revolution of the mind and heart, worked on painstakingly by the party faithful” (199). This is what Rev. Hartman’s subconscious desire seeks. He seeks a reformation of the class structures positioned by the hegemon and desires an alliance among subalterns and the masses to alter the cultural hegemony established. However, Rev. Hartman also struggles with another concern of his traditional role.

With his traditional role, he has been given the benefits of that position such as wealth and power. These comforts alone separate him from the “poor” working class to which he was born. This leaves Hartman with a conundrum between passion and privilege and creates a spiritual, emotional, and physical struggle within him. When he first views Kate Swift through the open window, “he was horror stricken” by her smoking and felt guilt for gazing at her “bare shoulders and white throat” (258). From

first sight, the inner stirrings of desire have awakened in him and, from this sight, “a struggle awoke.” He is captive to her and struggles daily with desire to view her on the bed. His role as an intellectual becomes endangered by his desire: he “forgot his sermon”, “he did not know what he wanted”, and “he began to blame God.” His desire to return to his class is signified in Kate Swift and, as a result, his ability to perform his hegemonic duties becomes jeopardized. Near the end of the story, he resolves to “besiege this school teacher” and thinks that he “would get out of the ministry and try some other way of life.” He is even nauseated from his desire to leave his position on the day he decides to abscond from his traditional role; he “trembled from head to foot”, “fever assailed his body”, and “his throat began to hurt.” This sequence of events and struggles are Hartman’s inability to fully commit to the socialist ideology of his born class and his inability to abscond the comforts of his position as an enforcer of cultural hegemony to the point that “he could not understand himself.” The epiphany for Rev. Hartman at the end of the story is an example of how integrated hegemonic principles are in a societal system. Instead of pursuing his passion, Rev. Hartman becomes threatened by Kate Swift when he sees her act of contrition:

“With a final outburst of weeping she half arose, and in the presence of the man who had waited to look and to think thoughts the woman of sin began to pray. In the lamplight her figure... looked like the figure of the boy in the presence of the Christ on the leaded window” (262).

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For Rev. Hartman, Kate Swift's action to pray becomes a threat. In his eyes, her decision is an attempt to ascend the social structure; to move from the production class to intellectual status. Rev. Hartman thinks he believes that Kate Swift's movement toward religion is an act of God's grace and that his lustful struggle has been a device to redeem her of her worldly ways.

However, Hartman's subconscious recognizes her action as a threat to become one with him. His true epiphany is that passion for an "intellectual and moral reformation" is secondary to the security and comfort of his subaltern status within the hegemonic social strata. If Kate Swift were to accompany Hartman as an organic intellectual in a traditional intellectual role, his power and status becomes diminished. Hartman's epiphany to retain his position as an agent of cultural hegemony is further evidenced through his interaction with George Willard. Hartman "went and ran in at the door of the *Winesburg Eagle*...to George Willard" and claims God had appeared to him "in the body of Kate Swift" (263). The significance of Hartman's action of confiding with George Willard about his struggle and decision is linked to George Willard's role as a traditional intellectual as a journalist. Some may view Hartman's correspondence with George Willard as coincidence, but when viewed along with the other evidence presented earlier, his decision to find solace with another intellectual indicates that Hartman has chosen to cement himself in his traditional role, using religion as his logic for his epiphany.

Before Hartman's social epiphany, there are clues within the text of "The Strength of God" that continue to lead the reader toward the idea of intellectuals as class bound. Ray Lewis White, in his essay entitled "The Grotesques," discusses "what grotesqueness and the buried life signify" in regards to the characters of *Winesburg, Ohio* (91). By grotesque, Anderson meant to unearth "the buried aspects of human character" (56) and, in the case of Rev. Hartman, there lies a social difficulty. Early in "The Strength of God", we see Rev. Hartman struggling with the duties of his position. As White states, "[Hartman] has a hidden worry- he is secretly unhappy with his performance as minister of God" (89). His doubts and dissatisfaction at the role he has assumed indicate that he, on a subconscious level, does not belong to part of the social strata he has been allowed to become a member. In order to fully understand Rev. Hartman's role, we must first examine the character of Kate Swift and her role as a personification of Hartman's birth class.

Kate Swift is a school teacher in Winesburg and lives with her Aunt Elizabeth next to the Presbyterian Church where Rev. Hartman is minister. As is common in most the stories of this collection, the majority of the population falls into the definition of the production class in regards to social positioning. As Thomas Yingling writes, "*Winesburg* is populated with people defined as ticket agents, farmers, hotel keepers, merchants, teachers, doctors, berry-pickers, bankers, carpenters – all of whom are identified by the kind of work they perform" (110). Each occupation mentioned

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in Yingling's statement illustrates the overall population and how the largest social class within the town is the working class. As a teacher, Kate Swift is the personification of the working class. In reading Sherwood Anderson's description of Kate Swift, we can see in her physical detail how Anderson creates an alluring object for Rev. Hartman. The text describes her as "thirty years old and had a neat trim-looking figure" (258). This succinct but telling sentence gives Kate Swift an attractive quality. Obviously, there is the physical attraction, but, in her role as a personification of the lower, production class, this attractiveness is one of passion of Hartman's desire for an "intellectual and moral reformation." Her role intrigues Hartman more for the text says, "she had few friends and bore the reputation of having a sharp tongue" (259) and, when Hartman first spies her, she is "lying in her bed and smoking a cigarette while she read a book" which indicates a characteristic of Kate Swift of confrontation and rebellion against the social establishments and customs of the town. Her act of smoking and reading a book signifies her attempt to ascend to the intellectual class because both actions, especially reading, represent advancement, education, and knowledge. For Hartman's subconscious lust to return to his birth class, Kate Swift illuminates this idea of revolution and tempts Rev. Hartman to abscond from his subaltern status, making her an agent of conflict for the preacher. At the end of the text, his decision to retain his privilege is solidified by his confidence in another intellectual playing the "traditional" role.

George Willard is another member of Winesburg who plays the traditional hegemonic role for the *Winesburg Eagle*, the town newspaper. Throughout Anderson's collection of stories, George Willard is the most predominant character to appear. In "The Strength of God", Willard only becomes an agent of hegemony near the end of the story, where he briefly comes into the action. On the night Rev. Hartman resolves to abscond his hegemonic role, there are only two characters mentioned: Hop Higgins, the night watchman, and George Willard (261). When Rev. Hartman makes his decision to retain his privileged position under the dominant group (the church), he does not seek Hop Higgins, a member of the production class, but, rather, a fellow subaltern. The language of the text suggests Hartman sought George Willard to expatiate his joy at overcoming his desire: "Along the street he went and ran in at the door of the *Winesburg Eagle*. To George Willard" (263).

At first glance, it may appear that Rev. Hartman came upon George Willard by coincidence since Willard was the only person awake in Winesburg. But, since each character in this last scene plays a hegemonic role as a subaltern, their interaction becomes all the more interesting. One can view Hartman's choice to converse with someone who shares his same status reveals his intention to remain in his position, outside of his birth class, and continue to enforce the ideational hegemony of the dominant group in the small town they reside. It is also in what Hartman says to Willard that provokes the conclusion of his decision.

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He tells Willard, "After ten years in this town, God has manifested himself to me in the body of a woman" and, later, "I am delivered. Have no fear" (263). Despite Hartman's inhibitions regarding his ability to perform the hegemonic role appointed him, he now understands that his position has allowed him to ascend from the rigors and hardships of his birth class and can rest in the knowledge that he is cared for by the hegemon. The knowledge that his power descends from a stronger political force and that he is not alone. As the final line of the story states, "The strength of God was in me and I broke it with my fist" (263).

Though "The Strength of God" appears to be more about repressed *sexual* desire, the story still elicits a strong subtext of a repressed *political* desire. This can be attributed to influence from the author, Sherwood Anderson, and his own personal experience regarding class systems and capitalism which are exhibited by the central character. Rev. Hartman is a minister of the dominant church (hegemon) of Winesburg, Ohio and has been allowed that role as a subaltern, or intellectual, to reinforce ideational hegemony upon his congregation. However, he is a member of the production class who, by his education and position, has been allowed to ascend to the "traditional" role of subaltern. Through Gramsci's belief that intellectuals are "class bound," we see the repressed desire of Rev. Hartman when he sees the revolution personified in Kate Swift, the signification of the lower, production class from which he was born into. This ignites in his subconscious the desire for

an “ideational and moral reformation,” a desire for political passion, and he struggles between returning to his original class or remaining in the privileged position afforded him by the hegemon. His ultimate decision to remain an agent of hegemony is reinforced by his conversation with George Willard, a journalist and fellow subaltern. Anderson sought to bring the hidden desires and secrets from “the grotesques” in his collection *Winesburg, Ohio*, and, in doing so on a more basic, primitive level, he also unearthed a social reality that is relevant in cultures and societies presently.

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