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Broken Mirrors: Iterations of the Other in the Post-Colonial Novel

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Broken Mirrors: Iterations of the Other in the Post-Colonial Novel

By

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

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Abstract

This thesis explores the post-colonial notion of the Other as an iteration of the broader cultural tendency to make meaning via binary opposition. The study of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Infidels*, and *At Swim Two Boys* reveals the connective thread of empire and subjugation that transcends time and place. Furthermore, I examine the various attempts of characters to resist this reality by creating an alternate space within the dominant culture. My interest lies in exploring the ways in which various markers of identity form the “self,” and consequently how characters attempt to gain agency and fully realize identity despite marginalization and disenfranchisement. Examining the various modes of Othering necessarily expands the project into a consideration of larger questions of subjugation based on race, class, gender, and sexuality. As this study reveals, the quest for identity and agency amid a culture of repression remains a timeless struggle.

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Introduction

“If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.”

-Frederick Douglass

I have always been drawn to this quote, to its power, and to the way in which it lays bare the eternal struggle of the disenfranchised. This sense of exposing the machinations of history is what also drew me to post-colonial studies. Similar to Douglass' quote, this theory attempts to get to the heart of power structures within colonized cultures, thereby providing a framework for the binarism and hegemony inherent in those societies. This thesis explores the post-colonial notion of the other as an iteration of the broader cultural tendency to make meaning via binary opposition. Post-colonial theory will serve as a springboard, a jumping off point for a discussion of gender, sexuality, and class within colonized and post-colonial societies. I am interested in the convergence/intersection of these various modes of othering as evidenced by the texts explored. Does this intersection create competing allegiances for the colonized subject? How is agency achieved despite the various modes of marginalization? What happens to notions of self within this context?

I will also examine the various attempts of characters to resist this reality by creating an alternate space within the dominant culture. My interest lies in exploring the ways in which various markers of identity form the self, and consequently how characters gain agency and fully realize identity despite marginalization and

disenfranchisement. To borrow from the aforementioned quote by Frederick Douglass, I seek to explore the plowing, the thunder and lightning, and the awful roar of the ocean. What does resistance/struggle look like? Does resistance to colony take on different forms depending upon one's gender or sexuality? Is death a viable form of resistance, or is it the ultimate defeat? Is it possible for a colonized subject to create an alternate universe/reality as a form of liberation? How does liminality factor into the struggle for representation?

I intend to address these questions via a thorough examination of the texts employed for this study: *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *Infidels* by Abdellah Taia, and *At Swim Two Boys*, by Jamie O'Neill. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a re-imagining of *Jane Eyre*, told from the perspective of Bertha, the madwoman in the attic. Rhys attempts to re-write Bertha's story by imagining her as Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole woman from Jamaica. By shifting the perspective, an alternate narrative is revealed, one in which the traditional notions of colony, culture, race, and gender are questioned and problematized. The novel "writes back" to *Jane Eyre*, and this sense of intertextuality makes it a valuable post-colonial novel. We see the ways in which gaze, both of the colonizer as well as the colonized, reveals the relationship of the margin to the center. In her article, "Gender, colonialism, and the colonial gaze," Kalpana Ram argues that "'the colonial gaze' is a term that has come to refer to a structure of representation which figures as a mode of intervention in itself, as well as providing pretext for a variety of other forms of practical intervention. The gaze directed at gender relations and the status of women has been crucial in sustaining the existential distance between colonial

states and the societies it sought to dominate” (Ram 1). Ram’s definition proves useful, as I will reference the colonial gaze throughout this project.

Similarly, Jamie O’Neill’s *At Swim Two Boys* is a response to Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim Two Birds*, a novel that itself questioned the notion of an independent Ireland, and what it meant to have an allegiance to this post-colonial nation. While O’Brien focused on the ways in which this fervent allegiance or nationalism could become a restrictive force, O’Neill takes that same question, but approaches it with a queer gaze. The novel takes place on the precipice of the 1916 Easter uprising, and the two main characters, Jim Mack and Doyler Doyle, enter into a passionate but closeted romance. O’Neill questions the very notion of Irish nationalism, and who is able to participate in that narrative. The novel is rich with intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. O’Neill converges queer and national liberation in a potent and complex manner, making the novel an ideal study of both post-colonial and queer theory.

Abdellah Taia’s novel, *Infidels*, also explores the intersection of sexuality and post-colonialism. The novel is set in Morocco, and the main character, Jallal, is the son of a sex worker. This dynamic allows Taia to wrestle with notions of class, gender, and sexuality within the context of a Muslim society. Eventually Jallal falls in love with a man named Mahmoud, and it is only in death by suicide bombing that their union is realized. The novel is dream-like and hypnotic, and uses unconventional sources to achieve an emotional and political potency. Marilyn Monroe appears as an angel and gatekeeper to heaven, among other symbolic peculiarities. The novel suggests throughout that liminality is a means of resistance, and in this way shines a light on the limitations of the binary dynamic inherent in colonization.

In terms of a theoretical lens, I rely heavily on post-colonial and queer theory. Specifically, I lean upon *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, as well as *Queer Phenomenology* by Sara Ahmed. Although Fanon's book was published over fifty years ago, it is striking how much of his theory still resonates in the present. The text is one of the first to provide a solid, theoretical and philosophical exploration of colonization. Fanon explores at length the relationship between colonizer and colonized as well as the interconnected issues of race, space, possession, and resistance. His ability to engage both the macro and micro of colonization make the text a valuable resource.

The Empire Writes Back takes on a variety of post-colonial considerations as well, and in some ways is an extension of Fanon's pioneering work. The book focuses on issues of center/margin, othering, and the relationship between self and place, to name a few. This text also considers post-colonialism within the broader context of other literary theories, which is quite instructive for the purposes of this thesis.

Lastly, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* explores orientation as it applies both philosophically and theoretically. This study looks at the effect of history and colonialism on the body and the self. The intersections of colony, sexuality, and gender are explored at length, but through a philosophical lens. Ahmed re-examines many of the central concerns of post-colonial theory to include exoticism, the nature of the palimpsest, and the colonial gaze, all of which are explored in this thesis. In addition to this introduction, the project will consist of three chapters: Post-colonial theoretical considerations, Gender and class considerations, and Resolutions and responses, as well as a conclusion comprising some closing thoughts.

I believe this thesis is useful in furthering knowledge of the humanities for a variety of reasons, chief among them is the contemporary relevance of the topics explored. We are still wrestling with issues of polarity, marginalization, and hegemony. Our nation is arguably more divided and polarized now than at any other time in its history. Binary opposition seems to rule political and social commentary. Shallow, divisive rhetoric seems to have replaced complex and thoughtful considerations of history, and that history's influence on the present. Disenfranchisement as a result of class, sexuality, race, and gender, is a contemporary issue. Examining manifestations of colonialism and cultural dominance through a variety of times and locales is a fruitful and important project. Exposing these various iterations of struggle and resistance is to welcome the lightning and the thunder.

Competing Allegiances

Although diverse in place and historical context, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Infidels*, and *At Swim Two Boys* all explore the issue of competing allegiances and the conflation of the personal and the political. The characters in each of these novels deal with the oppositional pull of different elements of their identity and sense of self, to include Creole/English, Irish/English, and Muslim/Gay. This often divisive and conflicted sense of self is symptomatic of the colonial condition and its reliance upon the binary for meaning making. For the characters in each of the novels, polarity and easy categorization are problematic, as their identities occupy seemingly opposing positions.

Mr. Mack, the father of *At Swim Two Boys*' central character, Jim, identifies strongly with England despite being an Irishman in occupied Ireland. In a sense he represents the colonized subject who suffers from Stockholm Syndrome, and he specifically idolizes the British military: "He might mention three square meals a day, smart uniform, healthy living, separation money for the women at home, pension at the end of it. Satisfaction of fighting for King and Country. Glory to be had and to spare" (O'Neill 40). Mr. Mack's defense of England is at odds with the political climate of much of his country, which seeks independence from England and a distinct Irish identity. There is a sense that Mr. Mack feels that his allegiance to England somehow makes him a better class of person, distinct from the poor Irish families in his own neighborhood.

However, in his unguarded moments, we see the holes in his rhetoric, and there is the sense that he too has conflicting allegiances: "Headlines full of British gallantry, but did British include Irish? Why wouldn't they be done with it and say Irish gallantry?"

(O'Neill 45). Even Mr. Mack, for all of his British loyalty, understands that British does not mean Irish, and the two are distinct in crucial ways. To lump the Irish army in with that of the British somehow negates the role of the Irish, both in the war effort as well as in the identity of the self and the nation. Joseph Valente alludes to this issue in his article, "Race/Sex/Shame: The Queer Nationalism of *At Swim Two Boys*: "As colonized Europeans, metropolitan subalterns, racially denigrated "whites," participant subjects and subdominant objects of the British empire, Irish under the Union occupied a position of historical exceptionality that likewise rendered their ethnic status the central, all-consuming element of their subject formation" (Valente 59). Mr. Mack seems to feel this anxiety of ethnicity and culture, but he chooses to sublimate it in his loyalty to England. Better to bury the ambiguity and confusion that this sense of self elicits rather than explore the complexities of a colonized identity.

Wide Sargasso Sea's Antoinette deals with the complexity of being a white Creole, and the resulting complexity that identity brings. In post-colonial Jamaica, the categorizations of white/black, native/foreigner, and rich/poor, become muddled as a result of the country's emancipation from Britain. In the colonial era, being white was often synonymous with wealth, but the post-colonial reality is quite different for many white Creoles, to include Antoinette. In a heated argument with another child, Tia, Antoinette's circumstance is disclosed through Tia's gaze: "She hear we all poor like beggar...no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (Rhys

14). This passage reveals the troubling, complex position of the white Creole, one in which competing allegiances have left them without a true nature or culture. During the years of colonial rule, families like Antoinette's felt an allegiance to and identification with England, despite the fact that their culture was distinct from that of the British. That allegiance leaves them in a precarious position in newly emancipated Jamaica, so much so that Tia questions whether Antoinette is a "real" white person, due to their lack of money. Here we see the conflation of whiteness and wealth; if Antoinette's family no longer has money, they are no longer "real" white people in the eyes of native Jamaicans.

Furthermore, this classification positions white Creoles in an outsider status, where they are not "seen" or engaged by other, wealthier whites. They are cast off from the people who they had an allegiance to, yet they occupy a country where they are referred to as "white cockroaches" (Rhys 13), an indication that they are an invasive pest encroaching upon occupied land. Antoinette feels an allegiance to both Britain and the Caribbean despite her outsider status in both cultures. When her mother marries Mr. Mason, an Englishman, a sincere effort is made to be an English, rather than Creole, girl. However, the allegiance to Jamaica and the distinct Creole culture runs deep, and casting off that element of her identity proves problematic, as she simply but succinctly states, "I was glad to be an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking" (Rhys 21). Food is fundamental to culture, and there is a sense that an English transformation will always leave something to be desired, making the transformation superficial at best.

Throughout the novel, Antoinette struggles to reconcile these disparate and competing elements of her identity, revealing the following to her husband: “It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me. That’s what they call all of us...And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all” (Rhys 61). This passage reveals the incredible toll that these competing allegiances exact. In identifying with both English and Caribbean culture, Antoinette experiences a fracture that finds no true resolution throughout the novel. This fractured sense of identity makes her an outsider: her culture and sense of self is both English and Jamaican, yet neither country is her true home. She questions who she is on a fundamental level, and we see that a sense of belonging eludes her. Furthermore, in this passage she calls herself the white cockroach, in a defeated sense owning the ridicule and the shame that accompanies it.

Judith Raitskin explores the implications of competing allegiances in her article “England: Dream and Nightmare,” and contends that “Rhys shows the ways in which cultural colonialism, operating through myths of home and family, is particularly implicated in the economic impoverishment and social exploitation of the colonized woman” (Rhys 251). Certainly this is the case for Antoinette, whose cultural and financial currency is negated by the colonial and post-colonial experience. Although Antoinette occupies a complex and controversial space by virtue of her family’s slaveholding past, she is nonetheless another casualty of the colonial machine. Her identity of duality creates a vacuum, a negative space of abjection and rejection from which there is no escape.

Similarly, Jallal, the central character of *Infidels*, finds himself torn between his Muslim beliefs and his sexual sense of self. The conflict between these competing allegiances becomes located in the character of Mahmoud, a man Jallal meets in the hospital. He is a Belgian man who has converted to Islam, and he is gravely ill with an unspecified sickness when he is first introduced to Jallal. Throughout the novel, Jallal has been wandering, exiled from his home in Morocco and quite rootless in his associations. It is through Mahmoud that Jallal finds strong identification as both a Muslim and a gay man: "Meeting Mahmoud at Brugmann Hospital in Brussels helped me to understand. Not loneliness or abandonment, but the deep meaning of my life, my existence. With Mahmoud, sick and beautiful, frail and powerful, I'd found a mission. Love and a mission. To love and be angry" (Taia 105). Mahmoud represents not only the competing allegiances of religion and love, but duality itself. Within this man resides polarity: love/anger, sick/ beautiful, devout/free, as though to locate these opposites within a single person somehow resolves the tension between them.

However, the novel reveals that these dualities and competing allegiances cannot be resolved so easily. Although Jallal sees Mahmoud as his reason for existing, as he is the convergence of his religion and his desire, the novel suggests that this convergence requires sacrifice: "With him, I entered the Revolution. With him, Mahmoud, I understood that a huge sacrifice had to be made in order for the world to change, for my heart to open and let in the light" (Taia 110). This passage acknowledges that Jallal's inner world is at odds with the world around him. In Jallal's vision, there is no conflict or tension between his devotion to Allah and his love of Mahmoud. However, the world in which he occupies, like Antoinette, is dependent upon

binary opposition. The love of two men and the love of Islam are mutually exclusive in the Muslim faith, requiring dramatic action from Jallal and Mahmoud in the form of a suicide bombing.

Although the act itself is horrific, in Jallal's view the bombing will reconcile this binary opposition that threatens to destroy him: "That was our mission, to make people see love. Through death. To stand firm against the plague spreading through Morocco. Banality. Narrowmindedness. Confinement. Submission...Who is preventing our souls from taking flight and writing another History with a new messenger?" (Taia 120-121). There is a sense that the only cure to the problem of competing allegiances and all of the resulting oppression it brings is destruction and regeneration. Jallal views the suicide bombing as an act of cleansing and purification, much as a traditional Jihadist might. However, he inverts this dynamic, as his bombing stands for the destruction of fundamentalism rather than the resurgence of it.

We see the bigotry that Jallal is attempting to destroy when a crowd realizes what Jallal and Mahmoud are attempting to do: "'It's them, the terrorists! Terrorists and fags'" (Taia 129). Here the act of a suicide bombing is conflated with being gay, which lends credence to Jallal's vision that the culture is irreparably broken and polluted with prejudice and hate. Mahmoud responds to the crowd with the following declaration: "'Stand back...We're not fags...We're brothers..Two brothers joined by Love...God is with us...'" (Taia 129). Although Jallal and Mahmoud recognize that their faith and their love for each other are in no way mutually exclusive, they also understand that the world does not share their view. Their love for each other and Allah can only be reconciled in the next world.

Intertextuality in *At Swim, Two Boys*

Intertextuality is a viable post-colonial response, in that it reorients the relationship between center and margin, and in this way “talks back” to the empire. Certainly this is the case for *At Swim Two Boys*, which can be viewed as a response to Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim Two Birds*, written just after Ireland gained its independence from England. However, while O’Brien questions the artificial and restrictive nature of national identity construction, O’Neill totally redefines what it means to be Irish. *At Swim Two Birds* is a multi-layered meta-fiction, featuring Irish scholars, Finn Mac Cool, and Mad King Sweeney, among other characters drawn from Irish myth and history. The characters ultimately revolt against the author who brings them to life, and the novel is at once comic and timely, as O’Brien provides a meditation on post-colonial Irish identity amid Ireland’s newfound freedom. It is this concern with the articulation of a national identity that is the primary connective thread linking the two novels, as O’Neill provides an alternative iteration of Irish identity.

Eibhlin Evans’ essay, “‘A lacuna in the palimpsest:’ A Reading of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim Two Birds*” contends that “inventing or inverting established, colonial or romanticized ideas of Ireland and the Irish are central concerns of many Irish writers” (Evans 92). Certainly this is true of both O’Brien and O’Neill, as both novels problematize the narrow options for national identity, albeit in very different ways. As Evans goes on to articulate, “Considering the context of its production and on examining its contents we can read *At Swim Two Birds* as a sophisticated rendering of the situation of the Irish subject in terms of self-creation and identity formation” (Evans 92). Likewise, *At Swim Two Boys* can be read as an extension of this conversation. O’Neill’s

novel explores the complex nature of self-creation in Ireland, and is a mediation on the formation of Irish identity, with a particular focus on the ways in which sexual orientation influences that sense of self and identity.

Both novels acknowledge the palimpsest of Irish identity formation, both with respect to history and culture, which is reflected in the structure of both books:

With close examination of the text we can identify the narrative components of O'Brien's truly carnivalesque novel echoing the narrative layers employed historically in the enterprise of Irish identity formation. This novel can be read as a disruptive and satirical intervention, a break or gap in the seamless layering of literary inscriptions/proscriptions of Irish identities which preceded its publication in 1939. O'Brien's metaphysical tendencies can then be read as deliberate attempts to escape the straitjacket of an identity model contained within a range of nationalistic narratives (Evans 93).

O'Neill and O'Brien both concern themselves with and respond to this "straitjacket identity" that prescribes how one should truly be Irish. Both novels attempt to disrupt this oppressive narrative, yet O'Neill takes this notion a step forward by queering the question of national identity. The novel's central objective is to build upon O'Brien's problematizing of the restrictive nature of Irish identity.

At Swim Two Boys seeks to integrate a queer identity into the palimpsest of Irish identity, and in this way it is the margin writing back to the center, demanding a seat at the table. This impulse is present throughout the text, and is particularly embodied within the character of Anthony MacMurrough. He serves as a kind of queer guide to

both Jim and Doyler, attempting to aid them in the formation of their own queer Irish identity, and to reveal that to be gay and Irish is not a mutually exclusive iteration of Irish identity. Most striking is MacMurrough's ability to show both Jim and Doyler what might be possible, despite the rigid restraints of the dominant culture. He often tells tales of the Sacred Band of Thebes, a group of soldiers who were also lovers; "Yes, and Jim had grasped instinctively that significance: that more than stories, they were patterns of the possible. ..Listen while I tell you, boy, these men loved and yet were noble. You too shall love, body and soul, as they; and there shall be a place for you, boy, noble and magnificent as any. Hold true to your love: these things shall be" (O'Neill 530-531). MacMurrough, in addition to offering a new and alternative "pattern of the possible," provides a reorientation of identity. Jim no longer needs to feel conflict or shame as a result of his love for Doyler. Rather, he can integrate that love harmoniously within his self-concept. MacMurrough provides the frame for this significant paradigm shift, via the model of the Sacred band of Thebes and the literal and metaphorical significance held therein.

To a certain extent, both novels also seek to expose the stereotypes inherent in this process of national identity formation. As Evans points out,

O'Brien includes a host of characters from Irish culture, from myths and legends, folk history and ancient literary works...they are adapted and included as parodic examples of a selection of nationally endorsed identity models, effectively as the source of stereotypical subscription for the Irish subject. In O'Brien's writing these figures/identity models become elements of the beleaguered psyche of a contemporary Irish subject (Evans 93).

There is a sense that national identity is artificial, as it is confined to the narrow definition promoted by the cultural agenda. We also see echoes of the post-colonial anxiety of identity post independence. Once a nation has freed itself from the colonial yolk, there is a questioning of what national identity will look like. O'Brien's concern was the restrictive and stereotypical representation in response to the question of who is Irish?

O'Neill's novel is equally concerned with stereotypes, yet he uses Oscar Wilde to subvert the stereotype of the gay dandy as somehow existing outside of the culture. Rather, he creates a convergence of Irish and queer identity in the character and representation of Wilde. Wilde is referenced throughout the novel, and he is presented simultaneously as the most famous and most tormented gay man of Ireland. Within the homophobic culture of 1916 Ireland, Wilde became the bogeyman symbol for all that the culture and the church wished to remain in the closet, and Anthony MacMurrough is an inheritor of the Wildean ethos. When he enters into a conversation with a former schoolmate who questions his sexuality, asking: "Damn it all, MacMurrough, are you telling me you are an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort?" He responds with: "If you mean am I Irish, the answer is yes" (O'Neill 268). In this powerful exchange, O'Neill successfully merges the queer and Irish identities within the symbol of Oscar Wilde. The suggestion is that the binary opposition that placed Wilde outside of the norms of Irish culture is no longer relevant and must be dissolved. To be Irish means many things, and in this passage O'Neill writes back to O'Brien, expanding the definition of Irishness to include queerness.

O'Brien recognized that the narrowly defined national identity that he parodied within his novel also created sexual repression, as that "identity model...stressed a pietistic and spiritually enriched image of the Irish person while ignoring the material deprivation and the social and sexual strictures that accompanied it. Members of the increasing urban population were...left to grope blindly for some reflection of themselves within their particular cultural space" (Evans 95). This superficial representation of identity negates the actual experience of the Irish subject, and problematizes any attempt at an authentic iteration of self. It is this problematizing that O'Neill explores, as both Jim and Doyler attempt to navigate through the layers of self that comprise their Irish identity. The novel suggests that the resolution to this crisis is the primacy of sexual identity as national identity.

O'Neill successfully merges the two elements via Jim and Doyler's fight, both for Ireland and for each other. When MacMurrough questions Jim regarding his feelings about fighting for Ireland's independence, a revealing conversation ensues, as Jim tells him, "'We'll be asked to fight for Ireland, sure I know that.' 'But what is Ireland that you should want to fight for it?' 'Sure I know that too...It's Doyler' he said. 'Doyler is your country?' 'It's silly, I know. But that's how I feel. I know Doyler will be out, and where would I be but out beside him? I don't hate the English and I don't know do I love the Irish. But I love him. I'm sure of that now. And he's my country'" (O'Neill). This beautifully written passage conflates the love of Doyler with the love of Ireland. In this way Jim's feelings for Doyler are elevated to the level of national allegiance and are integrally connected to his place within the Irish struggle. This dramatic reorientation of sexuality and nationality illuminate and expand O'Brien's ruminations on the limits of

Irish identity. O'Neill takes on O'Brien's challenge to articulate an Irish identity that is inclusive and authentic, rather than an imposition from a hegemonic imperative.

Intertextuality in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea is a prime example of the use of intertextuality as a post-colonial response, as it is a critical response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Jean Rhys writes back the empire via the re-imagining of the character of Bertha, Rochester's mad wife in the attic. By re-writing Bertha as Antoinette, a fully realized character with a life and a story distinct from that of Rochester, Rhys brings the margin to the center of the narrative. The concept of center/margin within post-colonial studies "is at the heart of any attempt at defining what occurred in the representation and relationship of peoples as a result of the colonial period. Colonialism could only exist at all by postulating that there existed a binary opposition into which the world was divided. The gradual establishment of an empire depended upon a stable hierarchical relationship in which the colonized existed as the other of the colonizing culture" (Ashcroft, et. al 32). In this textual response to *Jane Eyre*, Rhys makes plain this colonial machination, in effect ripping away the veil to reveal the operations of empire.

Bertha's movement from margin to center also involves a shift that humanizes her character. The Bertha of *Jane Eyre* is the essence of the margin, she is a beastly, sexualized other: "And Bertha's monstrosity is both accentuated and confirmed by her foreignness. A white Creole from Jamaica, she is implicitly alien to English nature and culture, an alarming mix of sexuality and savagery, of unnatural sexual 'propensities' and alien primitivism" (Nixon 267). Nicola Nixon articulates Bertha's marginalized role within the novel, noting the interconnectedness of her rampant, dangerous sexuality and her foreignness. Her status as a hyper-sexual other simultaneously reinforces both her outsider status as well as the implied superiority of

the more chaste English woman, in this case Jane Eyre. Bertha's savagery and sexuality are posited as a direct threat to the established culture of empire, and for this reason she is villainized and dehumanized.

This monstrous nature is further defined as aberrant and unnatural; "Characterized as mad and savage, as herself an affront to the 'natural' laws of progressive civilization and acculturation so dear to the Victorians, Bertha signifies what Nancy Armstrong calls an 'aberrant form of desire'-a desire that displays itself as a physical, and thus debased, sexualized passion rather than a mental, and therefore enlightened, chastely spiritual love-and her visibility in the text can therefore highlight by contrast the discreet parameters of legitimate desire" (Nixon 268). Bertha is devalued and delegitimized via her inappropriate sexual passion, which exist outside the boundary of appropriate female behavior. She is represented as the essence of physicality and the body, in contrast to Jane, who, in her preoccupation with the mental and spiritual, aligns with the Victorian ideal of femininity. The colonial is apparent within the text, as a gendered morality is encoded and reinforced via the narrative, particularly in the use of Bertha as Jane's foil. Boundaries are established, and the consequences of stepping outside of those codes of behavior are grave.

It is precisely these parameters that Rhys argues against; she challenges the colonial imperative, and adopts a critical, post-colonial gaze in her re-imagining of Bertha as Antoinette. Rhys calls attention to the fact that Bertha/ Antoinette functions as the other to the English ideal:

The existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through

discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view (Ashcroft et. al 154-155). By highlighting the ways in which colonialism has othered Antoinette and altered her life's trajectory, Rhys effectively shifts the blame from Bertha to the colonial/binary dynamic. The Bertha of *Jane Eyre* is also other, but her otherness is used as a justification to abuse and imprison her, while Antoinette's position as other is used to shine a light on the cruel consequences of empire.

In shifting the gaze of the novel, Rhys gives voice to the subjugated other, whereas Bertha was completely silenced. As aforementioned, the creation of the other serves to reassert the colonizer's alignment with all that is right and natural, thereby legitimizing their power and control of colony. For this reason, Bronte chose to silence Bertha, as she functions as the unnatural other. By contrast, "It was to be Jean Rhys' assumption in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, that the lost voice in *Jane Eyre* was one which the Victorians would neither articulate nor acknowledge: the voice of female passion, and of the 'other' who was both biologically and racially alien" (Nixon 269). This is the essence of intertextual post-colonialism: giving voice to the voiceless, and articulating and acknowledging all that the colonizer sought to suppress. By creating the character of Antoinette, Rhys is resisting the colonial narrative that *Jane Eyre* reinforces, as well as questioning the supposedly inscrutable truths that the novel seeks to uphold.

Specifically, Rhys questions the function of madness within *Jane Eyre*. Bertha's primary characteristic is her insanity, and it has certainly been at the center of literary

criticism of the novel: “the scene of Bertha’s madness seems to present what Helene Cixous might call an *unorganizable* female construct. This intrusion of Bertha’s madness into the narrative thus presents a sort of double madness-functioning at once as a disorganizing principle and as a scene of incomprehensible female passion” (Nixon 270). Either way, the blame falls squarely on Bertha, and her madness further justifies Rochester’s treatment of her. By contrast, Rhys envisions Antoinette’s decline as the result of Rochester’s cruel treatment of her. In her view, Rochester sought to break her spirit, as evidenced by his inner dialogue: “I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree-and break it. You say I did? No. That was love’s fierce play. Now I’ll do it. She’ll not laugh in the sun again... She said she loved this place. This is the last she’ll see of it” (Rhys 99). In shifting the point of view/gaze to Rochester, Rhys reveals the inverse of the *Jane Eyre* narrative, where Rochester is not victim, but rather villain. This passage reveals his purposeful cruelty, and his intention to break Antoinette, and this cruelty is intimately connected to both sex and place. He indicates that he has already “broken” her through “love’s fierce play,” which can be read as sex. This revelation inverts the unbound sexuality of Bertha and instead re-orientates the dangerous sexuality to Rochester. Taken a step further, Rochester represents the colonizer, and his brutal sexuality is a marker of the colonizer’s treatment of the colonized subject. Additionally, it is significant that Rochester seeks to break Antoinette by taking her away from Jamaica, as if her love for the place is somehow connected to her power, the power that he seeks to destroy. In this, we see echoes of the colonizer’s fear of the other, a fear of their power and connection to place.

The Rochester of Bronte's novel is blameless; he is imagined as the victim of a mad and dangerous woman, and Bertha's nature "allows Rochester credibly to vindicate himself at Bertha's expense, serving both to lessen his guilt as a potential bigamist and proleptically to anticipate his later 'true' marriage" (Nixon 271). Although Rochester has courted Jane while still married to Bertha, he is absolved of wrongdoing by virtue of Bertha's monstrousness and non-human status. In an inversion to this narrative, Rhys positions Rochester as the true monster, a man full of irrational hatred and darkness: "I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know...Above all I hated her" (Rhys 103). Here we witness the true reason that Rochester locked Bertha in the attic; it was his hatred of her, his inability to understand her, as well as the fear that arose from that lack of understanding. This re-writing of the narrative could also be interpreted as the ways in which the colonizer justifies his treatment of the colonized via othering and dehumanization. Rhys again shines a light on the colonizer/colonized dynamic, revealing the justifications for oppression and the erroneous, fabricated nature of those justifications.

Rhys reorientation of the gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea* illuminates the workings of the colonial machine. By re-imagining a text from the literary canon, she highlights the pervasive nature of the colonial narrative, and the ways in which literature can either further or limit the proliferation of that narrative.

Liminality as a Postcolonial Response

Both *Infidels* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* explore the concept of liminality, albeit in strikingly different ways. *Infidels* journeys through Morocco and reveals the rigid constraints of the dominant culture with regard to gender and sexuality. Taia exposes the shame and degradation endured by the main character, Jallal. He suffers as a result of being the son of Slima, a prostitute, and later as a result of being a gay man. Similarly, Antoinette, a white Creole from the Caribbean, suffers as a result of both her gender as well as her precarious place in the post-colonial West Indies. Jallal seeks to escape the binary prison of the culture, preferring to inhabit a liminal space, where all is possible. He dreams of escape, transformation, and Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate symbol of the interstitial fantasy space. This freeing, dreamlike effect of the liminal is not accessible for Antoinette. Rather, her occupation of the liminal is rather nightmarish, akin to that of the zombi who looms large on the Caribbean Islands.

In order to understand the ways in which liminality is functioning within the texts, it is useful to explore the specific definition of liminality in a post-colonial context. Simply stated, the liminal is “an interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area” and “the liminal prevents identities from polarizing between such arbitrary designations as ‘upper’ and ‘lower,’ ‘black’ and ‘white’” (Ashcroft 117). Certainly this definition seems to ring true in *Infidels*, as Jallal creates a sort of alternate reality in which the binary dissolves and meaning moves beyond the traditional polarizations of man, woman, good, evil, sinner, and saint. For Antoinette, the liminal space is nightmarish and prison-like, and her interstitial status is used as further justification for her subjugation by her husband.

Infidels opens with a stark perspective on Jallal and Slima's daily reality; although she performs a service that many in the community seek, she is paradoxically shunned for performing that service, and by extension, Jallal is as well. Their neighbor, Aisha, is particularly venomous in her attacks: "Day after day and year after year, with the blackened skillet, so very black, she's been saying, 'This is what you're worth, Slima, old slut. This is what I wish for you, to be burnt alive over the flames in this scorched pan! For you and your son to go to the Blackness forever, and soon! To be cursed forever in hell, on earth and in the Hereafter...'" (Taia 9). Aisha's curse represents the culture's appraisal of Slima and Jallal. Within the binary construct, there is only good/evil, and they fall on the wrong side of the polarity. Clearly gender is at issue; Slima is shamed and cursed for being a prostitute, yet the men who pay her are not. In the gender binary, women are held to a different standard than the men who engage in the same behavior.

Antoinette is similarly shunned with relation to the binary, but it is precisely her outsider/liminal status that creates the conflict. In order to fully understand her complex position, one must define what it means to be Creole: "'Creole' originally referred to a white (man) of European descent, born and raised in a tropical colony...From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, however, the most common use of the term in English was to mean 'born in the West Indies'" (Ashcroft, et. al 50-51). In newly emancipated Jamaica, white Creoles like Antoinette are despised; as she says, "They called us white cockroaches...One day a little girl followed me singing, 'Go away white cockroach, go away...Nobody want you. Go away'" (Rhys13). Clearly Antoinette's status in post-colonial Jamaica is quite complex; she was a part of the colonial system, viewed

as an intruder despite being born in Jamaica, which in some ways makes her a less sympathetic character. However, it is clear that she is also a victim of the ravages of colonialism, albeit in a very different manner than that of the Afro-Jamaican whose freedom was taken by force. It is this murky status that creates such conflict for Antoinette, especially when measured against the binary of good/evil and English/Caribbean. We see this conflict in the gaze of Rochester, who is troubled at the fact that he cannot neatly categorize his new bride. As he muses, "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 39). The liminality that Rochester identifies ultimately becomes a source of othering Antoinette; she cannot be placed within the binary system, so she must be destroyed.

In strong contrast, as a witness to the ravages of this polarized thinking, Jallal dreams of another reality; he dreams of transformation as a means of escape. This functions as a call for the dissolution of the borders and boundaries that imprison both he and Slima. However, as a young boy he is already aware that this type of reality does not exist for them, so he considers God's gaze and the ways in which it might be free of the binary constraint of culture: "God already accepts us as we are. He made us this way. In this condition...The others crush us, prevent us from seeing the light; more and more, they shut us into a hell they first invented for themselves" (Taia 13). Here we witness the contrast between the artificial and the natural state of being: the hellish creation of the binary and the resulting repression blocks out the light of God, who is free of these unnatural restrictions and limitations. God is possibility, existing within the interstitial space of the heavens.

Eventually, Jallal sublimates all of his hopes and fantasies about this liminality in the symbol of Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn functions as a placeholder and symbol of the interstitial space: "An actress. A solitary being. Naked. Between earth and heaven. In transit. A prophetess. A poet. Ignorant. Inspired" (Taia 51). Marilyn takes on a God-like role, and by the close of the novel she assumes the position of an angel in heaven. Yet, her person is not what would traditionally be characterized as angelic, which is precisely why Jallal elevates her to such a status. In his fever dream, the traditional definitions of good/bad, angel/devil, are absent. In this interstitial dream space, anything is possible, everything is fluid, in flux. Much like a long journey, the possibility lies in the in-between, neither here nor there, where anything may yet happen.

For Antoinette, her interstitial status makes her alien to both the English and the Caribbean alike. Even Christophine, a native of the West Indies who has known Antoinette all her life, finds her to be other. In a conversation with Rochester, she reveals her own difficulty in situating Antoinette within the cultural landscape: "She is not beke like you, but she is beke, and not like us either" (Rhys 93). Beke is a term for whites, and here we truly see Antoinette's liminal status. Although she is English by blood, she is culturally Caribbean, yet neither group recognizes her as one of their own. In this way, her liminality creates her outsider status, a kind of limbo from which there is no escape and no protection from the anger this liminality inspires in her husband. Truly, she is a sort of zombi, "a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombi can also be the spirit of a place" (Rhys 64). Like the zombi, Antoinette occupies the in-between, a kind of suspended purgatory that defies categorization. While Jallal sees potential and hope in the interstitial, Antoinette finds it

a nightmarish space in which her freedoms are slowly and methodically eradicated by Rochester.

Despite the optimism inherent in Jallal's liminal space, the vacillation between dream and reality ultimately reveals a tragic truth; it is only in death that Jallal can hope to come to this place of hope, freedom, and possibility. The only escape from the binary prison that shames him and denies his identity is death. When Jallal meets Mahmoud, even his excitement at meeting a man he could love and make a life with is tinged with sadness and fear, for he knows that the culture they inhabit will never permit them happiness. Perhaps this is why he agrees to a suicide bombing mission, even as he asks, "Who is preventing our souls from taking flight and writing another History with a new messenger?" (Taia 120-121). Of course, he is well aware that it is the keepers of the culture who limit and imprison him, so death becomes the only means to bring this dream to fruition. As they move closer to the bombing, they begin to move closer to this dream, this interstitial space: "Mahmoud's voice came again...Soft, Violent. Female. Male...We climbed very high...and pushed past all boundaries, all religions, all sexes" (Taia 124). The highest, most sublime state of being is that of the liminal, this is the place of true peace and freedom, where polarity and the resulting bigotry do not exist.

It is in heaven that Jallal and Mahmoud can be free, the liminal dream is realized, and the bonds of culture are finally broken. In meeting God, Jallal finally receives the blessing he has dreamed of : "You've arrived...Boundaries no longer exist. Shame does not exist...Here you can finally know each other. Know each other without judgments or insults" (Taia 135-136). How tragic that it is only in death that Jallal and Mahmoud can be afforded the same rights that heterosexual couples enjoy in life. Ultimately, though

much of the novel reads as Jallal's fevered dream, it is in reality a nightmare mirror reflecting the culture back to us. Similarly, Antoinette's nightmare occupation of the liminal is a direct consequence of the colonial gaze and the imposition of gender and power relations that gaze implies.

Gender Dynamics

The gender dynamics in *Wide Sargasso Sea* mimic the colonial/hegemonic patterns of the island itself. The relationship between Antoinette and Rochester mirrors the colonial power dynamic in a variety of ways. Specifically, Rochester's attempt to possess, exoticize, and re-name Antoinette are iterations of a broader attempt to colonize what he envisions as the "blank slate" of both Antoinette and of Jamaica as well. This colonization speaks to the hegemonic devices that control the narrative of both gender and place, and the ways in which that hegemony insinuates itself in both the public and private spheres.

Davi Silva Goncalves explores these parallels in her article, "Drowning in a Wide Sargasso Patriarchy: the Borderland's Revision of Female Prototypes." Among other relevant issues within the text, Goncalves asserts that "All women are still, to a less or more considerable extent, marginalised by a hegemonic narrative based upon the sovereignty of what is male, white, Eurocentric, and heterosexual" (Goncalves 198). Truly, this statement gets to the essence of the multivalent modes of othering that occur in a postcolonial society. There are layers of marginalisation and oppression as a result of the hegemonic/colonial machine, which results in the subjugation of the individual on a variety of levels. Rochester is the embodiment of this form of sovereignty, and Antoinette proves to be his foil.

From the start of Rochester's entrance into the novel, there is a sense that he seeks to possess Antoinette, despite the fact that he remains incredibly divided in terms of his feelings for her. The possession that he seeks is all consuming, despite his misgivings about her as the narrative progresses: "I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic.

She's mad but *mine, mine...*My lunatic. My mad girl" (Rhys 99). Although brief, this passage is quite revealing in terms of Rochester's inner world. There is such emphasis on the possessive here, a sense of perverse and stubborn ownership of this sick and broken woman. Of course, it was Rochester who brought Antoinette to this state of madness via his rejection of her, which makes this desire to possess so strangely ironic and unsettling. It is as if he only wanted to possess her in this broken state, as though Antoinette was too much for Rochester to handle. This stance can be viewed as an additional resonance of the colonial gaze, as the colonizer often felt intimidated by the native inhabitants, and sought to weaken and subjugate them in order to possess them and the land they occupied.

Similarly, Rochester seeks to possess the land of Jamaica, yet feels the same trepidation for place that he does for Antoinette, again by virtue of the otherness of both. "It was a beautiful place-wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret" (Rhys 51-2). Here we witness the gaze of the colonizer, who sees the colonized land as a blank slate, a space upon which he can inscribe what he pleases. However, we also see the disturbing quality of otherness and difference, which tinges the pastoral view. Rochester also seems to feel frustration at being denied access/entrance to the mysteries of the land, as if this denial prevents the possession he craves. Goncalves also notes this attempt to possess place;

Rochester's admiration for the seemingly pristine landscape of Jamaica is about to be transformed into his will to domesticate and tame what belongs to it-and that he wants for himself. His discourse, here, manifests rather clearly the configuration of hegemonic pastoralism-the idea that what is different from

Western tradition is already lost and about to be adapted (what is untouched, in this sense, would be waiting to be touched) (Goncalves 198).

In this articulation, there is a sense that a colonized space is only made real by the recognition of and interaction with the white colonizing male. He is not satisfied to merely inhabit the land; rather he seeks to assert his will and dominate all that surrounds him, in the process irrevocably transforming both people and place.

Certainly this extends to Rochester's relationship with Antoinette, which proves to be another iteration of the colonizing impulse. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Rochester intends to possess Antoinette fully, to the point of bondage, immobility and complete lack of agency. This desire is most apparent in the following passage, a conversation between Rochester and Christophine; "She tell me in the middle of all this you start calling her names. Marionette. Some word so.' 'Yes, I remember I did.' (*Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta*) 'That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak'" (Rhys 93). The transformation of Antoinette to a marionette, a doll, represents the methodical stripping away of her agency to the point of immobility and stasis. Here Rochester is the puppetmaster, he pulls the strings, all movement and access is available only through him, which is the ultimate iteration of possession.

In a broader context, their union represents the hegemonic machine: "His hidden marriage to Antoinette (whose name he changes to Bertha) represents British domination over the colony (and its subjects); and so does his rage and disgust concerning her" (Goncalves 198). We see this disgust develop gradually throughout the novel, and it is consistently linked to the exoticism of Jamaica: "I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too

large and can be disconcerting...Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 39). In Rochester’s gaze we see a foreign, exoticized version of Antoinette, a hybrid creature who both excites and repulses him.

In post-colonial theory, the exotic becomes illuminated:

The word exotic was first used in 1599 to mean ‘alien, introduced from abroad, not indigenous.’ By 1651 its meaning had been extended to include ‘an exotic and foreign territory,’ ‘an exotic habitat and demeanor’..During the nineteenth century, however, the exotic, the foreign, increasingly gained, throughout the empire, the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference (Ashcroft, et. al. 87).

We see elements of both definitions of the exotic in Rochester’s estimation of Antoinette; she is certainly alien, as evidenced by her appearance and demeanor, but there is also something quite stimulating about her, which manifests itself in their physical relationship. “As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (Rhys 55). This passage reveals the parallels of the colonization of both land and body, and the ways in which exoticizing the other gives permission to degrade and abuse. Because Antoinette is other, alien, and strange to Rochester, he feels justified in using her body for pleasure while simultaneously feeling revulsion for her. This type of hypocrisy and dualism is symptomatic of the colonial condition, in which the land and the people are abused in a variety of ways, and that abuse is sanctioned by virtue of their otherness,

their difference from the colonial power. This exoticizing and abusive force ultimately transforms Antoinette into the mad marionette, totally devoid of agency and currency.

This exoticizing impulse of the colonizer has a long history, and has particularly affected women: "Subaltern women have historically been described as animalised and hypersexualised, as if in need to be "named"/ "controlled"-and such notion still survives in the contemporaneity" (Goncalves 195). Rochester's re-naming of Antoinette could be interpreted as an attempt to repress what he perceived as a dangerous and exotic sexuality. Throughout the novel there is a sense that Rochester feels threatened by both Antoinette and the land itself, so her re-naming could act as a balm to this fear, a way of harnessing the threat of the other. Antoinette recognizes this attempt at magical thinking; "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's Obeah too" (Rhys 88). There is a true power to naming, and Rochester attempts to dismantle Antoinette's sense of self and identity, and by extension, her connection to the land itself. Both Antoinette and Jamaica represent the unknowable, the inaccessible, and Rochester's mission as a colonizer is to know all and possess all.

There is a sense that Rochester had desired a sort of blank slate, both of place and of person as well. He desired the ability to make both Jamaica and Antoinette into whatever he desired them to be, which is to totally negate the subjectivity of both the individual and the nation/culture.

The classic figure of the good shepherd resurrects with a clear agenda; taken from the industrial and corrupted European existence, he/she believes in the chance of a new beginning in the New World...there is no way to start over with a

clean slate-, and revising history is thus about providing documents with new versions of events, as what has been narrated can no longer be erased or simply abandoned (Goncalves 199).

Truly, the narrative is a testament to the impossibility of the blank slate. Rochester's naive belief in this pastoral myth and his resistance to accept the true nature of his circumstance led to Antoinette's demise and descent into madness.

Rhys' novel is evidence that rather than a blank slate, history, and especially post-colonial history, is a palimpsest, as "any cultural experience is itself an accretion of many layers... While the 'layering' effect of history has been mediated by each successive period, 'erasing' what has gone before, all present experience contains ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present" (Ashcroft, et. al. 158). Antoinette herself is a living palimpsest, imprinted with the traces of the past that still color and influence the present. It was this fullness, this mystery within her, that Rochester sought to destroy. The impulse of the colonizer is to destroy that which cannot be understood, and in this way their relationship is a potent reminder of the menace of hegemony and colony.

Considerations of Class and Sexuality

It is also important to look at the ways in which class is further striating society, in effect weakening the colonized via an attack from within. This notion of divide and conquer is yet another element of the colonial palimpsest of othering/subjugation. We see class issues and the ways in which they wreak havoc in all three of the novels, but it is of particular importance in *At Swim Two Boys* and *Infidels*. In these novels, there is a convergence of class and sexuality, and an exploration of the ways in which sex functions as currency within this striated class system. *At Swim Two Boys* will be investigated for the ways in which MacMurrough and Doyler's relationship is a convergence of sex and class within colonial Ireland, while *Infidels* will reveal the ways in which women, particularly Slima, experience oppression as a result of the intesection/interplay of class and gender/sexuality.

Throughout the novel, Doyler is represented as the other on many levels: he is a colonized Irish citizen from the west of Ireland, an area that is most symbolic of the quintessential Irish language and culture that was subjugated by Britain. Additionally, he is from a poor family and has socialist leanings. Lastly, he is gay; Doyler is a true cultural outlier in 1916 occupied Ireland, and much of the novel concerns itself with iterations of this outsider status. Doyler's class status is magnified further via his interactions with MacMurrough, the wayward son of a prominent and wealthy Irish family. MacMurrough and Doyler begin a sexual relationship that is financial in nature, essentially Doyler is paid to have sex with MacMurrough, though the process is not articulated openly between them.

However, there is no doubt that sex is the currency, and that Doyler's lower class position is of great relevance. After their first night together, ironically it is Doyler's mother, a washerwoman, who launders MacMurrough's dirty sheets as Doyler looks on: "What house is it at all needs them sheets?' 'Miss MacMurrough' she answered...In a confused way he watched the sheet she was scrubbing. 'The slavey says 'tis a nephew from England they have staying and he's the jack and all for clean sheets. Please God, he'll stay a while yet. 'Tis the dirty linen of them above us will keep us body and soul together'" (O'Neill 189). This passage is incredibly revealing, both of gaze, and of the complexity of social interactions via class and sexuality. Doyler has a shift in perspective; as he watches his mother wash the sheets that he had paid sex with MacMurrough on, it is as if he recognizes anew the dynamic between them. The sheets become a symbol of class and sexual shame for Doyler, and by virtue of his relationship with MacMurrough, the two are inextricably intertwined. As his mother states, they rely on the dirty linens of the upper class to survive, in more ways than one.

In a colonial society, class divisions take on a significant resonance, as this stratification causes conflict and division among the colonized subjects: "It is the opposition between the colonized excluded from the benefits of colonialism and their counterparts who manage to turn the colonial system to their advantage" (Fanon 67). Certainly Doyler is a symbol of the dispossessed colonized, while MacMurrough's financial and class position insulates him from the harsher realities of colonialism. Eventually this divide between them is overtly discussed, especially as Doyler becomes more deeply entrenched in the socialist movement. He begins to see class divisions as

related to sexual dynamics, in that both involve a power differential and sex becomes currency.

When MacMurrough brings Doyler to a tailor to be fitted for a suit, Doyler feels as though the tailor made advances to him, and he attempts to situate those advances in a class context: "Damn fellow had a squeeze at me flowers and frolics...Why would he want doing a thing like that?" He was genuinely mystified. MacMurrough said, 'Perhaps he liked you.' 'Liked me? He wasn't rich.' This leap of logic required another cigarette...'Does one need to be rich to enjoy the company of a handsome young man? Money is irrelevant to desire. Only it helps to overcome another's shyness, That's all.' 'No, it's not all...you think any fellow would want another fellow? That's me point sure. If it wasn't for the walker as led him into it, he wouldn't think to do that. If it wasn't for meeting you I wouldn't be..I wouldn't be sitting here, that's all'" (O'Neill 243). The polarity of class gaze is quite revealing in this passage; MacMurrough views money as merely a means to an end, it provides access to sex and affection. For Doyler, sex is currency, an exchange of services is rendered, and the power differential between rich and poor remains intact. Furthermore, Doyler suggests that homosexuality is a sort of inherited or communicable condition, as he feels one must be "led" into sex with another man rather than desire it naturally. Of course, this analysis may derive from the culture's homophobic overtones; it may be easier for Doyler to displace his sexuality on MacMurrough rather than to accept it as an element of his identity. Additionally, the fact that sex between them is financially based makes it easier to situate MacMurrough as the aggressor, a reiteration of the class dynamic between them.

MacMurrough also comes to question the relationship between them, and what it reveals regarding both class and sex. As he considers their first night together, he concludes that “It was my desire that had occasioned our intercourse, it was by my leave that we walked through the garden. Yet he chose-I do not know by what expediency-to behave as if this were not the case” (O’Neill 162). MacMurrough is struck by this, and ponders the ways in which Doyler attempts to regain some sense of agency, to somehow right the power differential between them. It is as if by negating MacMurrough’s control of the situation, Doyler somehow asserts his own agency within their sexual dynamic. There is a threat of choicelessness and powerlessness in being of the lower class position, and Doyler resists this same striation within his relationship with MacMurrough.

The two discuss the conflation of class and sex overtly via an author (Edward Carpenter, a late 19th/early 20th century queer theorist), who advocates sex as a means of negating class division: “‘Fellow called Carpenter. Written books, apparently. Talks about comrade love...No, seriously. Believes it’s a way of bridging social divides.’ ‘Likely story. If that was the case, every time a nob took a tart they’d end up talking socialism...Suppose you’re going to ask me to go with you now.’ ‘Would you-if I asked?’ ‘Not if you asked. Different if I offered’” (O’Neill 248). Again, Doyler asserts his agency by suggesting that he can make choices the same as MacMurrough can, he can choose to have intercourse without MacMurrough asking, which is a form of agency and provides an access to control that is largely absent from his experience. MacMurrough’s notion of sex as a means of leveling the playing field is complex in terms of how sex reflects class roles within the novel. While Doyler initially seems to be subjugated by

MacMurrough, it is also true that MacMurrough assists Dolyer in seeing the possibilities of a gay identity and also of a true relationship with Jim, where sex is not a currency but rather a source of pleasure and liberation. This duality represents an important truth, that the conflation of sex and class can be both liberating and stifling.

Certainly this is the case in *Infidels*; as the son of a sex worker, Jallal experiences oppression as a result of Slima's profession: "They say I'm dirty. You're dirty. I am the son of a dirty woman. The son of dirty Slima" (Taia 8). Although Slima performs an essential role within the culture, in that she helps husbands and wives in their sexual relationship, she is nonetheless reviled in the public sphere. Both she and Jallal are relegated to the space of the other: Slima is defined in opposition to the chaste Muslim women that she often helps on their wedding nights. It is this binary opposition that striates the culture and leaves Jallal in the lower social caste.

Slima's mother was also a sex worker, and she too experienced the prejudice of the culture and the relegation to the lower caste of society: "People have always given me another picture of myself. I'm perverse. The perverse old woman everyone needs. A bit of a witch. A bit of a doctor. A bit of a whore. The sex specialist" (Taia 20). The gaze in this passage is significant, as Slima's mother seems unable to form an identity separate from the one placed upon her by the culture. As a woman who helps others understand their sexual nature, she is automatically labeled a whore and a cultural outlier. She finds that her only salvation is escape: "I'd had enough of the hostility and rejection they constantly made me endure...Like all abandoned women in this country, I lay down by the tomb of the saint" (Taia 20-21). This passage situates the condemning gaze specifically in Morocco, and in what is inferred to be a culture of repression, one

which casts out those who are different or other, those on the wrong side of the binary dynamic.

Throughout the novel, there are connections made between women, sex, and subjugation. There is a sense that to be a woman in Morocco is to be oppressed, and that one's sexual nature is the most likely to be villainized. At one point in the novel, Slima gets into a heated debate about a Moroccan singer, Samira Said, who is accused of starring in a pornographic film, again conflating sex as currency and condemnation: "And where did this rumor start? Do you know? Morocco, I suppose...No other country pushes its citizens to the brink the way Morocco does. Tries to destroy them at all costs. Follows them everywhere with its curse...You can't succeed in Morocco. People will do anything to stop you, control you, keep you down. They force you to whore yourself. They take your money then pretend they don't know you. They call you a slut, a disgrace, an infidel. But they're the infidels. Totally heartless" (Taia 63). There is much defining and redefining within this passage; there is the notion that Morocco as a cultural force defines women in terms of sexual currency, with perceived sexual deviance being cause for condemnation. By extension, that means that sexual purity also has its own currency, and this dynamic positions women quite precariously, as any acting out of sexual norms means one is an infidel. Slima boldly problematizes this assertion, suggesting that it is the culture and ways in which culture perverts women's sexuality that is the true heretical evil.

The beauty of the novel is that despite the rigid and oppressive nature of the culture, Jallal finds ways to resist subjugation and to redefine identity. Specifically, Jallal creates an alternate view of his mother, seeing her holiness despite the cultural label of

infidel: "God already accepts us as we are. He made us this way. In this condition. In this situation...The others crush us, prevent us from seeing the light; more and more, they shut us into a hell they first invented for themselves" (Taia 13). This inversion of the social strata is a powerful redefinition of identity, both for Slima and Jallal. Like his grandmother before him, Jallal realizes that the only solution to the hegemonic repression of the culture is escape.

The Sea and Freedom in *At Swim, Two Boys*

In each of the three novels, there is an attempt made by the characters to create an alternate reality/space in which they can be free of the restrictive impositions of the dominant/colonial culture. They succeed to varying degrees in this mission to bring their identity to fruition in a created and intentional space. For Jim and Doyler, the main characters in O'Neill's *At Swim Two Boys*, the sea functions as this alternate universe, in that it is a place of freedom and possibility. It is as though the ocean is a portal to another realm, one in which Doyler and Jim can reconcile the supposedly competing elements of their identities as articulated by the dominant culture. The sea provides a space for redefining what it is to be an Irish man who loves both his country as well as another man.

Although Jim initially must be coaxed into swimming at the Forty Foot with Doyler, it soon becomes apparent that this location holds a special significance. It is a place out of time, a portal into another realm that is full of freedom and possibility. Significantly, it is a space that is free of the rules and restrictions of Irish society, specifically those of the homophobic and restrictive Catholic church. When Jim imagines the sea prior to actually swimming with Doyler, it takes on the resonances of a dreamscape: "In a dreamy way he saw the sea and the way the sea was brighter than the sky when it rained...And a boy swimming at the Forty Foot, or maybe two boys swimming, the only figures in all the scene while all round the rain fell and the church bells tolled for Mass." (O'Neill 130). The metaphorical impact here is of the sea being the bright, beckoning image that stands in contrast to the grey and dreary rain, a place of refuge for the two boys who swim in it without interference or interruption. It is also

significant that Jim imagines the church bells tolling at the very moment he is in the sea with Doyler, a testament to his conflicted feelings about missing church to swim at the Forty Foot and all that the choice implies.

Despite his ambivalent feelings, Jim recognizes the ocean to be a place of freedom, and he yearns to be free of the guilt and shame he feels as a result of his burgeoning sexuality. The constant pressure to perform according to the standards of the culture and the church can only be lost in the sea: "Pleasure to swim in the rain, they say...That would be a freedom, to be out in the rain and not to trouble. Your trouble in your pile of clothes" (O'Neill 131). Jim lives with the constant worry or "trouble" that he is evil or damaged as a result of his attraction to men, and there is the sense in this passage that he desperately craves a reprieve from this trouble, one that the sea can provide. We sense a line of demarcation here; the clothes are left behind on the shore, along with all of the repressive elements of the culture that threaten to weigh Jim down to the point of overwhelm. Setting foot into the water is a kind of rebirth, a chance to reimagine oneself without the weight of expectation, true freedom that is inaccessible to Jim in the rest of his life.

It is this sense of freedom that Doyler uses to convince Jim to skip Mass so that he can begin to teach him to swim at the Forty Foot. Jim has only swam in the public baths, which represent conformity and adherence to the norms of the culture. The sea is something altogether different, and Doyler's invitation to swim with him carries the resonances of that difference: "'Forget your baths, come swimming in the sea. It's different in the sea, don't ask me why, but you don't find the same anywheres else. There's a freedom I can't explain, like your troubles was left in your pile of clothes.

There's how many waves to wash you, sure they wash right through your head. Will you come?" (O'Neill 127). Doyler describes a mysticism that is exclusive to the ocean, in that it serves as a portal to another dimension, one of freedom and possibility.

Furthermore, there is a ritualistic component to his invitation to be cleansed by the waters. This passage evokes a baptismal element, an inverse indoctrination in which Jim will be cleansed of the guilt and repression of the church and the culture at large. All that remains after this cleansing is his essential self, free of the superficial markers of identity imposed upon him by the dominant, polarizing culture.

This freedom is inextricably linked to Jim's attraction and connection to Doyler. Although subtle at the start, their swimming lessons are clearly charged with their desire for one another. The sea provides the space for this attraction and connection to come to fruition, and for both boys to understand that their relationship is perfectly natural, in strong contrast to the homophobic world in which they occupy. Although he is initially hesitant, Jim agrees to swim naked in the Forty Foot with Doyler: "It was special to swim naked. The way nature intended, so Doyler claimed. Nobody minded at the Forty Foot" (O'Neill 193). The ease with which the two young men swim together in the flesh is a testament to the great liberating power of the ocean within the scope of the novel. Not only is the act permitted, it is deemed natural, and there is no threat of ridicule or reprisal in this space. In this way, the Forty Foot is the alternate universe, the inverse of the repressive, polarizing culture of the land.

Once the lessons begin, we quickly see the metaphorical significance of the sea expand to larger notions of nation and identity. Doyler tells Jim the story of two Irish patriots, Gidley and MacKinley, whose bodies were left on the Muglins, an island in

close proximity to their swimming area. At Doyler's suggestion, they form a plan to swim out to the Muglins in a culminating feat of their lessons at the Forty Foot: "When we swim out there we'll bring us a flag to raise. We'll raise the Green and claim the Muglins for Ireland. Then finally the ghosts of Gidley and MacKinley, bold patriots them both, will go to rest" (O'Neill 191). The implication here is that the flag will be planted for these lost patriots, but also for Jim and Doyler, the act itself being a claim on the legitimacy of their newly forged identities within the waters of the Forty Foot.

The convergence of Ireland's freedom with that of Doyler and Jim is explored in Joseph Valente's article, *Race/Sex/Shame: The Queer Nationalism of At Swim Two Boys*. Valente identifies the quest to plant the flag at the Muglins as particularly significant:

The proposed buddy quest represents the supreme expression of their shared commitments, amorous and ethno-political, and of the underlying connection between them...Understood in the broader context of their relationship, this symbolic gesture serves to invoke the prospect of a queer nation...The flag to be planted, accordingly, signifies Irish claims on the island while simultaneously resignifying Irishness, placing it beyond the boundaries of normative identity formation (Valente 61).

Valente's argument gives credence to the notion of the ocean as a place of possibility, to include the possibility of a queer nation. The convergence of the Irish cause with that of Jim and Doyler's plight challenges the binary system that is at the heart of oppression, be it colonial or homophobic. Furthermore, Valente's assertion that the resignification of Irishness places it beyond the boundaries of normative identity

formation is further evidence of the otherworldly quality of the sea. It is only within the water that such a radical and refreshing concept could be born. Jim and Doyler gain access to a new kind of Irishness, one in which they are free to form their own sense of identity without fear of losing their connection to Ireland and all that the connection signifies.

The power of the sea and all that it signifies is also acknowledged by MacMurrough, a character who is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde, and who serves as a sort of complex mentor to Jim and Doyler. MacMurrough suffers extreme shame and self-loathing throughout the novel as a result of being gay, and there is a sense that he seeks to somehow protect Jim and Doyler from the same fate. He recognizes the Forty Foot's role in this ambition as he watches the boys swimming: "Two heads. At swim, two boys. And yet not boys but youth itself. Distance detached them, water unformed them, particularities washed away...The sea proposed an ideal, unindividuate, sublime" (O'Neill 228). MacMurrough's gaze provides further insight into the possibilities the sea provides. Within its waters the boys are detached from the real, the everyday, and a sort of universal, mystical perfection reigns. They are somehow bigger than just their individual selves, they are youth itself, youth in its natural, unbridled perfection.

Despite the utopian quality of the Forty Foot, the dominant culture always threatens to overwhelm the dream, a fact of which both boys are acutely aware. This fact makes the Forty Foot all the more significant, as it is the only space they have in which to bring dreams to fruition, as Doyler remarks: "It's clearer now. It'll be us two together, out there in the sea. We have to go, because in a way, you see, we'll always be there...No one will take it from us" (O'Neill 443). Doyler implicitly acknowledges the

challenges of bringing their dream to fruition in the “real world.” Despite the fact that their time at the Forty Foot had real and incredibly significant implications for both of them, it was very much an alternate universe. For that reason, he firmly situates the dream in the ocean, and in their trip to the Muglins. There is a sense that the only space where the beauty and power of their relationship will be safe is in memory, and in their time in the sea. Because of the mystical quality of the Forty Foot, one gets the idea that somehow the ocean can hold the experience in a sort of hyper-present, in a space that is free from the restraints of time, and is rather eternal. Because Jim and Doyler are part of a dispossessed class all too familiar with the ways in which one can be stripped of all that is dear, it is all the more crucial that this potent experience be safe from exploitation.

When the boys finally accomplish their goal of swimming to the Muglins, there is a sense of finality to that act that is both beautiful and haunting. It is on the island that they finally consummate their relationship, lending further credence to the concept of the island and the sea as the locus of freedom and possibility. However, within this liberating experience there is a sense of inevitability, and of the fleeting nature of this alternate reality: “They had this together now. They had their island...No one could take it from them...This was the light the Muglins shone all those years. It was here was their home, it was in the sea, an island” (O’Neill 466). Of course, the irony here is in situating the sea as home- it is by definition a place of constant change and impermanence, as is the Muglins island. Nonetheless, there is a powerful possession that is expressed in this passage, a kind of reclamation of self and identity that will be very permanent despite the fleeting nature of the experience. Jim and Doyler have suffered dispossession and

disenfranchisement, both as colonized subjects and as a result of their sexuality, so the act of reclaiming the island and possessing their own experience is quite significant.

The light of the Muglins is the light of their love, which, like the sea, is eternal.

Alternate Realities in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Similarly, we see an attempt by Antoinette to create an alternate reality in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Feeling despair due to her troubled relationship with Rochester, she seeks the help of Christophine, a native Jamaican who works in her home. Antoinette attempts to use obeah (a spiritual system based in the supernatural) to bind herself to Rochester and solidify her place as his wife. However, the actual desire to create this alternate space via obeah is much more complex and speaks to Antoinette's place as Other, and to the instability inherent in her occupied space of subjugated liminality. It is this liminal standing that ultimately undoes the attempt to carve out a self-regulated space, and actually hastens Antoinette's descent into madness.

In order to fully understand Antoinette's deep need to create a new and alternative space to occupy, one must investigate her complex role within the colonial culture of a newly emancipated Jamaica. As a white Creole and daughter of a former slave owner, she occupies a controversial and difficult position within the culture. She is not exactly one of the colonized, and in truth she could be said to carry the sins of the oppressor; certainly she is despised by the Afro-Jamaicans who suffered tremendously as a result of the practice of slavery. However, she is also not a colonizer: she is not English, and as a woman she lacks power or authority. The new culture of Jamaica has left her essentially powerless, as she occupies an intermediary zone devoid of agency or true currency. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* makes plain the colonial lines of demarcation, and in his definition we can see that Antoinette falls through the space in between: "This compartmentalized world, this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species...it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what

species, what race one belongs to...you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (Fanon 5). Although Antoinette is assumed to be white, she is not English, and that in itself makes her other, yet she is not black either. Additionally, she is not rich, which further problematizes her place within the racial binary of colonial culture.

Antoinette is painfully aware of her other, liminal position, and she seeks a transformation in order to situate herself in a more favorable context, in essence to transform her entire sense of self and reality. Initially she feels this transformation or alternate reality may be possible via a move to England with Rochester, as she explains to Christophine: "I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me" (Rhys 66). Antoinette imagines a new world in England, a complete eradication of her liminal and unstable status as a Creole; she will finally belong, an English woman firmly established within the confines of the culture. However, her access to that realm is firmly based on her marriage to Rochester, which also exists on unstable ground, as he feels ill at ease with Antoinette due to her otherness and her connection to a land that he finds menacing and foreign.

As he ponders his circumstance, his colonial gaze is revealed. "I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain...I hated its beauty and its magic and the secrets I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness" (Rhys 103). Here we see Rochester's conflicting feelings for Antoinette, and by extension, the Caribbean. His gaze is that of the colonizer; he reveals his anger and frustration at being denied full access to the land and to his wife, as the secrets he

alludes to prevent his full possession of both. The paradox here is that Rochester at once feels desire and repulsion for this exotic land and the woman who is the embodiment of that land. The fact that she cannot be compartmentalized into the colonial machine that Fanon alludes to assures her demise.

Nonetheless, Antoinette is tragically determined to create this alternate universe for herself, one in which transformation and therefore acceptance is possible. She understands that she will require forces beyond the normal realm to accomplish this impossible goal, which lead her to Christophine and the magic of obeah. However, Christophine is resistant to assist in this way, noting “All that foolishness and folly. Too besides, that is not for beke (white person). Bad, bad trouble come when beke meddle with that” (Rhys 68). It is ironic that Christophine evokes Antoinette’s whiteness as a reason not to use obeah, as it is precisely her questionable belonging to the race that has created the problem in the first place. Additionally, Christophine herself acknowledges Antoinette’s otherness, commenting that “She is not beke like you, but she is beke, and not like us either” (Rhys 93). Antoinette is an outsider, and for this reason she seeks out a space in which she can resolve this otherness and access a new identity via Rochester and a move to England. Sandra Blake, in her article, “Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematics of Liberation in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” views this desire negatively, commenting that Antoinette “has betrayed herself...Worst, Antoinette wants to use the spell to complete her assimilation to England and to whiteness” (Drake 198). However, Antoinette attempts to resolve her fractured identity with the means available to her, even if that is a sort of self-betrayal. Her interstitial position within the colonial culture affords her few options.

Christophine eventually agrees to make an obeah love potion in order to bewitch Rochester and bind him to Antoinette, but the process goes horribly wrong. After ingesting the potion Rochester blacks out, and wakes up in horrible recognition of what has occurred:

I woke in the dark after dreaming that I was buried alive, and when awake the feeling of suffocation persisted...The cold light was on her and I looked at the sad droop of her lips, the frown between her thick eyebrows, deep as if it had been cut with a knife...As I watched her, hating, her face grew smooth and very young again, she even seemed to smile. A trick of the light perhaps. What else? (Rhys 83).

Again, the gaze here is essential; the obeah potion, meant to make Rochester see Antoinette through a veil of love and devotion, has only strengthened his feelings of revulsion for her. It is assumed that, as predicted, her liminal status prevented the magic from taking root. Instead, the attempt to create an alternate space of possibility and transformation becomes a nightmare. The potion hastens Antoinette's downward spiral, a premonition of which is revealed when Rochester reveals the following: "I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl" (Rhys 83). The obeah potion ushers in a psychic death for Antoinette, as any hope of a new life is shattered by the failed attempt at changing Rochester's gaze.

The terrifying experience of the love potion solidifies Rochester's hatred of Antoinette, and at the same time it reaffirms her otherness, the foreign taint that he has feared and suspected all along. Additionally, Rochester begins to align her otherness with her sexuality, as he believes that "She thirsts for *anyone*, not for me...She'll loosen

her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving). She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would-or could" (Rhys 99). The colonial gaze conflates the exotic with the sexual and the mad. The binary opposition of the culture of colony posits the propriety of the English against the savagery of the Caribbean.

Nese Senel explores this notion in the article, "A Postcolonial Reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys," suggesting that "Another main oriental attitude of the West towards nonwestern societies has been to perceive the rest as the 'exotic, mystical, and seductive' other companion" (Senel 4). Certainly Rochester situates Antoinette as the dangerous, overly sexualized other who must be contained. Lee Erwin's "History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" supports this position as well: "Whereas Antoinette sees her own displaced, deracinated condition in terms of historically specific shifts in class and economic power, the Rochester figure refuses these categories and instead interprets racial difference in moral and sexual terms, specifically in terms of miscegenation and 'contamination'" (Erwin 208). Rochester displaces Antoinette's historical and social reality in favor of stereotypical representations of the exoticized, sexualized other. In his view, this otherness makes her dangerous, and she must be contained.

However, his motivations at containment are complex; although he expresses revulsion at her madness/otherness/exoticism, true to colonial form, he still desires to possess her. After deciding that they must leave for England, Rochester ponders Antoinette's reaction to the move: "She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it...I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but she's *mine, mine...* My

lunatic. My mad girl" (Rhys 99). The irony here is that Antoinette's vision of England as an alternate dreamspace has become a nightmare of possession and containment.

Rochester, as the representative of the colonial position, seeks to possess all, even that which repulses or confounds him. He also seeks to punish Antoinette for her otherness and for her connected allegiance to the Caribbean, as he will rob her of that which she loves with intention and malice. Worse still, he imagines this hurt will thrust his "mad girl" into his arms, further ensuring his possession of her and affirming her subjugated status.

The tragedy of Antoinette's failure to create a new space for herself and therefore a new identity, rests firmly in her otherness and liminality. Although an interstitial space can be one of possibility, for Antoinette it is a place of loss and desperation. As Senel contends in the aforementioned article,

The Creole culture that Antoinette originally belongs is no exception to Bhaba's aforesaid hybridization of cultures. She does not belong to the authoritative mainstream English culture in the West Indies and is therefore estranged from the 'superior' context culture. Nor does she belong to the alleged inferior black community...This aspect of Antoinette's hybrid culture pushes her to suffer from all the trauma's of in-betweenness (Senel 6).

This notion of a trauma of in-betweenness is precisely what characterizes Antoinette's actions throughout the novel. There is a sense of fatalism attached to her place within the colonial structure, and we see that she is another victim of the colonial machine.

Infidels and Dreamscapes

As previously discussed, both *At Swim Two Boys* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* employ the creation of an alternate universe or reality to explore the ways in which characters find liberation from oppression. Similarly, Abdellah Taia creates a portal to another dimension in *Infidels*; Jallal seeks escape and transformation via the cinema. Specifically, he associates Marilyn Monroe with this liberation, this alternate realm in which the binary dissolves and all is possible. For Jallal, film and television offer an alternative reality to his own, which is limiting and cruel by virtue of a repressive, stratified culture. Marilyn Monroe comes to symbolize the antidote to that repressive existence, a reprieve from the limiting, oppressive lived experience, and a window into the realm of sublime fantasy.

Throughout the novel, cinema is evoked as a means of transformative escape for Jallal. However, Jallal seeks not only to escape the reductive nature of his life, but rather to be transformed by the process. Jallal exists as an outsider to the Islamic culture via his homosexuality and also due to the fact that his mother, Slima, is a sex worker. Therefore, the opportunity to live an authentic identity in real life is severely limited, hence the need to create this alternate dream/fantasy space. Jallal captures the power of film and television in the following passage: “The color television symbolized that attitude, that way of thinking...Learning to cast spells..Nobody knew, nobody got it right about me. Except maybe the soldier...He knew it had been invented to speak for us, write our stories for us...Television showed me another way of thinking about the world and myself” (Taia 48). This passage speaks to the profound role of cinema in

Jallal's life: it represents magic, possibility, and access/agency to an alternate version of both the world and himself.

This last point seems quite critical, as it highlights the disjunct between fantasy and reality for Jallal. In reality, Jallal has been having a sexual relationship with the soldier, who also visits his mother weekly for paid sexual services. It is difficult to unpack precisely the nature of the relationship between Jallal and the soldier; is it predatory or romantic? There are allusions to both, and the impression is that the relationship is complex, both literally and morally. However, it is also quite veiled, and that seems an essential part of the dynamic, especially with regard to cinema. Whether or not the relationship was appropriate via the reader's gaze, it is apparent that the Jallal had a strong emotional connection to the soldier, and that connection could only be given voice via the colored television, which speaks for Jallal and writes his story. There is so much within his culture that is unspeakable; through the cinema his experience can be located, articulated, and spoken, and in this way he is given an alternate view of both the world, and himself.

This dimension of possibility and identity is situated in the character of Marilyn Monroe; she becomes a portal of the possible, and cinema provides that gaze. As aforementioned, Jallal's mother, Slima, is a sex worker, and she is repeatedly condemned and villified as a result. Like Jallal, she is an outsider, as she occupies a cultural space that is at odds with her sexual practices. For both Slima and Jallal, Marilyn Monroe is a placeholder of the possible, through her they access an alternate realm in which they are liberated from the restrictions of class, religion, and culture: "My mother's name that night, was Marilyn. She was an infidel, like Marilyn. Like her,

unhappy. A whore. A servant. A goddess. She hid herself. *River of No Return* revealed my mother to me in a different way...Cinema was invented for this. For making us see our mothers in a new light" (Taia 52). Here the true transformative gaze of the cinema is revealed, as Jallal literally sees his mother anew. The film provides a portal of entry into this limitless realm, where Slima becomes Marilyn and all the elements of her identity are merged. There is no binary distinction between what is desirable and what is repugnant; the unhappy whore is also a goddess, an infidel, a servant. The dissolution of any line of demarcation is a central aim of the Marilyn symbol.

Furthermore, the invocation of infidel in this passage is significant, as the very term relies on the binary opposition and lines of demarcation that Taia problematizes throughout the novel. An infidel is an extreme other, a cultural and religious outlier who threatens the established order. It is charged with all of the expectations of culture and rests upon Manichean notions of good and evil, which makes it a potent symbol. Within a culture that relies on labels such as infidel, pagan, or heathen, movement or transformation is severely restricted, and a society of oppression often results. It is this oppression that Jallal resists via his allegiance to Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate symbol of liberation, acceptance, and possibility.

Looked at closely, Marilyn also symbolized love, for both Jallal and Slima: "A love that went beyond my mother, her gender, her sex, her history. Beyond her circumstances and reality. Movies and Marilyn Monroe drew my mother out of her silence" (Taia 50). Marilyn is the antidote to the restrictive categories inherent in the Manichean worldview that is imposed upon Jallal and Slima. Marilyn takes on an ethereal, otherworldly quality via the adoration they feel for her, as she takes Slima

above and beyond all that holds her in bondage: her gender and her place within the culture as Other. Likewise, Jallal finds a transcendent experience via the Monroe symbol, one in which he receives the acceptance and love denied him in real life.

In addition to representing this love and acceptance, Marilyn also represents the liminal space that is a portal to the possible, a blank slate upon which Jallal can write his own story. In a sense, all duality merges within this symbol; “An actress. A solitary being. Naked. Between earth and heaven. In transit. A prophetess. A poet. Ignorant. Inspired” (Taia 51). In this realm of fantasy, all binary opposition dissolves. Marilyn is all of these things simultaneously, and there is no judgement or hierarchy, only transformative possibilities.

By the close of the novel, Marilyn has been elevated to the mouthpiece of God, an angel who greets Jallal after he commits suicide by bombing. It is in this heavenly realm that she reveals her final incarnation: “I’m human. Extraterrestrial. Everywhere. Nowhere. Man. Woman. Neither one or the other. Beyond all borders..You see, I’m like you. In misfortune and power. Divine and orphaned. I’m made of the same stuff as you. I’m in you” (Taia 142). At this crucial moment in the novel, the liminal, liberating qualities of the Monroe symbol are conferred upon Jallal, releasing him from the prison of the binary. Throughout his life, Jallal has been imprisoned by borders of class, religion, and sexuality, and it is only in death that he finds freedom from this bondage.

From a theoretical gaze, Taia’s exploration of the dissolution of the binary speaks to the gay liberation movement, which “advocated a radical transformation of social values, arguing that gay liberation would be secured only after sex and gender categories had been eradicated” (Jagose, 59). By locating this liberation in the cinema

and the character of Marilyn Monroe, Taia advocates an extreme overhaul of the ways in which both self and society are defined. A refusal to define oneself in opposition to the dominant, heteronormative culture implicitly advocates for a more expansive view of identity and place. Certainly, from Jallal's perspective, the eradication of these restrictive roles were the only means of liberation and access to all facets of his identity. It is a tragic and ironic cultural commentary that liberation and agency could only be accessed through death by suicide.

Death as Resolution

All three of the novels explore the notion of death/suicide as an iteration of sacrifice, escape, and resolution within the text. This concept elicits interesting questions regarding the ways in which death is framed in the post-colonial novel. Is death, and especially death by suicide, an act of liberation and resolution, or an admission of defeat? Is suicide that also involves the death of the colonizer a form of resistance or senseless violence? In examining death/suicide within the context of the post-colonial, I hope to illuminate the intersection of othering via class, race, gender, and sexuality, and the ways in which that marginalization is resolved (or not) through death.

As aforementioned, all of the novels involve a central character who dies fighting for their “cause,” either by suicide or an armed uprising. I will investigate whether these acts can be considered a symbol of liberation/resistance, or a trap of the hegemonic/colonial machine in which these characters are ensnared. Jallal, the central character of Abdellah Taia’s *Infidels*, ends his life via an attempted suicide bombing. Although the bombing does not kill any civilians, it was initially orchestrated as an act of defiance of a country and culture who cannot accept the love Jallal and Mahmoud share. In a sense, the suicide bombing is framed as the only access to true agency and freedom. When Jallal and Mahmoud find themselves greeted by Marilyn Monroe in heaven, she affirms this notion of death as freedom: “Yes, you did the right thing...you decided to join your two hearts forever. Sacred Union. Single heart” (Taia 136). The suggestion here is that only in death by suicide could Jallal and Mahmoud realize their love for one another in an authentic and permanent way. In taking their own lives, they

provided themselves access to a relationship and a union denied them, and more importantly, they had the agency to make that choice for themselves.

Of course, Taia is commenting on the restrictive culture of Morocco in this ironic and tragic course of the narrative. Two men who love each other should have the ability to realize that love in life, death should not be the only option for that love to come to fruition. In this way, Taia is suggesting that Jallal and Mahmoud are simultaneously resisting the hegemonic nature of their culture while at the same time falling victim to its poison. As Marilyn tells them, in heaven “you can finally know each other. Know each other naked. Know each other without judgement or insults. No houris or virgins for you. I’ll make sure you’re left alone. For as long as you wish” (Taia 136). This passage is a direct reference to the Muslim version of heaven, in which men are offered virgin women as a reward for their adherence to the faith. Taia articulates that devotion in Jallal and Mahmoud, as both are devout Muslims, yet they desire each other rather than virgin women. This commentary is an alternate form of resistance, as it dissolves the binary that equates religious devotion with heterosexuality. Jallal and Mahmoud are Muslim men who are exploring their own version of heaven, one in which they can explore the physical and emotional manifestations of their love without fear of reprisal.

Overall, Taia’s version of the afterlife is incredibly fluid and liminal, and as such contains resonances of the gay liberation movement, which “understood that the marginalisation and devaluation of homosexuality was effected by the dominant and rigidly hierarchical conceptualization of sex and gender which constituted the social norm” (Jagose 41). Taia’s heaven is an inversion of those social norms, and as such is a location of liberation and resistance. Jallal is trapped within a culture that views

everything in terms of the binary, and heaven is an escape from, and rejection of, this version of living.

Similarly, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* Antoinette finds suicide to be the only method of escape. Throughout the novel, we witness Rochester's systematic attack on Antoinette's identity, and her subsequent descent into misery and disenfranchisement. The novel closes with her locked away in Rochester's attic in England, a scene that many will recall from *Jane Eyre*. In Bronte's rendering, Bertha is a wild animal, dangerous and threatening, as evidenced in her attempt to set fire to the home and destroy all within it. Rhys' Antoinette frames the suicide quite differently, as it is her purpose for being in England. While locked away in the attic, she contemplates her red dress, which takes on all the symbolism of the Caribbean, and it is the dress that reminds her of her the inevitability of her actions: "But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now" (Rhys 111). The premonition that Antoinette receives is, of course, to set the house on fire. This act of suicide/murder is her last attempt at agency, at reclaiming all that Rochester has taken from her. It is quite significant that the red dress incites the thought, as it contains all her memories of Jamaica: "The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetiver and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain" (Rhys 109). The dress, as the symbol of home, stands in sharp contrast to Antoinette's English nightmare, where all is grey, cold, and lifeless. The dress represents all that Antoinette has lost, the smells, the sounds, the pulsing life of the Caribbean, all that Rochester

resented and therefore denied her. For that reason its connection to the fire can be read as an act of rebellion and liberation, a symbol of Antoinette's allegiance to Jamaica and to her Creole culture. After having been stripped of her very sense of self, the act of lighting the house on fire is a final reclamation of that lost identity.

Like Jallal's suicide in *Infidels*, Antoinette's suicide is also a social commentary, another ironic and tragic "resolution" for yet another character with no options left. Gayatri Spivak speaks to this issue in her article, "*Wide Sargasso Sea* and a Critique of Imperialism," noting that:

In this fictive England, she must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer (Rhys 243).

Read this way, Antoinette is a symbol of the sacrifice the colonial machine demands, as she becomes a part of the binary construction that positions English/Other. Her immolation can be read simultaneously as escape or the ultimate entrapment, such is the complexity of the colonized subject.

Similarly, Doyler's death in *At Swim Two Boys* is a convergence of the personal and the political and a commentary on the sacrifice one makes for culture and country. Doyle dies during the Irish liberation attempt, the 1916 Easter Uprising, and it is Jim who watches him die. Both Jim and Doyle were fighting for Ireland's liberation, and Doyler's death seems to symbolize the intersection of the Irish struggle and the boys'

struggle to love one another openly. Like both *Infidels* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, O'Neill seems to suggest that it is only in death and dreams that liberation and resolution can be realized.

For Doyler's death, which can also be viewed as a sacrifice for Irish liberation, ironically represents the end of Jim and Doyler's love story. Directly after his death, Jim dreams of Doyler: "But already he had turned, and he was walking away...Walking; and though Jim tried to keep pace, he could not, and sometimes he called out Doyler! Doyler! But he never heard or he did not heed, only farther and farther he walked away...And it was hard then to make his day, hard to make anything much save war, and those years that followed had plenty war" (O'Neill 561). This passage suggests that even in dreams, that union that Jim longs for eludes him, and the feeling of loss and longing is palpable. Additionally, the intersection of the Irish struggle alongside the struggle for a legitimization of same sex love seems evident.

Jim continues to fight for Ireland, and it is during the struggle for Ireland's freedom that he too dies. It seems significant that both young men sacrifice both their life and their chance to love one another for the Irish cause. It is also noteworthy that Jim and Doyle only reunite (in dream) as Jim himself is dying: "only when he lay the last time in MacMurrough's arms...his eyes closed as he drifted away, and that last time he did look for his friend. Doyler was far far away on his slope, his cap waving in the air. 'What cheer, eh?' he called" (O'Neill 562). The book ends here, and the suggestion is that, like Mahmoud and Jallal, Doyler and Jim can only unite in death. There is the same tragic resolution in all three of the novels, and the implicit suggestion that the

prison of colony and culture exact a terrible cost for those who are imprisoned within those walls.

Closing Thoughts

In reflecting upon this project, it seems as though it has been an effort to part the veil in order to reveal the operations of colony and culture across time and place. As aforementioned, this seems a most timely endeavor, as we still experience the effects of a polarized society and the subjugation and dispossession contained therein. Although this thesis dealt with works of fiction, the issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class that are explored are all too real. The ways in which people are subjugated is quite relevant today, and what isn't acknowledged can never be changed. Often fiction gives us a unique perspective by which we can gaze upon the structural elements of culture and the effects of those various structures. Post-colonial theory affords one the opportunity to take a deep dive into disparate times and cultures in order to reveal the patterns of colonization and hegemony. This project spanned both time and place, and in doing so evoked the connective threads of colonialism and the marginalization that results from the colonial process. From contemporary Morocco to 1830's Jamaica, the pattern of binary opposition and the creation of the other remains the same. So too, does the struggle for representation and liberation persist.

Much of this project was concerned with the ways in which agency is gained; how does the margin attempt to move to the center? What are the different iterations of liberation and resistance? I have argued throughout this thesis that resistance to the binary structure is a form of liberation and a viable response to othering and marginalization. As we see in Taia's *Infidels*, liminality is a response to the constraining effects of a polarized culture. Denouncing and rejecting cultural binarism makes room for self-definition and agency. By invoking a new way of being, Taia suggests a cultural

liberation and a reappropriation of identity formation. One must move beyond the narrow strictures of the binary in order to develop a more fully realized self-concept. As Taia proves, the liminal space is the space of imagination and possibility, it is the realm of freedom and liberation.

Similarly, the creation of an alternate space or reality is central to the concept of resistance of freedom, as argued throughout this project. Whereas liminality is a macro concept of liberation, the creation of an alternate reality is a personal or micro iteration of freedom and resistance. All three novels explore this concept, but *At Swim Two Boys* delves most deeply into the idea of the alternate reality. The sea becomes the ultimate symbol of liberation and freedom for Doyler and Jim. Throughout the novel, O'Neill uses the metaphor of the Forty Foot to suggest what might be possible. This space becomes a utopia, a vision of what life is like when one is free from the yolk of an oppressive culture. This notion is of value, because the imagination is the space in which dreams can come to fruition. O'Neill's Forty Foot and Taia's version of heaven are reminders of the possible, of the ways in which liberation and self-actualization can occur, even in the midst of dispossession and marginalization.

This project has also endeavored to make meaning, and to explore the ways in which meaning is made. I have referenced the post-colonial notion of the palimpsest throughout, and I believe that this concept is central to our understanding of the ways in which meaning is made and articulated. Sara Ahmed articulates the concept of the palimpsest quite succinctly: "To suggest that we inherit proximities is also to point to how that past that is 'behind' our arrival restricts as well as enables human action: if we are shaped by 'what' we come into contact with, then we are also shaped by what we

inherit" (Ahmed 123-124). Truly, this thesis has been shaped by the belief that the past is never really over; rather, there are echoes of it in all elements of the present. The objective is to be aware of the ways in which the past colors the present, or as Ahmed suggests, the ways in which it can both restrict and enable. This project has been an attempt to articulate the ways in which certain people are enabled by the past and its influence on the present, while others remain captive to its restrictive elements. We must recognize that race, class, gender, and sexuality are very much a part of the palimpsest of culture and society.

The palimpsest is an integral part of the construction of our present reality, as is the concept of inheritance. It has been my objective to shine a light on our collective cultural inheritance with respect to colony and hegemony. By exploring the intersections of the various modes of othering, I aim to expose the inheritance of disenfranchisement we still wrestle with today. Ahmed provides a relevant definition of this cultural inheritance: "Inheritance can be understood as both bodily and historical...It is useful to recall that inheritance is crucial to the Marxist conception of history. For Marx, although we 'make history,' this making is shaped by inheritance: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in a present given and inherited from the past'" (Ahmed 125). This is an ideal representation of the effect of the palimpsest, and also of the ways in which the machinations of culture act upon the individual. The polarizing structures of a society act upon and influence the individual, potentially altering their trajectory as well as their identity and sense of self. This is a vital issue that should not be relegated to the world of theory, as it is highly applicable to our current social

climate. Change comes by bringing these hidden power structures to light and demanding something better.

This project has expanded my own understanding of the often invisible operations of culture, and it has awakened a desire to further investigate these structures and their relationship to meaning-making. Going forward, I plan to expand the scope of my research into the gothic and science fiction realms. I feel an investigation of the binary operation of man/machine and human/monster would prove most fruitful. Specifically, I believe Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* would lend themselves to a discussion of not only what it means to be other, but what it means to be human, especially in our tech-driven world. Larger philosophical questions of humanity, technology, and identity would be explored. This project has raised as many questions as it has provided answers, but I believe that is the true purpose of all intellectual inquiry. To study the humanities is to shine a light into the darkness, and one must always seek to banish the dark.

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