

Silencing the Male: Rochester's Muteness

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In 1958 Jean Rhys wrote to Francis Wyndham: "This is to tell you something about the novel I am trying to write – provisional title 'The First Mrs Rochester'. I mean, of course, the mad woman in 'Jane Eyre'. [. . .] The real story – as it might have been" (Rhys 1999a: 135-136). Rhys's re-imagining of the "mad woman's" story was intrinsically combined with a textual recapitulation of the latter's self and identity. This project called for a restructuring of her narrative and a re-articulation of the narrative voices through which she was told. These voices belong to Bertha/Antoinette herself, her husband, Christophine and Grace Poole (Rhys 1999b: 137). This intertwining of characters' tales means that with the re-writing of Bertha Mason and her story, not only her identity as the other – the colonised, the feminine – has been reiterated, but also the identities of all those who create her; most importantly, her husband – the crucial chronicler of her past.

Rochester's voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only important to the constitution of Antoinette's identity; it is also a major instrument with the help of which his own identity is established. Does Rhys's account – from the other, not English, side – also change male self-articulation, and male identity, as it modifies the identity of the female other? To answer this question and to understand gender relations in Rhys's novel one has to "go beyond gender" (Connell 1995: 76), and look at gender categories with reference to the issues of class, race and ethnicity. In this way not only the dependency of the masculine on the other will be seen, but also the male's attempts to sustain the continuity of his identity will be revealed. These male performative endeavours at exclusion of otherness often take the form of negative self-definition: male as not-female, not-homosexual, etc. They frequently take place in the

field of language which, in contrast to silence, has very often been judged as a carrier of patriarchal values and as the major instrument in the execution of the Law-of-the-Father. Nonetheless, silence, or, more precisely, the process of silencing, carries with itself specific political and gender implications. In view of the significance attributed to speech and silence in the context of gender and power relations, it is not only important to see what men say, when and how they do it but also when they fall silent. If identity be regarded as a set of performative (verbal, discursive) acts, then it is not only Rochester's appearance, language or actions that matter to the constitution of his identity, but also his silences.

Thus, it is the contention of this essay that unuttered thoughts, half-pronounced words or a definite refusal to speak are crucial to the understanding of Rochester's masculinity both in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Stylistically, silence can be regarded – along control and conciseness – as a characteristic feature of a masculine style, which is part of the textual masculinity that is “construed in the interpretative processes between readers and the text” (Hekanaho 2006: 10). On the other hand, the process of silencing has been intrinsically related to the precarious situation of non-hegemonic subjects (women, homosexuals, etc.) who were either denied the possibility of self-articulation or whose voices were purposefully ignored. In view of this ambiguity in the gendering of silence, the essay examines to what extent such binaries as eloquence and muteness are present in the gendered discourse of the British white dominant male confronted with a non-dominant, colonial/female other in these two texts. It determines whether Rochester's silence undermines the cohesion of his masculinity or, rather, whether he refuses to speak in order to assert his homogenous and hegemonic self. Aware that the voices of Edward Rochester and Antoinette's husband reverberate thanks to the kindness of female authors and narrators, the essay enquires whether this rewriting of masculinity from non-dominant, female points of view has changed the performative quality of textual

masculinity or whether it uncritically re-appropriated the existing, phallogocentric modes of expression and domination in 19th and 20th century Britain. It argues that although both authors and their narrators allow some scope for Rochester's free expression, they colonise and subdue his voice.

The project of analysing Rochester's moments of silence requires that (1) the modern understanding of masculinity as related to femininity and embedded in a socio-cultural matrix be addressed and defined; (2) the complexity and significance of gendered textual silence be addressed, especially the relation between female/male and colonised muteness. On this background, (3) the specificity and function of male silence in both novels can be delineated, and (4) its role in male establishment of personal identity established. This four-step analysis will allow us to see that, although many instances of male silence in both novels function as carriers of male hegemony, the silencing of the male text by female authors has the power to implode the apparent continuity of the male text/identity and reveal its incongruencies.

I. The Performative Male Voice and the Eerie Silence

The modern idea of masculinity has been established in opposition to femininity and is embedded in specific socio-economic circumstances. George Mosse, in *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, and Robert Connell, in *Masculinities*, date the origin of the modern understanding of Western masculinity to the eighteenth century (Mosse 1996: 4; Connell 1995: 189). The latter associates its genesis with the expansion of the modern capitalist economy, thus situating the beginning of its formation-period to 1550-1650. He links the changes in the understanding of masculinity with four forces that contributed not only to the reshaping of the political and social arena of Europe and America, but also to the subsequent crystallisation of the "modern gender

order” (Connell 1995: 186). These forces cover the cultural metamorphoses which produced novel concepts of personhood and sexuality, the colonial expansion, the growth of capitalist centres and, finally, the subsequent visibility/emergence of sexual subcultures (186-188). With further changes in the socio-political arena, the idea of masculinity morphed and evolved:

[w]ith the eighteenth century, in seaboard Europe and North America at least, we can speak of a gender order in which masculinity in the modern sense – gendered individual character, defined through an opposition with femininity and institutionalized in economy and state – had been produced and stabilized. (189)

This institutionalisation of masculinity brought a diversification of male paradigms, whose variety and hierarchical character have long been recognised (76). According to Connell, one should talk about masculinities in the plural and remember that “it is impossible to understand the shaping of [. . .] masculinities without giving full weight to their class as well as gender politics” (76).

Likewise, Judith Butler provides a redefinition of gender which, while embedded in the discourse of binaries, allows one to see its unnatural character and provides a space for its re-designation, thus proposing a novel perception of masculinity. According to her, gender is produced and sustained by specific socio-political conditions and “intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler 1999: 3). These socio-political processes, which are jointly informed by the heterosexual matrix, determine the performative character of gender (Butler 1993: 234).

With reference to these theories, gender, and thus also male identity, must be understood as discursively and performatively created, intertwined with the categories of class, race, and ethnicity, and grounded in the heterosexual matrix. This complexity requires that Rochester’s masculinity be analysed as irretrievably interlaced with female identities, bound to his social status, and motivated by his imperial setting. With the help of this theoretical framework,

the coalescence of Rochester's text (and his identity) with female narratives (Jane, Antoinette, Rhys and Brontë) can be considered with reference to the issues of audibility and silence, which are crucial to the formation of legitimate gender identities. Thus, the moments of Rochester's vocal (textual) and discursive stillness can be put under scrutiny to determine whether they function as fissures in the construction of the hegemonic male identity or rather if they guarantee its stability.

Before the significance of silence can be determined, it is crucial to establish the importance and function of gendered speech in Brontë's novel. In her article "Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*," Janet H. Freeman argues that verbal proficiency and inadequacy are closely related to the question of authority and subjugation, and that,

[i]n *Jane Eyre*, the power of speech is supreme. It enables Jane to take more and more control of her life as the years pass and in the end to tell it to us. The gift of speech – and silence, its counterpart – of uttering words and hearing them spoken, dominates the world of *Jane Eyre* absolutely. (1984: 686)

Yet, although Freeman recognises the value that verbal communication and stillness acquire in the novel, she ignores the question of gender in their use, due to her exclusive focus on the main character and to little critical attention to ideological issues present in the text.

This omission significantly simplifies the analysis of character relations and the characters' individual appropriation of power. While audibility very often refers to male power, silence – traditionally categorised as a female virtue – can also be used by male protagonists to usurp and ensure their authority and subjugate the other. That is why Rochester's moments of silence cannot be interpreted in the same way as Jane's stillness and tranquillity; nor can one see them only as a means with the help of which he deceives and manipulates his environment, as Freeman does (1984: 694). One also cannot generalise and accept these moments as

instants of male failure – monuments of inactivity and stillness. Rather, one has to see his silence as interwoven with the silence of the other, the feminine, the non-white, the colonised. Thus, in order to reveal the complexity of Rochester's muteness, this essay re-positions it on the background of the racial and gendered silences as produced in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

As for the silenced other in *Jane Eyre*, it is epitomised by Bertha Mason. Muteness seems to occupy the centre position in her construction. Not only does she never speak herself, she is also almost extinct from the general narrative of the book. Although there are references made to peculiar events in Thornfield Hall, her story is only told after Briggs upsets the wedding ceremony and reveals "the existence of a previous marriage: Mr. Rochester has a wife now living" (Brontë 2000: 289). The subsequent narratives of Briggs, an old butler and, especially, Rochester and Jane, stress Bertha's performative silencing and, simultaneously, participate in it. In Rochester's verbal outburst after Brigg's revelation, she is painted as a creature devoid of agency:

she came of a mad family: – idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a woman and drunkard! – as I found after I had wed the daughter; for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. (292)

It is in this "aping" of her mother that Rochester perceives Bertha's fault and that he sees a sign of her inability to act out of her own accord. Yet, he himself is also responsible for her inertia. Although he provides convincing reasons for his conduct, there is no doubt that both his actions (Bertha's confinement to the attic) and speech acts rob his wife of any performative power.

Rochester's performative and verbal silencing of Bertha is a process which is to guarantee his patriarchal position. He acts here as a representative of the Law-of-the-Father, who forces upon her the mandatory tranquillity which Victorian society regards as an

attribute of femininity and which frustrates Victorian female subjects:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with *tranquillity*: they must have action [...] Millions are condemned to a *stiller* doom than mine, and millions are in *silent* revolt against their lot. [...] Women are supposed to be very *calm* generally [...] they suffer from too rigid a *restraint*, too absolute a stagnation [...] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has *pronounced* necessary for their sex. (109; my emphases)

In her monologue, Jane uses such words as stillness and tranquility to describe the condition imposed on women by the patriarchal society, which forms and pronounces the accepted paradigms of female articulation. Thus, by subduing Bertha, Rochester acts as an enforcer of patriarchal codes and so simultaneously protects his own position. Robert Kendrick recognises the rationale behind Rochester's actions: "[t]aking Jane as his illegal wife or as his mistress is an attempt to erase Bertha and the 'problem' she represents for Rochester – the problem of his own representation vis a vis others within the dominant fictions" (1994: 8). According to Kendrick, Rochester's

transgressions, in the form of the mercenary marriage and subsequent abuse of Bertha, and his attempt to marry outside the codes that sanction marriage, are not so much violations of the patriarchal norm as they are exaggerations of it so that it exceeds its original boundaries. (8)

Yet, rather than solidifying his own position by silencing the other, Rochester only reveals the desperateness with which he wishes to attain the masculine paradigm prevalent at the time. His exaggerated attempts at "fitting in" issue from the recognition of his lack and the fear that it inspires. They show that his masculinity is a concept in the making and that it is controlled and governed by the patriarchal order, which imposes certain discursive paradigms on men and coerces them to live up to these. Rochester's repetitive silencing of the colonial and female other together with his performative acts of exaggerated adjustment to social norms

(veiling of his past, constraining of the other, re-positioning of himself through marriage) testify to his recognition of the precarious position he occupies.

Through the subjugation of the other, Rochester not only wishes to reclaim his hegemonic position in Victorian society and acts as a guardian and a representative of British imperialism but is also established as a pawn and victim of the patriarchal order. By defining Bertha's mother as "the Creole," "a mad woman," and "a drunkard" (Brontë 2000: 292), Rochester equates the three, thereby questioning her culture and its righteous existence. At the same time, he usurps a higher position in the hierarchy of being by referring to the Creoles' insanity and instinctive, excessive behaviour. This gives him the opportunity to present them – the other – as deceitful and indulgent, and thus as rightly controlled by and subjugated to imperial power. In this way his speech acts adhere to the father-text, the male paradigm of thinking in colonial Britain. The father-text must be understood as a set of normative rules, which, having been socially, legally and culturally sanctioned, invest total control in male citizens but also require from them acceptable conduct.

Yet, Rochester's verbal erudition not only serves him to symbolically establish and maintain power over the colonial other; he also uses it to manipulate gendered subjects around him. Mrs. Fairfax is baffled by his speech; she reveals to Jane that, "you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don't thoroughly understand him, in short" (105). It seems that Rochester prides himself on his ability to puzzle. While talking to Jane, he asserts that she is afraid of him "because I talk like a Sphynx" (138) and although Jane tries to deny it, her discomfort is to be sensed in her speech. In spite of this ability to bewilder, Rochester's speech acts do not always render the desired effect. When seated in the dining room, Rochester urges Jane to speak, which does not produce the looked-for outcome: "Accordingly I sat and said nothing: 'If he expects me to talk for

the mere sake of talking and showing off, he will find he has addressed himself to the wrong person, 'I thought' (133). Here, Rochester fails to command Jane, and thus to take control over her. Jane's muteness serves her as an instrument of resistance. Her insubordination sabotages the illusion of Rochester's hegemonic position. So does Bertha's avoidance of his last call, after she sets the house on fire. As Kendrick observes, elaborating on the effects of her disavowal,

her refusal to acknowledge him, even with mad laughter, leaves the exchange in suspension as she jumps. Even though she is dead, she is not "finished," because she does not die as "Bertha Rochester." She dies unrecognized, and unrecognized, and her remains remain the disruptive supplement to the narrative of English normalcy in which Rochester participates. (10)

In view of this, it can be claimed that, although Victorian patriarchy coerced women into silence, it simultaneously gave them a powerful instrument with which the "weaker sex" could threaten the allegedly stable identities that men enacted. It is these patriarchal codes of silence which Brontë plays with in her construction of textual gender identities.

On the one hand, the narrator is aware of the ambiguity of female silence and uses it to her own purposes. On the other hand, she is conscious that the patriarchal order handed muteness to men as well, which, rather than subjugating them in the way that it subdues women, has become another expressive means of their dominant position. Freeman argues that Rochester's silences, like his speeches, serve as a tool of deception and irony. She argues that they establish imbalance between him and Jane as "[h]e specializes in partial truths, in half-said exclamations of love or despair, in obscure references to nameless horrors out of the past only dimly revealed" (Freeman 1984: 694). Although Freeman is right in maintaining that silence is another instrument Rochester uses to manipulate Jane, its manipulative power must be seen in a broader context, and in reference to the narrative progression: Before Jane's

flight from Thornfield Hall, Rochester's stillness allows him to protect himself by refusing to grant Jane access to information. After Bertha Mason sets his bed on fire and Jane prevents his death, Rochester disappears for a long time without a word of explanation. This acoustic and physical withdrawal is a moment of deliberate silence and separation.

The distance which is created by muteness is a mechanism characteristically used by male characters in the novel when their identity is at stake. Having returned from his inspection of the third floor which ensues after the fire in his chamber, Rochester says: "I have found it all out [. . .] it is as I thought," (Brontë 2000: 149) without, however, disclosing what he has found out. The words that he decides not to utter are "almost visible [. . .] on his lips" (150). After he releases her, no more is spoken for the next one and half chapters, which is, among other things, motivated by Rochester's sojourn at Miss Ingram's place. Thus, here, the physical desertion as well as silence concerning the events of the previous night can be interpreted as defensive mechanisms, which are supposed to protect Rochester's identity and reputation, and, above all, to guarantee his future success. Yet, one should not forget that it is the female narrator (or Brontë by proxy) who controls his utterances and thus also limits reader's access to his thoughts and actions. Notwithstanding the author's wish to create suspense and to stress the narrator's emotional struggle, her silencing of Rochester also has another dimension: it denies him the possibility to tell his own story and, thereby to establish a textual link with the reader. Brontë, it seems, re-inscribes Rochester in the oppressive position that the Victorian society has designated for him.

In other words, silence – both on the levels of Jane's narrative and Brontë's text – serves Rochester to protect his position of a patriarch, a gentleman. One such instance occurs when he talks to Jane, who has slipped away from the room full of guests. This incident should be analysed carefully due to its acoustic potency. Jane, sitting in the corner of the room, witnesses

verbal duels between Rochester and Miss Ingram, who, with a short “Sing!” (180) finishes the debate, and orders him to perform. What he sings we do not know, but we are, like Jane, “arrested” by the quality of his voice, which she describes as “a mellow, powerful bass, into which he threw his own feeling, his own force; finding a way through the ear to the heart, and there waking sensation strangely. I waited till the last deep and full vibration had expired” (180). This enchantment is followed by subdued voices heard by Jane outside the room and Rochester’s address to Jane. Their conversation, which betrays signs of his concern for and deeper feeling towards Jane, is followed by Jane’s and then Rochester’s silence, and is rounded up in a narrative pause. Jane’s refusal to disclose her feelings is succeeded by Rochester’s inquisitive speech, which he finishes with:

Well to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening: this is my wish; don’t neglect it. Now go, and send Sophie for Adèle. Good night, my _____’ He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me. (181)

This moment of silence seems to be more reverberating with meaning than the word-duels with Miss Ingram and Rochester’s dialogues with Jane. His half-uttered address is arresting – the more so that the narrator keeps silent on this issue as well. This time, Rochester’s speechlessness results from his momentary lack of control and the subsequent realisation that he has said too much. It seems as though the barriers and frontiers which he has maintained all this time begin to leak and give way to the other, the abject, the unmanly – the feelings which do not become a man in his position.

And yet, his refusals to speak are not only a result of a momentary forgetfulness and subjugation to conflicting feelings; sometimes they are premeditated and thought over. Before the wedding, Rochester replies to Jane’s inquiries concerning the person of Grace Poole with a promise of postponed explanation: “when we have been married a year and a day, I will tell you; but

not now” (285). This premeditation testifies to Rochester’s search for shelter in silence when his identity is at stake. Be it a revelation of his past that he worries about or his future prospects, his muteness guarantees him (at least in his eyes) the maintenance of the dominant position. His silence must be regarded as an individual enactment of socially imposed precepts of masculinity – a way of keeping up appearances and maintaining a homogenous self. All three moments in which Rochester says nothing mark not only his conscious decision to manipulate but also serve as a protection shield. Simultaneously, they prove that Rochester’s masculinity is in no way continuous and stable and that many of its disruptions are prevented or concealed by silence.

Interestingly enough, his voice also disappears at the end of the novel, when, in a direct address to the reader, Jane reiterates his words without giving the reader any direct access to them. In this way his voice, more than before, becomes embedded in and re-told through the female-text. It is only sporadically that his words resound on the last pages of the book, the last instance being his regaining of sight: “Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck? [. . .] And have you a pale blue dress on?” (451) are the last words of his we hear. Although insignificant in their content, these utterances rehabilitate Rochester as they indicate the end of his penance. Yet, this restoration of his sight does not reintroduce his voice. From this sequence on, the female voice is the only one in the narrative. This authorial and narrative subordination, silencing and full re-appropriation of the male voice makes place for the female voice to flourish. However legitimate this decision, it nevertheless shows that the “free expression” of the male hero is never liberated, and that, analogously to male narratives which subjugate the female characters, women’s narratives do the same with male protagonists.

II. Weaved into the Mother-Text

Harrison maintains that Brontë's text, like a majority of novels in the 19th century, simultaneously subverts and maintains "patriarchal literary standards" (Harrison 1988: 14). Despite this ambiguity inherent in the woman's text, there is no doubt that *Jane Eyre*/Jane Eyre conquers the male protagonist and subdues his voice. Likewise, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the male narrative is plated and intertwined with the female story and re-told by a female author. Here, however, it is given more prominence, which allows Harrison to argue that,

[w]hile Rhys's presentation of the masculine text is rigorous in the seemingly accurate psychological narration of itself [. . .] Rhys nevertheless uses the male text as a fixing place in much the way that the discourse of "Man" in our culture has used "Woman," but with a difference. The placement of the masculine text does not silence the text – he still tells his own story – as the woman's text has been silenced. In his displacement, he becomes the defining litany of his own speech, and a recital of the reasons for it. (129)

It is the contention of this essay that, notwithstanding the possibility of Rochester's self-articulation, the female text severs his connection with the other – the female, the colonised – and thus also with the female reader, thereby aborting any possibility of his being understood.

The situation in which Rochester has found himself when marrying Antoinette requires from him that he take up a new position: that of a husband and a representative of the imperial and patriarchal masculinity in the Caribbean. In this attempt, he can do nothing else but rely on structures that he knows. Rochester falls back upon textual identities that are familiar to him and that he can utilise to express himself. In the chapter devoted to Rochester's narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Harrison convincingly argues that Rochester's narrative establishment of the self is ambiguous due to this problematic attitude towards the mother- and father-texts (242-243). These two discursive paradigms are to her nothing else but

culturally sanctioned gendered structures within which males and females can express themselves, and whose frames offer them scaffolding for their self-expression. These codes allow them to be recognised as legitimate subjects.

In view of this, Rochester's entanglement with both feminine and masculine texts illustrates his ambivalent attitude towards gendered discourses around the self:

The further he attempts to thrust the mother-text from him, the closer he comes to an identification with it. Within this subtextual framework, we can also see "Rochester" and Antoinette as distorted mirror-images of one another. The novel may be about the relationship between "Rochester" and Antoinette, and its consequences, but the man's narrative provides a testing ground for the real combatants, the mother-text and the father-text. His narrative is consistently poised between mother and father and he tries again and again to opt for the father-text. (194-195)

These attempts prove the indefinite position that Rochester inhabits in relation to the female narratives with which his self and his narrative are interlaced: those of Antoinette, Amelié, Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë (221). From this intertwining springs the ambivalence of his own text, which he tries to de-feminise, so that, although "[h]e both emphasises and rejects his alliance of the several texts of difference that he has attempted to condense into one, [. . .] his narrative [can] return to the intimate, individual text of his own masculinity" (247).

When seen from this perspective, Rochester's attempts to separate his own narrative from the narrative of otherness can be interpreted with the help of Butler's line of argumentation. According to her, gendered subjects are required to attain an ideal and thus to engage in a reiterative struggle which is to bring them nearer to the socially accepted paradigm. This repeated performance gives them the illusion of having eliminated ambiguities inherent to their position. At the same time, these struggles testify to nothing else but an ultimate failure of subjects to attain the ideal (Butler 1999: 37). Likewise, Rochester's tale is not entirely free of feminine codes, which is partly due to the fact

that the trespasses between his and Antoinette's narratives are not altogether easily definable. Although the largest chunks of their stories conform to the overall divisions in the book, the reader does not immediately recognise the narrative standpoint, especially in the shorter interruptions of Rochester's account. Such a configuration adds to the ambiguity of Rochester's articulation of his identity.

Not only is Rochester's text intertwined with Antoinette's narrative, but like her, he also often makes use of the rhetoric of gendered silence. In his narrative in the second part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, muteness is intrinsically gender specific. His filtering of information testifies to the gendering and proper acculturation of his perceptive apparatus. Thus, as Harrison rightly notices, in the initial parts of his narrative, "[w]omen and male children [. . .] are described in their response to him almost exclusively in their manner of looking at him; men are described by what they say and how they say it" (1988: 203). In view of this, one could argue that the society which has formed him has also formed his habit of regarding voice as the centre of male identity but referring to sight as intrinsically belonging to female perception. Rochester's gaze here is utterly masculine as it objectifies the females he sees, constructs them as unable to enter the male linguistic codes and thus assigns them their "proper" places in the culturally sanctioned imperialistic and heterosexual matrix. In what follows, he rejects the validity and authority of their narrative voices through which they attempt to explain their selves to him.

The ultimate demonstration of Rochester's deafness to the female (Antoinette's) voice is articulated when he admits to himself, "I won't tell you that I scarcely listened to your stories" (Rhys 1999: 102). This refusal to listen is closely related to the cultural deafness to female self-articulation and testifies to a deliberate separation of the two discourses which, socially imposed, prevents their mutual exchange and influence, thus guarding the patriarchal hierarchy of gendered subjects. To sustain

his identity and to protect his reputation, Rochester must quieten Antoinette; he must erase her from his mind – after all, she has ruined him: “She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it” (103). It is her who has whetted his desire and has failed to satisfy it. His dissatisfaction comes from his conviction that her animalistic instincts can be infectious and thus precarious to his position, but also from his recognition that his father’s plan to marry him to Antoinette, and thus to ensure his financial well-being, backfired. The marriage with the Creole has become a hindrance on his way to respectability. That is why it has to be repressed and forgotten: “I too can wait – for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie. . . .” (103).

Yet, Rochester’s resolution to forget is accompanied by his awareness that this goal can never be achieved and that, from then on, his position will always be vulnerable. Whatever plan he devises, he will neither be able to quieten her voice (which will reverberate in the gossip and the legends told by others) nor to separate his own story from that of Antoinette:

I wrote to the firm of lawyers I had dealt with in Spanish Town. I told them that I wished to rent a furnished house not too near the town, commodious enough to allow for two separate suites of rooms. I also told them to engage a staff of servants whom I was prepared to pay very liberally – so long as they keep their mouths shut [. . .] I scowled [. . .] as I re-read the letter [. . .] However much I paid Jamaican servants I would never buy discretion. I’d be gossiped about, snug about. (97-98)

Rochester’s attitude towards Antoinette and his plan to deal with the story show that not only has he been coerced into believing that his position depends on his ability to separate and silence the other, he has also been fooled into thinking that he can easily do it. What he has not been told is that this masculine paradigm is nothing else but an unattainable ideal, which he will never be able to embody. What is more, he has also been forced to trust in the stability of his identity, which is to come from the fortification of his self against

the other, but has been left in ignorance about the inadequacies of the paradigm itself. In effect, he has been left alone with a few dominant fictions, and no acceptable structure to fall upon when he fails to embody the masculine ideal. Patriarchy, then, has crippled Rochester (and continues to cripple its men) as it has allowed him to believe in his hegemony and has left him to cope with the inadequacies and incongruencies of his status.

In view of the coercive power of patriarchy, it is not surprising that Rochester makes his father – both a person and a representative of the patriarchal order – the reference point in his self-defining process. Although he guesses that his father was familiar with Antoinette's story, he never addresses this issue directly in his letters. His avowed accusations, "I know now that you planned this because you wanted to be rid of me. You had no love at all for me," (97), never reach his father. Instead, he only cautions the latter not to tell anyone about his marriage, which is in both their interest (97). Despite the calamitous position in which Rochester has found himself as a result of his self-oppressive subjugation to his father's will, and, by that, to the rules of patrimony, he continuously identifies with the Law-of-the-Father. His refusal to express feelings is but another symptom of this identification. Rochester recognises his own oral inadequacy: "How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted" (61). Rochester's succumbing to the father-text is best illuminated in the end phase of his narrative when he disapproves of a servant boy who expresses his disappointment at Rochester's refusal to take him to England: "That stupid boy followed us, the basket balanced on his head. He used the back of his hand to wipe away his tears. Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing. . . ." (104). Forced into silence on the subject of his feelings, Rochester expects the same from other men and men-to-

be, and derides them if they transgress against this rule. In this way, Rhys makes him a victim of the sanctioned models of masculinity.

Despite these continual attempts at reintegrating himself in the Law-of-the-Father, Rochester again and again fails to establish his vocal and male supremacy. Harrison argues that, for instance, in his letters, “[h]is use of the passive voice [. . .] suggests that he knows he cannot find his voice, not even in writing” (207). This incapability does not necessarily mean that he lacks male attributes; rather, it again points to the oppressive character of the culture which, through the processes of socialisation, robbed him of the ability to express himself freely. It is difficult not to hear echoes of his own subordination to the patriarchal structures when he describes the dependence of his wife: “I could see Antoinette stretched on the bed quite still. Like a doll. Even when she threatened me with the bottle she had a marionette quality” (90). What has happened to Antoinette, has befallen him, too, which is clearly perceptible in his assertion that he “played the part [he] was expected to play. [. . .] I would listen to my own voice and marvel at it, calm, correct but toneless, surely. But I must have given a faultless performance” (45). This statement testifies to Rochester’s self-awareness, his recognition of masculinity scripts and the role silence plays in them. The ability to behave according to these scripts requires, and Rochester knows it, that his inner, individual wishes should be silenced as well.

Yet, these tyrannical cultural paradigms are not the only factor behind Rochester’s silence. There is also the speechlessness in the face of Antoinette’s changed appearance (87), and the silence which envelops his physical encounter with Amélié. This terrified and prudish muteness is just one type of an amalgam of silences which function as refusals to establish contact and as testimonials to Rochester’s stubborn attempts at his re-inscription in the frames of cultural paradigms. This is the silence that marks his final estrangement, thus turning him into an executor of the paternal law, and a female subjugator. It is well visible in his reaction to

Christophine's words: "You young but already you hard. You fool the girl. You make her think you can't see the sun for looking at her." / It was like that I thought. It was like that. But better to say nothing" (92). This silent agreement is accompanied by an overt rejection of the link with the other which would be created had he uttered these words aloud.

Overall, neither of the protagonists can re-tell the other, which is due to Rochester's refusal to speak. His speechlessness separates them and re-inscribes them within the roles that are culturally ascribed to them: that of a colonial male (Rochester) and a colonised other (Antoinette). Thus, when Antoinette admits, "[n]o, I had no right, I am sorry. I don't understand you. I know nothing about you, and I cannot speak for you" (103), she acknowledges the fact that neither their narratives nor cultures can ever meet. This failure arises from male socio-cultural conditioning and adherence to the precepts of masculinity, which equip men both with speech and silence as the instruments of exclusion of and separation from the other. At the same time, the novel depicts Rochester as a person aware of the fact that the patriarchal society in which he came to live requires from him silence in certain situations and thus also oppresses him with it. His inner beliefs thus cannot always be articulated and he is, like the female subject, a victim of this order, but also of the text – the female text.

Although inaudible to any of the characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester's self-doubts, irritations and testimonies to his failed attempts at belonging are articulated to the reader. Yet, the revelation of his feelings does not guarantee any textual link with the latter. The reader's empathic connection, which is bound to be solicited by Rochester's self-revelatory meditations, is severed by the author. Having left Antoinette's husband full of hatred, callous, insensible and deaf to the pleas of others/the other, Rhys re-inscribes him in Brontë's narrative (Harrison 1988: 241). She does it by restricting our access to his thoughts and by denying his further self-articulation after he, once again, stresses the importance

of splitting his and his wife's narratives: "If Mrs Poole is satisfactory why not give her double, treble the money [. . .] but for God's sake let me hear no more of it" (Rhys 1999: 105). In this way Rhys participates in the gendered power struggle: although she allows Rochester to speak, she denies him the possibility of expression which would be liberated from the confines of masculine discourses. Like Brontë, Rhys silences the man in and through the female narrative.

All in all, in both novels Rochester is made aware of his precarious position in the patriarchal order, which suppresses not only its female but also its male subjects, and which coerces the latter to maintain the order by subjugating the female other – in general and in their narratives. Thus, not having any other framework of reference, Rochester uses silence to protect himself, and the ideal, which he is forced to embody, thereby maintaining patriarchy, of which he is a victim. Neither Brontë nor Rhys, however, offers him a possibility of self re-inscription in and through the female text. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester begins to be re-articulated by his wife, which, rather than offering him an instrument of self-expression, silences his voice and renders it insignificant in comparison with Jane's closing passage, which quotes St. John Rivers's last words. Similarly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* closes with a female narrative in which Rochester is marked by his absence. More importantly, although Rhys allows for Rochester's partial self-articulation, she severs the textual link between him and the reader, which she herself establishes. This refusal to re-write the male protagonist leaves Rhys's and Brontë's female (feminist?) postulates and texts wanting, as they are also subjugated to the binaries prevalent in western society. It also shows that reductive dichotomies such as speech and erudition are a means of socio-cultural control rather than adequate instruments of self-articulation.

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